

# Categories in action: person-reference and membership categorization



*Discourse Studies*  
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SAGE Publications.  
(Los Angeles, London,  
New Delhi and Singapore)  
www.sagepublications.com  
Vol 9(4): 433–461  
10.1177/1461445607079162

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**ABSTRACT** The article begins with an effort to clarify and differentiate a variety of terms used by analysts in dealing with mentions of persons in conversation and other forms of talk-in-interaction – such terms as person-reference, identifying, describing, categorizing, and the like. This effort leads to the observation that ‘reference to persons’ and ‘membership categorization’ are quite distinct sets of practices, with most reference to persons not being done by membership categories, and most uses of membership categorization devices being in the service of actions other than referring. Two interactional sequences whose analysis turns on a connection to talk earlier in the occasion (a configuration termed ‘interactional threads’) are then examined; first, to establish what is going on interactionally without respect to the mentioning of persons, and then as exercises in examining the various ways person-reference and membership categorization can figure in a stretch of interaction.

**KEY WORDS:** *action, categorization, conversation, description, reference, referring*

A variety of terms have figured in past conversation-analytic work in the domain to which this special issue of *Discourse Studies* is devoted, the most common among them being ‘person-reference,’ ‘description,’ ‘identification,’ ‘formulation,’ ‘categorization,’ and others.<sup>1</sup> These terms convey distinct, though sometimes overlapping, senses of the target object, and have (not surprisingly) caused some confusion – especially in the relationship of person-reference and membership categorization. This article addresses this domain in several partially distinct and partially overlapping ways:

1. it means to show that ‘(membership) categorization’ is not equivalent to ‘(person) reference,’ and ‘reference to persons’ is not equivalent to ‘(membership) categorization;’

2. it grounds the discrimination between 'reference,' 'description,' 'identification,' 'formulation,' and 'categorization,' not only in conceptual explication or stipulation but also in empirical exemplification;
3. it reviews some of what is already known (at least for English) about practices for referring to persons that take priority over use of membership categorization;
4. it brings the analytic resources reviewed in the preceding discussions to bear on two extended episodes of interaction, episodes whose analysis is *not* restricted to observations about person-reference but is shaped by the exigencies of getting analysis of the interactional episode right, whatever it takes; and
5. it offers two samples of interactional analysis which turn on 'threads' – that is, whose analysis of its target segment in many ways requires examination of earlier talk separated from the target segment temporally and interactionally.<sup>2</sup>

These five themes do not always neatly occupy separate sections, but each of the following sections is mainly given over to one or another of them.

### *Person-reference and membership categorization: sorting out the terminology*

The assertions that 'categorization' is not equivalent to 'reference,' and 'reference to persons' is not equivalent to 'categorization' turn on two observations. The first is that terms for categories of persons can be used to do referring, but they can also be used to do other actions, such as describing. The second is that referring to persons can be done by use of terms for categories of persons, but can also be done by use of other resources, such as names. The next section reviews some of those other resources and some of what is known about them. But first it will be useful to develop some terms for discussing this domain without getting tangled up in the very terminology which it is our goal to clarify.<sup>3</sup>

I will use the terms 'mention' and 'mentioning' as the most general terms<sup>4</sup> for articulating or deploying some terms for people, and the terms 'signifying' or 'betokening' as the most general and neutral term relating a mention to that which is mentioned. Then 'reference' and 'referring,' 'identification' and 'identifying,' 'categorization' and 'categorizing,' 'formulation' and 'formulating' and 'description' and 'describing' are among the sorts of relationship that there can be between the 'mention' or the 'mentioning' on the one hand, and the 'signified' or 'betokened' on the other, that invite characterization in understanding this domain in talk-in-interaction.

What is the import of my insistent use of both the noun and the participial forms in the preceding sentences? It is to underscore the key difference for *analysts* between something taken to be intrinsic to a linguistic form or usage on the one hand and the use to which it is put – *the action it is used to do* – on any given occasion of use, on the other. This discrimination will figure centrally in what follows, because we will need to be registering that some instances of

so-called 'terms of reference,' or 'references,' and the like are, on some occasion, *not* doing 'referring,' and it will be awkward if we continue to refer to them as 'references' or 'reference forms' or any phrase in which that word figures. So we will instead employ 'mentions' as the usages deployed by speakers to signify or betoken a person or persons, and then specify the character of that signifying/betokening as referring, identifying, categorizing, describing, formulating, etc. Accordingly, 'person-reference' will only be appropriate when one is proposing and/or showing that a speaker was using some mention to 'do referring;' it will *not* be appropriate to use that term when the same mention (which might elsewhere have been used to do referring) is being used to 'do categorizing' (or describing or formulating, etc.).

Consider the following sequence, in which Bee is telling Ava about the courses in which she is enrolled and about the instructors. One of these accounts (digitized audio/video clips of data extracts can be accessed at: <http://www.sscnet.ucla.edu/soc/faculty/schegloff/>) goes like this:

## (01) TG, 6:01-42

- 01 Bee: -> nYeeah, 'hh This feller I have-(nn)/(iv-) "felluh"; this  
 02 -> ma:n. (0.2) t! 'hhh He ha::(s)- uff-eh-who-who I have fer  
 03 Linguistics [i s r e a l]ly too much, 'hh [h= ]  
 04 Ava: [Mm hm?] [Mm [hm, ]  
 05 Bee: [=I didn' notice it  
 06 -> b't there's a woman in my class who's a nurse 'n. 'hh she  
 07 ->> said to me she s'd didju notice he has a ha:ndicap en I  
 08 said wha:t. Youknow I said I don't see anything wrong  
 09 wi [th im, she says his ha:nds.=  
 10 Ava: [Mm:.  
 11 Bee: ='hhh So the nex' cla:ss hh! 'hh fer en hour en f'fteen  
 12 minutes I sat there en I watched his ha:n(h)ds hh  
 13 hh ['hhh=  
 14 Ava: [ Why wha [t's the ma [ t t e r ] with (his h'nds)/(him.)  
 15 Bee: [=She [meh-]  
 16 Bee: 'hhh t! 'hhh He keh- He doesn' haff uh-full use uff hiss  
 17 hh-fin::gers or something en he, tch! he ho:lds the chalk  
 18 funny=en, 'hh=  
 19 Ava: =Oh [: ]  
 20 Bee: [hhHe- ] eh-his fingihs don't be:nd=en, ['hhh-  
 21 Ava: [Oh [:: ]  
 22 Bee: [Yihknow] she  
 23 really eh-so she said you know, theh-ih- she's had  
 24 ->>> exper<sup>i</sup>ence. 'hh with handicap' people she said but 'hh  
 25 ih-yihknow ih-theh- in the fi:ld.  
 26 (0.2)  
 27 Ava: (Mm:.)  
 28 Bee: thet they're i:n [::.=  
 29 Ava: [(Uh [huh)  
 30 Bee: [=Yihknow theyd- they do b- (0.2)  
 31 t! 'hhhh they try even harduh then uhr-yihknow a regular

- 32 instructor.  
 33 Ava: Righ [t.  
 34 Bee: [ 'h h h h to uh ins(tr)- yihknow do the class'n  
 35 evr [ything. ] An:d.  
 36 Ava: [Uh huh. ]  
 37 Bee: she said they're usually harder markers 'n I said wo::wuhh  
 38 huhh! 'h h h I said theh go, I said there's- there's three  
 39 courses a'ready thet uh(hh)hh [hff  
 40 Ava: [°Yeh  
 41 Bee: I'm no(h)t gunnuh do well i(h)n,

The first half dozen lines here are full of category terms – ‘feller,’ ‘man,’ ‘woman,’ – and we will return to them in what follows. But these are not the only person-references in this stretch of talk; it also includes ‘I,’ ‘he,’ ‘she,’ ‘me,’ and so forth. These are as much person-references as ‘man’ or ‘woman;’ in fact, ‘I’ and ‘you’ and their variants (e.g. me, mine, your, etc.) are among the most common words used in interaction. Nor are they uninterestingly simple; they are the focus of a variety of practices for referring to persons, only some of which have been described (for example, see pp. 163–8; 333–6; 349–50; 711–15 *inter alia* in Sacks, 1992: I; Schegloff, 1988, 1996; other articles in this issue of *Discourse Studies*, and the chapters in Enfield and Stivers, forthcoming). It is only a slight exaggeration to say that, whereas other forms of referring to persons do other actions as well, these (I, you, he, she . . .) do little else;<sup>5</sup> they are meant to do referring *simpliciter* – simply referring.

The other terms that often blur into person-reference – ‘description,’ ‘identification,’ ‘formulation,’ ‘categorization’ – convey other sorts of import or action carried by a mention. Consider the following person-references in Extract (01):

- (a) “‘h This feller I have-(nn)/(iv-) “felluh”; this ma:n. (0.2) t! ‘h h h He ha:(s)- uff-eh- who- who I have fer Linguistics [is real]ly too much,” (ll. 1–3)  
 (b) “. . . there’s a woman in my class who’s a nurse. . .” (l. 6)  
 (c) “. . . she s’d didju notice he has a ha:ndicap. . .” (l. 7)  
 (d) “. . . tch! he ho:lds the chalk funny. . .” (ls. 17–18)  
 (e) “. . . she’s had experience. ‘h h with handicap’ people she said. . .” (ls 23–4)  
 (f) “. . . she said they’re usually harder markers. . .” (l. 37)

Fragments (a) and (b) both are introducing characters who will subsequently figure in the telling; the subsequent references to them – (c) through (f) – are all done with terms that do referring *simpliciter*, but the initial references to them are more than simple reference terms, and we shall return to them. Each of the fragments says something about the referent mentioned – referred to – at the fragment’s start, and we might then wish to say that these ‘sayings about’ are *person descriptions*, and that they take different forms. Some of these person descriptions mention *attributes* – for example, ‘has a handicap’ or ‘holds the chalk funny.’ Some mention a category the person is a member of – for example, ‘who’s a nurse,’ and these we might want to term *person categorizations*.<sup>6</sup> Some are designed to target a specific individual, and these we might term *person identifications*, as in ‘This feller/man who I have for Linguistics,’ where the linguistics course had been

mentioned earlier in the conversation. The same mention invites the observation that this is one of a variety of ways Bee could refer to him and that the use of it is part and parcel of the activity she is otherwise engaged in in this phase of the conversation – namely, telling about her courses (note its upshot at lines 37–41); and that might lead us to characterize it as a ‘person formulation’ chosen for its deployment in the ongoing activity, this observation co-existing with the characterization of it as a person identification as well as a person-reference – each term picking out a particular feature of the data for attention and analytic treatment.

The most basic and analytically pertinent way of sorting out this variety of usages is to embed them in the action-accenting phrase ‘doing X.’ So, for example, in Extract (b) earlier – ‘there’s a woman in my class who’s a nurse’ – it is perfectly plausible in *vernacular* parlance to say that ‘nurse’ refers to the ‘woman in my class,’ in the sense that that is who it is ‘about.’ But this won’t do for analytic purposes. In deploying ‘nurse,’ Bee is not *doing* referring; she is *doing* describing by *doing* categorizing. ‘A woman in my class,’ however, is *doing* referring; and so are ‘This feller I have fer linguistics,’ and, of course, ‘she’ and ‘he.’ The key criterion is whether some mention is ‘*here* being used to *do* referring,’ or whether it is ‘*here* being used to *do something else*’ pertaining to someone who has already been referred to or is about to be. And this goes for category terms as well; they are sometimes used to do referring,<sup>7</sup> sometimes to do describing (as in ‘who’s a nurse’), sometimes to do other actions.

That was theme #1 – categorization is not *ipso facto* reference (or ‘doing referring’), it can be used to do other things as well; reference to persons – or, better, ‘referring’ to persons – can be done by using category terms or by using other resources, and a first installment of theme #2 – empirical exemplifications. The next section briefly summarizes some of those ‘other resources for referring to persons’ – theme #3.

### *Some practices for referring to persons in talk-in-interaction: a partial sketch of a partial sketch*<sup>8</sup>

However much we may appreciate the depth and reach of the bearing of membership categorization on talk and other conduct in interaction, the part it plays in person-reference is far from primary.<sup>9</sup> One organizational logic that appears to operate in the practices for referring to persons is keyed to the sheer number of occasions for person-references of various sorts in talk-in-interaction. By far the most common referrals to persons are those to speaker and targeted recipient. The following set of generalizations appear to hold in decreasing order of commonality:

1. There is a dedicated terminology for speaker and targeted recipient(s): I, you and their grammatical variants (me, mine . . . , You, your . . . ).<sup>10</sup>
2. For others than speaker and targeted recipient(s), on *non-initial* occasions of mention, pronouns can be used to do referring. As stated here, this is far too

gross. In practice, the domain relative to which 'initial/non-initial occasion of mention' is figured implicates assessment by the participants in a fashion which is far from mechanical.

3. For others than speaker and targeted recipient(s), on *initial* occasions of mention, if recipient(s) are figured to know, or know of, the one(s) to be mentioned, then referring may be done by using a/the name by which recipient(s) are figured to know, or know of, that one(s), or by some description by which recipient(s) are figured to know, or know of, that one(s) – with name being preferred to recognitional description, if possible. This is reflexive in the sense that using personal name to refer to a co-present person can show that that person is not a targeted recipient or addressee.<sup>11</sup>
4. For others than speaker and targeted recipient(s), on initial occasions of mention, if recipient(s) are figured *not* to know, or know of, the one(s) to be mentioned, then (some) category term(s) can be used to do referring.
5. For others than speaker and targeted recipient(s), on initial occasions of mention, if recipient(s) are figured *not* to know, or know of, the one(s) to be mentioned, then topic- or activity-relevant descriptions can be used to do referring (as, for example, in the case of 'this fella/man who I have fer Linguistics' discussed earlier).

As suggested earlier, referring to self or recipient(s) is by far the most common person-reference. It is also the case that non-initial referring to persons is far more common than initial referrals; and referring to persons known-to-recipient(s) are far more common than referring to ones unknown to recipient(s). Although category terms could be used as 'specific alternatives' to the practices for referring to persons 'covered by' the practices sketched above, their main application in referring to persons does not become systematically relevant until a relatively small pool of referable persons enter the picture.

I hope to have shown so far that referring to persons can be done – and is most often done – by other than terms from membership categorization devices, and that, when terms from membership categorization devices are deployed, they are often being used to do actions other than referring.

The remainder of this article will center on two extended sequences taken from a family dinner and will provide an opportunity to bring the resources explicated so far to bear as tools of analysis on several episodes of talk-in-interaction. The focus will be on person-reference, the explicit use of categories from membership categorization devices and the relationship of these to attributes,<sup>12</sup> but the interactional episodes will need to be analyzed 'in the round' and not with exclusive attention to our topic in order to achieve a robust and defensible grasp of what is going on, against the background of which the issues of person-reference and categorization can be properly assessed. This way of proceeding will require analytic explication of the interactional roots of these extended sequence in prior exchanges at the dinner table. The result is meant to combine the virtues of intensive single case analysis with the contribution such analysis can make to our understanding of very general and formal resources and practices of talk-in-interaction.

## *The first target sequence, its parts, and its local interactional sources*

The first episode to be examined occurred in a family dinner videotaped in the early 1970s. Mom is the apparent head-of-household, and sits at the head of the table. To her left is Virginia, the youngest child at 14 years. To Virginia's left, and not visible on the tape except for its last minutes, is Beth, who is doing the taping for a class at the local college. To Mom's right, and across from Virginia is Wesley, apparently Mom's oldest, who seems to be in his mid-20s, and to his right is Prudence, Wesley's fiancée.<sup>13</sup>

### (02) Virginia, 15:1–17:16

- 01 Mom: 'hhh ^Well that's something else. (0.3) ^I don't think that  
 02 you should be going to the parties that Beth goes to. She is  
 03 eighteen years old. An' you are fou:rtee:n, da [rlin'.  
 04 Vir: [I KNOW::, BUT  
 05 A:LL THE REST OF MY: PEOPLE MY AGE ARE GWAFFS. I promise. they  
 06 are si: [ck.  
 07 Mom: [They're what?  
 08 (.)  
 09 Vir: GWAFFS.  
 10 ???: ( )  
 11 Pru: What's a gwaff.  
 12 (3.1)  
 13 Vir: Gwaff is jus' someb'dy who's really (1.1) I just- ehh! 'hh  
 14 s- immature.>You don't wanna hang around people like tha:t.<  
 15 (1.9)  
 16 Mom: Well, don'tchyou think thet thuh: eighteen year o:lds, an' thuh  
 17 twenny year olds think you're a gwaff?  
 18 (0.8)  
 19 Mom: Whatever a gwaff might be:  
 21 Pru: [ehh huh!  
 22 Vir: [eWell not if I date 'em, I mean my go:osh!  
 23 Pru: ehh!  
 24 (2.2)  
 25 Mom: (e)Well, (0.5) t' 'hh' 'hh I don' know. I just ^don't think it's  
 26 a very good i^dea for [a fourteen year o [ld tuh be- (0.7)=  
 27 Vir: [Why::? |  
 28 Pru: [mghm hgm  
 29 Mom: =goin' around at p [a:rties with older bo [ys ( now su- ) ]  
 30 Vir: [MOM, I DON'T PICK] yer friends. duh-y] ou  
 31 shouldn't pick mi:ne now.  
 32 (2.1)  
 33 Mom: pt You (.) are not mature enough. (.) tuh make thuh- right  
 34 deci [sions.  
 35 Wes: [°Put a little [bit more (on)] ('a) that.  
 36 ???: [°°( )  
 37 (0.8)

- 38 Pr?: °( [ ] )  
 39 Wes: [egh cassero:le (on thuh plate).  
 40 (1.0)  
 41 Vir: I'm ma<sub>t</sub>ure enough ta pick my frien:ds.  
 42 (3.0)  
 43 Wes: Well uhm  
 44 (0.2)  
 45 Pr?: (hh [ 'hh)  
 46 Wes: [what- all these young people yer own age.You don't like  
 47 tuh (1.0) do thuh same th<sub>i</sub>ngs they do?  
 48 (0.9)  
 49 Vir: >No I hang around [some people my age but they hang around=  
 50 Wes: [(That's enough.)  
 51 Vir: =older ↑people.<  
 52 (2.0)  
 53 Wes: You're not worried about 'um takin' adv<sub>a</sub>ntage of yuh?  
 54 (1.5)  
 55 Vir: W [ho.  
 56 ???: [ehkhhh! ((sneeze) m[ghm (hm hm)  
 57 Vir: [N:UH-(h)O::!  
 58 Ws?: °(huh huh 'hh)  
 59 (3.5)  
 60 Vir: >Thuh only time any [body ( )  
 61 Mom: [Whaddya mean by th<sub>a</sub>:t.  
 62 Pru: Mm hm hm!  
 63 (0.6)  
 64 Wes: Wull 'ey just- (.) the [y'll say th<sub>i</sub>n: ]gs, an' (1.4) they'll=  
 65 Pru: [( )]  
 66 Wes: =lie to yuh, 'n you won't know when they're tellin' you thuh  
 67 tr<sub>u</sub>th,  
 68 (.)  
 69 Vir: °Buh° yes I will:.  
 70 (2.0)  
 71 Wes: °(Whatever.)  
 72 (0.3)  
 73 Wes: Just like fr<sub>e</sub>shmen in col<sub>e</sub>ge.you c'n (always) (1.0)/( 'hhhh)  
 74 you c'n always say about an<sub>y</sub>thing to 'um an' they'll believe  
 75 everything you say.  
 76 (1.6)  
 77 Mom: Vuhginia, do you believe everything everybody says?  
 78 Vir: Mm mm.  
 79 (2.0)  
 80 Vir: I used to.  
 81 (1.2)  
 82 Vir: B't I 'don't any more.  
 83 (3.8)  
 84 Pr?: °°Mhm hm hm  
 85 ???: 'hh hh  
 86 (1.1)



I take this episode to have two parts: lines 1–42 and lines 43–85, respectively – the first featuring Virginia and Mom, the second featuring Virginia and Wesley.

But there is a history here, one indirectly invoked by the way in which Mom launches the sequence – ‘Well that’s something else.’ What is being launched here is presented as an upshot of what has preceded, which deserves some examination in its own right.

### *Sources in the preceding talk*

The thread that runs through this family’s dinner conversation begins when Mom mentions that she had not gone jogging that day because she had to attend to a sale she was running at her women’s clothing store, touching off a plea from her 14-year-old daughter Virginia that she be allowed to get a dress she has been asking for in vain – a plea no more successful this time than it has been in the past (Schegloff, 2005). Mom then suggests that if she saved her allowance, Virginia could ‘get these little extra things,’ a suggestion which she rejects as ‘ridiculous,’ given that she only gets five dollars a week for allowance. A moment later she complains that her older sister Beth ‘gets all the clothes.’ Then:

#### (03) Virginia 5:01–33

- 01 MOM: Well: -Beth (.) spends her own money on her clothes.  
02 (0.7)
- 03 VIR: <Well if I got more money °I could spend my own  
04 mon[ey.
- 05 MOM: [But Beth works.  
06 VIR: Wull why can’t I::?  
07 MOM: Beh- oh:, Vuhginia, we’ve been through this. When you’re  
08 -> old enough you ca:n work in the store.  
09 (0.2)
- 10 VIR: -> ‘hh Well Beth didn’ Beth get tih work b’fore she was sixteen?=  
11 MOM: =No::! I’d- (0.2) I would let her wrap presents an’ packages et  
12 Christmas an:’- °times we needed somebody.° ‘hh >But people  
13 -> just don’t want< (0.4) chu:ldren (0.2) waiting  
14 on [(‘um).
- 15 VIR: -> [I’m not a chi:::ld! ((shrilly))  
16 PR?: hhh!  
17 MOM: Wellç  
18 (1.0)
- 19 MOM: I said’yuh could wrap packages at Christmas.  
20 (.)
- 21 WES: -> Yo [u sure look like a chi:ld.  
22 ???: [(eh-hhh! eh) ((laughter or cough?))  
23 ???: ‘hh=  
24 WES: =h [h!  
25 VIR: -> [Wel [I I(‘m) | no(h)ot] o(h)ne,  
26 M/P: [W e s: | I e y ! ]  
27 WES: [(huh huh huh)/((nothing))  
28 (0.2)

- 29 WS?: ekhh [hh! ((laugh))  
 30 PRU: [(Th)at wasn't n(h)i [(h)i(h)ice,  
 31 WES: [heh h [eh huh  
 32 MOM: [hih hih hih heh ( ) 'mh' hhm!  
 33 MOM: 'hh Well if you jus' save(d) yer allowance you could get  
 34 some  
 35 VIR: <eWell. eFive dollars a week is ridiculous. °Nobody can save  
 36 (enough)/(it up).° 'phh Have tuh save up for three years tuh  
 37 buy a dress.  
 38 (0.3)  
 39 WES: -> (Dih')/('n) they letchya in Friday's the othuh night?  
 40 (1.0)  
 41 WES: They did.  
 42 (0.3)  
 43 WES: W:hich side 'juh go in.  
 44 VIR: -> (mt) Wull we wen' in the eighteen °you know° but we walked  
 45 -> (under) the twenny one.  
 46 WES: ( )  
 47 (1.7)  
 48 ???: hhh!  
 49 (0.3)  
 50 P/B: Who'dja go with.  
 51 (0.6)  
 52 VIR: (mm) (0.3) Beth and Legette.  
 53 (0.3)  
 54 P/B: ^O:h.  
 55 (2.0)  
 56 WES: -> Well what- d:'ju have a fake ID card? or they didn' check it.  
 57 MO?: (Mm::!)/(Mmooh!) [I didn' get a roll. Could I have a roll.  
 58 VIR: -> [They didn' ask me for'it.  
 59 MO?: <°Good.  
 60 (4.0)

This (at lines 7–8) is the first explicit mention of age on this occasion, although the form of Virginia's pleading to be allowed to get the dress amounts to a public display of her delimited status. This status gets formulated in this brief exchange in several ways:

- first as a matter of being 'old enough' as articulated by Mom at line 8;
- next, a numerical value – 'sixteen' – is attached to 'old enough' by Virginia at line 10;
- Mom then introduces a 'stage of life' term for those 'not old enough,' namely 'children' at line 13;
- a term which Virginia protests at when applied to her (line 15);
- only to have older brother Wesley tease her about being visibly a member of that category (line 21);
- met by re-rejection by Virginia (line 25); and
- chastening of Wesley by Mom and Prudence (Wesley's betrothed).

This is a summary of what happens in lines 1–32. There are several elements in this exchange which, without any deep analytic motivation, invite explanation. For example, to Virginia's question about Beth's working in the store before she was 16, Mom answers 'No,' but then adds, 'I would let her wrap presents and packages at Christmas and times we needed somebody.' One could imagine her as easily saying, 'Yes, I would let her . . .,' for store employees also do that work. How then shall we understand her saying 'no'? There is a clue (but only a clue) in her continuation: 'But people just don't want children waiting on them,' a remark which mobilizes outraged rejection by Virginia.

Mom declines to respond by making explicit what the issue is, instead just repeating that Virginia would get the same opportunity that Beth had gotten. Wesley, on the other hand, however bluntly, does make the issue clear; it is not how old you *are*, but how old you *look* (that is, to the customers); and Virginia does not look like an adult. Virginia's re-rejection ('Well I'm not one,' delivered with laughter) has been thereby preordained for failure.

As a side note I might add that my own inclination had initially been to think Wesley's assertion off the mark: it is not that she *looks* like a child, but that she *behaves* like one, or is behaving like one in the just preceding interaction. But that had presumed that Wesley was just trying to tease Virginia or 'score' on her. In fact, Wesley now seems to me to have been doing something more serious, however much his remark occasions laughter and light sanctioning. And, in fact, when Mom and Virginia resume the 'allowance' issue (lines 33–7), Wesley's inquiries about Virginia's access to a local drinking establishment (lines 39–58) can be understood as a further examination of the issue 'how old she looks:' did they let her in? Was that because of the company she was in? Was her appearance problematic enough to prompt asking for ID? The outcome seems to be that they did *not* think she looked like a child.

Soon thereafter, however, the talk does return to allowance, what Virginia spends it on, how much more she wants, etc., and continues in that vein for about five minutes, with occasional re-mentions by Virginia about how someone her age needs more money, for example for gas, since others have to drive her around, and, in particular, her older sister Beth, about whom she complains. Then one complaint leads to another:

**(04) Virginia 13:17–14:03**

- 01 VIR: -> [An' she always embarrasses me Mom I swear, ]  
 02 Beth[is so=  
 03 WES: [h-hm?  
 04 PRU: =°Wish I didn't get in(yu)volved in your family arguments all the  
 05 ti(h)hah[hih ('hh)  
 06 WES: [eh heh!  
 07 PRU: 'hhh!  
 08 (0.4)  
 09 PR?: mgm hgm ((throat clear))  
 10 (1.3)  
 11 MOM: -> Well why does she embarrass you.  
 12 (1.1)

- 13 VIR: ->> ^Becuz the other night.<She w-we were at a party, >(tagetha) you  
 14 know?  
 15 (2.5)  
 16 VIR: -> An' she starts teasin' me.I swear (it's) °embarrassing me.  
 17 (1.4)  
 18 VIR: -> ((shrilly)) YOU GOT TO GO HOME, IT'S ELEVEN THI::RTY!!  
 19 (1.2)  
 20 MOM: -> Well she's supposed tuh be in'et eleven thirty when she takes  
 21 thuh ca:r out.  
 22 (1.4)

Virginia has understood Beth's remark about needing 'to go home' at the party as designed to tease and humiliate her, but Mom sanitizes it by pointing out that the time constraint is imposed *on* Beth by *her* – that is, by Mom, not on *her* – that is, not on Virginia – by Beth. Once the utterance which Virginia has attributed to Beth has been re-analyzed by Mom as not teasing but invoking a parental constraint, the question is raised how Virginia had come to analyze it as 'teasing,' and to find herself embarrassed by it. At least one possible analysis is that she heard Beth to be underscoring her (i.e. Virginia's) under-aged-ness, the very entertaining of which displays Virginia's own orientation to differential aged-ness. And then, about a half minute later, the target sequence presented as Extract (02) gets played out.<sup>14</sup>

### Target sequence 1, part 1

Here again is how this sequence begins:

#### (02a) Virginia, 15:1–16:06

- 01 Mom: 'hhh ^Well that's something else. (0.3) ^I don't think that  
 02 you should be going to the parties that Beth goe:s to. She is  
 03 eighteen years old.An' you are fou:rtee:n, da[r]lin'.  
 04 Vir: [I KNOW:: BUT  
 05 A:LL THE REST OF MY: PEOPLE MY AGE ARE GWAFFS.I promise.they  
 06 are si:[ck.  
 07 Mom: [They're what?  
 08 (. )  
 09 Vir: GWAFFS.  
 10 ???: ( )  
 11 Pru: What's a gwaff.  
 12 (3.1)  
 13 Vir: Gwaff is jus' someb'dy who's really (1.1) I just- ehh! 'hh  
 14 s- immature.>You don't wanna hang around people like tha:t.<  
 15 (1.9)  
 16 Mom: Well, don'tchyou think thet thuh: eighteen year olds, an' thuh  
 17 twenny year olds think you're a gwaff?  
 18 (0.8)  
 19 Mom: Whatever a gwaff might be?  
 21 Pru: [ehh huh!

- 22 Vir: [eWell not if I date 'em, I mean my go:osh!  
 23 Pru: eh!  
 24 (2.2)  
 25 Mom: (e)Well, (0.5) t! 'hh' hh I don' know. I just ^don't think it's  
 26 a very good i^dea for [a fourteen year o [ld tuh be- (0.7)=  
 27 Vir: [Why::? |  
 28 Pru: [mghm hgm  
 29 Mom: =goin' around at p [a:rties with older bo ]ys ( now su- ) ]  
 30 Vir: [MOM, I DON'T PICK ] yer friends.duh-y ] ou  
 31 shouldn't pick mi:ne now.  
 32 (2.1)  
 33 Mom: pt You (.) are not mature enough. (.) tuh make thuh- right  
 34 deci [sions.  
 35 Wes: [°Put a little [bit more (on)/('a) that.  
 36 ???: [°( )  
 37 (0.8)  
 38 Pr?: °( [ )  
 39 Wes: [egh cassero:le (on thuh plate).  
 40 (1.0)  
 41 Vir: I'm mature enough ta pick my frien:ds.  
 42 (3.0)

1. Mom shows that she is beginning a new sequence not directly related to the just prior talk with 'Well that's something else.' In this usage here, the 'that' serves as a 'prospective indexical' (Goodwin, 1996) referring to what is to follow. Its deployment here is designed to prompt recipient(s) to find what that 'something else' is 'another of' – what in the preceding talk this is returning to, and what is being added to it, and it requires recipient(s) to find the 'what-earlier-talk-is-being-invoked' from the composition of the talk-to-follow. Here the key 'clue' is 'parties that Beth goes to,' which can serve to retrieve 'we were at a party (together)' from the preceding talk (cf. Extract 4, line 13 earlier).
2. Mom grounds her disapproval of Virginia going to parties Beth goes to in their respective ages, that is, in their ages formulated as attributes of them as individuals: 'she is eighteen years old, and you are fourteen.' While 'eighteen years old' and 'fourteen' take the form of attributes here, they allude to possible categorical usage; some attributes *do* resonate category-relevance, but for the moment this remains an inchoate possibility.
3. In her turn at lines 4–5, Virginia shows herself to have heard the categorical resonances in Mom's turn. From 'you are fourteen' she goes to 'people my age,' and thereby converts individual attribute to membership category. And it is categories that figures centrally in the remainder of this sequence, and for all the participants, not just Virginia. Mom comes to refer to 'eighteen-year-olds' and 'twenty-year-olds' (Extract 2a, ll. 16–17), to 'older boys' (Extract 2a, l. 29), and 'a fourteen-year-old' (Extract 2a, l. 26); and, a bit later in the sequence, Wesley refers to 'young people your own age' (Extract 2b, l. 46). These usages are all from the MCD 'Age.' But after converting the attribute 'fourteen(-year-old)' to a category from MCD-age, Virginia introduces an MCD of a different sort.

4. At Extract 2a, l. 05, Virginia introduces another category with which to characterize 'people my age' – 'gwaffs,' which was apparently a teenagers' category in South Carolina of the mid-1970s. By 'teenager's category' I mean not a category *of* teenagers, but a category 'owned' and 'managed' *by* teenagers, about other teenagers.<sup>15</sup> It is an alternative to adult categories like 'age.' But, of course, Virginia is not 'doing changing categories' as an action in its own right. She has undertaken to contest Mom's looming prohibition by recasting the circumstance – and the terms of which it is composed – that has prompted Mom's stance. She proposes a world relevantly composed not of people of different ages, but of people who are either 'friends' or 'gwaffs' – people 'you don't want to hang around with.' People who are 'fourteen-year-olds' by reference to MCD-Age are 'gwaffs' by reference to MCD-Cool; people who are 'eighteen-year-olds' by reference to MCD-Age are 'friends' by reference to MCD-Cool.
5. In the nature of the case, adults are not competent users or understanders of the term 'gwaffs,' as they proceed to show. First, Mom (at line 7) cannot understand it, though Virginia gently takes it as only a hearing problem. Then Prudence, who cannot be more than a few years Virginia's senior, asks (at line 11) what it means.
6. Again, in the nature of the case, if you don't already know what one is, there's no way to tell you . . . except in your own (that is, 'adult') idiom. So here Virginia, after struggling for a way to explain (at lines 13–14) finally breaks down and (at lines 13–14) uses the adult word that adults use to put down people like Virginia (as Mom in fact does later, at line 33) – 'immature.' Basically, in her group's own terms, a 'gwaff' is uncool – 'you don't wanna hang around people like that.'
7. Mom isn't even aware of the blindness she displays in falling back on her own, reality-defining, categories – in terms of *age* – 'the 18-year-olds and the 20-year-olds' (at Extract 2a, ll. 16–17) and wouldn't they think Virginia is a 'gwaff' as defined by the term – the *adult* term – that Virginia had used to explain the term to the adults, that is, 'immature,' though Mom does show her awareness that the term is a foreign tongue to her and she does not 'control it' (in many senses of the term) when she adds (Extract 3a, l. 19) 'whatever a gwaff might be.'
8. But Virginia's other definition of 'gwaff' – people you don't want to hang around – betrays Mom's usage; clearly they don't consider her a 'gwaff' if they date her – by definition! I mean 'my gosh!' Point to Virginia! And, for the moment – with a little chuckle from Prudence (who belongs to neither camp) – end of sequence.
9. But after 2.2 seconds of silence, Mom does not allow the sequence to end there. In the end adults control the world; Mom can set aside her shortcoming in the previous sequence (Extract 2a, l. 24) and simply revert (at Extract 2a, ll. 25–8) to her previous position and re-invoke the categories she thinks matter – 'a fourteen-year-old' on the one hand and, on the other, older *boys* (gender has now entered the mix, and, with it, sexuality) – the ones Virginia has just said she dates! To which Virginia can respond by re-invoking

hers – the ‘friends’ at lines 30 and 41. For Mom it is all about age and being ‘mature enough to make the right decisions;’ that is the real world as she knows it. For Virginia, it is all about friends and ‘gwaffs’, and being ‘mature enough’ to decide which is which; that is the real world in which she lives and must act.

10. So, at line 42, they have come to something of a stand-off: two alternative worlds, constituted by alternative MCDs . . . for three seconds of silence. Enter brother Wesley.

### Target sequence 1, part 2

#### (02b) Virginia, 1606–17:16

- 42 (3.0)  
 43 Wes: Well uhm  
 44 (0.2)  
 45 Pr?: (hh [‘hh]  
 46 Wes: [what- all these young people yer own age. You don’t like  
 47 tuh (1.0) do thuh same things they do?  
 48 (0.9)  
 49 Vir: >No I hang around [some people my age but they hang around=  
 50 Wes: [(That’s enough.)  
 51 Vir: =older ↑people.<  
 52 (2.0)  
 53 Wes: You’re not worried about ‘um takin’ advantage of yuh?  
 54 (1.5)  
 55 Vir: W[ho.  
 56 ???: [ehkhhh! ((sneeze) m [ghm (hm hm)  
 57 Vir: [N:UH-(h)O::!  
 58 Ws?: °(huh huh ‘hh)  
 59 (3.5)  
 60 Vir: >Thuh only time any [body ( )  
 61 Mom: [Whaddy mean by tha:t.  
 62 Pru: Mm hm hm!  
 63 (0.6)  
 64 Wes: Wull ‘ey just- (.) the [y’ll say thin:] gs, an’ (1.4) they’ll=  
 65 Pru: [( )]  
 66 Wes: =lie to yuh, ‘n you won’t know when they’re tellin’ you thuh  
 67 truth,  
 68 (.)  
 69 Vir: °Buh° yes I will:.  
 70 (2.0)  
 71 Wes: °(Whatever.)  
 72 (0.3)  
 73 Wes: Just like freshmen in college.you c’n (always) (1.0)/(‘hhhh)  
 74 you c’n always say about anything to ‘um an’ they’ll believe  
 75 everything you say.  
 76 (1.6)  
 77 Mom: Vuhginia, do you believe everything everybody says?

78	Vir:	Mm mm.
79		(2.0)
80	Vir:	I <u>u</u> sed to.
81		(1.2)
82	Vir:	B't I'don't any <u>m</u> ore.
83		(3.8)
84	Pr?:	°°Mhm hm hm
85	???:	'hh hh
86		(1.1)

11. Wesley starts with the category introduced by Virginia at the very outset (Extract 2a, l. 05) in converting an attribute used by Mom into a category – ‘people my/your age,’ and explores Virginia’s relation to that category. She had referred to ‘all the rest of my: people my age’ (line 05); now he asks about ‘all these young people yer own age’ (l. 46). He appears to be exploring the possibility of modulating what is otherwise the perfectly opposed partitioning between Mom’s categorization and Virginia’s. The people who by reference to Mom’s age-based categories are appropriate to be with are by reference to Virginia’s categories ‘gwaffs,’ and not to be hanging out with (Wesley uses the ‘adult’ language for this – ‘liking to do the same things they do’). And the people that Virginia ‘picks as her friends’ are by reference to Mom’s categories ‘older,’ and therefore inappropriate. The standoff could be solved if there were not such perfect inverse partitioning constancy.
12. But Virginia frustrates this project. She translates Wesley’s ‘liking to do the same things they do’ back into her own parlance and allows that she *does* ‘hang around some people my age,’ but they in turn are people who ‘hang around older people’ – an intersection of older and younger, of age and ‘hang-around-able-ness,’ that defeats the goal of separating her from ‘older people.’
13. Finally (at line 53) Wesley articulates Mom’s underlying concern: ‘You’re not worried about ‘um taking advantage of you?’ (in standardized orthography), a concern which had leaked out overtly in Mom’s earlier reference to hanging around parties ‘with older boys,’ and being ‘mature enough to make the right decision.’ Curiously, just as ‘gwaff’ was part of teenagers’ experience and was inaccessible to adults, so is the opposite the case for ‘taking advantage of you.’ It is an adult’s term; if you knew for any given occasion what it meant, you wouldn’t be vulnerable to it. At first, Virginia does not appear to understand who he is talking about, but this may be because the ‘them’ in his question could refer (on sheer grammatical grounds) to the ‘people my age’ or to the ‘older people.’ When she realizes it refers to the latter, her denial conveys a sense of outrage, as if such a thing is unimaginable. Astonishingly, Mom (at line 61) takes up a virtually identical position, or pretends to do so: ‘Whaddya mean by that.’ What else might she have meant by her earlier ‘making the right decisions’? And Prudence endorses Mom’s question/challenge with a quiet chuckle.
14. Wesley then (Extract 2b, ll. 64–7) provides the standard version of ‘sweet talkin’ predators’ – they lie to you, they say anything, you won’t know when they’re telling the truth, etc., and gets the standard denial from



Virginia, which evidences just the vulnerability which the predator exploits. Wesley tries again, now referring to another category – freshmen in college (ironically a category populated by those who are the ‘older’ folks in the ongoing discussion – 18-year-olds) and the common-sense knowledge about its members: ‘you can always say about anything to them and they’ll believe everything you say.’ Mom tries this out on Virginia, who is clever enough to demonstrate ‘maturation’ by admitting that she used to believe everything everybody says, but no longer does so. One doubts that Mom will be much reassured by this.

### *Person-reference, person description and membership categorization, episode 1*

Let us take stock by returning to the discriminations made earlier in this article, and ask how they apply to the extended sequence we have examined. What in this sequence is properly termed ‘person-reference,’ ‘person description,’ or ‘membership categorization?’ Or, better, what is doing referring, what is doing describing, what is doing categorizing? In preparing this section of the article, I have culled all the candidate usages and addressed the preceding questions to them. Some readers may wish to do the same before reading further.

1. All but one of the ‘I’s, ‘you’s, ‘she’s, and ‘they’s are person-references in the sense that they are ‘doing referring’ to one or more persons.
  - a) The exception is the ‘you’ at line 14 (‘You don’t wanna hang around people like tha:t’), which is used here as unspecific ‘one’ (as in ‘one doesn’t want . . .’ or ‘no one wants. . .’).
2. None of the ‘gwaff’s is doing referring:
  - a) the ‘gwaff’s at lines 05, 09, and 17 are ‘doing describing’ of the persons referred to earlier in that TCU: ‘. . . all the rest of my people my age’ at line 05; others ‘think you’re a gwaff’ at line 17; and a simple answer to ‘They’re what?’ addressed to line 05 at line 09.
  - b) at lines 11 and 13 it is the word ‘gwaff’ that is involved, not any reference to a particular person or set of persons, either as referring or as describing; and ‘somebody who is immature’ at lines 13–14 is providing the meaning of the word, not a reference to a person.
  - c) none of this is incompatible with the observation that ‘gwaffs’ is a term for a category of persons – a category in an MCD whose other categories we do not know (except perhaps for ‘friends’). That is, MCDs can be used to do referring, to do describing, and most likely other actions as well.
3. There are several other category terms from MCDs that are used to do referring:
  - a) overwhelmingly these are used to refer to multiple persons collectively, as with ‘18-year-olds,’ ‘20-year-olds,’ ‘older boys,’ ‘your friends,’ ‘my

- friends,' 'all these young people yer own age,' 'some people my own age,' 'older people,' and 'freshmen in college;'
- b) common-sense knowledge about presumptive members of these categories is invoked in many of these cases.
- c) in one instance, such a term is used to do referring to a particular person, and that person is the recipient, that is, at lines 25–9: 'I don' know. I just don't think it's a very good idea for a fourteen-year-old to be- (0.7) goin' around at parties with older boys,' where 'a fourteen-year-old' clearly refers to Virginia.<sup>16</sup>

### *The second target sequence, its parts, and its local interactional sources*

The second episode to be examined occurred later in the same family dinner occasion.<sup>17</sup> The only difference between the episodes is that, by the time of target sequence #2 (though not during its interactional sources), Beth had re-positioned the camera and her own seat so that both she and Prudence are visible on the tape.

The talk has turned (again) to boys and to one boy in particular, named Paul (see note 14 earlier) – apparently closer in age to older sister Beth (who is 18) than to Virginia (who is 14). The girls are quarreling about something which Paul supposedly (according to Virginia) said about Beth (which Beth denies). Apparently Paul has also written notes to several of the girls, although which ones is subject to dispute. The target sequence in which what Paul said is revealed (actually, what Paul *wrote* in a note) goes like this:

#### (05) Virginia 34:18–35:9

- 01 VIR: 'hh Donna collects (all those) an' puts 'em in a bo::x.  
02 (0.5)
- 03 WES: Uh:: o::h,  
04 (2.0)
- 05 PRU: An' Miz Ma [rtin just re]ad it?=  
06 WES: [That's called]  
07 WES: =That's called blackmai:l. eh huh [huh  
08 MOM: -> [Well, I think  
09 -> [that a mothuh has a certain] prer [o: g a t i v e ] 'hh=  
10 BET: [No, Donna is so:] [ (-s:he gits-)]  
11 MOM: -> =tuh: ta: make sure the:t ah:: thu- bo:ys an' girls her  
12 child assoc [i a t e s w i t h ]  
13 BET: [THAT'S NOT-] That's nuh uh::hh,  
14 (1.0)
- 15 BET: [It was Do:]nna's fault an' >i' was ^Donna's fault< ^Miz^=  
16 MOM: [YEAH:::HH!]  
17 BET: =Martin wouldn't do: that.=An' I hope you wouldn't ei:ther.  
18 (0.2)
- 19 MOM: °^Well I should say no:t.°  
20 (0.5)

- 21 BET: Okay w'll she's sittin' the:re an'- eh::b opened it up  
 22 an' it sai:d (0.4) Hi, I'm ho:rny,er >somethin'like  
 23 that<=^that's a::ll it said.=  
 24 = [<It was (one ['a thuh >stupid <)]  
 25 MOM: ['h h h h [^Oh::, good GRIE:::]E, YOU AN' YOUR  
 26 fou:l mouth frien:ds.  
 27 (.)

As with episode 1, to understand this exchange properly we need to examine its interactional roots in earlier talk.

### *Sources in the preceding talk*

The initial quarreling about something that Paul supposedly said (according to Virginia) about Beth (which Beth denies) takes this form:

#### 6a) Virginia 30:5–14

- 01 BET: Paul dudn't like you anyway.  
 02 VIR: eW(h)ellh hhow do [you know. He always ( [                    ] )  
 03 WES: [e h h h u h h u h ]  
 04 BET: [umCuz what 'e ca:]ll you.  
 05 (.)  
 06 VIR: <Well he called you the same thi:ng.  
 07 BET: He did not. [(>                    ) that.< ]  
 08 VIR: [Yes he di d. 'E did ] so. He did so:.  
 09 (0.7)

When older brother Wesley asks what the name-calling was, Beth declines to say, and again denies she was targeted by the (presumably off-color) remark. Again Virginia insists that the offending term was targeted at Virginia herself, at Beth and at another girl – Donna. Just then Mom returns from the kitchen and asks Virginia what it was that she was called. When Virginia again declines to answer, Mom turns to Wesley for an answer:

#### 6b) Virginia, 31:1–19

- 01 MOM: What. Whatta they call- what did h[e call  
 02 WES: [(i')Some'in' Paul  
 03 Pajett <ca:lled them.>  
 04 (0.4)  
 05 MOM: What's that.  
 06 (0.6)  
 07 BET: Nothin'. 'Cuz [I 'on't (really [think 'e] said it about=  
 08 WES: [Some- [some:  
 09 BET: =me becuz 'hh yo [u: didn' even wait tuh tell] me. >You s]at=  
 10 WES: [Some wo:rd (t h a t 'll affect 'um). ]  
 11 BET: =there an' told me what 'e said about you an' Donna an'  
 12 then after about fifteen twenny minutes y'said< 'hh oh yeah.  
 13 (.) An' he said thuh same thing about Beth >an' I asked 'im  
 14 about that an' he sat there n'< swore to Go:d

- 15 [that he didn't (say it).]  
 16 VIR: [uh Well h e's l y]:in' then, too.  
 17 (0.8)  
 18 MOM: ('hh) I t<sub>1</sub>oldj yuh. I didn't l<sub>1</sub>ike that boy.  
 19 (2.0)  
 20 BET: MOTHER! HE DIDN' SA:Y IT.  
 21 VIR: H [E D I D ] SO:: I promise he did.  
 22 BET: [She's jus']  
 23 WES: (Momma)/(Mom ha')you been readin' her mail ag'in?  
 24 (0.2)  
 25 WES: hhhhhhh! [huh huh | huh (huh [huh  
 26 PR?: [e h hh! | huh hah [(hah  
 27 MOM: [^We:sley?  
 28 (0.5)  
 29 MOM: ^What is thuh [m:- in thuh wo:rld's 'uh matter with=  
 30 ???: [(sniff)  
 31 MOM: = [you?I don't read her ma:il;  
 32 ???: [mt  
 33 WES: Oh you don't?  
 34 (.)  
 35 WES: -uhhhh!huh-  
 36 (1.4)  
 37 MOM: No, I=hhh (0.4) Donna's muthuh.told me.(.) somethin'  
 38 that she ((volume escalation through cutoff)) read in a letter  
 39 that- 'hh ((rhythmic)) he wrote tuh Donna.  
 40 (0.7)  
 41 WES: [O:; v :h!  
 42 PRU: [>Oh that was (s)o long (a)g<sub>1</sub>o::.<\*  
 43 (.)  
 44 ???: (tch-km)/((non-spoken noise)) (( \* to \* = (0.8) ))  
 45 (.)  
 46 MOM: \*Well: I: tol' Beth >I didn' like that< bo:y, >°I didn'  
 47 wan' her havin' 'nything tuh do with him.<  
 48 (0.2)

When Mom pursues the matter with her question at line 5, she re-directs her gaze – and, with it, her question – to Beth, who again declines to answer, again denying that what was said was about her, and again insisting it was directed only at Virginia and Donna. Although Beth is not visible at this point in the video, it is clear that the declining to answer ('Nothin' at Extract 6b, l. 7) is a reply to Mom, and what follows is addressed to Virginia (the 'you' at line 9) who turns to Beth as aligned recipient after the 'me' on line 11. Although the offending term has remained undisclosed, Mom has heard enough to announce her judgment about the boy in question (at line 18) – in fact, to announce vindication of her judgment about him independent of the matter now under discussion.

When Beth and Virginia respond to Mom with another round of denial and insistence (lines 20–1), Wesley's response registers that Mom's judgment has been arrived at without the offending term having been disclosed, and asks about – or accuses her of – reading Virginia's mail (and not for the first time – cf. 'again' at

line 23). Mom replies with a huffy and a markedly upgraded<sup>18</sup> display of outrage (lines 29–31) and an explicit rejection of the accusation, which Wesley receipts with a change of state token and a pro-repeat, treating Mom's assertion/denial as news. In response, Mom reaffirms her denial, and explains that the grounds for her judgment about Paul are to be found in something Donna's mother read in a letter Paul had written to Donna, and she then repeats the judgment (lines 46–7) based on that evidence.

This is followed by about a minute of fruitless effort by Virginia to find out what was in that note that Paul sent to Donna. Then, referring to Paul's letter to Donna, Virginia says (in regularized diction and orthography), 'Donna collects those and puts them in a box' – an utterance which is followed by the target sequence on which we will now focus (reproduced below for ready examination):

05) Virginia 34:18–35:9

01 VIR: 'hh Donna collects (all those) an' puts 'em in a bo::x.  
 02 (0.5)  
 03 WES: Uh:: o::h,  
 04 (2.0)  
 05 PRU: An' Miz Ma [rtin just re] ad it?=  
 06 WES: [That's called ]  
 07 WES: =That's called blackmai:l. eh huh [huh  
 08 MOM: -> [Well, I think  
 09 -> [that a mothuh has a certain ] prer[o: g a t i v e ] 'hh=  
 10 BET: [No, Do n n a i s s o:] [(-s:he gits-)]  
 11 MOM: -> =tuh: ta: make sure the:t ah:: thu- bo:ys an' girls her  
 12 child assoc [iates with ]  
 13 BET: [THAT'S NOT- ] That's nuh uh::hh,  
 14 (1.0)  
 15 BET: [It was Do: ] nna's fault an' >i' was ^Donna's fault< ^Miz^=  
 16 MOM: [YEAH:::::HH! ]  
 17 BET: =Martin wouldn't do: that.=An' I hope you wouldn't ei:ther.  
 18 (0.2)  
 19 MOM: °^Well I should say no:t.°  
 20 (0.5)  
 21 BET: Okay w'll she's sittin' the:re an'- eh::b opened it up  
 22 an' it sai:d (0.4) Hi, I'm ho:rny,er >somethin'like  
 23 that<=^that's a:::ll it said.=  
 24 = [ <It was (one [ 'a thuh >stupid <)]  
 25 MOM: [ 'h h h h [ ^Oh::, good GRIE:: ]:E, YOU AN' YOUR  
 26 fou:l mouth frien:ds.  
 27 (.)

1. Wesley reacts to Virginia's telling/announcement with the conventional non-lexical 'reaction token' (Wilkinson and Kitzinger, 2006) for registering 'trouble,' – 'Uh:: o::h.' After a long gap of silence (Extract 05, l. 4) reveals a possible failure of understanding by others of his reaction token, Wesley launches a follow-up explication (line 6), only to find that Prudence had already begun her own reaction.<sup>19</sup> The consequence is that, after abandoning

his now-overlapping talk and re-delivering it after Prudence's has come to possible completion, it is Prudence's reaction to which the ensuing turns are responsive – at least in part because it is a question that makes a reply relevant next.<sup>20</sup> What is Prudence's reaction?

2. Prudence's turn (at line 5) has the form of a candidate understanding, one which here is checking out the relationship of Virginia's comment to Mom's earlier mention of Donna's mother telling her about 'something that she read in a letter that he [Paul] wrote to Donna' (see earlier, Extract 6b, ll. 37–9). At the same time, it appears at the least to express disapproval, and perhaps serve as a possible accusation of inappropriate conduct by Donna's mother ('Miz Martin') – both in the astonishment of its prosody and in its use of 'just,' attributing to Miz Martin an unjustified (so to speak) sense of determined entitlement,<sup>21</sup> leading to the conjectured action – an unwarranted invasion of privacy. That it was so heard is displayed in the responses of Mom and of Beth to it<sup>22</sup> – delivered in partial overlap, each defending Ms Martin against the disapproval/accusation, but in quite different ways. Mom argues for a parental prerogative justifying Ms Martin's action; Beth denies that Ms Martin did the action that Prudence was asking about and/or disapproving of. Although Beth starts a bit later than Mom, when she does start, Prudence withdraws her gaze from Mom and redirects it to Beth, and we will therefore also attend to Beth's response to Prudence's turn first.
3. Beth's turn starts out with a direct and type-fitted (Raymond, 2003) answer to Prudence's question, one which rejects or disagrees with the proffered candidate understanding. Not uncommonly, such turn-initial lexical turn-constructional units – especially when disagreeing, and even more so when separated from the turn they are meant to be responsive to – are followed by further talk which may make clear what in the prior talk the response is directed to and the grounds for the stance it takes. This is what Beth's ensuing talk ('Donna is so. . .') appears to be doing.<sup>23</sup> But, as is common in overlapping talk, each party can track the talk of the other and choose either to continue with their part in the overlap, to drop out and yield to the other, or to drop out and then deal with what they can hear the other to be doing (Schegloff, 2000, 2002). Here Beth hears what Mom is on her way to proposing, and after hearing the claim for 'a mother's prerogative,' withdraws from prosecuting her own utterance in favor of tracking Mom's (ll. 26–9). When she hears Mom's turn approaching possible completion, she begins objecting – first with two tries at characterizing Mom's position ('That's not- That's'), and then with the generic, child-like 'nuh-uh:::.' Before pursuing Beth's rebuttal further, we would do well to take up the turn by Mom which she is addressing.
4. Mom accepts Prudence's proposed understanding that Donna's keeping all the letters and putting them in a box does not mean that her mother did not read them. It is not the factual aspect of Prudence's question (whether Miz Martin did it or not) that Mom addresses herself to, but its implicit moral challenge to what she (Prudence) has taken to be reading another's mail covertly and without permission – 'implicit' in the sense that it is nowhere

articulated in words, but is carried in the prosody and, above all, in the 'just.' Mom addresses this by what might be termed (with apologies to Kant) a categorical prerogative, that is, she does not refer this prerogative to 'Miz Martin' or to 'Donna's mother' or to 'she' – the three ways in which that person has so far been referred to. Nonetheless it is clear that in saying that 'a mother has a certain prerogative . . .' she means to be referring to 'Donna's mother,' – 'clear' in the first instance to Beth, who, after objecting to the generic claim of prerogative, and after reassigning blame to Donna, specifically contests the notion that Miz Martin would do any such thing. So here a category term has been used to allude to a person, if not to refer to one – to allude to that person by invoking a category of which they are relevantly a member, 'relevantly' given what is going on at that moment in the interaction.

5. As it happens, there is another person present who is alluded to on the same grounds, and who may also be suspect – who may *especially* be suspect – of exploiting the prerogative that she has just invoked, and that is mom herself (not Donna's mom, but the Mom at the table). After all, it was only a few minutes earlier that Wesley had put it to Mom (Extract 6b, l. 23), '(Momma)/ (Mom ha')you been readin' her mail ag'in?' And Mom had replied in a huff (Extract 6b, ll. 27, 29, 31), 'Wesley? (0.5) What is the m- in the world is the matter with you? I don't read her mail.' Now she has come up with this 'mothers' prerogative,' and Beth re-poses the question (line 34), 'An' I hope you wouldn't either,' to which Mom now replies in a tiny voice, 'Well I should say not' – hearable as emphatic, but also amenable to a literal understanding that Mom almost certainly did not mean to be heard, however much it leaked out her actual position: 'I should say "not"' – saying what you should say, not what is the case.

### *Person-reference, person description and membership categorization, episode 2*

Let us again take stock by returning to the discriminations made earlier in this article, and ask how they apply to the second thread we have examined. What in this sequence is properly termed 'person-reference,' 'person description,' or 'membership categorization?' Or, better, what is doing referring, what is doing describing, what is doing categorizing? In preparing this section of the article, I have once again culled all the candidate usages and addressed the preceding questions to them. Some readers may wish to do the same before reading further.

1. All the pro-terms – 'I's, 'you's, 'she's, and 'he's – are person-references in the sense that they are 'doing referring' to one or more particular persons.
2. There are additional mentions that are doing referring to particular persons; these are:
  - a) names: 'Donna,' 'Miz Martin,' 'Paul,' 'Paul Pagette,' and 'Beth.'

- b) name + relation: 'Donna's mother;'
  - c) a 'distancing' version of a pro-term: 'that boy.'
3. There is one set of category terms from MCDs – 'a mother,' 'her child,' and 'the boys and girls her child associates with' – used ostensibly to avoid referring to particular persons (Donna, Donna's mother, Paul Pagette), but heard as having referential import not only for them, but for other members of those categories as well (Mom, Virginia, Paul Pagette).

## Conclusion

Referring to persons and membership categorization are quite distinct activities. Referring to persons is mostly done with resources other than membership categories – dedicated terms, pro-terms, names and recognitional descriptors. Terms from membership categorization devices are mostly used as resources for identifying, describing, formulating, etc., persons – often aggregates of persons; they do some action vis-a-vis the one(s) they are 'about' – one(s) introduced into the talk by some resource for doing referring. These are empirical findings; they are not so by definition or stipulation, as can be seen from the instances in which membership categorizations terms *are* used to accomplish reference – whether to some third party (as 'a mother' is doing referring to Miz Martin), to the addressed recipient (as 'a fourteen-year-old' is doing referring to Virginia), or to the speaker (as 'a mother' is also taken as implicating Mom). Both referring to persons and invoking category terms from membership categorization devices play major roles in talk and other forms of conduct in interaction. Neither is more important than the other; each needs its practices to be subjected to close and competent empirical examination.

## NOTES

1. For example, Sacks (1972b: 333) writes that '... if a member uses a single category from any membership categorization device, then they can be recognized to be doing *adequate reference* to a person' (emphasis in original). Surely Sacks did not mean that only categories from membership categorization devices can do adequate reference; in the same set of lectures as included the first pass at 'The baby cried' may be found a discussion of 'you' as doing adequate reference (Sacks, 1992: I: 163–9).
2. On 'threads', see pp. 244–50 in Schegloff (2007).
3. The usefulness of beginning in this way was suggested by the editors of this special issue.
4. I draw on the sense given by the *Shorter Oxford English Dictionary* (II: 1308): 'to make mention of; ... to specify by name or otherwise.'
5. The exaggeration is, of course, that 'he' and 'she' convey gender, and also (as a default) that the one being referred to has been referred to before. Still, though surely substantial and consequential, these additional 'doings' are relatively blunt instruments as compared to other forms of person-reference that are not designed to do only referring.



6. There is an alternate hearing of this utterance which would be transcribed as 'there's a woman in my class who's in nursing 'n:.' on that hearing, this would be not a categorization but a description using an attribute (see Schegloff, 2006).
7. As in the focal utterance in Sacks (1972b), 'The baby cried, the mommy picked it up.' The initial work reported in that paper was done in the mid-1960s; there is a discussion of it in the first lectures – those for Fall 1965 – published in Sacks (1992). Some of the current confusion about these terms may go back to these early papers by Sacks. In Sacks (1972b: 331) he refers to these sentences as doing 'possible description.' Several pages later (1972b: 333), in explicating 'the economy rule,' he characterizes the same talk as 'reference:' '... if a member uses a single category from any membership categorization device, then they can be recognized to be doing *adequate reference* to a person' (emphasis in original). And he goes on to reformulate the economy rule in the following terms: 'It is not necessary that some multiple of categories from categorization devices be employed for recognition that a person is being referred to, to be made; a single category will do. (I do not mean by this that more cannot be used, only that for reference to persons to be recognized more need not be used.)' This text could (incorrectly) be understood to convey that category terms do only reference, and that reference to persons is always done by category terms. And the text may have led to a problematic conflation of 'description' and 'categorization,' terms which some 40 years later need to be distinguished. This applies as well to the other early paper on categorization, where Sacks writes (1972a: 34), '... single categories of single categorization devices can be referentially adequate ... For Members, it is not absurd or insufficient in characterizing a Member to use a single category to refer to him. It is adequate reference on many occasions to say of someone no more than that they are "female" or "old" or "negro."' The first of these sentences was and is unproblematic; the second is unproblematic if we understand by it that the 'single category to refer to him' is one thing, and the 'characterizing a Member' is another, separate thing; the third of these sentences (I am proposing) conveys by the phrase 'to say of someone' that it is description or categorization that is involved, not reference or referring.
8. What follows is a highly compacted and data-deprived rendering of my 1996 paper, 'Some Practices for Referring to Persons in Talk-in-Interaction: A Partial Sketch of a Systematics'.
9. As I wrote in the earlier paper (1996: 471, n. 2): 'I have looked at talk-in-interaction in English; what I have to say may be relevant well beyond that limit, but I think in this area, the relevance of linguistic and cultural variation sets in far earlier in our inquiries than, for example, in research on sequential organization.'
10. For each of the general assertions, there are exceptions and alternative resources which cannot be taken up here, but are discussed in Schegloff (1996). One useful way of thinking about the relationship of the practices here proposed as central and others which are on occasion employed is the notion of 'specific alternatives' (or asymmetrical alternatives) introduced in Schegloff and Sacks (1973: 313–14) with respect to responses to 'possible pre-closings' of conversations:

It should be noted that the use of a possible pre-closing of the form 'O.K.', or 'we-ell' can set up 'proceeding to close' as the central possibility, and the use of unmentioned mentionables by co-participants as specific alternatives. That is to say, the alternatives made relevant by an utterance of that form are not symmetrical. Closing is the central possibility, further talk is alternative to it; the reverse is not the case ... Unless the alternative is invoked, the central possibility is to be realized.

In the present context, I/you are the central possibility; other practices are specific alternatives. I might add that, as specific alternatives, they invite special attention from participants and analysts for what has prompted their use – ‘why that now.’

11. Some readers may have encountered the following turn from material collected and analyzed by C. and M.J. Goodwin, known informally as the ‘Automobile Discussion’ tape. Sitting around a picnic table in Curt and Pam’s back yard, guest Phyllis launches a story-telling by her husband Mike by saying, ‘Mike says there was a big fight down there last night,’ which thereby de-selects him as addressee (and likely next speaker) and prompt uptake from their host, Curt. See Goodwin (1986) and Schegloff (1987, 1992).
12. Some of the discussion of the main data extract examined in what follows and of the relation of attribute to category draws on an earlier treatment in Schegloff (2006).
13. An earlier episode of this family dinner is taken up in a past issue of this journal (Schegloff, 2005), which some readers may find useful.
14. One other element of this background deserves mention. The talk just preceding Mom’s ‘Well, that’s something else’ concerns Beth, and whether she dances well.

(07) Virginia 14:23–31

- 01 Wes: I [ didn’- I didn’t think she was too goo:d. She- (.) must=  
 02 Pru: [(I)/(What)  
 03 Wes: =be gettin’ bettuh now.  
 04 Vir: She’s good. ‘Cuz pa- (0.8) Paul taught ‘er how.  
 05 (1.0)  
 06 Vir: Paul danc [es good.  
 07 Pru: [ >Oh I thought you were the one that [taught her how.<  
 08 Wes: [Oh ‘e did?  
 09 (.)

When this ‘Paul’ is mentioned later in the dinner, Mom says ‘Well I told Beth I didn’t like that boy, I didn’t want her having anything to do with him’ (regularized spelling). The mention of his name here may figure in Mom’s launching of the target sequence a moment later.

15. This has all the marks of what Sacks took up in his lecture on ‘hotrodder’ as a revolutionary category (Sacks, 1992: I: 169ff., 396ff.). It is a category invented by teenagers to describe teenagers. They administer it and its criteria, and these categories often govern the desiderata of social relationships (as here at line 14, ‘>You don’t wanna hang around people like tha:t.<’).
16. I am indebted here to an unpublished paper by Jae-Eun Park (2006).
17. My understanding of this sequence has benefited from discussion with students in the discussion section of my introductory graduate course in conversation analysis in Fall 2006.
18. Note her momentary abandonment of the turn-constructional-unit-in-progress – ‘What is the m[atter with you]’ – to insert the upgrade ‘in the world,’ yielding the upgraded result ‘what in the world is the matter with you’ at lines 29–31.
19. I have benefited here from an observation by Celia Kitzinger (personal communication).
20. Prudence ‘wins’ despite Wesley’s use of an overlap-management strategy designed precisely to ‘win’ in such a circumstance – losing the battle to win the war, i.e. yielding to the other in the course of the overlap so as to restart on completion of



- 16 Mike?: (okay.)  
 17 Sher: right on the dou [ble ba'?'  
 18 Marg: [mm hmm,  
 19 (1.2)

Another exemplar may be found in Extract 03 at lines 12–13: '.hh >But people **just** don't want< (0.4) chu:ldren (0.2) waiting on[('um).'

22. Being hearably addressed to Virginia's preceding turn, Prudence's question makes a response *by Virginia* relevant next, and, in fact, during its course Virginia raises her eyes from her plate and re-directs them at Prudence, but Wesley starts talking again immediately after (and possibly slightly overlapping with) the end of Prudence's turn, and by re-using the same words with which he had begun before (lines 23–4), he shows himself to be trying again to say the same thing he had started to say before, for which he is now claiming priority rights. Wesley turns toward Prudence while delivering his line, and Prudence deflects her gaze slightly from Virginia toward Wesley to align as recipient of his talk, a gaze line which, as it happens, also includes Mom. And so, when Wesley finishes his turn, Mom (inheriting his recipient, Prudence) almost immediately starts up with a response to Prudence's turn and the action(s) it was doing (at line 25), and Virginia again drops her eyes to her plate and returns to toying with her food. Dealing with Prudence's query/ disapproval/ accusation is thus left to Mom and Beth.
23. Although we cannot be certain how this turn-constructural-unit was meant to develop, one plausible possibility is to examine what Beth says after she has finished rejecting Mom's response to Prudence and appears to be returning to her own. To be sure, she does not re-start with the same words she used before (as Wesley had done with his turn), but her account at lines 21–3 conveys that she may have been on her way to saying that Donna is careless and had left the letter in question lying around, and Miz Martin picked it up and read it – that is, she did not invade Donna's privacy by opening the box in which she keeps the letters.

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