

Category-Sensitive Actions in Interaction

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Abstract

This article is concerned with how social categories (e.g., wife, mother, sister, tenant, guest) become visible through the actions that individuals perform in social interaction. Using audio and video recordings of social interaction as data and conversation analysis as a method, we examine how individuals display their rights or constraints to perform certain actions by virtue of occupying a certain social category. We refer to actions whose performance is sensitive to membership in a certain social category as category-sensitive actions. Most of the time, the social boundaries surrounding these actions remain invisible because participants in interaction typically act in ways that are consistent with their social status and roles. In this study, however, we specifically examine instances where category boundaries become visible as participants approach, expose, or transgress them. Our focus is on actions with relatively stringent category sensitivity such as requests, offers, invitations, or handling one's possessions. Ultimately, we believe these are the tip of an iceberg that potentially includes most, if not all, actions.

Keywords

action, conversation analysis, membership, social categories, social interaction

Some of the earliest work on the organization of social interaction observed that people's conduct is often organized by reference to the social categories of which they are members: wife, mother, sister, tenant, guest, and so on (for a review, see Housley and Fitzgerald 2015). Membership categories are grounded in a range of social institutions (e.g., family, religion) and sociodemographic features (e.g., age, gender). But common across categories is an association with different rights and responsibilities in social life.

Research in social psychology shows that some of these rights and responsibilities are understood from an early age. For example, three-year-old children are able to identify an object's owner and

stand up for the owner's property rights when a nonowner takes or threatens to throw away the object (Rossano, Rakoczy, and Tomasello 2011). Also, children's cooperative behavior appears to differ according to the category of person they are interacting with. For instance, differences in children's rates of compliance with requests as well as variation in how they make requests correlate with

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categories including mother, father, older child, and younger child (Ervin-Tripp, O'Connor, and Rosenberg 1984).

As sociologists, particularly in the Parsonian tradition, we tend to take such correlations as evidence that social categories and identities drive what individuals do in interaction. Ethnomethodology (EM) and conversation analysis (CA) have challenged the basis for this assumption on the grounds that there are too many aspects of an individual's social identity that might be relevant at any given moment, so which aspects matter for a given action must be empirically demonstrated as relevant to participants (for a review, see Eglin and Hester 2003).

Partly due to this methodological imperative, EM/CA research on membership categories in ordinary interaction has been limited in scope. The predominant focus has been on how participants categorize others using explicit expressions (e.g., "a woman," "teenagers," "Catholic people," "my Asian friends") in the context of reporting activities or attitudes. This has left largely unexplored the tacit processes through which membership categories afford or constrain sequential and practical action in the moment (e.g., opening a house door, offering service to someone). The few EM/CA studies examining the relation between sequential action and membership categories have focused primarily on conversational roles (e.g., selected next speaker vs. other speakers, producer vs. recipient of problematic talk) and their intersection with the relative authority of participants over particular domains of knowledge.

In this study, we extend the scope of EM/CA research on membership categories in ordinary interaction by exploring domains of sequential and practical action such as requesting, offering, inviting, and handling one's possessions and by examining a broad range of social statuses and roles, including ones grounded

in family and property relations. We ask: Does a social category such as wife, mother, sister, tenant, or guest facilitate or constrain the actions that an individual can legitimately perform in the moment-by-moment flow of social interaction? And how do individuals demonstrate this? Our interest is in how social categories become visible through the actions that people perform in interaction, particularly through the rights and constraints associated with people's everyday cooperation and handling of objects and possessions.

Consider an example: When an individual opens a house door, the act embodies the individual's right to enter that house. Only owners, tenants, and some guests, however, are treated as possessing such rights, not uninvited or unknown individuals. In fact, entering a house as an unbidden stranger has been codified as illegal. In extract 1, a resident calls 911, characterizing the problem as having "an intruder in my house," and then just a bit later as "he just walked right into my house." An unbidden stranger's action of opening a house door without permission is a violation not because this action is inherently problematic (as would be smashing the door lock to break in) but because of who performs it.

Many actions that are not law-violating can nonetheless be norm-violating when performed by certain individuals. We term these *category-sensitive actions*, by which we intend to capture a range of ways in which certain actions are governed by social norms tied to membership in social categories, including how rights may be borrowed or shared across related categories. For instance, one way in which offering the use of one's possessions is category-sensitive is that the owner has primary rights. At the same time, membership as a partner, daughter, or housemate may be treated as providing a warrant to offer the items for

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(1) 911 Call

1 CLR:      I have- (0.2) I have an intruder in my house,=hh
2 911:      Kay: what's your address,
3           ((--- tape cut? ---))
4 911:      Uh hu:h?
5           {(1.2)/((muffled talk))}
6 ????:     hhh
7 CLR:      I'm sorry uh- (.) he just walked right into my
8           hou:se, (.) but he- (.) d- I don't think he's
9           hur- trying to hurt us?
10          .hhh [He a- a- ]
11 911:     [Ju- What's your add]ress ma'am.

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use on the owner's behalf. Similarly, in a parent-child relationship, parents sometimes leverage their membership in the social category of parent in answering questions for their children—an action that may be more readily sanctioned if performed by people lacking similar membership. Finally, romantic partners may accept requests or invitations on behalf of the other or make offers on their behalf. Of course, in all of these cases, individual prerogatives may trump couple or familial entitlements. Our point is that individuals acting on behalf of others orient to their membership in particular social categories as providing a warrant for performing certain actions.

Consider extract 2 in which Leslie phones Margie to offer her husband's help to Margie's husband who is currently out of work. We argue that the action of offering on another's behalf is category-sensitive. Not just anyone can offer on behalf of another. Leslie orients to her membership in a wife-husband partnership as entitling her to offer her husband's services to another. Moreover, she treats Margie's membership in a wife-husband partnership as authorizing her to receive this offer on behalf of her husband.

After a brief opening (not shown), Leslie provides the background account

for her upcoming offer: She begins by characterizing how she and her husband (“we”) came to know of the problem that Margie’s husband (“your husband”) is unemployed. In lines 6–10, Leslie puts the agency for knowing about the problem with Margie’s husband (“he told us . . . he said he might have another position in view,”). She then sets up a conditional offer with “if he hasn’t” (line 13) then “we have friends” (line 14) and “if: i-your husband would like their address . . . my husband w’d gladly give it to him.” (lines 29–30, 35).

The offer’s design is examined in detail elsewhere (Curl 2006). Critical to our analysis is that making an offer on behalf of another (and receiving an offer on behalf of another) is not something that just anyone has rights to do. For instance, there would be a clear breach of social norms if an acquaintance were to offer another’s services. Although Leslie’s and Margie’s husbands may or may not ultimately be happy with their wives speaking on their behalves, the point is that by invoking their memberships in a partnership, Leslie and Margie display the basis for their respective warrants to make and receive the offer. Although individual rights pose limits to what partners and other relevant category members are entitled to do on another’s behalf, the fact

(2) Holt 2.3

1 Les: I hh^ope you don't ~mind me getting in touch
 2 but uh- we met=your husband little while ago at a Liberal
 3 meeting.
 4 (0.3)

5 Mar: Ye:s?
 6 Les: [.hh And he wz: (0.3) i-he told us something of what'd
 7 happen:ed,
 8 (0.5)

9 Les: to him .hh An:' I wondered haa- (0.2) i-he said he m::ight
 10 have another position in vie:[w,
 11 Mar: [Mhm,
 12 Les: .hh (.) Uhm (0.3) .tch Well I don't know how that went, .h
 13 uh (.) It's just that I wondered if he hasn:t (0.3) uh
 14 we have friends in: Bristol

15 Mar: Ye:s?
 16 Les: who:-(.) uh: that u-had the same experience.
 17 Mar: Oh^:~:.
 18 Les: And they uhm: .t (0.2) .hh He worked f'r a printing an:'
 19 paper (0.9) uh firm[u-

((6 lines not shown involving documentation of previous experience))

27 Mar: [Oh I see:[:.
 28 Les: [hh An:d if: i-your
 29 husband would li:ke their addre:ss.
 30 Mar: [Y e :[: s,
 31 Les: [<As they're
 32 specialists,
 33 Mar: Ye::s?
 34 (.)
 35 Les: Uhm: my husband w'd gladly give it [t o h i m .]
 36 Mar: [Oh ^that's ~v]ery ^kind

that members of these categories orient to possessing rights to perform certain actions is one illustration of what is at the core of category-sensitive actions.

In what follows, we review prior work on membership categorization in the ethnomethodological and conversation analytic (EM/CA) traditions. We then provide evidence in support of our claim that sequential and practical actions such as requests, offers, invitations, and handling one's possessions are category-sensitive. We draw first on cases where participants orient to the boundaries of actions but stop short of transgressing those boundaries; we then discuss cases where there

is a transgression and this is oriented to through accounts or acknowledgments; finally, we turn to cases in which the performance of category-sensitive actions shows a participant's claim to membership, focusing on instances where this claim is then negotiated in the interaction.

BACKGROUND

Sacks (1992:226) famously claimed that "a culture is an apparatus for generating recognizable actions." Using the brief story "The baby cried. The mommy picked it up" as an example, Sacks argued that it is culture that allows us to understand

that the mommy was the mommy of *this* baby. We could similarly understand that picking up the baby was responsive to her crying. Levinson (2013:105) pointed out that Sacks's interest in how social action is produced and interpreted essentially brought two research agendas together: sequential analysis and membership categorization. Whereas sequential analysis has received decades of attention, CA researchers have not put the same energy into understanding the role of membership categorization and its relation with sequential analysis (Raymond and Heritage 2006; Schegloff 2007).

One of the foundations of EM/CA research is the methodological requirement that social categories must be demonstrably relevant and consequential to participants in their conduct (Schegloff 1987). Partly as a result of this, studies have privileged interactional phenomena and practices whereby participants categorize others explicitly by referring to them as members of a category (e.g., "a woman," "teenagers," "Catholic people," "my Asian friends"), typically in the context of narrating or reporting the activities or attitudes that they believe are associated with the category, often as part of complaints or accusations (e.g., Stokoe 2009; Watson 1978; Whitehead 2013). This research shows how categories can be used to describe and evaluate others and the activities they engage in as characteristic of a particular social identity (see also Antaki and Widdicombe 1998; Eglin and Hester 2003). Besides religion, race, and age, a good deal of attention in this area has been given to distinctions of gender and sexuality (Raymond 2019; Stokoe and Smithson 2001; Weatherall 2002; Wilkinson and Kitzinger 2008) and their intersections with family (Kitzinger 2005). Whatever the specific categorial themes, however, most of this research focuses on how social categories and identities are

invoked while narrating, reporting, or otherwise describing and evaluating what people do after they have done it.

To fully understand the role of membership categories in the organization of ordinary interaction, we must be able to show how they afford or constrain what people do as they do it. This is where the two directions of Sacks's program of research into social action—sequential analysis and membership categorization—can be powerfully united. The challenge is that the ways in which membership is invoked in the performance of here-and-now action in interaction are often tacit (Butler and Fitzgerald 2010; Lerner 2003), which raises the question of how we can demonstrate the operational relevance of a given membership category when this is not explicitly articulated (Deppermann 2013; Stokoe 2012).

With this in mind, it is important to distinguish between three levels of action where membership categories may be tacitly invoked: (i) action design, (ii) action formation/ascription, and (iii) rights and constraints to perform certain actions at all (see also Pomerantz and Mandelbaum 2005). Let us briefly consider how each of these aspects helps us link the organization of interaction to social categories and identities with particular reference to institutional settings (Heritage and Clayman 2010).

Action design refers to the alternative practices and constructional features that participants use in performing a certain type of action. Clayman (2016) showed that the design of a journalist's questions in a news interview, for example, can orient to and reflexively constitute the identity of a politician as mainstream or extremist.

While action design concerns how participants formulate a given action, action formation/ascription focuses on how a given utterance is produced and recognized as a particular type of social action.

Sacks (1992:314–15) first discussed how in a group therapy session an utterance that does not transparently express an action of closing an interaction (“Well what’s new gentlemen”) is understood as a closing by virtue of the speaker’s membership as therapist (see also Schegloff 2007:473). Similarly, the import of a head nod as a particular type of action in the context of an auction must be understood by reference to its producer’s membership as buyer or auctioneer. Performed by a buyer to an auctioneer, the nod will be understood as bidding; performed by the auctioneer to a buyer, it will be understood as acknowledging a bid (Heath and Luff 2007).

A third level of the organization of social action is how the social categories and identities inhabited by participants provide for or constrain their rights to perform actions. Take question-answer sequences: In the classroom, teachers are entitled and expected to evaluate students’ answers in third position (see also Sinclair and Coulthard 1975); in the courtroom, on the other hand, attorneys should neither evaluate nor acknowledge witness answers lest the legitimacy of their questioning be undermined. Social categories (e.g., teacher, attorney) thus constrain the types of action that participants can or should perform.

Institutional interaction has been a critical arena for demonstrating the import of social categories and identities for the performance of sequential action. At the same time, the strictures of institutional activities limit the range of possible actions compared to the “open sea of ordinary conversation” (Raymond and Heritage 2006:680). Few studies have explored links between membership categories and sequential action. One area that has attracted some attention, however, is where the conversational roles of speaker and recipient are associated with different rights and responsibilities

(Lerner 1993). The category of selected next speaker (vs. other speakers), for example, comes with primary rights to respond to a turn at talk, even when the incumbent of the category is a child (Stivers and Robinson 2006). Similarly, in the domain of repair, the producer of a trouble source has primary rights to repair his or her own talk, although the producer may have to defend these rights against the claims of certain unaddressed recipients (Bolden 2013). These membership categories fall under the umbrella of self/other relations in conversation and intersect with participants’ relative authority over particular domains of knowledge (Bolden 2011). Such categories are transient and may shift from moment to moment within a conversation.

When we consider more enduring social categories based, for example, in family relations or property, the few available studies have concentrated on how such categories may be involved in the design of actions like troubles-tellings, questions, and assessments (Pomerantz and Mandelbaum 2005:161–66). Among these is Raymond and Heritage’s (2006) study of a phone call between two middle-aged friends, showing how the social status of grandparent is reflected in the formulation of assessments concerning grandchildren, displaying the grandparent’s greater epistemic authority compared to someone who knows the children but is unrelated to them. Observations about other types of action can be found, for instance, in Schegloff’s (2005) analysis of an interaction in which a host apologizes to her guests when someone knocks on the door and interrupts them. As Schegloff observed, the apology is not for something that she has done but for something that has happened while she is hosting and for which she treats herself as responsible. In another study, Butler and Fitzgerald (2010) analyzed a breakfast between

family members, showing that social roles like host and guest as well as social statuses like parent and child can be made operationally relevant in the design of offers and directives (e.g., “Do you want a separate plate for him?”, “You show grandma that you can drink nicely from the cup”).

Butler and Fitzgerald (2010) offered an important antecedent looking at sequential and practical actions involved in everyday cooperation. This is the domain of ordinary interaction that is at the center of our investigation, a domain that includes actions of requesting, offering, inviting, and handling one’s possessions. CA research traditionally does not mobilize participants’ social status or role in explaining the organization of these actions. For the design of offers, for instance, Curl (2006) showed that what speakers treat as relevant is whether they are offering something as a reason for calling; are responding to a problem that was directly brought up during the call; or are addressing a problem deduced from the conversation. Similarly for requests, Curl and Drew (2008) rejected the view that social identities are the primary factors influencing the format of a request, arguing instead that request design is associated with the contingencies that someone may encounter in doing what is requested and with the entitlement to have something done by someone, which may be based on different interactional circumstances.

Our study complements this perspective on the sequential and interactional circumstances in which offers and requests are made by exploring how the social categories and identities inhabited by participants are implicated in the process. Rather than focusing on the design or formulation of these actions, however, we direct our attention to the way in which membership categories facilitate or constrain the actions that participants

perform. Most of the time, these affordances and constraints remain invisible as interactants typically respect the boundaries associated with their social position (see also Pomerantz and Mandelbaum 2005). In this study, however, we focus on cases where these boundaries become visible as a result of participants engaging in, or starting and then abandoning, actions that are inconsistent with their membership in a given social category (see also Raymond 2019). Some of the breaching experiments conducted by Garfinkel’s (1967:48) students tapped into this, for example when a student asked his mother in front of her friends if she minded if he had a snack from the refrigerator. The stupefied reaction of the mother as reported by the student (“You’ve been eating little snacks around here for years without asking me. What’s gotten into you?”) exposes the normative assumptions associated with the category of adult child who not only has the rights to help himself to food in the house without asking for permission but is expected to do so.

In his seminal work on membership categorization, Sacks (1992:248) used the term “category-bound activity” to refer to conduct that is tied to membership in a particular social category, such as crying is to baby. We introduce *category-sensitive action* instead. One reason is that the term *action* puts the focus on distinct moves within a sequence rather than on more indefinite stretches of conduct often referred to by the term *activity*. Second, *bound* implies a strict relation with a specific social category, whereas *sensitive* allows us to better account for instances where individuals perform actions that transgress the boundaries of social membership, including cases of borrowing incumbency of a given social category (Watson 1978:107) or otherwise claiming rights or responsibilities associated with

that category by virtue of one's membership in a related category.

DATA AND METHODS

Our approach in this article is conversation analytic (Sidnell and Stivers 2013). We ask whether and how social category membership facilitates and constrains actions. By *social categories*, we mean to include enduring elements of social status such as mother or wife as well as more transient social roles such as guest or passenger. Our focus is on what is common across types of categories, namely, their association with different sets of rights and responsibilities in social life and on whether and how these are reflected in the way members and nonmembers act in social interaction.

To address this, we use corpora of audio and video recordings of spontaneous naturally occurring social interaction in American English, British English, and Italian. Most of the time, people perform actions—whether requesting, offering, welcoming, or thanking—that are consistent with their social position (e.g., host, owner, guest). So, to better understand the relationship between social categories and actions, we focus on the relatively infrequent and marked cases in which there is a discrepancy between an action and the participant's membership in a relevant social category. To identify these cases, we performed targeted searches of our corpora looking for actions that commonly have associated social categories such as those listed previously. In keeping with a CA approach, when studying norm-departing behavior, our goal was not to systematically identify all instances in a set amount of data but rather to build a collection that represented a cross-section of social actions and membership categories that are relevant in ordinary interaction.

Our final collection included 47 instances in interaction where an individual's social category membership did not clearly provide the individual with the rights to perform a given action and this was reflected in the individual's conduct or in that of another participant. We did not pursue further cases because the collection was internally consistent—interactants all oriented to the breach or potential break in recurrent and concordant ways. Once collected, all instances were transcribed according to CA conventions (Hepburn and Bolden 2013). For Italian, we supplemented traditional CA transcription with conventions from interactional linguistics to better represent certain prosodic and intonational features (Couper-Kuhlen and Barth-Weingarten 2011) and with conventions for representing nonverbal behavior (Mondada 2016).

HOW THE BOUNDARIES OF SOCIAL MEMBERSHIP ARE EXPOSED IN ORDINARY INTERACTION

The distribution of rights and constraints to perform certain actions creates boundaries in people's activity space (cf. Lyman and Scott 1967), which are typically respected but sometimes exposed or even crossed. In what follows, we first examine cases in which actors stop short of crossing a boundary. These are cases in which someone visibly refrains from doing something and defers to another, entitled individual. Such cases provide a first form of data-internal evidence that participants understand certain actions as category-sensitive. Then, we examine cases in which actors do cross the boundary surrounding a category-sensitive action. In this set, we see evidence that participants orient to this as a transgression through their provisions of accounts or acknowledgments.

Finally, we examine cases where participants assert rights to perform actions, particularly actions on behalf of another, by virtue of their social membership.

These cases provide evidence that although individuals maintain primary rights to, for example, make offers, accept offers, and grant requests on their own behalf, category membership such as romantic partnerships or families is treated as giving contingent rights to perform some of these actions for particular individuals. Although such rights are always contingent because individuals sometimes sanction partners and family members, in this third set, we focus on how category membership is relied on in social interaction to extend participants' rights to perform actions. We show that spouses, children, parents, siblings, and so on perform actions on behalf of their relatives, orienting to their category membership as providing the relevant warrant for what would otherwise be a breach of individual rights.

The three types of cases we present in this study are likely not exhaustive of all ways in which membership categories become visible in social interaction but represent three recurring types of data-internal evidence for the category-sensitivity of action across a range of settings in ordinary interaction.

Stopping Short of a Category Boundary

The boundaries of one's entitlements to perform actions in the social and material world are often invisible. For example, during a dinner party, the host has the right and duty to open the house door for guests, whereas guests normally refrain from helping themselves to food or drinks in the cupboard or refrigerator and wait for the host to make them available. This is part of what constitutes their behavior as guests rather than hosts.

The boundaries of actions one has rights or constraints to perform based on one's social status or role, however, sometimes become exposed. This happens when a participant can be shown to have the means (e.g., in terms of knowledge, ability, etc.) to perform an action but refrains. These are cases in which people come close to crossing the category-sensitive boundary of an action but ultimately defer to another participant who has social category membership that warrants performing the action or warrants giving someone else permission to perform it. These interactions reveal social membership category boundaries.

In extract 3, Ada is visiting at her sister Milena's house. When the extract begins, Ada enters the kitchen where her husband, Remo, and her nephew, Furio, who also lives in the house, are chatting. In lines 4–7, Ada asks Furio a question on behalf of his mother Milena ("Milena asks if . . . there's coffee"). Because Milena doesn't drink coffee, Ada's question is hearable not as a pre-request for Furio to make coffee but as a possible pre-request for him to resupply the house with coffee should it turn out that there is none (on pre-requests, see Rossi 2015; Sacks 1992:685).

A first element of interest in this case is that Ada invokes Milena as the authority—in Goffman's (1981) terms, the "principal"—behind her question about whether there is any coffee. As a guest, Ada is neither responsible nor has any obvious warrant for checking house supplies. Indeed, if Ada did not attribute her inquiry to Milena, her position as a guest would suggest that she was moving to request coffee for herself.

A second important element of this sequence is what happens as Ada asks the question ("Milena asks if . . . there's coffee"). After initially gazing at Furio (line 5, Figure 1a), Ada shifts her gaze to the cupboard, displaying an orientation

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(3) BiscottiMattina02_3316005

1          ((Ada enters kitchen))
2 Remo    ciao cara.
          hello dear
3          (0.2)
4 Ada     chie+de ↓la Milena ↑se+[:?
          ask-3SG the NAME if
          Milena asks if
5          +gazes at Furio-->+gazes at cupboard-->
6 Furio   [si:?
          yes
7 Ada     c'è caffè.+
          there's coffee
8          ----->+gazes back at Furio
9          (0.6)*(0.1)+(0.5)
10 furio  *turns to cupboard-->>
11 ada    +gazes at cupboard-->>
12 Ada    [secondo te.
          according to you
13 Furio  [ö::h_
          u::h
14          (0.4)*(0.2)
15 furio  *opens cupboard-->>
16 Ada    se ce n'è abbastanza o se ce n'è da comprare.
          if LOC PTV=be.3SG enough or if LOC PTV=be.3SG to buy-INF
          if there's enough or if it's necessary to buy more
17          (0.7)
18 Furio  <<p>↓allora.> ((reaches into cupboard))
          so

```

to coffee being there (from line 5, see Figure 1b). Ada thus has the knowledge required to check the coffee supply herself. Yet she maintains her position next to the cupboard and gazes back at Furio (line 8). As Furio turns to the cupboard (from line 10, see Figure 1c), Ada adds an increment to the question (“according to you”, line 12; Ford, Fox, and Thompson 2002; Schegloff 1996), thus reinforcing her deference to the membership boundary that keeps her from searching into another family’s cupboard.

An even stronger case is shown in extract 4, involving three friends driving to town. Sofia is behind the wheel, Ettore is in the passenger seat, and Furio—the owner of the car—is in the back seat. As it happens, the police stop the car. As the police officer begins the interaction with Sofia (lines 1–2), she turns to get her purse from the back seat, which Furio is already in the process of handing to her (line 3). The purse contains her driver’s license, which is one of three documents to be inspected in a traffic stop in Italy.



Figure 1. Frames from Extract 3 Temporally Ordered from Left to Right

(a) Ada gazing at Furio as she says “Milena” (lines 4–5), (b) Ada gazing at cupboard as she says “coffee” (lines 7–8), (c) Ada gazing again at cupboard as she says “according to you”; Furio turning to cupboard as he says “u:::h” (lines 10–13).

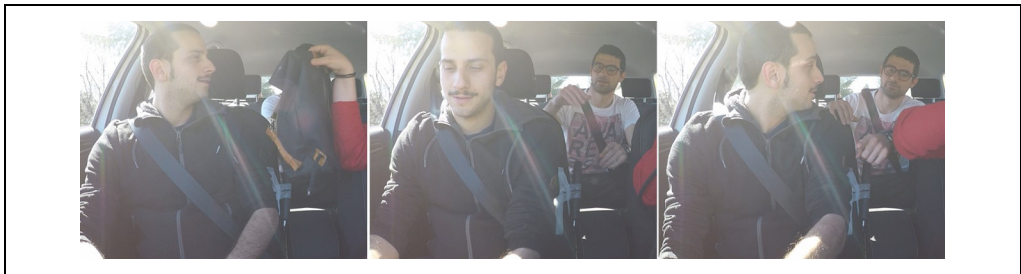


Figure 2. Frames from Extract 4 Temporally Ordered from Left to Right

(a) Ettore looking to his left as the police officer says “certificate of title” (line 5), (b) Ettore leans forward and moves hands toward glovebox (line 8), (c) Ettore turns back to Furio and says “is it inside here” (lines 9–10).

The other two documents, as the police officer says in lines 5–6, are the car’s certificate of ownership and the insurance papers, both of which are typically kept in the glovebox. This is where our focal sequence begins: Ettore gazes down at the glovebox (line 7), leans forward, and moves his hands toward it (line 8, Figure 2b).

Similar to Ada’s gaze in extract 3, Ettore’s visible behavior shows that he has the knowledge and ability to open the glovebox and get the car documents on his own. And indeed, reaching toward the compartment brings him very close to performing the action. Unlike in

extract 2, the owner here does not have close proximity to the relevant space. Nonetheless, Ettore stops short of opening the glovebox (line 9) and turns back to Furio (see Figure 2c), nominally checking with him that the documents are in the glovebox (“is it inside here”, line 10) and thereby soliciting permission from Furio to take them out (lines 11–12).

In extract 5, we see that a category-sensitive action need not involve an object. Uncle is chatting with his nephew, Fabio, while Fabio’s girlfriend, Sara, is also present. In lines 3–4, Uncle launches a new course of action by asking Fabio if

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(4) PECII_IT_Car_20180402_Sbirri

1 Officer   [buongiorno.
             good morning
2 Sofia     [↑buongiornoΔ:_
             good morning
3
             Δturns to get purse from Furio-->>
4
             (0.6)
5 Officer   se ha la patente e il libretto
             if have-2SG.FORM the driver.license and the certificate.of.title
             if you have your driver's license the certificate of title
6
             e +l'assicurazio*ne grazie+*[:.
             and insurance papers madam thank you
7 ettore    +gazes down at glovebox +
8
             *leans forward and moves hands
             toward compartment
9
             *stops and turns back to Furio
10 Ettore   [è qua ^DENtro;
             be.3SG here inside
             is it inside here
11 Furio    [è f- ((points at glovebox))
             it's f-
12
             s*ì sì.
             yes yes
13 ettore   *opens glovebox-->>

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he is going to invite his “friend” to join the choir (of which Fabio and Uncle are both members) to sing Christmas carols later that week. Uncle’s membership in the choir would in principle entitle him to invite other people to come along. His status as Fabio’s uncle with no other relationship to Sara, however, appears to supersede his position as choir member, and Uncle resorts to prompting his nephew to invite her—in Sara’s presence.

As Uncle asks whether Fabio is going to invite Sara to sing Christmas carols with them (lines 3–4), his referring to her not by name but as *la tua amica* (“your friend [feminine]”), an alternative recognitional (Stivers 2007), suggests that the question he is asking is related to the fact that Sara is associated with

Fabio. This referring expression leads to a moment of banter and laughter by all three participants (lines 9–14). As this side sequence comes to a close, Fabio responds to Uncle’s question by saying that he has not invited Sara yet (line 16). The string of self-repairs and hesitations that precede Fabio’s response show the delicate position in which Uncle’s question has put him, effectively exposing his failure to invite his girlfriend to an event of potential interest and meaningfulness. This exposure is intensified by the fact that Uncle asks Fabio in Sara’s presence, which amplifies Uncle’s orientation to the membership boundary associated with the action of inviting her: Sara is right there and available for a direct invitation, yet there is a shared

(5) Beganate02_2729151

1 Uncle i biscotti sanno tutto erano dei biscotti: onniscienti.
the cookies know-3PL all be.PST.3PL some cookies omniscient
the cookies know everything they we:re omniscient cookies

2 (1.0)

3 Uncle ↑senti ma la tua amica
listen but your friend

4 la in^Viti alle beganate.
3SG.ACC invite-2SG to-the Christmas.carols
are you going to invite her to sing Christmas carols

5 (0.7)

6 Fabio la mia amica ^LEi. ((points at Sara))
the my friend-F 3SG.F
my friend {you mean} her

7 Uncle eh?
huh

8 (0.6)

9 Uncle non so ne hai delle ^Altre;
not know-1SG PTV have-2SG some others
I don't know do you have others

10 Sara ((laughs 0.4)) [((laughs))

11 Fabio [si:[:, (.) <<laughing>ovvio?>
yes of course

12 Uncle [((laughs))

13 ((general laughter 3.2))

14 ((Uncle coughs 0.7))

15 (0.7)

16 Fabio n::- ò::h s:i se:: no non l'ho ancora invitata in realtà;
yes if no not 3SG.ACC=have-1SG yet invite-PCP
n::- u::h y:es i::f no I haven't invited her yet actually

17 Uncle ↑ah no allora non invi[tarla no,
PTC no then not invite-INF=3SG.ACC no
oh you haven't then don't invite her no

18 Sara [non è mica una persona gentile sai,
not be.3SG PTC a person kind know-2SG
he's really not a nice person you know

19 Uncle infatti avevo anch'io questa impressione.
INTJ have-IMPF-1SG also=1SG.NOM this impression
right I too got this impression

orientation to her boyfriend (his nephew) as having primary rights to do the inviting. Fabio invites Sara moments after extract 5, thus performing the action that Uncle has refrained from.

In the next section, we examine cases where individuals perform an action that is inconsistent with their social category membership (e.g., guest, housemate), thus transgressing the restrictions

associated with it. We show that this is done with an overt orientation to the boundary being crossed, which provides further evidence for category-sensitive actions.

Crossing a Boundary with an Account or Acknowledgment

Entering another's house or taking another's things is not a violation of social norms in and of itself: this depends on whether the actor is a member of a relevant social category. Membership is one warrant for performing category-sensitive actions. As we saw in the introduction, when someone is classified as an intruder, they specifically lack membership in a category (e.g., owner, tenant, guest) that would allow entering another's house unproblematically. In everyday life, such violations do not occur frequently, but people do, at times, perform actions that are at odds with the constraints associated with their social category memberships. In this section, we show that such violations often come with an orientation to the extenuating circumstances motivating the action. The orientation may be minimal—an acknowledgment—or it may involve an apology or request for permission after the fact. This subset of cases provides further evidence for participant orientations to the category-sensitivity of actions, further grounding our claim that certain actions are performed by reference to who people are to one another.

In extract 6, three guests at a dinner party are helping in the kitchen (Viola, Diego, and Lidia) while the host (Eliana) is in the living room entertaining other guests. When the extract begins, the guests in the kitchen are looking for black pepper, which leads them to looking in the kitchen cupboards (lines 2–7). As they inspect the contents of the cupboard that turns out to contain black pepper,

Viola steps out into the living room and asks Eliana for permission to take the pepper (“ca- can we- can we take the pepper”, lines 15, 17).

Looking through cupboards is inconsistent with Viola's position as a guest. Although there would be no problem with her opening and inspecting the contents of cupboards in her own house, by doing so in Eliana's house, she effectively trespasses the boundary of a category-sensitive action. In contrast with extract 3, here no host is present in the kitchen. Nonetheless, the searching is oriented to as a violation, as seen in Viola's attempts to mitigate and redress the violation. As the host walks into the kitchen (line 19) and gains visual access to her guests still looking through the cupboard, Viola adds an explicit acknowledgment of the violation in the form of an admission “regrettably/unfortunately we're rummaging”. Her use of the verb *rovistare* (“to rummage”) is especially meaningful here as it denotes an action of searching for an object without knowing where it is, which is reflective of their position as guests. Further contributing to characterizing this as an acknowledgment and admission of a violation is the adverb *purtroppo* (“regrettably/unfortunately”), which constructs the action as socially undesirable.

In contrast to extract 6, in extract 7, the transgression is not related to taking another's things but rather to making a decision that overreaches a participant's social category membership. This interaction takes place among four housemates who have recently moved in together. Early in the evening, Robert went to a home improvement store. While he was gone, the others began preparing dinner. He recently returned, announcing that although he went to buy lamps for the household, he initially had a thousand dollars' worth of items in his basket. As he states, “I ^put it all back and I wound up just buying (.) two lights like

```

(6) 20180330a_CenaPrep

1 Diego      quindi ↑pepe ne:ro;
              therefore pepper black
              so black pepper

2            (3.1) ((Diego walks to one cupboard and opens it))

3 Lidia      secondo me s- il *sale era da qualche parte (li) ( )
              according.to 1SG s- the salt be.IMPF-3SG by some part there
              I think s- the salt was somewhere over (there) ( )

4 viola      *opens another cupboard----->

5 Viola      ↑eccolo qua:.
              INTJ=3SG.ACC here
              here it is

6            (0.8)*(1.7)

7            ---->*reaches into cupboard and inspects jars---->

8 Viola      allo:ra_
              so:

((12 seconds not shown during which participants inspect contents of
cupboard and wonder what kind of pepper they should use))

9 Viola      ((steps out into living room))

10           ↑Eliana?
              Eliana

11           (0.8)

12 Eliana    ehi.
              hey

13           (2.1)

14 Eliana    ↓cia[o_
              hi

15 Viola      [pos- possa+mo_
              can/may-1PL
              ca- can we-

16           (0.5)

17 Viola      possiamo prendere il ^PEpe?
              can/may-1PL take-INF the pepper
              can we take the pepper

18 Eliana    ↑certo,
              sure

19           (0.5) ((Eliana walks over and Viola steps back into kitchen))

20 Lidia     ma: è quello da trita[re quello tritato quello::_
              PTC be.3SG that to grind-INF that ground that
              i:s it the kind to be ground or already ground or the::

21 Viola      [stiamo rovistando purtroppo;
              stay-1PL rummage-GER regrettably/unfortunately
              regrettably/unfortunately we're rummaging

22 Eliana    ↑certo;
              sure

```

(7a) Housemates

1 ROB: Uhm So you guy::s (.) I did the right thing,
 2 I listened to like my conscience here, an' I bought the two
 3 lights I was supposed to,
 4 (0.2)
 5 ROB: [And I bou:ght (.) something (.) that I really w:ould like (.)=
 6 LAN: [(that's good)
 7 ROB: =tuh get a vote of a- approval before I put it in as a new
 8 Che[^]ers.
 9 (0.7)
 10 LAN: [Mm! cheers]
 11 ROB: [as a new- uh it's a new uh] Shower head. an outdoor- ju- to
 12 to To T[O THI[^]S to us-]
 13 GIO: [Ah You're keeping me down Lance. ((smiling))
 14 ROB: To to thi:[^]s. To this moment. Cheers to this moment. (.) Salut[^]e.

I'm supposed to.” A bit later in the interaction, however, Robert reveals that he also bought something for which he did not have prior housemate approval: a new showerhead. He reintroduces the topic of his trip to the home improvement store in line 1. Then, in lines 5, 7, and 10, he requests post hoc approval for buying the showerhead.

This is not initially responded to, and there is an intervening toast (starting in line 8 and continuing in 10 and then 11–14). After discussion of an alternative topic, Robert again reintroduces the topic of the showerhead. We see in both extracts 7a and 7b that this is done with a so-prefaced utterance (Bolden 2009). In extract 7b, his request for permission is done as a pursuit with the interrogatively formatted request for confirmation “are you all down with that?”, where “that” is subsequently repaired using the replacement description “the showerhead thing?”. The minor transgression here is not only a matter of approval but most likely a matter of financial support and responsibility as well. The showerhead itself is not likely to be very expensive, but Robert would be installing it in the rental house that they just moved into.

This implies a possibility of damage or extra costs if installation is not smooth—something that he may be keen to offload onto the group.

Indeed, the decision to acquire the showerhead does become the subject of housemate challenges. In line 99, Gio approves the decision. In line 100, however, Judy contests it, requesting an account for the purchase. This quickly receives a defense (lines 103–105) that Judy then refutes (lines 106–107).

Robert would certainly be entitled to spend money and purchase a showerhead if this were for his own apartment. Here, the transgression he orients to is unilaterally deciding to purchase the showerhead on behalf of the others without their prior approval (note that they had approved the lights ahead of his trip to the store, which Robert alludes to in lines 2–3). Just as Viola taking the pepper from the cupboard in extract 6 constitutes an action that she is not entitled to perform in someone else's kitchen, Robert imposing responsibility for a purchase is similarly problematic. We argue that one way of managing such transgressions is to retroactively acknowledge or account for them or otherwise orient to the action as

(7b) Housemates

97 ROB: So do you guys- are you all down with that?
 98 The showerhead thing?
 99 GIO: I'm fine with it.=
 100 JUD: =What? Why do you need a new
 101 [showerhead.
 102 GIO: [you know [what-
 103 ROB: [Cuz that that thing
 104 really doesn't- don't- Okay first of all thuh
 105 lil- the [sep'rate-
 106 JUD: [It's thuh water pressure in thuh
 107 house.
 108 ROB: Well yeah that's great.

problematic. In extract 7, this is done with a postpurchase request for approval.

The last case in this section is somewhat different from the previous two because here a participant orients to the boundary of a category-sensitive action just before crossing it rather than after. Marzia has just arrived at Enrica's place, where Enrica and other friends are playing Monopoly. After exchanging greetings, Marzia takes off her jacket while the players continue a heated negotiation over a trade price in the game. When extract 8 begins, Alba jovially reassures the newcomer that even though two of the players "are at each other's throats . . . everything's OK" (lines 1–3). A moment later, Marzia announces that she is going to use the bathroom ("I'm going to pee", line 6). As she says this, Marzia gazes at the host, Enrica, who turns to Marzia and gives her assent ("yes", line 10).

Like looking through cupboards (extract 6), roaming around or entering the private space of someone else's house is inconsistent with Marzia's position as a guest. After taking off her jacket, Marzia interjects into the game to notify Enrica of what she is about to do. Although Marzia does not ostensibly request for permission to use the bathroom, she does address the announcement to Enrica, thereby orienting to their respective memberships in

the social categories of guest and host. This orientation is validated by Enrica's response as she suspends her ongoing talk (line 5), turns to Marzia (line 9), and says "yes" with a smile (line 10), providing both a receipt of Marzia's announcement and a go-ahead to her action.

Marzia's announcement might also be heard as an account for leaving the game activity or for not joining the others at the table right away. The way she addresses the announcement to Enrica and Enrica's subsequent response, however, are not typical features of a unilateral departure (Goodwin 1987). Instead, they display a shared orientation to clearing Marzia of a possible transgression, not unlike the cases of requesting and giving permission that we saw in extract 6 and extract 7. Although Marzia and Enrica are friends and Marzia apparently knows her way around Enrica's house well enough to find the bathroom without asking where it is, as a guest, she shows sensitivity to the constraints posed by her social position by alerting an incumbent of the social category that has rights to assent to her action.

Assertion of Membership

In our first set of cases, we provided evidence for the category-sensitivity of

```

(8) Freccia02_2724953

1 Alba      <<:->↑si stanno per scan[nare ma no- è tu]tto:=
              RFL stay-3PL for slit.throat-INF but not be.3SG all
              they are at each other's throats but no- everything's

2 Enrica                                [viale Monte `ROsa?]
              Mount Rose Boulevard

3 Alba      =è tutto a pos>to,
              be.3SG all at place
              everything's OK

4 Sonia     viale Monte Rosa cinquantamila Stazione Nord.= ((nods))
              Mount Rose Boulevard fifty thousand North Station

5 Enrica     =e::[:_
              a:::nd

6 Marzia    [io +↑faccio la *pi+pi;
              1SG.NOM do-1SG the pee
              I'm going to pee

7              +gazes at Enrica

8              +heads to bathroom-->>

9 enrica    *turns to Marzia----->

10 Enrica   [<<f, :->↑si_>*
              yes

11          ----->*

12 Alba    [<<laughing>vai,>
              go-NPST.2SG
              go

13 Enrica   viale Monte Rosa settantamila Stazione Nord.
              Mount Rose Boulevard seventy thousand North Station

```

action by looking at how the boundaries of actions we are entitled to perform may be exposed without being transgressed. We then looked at a set of cases in which actions involve transgressions of boundaries with interactants orienting to this. As a third type of evidence for our claim, we now turn to cases in which an individual performs an action (e.g., making an offer or request on behalf of another) that might be viewed as a violation of another's individual rights and thus as a transgression. These cases are unlike the transgressions examined in the previous section because the individual performing the action exhibits no orientation to it as departing from a norm. We argue

that in these cases, it is relevant social category membership that provides the warrant for the individual to perform the action. For instance, although an individual may not be the person whose services are being offered or who is requesting service, the individual may occupy a social status (e.g., wife, mother, sister) that can be implicitly invoked as a license for making the offer or request.

In extract 2, a wife called another wife to offer *her* husband's help to the *other's* husband. Through her simple assertion of the offer and her references to "my husband" and "your husband", Leslie adopts a stance that she has rights to make the offer on behalf of her husband and treats

```

(9) Holt:1:6 (Modified Standard Orthography)
((opening unrecorded))
1  Les:   Could you:r husband call on my mother in law please_
2         (0.4)
3  Les:   a:nd uh have a look at he:r um: (1.0) .h uh her bathroom,
4         (0.7)
5  Sut:   .hh Uh w'dju give me your name please,=
((8 lines not shown involving documentation of problem))
14 Sut:   Um it won't be-e um: (2.0) t'morrow .hh 't's (her) only-
15        um .hh.hh (0.3) My husband's got this Missiz Fremont
16        t'morrow even[ing,
17 Les:   [Oh dea:r. hu-[Alright-
18 Sut:   [S o it- ][p r o b'l y ]
19 Les:   [I'll tell'er]
20        tha:[t,h
21 Sut:   [I'spect it'll be: (.) the next day o[k a ]:y?
22 Les:   [Yes.]

```

Margie as having rights to accept the offer on behalf of her husband through that same type of membership. Such claims are not restricted to romantic partners.

In extract 9, Leslie calls Sutton and requests help on behalf of her mother-in-law. Leslie treats Sutton as able to grant or reject the request on behalf of her husband. In line 1, her request formulation “Could you:r husband call on my mother in law please_” treats the request on behalf of this particular other as unproblematic and builds her relationship into the person reference. Similarly, the grounds for Sutton to be able to grant the request is also built into the reference “your husband” in a way that it would not be had Leslie relied on his name. Even when the granting is not immediately forthcoming (line 2), the continuation is a specification of the request with no orientation to there being any issue with Leslie’s rights to make the request. Ultimately, the granting must be deferred, but the wife unproblematically grants that deferred appointment.

Of course, individuals sometimes protest another offering services or granting requests on their behalves. What is

critical to our argument, however, is that there are few individuals who would have any warrant to perform actions such as offering and requesting or to respond to such actions on behalf of another. Only membership in a social category that is closely related to the individual with primary rights could offer such license. In extract 2, that closeness is membership in a romantic partnership; in extracts 9, 10, and 11, it is family membership. In institutional settings, it could be membership in a professional relationship such as attorney-client, boss-employee, or colleagues, depending on the action.

In extract 10, we see a mother declining an offer made by a father to their four-year-old daughter. Dad is opening a pizza box at lunch. As the girl utters line 1, she is looking at the pizza left in the box. In line 3, Dad offers her a piece. With the offer, Dad selects his daughter to speak next and, by extension, gives her primary rights to accept or reject his offer. Mom immediately rejects the offer, however, with “No.”, on the grounds that the child still “has food on her plate.” (lines 3 and 6).

This case represents a transgression insofar as selected next speakers have

(10) [1-614] Chd: 4y9m

- 1 Chd: Three more: (0.2) three more left.
 2 Dad: -> There's three left. That's right. You want one?
 3 Mom: -> No.=She still- she's-
 4 (0.6)
 5 Chd: I have=
 6 Mom: =she has food in her plate.

primary rights to respond to the actions that selected them, even children (Stivers and Robinson 2006). Mom, however, here asserts the right to respond through her immediate response. Our claim is that it is her membership in the category of parent that provides a warrant for transgressing. Consider that if a guest having lunch with the family performed the same action in the same way immediately upon completion of Dad's offer in line 2, this would be heard as a violation for which there was no obvious absolution. Although the child might well protest her mother's actions given that she does have primary rights to respond, it is by virtue of the mother's social status that there is a license for performing this action at all.

In extract 11, we see a sister granting permission for others to handle her brother's recording equipment in his absence. Fedro, Eliana, and three other friends are sitting around an office table, preparing a booklet of readings for an upcoming religious meeting. As a sequence of talk about the booklet's title comes to an end (line 1), Fedro turns the group's attention to the matter of printing the booklet, asking whether this will require them to move the microphone that the researcher recording them placed on top of the printer ("then mov- but if we have to print do we also have to move his microphone", lines 3-4). Fedro follows up on this with another question more specifically addressed to Eliana, the researcher's

sister ("do I call your brother and tell him 'move the microphone for us' or can we move it ourselves", lines 10-12). After some hesitation, Eliana eventually gives the go-ahead for moving the microphone without asking her brother ("we move it ourselves", line 18).

Fedro's orientation to the category-sensitivity of the action in question begins with a self-repair, where he abandons a projectable directive (*poi spo-* "then mov-", line 3, e.g., *poi sposta il microfono* "then move the microphone") and replaces it with a question about the need to move the microphone ("do we also have to move his microphone", line 4). Following this, Fedro's whispered expletive (<<pp>>*cazzo* > "shit", line 6) further displays his understanding of the situation as potentially delicate. Note that although Fedro's initial question is not explicitly addressed to any of his four co-participants, it is only Eliana who responds ("huh?", line 6; "u:::h", line 8).

Eliana's status as a privileged recipient becomes clear as Fedro subsequently reformulates his question by presenting two alternatives for her approval: getting her brother to move the microphone or moving the microphone without asking him ("do I call your brother and tell him 'move the microphone for us' or can we move it ourselves", lines 10-12). Eliana's delayed and very soft "y:e:s" followed by a "no:" (line 14) shows her hesitation to make a decision. Note, however, that Fedro has by now explicitly invoked her

(11) Precamp01_725641	
1 Fedro	<<:->è troppo bello iberna giovanile.> too.much nice winter.encampment of.youth "Youth Winter Encampment" sounds so cool
2	(0.6)
3 Fedro	↑poi spo- però se dobbiam stampare then mov- but if must-1PL print-INF then mov- but if we have to print
4	dobbiam spostargli anche il mi^CROfono. must-1PL move-INF=3SG.DAT also the microphone do we also have to move his microphone
5	(0.3)
6 Fedro	<<pp>ca[zzo> shit
7 Eliana	[e:h? hu:h
8	(1.0)
9 Eliana	ö::[:h_ u:::h
10 Fedro	[chiamo tuo fratello e gli dico call-1SG your brother and 3SG.DAT say-1SG do I call your brother and tell him
11	spostaci il mi^CROfono relocate-IMP.2S=1PL.DAT the microphone "move the microphone for us"
12	o possiam spostarlo ^NOi; or can-1PL relocate-INF=3SG.ACC 1P.NOM or can we move it ourselves
13	(0.7)
14 Eliana	<<p>s:i:_> (.) ↑no:_= y:e:s no:
15 Fedro	=lo ^CHIAmo. 3SG.ACC call-1SG do I call him
16	(.)
17 Fedro	↑ma è già [andato ^VIa. ((looks around)) PTC be.3SG already go-PCP away is he already gone
18 Eliana	[ma lo spostiam noi_ PTC 3SG.ACC move-1PL 1PL.NOM we move it ourselves

social status as sister as a warrant to grant permission for others to handle her brother's recording equipment in his absence.

Similar to extract 5, this includes the use of an alternative recognitional, "your brother", even though Fedro knows Eliana's brother and would normally refer to

him by name (Stivers 2007). By using this reference form and posing the question to Eliana, Fedro mobilizes her as an incumbent of a social category related to the individual who has primary rights over the action in question, rights that Eliana may borrow to grant permission in his absence. Her hesitation shows that individual rights can pose limits to what people are entitled to do on behalf of their relatives. And indeed, in the face of her hesitation, Fedro begins to fall back on the safe course of action—asking her brother to move the microphone (“do I call him”, line 15). But the subsequent development of Eliana’s stance provides a window into the very process of borrowing individual rights as she ultimately asserts her entitlement to authorize moving the microphone (“we move it ourselves”, line 18). Through this assertion, Eliana ends up treating her social status as a sufficient license to act on her brother’s behalf.

This third set of cases offers further evidence that when interactants perform social actions, they are oriented to the rights that category membership provides them. Whereas the first set of cases showed individuals refraining from actions that they did not have rights to perform, this third set shows how individuals who perform actions that might be violations as individuals, claiming entitlement to act on behalf of another, rely on category membership as a warrant for doing so.

DISCUSSION

This article has documented recurrent patterns of social interaction in which social categories become visible through the actions that individuals perform. Categories such as wife, mother, sister, tenant, or guest are associated with different sets of rights and responsibilities in social life. We have examined how individuals

display such rights and responsibilities in the performance of sequential and practical actions like requests, offers, invitations, and handling one’s possessions, and we have defined actions whose performance is sensitive to membership in a certain social category as *category-sensitive* actions.

Most of the time, the social boundaries surrounding category-sensitive actions remain invisible because participants in interaction typically act in ways that are consistent with their social status or role. In this study, however, we have provided evidence that actions are at times category-sensitive, drawing on instances where category boundaries become visible as participants approach, expose, or transgress them. Empirically, these instances function as a diagnostic for the operational relevance of membership categories in the performance of sequential and practical action, showing how participants enact and give life to specific membership categories as sources of warrants or constraints on their actions. Because these processes are mostly tacit, compared to the explicit categorization of others through person reference, the conduct of participants in these instances can be seen as a beam of sonar pulses bouncing off of social structure and revealing its contours.

We have presented three types of evidence for the category-sensitivity of action that were recurrent in our data. The first involves individuals stopping short of performing a category-sensitive action, such as a guest not opening a cupboard (extract 3), a car passenger refraining from opening the glovebox (extract 4), or a family member withholding a direct invitation to another member’s partner (extract 5). By visibly holding back, individuals orient to the category boundary that keeps them from legitimately performing the action; at the same time, by mobilizing an incumbent of the entitled social category (the host, the car

owner, the partner), they demonstrate an understanding of the rights associated with that category.

The second type of evidence involves individuals performing a category-sensitive action but orienting to what they have done or are about to do as in breach of the constraints posed by their social position through an account or acknowledgment. We saw this, for example, when a guest expressed regret for rummaging into a cupboard (extract 6), a housemate sought the approval of the others for the purchase of a house item after having bought it (extract 7), and a guest notified the host that she was going to use the bathroom (extract 8). In these cases, through their expression of regret or solicitation of permission/approval, individuals orient to their actions as overreaching their rights, thus displaying an understanding of the relevant category boundary.

The third type of evidence we offered was through cases where individuals instantiate a right to perform a category-sensitive action without orienting to this as a transgression but showing that the warrant is by virtue of their membership in a relevant social category. These cases include people making and receiving offers and requests on behalf of their spouses or relatives (extracts 2, 9), a mother declining an offer addressed to her child (extract 10), and a sister granting permission to handle her brother's things (extract 11).

These three types of evidence all help us bring into view the boundaries of membership categories and the action affordances and constraints that they create for members and nonmembers. Although the set of action affordances and constraints associated with a given membership category may depend on the nature of the category in question (see e.g., Brubaker 2015) and on the social institution in which it is embedded, the generic patterns we have

documented in this study cut across specific types of membership categories given that they are grounded in the differentiation of rights and responsibilities that characterize any form of social structure.

Our investigation addresses the intersection of two fundamental domains of social organization: sequential action and membership categorization. As such, it contributes to uniting the two perspectives that Sacks envisioned as part of a science of social interaction. Following on previous research on institutional interaction (Heritage and Clayman 2010), we demonstrate more broadly how social identities establish affordances and constraints on the performance of particular actions in ordinary interaction. To do so, we located relatively infrequent marked cases where there is an actual or potential discrepancy between action and social category membership. Some of the norms being violated or oriented to in these cases are analogous to those exposed by Garfinkel's (1967) breaching experiments. The advantage of our approach, however, is that we are able to document instances of borrowing incumbency of a given social role in naturally occurring interaction without intervention or manipulation.


Our analysis concentrates on actions involved in everyday cooperation, such as requests, offers, invitations, and handling one's possessions. These actions are particularly conducive to category-sensitivity as they implicate rights and responsibilities to assistance, collaboration, participation, and agency. As such, the category boundaries affecting their performance are relatively stringent. Our argument, however, is that these actions are the tip of an iceberg that potentially includes most, if not all, actions. Even greetings, which do not involve notable social costs or benefits for participants, at the very least are sensitive to the category of acquaintance as opposed to stranger. This argument has


two important consequences for sociology: one is that it implicates membership categorization in the very ability of individuals to produce and understand social action; the other, broader consequence is that the category-sensitivity of action significantly extends the operational relevance of sociodemographic structure in the organization of social interaction. The latter suggests a way that conversation analytic research can move forward in deepening the understanding of the mechanisms through which social identity permeates social interaction.

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