Couples Sharing Stories

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Some ways in which shared stories are begun and told are described using conversation analysis. Tellings shared by two persons who participated together in the events to be narrated display how coparticipants encounter and resolve the problems of having two potential tellers, and a "knowing" recipient present. The stories examined are begun with a three-part series of turns: a "remote" approach, a forwarding, and a ratification of the forwarding. The body of the telling includes techniques which involve the knowing recipient in the telling without necessarily challenging the current teller's role as teller. Implications are drawn for the study of how pairs of persons "do" their relationship in public.

KEY CONCEPTS Storytelling, narration, conversation analysis, discourse, personal relationships, intimacy, sharing.

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This paper presents some findings about shared storytelling—the telling of a story by two persons about events in which they participated together. The study is an analysis of the conversational details of a round of storytelling which takes place during a videotaped conversation between four people eating dinner together. This round of storytelling is chosen because each story told concerns events in which two tellers participated together. It is therefore a fruitful site for investigation of the achievement of co-telling. The analysis indicates some ways in which retelling shared experiences may produce the appearance that telling partners share a relationship or, as Goffman puts it, are in a "with" (1971, pp. 19–27). The shared telling of a story may be an occasion in conversation on which being a member of a "with" presents specifiable interactional "problems" for participants. By examining the "solutions" that co-tellers have to these "problems," it is possible to explore one of the interactional ways communicators have of "doing" their relationship in public.¹

Research on Storytelling

Storytelling in ordinary conversation has been described by Sacks, (1972), Jefferson, (1978), Goodwin, (1981), Goodwin, (1984), and Ryave (1978). Labov (1973) has described narratives which are constructed in response to an elicitation question. Sacks, (1972), and Jefferson, (1978) show how stories may emerge out of ongoing conversation. Ordinarily when people talk together
their conversation is organized so that each speaker is entitled to one turn at a time, and speakers alternate. Usually turns are brief rather than extended (Sacks, Schegloff & Jefferson, 1974). Stories differ from this arrangement, since they generally consist of a long turn by one speaker (Sacks, 1971). So in order for a participant in an ordinary conversation to tell a story, it is necessary for speakers to temporarily suspend regular turn-taking while one speaker takes the floor for an extended turn. The beginning of a storytelling in conversation involves solutions to the interactional "problem" of how to suspend regular turn-taking, yielding the floor to the potential teller. Examination of this occurrence reveals orderly solutions participants have to such problems. The orderliness of solutions to conversational "problems" is orderliness produced by and for participants. Schegloff and Sacks makes this point with respect to the suspension of turn-taking so as to end a conversation:

If the materials (records of natural conversations) were orderly; they were so because they had been methodically produced by members of the society for one another, and it was a feature of the conversations that we treated as data that they were produced so as to allow the display by the co-participants to each other their orderliness, and to allow the participants to display to each other their analysis, appreciation, and use of that orderliness. (1973, p. 290)

The regular ways that participants have of beginning stories, for example, are the orderly solutions to problems which the act of telling a story poses for them.

A story may be begun by the prospective teller projecting a forthcoming story in a "story preface," or utterance which offers, or requests a chance, to tell a story. Sacks (1972) gives the following instance:

(1) 1 Ken: You wannah hear muh-eh my sister told me a story last night.

This utterance has sequential implications for the beginning of a storytelling, "You wanna hear" offers to tell the story. As an offer it may be accepted or rejected by recipients. That is, it is the first pair part of an adjacency pair (see Schegloff & Sacks, 1973), and therefore provides for a second pair part by recipients in which they can accept or reject the offer to tell. If this offer is accepted, the producer of the story preface may begin the telling in the next turn at talk. By providing for this acceptance or rejection, then, the offer to tell may instigate the suspension of turn-by-turn talk by proposing the relevance of a story of which participants may or may not become recipients.

A story preface can contain other components which provide recipients with an opportunity to assess whether or not the projected story is worthwhile. For example, the preface may indicate the source of the events to be narrated (in this case, "My sister"). It may also indicate the time of occurrence of the events to be narrated ("last night"). All of these elements offer indications of the character of the projected story, and thereby provide grounds for prospective story recipients to assess the relevance of forwarding it. If co-participants then show themselves to be potential story recipients by accepting the offer or granting the request, turn-by-turn talk may be...
suspended while one person (the story teller) takes the floor for an extended turn, in the course of which the story is produced.

We generally do not tell people things that we know they know. (Sacks, 1971; Grice, 1975). Sacks (1974) points out that we may attempt to avoid telling people jokes/stories they have already heard by asking potential recipients to “Stop me if you have heard this one.” This might be problematic for pairs of persons telling stories about events in which both members of the pair participated in two ways. First, there are two possible tellers; there are two people present who are potentially equally competent to tell the story (although the contributions each is “qualified” to make may differ by virtue of their different participation during the events being narrated). This means that there are two possible incumbents in the “teller” party. Therefore at any one time during the production of the story, there will be two people who could be producing it. This leads to the second part of the problem: the consequence of there being two potentially “qualified” tellers is that while the story is in progress, there will be at least one person present who cannot align as a recipient of the story in the way that unknowing recipients (Goodwin, 1981)—that is, those who have not heard the story before—ordinarily do.

When two persons recount an event in which they both participated, then, their coparticipation in the event becomes an issue in their talk, for they tell details which their coparticipant in the event already knows. Coparticipation in an event and its telling presents specifiable interactional problems for pairs of persons. It is therefore an appropriate locus for examining ways interactants have of “doing” their relationship in public.

Research on relationships

Research has investigated various aspects of the communication behavior of people in relationships. This includes studies of couples’ “language” (Brady, 1983; Wiedemann & Krueger, 1980), marital adjustment (Gottman, 1979), interpersonal perception and marital adjustment (Bochner, Krueger, & Chmielowski, 1982), decision-making patterns (Krueger, 1982; Krueger & Smith, 1982), and compliance gaining strategies (Sillars, 1980). Many researchers have examined relationship development. (For a comprehensive review of this research see Bochner, 1983). Work on the deterioration and dissolution of relationships has also been undertaken. (See Duck, 1981, 1982). Yet this research does not ask how people produce the readily recognizable appearance of “being in a relationship” or being a “with.”

In our everyday lives we readily recognize when pairs of persons are “in a relationship.” This may account for the lack of scholarly attention given to how the appearance of “being in a relationship” is produced. “Withs” are treated as taken-for-granted, unproblematic entities by members of the culture as well as by researchers.

Goffman provides some answers to the question of how people produce the appearance of being in a “with.” He describes body behaviors (such as handholding) engaged in by members of “withs.” These “tie-signs” “contain evidence about their relationship” (1971, pp. 226–230). For example, he suggests that “hand-holding” is a “tie-sign” which “implies that the makers of
it are within the age for sexual relations and that the relationship that is
signified is a sexually potential one.” (p. 227). He notes that not only both
persons in a relationship (whom he calls the relationship’s “ends”), but also
“third parties” can be informed by tie-signs. Further, “these signs will not only
inform that the relation is anchored, but provide some information about its
name, its terms, and its stage.” (p. 194)

His account of tie-signs stresses that both “with’s” and “single’s” are
interactional units, not just social-structural ones. This point is demonstrated
in a story recently recounted to me. It concerns a “couple” who were new in
town, and accepted an informal invitation from a “friend of a friend” to attend
a New Year’s Eve party. The members of the couple were independent at the
party, and interacted separately with other guests, meeting occasionally to
“compare notes.” During these occasional meetings they encountered signifi-
cant difficulty in agreeing on who at the party was “with” whom: One would
refer to “Joe,” the big dark guy, who was with the blond woman,” and the
other would disagree, claiming that Joe was with a dark-haired woman. They
subsequently discovered that they were both right: the event turned out to be
a “mate-swapping” party.

Partners may be described by the social-structural unit, “married couple,”
or “husband and wife,” but this social-structural unit is not necessarily the
only information source for perceiving them as a together. We achieve the
appearance of being together in interaction. For on an occasion (the “mate-
swapping” party) where the explicit purpose is to spend time with one who is
not your spouse or significant other, pairs of persons are still recognizable to
other interactants as “together.” It is apparent from this case that a “with”
may be interactionally achieved, rather than simply social-structurally deter-
mixed. The question then becomes, how are “withs” interactionally achieved? That is, what do interactants do that results in them being perceived
as a “with”?

The interactional problems facing pairs of persons sharing stories may
become a resource for investigating how the stable appearance, “with,” can
be produced by participants in the course of interaction. To show this I
describe some parts of the telling by two persons of a story about events in
which they participated together. This is an example of an occasion on which
two persons need to undertake together an activity which is generally
undertaken by one person. Therefore at this point, being part of a “with”
becomes an interactional issue for participants: there are two potential tellers,
and one knowing recipient present. Solutions to the problem of how to tell a
story about events in which two persons participated can be shown by
detailed examination of instances of tellings of this kind. Before proceeding to
an account of these solutions, I offer some details of research method and
data.

**Method**

**Procedures**

The method used in this study is conversation analysis. As practiced by
Sacks, Schegloff, Jefferson, Pomerantz, Goodwin and others, this method
involves the following steps:

(1) Tape recordings are made of interactions which would have occurred whether or not the event was recorded. Video recordings are used whenever possible, since the conversation analyst attempts to describe any details to which participants show in the course of their interaction to be relevant to them. Therefore the recording is most useful when it includes as full a record as possible of the events recorded. Video recording maximizes the chance of recording these details.

(2) A thorough transcription of the recorded details of interaction is made, using the transcription system developed by Gail Jefferson. This directs attention to details such as laughter, in-breaths and out-breaths, overlapped turns by different speakers, stress, intonation, and sound stretching, as well as words used, and the lengths of gaps in talk. (See Appendix for an example of transcription and transcription symbols). A rough attempt is made, through the use of variations in standard spelling, to capture participants’ “non-standard” pronunciations. Full phonetic/phonological transcription is usually beyond the needs of this kind of analysis, particularly since the transcription is used simply as a “guide” to the recorded talk, and is not used for analysis without the tape recording.

(3) Description of the conversational activities taking place in the recorded event is then undertaken. Description is based on a process involving unmotivated listening to/observation of tapes, in conjunction with close examination of transcribed details of talk. The analyst poses to the data the generic question that participants must ask themselves about every occurrence in interaction: “Why that now?” Answers are obtained by seeing how recipients respond to prior utterances, and how the original speaker treats the response. In this way, analysts use their intuitions about what speakers are “doing” in interaction, and confirm or disconfirm these intuitions by testing them out against the recorded talk. Thus “data” for conversation analysts are whatever participants display to one another as relevant to their emergent understanding of their interaction.

Conversation analysts are generally concerned with the ways in which conversationists “bring off” activities in interaction. For example, if the analyst observes that a story is told in conversation, the telling is treated as an achievement, and the data are examined in order to establish how a story was accomplished by and for participants. (e.g., turn-by-turn talk was suspended after a story preface, one speaker produced a multi-unit turn, etc.) In this way, researchers treat ordinary activity as though it were “problematic.”

The Participants

The present study uses a portion of a half-hour videotaped recording of a dinner shared by two couples (Shawn and Vicki, Matthew and Nina [not their real names]) in the home of one member of one of the couples. The participants are two male and two female caucasian Americans, between the ages of (roughly) twenty and twenty five. All four are undergraduate students at a major West Coast State University. From the conversation it is apparent that some (or possibly all) of them are film majors. Neither couple is married.
No information is available on how long members of each couple have known each other. The round of storytelling described in this paper occurs after approximately twenty-five minutes of recorded interaction, and is preceded by a discussion of going to Church. The tape was made for an anthropology class by one of the participants. The transcription was made by the researcher, using the transcription system developed by Jefferson. (See Appendix). All transcripts presented in the text are simplified versions of the full transcript provided in the Appendix. The key to transcription symbols may also be found in the Appendix.

**Findings**

Findings are reported in two parts: How each pair begins its shared telling, and how the body of the telling is produced. For each part of the telling the solutions to the problems of (1) having two potential tellers, and (2) having a knowing recipient present are described. Implications for an account of how these pairs of persons may be displaying their relationship are also drawn.

**Beginning the Story**

In each case the beginning of the story is marked by a three-part series of turns: first, one participant makes a "remote" or "obscure" approach to the prospective story. Second, this is "forwarded" by the person who was their coparticipant in the event to be narrated. Third, the forwarding is ratified by the participant who made the "remote" approach. These claims are demonstrated "in action" by describing in detail the beginning of each jointly told story.

The first story unfolds as follows:

(This excerpt is preceded by a discussion "going to Church." In line 5 Shawn says, "I have t' start go'n.", but it is not responded to by co-participants. Turns to which particular attention are drawn are marked with an arrow —).

(2)

—13 Shawn: I have to start goin'. (0.8) cuz I'm gettin' really tense.
  (0.4)
—16 Matthew: Yeah
—17 Shawn: an' that really ca:ims you
—18 (0.3)
—19 Nina: Yeah: it does. 'n its- like medica:tion
—20 Shawn: I was goin'
—21 (0.4)
—22—23 Vicki: Well you know what he did?
—24 Shawn: =Wen' outa my luckin mind. =
—25 Vicki: =He m(h)ade a right.- (Story continues))

Here Shawn begins a remote approach to a possible story in line 13. It is less remote in lines 20–21. In line 23 Vicki forwards the story, providing a second, stronger story preface. In line 24 Shawn demonstrates that he understands Vicki to be referring to the same event, when he further intensifies the "out of the ordinariness" of the event, and thus begins the
telling. The following fuller account of the unfolding of this part of the story shows how this three-part exchange demonstrates that there are two potential tellers of the story, neither of whom can be an unknowing recipient of it.

The “Remote” Approach

As noted above fragment (2), in line 5 Shawn begins a remote approach to a possible story: “I have to start goin’.” Something “out of the ordinary” is mooted. “have to” suggests the possibility of some “unusual” circumstance. However this is not picked up by recipients. In line 13 Shawn repeats this suggestion, saying again, “I have to start goin’.” A reference to something “out of the ordinary,” which recipients apparently do not know about, could constitute for participants something “newsworthy,” or worth finding out about. Once again, though, it is not picked up by recipients. There is a gap of 0.8 seconds. In a continuation of this utterance he tells why he has to go to Church: “cuz I’m gettin’ really tense.” This “tenseness” further suggests something “out of the ordinary,” to which Church is apparently proposed as a remedy. He furthers the sense of “something out of the ordinary” in lines 20–21: “I wz goin’ crazy‘t day. un the- un the road.” The “crazy’ness” seems to reformulate the “tense” of lines 5 and 13. He refers to a recent event: it happened “‘t’day,” and specifies the kind of event: it happened “on the road.” This may project a possible story, since it refers to a specific, recent event, about which there may be something worth telling. No recipient uptake occurs in line 22, but in line 23 Vicki forwards the story, producing a second story preface.

The Forwarding

“Well you know what he did?” has the sequential implications of a story preface: it strongly projects a possible story, and provides an opportunity for recipients of the preface to align as potential story recipients. Its “prefacing” qualities can be understood in light of findings about the “Demand Ticket,” and the nonterminal properties of summonses.

Vicki’s utterance is a preface to further talk since, like the “Demand Ticket” described by Nofsinger (1975), it proposes an unknown entity which the proposer must identify, and returns the floor to the utterer of it. Its sequential effect resembles that of a summons (Schegloff, 1968), since it is a preface to further talk by the producer of it. Schegloff (1968) describes this feature as “nonterminality” in summonses-answer sequences. That is, he shows that summonses are “preambles, preliminaries, or prefaces to some further conversational or bodily activity. They are both done with that purpose, as signalling devices to further actions, and are heard as having that character.” (1968, p. 1081). He points out that our hearing of summonses as prefaces to further talk by the summoner is well displayed in the common answer to a summons, “What is it?” Thus summonses may license speakers to further talk after a response such as “What is it?” by unknowing recipients. Further, the kind of talk they preface may be determined by the speaker of the summons. In this way, Vicki’s utterance bears a resemblance to utterances like “You know what?” and “Guess what,” since Vicki has a lot of liberty in the kind of
response she needs to give to recipients' possible "What?" Schegloff (1968) and Sacks (1972) describe how such utterances return the floor to their speakers, and give them "a certain freedom in [their] response by virtue of [recipient's] inability to know in advance what would have been an adequate, complete, satisfactory (...) answer." (Schegloff, 1968, p. 1092).

Vicki's utterance at line 23 ("Well you know what he di:di?") proposes an entity which is unknown to Matthew and Nina, but known to Vicki (and presumably to Shawn). It suggests not only that she does know what he did, but also that she is potentially competent to tell what he did in response to coparticipants' possible "What did he do?" It is a stronger story preface that Shawn's at line 20-21 because it has the feature of nonterminality: its structure is designed to specifically elicit a response from recipients which will return the floor to Vicki, as described above. However in the next utterance it is not unknowing recipients who ask "What did he do?" Rather, Shawn produces an utterance which, by virtue of its adjacency and contiguity to it, stands as an answer to Vicki's question, and ratifies Vicki's competence as potential co-teller, and status as knowing recipient.

The Ratification

Shawn's utterance in line 24 offers ratification:

(3) 20 Shawn: I was goin'
  21 crazy t'day, on the- on the road.
  22 (0.4)
  23 Vicki: Well you know what he di:di?–
  24 Shawn: =Wen' outa my fuckin' mind.~
  25 Vicki: =He m[had]e a right-

"Wen' outa my fuckin' mind." provides information of the kind Vicki might have provided in response to unknowing recipients' response to her utterance. By providing this information, Shawn's answer displays that he is party to the knowledge that Vicki is claiming. It does several other things also. As well as developing his "crazy'ness a step further "Wen' outa my fuckin' mind." displays that Shawn is treating Vicki's utterance as referring to the same event as the one to which he was referring in lines 20-21. This appears to confirm that Vicki has access to an account of the event Shawn referred to in his prior utterance. Vicki's second story preface therefore not only forwards the story; it also displays that she is potentially a competent co-teller of the story. The production by Vicki and ratification by Shawn of this second story preface provides a demonstration that Vicki is not an unknowing recipient of the projected story.

This description shows one way in which individuals demonstrate together at the very beginning of a storytelling that they have shared knowledge of an event, and are both potentially competent to participate in its telling. The story preface is collaboratively constructed by two knowing parties to the telling. Their participation displays that each has knowledge of the upcoming story. This distinguishes the beginning of the shared telling from the beginning of a story addressed to an audience of unknowing recipients. Unknowing recipients are unable to display knowledge of the events to be
told by offering or promising details of it in an assured way. (Sacks, 1974; Jefferson, 1978). By contrast, in the present data, a remote approach to the story by Shawn is forwarded by Vicki. Shawn ratifies the forwarding, displaying the forwarder to be a competent co-incumbent in the potential teller party, and a knowing recipient of the potential telling. In this joint construction of the story's beginning, participants ratify each other's rights and competence as potential storyteller. They participate together in the telling of the event, demonstrating their co-participation in its occurrence. An account of the preface to the second story shows another way in which past 'with'ness is displayed in current 'with'ness.

The second story in this series also begins with one participant making a "remote" approach, which is forwarded by their co-participant in the event. This shared story beginning is of particular interest for two reasons. First, it emerges out of the end of the preceding story (lines 60–68). Second, it is begun with an aside by one participant (Matthew) to his co-participant (Nina) (line 70), who responds to this aside in such a way as to confirm that the event was shared (lines 71 and 76). ((Vicki's and Shawn's story ends)):

(4) 58 Shawn: _FLICK YOU AND_ OH: and I-I- got oh: my Go-d
  [ (heh) ]
  [ ]

59 Vicki:
  [ ]
  [ ]

59 Nina:

60 Vicki: (h) It's a ssca:ry

61 Vicki: [ fecling. (really

62 Vicki: )Yeah: you ( )

63 Vicki: )Yeah: you ( )

63 Nina: It certainly (h) s.

64 Vicki: 'd wre:ck.

65 Vicki: '

65 Nina: Ah?2

66 Nina: You see all these: (. ) ca:rs coming::

66 Nina: (0.9)

67 Nina: toward you with the ir headlight

68 Nina: toward you with the ir headlight

69 Vicki: We'll, thank Go d there weren't that many.

69 Vicki: [ ]

70 Matthew: Remember that guy we saw.

70 Nina: ho ho ho ho yu(h)u ha ha ha

71 Nina: ho ho ho ho yu(h)u ha ha ha

72 Vicki: Uh(h)

73 Vicki: [ ]

74 Vicki: hihihi

75 Vicki: That's him

76 Michael: Ey listen i:ss

76 Nina: (h)h)aaa

77 Matthew: We were drivin no:me one night

((Story ensues))

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Once again the "problems" for participants recounting shared events (that there are two potentially competent tellers, and two knowing recipients) are resolved at the very beginning of the telling through a display of coparticipation in the event to be narrated. The beginning of the second story proceeds as follows.

The "Remote" Approach

Nina and Matthew's telling begins as the other story apparently reaches completion. Shawn's line 58 (FL:CK YOU AND- OH:: and I- I- got oh:: my Go::d) is a brief "review" of the story that they have told. At this point, Nina's response suggests that she is treating Shawn and Vicki's telling as complete: she begins a display of understanding of the story which merges into a demonstration that she has been in a similar situation. In lines 60-61 Nina shows her understanding of Shawn and Vicki's story by indicating her reaction to the events described: "It's a scary fee::ling. really." This appears to be a "significance statement," Ryave (1978) describes significance statements as utterances which generally take "the form of an idealized, abstract assertion, accomplishable within one utterance:"

(5) Nina: You see all these: (. ) cars comin:::-?
    (0.9) 67
    toward you with the ir headlight
    [ ]

   Vicki: We'll, thank God there weren't that many.
    [ ]

  69 Matthew: Remember that guy we saw.

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Vicki’s utterance at line 69 overlaps with Matthew’s in line 70. Here Matthew addresses himself to Nina and, as is discussed in greater detail below, does an “aside” to her: “Remember that guy we saw:” Matthew apparently refers to a specific, shared event. By virtue of the kind of response that Nina does to this utterance (loud laughter), Matthew and Nina together create a suggestion that there is something “worth telling.” Matthew’s utterance at line 70 (“Remember that guy we saw”) suggests that he and Nina have some shared event that is relevant to—or at least touched off by—the events narrated by Vicki and Shawn. As Vicki in the first story turns a remote approach of Shawn’s into a particular story, so does Matthew to Nina in this instance.

The Forwarding

Matthew’s “Remember that guy we saw” forwards Nina’s remote approach by making reference to the event that she appears to be moving toward in the course of her reaction to Vicki and Shawn’s story. In this instance, it is not clearly apparent that Matthew’s strong story preface in line 70 is touched off by Nina’s remote approach. Nevertheless, this is suggested by the preface’s contiguity with Nina’s references, particularly in lines 68–70. Three aspects of Matthew’s utterance suggest that he is referring to an event that she knows about.

First, he asks her if she “remembers” the guy they saw. This suggests that she can be expected to remember him—that she has the resources to remember. Second, he uses a reference to “that guy we saw” which relies on Nina being able to fill in “who” is being referred to from the details which she has built up in her previous utterances. Such economy of reference (c.f., Sacks and Schegloff, 1979) to another person suggests that Nina could legitimately be expected to recognize the reference and remember the guy. Third, Matthew shows that it is an event in which they both participated by saying that it was “we” who saw him. Also, his physical orientation away from Shawn and Vicki, and towards Nina adds to the suggestion that he is referring to an event shared by the two of them which Shawn and Vicki do not know about. The reference’s relationship to that to which Nina might have been alluding is further suggested by the fact that Matthew’s utterance at line 70 follows Nina’s at line 68 without gap or overlap, and appears to disattend to Vicki’s overlapping utterance at 69:

(6) 66 Nina: You see all these: (.) cars comin:.?  
67 (0.9)  
68 Nina: toward you with the ir headlight  
69 Vicki: [ Weil, thank Go d there weren’t that many.  
[ ]  
→70 Matthew: Remember that guy we saw.  
71 Nina: (h)o (h)o (h)o (h) yu(h)u ha ha ha ha

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That is, it follows on from Nina’s utterance, rather than responding to Vicki’s, even though Vicki’s is subsequent to Nina’s.

The Ratification

Nina’s response to Matthew’s utterance at line 70 consists of loud laughter (line 71). This laughter suggests that she does indeed “remember,” and that what she remembers is very amusing. Her laughter has the effect of making Matthew’s reference seem more than simply a “private reminiscence,” but also possible grounds for a “story worth telling,” since it indicates the “amusement value” of event(s) recalled. It also strongly suggests her recognition of the event Matthew remembers. The claim which this three-part exchange makes is one of shared knowledge. Matthew’s forwarding of Nina’s remote approach, and her displayed recognition of the forwarding, and indication of the story’s potential tellability, constitute a display of shared knowledge in action.

The above discussion describes two instances in which individuals who participated in events together show themselves to be members of the same party for the telling of those events. Shared participation in an event in the past is displayed by sharing the beginning of a storytelling. In each case one participant’s “remote” approach to the event to be narrated is forwarded by the other participant. The first participant then ratifies the understanding claim made by the forwarder. In the course of beginning the telling, the work of achieving the suspension of turn-by-turn talk is shared by the persons who participated together in the event to be told. Work that, in prospective tellings by one teller, is generally done by unknowing recipients is done by knowing recipients in such a way as to display their knowledge. This resolves the problems of having two potential tellers, and having a knowing recipient present for the suspension of turn-by-turn talk at the beginning of the story.

The Body of the Telling

The problems of shared storytelling continue beyond the accomplishment of a shared story beginning. The shared story beginning, especially in the case of Vicki and Shawn, suggests not only that there is a knowing recipient present, but also that there are two competent tellers of the story. Who should tell what, and when, must be determined in the course of the telling. Goodwin (1981, Chapter 5) describes various things knowing recipients can do during a telling, such as monitoring for errors or omissions, and requesting verification. In the first telling Shawn apparently monitors Vicki’s telling for errors. In the second, Matthew requests verification from Nina of a detail of his account. In both tellings there is another interesting occurrence: sharing the telling by doing complementary parts of it. Below description of an occurrence of error correction, and a request for verification precedes an examination of some instances of complementary telling.

Monitoring for Errors

In excerpt (7) Shawn offers a correction to Vicki’s telling in such a way as to participate in the telling without actually becoming teller.
Vicki begins to tell what Shawn did ("He m(h)ade (. ) a right- ."). She then cuts off "right-" and does a self repair, "backing up" in the telling to "set the scene" by telling the location of the event, and beginning a reference to characteristics of the location ("you know have- they have").

In line 29, in overlap with Shawn's utterance in line 28 ("Oh: shit"), Vicki continues her scene-setting. It is not clear whether the last word in line 29 is "right" or "bright." In line 30 Shawn takes a turn ("I make a left- .") which seems to offer an account of what he did. It apparently offers a correction to Vicki's telling. Potentially a contribution by a knowing recipient could constitute a bid for the tellership of the story. As the following description shows, Shawn's utterance is produced as a correction to the telling, rather than as a bid for tellership. Its status as a repair may be shown in the following way.

Although Shawn's utterance comes after Vicki's at line 29, it does not seem to follow naturally from the last part of Vicki's prior utterance. It appears to be related to it in two ways. First, its form is similar to the form of the beginning of Vicki's line 27: "I made a left- ." is directly related to "He m(h)ade (. ) a right- ." Both have the form "X made a Y," and both presumably refer to the significant turning that Shawn "made." Secondly, Shawn's utterance at 30 contains the word "left" which possibly contradicts Vicki's assertion in line 25 of the direction of the turn that he made. In line 27 the word "(b)righ" is presumably also hearable to Shawn as like the word "right." This may have touched off his subsequent utterance.

That he offers this correction now, when he did not earlier, may be explained as follows: if Vicki says "right-" at the end of line 29, this constitutes a second time that she says it. In light of Shawn's utterance at line 30, this part of her telling is incorrect. The first time she says it, in line 25, it is cut off, as though a self-repair were upcoming. However in line 29 the same "error" is made a second time. That is, the element is not repaired by Vicki. A second occurrence of the mistake may constitute "proof" for Shawn that this part of her narration is in need of correction by him.

It is possible that Shawn is treating this point in the telling as a point at which this detail is importantly relevant, but incorrectly represented by Vicki. He therefore provides a correction of the direction of the turning that he made. Line 30 may therefore be characterized as an other-initiated other correction (c.f., Schegloff, Jefferson, and Sacks, 1977). The initiation and
correction are simultaneous. He apparently proposes "left" as a substitute for Vicki's "right" in line 25 and possibly line 29. The similarity of form, "X made a Y," seems to be what locates the repairable of which this item is a repair. In line 30 Shawn repeats the word "left." From the video tape it is apparent that he looks over at Nina and Matthew as he produces the first "left." This is cut off, and during the second "left," he turns his head to his right, toward Vicki and away from Nina and Matthew.

A correction of this kind may be used as a bid for co-tellersh of an ongoing story. Schegloff, Jefferson, and Sacks (1977, p. 380) note that "an as-of-some-point-non-teller of a story [...] may use other correction of the teller as a bid, or subsequently as a vehicle, for being a co-teller of the story—making with the initial teller, a 'team.'" Shawn's utterance here does not appear to stand as a bid for tellersh. This is shown by his body orientation during the production of this turn: he addresses the first part of his utterance ("I made a left") to unknowing recipients of the story, Nina and Matthew. However the second part is apparently produced as an aside to Vicki since Shawn's head and body are oriented away from Matthew and Nina and towards Vicki at this point. He has already ratified Vicki as a knowing recipient of the story at the beginning of the story (lines 20-24). Following the rule that we do not ordinarily tell people things that we know they know (Sacks, October 17, 1971; Grice, 1975), when Shawn addresses to a knowing recipient a detail of the events being recounted, he is presumably giving her a detail he considers she does not know. Since his utterance is produced first to unknowing recipients, and then to a knowing recipient, it appears to stand simply as a correction of her account. It does not seem to be a bid for tellersh, since his orientation to Vicki (the coparticipant whom he would not address if he were to continue the telling, because of her ratified status as a knowing recipient) at the end of the correction suggests that he is not attempting to continue as teller, but is instead correcting a detail of the telling for the teller. In this way, then, what could at first stand as a bid for tellersh as well as an amendment of the error in the telling, is re-produced in the course of the correcting turn as an amendment of an error in the telling directed to Vicki as teller.

(7) 25 Vicki: He m(h)a de a right- It wz: in Sanna 27 Moniga. You know have-the have 28 Shawn: Oh: shit 29 [ 30 31 Vicki: all those (bi)right 30 Shawn: I made a left- left- 31 Vicki: They have (.) m one-way streets 32 and everything (0.4) and then two-way streets? 33 he made- (0.4) a left turn from a one-way 34 street (0.8) into a two-way street (0.5)

In line 31 Vicki continues her telling specifically as a continuation of her utterance in line 27, repeating "they have." In line 33 she embeddedly integrates Shawn's correction into her account, correcting "He m(h)a de (.) a
right... (. . . )” in line 25, to “he made (0.4) a left turn from a one-way street (. . . .)” in line 33. The “left” in line 33 does not seem to be stressed in such a way as to draw attention to the fact that it is a repair of an earlier item. The embeddedness (Jefferson, forthcoming) of the repair suggests that she treats Shawn’s amendment precisely as a correction of an error offered to the teller of the story. She does not make overt note of Shawn’s contribution. Instead, she simply integrates it into her telling. This may stand as an acknowledgement of his status as knowing recipient and competent co-teller, since she appears to treat his correction as worthy of incorporation into her telling.

The above account shows a way in which a knowing recipient may monitor for an error in the telling, and offer a correction, which is then integrated into the telling by the current teller. The offering of a correction by a recipient, and its incorporation by the teller, does not in this case appear to be treated as a competitive bid for tellership. Instead it displays that teller and knowing recipient are part of a “team” of co-tellers. The request for verification has a similar effect.

Request for Verification

Goodwin (1981, Chapter 5) notes that a teller of a story may request verification of details of the telling from their co-teller. This occurs in the second story, when Matthew looks up at Nina and, in line 87, checks a detail of the story with her:

(8) 86 Matthew: First of all, (1.1)  
87 we’re (. ) w- were we loaded?  
89 (1.1)  
91 Matthew: I don’t know if we were loaded or not.  
[   ]  
92 Nina: I don’t think we loaded  
93 (1.0)  
94 Matthew: But  
95 (1.1)  
96 Matthew: First ‘v all we see this car(, ) goin down the  
97 street sideway.  
((Story continues))

Once again, as in line 70 (“member that guy we saw: . . .”) Matthew shows that Nina was directly involved in the event being recounted. He does this by asking her to use her memory of the event to supplement his, and also by again using “we” to indicate that they were together in the event: “We w’re w- were we loaded?” This displays to the other recipients that she has as much knowledge of the story as he does, and perhaps more.

Matthew’s request for verification may be seen as an “invitation to co-tellership,” inviting the knowing other to participate in the telling by providing or corroborating its details. It invites her to take a turn which may have the form of a part of the story addressed to the story’s unknowing recipients. However this possible invitation is not taken up by Nina. First, as line 89 indicates, her response is not forthcoming during the 1.1 seconds after
Matthew addresses this utterance to her. It does not begin until Matthew has started his next utterance in line 91, and appears to “feed” on his utterance. That is, her utterance at 92 begins “I don’t” as does his at line 91.

In both the error correction described above, and this request for verification, coparticipants display that they were coparticipants in the event in the course of the telling of the story. In both of these instances this displays that they are knowing recipients of the story. While in each telling there is an opportunity for potential usurpation of the tellership by the current non-teller, participants seem to do complementary work during the act of co-telling.

**Complementary Tellings**

Some details of the telling of these stories suggest that even as participants’ utterances compete for the floor, they may simultaneously do complementary work. This occurs (a) when one potential teller narrates, and the other “dramatizes,” (b) when details specific to each interactant’s participation in the event are narrated simultaneously, and (c) when one participant tells, and the other indicates how recipients might react to the telling. The following discussion shows ways in which complementarity may provoke competition for the floor.

(a) At the point of possible completion of Vicki’s utterance at line 43 Shawn begins an utterance in which he appears to begin to participate in the tellership of the story.

(9) 40 Vicki: he’s traveling down
  
(10) 41 Matthew: Wrong way?
  42 (0.5)
  43 Vicki: The wrong way:
  →44 Shawn: All of a sudden this guy goes - AAAAAAHCHH AAAAAAH-
  (And how much) ( )
  45 Vicki: ( )
  46 cross the block.

At line 44 Shawn “acts out” what ensued, by demonstrating the sound made by “this guy”: “All of a sudden this guy goes AAAAAAHCHH AAAAAAH-” Simultaneously with Shawn’s dramatization, in line 45 and 46, Vicki apparently continues her narration in overlap with Shawn’s enactment, “(And how much) ( ) cross the block.” While they are competing for the floor, it is interesting to note that they are doing complementary activities; V narrates while S dramatizes.

(b) Subsequent to this, another kind of complementarity emerges: each participant tells what went on from their own point of view.

(10) 45 Vicki: (And how much) ( )
  46 cross the block.
47 Shawn: (very rushed) cross the block ‘hhhh–
48 Shawn: ‘An I– An I– ‘An I’m
                  [                ]
49 Vicki: AN I’M YELLIN’ Y’ SHAWN at SHAWN

In line 46 the end of Vicki’s utterance begun in line 45 emerges into the clear. In line 47 Shawn repeats Vicki’s line 46 very hurriedly. Lines 48 and 49 also occur in overlap. In line 49 Vicki continues the narration of events: ‘AN I’M YELLING Y’ SHAWN’N’ The conjunction “An” (“and”) here suggests that this utterance is built as a continuation of her prior turn. This is also the case with Shawn’s utterance in line 48. He restarts his turn (“‘An I’m’”) after Vicki’s is possibly complete. Vicki’s and Shawn’s utterances both begin, “An I . . .” At this point they are apparently both telling (or beginning to tell) what happened from their own point of view in the course of events. Like lines 44 and 45, their utterances are competing for the floor, and they are presumably competing for recipients. They are nevertheless each telling their own part of what happened, and therefore recounting complementary details.

In this part of the telling, then, we see two kinds of complemental activity. First, in lines 43–46 while Vicki describes what happened, Shawn “acts it out.” Second, Vicki and Shawn appear to provide complementary details by telling simultaneously what they were apparently doing simultaneously in the course of the events being told.

(c) This may be contrasted with Shawn’s utterance in line 28, where he may be seen as doing a teller’s activity which is also complementary to the kind of tellership activity undertaken by Vicki, but in a different way.

(11) 25 Vicki: He m(h)ade a right- it wzz: in Sanna
27 Moniga. You know have- the have
→28 Shawn: Oh shit

29 Vicki: all those (b)righ
30 Shawn: I made a left- left-
31 Vicki: They have (. ) m one-way street:ts
32 and everything (. 0.4) and then two-way streets?
33 he made- (0.4) a left turn from a one-way
34 street, (0.8) into a two-way street, (0.5)
35 But he though: T it wzz: ::

36 Shawn: But in the worship lane hehehe

His reaction (“Oh: shit”) in line 28, and his laughter in line 36 may stand as indications of relevant responses by the audience to the telling, as well as indicating his reaction in the situation being told about.

A similar complementarity is evident in Matthew and Nina’s telling. However it takes a slightly different form. It consists of Nina laughing at or before appropriate points in the telling. This is best illustrated in line 127.

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In lines 123–124 Matthew is the principal teller of the story. He says that they are “almost up the hill,” when (lines 124 and 126) “here comes this gu(hi(h)iuy).” It is at the point indicated by the square bracket that Nina comes in with loud laughter. Her laughter occurs before the laughter tokens (“gu(hi(h)iuy)” in Matthew’s utterance. Furthermore, she laughs uproariously not only before Matthew completes his utterance, but also before Matthew mentions what this guy was doing. By laughing in this way before the laughable event is described Nina demonstrates that she knows what is upcoming. The laugh tokens in Matthew’s “gu(hi(h)iuy),” which are simultaneous with Nina’s laughter, may confirm that laughter is an appropriate response at this point. Also, by giving this hilarious response she may indicate (as Shaw does in the first story) what an appropriate response might be for unknowing recipients of this account. (As Schegloff (personal communication) notes, this is done more directly in Nina’s “It was heh: heh: so(h)oful(h)many” at line 99). Although Matthew’s utterance remains hearable through Nina’s laughter, whether her activity is complementary or competitive remains unclear. As Jefferson (1979) notes, laughter by one may constitute an invitation to others. Therefore although it may do the “complementary” work of indicating an appropriate response for recipients, it may do competing work by inviting that response while the telling is still in progress, and not complete.

The complementarity of the three kinds of activities described above may be likened to the complementarity of right hand and left hand in the playing of a piece of piano music. Vicki and Matthew may be characterized as doing the work done by the left hand in piano music; they “play” the “dominant theme.” Shaw and Nina, by contrast, do the right hand’s work, elaborating, “decorating,” and supplementing the dominant theme. While such complementarity may provide harmony in piano music, in talk it may provide discord. The conversation system is governed by the taking of turns at talk. Simultaneous talk is generally relinquished in favor of turn-by-turn talk fairly soon after it has begun. (c.f., Sacks, Schegloff & Jefferson, 1974). As the excerpts of simultaneous talk displayed above indicate, when two speakers speak at one time, repeats and increased volume (as in lines 48 and 49) may occur.

While simultaneous talk by potential tellers of the story may be logically described as performing complementary activities, it may sometimes constitute competition between speakers for the floor.
"Doing" Relationships in Public

In the account of the beginning and body of the two stories we see that persons who coparticipated in events may demonstrate their coparticipation when they collaboratively construct the beginning of the telling, and share the telling itself. The description of Vicki and Shawns's and Matthew and Nina's ways of beginning the telling shows how they resolve the problem of having a knowing recipient, and potentially competent co-teller present by displaying themselves to be members of the same party to the conversation. The account of the division of labor in the tellership of the story shows ways in which co-participants may resolve the problem of who should tell what, and when. These stories are begun when one prospective teller forwards the other's remote approach, and the forwarding is ratified. Shared telling is accomplished through monitoring for errors, requesting verification, and complementary telling. Coparticipants in the events narrated show themselves to be in the same conversational party, and potential equally competent tellers. In these ways they emerge as being "with," or "teams." The details of the stories' telling may also provide indications about the extent to which the actions of sharers of a story may be described as constituting them as members of a couple. As was noted above, Goffman (1971, p. 194) suggests that "tie-signs" may provide some information about a relationship's "name," "terms," and "stage." The collaborative claims to coparticipation described above show us that co-tellers were "together." They do not yet suggest that the co-tellers are displaying intimacy. The following speculations suggest some other elements of the telling which may provide an index of the perpetrators' intimacy.

An element which seems to do this work is present in the beginning of the first story, and becomes an issue in its telling. That element is "telling on behalf of another." It manifests itself in two ways in Vicki's and Shawn's story. First, Vicki claims knowledge of Shawn's thoughts. Second, in Shawn's presence she tells a story which potentially ridicules him.

In line 23 ("We you know what he di:dt") Vicki begins a telling of an event in which they both participated, but in which Shawn was clearly the main protagonist. Nevertheless, Vicki begins to tell the story on Shawn's behalf. This involves her not only in describing what he did, but also in making claims about what he thought:

\[\text{Vicki: } ((...)) \text{ he made- (0.4) a left turn from a one-way street. (0.8) into a two-way street, (0.5) But he THOUGHT: It wz: :} \\
\text{35 [ ]} \\
\text{36 Shawn: But in the wrong lane hehehehe} \\
\text{37 Vicki: He thought it wz a one-way street,}\]

Here Vicki claims understanding of Shawn's thoughts. We generally do not claim knowledge of another's thoughts unless we are fairly certain that we are right. Persons' thoughts tend to be treated as their private realm, over which they have ultimate jurisdiction, and to which others have rather limited access. To claim knowledge of someone's thoughts seems to entail a high

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degree of understanding of them. There may be negative interactional consequences to being told by someone that you are incorrect in your evaluation of what you have claimed they are thinking. It possibly stands as a claim that you do not "understand" them. Claims to understanding another possibly constitute displays of intimacy. Telling someone they have made an incorrect evaluation of one's thoughts in such an instance is much like catching someone trespassing on "private property." While psychiatrists and psychologists earn the right to claim knowledge of the thoughts of others via university degrees, lay people may only be permitted to claim knowledge of the thoughts of another if they have a fairly high degree of intimacy with them, which "legitimates" the "trespass." To suggest that one has knowledge of someone else's thoughts, then, implicitly claims intimacy with them. To permit someone to perform this kind of "trespass" may possibly ratify that claim of intimacy. Here Shawn does not contest Vicki's claim. This at least suggests that he does not reject her claim to knowledge of his thoughts, understanding of him, and thereby perhaps intimacy with him. In this instance, then, (1) claiming and (2) not being prevented from claiming, knowledge of another's thoughts, may stand as a display of intimacy.

Secondly, on this occasion Vicki tells a story, of which Shawn is the butt, in his presence. (Goodwin, 1984, provides a detailed account of the body behavior of the butt of a story). In the same way that tellers of ethnic jokes may only perform these tellings to members of the ethnicity being joked about if they themselves are members of that ethnicity, so it is presumably less acceptable to have someone else ridicule you in public in your presence than to ridicule yourself. To let someone else ridicule you in public, then, might constitute a demonstration that this person is intimate with you to the extent that it is permissible for them to do so, in the same way that someone might achieve such acceptance in an ethnic group that the group permits them to tell jokes about that ethnicity without incurring censure. Whether or not Shawn "permits" Vicki to do this remains unclear in the this telling, for at the point at which Vicki begins to tell the "ridiculous" action Shawn performed, he begins to join in the telling, and they become partners in the telling of the events, as they were partners in the events themselves.

Despite this, any claims that the behaviors described above constitute "couple"ness must be attenuated by the observation that they do not appear to be done demonstrably for the purpose of displaying coupleness. First and foremost, these participants are best described as tellers and recipients of stories, or protagonists and co-protagonists in narrated events. What they are doing, among other things such as eating and drinking, is telling a story. The appearance of being a "couple" may be a by-product of this behavior. The shared story, where the participants resolve the interactional "problems" of having two potentially competent tellers, and two knowing recipients present, seems to be a viable setting for describing how the appearance of a relationship, or "withness" is produced through participants' communication behavior. A setting which provides structural interactional problems with respect to the "name," "terms" or "stage" of relationships might enable researchers to describe ways in which the appearance of the "name," "terms" and "stage" of a relationship are produced.
Conclusions

Comparison of the ways in which stories are told enables us to see how two persons who shared an event may share a storytelling, and through this produce the appearance of being "with" each other. Using as a resource conversation analysts' accounts of the details of how storytelling is ordinarily done in conversation, we are able to describe how this activity is done when there are two potential storytellers. Conversation analysis is a tool with which we can come upon the orderliness in talk which participants can be shown to create and display. This enables us to gain access to the solutions which participants in conversations have to the interactional problems of recounting an event in which two of those present at the telling participated. The findings presented above indicate some of the ways in which the appearance of being "together" may be produced in the course of a shared telling. It suggests that this may be one research avenue which could contribute to our understanding of the behaviors pairs of individuals may be engaged in when we recognize them to be a "couple." Analysis of further instances of shared storytelling, particularly those where interactants are demonstrably oriented to their "with-ness," should increase our understanding of how interactants "do" their relationships in public. This may enable us to predict and explain more accurately the behaviors that couples do.

NOTES

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2 I am grateful to Michael Moerman for making this recording available to me.

3 I am indebted to Emanuel A. Schegloff for pointing out this similarity between the two stories.

REFERENCES


TRANSCRIPTION SYMBOLS

(0.X) Indicates a pause of 0.X interactional seconds
--- Underlining indicates stress on sounds/words
- Period indicates falling inflection, not necessarily at the end of an utterance or sentence
, A comma indicates “continuing’’ intonation
(( )) Double parentheses enclose descriptive remarks
( ) A degree mark preceding an utterance indicates that that utterance is said more quietly than preceding talk.
= The equals sign indicates that two utterances are contiguous, but not overlapping
:: Colon(s) indicate the extension (“stretching”) of the sound it follows.
[ ] Brackets are used to indicate overlapping utterances. Left brackets note beginning of overlap, right brackets “close” or end the overlap.
- A hyphen at the end of a word or part of a word indicates that it sound “cut off”
(h) An hwithin parentheses, within a word or sound, indicates explosive aspiration, such as laughter or breathlessness.
’hhhh h’s preceded by a reversed apostrophe indicate audible in-breaths.

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