Conversation Analytic Approaches
to the Relevance and Uses of
Relationship Categories in Interaction

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For about forty years, conversation analysts have been studying the practices in which members of a culture conduct and understand social interaction. Conversation analysts have studied the reasoning and practices used to accomplish and understand conversational actions, to negotiate taking turns, and to coordinate social activity. This body of research, conversation analysts have shown that people monitor each other's conduct in the course of interaction and design their own conduct in the light of what the recipients know, want, feel, and will do next.

In this chapter, we have elected to discuss conversation analysis (CA) in terms of its approach it takes to relationship categories. Our selection of relationship categories as an important aspect of CA is influenced by the fact that scholars in interpersonal communication, psychology, and sociology have long regarded the concept of relationships as important for studying the organization of social life. We intend this chapter to speak to conversation analysts and other social scientists interested in how participants, in interaction, define and structure their knowledge of the activities, motives, rights, responsibilities, and competencies in terms of relationship categories. We regard such definitions as appropriate for incumbents of a relationship category, for example, of friends, mothers, or children. This chapter contributes to the CA work in that it clarifies and develops a framework for studying how person on and use their assumptions and understandings regarding incumbents of part relationship categories in interaction.

1 In keeping with Garfinkel's (1967) conception of "member," when we refer to "cultural members," "members of a culture," "persons," "people," or "participants," we assume that the referenced actors are culturally competent, that is, they have knowledge of and are capable of using the practices and reasoning that allow them to be and to act as normal/abnormal and competent/incompetent persons within the culture.
ASSUMPTIONS OF THE CA PROGRAM OF RESEARCH

Conversation analysts view persons in a culture as sense-making actors. In interacting, persons engage in conduct that they understand, and assume others will understand as having some particular sense or meaning. Persons produce their talk, gestures, expressions, and body movements so as to be understood in particular ways; they interpret their own and other persons’ conduct as indexing, indicating, or revealing some particular meanings.

Persons in a culture use shared sense-making practices to produce and understand conduct. They produce and interpret conduct in accord with their analyses of the contexts in which the conduct is produced. Participants’ production and understanding actions rest on their analyses of the participants’ relationship, the participants’ use of the local interactional environment, and the larger activity in which the participants engage. In important ways, participants make sense of interactional conduct, turning, in terms of the local identities of the speakers and the recipients, the talk and actions; to which the speaker is responding, the inferred intention of the speaker, and the possible events that can be expected to follow.

The analyses that members of a culture make in performing and understanding activities, and events are the objects of inquiry for conversation analysts. Pomerantz and Mandelbaum (1997) provide a succinct statement of a central aim of the research program for conversation analysis:

The organization of talk or conversation (whether “informal” or “formal”) was never central, defining focus in CA. Rather, it is the organization of meaningful conduct of people in society, that is, how people in society produce their activities and make sense of the world about them. The core analytic objective is to illuminate how actions, events, objects, etc. are produced and understood rather than how language and talk are organized as analytical separable phenomena. (p. 65)

For our purpose here, we emphasize that CA research focuses on persons’ sense-making practices. However, there are a number of ways to characterize the centrality of CA, especially as the enterprise of CA is a synthesis that drew heavily from ethnomethodology’s interest in the interaction order and Harold Garfinkel’s interest in the dures of common sense reasoning used to produce and recognize interactional conduct. Although we choose to emphasize sense-making practices in this chapter, we could have said that CA’s central focus is on the sequential organization of the talk and actions. Complete discussions of the assumptions of the CA approach are available in Garfinkel (1970), Schegloff (1992), Heritage (1984), Atkinson and Heritage (1984), and Clayman (1991).

A CA APPROACH TO CATEGORIES OF RELATIONSHIPS

As already discussed, conversation analysts’ aim is to analyze the reasoning and the practices used by participants. One domain in which persons engage in reasoning and rely on and use that reasoning in practice, concerns categories of relationship...
on Sacks' work, Psathas (1999) defines membership categories as classifications or social types that may be used to describe persons, and he gives as examples politician, woman, nerd, astronaut, friend, and grandmother. The importance of such categories, according to Sacks, is that persons organize much of their knowledge with respect to such categories (Sacks, 1972a, 1972b, 1992). When people recognize someone as an incumbent of a category such as student, mother, or friend, they make inferences regarding the rights and responsibilities, typical conduct and motives, and possibly personal characteristics of the incumbent. Psathas (1999) suggests that people make references to motives, rights, entitlements, obligations, knowledge, attributes, and competencies in describing the activities and conduct of those categorized in a particular way (p. 144).

Conversation analysts have shown that participants use their understandings about the activities, motives, rights, responsibilities, and competencies associated with incumbents of particular relationship categories in their selection of recipients, in the design of talk and action for those recipients, and in their interpretations of the recipients' talk. For example, persons who have news to tell select their recipients in part with respect to the different rights that incumbents of different relationship categories have to hear such news from them. Maynard (2003) argues that "... conversational episodes of bad and good news are, in a hearer's sheer selection of whom and when to tell, or in a hearer's decision about when and how to solicit such news, already imbued with relational implications and doings" (p. 124). Conversation analysts have demonstrated that people use their assumptions about the typical concerns of incumbents of particular membership categories in the way they design their talk and actions. In one study, Pomerantz, Fehr, and Ende (1997) found that supervising physicians introduce themselves to patients who have been examined previously by interns in ways that reflect their assumption that incumbents of the category intern typically are concerned with maintaining their authority in front of patients. They may introduce themselves with terms that imply that the intern is the supervising physician's equal. Conversation analysts have also studied how participants use their understandings of the rights and responsibilities associated with particular categories when they interpret talk. Robinson (forthcoming) has shown that when a physician asks a patient a question such as "How are you feeling?" the recipient interprets the question as a request for an update regarding a medical problem dealt with on a previous visit. This interpretation is consistent with a common understanding of the rights and responsibilities associated with the categories of physician and patient.

Participants use their knowledge of the activities, motives, competencies, rights, and responsibilities that are appropriate for incumbents of particular relationship categories both when they explicitly reference a relationship category and when they engage in certain conversational actions. In the remainder of this section, we discuss first a CA approach to speakers' incorporating explicit relationship categories in their talk and then a CA approach to studying the actions and activities understood as appropriate for incumbents of particular relationship categories.

Using Explicit Relationship Categories

In performing locally relevant conversational actions or activities, participants incorporate explicit relationship categories anticipating that recipients will draw on their understanding of the activities, motives, rights, responsibilities, and/or competencies associated with incumbents of the category. The understanding that the recipient supposed to have provides, in part, for the intelligibility and force of the conversational action. This phenomenon can be illustrated using an excerpt from fiction. In the excerpt below from a Harry Potter novel (Rowling, 1998, p. 92), the plump woman is the mother of twins Fred and George.

"Fred, you next," the plump woman said.
"I'm not Fred, I'm George," said the boy. "Honestly, woman, you call yourself my mother? Can't you tell I'm George?"
"Sorry, George, dear."
"Only joking, I am Fred." said the boy, and off he went.

Fred's teasing rebuke, "Honestly, woman, you call yourself our mother?" has for intelligibility as a rebuke inasmuch as the recipient, his mother, assumes that Fred is expected to be able to tell their children apart, even twins, and that she failed the task. A conversation analyst would examine the use of the category in the sequence to analyze how the action (e.g., teasing rebuke) depended on this shared understanding regarding the activities and competencies expected of mothers.

Activities Associated with Incumbency in Relationship Categories

The conversational actions that a person performs vis-à-vis another may have implications for enacting and maintaining incumbency in a relationship category. When a person engages in just those conversational actions or activities that are recognized as appropriate for incumbents of the relationship category, the person can be seen to be enacting/maintaining incumbency in that relationship category. Put somewhat differently, when viewing conduct that is recognized as appropriate for incumbents of a particular relationship category, participants may conclude and/or reaffirm that the speaker is an incumbent of that relationship category. Maynard and Zimmerman (1984) contended that such vernacular terms as "intimate" and "distance" are member-analytic acts (Garfinkel, 1967); that is, they are the products of members' analyses of a relation. They assert, "We assume that the course of the interaction itself provides the 'dat this analysis'" (p. 302). Through talking and acting in ways that are recognizably related to relationship categories, participants both achieve and renew the character of relationships.

METHODS FOR STUDYING THE USES OF RELATIONSHIP CATEGORIES IN TALK-IN-INTERACTION

The methods for studying how the assumptions about incumbents of relationship categories are used in interaction are the same methods conversation analysts use to study other aspects of members' discursive practices. However, there are some methodological considerations specific to investigating explicitly uttered relationship categories and their uses in interaction.
categories. In the paragraphs that follow, we briefly discuss methodological considerations for each of the two areas.

Considerations in Studying Uses of Explicit Relationship Categories

Because we cannot know in advance when a person will explicitly invoke a relationship category, there is no way to plan data collection of them. From data already collected, an analyst can identify sequences in which explicit relationship categories have been uttered and analyze those instances.

There is a question, however, as to what an analyst would do with such a collection. The problem in treating these instances as if they were a collection is that, in all likelihood, they would not be instances of the same interactional phenomenon. When persons invoke explicit relationship categories, they may be performing any number of different actions. Even in situations in which persons invoke the same relationship category, there is no reason to assume that they are engaged in similar actions. The feature that cuts across the different uses of explicit relationship categories is that, in each case, a speaker relies on the recipients' understandings of the activities, motives, competencies, rights, and responsibilities of incumbents of the explicit category for the intelligibility of the action.

In sum, an analyst can identify instances of invoking explicit relationship categories and can investigate how the participants' assumptions regarding the proper activities, motives, competencies, rights, and/or responsibilities of incumbents of the relationship category provide for the coherence or intelligibility of the action. In our view, however, this study would not lead to an analysis of one interactional phenomenon, because participants invoke explicit relationship categories in the service of a wide variety of conversational actions.

Considerations for Studying Actions Related to Enacting/Maintaining Incumbency

Conversation analysts have started to study collections of interactions between persons who are incumbents of complementary pairs of relationship categories, for example friend–friend or daughter–mother, and role categories (See Heritage's chapter, this volume). Based on both the regularity with which certain activities are performed and the accountability associated with performing the activities, conversation analysts make claims that these activities are recognized as proper for incumbents of those relationship categories. As an illustration, incumbents of the category of friend not only regularly greet each other and regularly update each other as to events in their lives; they also are accountable, and are called to task, for failing to perform these activities.

To analyze the activities that are associated with incumbency of a particular category vis-à-vis engagement with incumbents of a complementary category, it is reasonable to collect occurrences of interactions involving incumbents of the two categories. However, the activities performed by the participants in the collected interactions may have different statuses with respect to the relationship category of interest. Some activities may be expected of, and recognized as proper for, incumbents of the relationship categories of interest; some activities may be permitted, but not necessarily expected, but incumbents of those categories; and other activities may be related to incumbents of other categories. We offer no formula for determining the status of each activity; we suggest that a case with compelling evidence needs to be made for whatever the analyst makes.

Analysts should not assume that the conversational actions that incumbents of complementary relationship categories perform are necessarily associated with the relational categories identified by the analyst. For example, when a woman and son work together to fix a broken garage disposal, the activities of demonstrating how to take apart the machinery might be better understood as activities enacting incumbency in the category of expert vis-à-vis novice rather than son vis-à-vis mother. The challenge is on the analyst to demonstrate an association between the activities, the relational categories to which participants seem oriented, and the assumptions the participants hold about incumbents of those relationship categories. For a thorough discussion and related points, see Schegloff (1987).

Illustrations of CA Approaches to Studying the Relevance and Uses of Relationship Categories

In this section, we offer illustrations of CA approaches to studying how members of relationship categories and their use of relationship categories when they interact. For these illustrations, we draw on both selected published studies and our own analyses of matter.

The discussion is divided into two parts. In the first part, we illustrate CA approaches to studying the relevance of relationship categories. We offer analyses of participants' actions and relationships categories. We rely on shared understandings of activities, motives, competencies, responsibilities, and/or rights associated with incumbents of the complementary pairs of the relationship categories they invoke to accomplish conversational actions. In the second part, we discuss CA studies of actions and practices associated with incumbency in complementary relationship categories. When one participant performs an action or engages in a practice associated with a relationship category and the coparticipant ratifies the action or practice, in effect they have established/re-established their incumbencies in their respective relationship categories. In other words, members enact incumbency in particular relationship categories by engaging in actions and practices that are recognizable and proper for incumbents of that relationship category.

Illustrations of a CA Approach to Studying Uses of Explicit Relationship Categories

Our approach to studying the uses of explicit relationship categories builds on Sacks (1992) foundational work on categorizations. Two aspects of the organization of categories are particularly relevant for this discussion: the inference-rich property of categories and the phenomenon of category-bound activities.

According to Sacks (1992), a central part of social organization involves how persons reason about sets of categories and incumbents of categories and how the
the reasoning and knowledge related to categories in interaction. Sacks identified three properties of the organization of categories, which he described as the MIR (membership, inference-rich, and representative) membership categorization device. The first property, membership, involves members' understandings that sets of categories are complete and encompass the population; any member of the population can be put in one of the categories in the set. Sacks called these sets 'which' -type sets "because questions about any one of these can be formulated as 'Which, for some set, are you?' and 'None' is not a presumptive member of any of the categories." (p. 40). The second property, inference-rich, involves the inferences that members make about incumbents of membership categories. As Sacks (1992) described it, "When you get some category as an answer to a 'which' -type question, you can feel that you know a great deal about the person, and can readily formulate topics of conversation based on the knowledge stored in terms of that category" (p. 41). The third property, representative, is that "any member of any category is presumptively a representative of that category for the purpose of use of whatever knowledge is stored by reference to that category" (p. 41). If, for example, Americans expect the French to be highly discriminating about food, on meeting a French person, an American may ask for his or her assessment of food in the United States "without reference to whether they stand as a member of the Gourmet Club of France, or don't ever eat out, or aren't interested in food, or are just ordinary citizens, so to speak" (p. 41).

Of particular interest for our discussion is the inference-rich property: "...a great deal of the knowledge that members of a society have about the society is stored in terms of these categories. And by "stored in terms of" I mean that much knowledge has some category term from this class as its subject" (Sacks, 1992, Vol. 1, p. 40).

In addition to describing some of the inferential work and reassembling that members engage in when they use and hear categories in interaction, Sacks demonstrated that an important part of the knowledge that is organized with respect to categories involves activities. He invented the term category-bound activity to refer to the connection that members see, and use, between particular activities and particular categories of persons. Sacks (1992) argued that members use the knowledge of that connection to do various things in interaction. One use to which the knowledge is put is when viewers make inferences about who the actor in a specific activity is: "for an observer of a category-bound activity, the category to which the activity is bound has a special relevance for formulating an identification of its doer" (Vol. 1, p. 259). Our discussion of CA approaches to studying explicit relationship categories relies on Sacks' analysis of the representative and inference-rich properties of categories as a foundation.

The following four instances illustrate how conversation analysts would analyze interactions in which a participant claims incumbency in a relationship category. We show how the participants' assumptions regarding the activities, competencies, and so on, that are expected of incumbents of particular relationship categories are relied on in accomplishing conversational actions.

The first illustration is drawn from a series of calls to a Suicide Prevention Center that were collected and analyzed by Sacks (1992). Based on the excerpt that follows, it seems likely that the caller, earlier in the call, said or implied that he or she did not have anyone to turn to. In line 1, the caller asks the query or implication that the caller has no one to turn to. In response, the caller gives an unanswered "no" (line 2). Instead of accepting the "no," the caller follows up with another version of the question, a version that provides the caller with the opportunity to give a different response. If follow-up question, the call-taker names explicit relationship categories that could be the caller in identifying candidates that the caller may not have initially considered (Billig et al., 1988).

Excerpt 1 (Sacks, 1972a)
1 Call-taker: You don't have anyone to turn to?
2 Caller: No.
3 Call-taker: → No relatives, friends?
4 Caller: No.

Thus in excerpt 1, the call-taker's "No relatives, friends?" (line 3) takes into account caller's previous claim that he or she had no one to whom to turn but questions her further on that matter, thereby casting the answer to the previous question: answer given to a question that retroactively was insufficiently clear (Pomerantz, 1984). In the service of pursuing the matter further and possibly eliciting a different response from the one the caller had just given, the call-taker used his/her knowledge of categories of persons with whom it would be appropriate to talk about personal prob (relatives, friends) and asked the caller to consider whether there were incumbents those categories in the caller's life.

The next example is drawn from another call to a Suicide Prevention Center. In this call, the caller expressed misgivings about calling the Suicide Prevention Center characterizing the call as a possible mistake (line 1). In response to the call-taker's request for the caller to explain or elaborate on the characterization (line 2), the caller provides an explanation (lines 3–6).

Excerpt 2 (Sacks, 1972a)
1 Caller: Maybe it was a mistake to call. I don't know. But I mean-
2 Call-taker: Why do you think it might be?
3 Caller: → Well, you know, it seems to reach out for help from strangers
4 is, I don't know. It seems to be very-like I shouldn't do it.
5 Like my family and friends don't help me. I mean why should
6 I go to a stranger for help, you know?
7 Call-taker: Sometimes you need professional help.

In offering an explanation of why he/she would consider the call as improper, the caller categorized the call-takers of the Center as strangers and juxtaposed them with "my family and friends." In discussing a different call to the Suicide Prevention Center, Sacks provides an insightful analysis of the use of the category stranger in the context of seeking help if a stranger is thought of as someone who doesn't know you, then plainly there are lots of people who could give one help whom one wouldn't call a "stranger." If you bro your leg and went to the hospital, then you wouldn't thank the doctor who fixed your leg for fixing the leg of a stranger... A characteristic of "stranger" involves, then, is that it is not merely one way of characterizing some person, an alternative to, e.g., "doctor," but an alternative characterization in the sense that somebody is called a "stranger" when o would have liked to have turned to somebody else. (Vol. II, p. 406)
To build an explanation that would be coherent to the call-taker, the caller relied on knowledge that he or she presumed was known to the call taker as well. He wanted strangers to be inappropriate, and family and friends appropriate, persons with whom to discuss personal problems.

As analyzed by Sacks, the call-taker countered the caller’s concern regarding the appropriateness of calling a stranger at the Suicide Prevention Center. However, rather than counter the assumption that strangers are inappropriate persons with whom to discuss personal problems, the call-taker claimed to be an incumbent in a category in a different set of categories, one based on professional knowledge. The call-taker used his/her knowledge of the categories of persons with whom it is appropriate to talk about personal problems to shift from being cast as a stranger, a category of persons with whom it is inappropriate to talk about personal problems, to casting him/herself as a professional, a category with whom it may be appropriate to talk about personal problems.

The next example illustrates the limitations of communication in interaction. Kinzig (2003) found that interactions relied on presumably shared understandings regarding the rights and responsibilities associated with being a mother, brother, or husband when they invoked family relationships categories in after-hours calls between caretakers of patients and doctors in England. The understandings that the participants presumed as shared included that the nuclear family is a co-essential unit (pp. 36–46) and that it is, among other things, a locus of ‘intimate caring’ (pp. 46–61). Caretakers used relationship categories to refer to the patient and/or to characterize themselves; both patients and doctors relied on shared assumptions about the rights and obligations associated with the relationship categories to provide coherence to the actions they performed. The feature of relying on shared assumptions to help accomplish an action can be seen in the following excerpt taken from a call in which the caller attempted to have the doctor make a house call to visit a sick infant. When questioned about her not asking to have the child’s ears examined during the prior medical visit (lines 20–21), the caller responded by identifying herself as being only the grandmother (line 22).

Excerpt 3 (DEC 2:1:9, 1:6:31)

1. Caller: Yes. It’s only ten months old,
2. Doc: Mmm
3. Caller: And ih-(is) had- (0:2) is got diarrhea for over (.5) six days.
4. Doc: Mmm
5. Caller: Is had ‘is injection on: on Wednesday, Ahh an’ (.1) it/’(e) seems to have something wrong with ‘is ears. <because ‘e keeps (chry) pulling at ‘s ears.
6. (0:4)
8. (0:4)
9. Doc: Ah: an’ this’s been going on for a whole week, is it?
10. Caller: Yes.
11. Doc: Has ‘e seen the doctor about it
12. Caller: Well, ‘e was there on: on Wednesday. <Got is injection.
13. Doc: Ahh And did the: doctor have a look at ‘is ears then?
15. Doc: No! Uhh- but ‘e was worried- you were worried about
16. the ears then, were you= [Yes.
17. Doc: Ahhh (swallow) Yuh: oh-hh But d’yu: you didn’t ask
18. ‘im to check ‘im then. Ahhh
19. Caller: → No Well I’m (only) ‘is grandma.
21. Caller: [Uhh huh! Ahhh A’n;
22. Doc: [Eh: ‘as ‘e been sick at all?
23. ()
24. Caller: Yes, he has been: e- violently sick.

The caller assumed that invoking the relationship category grandma was an explanation for not having asked the doctor in a previous visit to check the child. In identifying herself as “only is grandma,” the caller relied on shared knowledge of mothers, rather than grandmothers, are the appropriate persons to request social workers and professionals alike. The call on the doctor’s understanding of the responsibilities associated with different relationship categories to provide the sense that it was reasonable and appropriate the “only is grandma,” had not performed the activity in question.

The following excerpt is taken from a telephone call in which the participants discuss a recent luncheon party that was hosted by Margy and attended by Edna’s praise of the party and her expression of appreciation. Margy expressed her own pleasure (lines 7, 9) followed by a reference to her bet on the table a lot (line 14). She described the circumstances in such a way as that her conduct, which might otherwise have been problematic, turned out no problem in this situation (lines 11–12).

Excerpt 4 (NB:VII:6)

1. Edna: [h]You do everything so beautifully and yer table wz so byoo-
2. I told Bud I said honestly. [h]hhhh hh wz jist delightful t’come
3. down there that day en mrr I these
4. Margy: [W e: ll
5. ()
6. Edna: [gaj’s n:
7. Margy: [I : jist wz so 2ickled thechu did, B’zuh hh=
8. Edna: [Mmm
9. Margy: = I like t u to that stuff en u. I he-
10. Edna: [Yah
11. Margy: → =I: s I: be I knew J heduh be away fn the table a lot
12. Edna: b’t: hhh wir all friend’s n you guys didn’t care, En uh-=
13. Margy: = That’s right
By characterizing the participants of the luncheon as friends and by asserting that the participants didn’t care that she was away from the table a lot, Margy offered a version of the event that would explain or make sensibile the participants’ not taking offense at her potentially offensive conduct. The coherence of the claim that the participants didn’t care relied on an understanding about incumbents of the category of friend, namely, that incumbents have ways of sustaining pleasant social interaction with no need for a facilitating hostess and/or that friends make generous interpretations of each other’s motives and conduct and overlook small infractions. Invoking either or both of these attributes of friends makes coherent Margy’s claim that the friends did not (or were not expected to) care.

In each illustration discussed previously, participants relied on shared understandings of the activities, competencies, responsibilities, rights, and/or motives regarded as appropriate or inappropriate for incumbents of specific relationship categories to perform a conversational action. In the first illustration, the call-taker relied on his/her understanding that the activity of talking about personal problems is appropriate for incumbents of the relationship categories of family and friends to accomplish the action of pursuing a different response from the response the caller had just given. In the second illustration, the call-taker relied on the caller’s understanding that incumbents of the category of professionals may be appropriate recipients of personal talk about problems to accomplish the action of countering the caller’s concern that calling strangers at the agency was inappropriate. In the third illustration, the caller relied on the doctor’s understanding that incumbents of the category of grandmothers do not have the same responsibilities as incumbents of the category of mothers to accomplish the action of justifying or accounting for her not having given due instructions to a doctor attending to the child. In the fourth illustration, a participant relied on the understanding that incumbents of the category of friends make allowance for each other and that friends enjoy socializing with one another with no need of outside assistance to accomplish the action of removing a potential offense. In sum, we have shown that when an explicit relationship category is used in interaction, participants rely on shared tacit knowledge about the activities, competencies, responsibilities, rights, and motives appropriate for incumbents of the specific relationship categories for the coherence and/or accomplishment of a conversational action.

Illustrations of CA Approaches to Studying Actions and Practices Associated with Incumbency

Interacts maintain incumbency in complementary relationship categories, such as friend–friend, intimate–intimate, or father–son, by engaging in conduct regarded as appropriate for incumbents of the relationship category and by ratifying appropriate conduct when performed by the counteractant. In this section, we discuss actions and practices associated with the co-present parties’ enacting incumbency in complementary sets of relationship categories. A discussion of the actions and practices through which participants enact and/or claim incumbency in relationship categories where the incumbent in the complementary relationship category is not present is outside the scope of this chapter.4

A number of CA studies have analyzed various actions and kinds of conduct members recognize as part and parcel of incumbency of specific relationship categories. In this section, we will review selected research on the following pairs of related action categories: (i) tracking inquiries + providing further details; (ii) discussing one’s own personal problems + displaying interest in discussing the other’s personal problems; (iii) making oblique references to shared experiences + taking up the other’s talk about shared experiences; and (iv) using irritation + taking up the other’s proprieties by using additional, stronger proprieties.

Inquiring About Tracked Events + Providing More Details on One’s Own Activity

A set of actions associated with the entitlement to claim the relationship of “close” includes not only sharing reports of one’s activities on occasions of interest but also using one’s memory of reports offered on previous occasions of interest to ask for updates on the events and activities in the other person’s life as tracked through the previous conversations. Demonstrating early in an encounter an interest in updates on previously discussed events and activities is a way of enacting involvement in the life of the other. Drew and Chilton (2000) and Morrison (1997) describe participants explore new topics through which interacts enact involvement with each other by seeking updates on the activities that each has been engaged in since their last contact and by providing updates to the other person.

Drew and Chilton (2000) analyzed a collection of weekly calls between a mother and daughter, calls made for the family members to keep in touch with one another analyzing the openings of the calls, they found that one recurrent activity concerns the other’s activities that were other-attentive to two sorts of things: (a) what was known about other person’s schedule and (b) problems experienced by the other person or signs of others. These inquiries invited the cocentric to report on the current state of their activities by identifying what they discussed the last time they spoke.

Morrison (1997) studied a collection of phone calls between family members who self-identify as friends. She found several different patterns of interaction in the openings of the interactions and suggested that these patterns reflect the different types of relationships. One pattern in the participants’ closely monitoring each other’s receptivity and shaping it accordingly. In this pattern, one person inquired about an activity that had occurred since their last contact, the second person briefly reported the event, the first

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4This distinction may be clarified with the following illustration: cocentric may enact their own engagement in conversing about the relationship categories wife and husband vis-à-vis each other. They also may enact one of the party’s interests in the relationship category friend vis-à-vis a friend who is not present. For an illuminating discussion of this through which cocentric, incumbents of the categories friend–friend, constitute one of the participants’ in grandmother of the children about whom they are talking, see Raymond and Heritage (forthcoming).
displayed understanding and interest in the report, and the second person elaborated on the inquired-about occurrence (p. 38). Morrison offered the following example:

**Excerpt 5 (UTCL A33C.5-12, modified)**

36 Lisa: How was your drive
37 Howie: Just fine.
38 Lisa: Good.
39 Howie: [Just fine, (I) no problem, (0.3) no problem at all
40 *hh* that road over to uh: the interstate was a little slick.
41 but not too bad.

In the above excerpt, after Howie’s minimal report (line 37) on the activity about which Lisa asked, Lisa’s enthusiastically enthused response (line 38) may have served to encourage him to elaborate on his report (lines 39-41). Morrison described another patterned way of interacting, which she characterized as enacting “mutual high involvement.” In this pattern, the first person asked the other something he/she knew had occurred since their last point of contact, the other shared the news and updated the first person about the event or activity, and the first person responded by displaying understanding and interest in the report.

In summary, conversation analysts have studied several actions that are associated with incumbency of the relationship categories of family members and friends and seem related to claiming entitlement to the relationship attribute “being close.” The actions include providing news of events in one’s life about which the other person would not know, inquiring about events or problems discussed during previous interactions, and providing updates in response to inquiries and to displays of interest.

**Discussing One’s Own Problems + Displaying Interest in the Other’s Problems.** As noted earlier, the activity of discussing personal problems is category-bound, that is, it is regarded as appropriate for incumbents of the categories of family members and friends and inappropriate for incumbents of the categories of acquaintances and strangers (see earlier analyses of excerpts 1 and 2). Discussing personal problems in interaction involves at least two parties’ respective work: One party talks about his or her personal problems to a second party, who shows some level of receptivity to participating in the discussion. If both parties engage in the activity, their talk both reflects and enacts a presumed understanding that they have the right and obligation respectively to engage in talk about personal problems.

Recipients of talk about troubles have different ways of doing uptake of that talk, and their responses may be read as relationship implicature. Jefferson and Lee (1980) showed how recipients of reports of personal problems may take up the reports in various ways or may resist taking them up. Jefferson and Lee described one patterned way of interacting: One person talked about troubles, the recipient exhibited affiliation with an expression of empathy or an affiliative formulation, and the first person responded with talk that is emotionally heightened, or may constitute letting go. A response of this kind appears to be specifically responsive to and engendered by the initial affiliation by the reci (Jefferson & Lee, p. 24). They offer the following example:

**Excerpt 6 (NB:IV:14:2)**

E: I have to take two tub baths with *sar* in it every hhhhh da[y?]
B: *Yeah!*
E: Ahhhhh And I have to have ointment oy put on four times a day
and I’m under: violet ray for a few seconds, and I got a shot in the hurr of vitamin: (0.2) *As: skin.*
(0.5)
L: → *Leg:sus.*
E: → *Leg:tic, honest to God you know, I just broke out terribly
a:uh: hh: when I le-ef home. And, I just-just my legs were just covered hh.

Jefferson and Lee (1980) suggested that there was a movement across the seg from attention to the “proper procedures of ordinary conversation to a focusing o trouble in its own right” (p. 26). They show that, initially, Emma focused on repc the details of her affliction, but after sympathetic, affiliative uptake from her recopi she produced a more emotional, extreme version of what happened to her. Jefferson considered that doing so constituted an intense focus on the trouble and on oher. They suggested that this letting go in response to sympathetic uptake of a r of troubles constituted a moment of intimacy between interacants. Stated in ten our focus here, this example shows that the enactment of intimacy involved a bip activity of telling troubles and sympathetic uptake, which was then followed by a emotional, intimate outpouring.

Cohen (1999) examined the discourse of meetings of a support group on inf focusing on the participants’ reports about interaction in which they were hurt or off and their fellow participants’ responses to those reports. The actions through the participants told injury stories and responded to them are relationship-relevant telling injury stories to other members of the infertility support group in an emb inexplicit way, tellers showed that they took fellow group members to be incumber a confidante relationship with them, in which it was understood that other member access to the (ordinarily private) feelings associated with the experiences of someone is infertile and could demonstrate this by responding with understanding and emt to stories whose emotion-related point was embedded and not explicit in their te One of the ways in which the stories were told provided for recipients to show they had been in the same position as the teller. Tellers often presented the inj nature of the events in their stories in a somewhat embedded way that required g group members to apply their own experiences to be able to understand the imp the reported trouble. Cohen found that recipients’ empathetic responses to the i stories constituted a kind of intimacy or relational connection because they disp through their responses, that they had been in the same position as the person repc the experience. In and through the embedded telling of, and recognition responsi injury stories, interactants enacted empathetic relationships with one another.
Making Oblique References to Shared Experiences — Forwarding the Talk About Shared Experiences. A set of practices that provides an entitlement to claim the relationship attribute "close" consists of one party's making minimal references to past shared experiences with the other party's taking them up or recognizing them. In one party's producing minimal references and relying on them to be picked up, and in the other party's picking them up, interactants display mutual involvement and interconnectedness. This expectation that relationship members can and should be alert to how shared past experiences may be relevant for a telling in the present is manifested in some ways in which storytellings are jointly brought to the floor by couple members. Mandelbaum (1987) described how a storytelling may be brought to the floor through the conjoint action of couples when one interactant makes a minimal or remote reference to some past event and an interlocutor recognizes the referent and forwards a story about the event to which the other interactant referred minimally by producing an utterance that prompts a telling by the interactant who made the remote reference. Lerner (1992) characterized a related method as a "reminiscence recognition solicitation," in which a speaker in a multiparty conversation references a past shared event in a way that shows a relational partner that the speaker expects him/her to be able to retrieve a memory of a shared past event about which a story can now relevantly be told to other coparticipants. In the following instance, we see how a minimal reference to an event was made by Michael in a way that showed that he expected Nancy to be able to retrieve the shared past event. Michael found a place where their shared history could or should be brought into talk and he referenced it with a minimal reference, which put Nancy in the position of recognizing it and forwarding a telling about it. With her laughing response, Nancy both claimed to remember and showed the character of the event she was recalling (Mandelbaum, 1987).

Excerpt 8 (From Maynard & Zimmerman, 1984, p. 303)
1 Bill: Joe came by the other night
2 James: Oh yeah?
3 Bill: Yeah
4 James: This is all on tape and don't say anything that could uh
5 Bill: Infringe on you?
6 James: Exactly Anyway what do you say?
7 Bill: Well we went to Los Angeles
8 James: Yesterday?
9 Bill: ⇒ Yeah I went by you know the guy's place and
10 James: ⇒ he went to Los Angeles so I'm gonna get it Monday maybe
11 James: You discuss the price?
12 Bill: No but I think it's gonna be lower than he said
13 it was

By referring to a third party as "the guy" in line 10, and by using the reference "it refer to the thing that he is going to get in line 11, Bill relied on James' ability to the inferential work necessary to fill in who and what are being referred to here. TI references indicate an assumption on the part of the speaker that his interlocutor could retrieve the referents from some previous exchange. Displaying prior shared expertise and relying on the interlocutor's uptake of minimal references in this way is one practical for enacting incumbrancy in a relationship with a degree of familiarity.

Using Improperites + Taking up the Other's Improperites by Using Addl Improperites and/or Laughter. Lexical choices pertaining toImproperites of various sorts provide a resource for enacting incumbrancy in particular relationships. Jefferson (1974) described a sequence in which one person used the term "crap" and another person, closely following that usage, included the term "shit" in her talk. Jefferson sugg
that the second person may have used the term that she took the first person to have suppressed in the first place, perhaps in deference to her. Jefferson offers this analysis: “In so doing, she not only accepts, understands, and reciprocates whatever the use of obscenity can do interactationally, but deals with the fact that he provided a situational selected version, now proposing that he saw the situation as more formal, their relationship more distant, than he need have.” (pp. 197–198). In using the word “shit” after the other speaker had said “crap,” the second person may be seen to be negotiating a new or modified understanding of whom they may be to one another. Jefferson suggests that “...rudeness, blasphemy, and obscenity can operate as indices of intimacy, their occurrence in ongoing talk constituting an offered formulation of degree of intimacy, that formulation being negotiable in subsequent talk” (1974, p. 198).

Laughter may also be implicated in the enactment of a close relationship when it is produced in response to another’s impropriety. Engaging in, or resisting shared laughter in response to an impropriety may also be a way for interactants to enact intimacy or distance with the person who produced the impropriety. Jefferson, Schegloff and Sacks (1987) suggest that intimacy is enacted as an interactive matter in and through the production of impropriety and the uptake of it through the production of shared laughter in response to it. They show how enactings intimacy can involve quite delicate negotiation where an impropriety is proffered, resisted, retried, and eventually taken up through shared laughter and sometimes escalation.

It may be that one party’s using an impropriety and another party’s appreciating its use enacts intimacy because improprieties involve conduct that is outside the bounds of polite social norms, lending a behind-closed-doors character to the relationship in which impropriety is proffered and appreciated. Although a display of this kind may enact a moment of intimacy in the immediate interaction, it is possible that such displays provide participants with resources for inferences about the more enduring character of the relationship between them.

**DISCUSSION**

Conversation analysts approach the study of relationship categories not as variables to be correlated with other variables, but rather as integral to and embodied in the methods that participants use in carrying out conversational activities. Since CA’s inception,

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Jefferson (1979) described how laughter can be proposed by one speaker when laughter tokens are incorporated in talk or produced just after it, as an invitation to shared laughter. This invitation can be taken up or not by the invitee. If it is taken up, interactants may engage in shared laughter. As Sacks pointed out, laughter differs noticeably from talk, because it is “one of the few things lawfully done together” (1992, p. 571). Furthermore, laughing together may be part of enacting incumbency in, or moving toward, a close relationship.

And, laughing together being one of the few things people can do together, it might well be that one of the ways that they arrive at doing something together in their interaction, is by coming to be able to do a laughing together. And if you’re talking about face-to-face interaction, a thing you want to consider is, there might be a series of other things involved which commend laughing together as something people might have as their project. For example, in the course of a laughing together people have a color change; they can do a little bit of movement; they may be able to look at each other more extendedly, i.e., they can do a range of other things in the course of laughing together. (1992, pp. 571–572)

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Explicit Reference to Relationship Categories

Our primary interest in discussing and illustrating the occasions in which participants make explicit reference to relationship categories was not to catalog the varieties to which they are put. Rather, it was to demonstrate how participants relied on shared understandings of actions, competencies, rights, and so on, regarded as appropriate to incumbents of particular relationship categories to accomplish conversation. For each excerpt, we pointed out the category-bound knowledge that provided and/or force for the conversational action being performed.

We briefly discussed three observations of invoking explicit relationship categories. First, persons employ explicit relationship categories in the service of performing particular local conversational actions. Recall in excerpt 3, it was specifically re- the doctor’s questioning the caller about her failure to bring up the child’s ear during a previous medical consultation that the caller identified herself as “only mother.” Faced with the task of dealing with something like an accusation, the patient found a way of denying responsibility by relying on understandings about respect of incumbents of the explicitly invoked relationship category of grandmother.

Second, the particular understandings of the activities, rights, competencies, and obligations of the relationship categories that come into play and are required to accomplish the action are determined by the local circumstances and actions; words, even for a given relationship category, different understandings come depending on the local circumstances and actions. In excerpt 1, when the call-taker at the Suicide Prevention Center prompted the caller to reconsider his or her prior dates with the query “No relatives, friends,” the call-taker relied on the understanding that in order to have the appropriate activity for incumbents of the relationship category of friends, there were about personal problems. In excerpt 4, when Margo asserted “we’re all frien guys didn’t care,” she relied on the understanding of incumbents of the relationship category of friends to socialize with no assistance and/or forgive minor other situations could be given in which participants invoke the relationship of friend relying on still different understandings of what is expected of incumbents to accomplish an action.

Our third observation is that, in the cases we examined, participants either in explicitly juxtaposed a category with the relationship category to which they referred. In excerpt 4, Margo’s use of “we’re all friends” played off of, and was juxtaposed with, others who would have been merely acquaintances. In excerpt 2, the caller’s use of strangers played off of, and was juxtaposed with, family and friends. In excerpt 3, the caller’s invocation of beat grandma implicitly (by use of the modifier “only”) juxtaposed grandma with each case, the relationship category juxtaposed with the explicit relationship was determined by the local circumstances and actions, and both categories provide the coherence and force of the action.
Actions Associated with Incumbency in Relationship Categories

We reviewed a number of actions and practices that are associated with incumbency in particular relationship categories. Enacting incumbency in a relationship category is not the focal activity in any of these cases, yet sensitivity to incumbency in a relationship may account for the particular ways in which these actions are implemented. Although we have been able to describe some actions and practices through which interactants enact incumbency of enduring or temporary relationships, intimacy or distance, the uses of the actions and practices are not limited to specific categories of relationship.

A prevalent feature of each of the methods through which interactants enact incumbency is their bipartite character. A move is proffered by one party and must be ratified or taken up by the other. The first move may instantiate a presumption of incumbency in a particular relationship category, but the response to it is integral to the enactment of incumbency. For instance, not taking up the proffered move could constitute a rebuff (Hopper & Drummond, 1990) that may indicate a rejection of coincumbency in the presumed category. In some cases, not making the first move (e.g., not presuming the other’s ability to recognize referenced past history from an oblique reference) could constitute a display of distance between interactants instead of, for instance, incumbency in the relationship category of friend.

One way to distinguish the actions associated with enacting incumbency is to consider whether they rely on a history of shared experiences between the interactants. Two pairs of actions we discussed rely on a shared history of experiences and hence serve to maintain incumbency in a relationship with a somewhat more enduring character. The first pair consists of one party’s inquiring about the activities of the other person as recalled from previous conversations, displaying alertness to and active interest in, the ongoing concerns of the other, and the other party’s legitimizing the concern by readily providing updating information. These are criterial actions for enacting ongoing involvement in one another’s lives. The second pair consists of one party’s providing minimal references to some past shared occurrence that could be recognized only by a recipient who has dependable shared knowledge of the event, and the other party’s recognizing and displaying its applicability to the current state of talk. Through these actions, the participants enact having shared knowledge of their past experiences and shared understanding of the relevance of those experiences to the current interaction, displaying through how these actions are produced that they are relying on particular knowledge and inferences by the coincumbent in the relationship.

Two pairs of actions we discussed earlier do not presuppose a shared history of experiences together, yet enact or constitute a moment of intimacy. The first set consists of one party’s sharing personal problems and the second party’s showing affiliative interest in them. The second set consists of one party’s using improprieties and the second party displaying appreciation of them via further improprieties and/or laughter. These sets of actions can constitute moments of intimacy, but do not presuppose shared history. As such, they may be produced as part of an ongoing intimate relationship, but are not limited to such relationships. Although the callers to the Suicide Prevention Center may have families and friends or intimates as their preferred recipients, they are able to tell their troubles to Suicide Prevention Center professionals. Telling and taking up trouble or using improprieties and appreciating them can be used to constitute a moment of intimacy that may provide grounds for the development and enactment of further intimacy or may be part of enacting intimacy in established relationships.

Although the actions described previously through which interactants enact incumbency in close relationships, are ways in which interactants participate in a certain relationship and enact involvement, they are not optional actions. Interactant relational partners involvement of this kind. In fact, these actions may be criterial various kinds of close, ongoing relationships. It is an obligation in close relational various kinds to enact involvement in these ways. Relational partners clearly rely relationship coincumbents’ recognition that these are legitimate and expectable acts. Furthermore, they may have the right to call another to account if they do not or do not take part in involvement in these, and presumably other, ways. This calling to account is a way in which involvement is enacted as an expectable and entitled part of incumbency in some relationships.

The descriptions of selected activities through which incumbency of an intimate relationship can be enacted suggest that some activities, such as tracking the other’s activities, and being able to recognize from oblique references and deploy for other purposes shared past events, are essential for being in a close relationship, and unavailing produce that appearance. Furthermore, not doing these activities may in fact conspire accountable actions and might be used as evidence of a relationship in disarray (Hop Drummond, 1990, cite as partial evidence of a relationship coming apart an instance which one interactant attempts to show knowledge of the other’s life and the other the attempt's show of knowledge as illegitimate). Other activities, such as telling taking up troubles, and producing and taking up improprieties, are not limited to intimate relationships, yet constitute moments of intimacy and strong affiliation.

Another notable feature of this account is that, although we have described some actional methods for enacting incumbency of a close relationship, and we have shown that these two are both part of this, we do not yet have in the CA literature any accounts of the body behaviors that are part of enacting incumbency in relationships (cf. Kendon, 1984).

Conversation analysts have demonstrated that relationship categories are real participants, are oriented to, and are consequential for how interactional conduct is enacted. For instance, we reported some of the activities that interactants should do in order to act as an intimate (asking update questions, for instance) that conversation analysts described. Practices of these kinds are members of the collection of practices that through which persons enact incumbency in relationship and role categories (su relationship-acquaintance, intimate-intimate, parent-child, doctor-patient, caret care recipient). Our discussion here suggests that just as conversation analysts must understand sequential organization, turn taking, repair, and other features of the organizational architecture of conversation because they are integral to how interaction unfolds, matters of
and relationships are central features of social organization that must be understood by researchers if we are to produce a full, nuanced account of interaction.

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REFERENCES


