

Communicating Inclusion: An Analysis of Family Conversation

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Abstract

Prior studies into human interaction from an ethnomethodological perspective have demonstrated that individuals create, define, negotiate, maintain, and therefore "do" relationship through interaction which is regularly patterned and organized. Based upon Mandelbaum's (1987) notion of coupleness, the current study extends the definition beyond the dyad to the larger group of family. Families, comprised of individuals in relation to each other, interact in ways that can be directly observed and therefore demonstrate the "doing" of family. This study uses conversation analytic techniques, applied to an actual, naturalistic family interaction, to examine how a family defines itself through interaction. The study demonstrates that the relationships of family are performed through inclusive tactics and strategies such as the co-telling of co-participated events, requests for information about daily activities, planning of future shared events, and shared attempts at the construction of meaning. The study discusses the strengths and weaknesses of conversation analytic techniques in examining relational communication.

Keywords: Communication, Inclusion, Ethnomethodology, Conversation, Family

1. Introduction

The ethnomethodological tradition initiated studies based on the assumption that individuals interact with each other in orderly, patterned ways (Schegloff & Sacks, 1973). It is in the examination of that order of interaction that the analyst is able to intuit possible or probable answers to the question, "how do individuals define relationship through interaction"? This question is made relevant by previous research which suggested that the communication between people specifies common knowledge, shared experience, and recognition of the other in a way which identifies each other as being in a relationship (Nofsinger, 1991, Lawrence, 1999). Mandelbaum (1987) argues that characteristics of talk demonstrate the "doing" of being members of a couple. A couple, as defined by Mandelbaum, is a group of two people who are intimate with each other. She concludes that the process of being "with" the other determines coupleness. The doing of "with"ness may be viewed by participants and observers as a relational defining method of inclusion. Given her argument, conversation analytic techniques can be applied to larger groups of "withs" such as a family. Indeed, Goodwin (2000) argued that human interaction allows for the embodiment of grouping through different sign systems including talk and nonverbal communication embedded within conversation.

This essay discusses ethnomethodological and conversation analytic attempts to describe how persons "do" relationship. In particular, a critique of Mandelbaum's (1987) article which provides reasoning and evidence for the interactional production of relationship through the co-telling of co-participated events is offered. Using Mandelbaum's model, this study analyzes the "doing" of family from a transcribed family dinner interaction. This study examined how interactants orient to each other as people with whom they have ongoing personal relationships in order to provide evidence for intimacy and "with"ness. To accomplish this, instances of the co-telling of co-participated events, requests for information about daily activities, planning of future shared events, and shared attempts at the construction of meaning is analyzed. Finally, this study discusses strengths and weaknesses of conversation analytic approaches to examining relational communication.

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2. Theoretical Framework

Mandelbaum (1987) examined an instance of conversational storytelling during a dinner conversation between two couples in which the retelling of events co-participated in by a "couple" were simultaneously and complementarily related by both members of the couple. It is in the retelling by both participants of an event that interactional problems must be overcome. The problems described by the author are that the telling of an event is an activity usually undertaken by one individual and that the telling usually occurs when the recipients have not previously heard the story.

The process of storytelling usually involves a suspension of the turn-taking sequence (Sacks, 1971; cited in Mandelbaum, 1987). This suspension requires the cooperation of the other interactants in allowing the extended turn at talk to occur. The suspension may be allowed when the story to be told has the following qualities: (a) it is relevant to the ongoing conversation, (b) it is out of the ordinary or somehow newsworthy, and (c) the events to be described are not known to the recipients. Meeting these conditions amounts to being cooperative. Grice (1975) proposed that conversational interactants must form their utterances in such a way as to fulfill the requirements of the conversational episode so that meaning may be co-constructed. Grice's cooperative principle specifies several maxims which must be followed in order for conversation to proceed smoothly. The maxims of strength and parsimony suggest that the speaker should say enough but not too much. The maxim of relevance suggests that an utterance should be directed by or toward ". . . the overall goal(s) of the participants, to the immediate topic or theme, to the immediate health or safety of the participants, or to some event that happens during the process of the conversation" (Nofsinger, 1991, p. 38).

Mandelbaum points out that repeating a story to a recipient is problematic. A reason for this is that repeating a story violates the maxim of parsimony. However, in a mixed group comprised of both knowing and unknowing recipients, the telling of the story concurrently violates and not violates the maxims. It is in this sense of violating a maxim for one interactant while not violating a maxim for others that the storyteller must orient his or her utterances. One possible way to resolve the problem of violating a maxim is to gain permission to do so beforehand. This may be accomplished through prefacing and qualifying the upcoming utterance or by including the knowing recipient as a co-teller of the story. This condition of inclusion is met in the examples provided by Mandelbaum.

However, the knowledge regarding the events of the story by the co-teller in the transcript provided by Mandelbaum (1987) is first-hand. Rather than simply relating a story that is based on second-hand knowledge, both the story initiator, or the primary storyteller (Vicki), and the co-teller (Shawn) participated in the events being recounted. Further, both tellers participated in the events together. They were co-participants. As such, both observed the peculiarities of the reactions and interactions of their partner with the events as they were unfolding. The partners had specific knowledge about each other within the context of the event. The event was a shared experience.

Mandelbaum offers the occurrence of shared experience, and the subsequent co-telling as a basis for the definition of couple. Mandelbaum proposed that the interactive co-telling of shared events offers evidence to the "doing" of relationship, in particular coupling. She suggests that "with"ness creates a peculiar interaction problem of violation/not violation but that resolution of the interactional problems associated with co-telling is a function of "with"ness. She offered several specific conversational phenomena (within the conversational transcript provided in the Appendix of the Mandelbaum article) related to co-telling of a shared experience as evidence.

The resolution of the problems associated with the co-telling of co-participated events was described as having several characteristics. First, following a preface or projection up an upcoming story, co-tellers display knowledge of the events about to be recounted either verbally or nonverbally. (For purposes of this discussion, story initiator refers to the individual who first offers the story as a possible topic. The teller refers to the primary storyteller, whereas the co-teller refers to the secondary storyteller. These uses apply to the terms offered by Mandelbaum.) For example, the co-teller may display knowledge of the upcoming story by laughing or by responding with, "Oh! this is really funny." Given this display of knowledge by the co-teller, the teller may ratify the knowledge of the co-teller by sharing the story preface, by an aside, or by explicitly stating to the unknowing recipients the participation of the knowing co-teller.

While telling the story, co-tellers may demonstrate co-participation in the recounted events by monitoring for errors, requesting verification of the teller's perceptions of the events, or by offering a complementary telling. A co-teller may offer a conflicting account following an occurrence of a mistake regarding a particular fact about the event in the teller's story. A co-teller may also request verification of facts about the event from the teller of the story.

The request demonstrates that the co-participant has as much knowledge of the event as the other. Also, the co-teller may offer a complementary telling of the event by dramatizing or adding cues to the telling by the other. At any point in the telling of the story, the teller or co-teller may switch roles. The story initiator does not have to serve as the teller. The story initiator may offer the topic and request the other to tell the story such as, "Tell them what happened to us in class today. . . ." The teller may become the co-teller following another-initiated other repair. However, to the recipients, the co-telling of a co-participated event demonstrates the shared experience of the tellers.

It is this demonstration of shared events that Mandelbaum offers as evidence of coupleness. As I shall demonstrate, the co-telling of shared experiences may demonstrate "with"ness, though not necessarily coupleness. Coupleness as defined by Mandelbaum is a particular kind of "with"ness which may require more particulars of relational definition in terms of a shared mutual awareness of coupleness expectations than that demonstrated by the co-telling of shared experiences. To be sure, Mandelbaum broadens Goffman's use of the term to apply possibly to non-sexual couples. However, she suggests that the demonstration of "intimate" knowledge of the others thoughts regarding a shared experience is sufficient for determining coupleness. At minimum, a family may demonstrate "with"ness through shared experiences. However, other conversational phenomena may be necessary to show how families "do" family through interaction. To this end, I will describe other phenomena which demonstrate "with"ness. For example, requests from adult "parents" toward their children regarding information about daily events in the children's lives may demonstrate a right to ask thus implying a role orientation illustrative of family relationships and therefore "with"ness. Planning of future shared events may imply expectations of continued "with"ness. And, shared attempts at the construction of meaning may imply orientation toward the other demonstrating "with"ness. Examples of these conversational phenomena taken together may offer a fuller picture of "with"ness as experienced by a family.

2.1 Current Studies Utilizing an Analogous Approach to Examining Coupleness

Conversation analytic techniques have been utilized to examine relational characteristics including rapport-building, enhancing understanding, demonstrating relational bonds, and decision-making. Recently, Land, Parry and Seymour (2017) in a meta-analysis of conversation studies in a health-care context discovered common characteristics of shared decision-making between patients, companions and health-care providers. Land and colleagues concluded that conversational participants treat decision-making as a shared endeavor.

Baker and Johnson (2000) found that couples co-tell stories of courtship and marriage in reference to the audience who may also participate in negotiating how the stories are told. When couples talk about living situations arising out of trouble, such as job loss, partners collaborate to assess the situation (Conroy, 1999). Barraja-Rohan (2003) demonstrated that these negotiations occur in talk about past-troubles, even when the conversational partners come from different language groups.

Sun (2000) found that inviting a partner to guess within a conversation builds rapport and strengthens relationship bonds. Alternatively, Oelschlaeger and Damico (2000) found that conversational partners will guess or provide an alternative guess to help the other when the other is attempting to find the right word. These sequences are typically followed completion and closing strategies. Such pragmatic features demonstrate collaborative work within conversations.

3. Method

As in the Mandelbaum study, the method used in this study is conversation analysis which includes the following steps: (a) observation of a videotaped interaction, (b) careful transcription, and revising and editing of a previously transcribed script, and (c) careful description of the conversational phenomena associated with the transcript and recording. The conversation analyst looks for orderliness in the interaction (Sidnell, 2001) which demonstrates the methods employed by the participants to maintain coherence in the co-construction of meaning. In this study, I will be looking specifically for phenomena which resemble the conversational acts specified by Mandelbaum as demonstrating "with"ness.

3.1 Data

This study of family interaction uses a portion of an eight-minute videotaped recording of a dinner shared by a family of four. The family includes a male (Tom) and a female (Linda) adult who are the natural parents of two young sons (Ben and Josh). Their relationship to each other is known by the analyst as constituting a family, as defined by the family members themselves. The transcription was made by B. Crow and M. Kelly (Southern Illinois University at Carbondale), and revised and edited by the researcher, using the transcription system developed by G. Jefferson².

4. Findings

As demonstrated by Mandelbaum, the telling of co-participated events involves resolving the interactional problem of revealing details to a knowing recipient. The telling of co-participated events also involves the dilemma of concurrently violating and not violating the cooperation principle because the group of potential hearers includes both knowing recipients and unknowing recipients. In a family context, the conversational act of storytelling involving events participated in by family members may serve a function of inclusion, thus enhancing the quality of "with"ness within the family.

To describe how inclusion is increased in the conversation being studied, I describe how members of the family interactively share in the telling of the events thus resolving some of the problems outlined above in the co-telling of co-participated events. I also offer other examples of cooperative interaction which demonstrate inclusion and "with"ness in the family context.

In the first segment (see below), Tom tells Ben and Josh about an event which involved Tom and Linda. The telling of the event is relevant in a couple of ways. First, the event involved the preparing of food, in particular a pie. In the context of the conversation, the family was just finishing eating supper and was about to eat dessert which included a pie. Second, the topic initiator beginning on line 006 can be perceived as a tease about a past event. Including the two boys in on the tease may enhance "with"ness. Also, the event is a "humorous" occurrence and is relevant in the context due to the jovial nature of the preceding conversation as evidenced by the laughter in lines 002 and 005.

(1)

001 L: (Well:::), it wasn't very filling was it
 002 ehehe[heh, eh eh
 003 T: [No it was uh (.)
 004 good but it went by pretty quickly
 005 B: heheheheh[eheheheheh
 006 T: [Did uh (0.2) Did you put all the sugar
 007 in our pie? (.) since I wasn't here?
 008 L: You know I- (.)
 009 Yeah, I did
 010 I almost didn't
 011 T: Your mom was makin a pie today boys
 012 'n I came up behind 'er 'n gave 'er a kiss
 013 'n said "Did you put all the ingredients in already
 014 so I don't gitchu distracted" ·hhh
 015 and she said "Yes," and she got mixed up 'n
 016 heheh ·hhh left part of the ingredients out
 017 L: And the- the (.) funny thing is I made the pie for
 018 (.) a couple (.) that's s:sick?
 019 Y'know[Mr. 'n Mrs. Bryant?
 020 B: [Sum- Uh huh
 021 L: Now they have a pie
 022 with part of the sugar out of it. hhhhhhhh
 023 T: Part of the sugar was rit there
 024 [ehehehehhaha ·hhh
 025 L: [(laughing)
 026 T: Part of the sugar from that pie
 027 eheheheheh
 028 J: Can (we) go now?

The topic initiator (line 006) serves as a possible story projection because the word "our" is emphasized thus demonstrating an out of the ordinary condition by implying opposition to an other's pie. The emphasized "our" specifies a distinction between an "ours" and a "theirs." Also, the upward intonation at the end of the utterance specifies a question, thus the first pair-part of an adjacency pair. This question makes a response from Linda relevant due to the eye gaze Tom makes toward her at the end of the question. Linda returns eye gaze and a smile, but does not respond at this turn relevance place. Tom continues following a micropause on line 007 by qualifying and clarifying the question with "since I wasn't here?" The qualifying tag question (line 007) also specifies a difference between the making of "our" pie versus the making of "their" pie.

The distinction is not known to the other two participants in the conversation, as is evidenced by the telling of the story beginning on line 011. Thus, the projection of the possible story as a newsworthy item is relevant because it is not known to the two boys, yet it involves an event which includes two family members and is not of an intimate nature, which the parents would not want to share with the children.

The sequence between Tom and Linda (lines 006-010) is oriented to as an aside. This is evidenced by the orientation of Tom and Linda toward each other and by the fact that the event is unknown by the boys. However, Tom's question may also serve as a request for remembrance of the past event alluded to thus recognizing Linda as a competent teller of the event. Linda demonstrates knowledge of the events and the distinction between the making of "our" pie versus "their" pie with her response in line 010. Linda's demonstration ratifies her status as a competent story-teller of the event.

Following Linda's ratification, Tom immediately turns toward the two boys and tells the story without any pause between Linda's utterance (line 010) and the beginning of his (line 011). Immediately following Linda's utterance on line 010, Linda turns toward the two boys thus signaling her anticipation of the story being offered to the boys. Linda's orientation toward the boys may also serve the function of acknowledging or ratifying the appropriateness of the story for the two boys. This function may be particularly important in a family context where a parent is sharing a spousal event with a child.

Tom tells the story to the two boys in a matter of fact tone until line 016 when he laughs. The function of this inclusion of laughter may be to indicate to the two boys that the fact that Linda got mixed up because she was distracted was laughable. Yet, this projected laughable does not gain the expected or relevant response of the boys. Linda's complementary addition of Tom's telling (line 017) serves to explicitly state the funny aspect of the story in order to elicit a response from the boys. Linda's addition also fails to get a response from the boys. Although the story is apparently funny to Tom and Linda, the boys do not demonstrate overt interest in the story. In fact, in line 028, following several attempts by both Tom and Linda in eliciting laughter, Josh asks to be excused. Linda attempts a second time to explain a funny aspect of the story in Line 021. During Linda's utterance Ben turns his head away and looks toward some papers on the wall. Tom and Linda continue to express humor in the story through laughter (lines 022, 024-025, and 027), and by adding other humorous elements to the story (lines 021-022, 023, 026). Apparently, the humor of the event existed only for Tom and Linda, although the telling of the event was designed to elicit laughter from the boys.

This segment of talk demonstrates inclusion and "with"ness in a couple of ways. First, it demonstrates an attempt at inclusion by describing to the boys an event which occurred between Tom and Linda. The event was, perhaps, a moment of intimacy between the parents which the parents felt was appropriate for them to tell to the boys. Second, it demonstrates "with"ness between Tom and Linda at an existential level by the sharing of the event, and at a communicative level by cooperating in their telling of the event. Inclusion of the boys was also demonstrated by a request for verification of shared knowledge offered by Linda on line 019. This shared knowledge was ratified by Ben on line 020 by his response "Uh huh."

Following several other segments of talk, and the occasion of the pie being served five minutes and forty-two seconds later, the topic of the pie is revisited beginning on line 301. Tom states, "Boy this pie is good." Linda offers a laugh token on the following line suggesting that the topic of the pie "mistake" is admissible as a topic. She then continues with an utterance containing laughter regarding the projected whereabouts of the low sugar pie. Tom and Linda then discuss how much sugar is left out of the pie. This information receives a response from Ben on lines 311, 316-317, and 322, in which Ben states a tease in the form of hyperbole, "That's horrible Mom you (coulda) drowned us." The topic then shifts from the ingredients or lack of ingredients in the pie to the kiss. Josh responds in line 347 to the information about the kiss with an incredulous question. Following Josh's question is an interaction which involves all of the family members (lines 348 through 367).

(2)

347 J: You ga::ve her a kiss?
 348 B: Mm hm!
 349 T: Sure!
 350 (1.6)
 351 B: Man! Josh
 352 [You got some problem.

353 L: |Didn't cost me anything.
 354 (0.4)
 355 B: Kissing
 356 J: Whoop 'im, mama
 357 (1.5)
 358 L: Why should I whip 'im
 359 I liked it=
 360 B: =Mm hm!
 361 |I would have
 362 L: |hehehehehe
 363 J: Nnn,
 364 (1.0)
 365 B: If I was you mom I would have
 366 (4.0)
 367 T: She didn't mind too much

This segment demonstrates the inclusion, illustrated through cooperative interaction, that may have been intended in the initial co-telling of the story at the beginning of the recorded session. However, it is discovered that for Josh the occasion of the kiss is more interesting than the mistake regarding the amount of sugar put in the pie. The sharing of that detail of shared intimacy between Tom and Linda brought about inclusion as illustrated by the cooperative interaction between family members.

Inclusion is also demonstrated by other conversational phenomena throughout this episode. For example, in the segment beginning on line 114 and continuing to line 150, the family talks about plans for future shared events (see below). Mandelbaum suggests that the co-telling of shared events demonstrates "with"ness because cooperation is required in order to manage interaction problems associated with co-telling. However, implicit in the co-telling of shared events is the sharing of events as demonstrative of "with"ness. The planning of future shared events demonstrates an expectation of "with"ness by co-participants and thereby ratifying current perceptions regarding "with"ness. This ratification of the current perceptions of "with"ness within this family is evidence by the use of the pronoun "we" in lines 131, 132, 133, 135, 138, 146, 147 and 149.

(3)

114 T: Are you looking forward to going to Arkansas?
 115 (0.4)
 116 J: Kinda
 117 B: Sorta
 118 B: |Uhh eh
 119 J: |You know what sh,
 120 our teacher said um,
 121 she might pack quick enough
 122 and she would go down there too
 123 cuz she used to live in the-, in Little Rock
 124 T: Oh now that's right, she did, didn't she
 125 L: She would like to go with you,
 126 is that what she meant?
 127 J: Yea
 128 L: To see her friends?
 129 J: Yea
 130 T: Did you tell her that,
 131 you told her we were going to Arkansas
 132 J: I told her we were going to Little Rock
 133 T: Uh huh
 134 J: I asked a prayer
 135 so we could drive safe to Little Rock
 136 T: Well that's nice
 137 (0.4)
 138 Well, |we ah, (0.4) we're supposed to have=
 139 B: |woosh, woosh, woosh
 140 T: =a bigbarbelque Saturday night

141 B: [do dododododo ((singing))
 142 J: Yeah
 143 T: [Barbequed ribs
 144 J: [Fish fry, fish fry
 145 B: Where
 146 T: Uh huh, I dunno know if we'll,
 147 I don't think we'll have a fish fry
 148 while you're down there,
 149 we'll probably have one while I'm down there, he heh
 150 J: A::w

Another conversational phenomenon in this episode which demonstrates inclusion is the request for information about daily events. These types of requests indicate a desire for shared knowledge by relational partners. In this case, Tom and Linda request information from the boys about activities they have engaged in throughout the day. For example, in lines 125-126, 128, and 130-131 Linda and Tom ask Josh about a conversation he had with his teacher. In lines 182 through 210, Tom asks Ben about his exercise program.

(4)
 182 T: .hhh (kay) Ben? what's this I hear about your
 183 conditioning program
 184 that'chu been doin'
 185 a littl[eworkin' out
 186 L: [(You do want some ice cream don't ya)
 187 B: What are you talking about ["a little"
 188 T: [I told your Mom I said
 189 "Ben looks like he's getting in good shape!" (.) And
 190 she said "Well, I:: think he's been doing some
 191 conditioning or some[thing"
 192 B: [Mm hm!
 193 T: Really?
 194 B: Exercises?
 195 T: Exercises?
 196 B: Yeah
 197 J: ((Whistling))
 198 T: Like what.
 199 B: Sit ups,
 200 (2.0)
 201 B: 'n::: You know that bicycle (thingy) out there?
 202 T: Yep
 203 B: (I) ride that for five minutes
 204 T: Uh huh?
 205 B: Sometimes ten minutes but (it figures) heheh,
 206 y'knowhhh
 207 T: Yeah!
 208 Uh- I can tell it's (.) th-
 209 I can tell that you're in better shape
 210 jus' by lookin'

In this example, Tom requests more information about an activity that he apparently heard about from another source other than Ben, possibly another family member. In the case of these requests by parents, the boys give relevant responses that appear to fulfill the obligations of an implied right to know by the parents. Within this episode, only one request for information from a parent (Tom) to a child (Josh) fails to get a response (line 038). However, this particular utterance overlaps an utterance by Linda (a parent) in giving information to Ben (a child). In this case, it is possible that the request was not heard. Also, no request for information about daily activities is made in this episode from child to parent. This may demonstrate parent-child role expectations, or it may be due to the age or interests of the children. The parent-to-child request for information demonstrates the parent's desire for shared knowledge thus implying inclusion.

Finally, inclusion is demonstrated as well by the interactional cooperation required to construct shared meanings. This characteristic of talk illustrates the axiom that relationships are defined by communication. However, in this episode, the construction of meaning, reference to a particular object in the back yard, is expanded over several turns, for a full minute and twenty-two seconds, due to an inability by Ben to describe more specifically the object referred. Beginning on line 213, Ben makes a request for verification from Tom (Dad) regarding Tom's knowledge of a metal object "out there." On line 229, Tom displays a lack of understanding regarding "what metal thing" to which Ben is referring. From line 229 until line 281, Ben attempts to describe the metal thing so that Tom will know to what he is referring. On line 281, Ben states emphatically, "Yeah, that!" displaying that understanding has been reached.

(5)

213 ⇒B: └And do you know that-
 214 L: ((whispering to Tom: maybe about Josh and a spoon?))
 218 (2.3)
 219 B: Dad.
 220 (.)
 221 Dad.
 222 Do you know that metal thing out there?
 223 L: ((laughing))
 224 B: You know └that metal thing out there?
 225 L: └We're in Trouble! heheh
 226 B: Dad.
 227 You know that metal thing out there?
 228 L: Josh, go ahead and ge└t an extra spoon for Ben
 229 T: └What met└al thing
 230 B: └Ya know
 231 that metal type of (.) thing
 232 that was in our sandbox?
 233 That metal (.) BIG metal (.)
 234 J: Oh yeah!
 235 That big metal (.) where you do the chinups,
 236 B: No:::
 237 T: The└gutter?
 238 B: └That big metal (.) uh,└piece of (.) metal?
 239 J: └Oh yeah
 240 B: and it's really big?
 241 T: Piece of what??=
 242 B: =It's lo::ng?
 243 It's a metal- It's a piece of metal .hhh
 244 T: I don't know what it is
 245 J: └(It-)
 246 B: └It- (.) It's a big thing, and it's-└
 247 J: └((whistling))
 248 B: it's a metal tube, alright?=
 249 J: =Y'know that thing behind the house?
 250 it looks like that.
 251 B: And half of it is um (.)
 252 half of it is filled up with concrete?
 253 (0.2)
 254 J: And and it's rusted└there
 255 B: └You know
 256 half of it was filled up with concrete?
 257 L: Oh, uh that hole:::a└post that's-
 258 B: └(Yuh)-
 259 L: it's s└et in concrete?
 260 B: └(Y-) No,
 261 J: Y'know- y'know that thing that was back there
 262 b└ehind the house?

263 B: [No, that wasn't there, (there) that's not it
 264 T: Well you're gonna have to tell me somethin' more a-
 265 about it.
 266 [More specifics
 267 B: [Er:::, you can go see it outside
 268 T: [Alright, but what about it.
 269 J: [It looks like the thing back behi[nd the house
 270 B: [uh-
 271 T: [((laughing))
 272 B: [You know how some (people)-
 273 No it doesn't
 274 T: Well I (heh) don't know what that is either
 275 B: It doesn't. Al[l right-
 276 T: [What kind of thing.
 277 B: °The clothesline is what he's talkin' about°
 278 but it's not that
 279 J: [Mm! hm!
 280 T: [I saw a piece of pipe out t[here,
 281 ⇒B: [Yeah, that!

The purpose of Ben's providing Tom with the referent of the metal thing is so that he can continue his description of his exercise routine. The occasion which brought about the trouble in understanding between Tom and Ben may have been the combination of the 1.6 second pause on line 211, and the off-topic interjection by Josh on line 212. Previously, Tom and Ben were talking about Ben's exercise program. The pause and subsequent topic shift may have affected Tom's ability to see the relevance between the previous segment of talk about the exercise program and the current one about the metal thing. Although Ben supplied an "and" to tie his utterance to the previous topic, the "and" overlapped a previous utterance by Josh which may have taken Tom's attention away from Ben momentarily thus prohibiting Tom from attending to the "and" as topic connector.

Throughout this segment, both Linda and Josh offer candidate answers to the question, "what metal thing?" This cooperation in the construction of the meaning "that thing in the back yard on which I (Ben) do my exercises" demonstrates how the entire family attempts to make relevant communication between its members. It is this type of cooperation which demonstrates an investment in the "with"ness of relationships.

5. Discussion and Conclusion

In a family context, the perception of "with"ness between spouses both within the spousal subsystem and from the children's perspective may be enhanced by cooperative co-telling of co-participated events. The co-tellers resolve the interactional problems of concurrently violating and not violating relevance, strength and parsimony maxims by checking appropriateness of the projected story with the other, and displaying and recognizing the knowledge of the other. Co-tellers also request verification of facts about the events and add information where necessary to enhance the story.

Other conversational phenomena also enhance the perception of "with"ness and inclusion within a family context. These phenomena include planning of future shared events, requesting information about the daily events of members, and shared attempts at the construction of meaning. Observation of these types of conversational acts can contribute to our understanding of how families "do" family through inclusion.

Conversation analytic techniques by themselves are not sufficient for making determinations about the nature of any given relationship between two or more interactants (Firth, 1996). Conversation analytic techniques allow the researcher to examine how interactants make relevant utterances by an other. As such, these techniques can claim that they examine the "doing" of relationship, for it is in the "doing" that relationships are defined. However, these techniques do not and do not purport to show the internal meaning and expectations an individual has toward an other-with which that individual is in relationship. These techniques merely show the particular and actual methods thus employed by an individual as opposed to the possible methods. There are other factors, other than behavior alone, which effectively create relationships, such as expectations based on past experiences to which neither the co-participants themselves, nor the analyst has direct access.

These expectations, as well as shared experiences by members of the relationship, serve as a subtext which is not always apparent to the observer. This subtext may only be partially accessed through direct interrogation of the people to which the subtext applies. The culture of the interactional partners, or indeed micro-cultures or cross-cultural differences, may also influence these complex interactions (Miller & Berry, 1999).

Furthermore, the analyst cannot be completely unmotivated. In the present study, the relationship of the interactants was already known. The author knew that the four persons in the interaction were related by blood and constituted a family from their own perspective. Although Mandelbaum claimed that little demographic information was known about the participants she examined, she was not completely unmotivated in that she was looking for instances of the co-telling of co-participated events for the purpose of discovering the characteristics of interactional "with"ness. This inability to be completely unmotivated as an analyst does not necessarily discount the findings. However, care must be taken not to assume that the findings of a study constitute a rule for interpreting phenomena. The assessment of a particular conversational phenomenon as being constitutive of relationships is to be left to the community of scholars to determine intersubjectively, but even then the assessment is a matter of interpretation and thus serves only as a probable explanation.

Yet, although the use of these types of analyses are not sufficient for determining the nature of relationships in (nearly) absolute and thus predictable terms, an orientation to the phenomena itself, as is performed through conversation analytic techniques, is necessary for the furtherance of knowledge about communication. Hawes (1977) argues that careful description of the phenomena about which the discipline of communication is engaged is a necessary first step before theory building can occur (see also Litton-Hawes, 1977). To be sure, an extensive database of ". . . all manner of human communicative activity," (Hawes, 1977, p. 64) should be developed to motivate subsequent research.

In the study of family communication, particular attention should be given to the "doing" of family through interaction with family members. Yet, the family still exists for the person, as does other relationships, even when those significant others are not present for the person to interact with. Although communication does define relationships by setting boundary conditions, implying rules and roles, and specifying the desires and expectations of the other through both content and meta-messages, the individual does bring to the relationship the self and those factors which do impact the choices which bring about the interaction.

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Appendix

² The special notation used in the conversational excerpts is taken from the transcription system developed by Gail Jefferson for conversation analysis (see J. M. Atkinson and J. Heritage (Eds.). (1984). *Structures of Social Action: Studies in Conversation Analysis*, (pp. ix-xvii). London: Cambridge University.

<i>Symbol</i>	<i>Function</i>
[or]	Indicates beginning of overlapping utterances.
] or]	Indicates ending of overlapping utterances.
=	Latching of contiguous utterances.
-	Abrupt halting of sound.
(1.2)	Timed pause in seconds.
(.)	Micropause of less than 0.2 seconds.
» «	Portions of utterance delivered at an increased pace.
« »	Portions of utterance delivered at a decreased pace.
CAPS	Increased volume compared to surrounding talk.
∞	Decreased volume compared to surrounding talk.
or ↓	Rising or falling shift in intonation.
?	Rising vocal pitch.
.	Falling vocal pitch.
,	Continuing intonation.
:	Prolonged sound.
—	Stressed sound.
·hhh	Audible inbreath.
hhh	Audible outbreath.
heh	Laugh particle.
()	Inaudible or muffled sound or utterance.
(())	Transcriber's comments.