Topical Talk, Ritual and the Social Organization of Relationships

DOUGLAS W. MAYNARD
University of Wisconsin–Madison

DON H. ZIMMERMAN
University of California–Santa Barbara

This is a study of how acquainted and unacquainted dyads initiated topical talk in an experimental setting in which they were told to “get to know” one another or to “warm up” before they were to debate an assigned topic. Referencing the setting was a device for initiating talk used by both acquainted and unacquainted dyads. When not doing “setting talk,” unacquainted dyads introduced topical talk with announcements that relied upon interpersonal common knowledge. Unacquainted participants utilized “pre-topical sequences,” by which they discovered and displayed categorical memberships and activities. Pre-topical sequences are examined in detail for how they allow the in situ negotiation of who will talk and what will be talked about. Pre-topical sequences can also be considered as ritual devices by which autobiographical talk is properly initiated. Setting talk, topical announcements, and pre-topical sequences are involved in the ongoing construction of intimacy and distance in relationship.

This paper explores specific procedures conversationalists employ to solve three issues involved in the introduction of a topic in conversation. One is the “problem of relevance.” Participants presumably have many things that they could discuss at a given time—experience, plans, ideas, and so forth. But one cannot say anything anywhere in conversation with impunity. As Schegloff and Sacks (1973) have observed, mentioning a topic is held off until it can occur naturally, or be fitted in regular ways to the ongoing talk at a particular point in the conversation. When there is no prior talk to which some new utterance can be topically fit, however, as at the beginning of a conversation, or at the conclusion of an ongoing topic (Maynard, 1980), new topical talk is still produced in a manner so as to furnish an “answer” to the question: “Why that now?” (Schegloff and Sacks, 1973; cf. Grice, 1975).

A second issue in the introduction of a topic concerns not so much what is said, but what is unsaid, i.e., treated as known-in-common and taken-for-granted (Goffman, 1983; Hopper, 1981; Keenan and Schieffelin, 1976:337–38). In a third-person reference, for example, a conversational practice is to use a single form that depends upon recipients’ capacity for recognizing the referent from that form (Sacks and Schegloff, 1979). Similarly, speakers employ locational formulations in topical talk partly on the basis of hearers’ presumed socio-geographical knowledge, e.g., according to their familiarity with an area, acquaintance with landmarks, and so on (Schegloff, 1972). In talk between acquainted persons, such taken-for-granted knowledge is largely unproblematic. Acquainted persons are “consoiates,” in Schutz’s (1973:16) terminology; they have shared face-to-face experiences which inform each as to what the other can be relied upon to know, and this permits laconicity in topic initiations (Berger and Bradac, 1982:107). In contrast, when unacquainted speakers talk, their common experiences are limited to that which they share by virtue of being “contemporaries” (Schutz, 1973:15) who have previously shared time and space only in the sense that they live in the same society. Nonetheless, unacquainted speakers do produce talk related to their personal biographies. We investigate how that is accomplished through practices that ritually protect the

Requests for reprints should be sent to Douglas W. Maynard, Department of Sociology, University of Wisconsin, Madison, WI 53706.

1 By focusing on “procedures” for introducing topical topics as objects, activities, events, or ideas that are talked about (see the brief review in Maynard, 1980:263 and 286, fn. 3). More precisely, we discuss topical content (what is talked about) as secondary to topical structure (how topical talk is done and done properly). In this regard, see Schank (1977).

2 Although reference and relevance are related topical issues, knowledge of the referent is not sufficient for establishing relevance. An object referenced not only has to be recognizable, but also has to be transformed into an object for this conversation, for these participants, a feature that Sacks et al. (1974:727) call “recipient design.”
“selves” of involved parties. That which is heretofore unsaid can be systematically approached or avoided according to whether or not it is sayable (Goffman, 1983:28–29).

Finally, practices for introducing a topic display and accomplish particular features of social relationships, such as the distance and intimacy of involved parties. We regard “relationship” as something that is subject to ongoing, step-by-step management within talk between persons, rather than as a state of affairs that underlies their talk. Thus, the issue of how topics are initiated in conversation sheds light not only on the structure of topical talk but on more general processes of social interaction. The vernacular terms “distant” and “intimate,” for example, may be thought of as accounts of a particular type, namely, member-analytic accounts (Garfinkel, 1967). They offer a member’s analysis of a given relationship. We assume that the course of interaction itself provides the “data” for this analysis. That is, a characterization of the state of relationship between persons is a member’s finding based on a range of behaviors, including talk. Additionally, the behavioral requisites for a finding of “intimacy” or “distance” are interactional accomplishments or outcomes that are crafted within talk as a sequential and ritually proper activity. Our aim, then, is to specify the work by which members may analyze and formulate a relationship as distant or intimate.

In the literature on naturally occurring interaction, the issues of relevance (e.g., Schegloff and Sacks, 1973), ritual (e.g., Goffman, 1967), and relationship (e.g., Jefferson, 1974:197–98) have largely been investigated separately from each other and from the introduction of topics in conversation. Our overall objective, in short, is to explore further the interdependence of these problems in interaction, with particular reference to differences in how previously acquainted and unacquainted conversationalists initiate topical talk.

DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS

The data for this study come from twenty-two two-party conversations that took place between individuals who were recruited from freshman-level sociology classes on a university campus. Fifteen of the conversations involved previously unacquainted students, and seven involved students who had some degree of prior acquaintance ranging from friendship to marriage. The conversations were recorded in a laboratory setting and involved students of roughly similar age and cultural background.4

The regularities in speaking practices reported in this paper derive from close analysis of each of the twenty-two transcripts. The object is not to explain the contingent occurrence of particular classes of events, but rather to discuss and describe the social-organizational constraints on interaction. We assume that the structures observed in these conversations were not created de novo by participants to deal with the demand characteristics of the “experiment.” Instead, we take them to represent an accomplishment of the routine procedures by which members manage topical talk in many settings. Whether this assumption is warranted, and whether the hypotheses we suggest are valid, will, of course, depend upon further research into the topical organization of conversation. The assertions we make reflect regularities in our data that occur without significant exception. Hence, the transcript segments displayed below are representative of the data and not merely illustrative.

TALK BETWEEN ACQUAINTANCES

Acquainted parties used two kinds of topic initiations. One practice, displaying prior experience, was unique to their interaction. The other initiation device, using setting talk, was employed not only by acquainted parties but

4 Among the unacquainted participants, there were five male-male, five female-female, and five male-female pairs. Among the acquainted parties, there were three male-female, three female-female pairs, and one male-male pair. All were white, and between the age of 18 and 60; the unacquainted pairs were all between the age of 18 and 21.

The laboratory setting consisted of a room with two chairs and a small table. Participants, when seated in the chairs, were at right angles to each other, with the table at knee height in front of them. Directly facing the subjects was a two-way mirror. This permitted videotaping and allowed the experimenters to view the interaction.

On the table was an envelope containing instructions for discussing a given subject. The participants were told that they were not to open the envelope until a bell rang, and that they would have a “few” minutes (actually, 12 minutes) before the bell for getting to know one another and warming up (if they were unacquainted) or simply warming up (if they were acquainted). These initial 12-minute segments of conversation were those used in the study.
by the unacquainted pairs as well. These devices are involved in achieving characteristic types of relationships.

Displaying Prior Experience

For most of their topic changes, acquainted parties relied upon mutually assumed knowledge of one another’s biography, including relationships, interests, and activities in which each one was involved. For a speaker to use a minimal reference term in a “topic initial utterance” (Button and Casey, in press) that occasions talk about some third person, for example, is to take for granted that recipient knows speaker’s friends, relatives, or other social contacts. Thus:

(1) C.03
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
5. anything that could uh
6. Bill: Incriminate you?
8. say?
9. Bill: Well we went to Los Angeles
10. James: Yesterday?
11. Bill: Yeah I went by you know the
12. guy’s place and he went to Los
13. Angeles, so- I’m gonna get it
14. Monday maybe
15. James: You discuss the price?
16. Bill: No but I think it’s gonna be lower
17. than he said it was

By “mutually assumed knowledge” we refer to items each party knows, presumes that the other knows, and presumes that the other presumes him or her to know, about self and other.

With three exceptions (to be discussed below) segments appearing in this paper are excerpts from the 22-conversation corpus, which was transcribed in its entirety. We are indebted to Candace West, who in the course of another research project transcribed the conversations between unacquainted parties and made copies available for us. Maynard transcribed the acquainted parties’ conversations.

With the acquainted dyads, we use hypothetical first name of participants in the segments appearing here. With unacquainted dyads, we use a lettering system: A denotes a male speaker, and B a female speaker. If the conversation is between a same-sex pair, numerals are used with the letters (A1 and A2 = male speakers; B1 and B2 = female speakers).

We have simplified the transcription of the segments appearing in this paper, preserving only that detail important to a specific analytic point we wish to make. See the Appendix for transcription conventions used in the segments, which are numbered in order of appearance. Next to the segment number are numbers or letters which give the trial and transcript line number from which the segment was drawn.

In line 1, Bill produces a topic-initial utterance using the term “Joe.” The utterance and reference are adequate for James at line 2 to provide a “topicalizer” (Button and Casey, in press) that permits further topical talk and indicates no recognitional trouble. In addition, they trigger a display of concern by James over the conversation occurring “on tape” (line 4). In that utterance, James also starts a warning (“Don’t say anything that could . . .”’) to which Bill provides a candidate completion, “incriminate you” (line 6). That candidate is ratified by James, who also initiates a move from the warning back to regular topical talk—“exactly” (line 7).

To the extent that the “side sequence” (Jaff¬erson, 1972) regarding the conversation being on tape was occasioned by the mention of Joe, it is a clear demonstration that James knows who Joe is, and Bill knows that James knows (and vice versa), and that such mutual knowledge could be drawn upon for the understandability of the introduced topic. Further evidence regarding the use and nature of participants’ common knowledge occurs in the return to, and elaboration of, the topic of Joe’s visit to Bill and what the two did subsequently (lines 7–17). It becomes available to us, in lines 13–17, and in part by the elliptical and euphemistic talk occurring there (Goffman, 1983:18, 21–24), that Bill and Joe may have been involved in some disreputable activity. But that matter is evidently available to James from the time of Bill’s introductory utterance and first reference to Joe.

It is a very personal common background that informs the production and hearing of a topic initiation. Another example:

(2) A.81
1. Betty: I don’t think we really need this
2. warmup period
3. Carl: heh heh
4. (5.5)
5. Carl: That snake was kind of neat work
6. the other day ‘cause of lot of
7. Betty: [Was it?]
8. Carl: the kids hadn’t ever seen a snake

After some talk about the “experiment” (lines 1–3), and a lapse (line 4) Carl initiates a new topic in line 5. The term “that,” which begins the utterance, is prototypical “tying” term, a device which links one utterance with an immediately, or sometimes distantly prior utterance (Sacks, 1965: lecture II). Carl’s use of “that snake” seems specifically formulated to connect with some earlier talk between these parties, talk that concerned the snake and the circumstances surrounding its presence at Carl’s work. The earlier episode, and the parties’ consociate relationship, is a resource for
the meaningfulness of the reference to “that snake” in the present situation. Thus, to say that acquainted parties rely upon mutual knowledge of one another’s biography is to say that reference and tying practices within their topic-introductory utterances make visible a shared history of interaction.

A further feature of these topic initiations is that they are deliveries of news; i.e., even if referent items within them are known by the recipient, they provide information about occurrences involving these items which are presumably not known by the recipient (Button and Casey, in press; Goodwin, 1981:150; Maynard, 1980:283; Sacks, 1971: Fall lecture; Terasaki, 1976). Thus, what is known in common is subject to continuous revision. Not just anything about known-in-common items is reported, however; while news announcements are speaker related (Button and Casey, forthcoming), they should also be of “interest” to a recipient:

(3) D.582

Helen: Oh, the uh thing that I’m uh interested in this just to comment because I know you’re interested in ESP and uh

Louise: Yeah right

Helen: Uh thought transference, and when Bob was in Japan I was working up at city college . . .

Helen goes on to tell of having a pain in her side simultaneously with Bob’s appendectomy. While that topic clearly “belongs” to Helen, its relevance is claimed by the assertion that Louise is interested in ESP and thought transference. The assertion may also operate as a “locator” device for bringing what is recallable into immediate consciousness (Goffman, 1983:11; cf. Sacks and Schegloff, 1979:19–20). Louise displays her interest and knowledge with an utterance that topicalizes the event.

The slot in which topicalizers occur is also a place where disinterest can be demonstrated, and a possible topic shut down. This happens in the next example when Jack responds to Melinda’s news with an utterance that demonstrates his independent knowledge and therefore the lack of newsworthiness in Melinda’s observation.

(4) A.184

1. Melinda: Your patches are coming apart
2. Jack: Yeah I know it
3. (0.9)
4. Melinda: Boy this is really funny when you think about our conversation
5. we’ve hit about twelve different topics in the last seven minutes

Jack’s utterance is followed by a silence (line 3) and a topic change in which conversation itself is referenced (lines 4–7).

Setting Talk

Some topical beginnings in the conversations between acquaintances can be characterized as being about the laboratory setting which provides the occasion for the conversation.

(5) F.03

Sharon: Hi there
Judy: This is no good
Sharon: I know
Judy: There are two-way mirrors, one-way mirrors, whatever they’re called

(6) C.68

Bill: Hey, I know he’s been watching us. They’re going to leave us in here.
James: They’re not watching me. Oh, it’s my one moment of glory then

(1.7)

James: Well

(3.0)

James: No, actually I was on TV twice
Bill: Real TV?

Setting talk, like conversation about the weather (Sacks, 1970: Winter Lecture 5), may be a “false” topic in the sense that it is quickly exhausted unless it is used to introduce other “mentionables” (Schegloff and Sacks, 1974). In segment (6), talk was occasioned about Bill’s being on TV before, a topic related to the setting by virtue of the videotape equipment involved in both the experiment and in television production.

Whether setting talk was exhausted or occasioned other topic talk, our interest is that the setting, or other aspects of the experiment (such as the questionnaire each participant filled out prior to entering the laboratory) were plainly common to both members of any set of participants. Setting talk may be generally characterized as a topical form available to parties by virtue of co-presence and co-access to events and objects in their environment. Our laboratory thus shares with diverse other social settings the capability of being immediately topicalized by persons who are in them (cf. Goffman, 1983:14–19).

Relationship and the Structure of Talk

We have discussed two devices by which acquainted parties initiate topical talk. Most of their topic introductions exhibit referencing and tying practices that presuppose a prior history of shared experience. The display of
that shared experience achieves, by making visible *in situ*, the very "acquaintedness" by which we characterized their relationship in the first place. Rather than being a static characteristic, then, "acquaintedness" can be regarded as something participants accomplish in the ways they rely on shared experiences to provide sense and make sense in topical introductions. Furthermore, displaying prior shared experience, by comparison with producing setting talk, is one way of accomplishing a degree of intimacy in relationship (cf. Goffman, 1983:18-42).

Conversely, topic initiations that reference the setting temporarily display and achieve a degree of anonymity in relationship. The availability of the setting for topical talk does not depend upon shared biographies and can be used as topical material by anybody talking to anybody (Chafe, 1974; Goffman, 1983:50).7 Indeed, the unacquainted parties in our subject pool often used the setting in their topic introductions:

(7) 7.07
A2: What do you think about this experiment
A1: I don't know, I really don't know what to expect
A2: Really
A1: Still don't

(8) 11.20
B1: This is really a strange scene
B2: Yeah
B1: It's like two-way mirrors
B2: Mm-hmm

The sheer availability of the setting may explain why talk about weather and other environmental features is a resource for persons in many make-talk situations. But we argue that people talk about such things not simply because they are unacquainted, or only more ac-

7 Setting talk *per se* is not the mark of an anonymous relationship. Contemporaneous experiences shared by strangers may produce close bonds, as in moments of extreme danger. Or being present in, and discussing the setting of a previous intimate experience, may be a way of initiating another such experience in the here and now. Moreover, talk about social surroundings may be unavoidable for persons who share a domicile. The business of everyday living involves traffic with and communication about domestic paraphernalia, among other things. It is interesting to note how setting talk of this type can be transformed into talk exhibiting a degree of intimacy, e.g., when the conversation involves preparations for some future event that will be shared, such as dinner. A shared setting may also be inspected for those matters that are cause for complaint or compliment, since these have relevance for a shared biography.

TALK BETWEEN UNACQUAINTED PAIRS

Where the setting was not drawn upon, unacquainted conversationalists generated topical talk by the use of question-answer pairs of two basic types. One type is the categorization sequence; the other is the category-activity sequence. Both types comprise what we call pre-topical sequence.

The questions which initiated categorization sequences invited recipients to classify themselves with respect to such "membership" devices (Sacks, 1972) as year in school, academic major, local residence, home residence, and sociology class (subjects were recruited from various introductory sociology courses).

(9) 8.20 [Year in school]
B1: Are you a freshman
B2: No, second year
B1: Oh

(10) 24.122 [Major]
A: Are you a soc major?
B: Um, I'm thinking of it. What're you?
A: Uh, marine geology is my major

(11) 2.19 [Local residence]
A1: Do you live here on campus
A2: I live over in I.V. in a place called the penthouse

(12) 14.16 [Home residence]
B2: Where'd you come from
B1: Sacramento

(13) 8.01 [Sociology class]
B1: Are you just from Soc one?
B2: Yeah, how about you?
B1: They just called you up? Heh yeah

From these sequences, it is evident that common-sense knowledge played an important role in the introduction of topical talk among unacquainted participants. They evidently assumed that their partners were students, since all of the categorization questions related to that more general status.⁸

The second type of question-answer pair, the category–activity sequence (cf. Sacks, 1974:222), relates to the first. Rather than inviting participants to categorize themselves, the question involves activities related to the categorizations, or to a person’s status as a student.

(14) 19.133
A: Ah, what are you taking anyway
B: Well, sociology, anthropology, and art history

The reason for dealing with categorization and category–activity question–answer pairs as pre-topical sequences is that they invariably preceded any elaborated form of topical talk among the unacquainted pairs.⁹ Pre-topical sequences represent a way for previously unacquainted conversationalists to generate typified knowledge of each other’s biography. If that is less than the mutually assumed particular knowledge that acquainted parties drew on, these sequences nonetheless offered pos-

---

⁸ It is not that subjects by chance assumed that their partners were students; instead, they may be thought to have inferred this status, e.g., by analogy to their own pathway to the situation (being recruited from a large, lower-division introductory class), or from the age, dress and demeanor of the other, etc. Thus, they may be said to have performed a membership analysis (cf. Schegloff, 1972).

⁹ Our use of the term “pre-topical sequence” is related to Sacks’s (1972: Lecture 1) “pre-sequence.” This is a device by which a speaker can produce a preliminary sequence that signals a forthcoming adjacency pair of a particular type. Thus, pre-sequences often come before invitations:

| Pre-sequence | A: What are you doing on Friday? |
| Invitation-acceptance | B: Nothing |
| Adjacency pair | A: Want to see a movie? |
| | B: Sure |

We depart from Sacks’s usage in that pre-topical sequences do not prefigure topical adjacency pairs as such, but rather they introduce extended segments of topical talk whose organization is more complicated than the adjacency pair.

The units of the pre-topical sequence—(a) categorization or category–activity question and (b) answer—can be compared with what Button and Casey (in press) discuss as (a) topic-initial elictor and (b) response.

Pre-Topical Sequences and the Generation of Topical Talk

Pre-topical sequences invoke “discourse-identities” for participants (cf. West and Zimerman, forthcoming). Questioner will refer to the person asking a categorization or category-activity question, and recipient will refer to the one who answers. The reason that not all sequences result in topical talk is that pre-topical questions do not require topical talk related to categorization devices, but merely allow that to happen in systematic ways. First, pre-topical questions are an invitation to a recipient, who may accept, decline, or provide an equivocal response to the invitation (Sacks, 1972: April 18; cf. Maynard, 1980:283–84). The invitation is not specifically for topical talk per se but for recipient to produce an utterance that offers or bids to be a topical initial utterance. Second, whether that topicial bid “succeeds” in generating further related topical talk depends on how it is treated.

1. Topical invitations and their replies. Acceptances of invitations to offer a topical-initial utterance are accomplished by long-form replies to pre-topical questions. For example, to a categorization query, recipient provides not just how he may be categorized but further comment on the categorization (see lines 2–5):

(15) 7.51
1. A1: What’s your major?
2. A2: Um, well my major’s physics but I haven’t really taken a physics class yet so I have a good chance to change it.
3. Probably to anthro if I change it
4. A1: I’ve heard that’s a good major

Rejections of invitations are performed by producing short-form replies plus a return question (line 2):

(16) 24.01
1. A: Are you a freshman here?
2. B: Sophomore. Are you- what are you
3. A: uh, I’m a freshman
In doing a return question, recipients may decline to offer a topic-initial utterance, but they do not reject the topic. Return questions relate to the categorization device occasioned by the original question. However, by replying to a categorization question with minimal information and returning a question, recipient clearly formulates the reply as only an “answer” and not an offer to do topical talk.

Short-form answers without return questions appear equivocal as to whether they are a topical-initial offer. As compared with long-form answers which are explicit topical bids, they may contain implicit offers. They at least leave the possibility for the questioner, in the turn (or turns) after the reply, to produce topicalizers that may occasion further topical talk.

(17) 2.01
3. A1: Really?
4. A2: Yeah
5. A1: uh, you taking Soc one or-
6. A2: um, right now I’m in Soc two

Following the short-form replies in both these examples (lines 2), questioners produce “minimal” topicalizers (lines 3). Next, recipients acknowledge these responses (lines 4), and questioners produce category-activity queries (lines 5). These occasion longer answers (lines 6) and related topical talk, which is not reproduced here. Thus, the original reply to a pre-topical question may neither accept nor reject the invitation to provide a topical bid. Following short-form replies, the questioner and recipient may formulate further utterances which preserve both the initial object as a possible topic and recipient as topical “speaker.”

On the other hand, topicalizers may be treated with a minimal response and return questions which retroactively constitute recipient’s reply to the initial categorization question as just an answer and not a topic-initial bid (see lines 4 in the next two examples).

(19) 8.26
1. B1: Where do you live?
3. B1: Berkeley?
4. B2: tch, how about you?
5. B1: San Diego

(20) 15.112
1. A: Where do you live anyway?
2. B: Ventura
3. A: Ventura? Ah, you’re just right down the road aren’t you?
4. B: Yeah. Where’re you from?
5. A: Um, Forest Park eh heh which is . . .

Thus, whether a short-form reply to a pre-topical question is also a topic-initial offer may be something accomplished over a series of turns. Observe that the echo responses (“Berkeley?” “Ventura?”) in these last two examples do not appear to be addressed to issues of recognition or intelligibility. In (20), for example, A displays that he recognizes the place-name “Ventura” by formulating its location in relation to where he and his conversational partner are at the moment. Thus, the echo device may be used to afford the other party a second opportunity to produce a topic-initial utterance, which in these two instances is declined through the production of a return question.

2. Topical bids and their responses. When a recipient of a pre-topical question equivocally or straightforwardly offers a topic-initial utterance, it can be handled by questioner in a variety of ways. As one kind of response, topicalizers generally display interest and facilitate further topical talk. Other responses may effectively turn down topic-initial offers. Two kinds of these responses appear in our data. The first kind contrasts with topicalizers and is a “downgraded response” to the recipient’s reply. For example, a silence and/or a delayed acknowledgment can be produced.

(21) 4.02
1. A1: Where you from?
2. A2: Ah, I’m just from L.A.
3. (1.0)
4. A2: Basically from L.A.
5. A2: I don’t have any idea
6. A1: [Yeah]
7. A2: what to expect
8. A1: Heh heh, heh heh heh really

When A2 provides a reply (lines 2–4) to A1’s “home residence” question (line 1), A1 produces a response (“yeah,” line 6) that is very delayed. That is, it occurs well after two “transition-relevance places” (at the ends of lines 2,4), or points where questioner could have taken a turn (Sacks et al. 1974:703). And it appears in overlap with an utterance in which A2, perhaps noting the absent responses, changes topic by referring to the experimental setting (cf. Maynard, 1980).

In addition to silences and delayed utterances, tokens, or what we referred to as minimal topicalizers, may be considered as
downgraded responses. They sometimes operate to diminish an utterance's topical possibilities. In the next segment, compare line 3, in which A2 provides a token response to A1's self-categorization, with line 6, in which A1 topologizes A2's similar self-categorizing utterance.

(22) 16.38
1. A2: What year are you.
2. A1: I'm a senior.
3. A2: Oh.
5. A2: I'm a freshman, huh!
6. A1: You know what you're going to do yet?
7. A2: Well . . . ((topical talk))

A2's token response, "oh," could be doing any of several things. For example, given that we subsequently learn that A2 is a freshman, the "oh" could be an expression of surprise or dismay. Whatever other work it does perform, it also permits A1 to produce a return categorization question (line 4), which momentarily focuses away from any topical possibilities his own year-in-school categorization may have. Then, following A2's answer (line 5), A1 formulates a topologizer specifically sensitive to A2's status (line 6).

Topologizers placed after replies to pre-topical questions, then, display interest and actively promote topical talk related to the reply. Silences, delayed responses, and various token forms apparently can be taken as indicating a lack of such interest and as sufficient reason not to pursue the topic. However, it is not a straightforward matter, because such items may also be regarded as "continuers" (Schegloff, 1981) which permit further topical talk. Like short-form replies as topic-initial offers, then, downgraded responses may be equivocal in terms of occasioning topical talk related to a pre-topical sequence. This equivocality is demonstrated in the next segment. A2's first categorization question (line 1) obtains a long-form reply from A1 (lines 2–3). That utterance is partly constituted as a topical bid by the use of an "identity-rich puzzle" (Schenkein, 1978:66–73). A1's formulation of his local residence as "over in IV in a place called the penthouse" invites a solicit from A2 for A1 to follow with talk that would disambiguate the formulation. However, the bid is effectively turned down by downgraded responses at lines 4 and 5.

(23) 2.19
1. A2: Do you live here on campus?
2. A1: No, I live over in IV in a place called the Penthouse.
3. A2: Hmm
4. (2.2)

6. A2: What are you, a junior now or a senior?
8. A1: Uh, technically I'm a freshman I- I'm a couple of units away from being a sophomore.
11. A2: Um
12. A1: Yeah, I'm going to try- I'm going to try to take like twenty units this next quarter if I can

At lines 6–7, A2 produces another pre-topical question, to which A1 provides a long-form reply (lines 8–10). Then A2 again issues a token response (line 11). This time, A1 produces a "yeah" (line 12) and pushes ahead with further topical talk. Thus, token forms in the position after a reply to a pre-topical question may help terminate talk regarding an occasioned mentionable. However, they may also leave open an option for the recipient of that question to pursue topical talk.

"Downgraded" responses to a pre-topical reply thus appear equivocal in terms of turning down its topical possibilities. A second kind of response more clearly foreshortens recipient's pursuit of topical talk. This is the reclaimer, an utterance following short-form replies in which questioners themselves may provide a topic-initial utterance regarding an occasioned categorization, recipient's membership, or their own membership. Notice lines 3–5 in (24) and lines 3–4 in (25) and (26).

(24) 8.111
1. B1: What are you majoring in?
3. B1: heh heh all right! I think that's the first . . . sophmore that I know that's undeclared

(25) 7.04
1. A2: What year are you.
2. A1: I'm a sophomore I think.
3. A2: Yeah, I'm a junior. I transferred from a J.C.
5. A2: (2.1)
6. A2: What do you think about this experiment?

(26) 14.16
5. B1: Yeah it's a little bit close.
6. B2: Yeah and I went home this weekend . . . ((story))

A reclaimer, like a pre-topical reply, may be responded to in various ways that more or less provide the warrant for further topical talk by the one who produced it. Thus, the reclaimer is merely a candidate topical-initial utterance and
does not automatically mean the one who produces it will be the topical speaker. For example, notice the different treatments which the reclaimers in (25) and (26) obtain. In (25), A2's reclaimer meets with silence (line 5) and then he changes the topic (line 6). In (26), B1 responds to B2's reclaimer with a topical comment (line 5), and that is followed by B2's further topical talk (line 6). However, reclaimers do enable the initiator of a pre-topical sequence to rightfully make a *bid* to be topical speaker regarding whatever categorization or category-bound activity is occasioned by the sequence. Thus, although first giving the opportunity for a topic-initial utterance to recipient, a pre-topical sequence may be designedly employed by the questioner in an attempt to get his or her mentionables on the table. By this we do not mean to suggest anything about the questioner's motivation, but rather about topical structure. Once the questioner has provided an opportunity for recipient to make a topical bid and recipient exhausts that opportunity, the questioner then has the right to offer mentionables regarding the occasioned topic (lines 3 in the next examples):

(27) 4.48
1. A1: Did you go to that concert last night?
2. A2: Um um.
3. A1: Oh you shoulda gone.
4. A2: 's good concert?
5. A1: Oh, it was fantastic . . .

(28) 14.127
1. B1: Have you heard anything about this experiment at all
2. B2: Uh unh
3. B1: Cause I've just heard in passing that it concerned bike paths . . .

**Summary**

When not using the experimental setting for introducing a topic, unacquainted dyads utilized pre-topical sequences which require the recipient of a question to perform a self-categorization and/or provide information about some category-activity. The pre-topical question also invites the recipient to offer a topic-initial utterance. The recipient may accept the invitation by producing a long-form reply, but may be observably equivocal by emitting a short-form reply. A rejection of the invitation is performed by use of a short-form reply and return question. Implicit offers (short-form replies) or explicit offers (long-form replies) by the recipient to do topical talk will be successful if the questioner provides a topicalizer. However, if the questioner does not respond to a reply, or delays or produces a minimal response, the recipient may or may not elect to produce further topical talk. Questioners themselves may offer a topic-initial utterance that references the pre-topical categorization or category-activity after recipient has produced a short-form reply.

**RITUAL ASPECTS OF PRE-TOPICAL SEQUENCES**

Topical talk among unacquainted parties evolves from pre-topical sequences in methodical ways which can now be appreciated for their ritual and relational import. In this section, we discuss ritual aspects of their use, and in the next section we return to the issue of relationship. By referring to ritual aspects of pre-topical and topical procedures, we mean that they sustain the *sacredness* of participants' selves (cf. Goffman, 1967). This is apparent in that they are *required* forms for initiating autobiographical talk; they allow that talk to be produced *properly* and with a *sensitivity* to co-participants (Goffman, 1983:28).

**Pre-Topical Sequences as Required Forms**

That all nonsetting topical talk was preceded by categorization sequences suggests that they are *required* conversational and cultural forms for generating "personal" or autobiographical talk among unacquainted parties in such settings. Indeed, conversational excerpts from investigations independent of ours between previously unfamiliar college student dyads reveal the same patterns we have found (Vuchinich, 1975; Wiemann, 1977; McLaughlin and Cody, 1982). Alternatives to such forms appear ineffective, if not disruptive, in terms of eliciting topical talk. Consider the following excerpts from a conversation in the Wiemann (1977) study.¹⁰ In the first segment, A1 asks A2 to provide "relevant" information about himself (lines 4–6).

(29) WC:8
1. A1: Anyway (1.0) Um:
2. A2: So I'm *sposed to get to know you
3. A1: M'okay
4. A2: Whadda you- whadda you think is relevant that I should know about
5. you
6. (0.5)
7. A1: Ahhm: Are we sposed to like a
9. question-

---

¹⁰ This study consisted of twenty dyadic conversations collected for a different purpose but recorded under very similar circumstances and instructions (Wiemann, 1977). These conversations were virtually identical to ours in how participants displayed the student status and its associations.
SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGY QUARTERLY

10. A2: What's that, (points)
11. A1: \{\}
12. A1: Did you bring that notebook in
13. A2: Hm?
14. A1: Or did she leave it here?
15. A2: Ah: this notebook?
16. A1: Yeah
17. A2: Yeah, this is mine I took- I was just
down at a Community Council
meeting
18. A1: Oh really?

A2's question does not yield turn-by-turn talk.
It is followed by a silence (line 7), a hesitation
("ahhm," line 8), and a query that appears to
raise the issue of the framework or format for
the task (lines 8–9). The utterance that does
succeed in reengaging turn-by-turn talk is a
change of topic which refers to an element of the
immediate setting (a notebook; line 12).

Following a spate of setting talk, the task of
"getting to know one another" is reintroduced.

(31) WC: 8
1. A1: What are we supposed to find out
2. about each other?
3. (1.3)
4. A2: Yeah! Uhm
5. (1.6)
6. A2: Lemme see, what's relevant to know
7. about me (sniff)
8. (1.2)
9. A1: Well- first of all I forgot your name
10. A2: Oh, Brian
11. A1: Brian, Okay, mine's Dave
12. A2: [you're Dave ]
14. A2: hh um:
15. A1: An' it could prove detrimental (to
gettin') started heh heh, okay
16. (0.7)
17. A2: Yeah um
18. (1.0) (sound of door opening)
19. R: Is everything going smoothly here?
20. A1: ( )
21. A2: (Yeah)
22. R: Okay, we'll be ready for ya in about
23. four or five minutes okay

By comparison with our pre-topical devices,
A1's utterance at lines 1–2 is an abstract
question; no specific categorization device is
employed in it. As formulated, the puzzle
posed in the utterance is troublesome for sub-
sequent interaction. The utterance is followed
by a silence (line 3), A2's exclamation and
token (line 4), and another silence (line 5).
Then, A2's utterance (at lines 6–7) localizes the
puzzle with what might be termed a state
marker, i.e., I am thinking about this matter
with reference to myself, which may invite a
more specific question from A1. Indeed, after
another silence (line 8), A1 produces an utter-
ance (line 9) that occasions a round of intro-
ductions (lines 10–13). Following this is an-
other series of utterances and silences (lines
13–19) which continue to demonstrate a lack of
topical talk. Finally, the experimenter enters
the room (according to plan) to check on the
progress of the session.

As exhibited in talk which ensues when the
experimenter leaves, the solution to the puzzle
and to the problem of getting to know each
other" appears to be constituted precisely by
those devices we have termed pre-topical se-
quencies.

(30) WC: 8
1. A2: . . . anyway, back to getting to know
2. each other
3. A1: Yeah-
4. A2: Eh hum
5. (1.4)
6. A2: Relative informa- rel- relevant
7. information about me ( )
8. (2.5)
9. A1: So what year you in?
10. (1.0)
11. A2: I'm a sophomore right now
12. A1: Oh yeah
13. (0.7)
14. A2: Where'd you live the first year?
15. A1: Where'd I live my first y-
16. A2: Or did you go to school here
17. A1: Yeah I went to school here . .

In lines 6–7, A2 recycles his previous statement
(30, lines 6–7), thus appearing to invite a
further question from A1. That is, while local-
izing the puzzle with reference to himself,
A2 offers no "information"; after a silence (line
8), A1 produces a specific query concerning
A2's year in school (line 9). Although A2's
answer ("sophomore," line 11) does not be-
come the subject of extended topical talk, the
question does occasion an immediate turn
transition and does elicit a fact about A2. Then
A2 initiates a pre-topical sequence which gen-

Eliciting Autobiographical Talk
with P propriety

An issue is why "getting to know one an-
other" meets with observable difficulties when
the task is formulated abstractly. Across three
instances of such formulation (29, lines 4–6; 30, lines 1–2; 31, lines 1–2), turn transitions are
accomplished with hesitation and display no
"relevant information" about either of the par-
ties even though their expressed concern is to
discover it. In contrast, pre-topical questions
employing specific categorization devices are followed by immediate turn transitions and clear exhibits of autobiographical talk.

From our analysis of pre-topical sequences, it is apparent that unacquainted participants develop autobiographical talk locally, that is, on a turn-by-turn basis. Ordinarily, a single item of information is elicited through the pre-topical query made relevant by the mutually assumed categorical membership of each as "student." An answer to the query is a locus where recipient can do various kinds of topical work, by producing a short-form or long-form response, a return question, and so on. The answer, then, affords an opportunity to say a little or a lot, and this response itself occasions a slot in which the questioner can encourage or discourage further talk on the matter. The outcome of the pre-topical sequence, and hence, what becomes jointly known about whom, is an interactional achievement which is negotiated now and at each next moment.

Stated differently, the problem of relevance or providing for the natural occurrence of possible topics is carefully articulated with attention to propriety. That is, topics are developed with mutual regard for each participant’s "information preserve" (Goffman, 1971:38–39), the set of biographical facts about the self over whose dissemination a person expects to exercise control. Thus, pre-topical sequences can be used to generate topical talk that is recognizably "personal" in nature without requiring rash self-disclosure.

The Sensitivity of Pre-Topical Sequences

Since there is an indefinitely large number of things that participants could say about themselves, an abstract question that asks a recipient simply to recount the relevant features of one’s biography poses a risk for the person. The risk is that the questioner may be uninterested in or even offended by what the recipient has to say. However, pre-topical sequences which employ categorization devices make possible, for the party who emerges as the topical speaker, the production of topical talk that is sensitive to the other. A pre-topical question contains an initial exhibit of the questioner’s presumed interest in a specific device, e.g., "major," "year in school," etc. Moreover, the recipient may produce a short-form answer as a procedure for eliciting the questioner's further display of interest, in the form of topicalizers, before expanding an answer topically.

When such a display occurs, the recipient may assume that the display is accountable—for example, it may be inferredly related to the questioner’s own category membership. In the next example, notice how B, the recipient of a pre-topical question (line 1) and topicalizers (lines 3,5) regarding where she lived, produces topical talk and then questions "why" she was asked (line 10). She does this by asking about A's own residence.

(32) 19.158
1. A: Where do you live in IV? or-
2. B: Yeah, I live in, uh, at the Tropicana
3. A: Ah
4. B: Good ol' Trop
5. A: Did you try to get into the dorms or-
6. B: Mm hmm. I thought I’d meet more
7. people that way. But I’ve met pretty
8. many people up there. I like it. But I
9. don’t want to stay here next year. So I
10. don’t know. Why, where do you live?
11. A: Oh, in a frat house. Theta Delta Chi

This suggests that the other's membership may be something the topical speaker regularly takes into consideration before producing evaluations, assessments, or other forms of topical talk regarding items potentially related to such membership. That is, a second kind of sensitivity-to-other exhibited in these conversations is apparent in the usual care participants take not to broach topics that may offend the other (Goffman, 1983:28-29). That care is noticeably absent in the following:

(33) 19.03
1. A: Are you taking Soc or what, or
2. [how did you ] get
3. B: [Yeah
4. A: hoodwi[nked into ] this
5. B: Soc two
6. A: Soc two?
7. B: Mm hmm
8. A: What’s Soc two?
9. B: That’s- I don’t know, symbolic
10. interactionism? Something like that?
11. It’s really- why, aren’t you in a Soc
12. class?
13. A: I’m in Soc, Soc one, but I find it’s so
14. much B.S.
15. B: Oh
16. A: That I’m-
17. B: Well this is my major
18. A: Oh!
19. B: Heh heh ,heh heh
20. A: [My goodness! ] .hh
21. B: But I’m not gonna do it, like I want to
22. go to Law School.
23. A: Oh I follow.
24. B: So, it's a good major for that
25. A: Did you sign up for this test to
26. impress?

After A’s utterance characterizing “Soc one” as “so much B.S.” (lines 13–14), B produces an item
("oh"; line 15) prefacing an announcement that sociology is her major (line 17). The latter utterance interrupts A’s continuation (line 16) of the turn he started at line 13. Then A produces expressions of surprise and perhaps embarrassment (lines 18 and 20). B laughs (line 19), and portrays herself as minimally involved in the major by formulating it as provisional to a more respectable enterprise (going to law school). By distancing herself from her identity as a sociology major, she may weaken the impact A’s disparagement of “Soc one” has on the self behind that identity. Finally, A moves the topic back to the issue of how B got into the experiment (lines 25–26).11

The offensiveness of A’s remark, then, is made visible by B’s interruptive announcement of her major, and, as indicated by the remedying procedures which follow, appears as something to have been avoided. Clearly, then, had B’s categorization as a “Soc major” occurred prior to the discussion of sociology classes, the disparaging characterization may not have occurred at all. If some things are not sayable in polite conversation by virtue of who the other might be, pre-topical sequences can forestall the production of unsayables by establishing who the other is categorically.

Summary
The ritual aspect of pre-topical sequences is displayed in their apparent required use as a means for generating topical talk, the difficulties produced or anticipated by their absence, the invitation-offer structure by which autobiographical talk is properly initiated, and the way such sequences allow for talk about self that is yet sensitive to other. In short, participants accomplish self-identification through these sequences, and allow further topical self-talk to develop, without it being demanded and without one presuming upon the other or encroaching on the other’s self-territories. In all these ways, participants preserve an attitude of respect, if not reverence, toward each other’s “self.”

RELATIONSHIP
In the last section, we suggested that offensive remarks may be avoided, in part, by the use of pre-topical sequences.12 Put positively, if pre-topical sequences provide for what is not sayable in talk between unacquainted parties, they also help establish what is sayable and productive of longer segments of topical talk by making visible the parties’ categorical co-memberships or co-participation in category-bound activities. At the same time, they provide for the contingent possibility of doing “affiliation” as a way of accomplishing intimacy.

Displays of co-membership and co-participation do not predict topical talk, but do allow it to happen in ritual ways we have already described.

(34) 15.20
1. A: You live in IV?
2. B: Yeah
3. (0.9)
4. B: How about you?
5. A: Isla Vista
6. (1.2)
7. B: And this is your first year?
8. Sec ond year here
9. A: [No this is my] second year
10. here
11. B: Yeah, same with me
12. A: Really, what classes did you take last
13. year
14. B: . . . uh, Soc one, Soc forty three
15. A: Oh, are you a Soc major?
17. B: Yea
18. A: Really? This is the first Soc class I’m
19. taking
20. B: Do you have a major yet?
21. A: Yeah, Law and Society

In this segment, while A and B both identify themselves as Isla Vista residents, neither explicitly offers to initiate topical talk regarding that identity, nor produces a topicalizer that would request it from another. However, by way of another pre-topical question (lines 7–8), a reply (lines 9–10), and a reclamer (line 11), A and B also exhibit co-membership as second-year students. Then, A produces a topicalizer (line 12) that occasions talk relating to an activity both would have participated in (taking classes) by virtue of that identity. Thus, displaying co-membership establishes a “may” but not a “should” for doing further topical talk.

When exhibited similarity is utilized for topical talk, it may reveal either further likeness or dissimilarity between parties. In the above, B’s naming the classes she took the prior year

11 Note that A’s line 20 question may be a collaborative face-saving mechanism performed on behalf of B, as it offers her the chance to account for her involvement in the experiment by characterizing it as an impression management technique (“Did you sign up for this test to impress?”), rather than by other characterizations, such as an intrinsic research interest, etc.

12 A general orientation toward avoiding offensiveness can be seen in the regular changing of topic whenever opposition or disagreement occurred (cf. Maynard, 1980:277–78).
TOPICAL TALK

(14, 16) occasions an inference by A that she is a Soc major (line 15), which B ratifies (line 17). It also enables A to produce a reclaimer (lines 18–19), an announcement that the class through which he signed up for the experiment is his "first Soc class." Then, B asks if he has a "major yet" (line 20), to which he replies that it is "Law and Society" (line 21). Thus, the pre-topical sequence regarding "year in school," and the topicalizer regarding what classes B took, ultimately results in topical talk that reveals differentness, at least with respect to the parties' "majors."

This example can be compared with a segment from another conversation. The following took place after a similar category-activity question, in which B2 had asked B1 about what classes she was taking. B1 began discussing her environmental studies class, which was presently dealing with economics:

(35) 9.256
1. B1: And I'm just not, you know
2. B2: Yeah
3. B1: Mathematically mi- I'm just NO
4. WAY
5. B2: 'Yeah'
6. B1: Heh, heh I mean I took geometry
7. THREE times!
8. B2: Heh heh heh heh
9. B1: [But can you] believe
10. th at?
11. B2: [Yeah]
12. B2: I took Algebra twice. That was it
13. B1: [Yeahbut]
14. I took it after I graduated! Took it
15. last summer, that's what I did!
16. B2: Oh, really?
17. B1: Yeah, then while everybody else was
18. going hey! Didn't you already
19. graduate? Yeah. What're you do(h)ing
20. back here? heh
22. B1: Taking geometry!

In this example, as compared with the last, a pre-topical question regarding "taking classes" is followed not just by the recipient's list of her classes but by an achieved affiliation. That is, B1 and B2 both produce self-descriptions that reveal their having repeated certain math classes (lines 6–7; 12). They thereby exhibit similar (not mathematically minded) "selves" behind such activities, insofar as situated behaviors are regarded as an expression of a person's substantial personality (Douglas, 1967; Goffman, 1974; cf. Maynard, 1982). Note that there may be an element of competition here, in terms of who is the most mathematically inadequate. However, insofar as the first party's admission of a failing is reciprocated by the second party's similar stance, the partici-

pants are arguably producing relational intimacy (Jefferson, 1974:198). Furthermore, while we cannot develop the complete argument in this paper, we do suggest that topical talk may be increasingly self-disclosing after such displays of similarity and intimacy. In this conversation, it is following the achieved affiliation that B1 provides further autobiographical detail by way of telling a joke on herself.

Earlier, we discussed doing "acquaintedness" as an intimacy ploy in the ongoing construction of relationship between parties. We thus add doing "affiliation" as another practice for accomplishing intimacy. It is achieved by parties displaying "similarity" and using it to occasion further self-revelatory talk.

CONCLUSION

In the introduction to this paper we argued that conversationalists' relationship is an ongoing accomplishment partly exhibited in those procedures utilized for initiating and pursuing topical talk. Acquainted parties largely produce topical introductory utterances whose understandability and relevance draw on their prior history of interaction, thereby making visible and reproducing a degree of intimacy such understandability presupposed. Still, acquainted parties could and did produce topical talk that, for the moment, distanced each from the other by referencing their setting. The "distancing" feature of setting talk, we argued, 13

Our argument is consistent on two points with experimental research into the acquaintance process. First, Davis and Perkowitz (1979) argue that interpersonal attraction varies directly with how well dyads match the intimacy levels of self-disclosing statements. They also suggest the importance of a second party's responsiveness to the self-disclosures of a first for ongoing interaction. Second, attraction to another has also been shown to be a function of perceived similarity (see the review by Byrne, 1971). However, from the standpoint of our investigation into more naturalistic interaction, experimental research focusing on the acquaintance process has the following shortcoming. As represented by Altman and Taylor's (1973) "social penetration" theory, the presumption is that the self-disclosure process becomes asymptotic at some point in a relationship. Moreover, there is a purported "monotonic increase with time in both the breadth and depth of the participants' self-disclosure" (Davis, 1976:787) until that point is reached. Our data suggest that this theory underestimates ritual ways in which self-disclosure may be approached, avoided, delicately achieved, withdrawn from after that achievement, and so on, even among previously acquainted parties. As a real phenomenon between persons this process displays more complexity than the linear formula captures.
is its availability for any persons who are co-present in a situation; and, indeed, unacquainted parties discussed the setting in ways similar to those of acquainted parties.

When not doing setting talk, unacquainted participants moved into extended topical talk by the use of pre-topical sequences. However, our point is not that they did pre-topical sequences because they were unacquainted. After all, they might have simply introduced topics with news announcements or other utterances like those of the acquainted parties. The meaning of these utterances would be provided by common knowledge of state, national or other affairs, that knowledge shared by virtue of the parties being "contemporaries." 14 Instead, by doing pre-topical sequences, these parties demonstrated an orientation to achieving a more intimate sharedness by ritually and mutually mapping each other's information preserve, thereby providing for the possibility of common territories of self usable for generating topical talk. Disinterest, offensiveness and opposition are partly avoided through pre-topical talk, while affiliation can be pursued. In short, unacquainted parties ritually test each other for just how close or distant their particular relationship will be. Clearly, there can be moments of intimacy among those who have never met one another before, just as there can be moments of distance among those who are long-term friends or marriage partners. Those moments are contingently achieved within interaction, partly as products of everyday methods for generating topical talk.

Appendix. Adapted* Transcribing Conventions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1. A:</th>
<th>Oh you do? Really [Um hmmmm]</th>
<th>A left hand bracket marks the point of overlap, while a right hand bracket indicates where overlapping talk ends.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>B:</td>
<td>Yeah me neither</td>
<td>Numbers in parentheses indicate elapsed time in tenths of seconds.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. A:</td>
<td>I'm not use ta that (1.4)</td>
<td>Ellipses indicate where part of an utterance is left out of the transcript. Generally used in this paper only at the end of an example.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B:</td>
<td></td>
<td>Capital letters indicate various forms of stressing, and may involve pitch and/or volume.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. A:</td>
<td>Are they?</td>
<td>The &quot;h&quot; within a word or sound indicates explosive aspirations, e.g., laughter, breathlessness, etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B:</td>
<td>Uh huh they are because . . .</td>
<td>The dash indicates a &quot;cut off&quot; of the prior word or sound.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. B:</td>
<td>I did okay::y</td>
<td>The &quot;h&quot; indicates audible breathing. The more &quot;h's&quot; the longer the breath. A period placed before it indicates inbreath; no period indicates outbreath.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. A:</td>
<td>That's where I REALLY want to go</td>
<td>Materials in double parentheses indicate features of audio phenomena other than actual verbalization, or they indicate kinds of talk appearing in the manuscript which is left out of the example.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. A:</td>
<td>I told them that there was...</td>
<td>Materials in single parentheses indicate that transcribers were not sure about words contained therein.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B:</td>
<td>That(h)t was really neat:</td>
<td>If no words are contained in parentheses, this indicates that talk occurred which was indecipherable to the transcriber.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. B:</td>
<td>You didn't have to worry about having the .hh hh curtains closed</td>
<td>Punctuation marks are not used as grammatical symbols, but for intonation. Thus a question may be constructed with &quot;comma&quot; or &quot;period&quot; (downward) intonation, and &quot;question&quot; (upward) intonation may occur in association with objects that are not questions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. A:</td>
<td>Well ((cough)) I don't know:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. A:</td>
<td>(Is that right)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. B:</td>
<td>It was unbelievable. I had a three point six? I think.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* From the work of Gail Jefferson.

14 In an experiment designed to compare spouses and strangers in terms of intimacy and reciprocity in their discussion topics, Morton (1978) found that strangers communicated more public facts as opposed to private information in their talk.

REFERENCES

Berger, C. R., and J. T. Bradac
1982 Language and Social Knowledge. London: Edward Arnold.

Button, G., and N. Casey


Byrne, D. E.

Chafe, W. L.

Davis, J. D.

Davis, D., and W. T. Perkowitz

Douglas, J. D.

Garfinkel, H.

Goffman, E.

“Felicity’s condition.” American Journal of Sociology 89:1–53.

Goodwin, C.

Grice, H. P.

Hopper, R.

Jefferson, G.

Keenan, E. O., and B. B. Schieffelin

McLaughlin, M. L., and M. J. Cody

Maynard, D. W.

Morton, T. L.

Sacks, H.

Sacks, H., and E. A. Schegloff

Sacks, H., E. A. Schegloff, and G. Jefferson

Schank, R. C.

Schegloff, E. A.

Schegloff, E. A., and H. Sacks

Schenkein, J.

Schutz, A.

Terasaki, A.
Cooperative Groups, Weak Ties, and the Integration of Peer Friendships

STEPHEN HANSELL
Rutgers University

This study investigated the strength of ties between students of different races and sexes, and tested a cooperative-group intervention designed to increase weak ties between naturally occurring peer groups. The results supported several hypotheses derived from the theory of the strength of weak ties. Friendships between races and sexes tended to be weak rather than strong, and ties between peer groups also tended to be weak. The cooperative-group intervention stimulated new weak ties between students of different race and sex. However, these did not form a bridge between groups, but instead were concentrated within existing peer groups. These results confirm that cooperative groups stimulate new weak ties between individuals of different race and sex, but raise doubts about whether this intervention directly improves intergroup relations among pre-existing peer groups.

Under natural conditions, people tend to select friends of the same race and sex as themselves (Tuma and Hallinan, 1979; Kandel, 1978; Hansell, 1981; Schofield, 1978). Moreover, these friendship dyads are usually embedded in larger peer-group structures which are relatively homogeneous in terms of race and sex (Cohen, 1977; Hallinan, 1980; Hansell, 1981). Because contacts between naturally occurring peer groups with different characteristics tend to be superficial and short-lived, the opportunities for intergroup communication and cooperation are structurally limited.¹

The marked preference for racial and sexual homophily in friendship choices and peer-group composition has frustrated attempts to integrate social institutions such as schools. Merely bringing students of different races together in the same school building does not automatically improve intergroup relations and frequently even increases interracial conflict (Gerard and Miller, 1975; St. John, 1975; Stephan, 1978). A growing consensus suggests that school desegregation must be accompanied by additional changes in school organization to surmount the social-structural barriers to interracial interaction and to improve racial relations (Cook, 1979).

Granovetter’s (1973) theory of the strength of weak ties has implications for improving

¹ In this study, the term “intergroup relations” refers to relations between existing student peer groups rather than between population subgroups such as blacks and whites, males and females, etc. Members of such subgroups are often, but not necessarily, members of different peer groups. The term “peer group” refers to student cliques.