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# CATEGORY RELATIONS, OMNIRELEVANCE, AND CHILDREN'S DISPUTES

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15 **ABSTRACT**

17 *Purpose – This chapter explicates the categorical resources and practices used in some disputes involving two children.*

19 *Methodology – The data on which the study is based consists of a transcript of an audio recording of the naturally occurring talk-in-interaction during a family meal. This data is analyzed using the approach of membership categorization analysis (MCA).*

23 *Findings – We show that it is neither the category collection “children” nor the category collection “siblings” that is relevant for the organization of these disputes but rather a number of asymmetrical standardized relational pairs, such as “rule-enforcer” and “offender” or “offender” and “victim.” It is these pairs of categories that are demonstrably relevant for the members, providing for and making intelligible their disputes. We then consider the question of the demonstrably relevant “wider context” of the disputes to which the disputants are actually oriented. This wider context is an omnirelevant oppositional social relationship between the children. We demonstrate that the disputes reflexively constitute the character*

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1 *of their oppositional relationship and show how these are instantiations*  
 3 *of an omnirelevant category collection, namely, “parties to an oppositional*  
*relationship.”*

5 Value of paper – *This paper contributes to the corpus of ethnometho-*  
 7 *dological studies on children’s culture in action and more particularly on*  
 9 *the categorical organization of children’s (and others’) disputes. It also*  
*contributes to MCA more generally in respect to its focus on the issues of*  
*omnirelevance and the “occasionality” of category collections.*

AU :1

11 **Keywords:** Ethnomethodology; membership categorization analysis;  
 13 children’s disputes; demonstrable relevance; social relationships;  
 omnirelevance

15 In this chapter, we use membership categorization analysis (MCA) to  
 17 explicate the categorical resources and categorization practices used by two  
 19 children in the production of their disputes. The data for the study consist of  
 21 some instances of such disputes which occurred during a family meal  
 23 involving a mother and a father and their two children, a boy of 13 and a girl  
 25 aged 8. MCA emphasizes that it is of crucial importance to comprehend the  
 27 categories and category collections that are demonstrably relevant for the  
 29 participants in the scenes of social life. The analyst is not entitled to merely  
 31 assume that some category collection such as “children” is relevant for  
 33 understanding “children’s disputes.” The relevance, for members, of such a  
 35 categorization would have to be demonstrated for the analyst’s account to be  
 37 an adequate one. We accordingly seek to discover and to demonstrate just  
 39 what categories are organizationally relevant for the participants in them. We  
 show that it is neither the category collection “children” nor the category  
 collection “siblings” that is relevant for the organization of these disputes  
 but rather several asymmetrical standardized relational pairs (SRPs) of cate-  
 gories such as “rule-enforcer” and “offender” or “offender” and “victim.” It  
 is these pairs of categories that are demonstrably relevant for the members,  
 providing for and making intelligible their disputes. We then consider the  
 question of the “wider context” of the disputes. At issue is whether such  
 wider contexts are actually oriented to and relevant for the disputants. Our  
 vehicle for addressing this issue is Sacks’ concept of omnirelevance. We show  
 that the relevant context for the disputants is their omnirelevant oppositional  
 social relationship. The disputes reflexively constitute, and comprise recog-  
 nizable instantiations of an omnirelevant category collection, namely,  
 “parties to an oppositional relationship.”

## CHILDREN'S CULTURE AND CHILDREN'S DISPUTES

An ethnomethodological approach to children's culture emphasizes "culture-in-action" (Hester & Eglin, 1997; Sacks, 1992a, 1992b; Speier, 1971, 1973, 1976). A particular avenue of inquiry has been concerned with the cultural resources used in children's disputes, and a major focus of attention in this field has been on the sequential organization of these disputes (Church, 2009; Maynard, 1985). It has been shown, for example, that the sequence of a dispute begins with a "disputable" or "arguable" (Maynard, 1985). The second part of the sequence involves a second party producing a turn which disputes or argues with the disputable turn. The disputability of the first turn is only realized in the second turn and is a product of analysis by its recipient or other participant in the interactional scene. For example, analyzing that one has been insulted, or analyzing that one has been inappropriately directed, or analyzing that someone's account is false is made available in the response to the turn containing the disputable. According to Maynard (1986) the dispute "takes hold" in the third turn when the original disputable "is defended by the first speaker" (Church, 2009, p. 12).

Another complementary strand of work has used MCA to investigate children's disputes (Bateman, 2012; Butler, 2008; Butler & Weatherall, 2006; Danby & Baker, 1998, 2000; Hester & Hester, 2010) and it is the approach used in this chapter. The potential payoff is that will offer insight into children's relationships, how these may be involved in their disputes, their own analyses of what is disputable and how these disputes are then organized. It is beyond the scope of this paper to provide a detailed discussion of MCA.<sup>1</sup> However, it is important for this chapter to make some remarks about what MCA is *not*. In particular, MCA is not the mere observation and re-description of members' talk and interaction in terms of a collection of technical concepts such as membership category, membership categorization device, and so on. MCA is something that the members of society engage in themselves when they make sense of the social world around them and produce their own actions as analyzable and recognizable by other members. As an analyst's enterprise, then, MCA is not simply description but the analysis of members' analyses.

MCA's emphasis on *members'* categorization practices follows of course from its ethnomethodological roots. Thus, it is now well known that where sociology prefers to treat social order as a theoretical problem,

1 ethnomethodology and conversation analysis have established programs of  
2 inquiry which respecify that orderliness as members' phenomena of practical  
3 action and practical reasoning (Button, 1991; Garfinkel, 1967, 1991, 2002;  
4 Hester, 2009). One expression of this respecification consists in how MCA  
5 has transformed categorizations of persons from taken for granted resources  
6 for sociological explanation into topics of inquiry in their own right (Sacks,  
7 1992a, 1992b; Zimmerman & Pollner, 1971). As Sacks (1992a, p. 41) pointed  
8 out: "all the sociology we read is unanalytic, in the sense that they simply  
9 put some category in." This is done, for example, in selecting race, class, or  
10 gender categories and then comparing distributions of some "problematic"  
11 type of behavior between these categories. In "just putting the category in"  
12 sociologists presume these categories are appropriate ones for under-  
13 standing the behavior in question. However, not only is it the case that these  
14 categories may not have any bearing on the behavior in question as far as  
15 the participants themselves are concerned, it is also the case that the  
16 procedures used in selecting and applying such categories for persons have  
17 not been subjected to analysis. In contrast, MCA has investigated how  
18 members of society (including professional sociologists) select and make use  
19 of categories in social interaction.

20 It was in this connection that Sacks (1966) also drew a distinction between  
21 "possibly correct" versus "interactionally relevant" categories (Coulter,  
22 1991). While persons may be "correctly" described as male, female, old,  
23 young, black, white, American, British, or Irish, not all of these will be  
24 relevant for some piece of social action. The research policy and task is to  
25 investigate *which* categories are selected and used in actual instances of talk-  
26 in-interaction. Schegloff (1991) later reiterated and elaborated this distinc-  
27 tion in his discussion of the "demonstrable relevance" and "procedural  
28 consequentiality" of categorizations of persons.

29 These considerations pertaining to the relevance of categories for  
30 members have some specific consequences for the analysis of "children's"  
31 disputes. A categorical orientation to the analysis of children's disputes  
32 raises the question of the relevance of the category "child" for under-  
33 standing the disputes to be analyzed. Indeed, Maynard (1986) has drawn  
34 attention to the possibility that the sequential structures deployed in the  
35 accomplishment of children's disputes may not be unique to children at all.  
36 In addressing the sequential organizational practices that are the witnessable  
37 endogenous properties of the local order of disputes, it is important to  
38 recognize that in characterizing them as "children's disputes" such a char-  
39 acterization should in no way be taken as a claim that *children's* disputes are

1 organizationally different from adults' disputes. The sequential resources  
used by parties to accomplish dispute may well be generic even if the actual  
3 topics of the disputes may differ. In a similar vein, as has also been argued  
by Butler (2008, p. 14), the category collection "children" may not be the  
5 relevant organizational device for the participants in such disputes at all.  
If it is, on the other hand, it is incumbent on the analyst to demonstrate that  
7 this is so, rather than simply presuming it a *priori*.

The key point is that the particular categories that the parties are oriented  
9 to, and that are relevant for them in the organization of the disputes, are  
matters for empirical research and are to be discovered in the research  
11 materials rather than being presumed at the outset. Therefore, the research  
questions are: What categories and collections of categories do the parties  
13 involved actually use in accomplishing their disputes? Are they disputing as  
"children," "classmates," "neighbors," "gang members," "game players,"  
15 "siblings," or as incumbents of some other membership categories? In our  
data, and we assume in the case of disputes generally, it is not categories in  
17 isolation but pairs of categories. Minimally, the relevant categories are  
disputant/disputant, but there seems to be more going on in these disputes  
19 than the occupancy of opposing dispute positions. Dispute turns can  
accomplish actions more than simply disputing. A dispute turn may, for  
21 example, be put to the service of putting somebody down, challenging their  
authority, getting someone into trouble, and a variety of other actions. Such  
23 actions, furthermore, are category-implicative; they consist of activities that  
are bound to particular membership categories for the occasion of their  
25 production, and they imply relationally paired categories. These "relational  
pairs" are "standardized" in so far as the one makes the other program-  
27 matically relevant and the parties are mutually aware of the predicates  
attached to each member of the pair relative to the other (Sacks, 1966, p. 37).

29 A distinction can also be drawn between those SRPs which are symmet-  
rical and those which are asymmetrical. The membership categories of  
31 symmetrical SRPs have similar predicates; asymmetrical SRPs are con-  
stituted from different activities, rights, responsibilities, entitlements, and  
33 other predicates. For example, in the case of the SRP "master/slave," the  
"master" has different rights from those of the "slave" and in the case of the  
35 SRP "teacher/student," the teacher has different predicates from those of  
the student.<sup>2</sup>

37 Our proposal with respect to our data is that neither the category collection  
"children" nor those of the SRP "brother" and "sister" would be effective in  
39 making recognizable what the participants were doing. Specifically, the

1 activities in question are not, *prima facie*, bound to the categories “children”  
 or to “brother” and “sister.” These activities consist of degradations and  
 3 attempted degradations, insults and name callings, rebukes, mockery, and  
 various resistances, defences, and other counters. These activities are not  
 5 bound to the category collection “children,” nor to the category collection  
 “brother” and “sister.” The question then is: if these activities are neither  
 7 bound to “children” nor to “siblings” then what categories and category  
 collections are they bound to? To answer this question we will turn to our  
 9 materials.

As indicated in the introduction to this chapter, the data upon which our  
 11 study is based consists of some instances of audio-taped and transcribed  
 (according to Jefferson, 1978) talk-in-interaction which occurred during the  
 13 course of a family meal involving a mother (Jen) and a father (Harry) and  
 their two children, a boy of 13 (Russell) and a girl aged 8 (Maggie).<sup>3</sup> For  
 15 reasons which should become clear as the analysis proceed, we have selected  
 not only the disputes which occurred between the two “children” but also  
 17 some of the talk-in-interaction which preceded it and followed it. In the  
 analyses that follow, we show that a collection of asymmetrical SRPs, such  
 19 as “rule-enforcer” and “rule-breaker,” “rebuker” and “resister,” and  
 “bully” and “victim,” are used to organize and structure the disputes. We  
 21 will illustrate this with three data excerpts.

In Excerpt 1 Russell and Maggie have just been informed via their  
 23 mother’s announcement that dinner is now ready and that they should go to  
 the bathroom and wash their hands. On their way from the bathroom to the  
 25 kitchen a “fight” breaks out and as they enter the kitchen the following  
 occurs:

27

*Excerpt 1.*

29

1. M: He stra:ngled me::  
 2. J: Have you washed your hands?  
 31 3. M: He stra:ngled me::  
 4. R: She wouldn’t die:  
 5. J: Ohhhh. Russ [please ]  
 33 6. M: [But you] strangled me hh: (1.0) it hu:r’  
 7. (2.0)  
 8. R: Of course it didn’t hur’  
 35 9. M: It hu:r’  
 10. J: Wehh:ll (2.5) We’ll have to start without Harry  
 37 11. R: Mm Mm Mm Mm Mm ((pretending to hit sister))  
 12. M: No [Ge’off] ((shrieks))  
 13. J: [Oh come] o::n calm down please and sit and eat

39

1 In sequential terms, after Maggie's initial complaint (line 1) to her  
mother, and its repetition (line 3), that Russell "strangled" her, a dispute  
3 between Russell and Maggie develops (from line 6) about whether his  
"strangling" her "hurt" or not. The dispute sequence begins with Maggie's  
5 disputable complaint that Russell's strangling her "hurt." He disputes this  
by saying (line 8) that "of course it didn't hur'", although he does not deny  
7 having attempted to strangle her. She then disputes this with her reassertion  
(line 9) that it did "hu:r'." In terms of the categorical resources used to  
9 produce the dispute, the organizing membership categories, we suggest, are  
neither "child-child" nor "brother" and "sister." This is not to say that the  
11 participants in the dispute are neither children nor siblings. Rather, it is to  
say that these categories by themselves are not demonstrably relevant for  
13 them because they do not render intelligible the nature of what these  
"children" or "siblings" are doing. The organizing category collection for  
15 the recognizability of the dispute at hand involves the asymmetrical SRP,  
"offender" and "victim." In saying that "you strangled me, it hurt," Maggie  
17 categorizes him as an offender/aggressor against her and herself as a victim.  
It is his behavior *as an aggressor* that she finds complainable, not the fact  
19 that he is another child and a brother. He disputes her categorization,  
denying that he offended in the way that she claims and also that she is a  
21 victim because his actions did not in fact hurt.

In rejecting the category pair, "victim" and "offender" Russell attempts  
23 to locate the strangulation within a rather different pair of categories,  
possibly "teaser" and "teased." He does not deny that he "strangled" her –  
25 he says that "she wouldn't die" – but this "admission" humorously  
misidentifies (cf. Sacks, 1992a, p. 419) the character of his action in that the  
27 mother responds to it with "oh Russell please" rather than with a response  
more resonant with an admission to a serious crime. His self-misidentifica-  
29 tion as an "attempted-strangler" seems to be treating the episode as a  
joke or play-fight to which Maggie has over-reacted. Furthermore, this  
31 over-reaction has been expressed with an incorrect (as far as Russell is  
concerned) and therefore contestable identification of the two categories  
33 involved.

It is important to note that both her selected categories – victim and  
35 offender – and his – teaser and teased – are asymmetrical. In terms of the  
predicates of these categories, both put Russell in an "elevated" and  
37 "dominant" position relative to that of his sister. As an offender, in  
relation to his sister as a victim, he has physically "overpowered,"  
39 dominated, and inflicted injury upon his sister. As a teaser, she is again a

1 victim, albeit of a joke rather than a physical assault. The second excerpt is  
 as follows:

3

*Excerpt 2.*

5

1. J: Do you want a drink?

2. R: You could have ask[ed Maggie ]

7

3. J: [Do you want] a dri[nk?]

4. M: [I ][did]]

9

5. J: [She ]did ask

6. you she did

7. R: ((s.v.))She asked for a side plate () The::re you go

11

8. M: Thank you ((falsetto))

13 Here the dispute sequence begins with an action by Maggie in response to  
 which Russell (line 2) makes an imputation of deviance.<sup>4</sup> This deviance  
 15 involves Maggie reaching across the table to get a drink. This is an instance  
 of a “dinner-time rule” being invoked by Russell, namely, that diners do not  
 17 reach across the table to obtain items but rather they should make requests  
 for others to pass them the item which they want.<sup>5</sup> The imputation of  
 19 deviance is disputed by Maggie who declares (line 4) that she did ask. Jen,  
 the mother, also disputes (lines 5–6) Russell’s complaint/accusation,  
 21 corroborating Maggie’s version of events. In the third turn of the dispute,  
 Russell addresses his mother and corrects her (line 7) with the retort that  
 23 Maggie did not ask for a drink but asked for a side plate.

As with Excerpt 1, the natural history of this dispute can be seen to be  
 25 organized in terms of an asymmetrical standardized relational pair of categories,  
 rule-enforcer and deviant. Russell takes a position as the incumbent  
 27 of the membership category “rule-enforcer,” imputing the relational  
 category “rule-breaker” or “deviant” to Maggie on the grounds that she  
 29 did not “ask” for a drink to be passed to her. However, rather than accepting  
 this category imputation, Maggie counters that she did not break a rule  
 31 because she “did” ask him. She is not therefore an “offender” because she in  
 fact produced an action that exhibited rule-compliance, not deviance. So,  
 33 contrary to Russell’s category imputation, she is actually a “rule-follower”  
 not a deviant. Her category-resistance and counter-self-categorization as  
 35 “rule-follower” (via the category-bound activity “asking”) is then countered  
 (after the mother’s corroboration of Maggie’s resistance) by Russell. He  
 37 does not dispute that she “asked” for *something* but that she asked for a  
 side plate, not a drink. She may have been a rule-follower in asking for a  
 39 side plate but in so far as she did not ask for a drink her incumbency of the  
 category “deviant” remains therefore in place, with Russell sustaining his

1 incumbency of the asymmetrical relational category, "rule-enforcer." This is  
 2 not disputed by his mother or by his sister.

3

*Excerpt 3.*

5

1. J: Milk or water Russ?

2. R: Water please (1.0) ((r.v.)) Sit down ()

7

3. M: I know I slipped

4. J: Oka::y there's no need to shout at [her]

5. R: [If ]you slipped

9

6. you're just standing there goin'

7. M: [No]

8. R: [Oo]h I slipped ((sarcastic tone))

11

9. M: I went backwards like that

10. (1.5)

13

11. R: ((r.v.)) Sit do::wn ()

12. M: I know don't talk with your [mouth open ]

13. J: ((s.v.)) [She is lovely]

15

14. R: Hmm how am I meant to talk then?

15. J: Russell

17

16. M: You've got a mou[thful ]

17. J: [Russell]

18. R: Ner ner ner ner ner [ner] (("talking" with mouth closed))

19

19. J: [ J-] Maggie just leave him alone

20. ignore him he's being purposely (3.0) Kevinish

21

21. M: Mm

22. R: I'm not

23. J: And you are eati'- er talking with your mouthful

23

24. (11.0)

25. J: What did Harry say when he phoned then?

25

This excerpt contains an extended dispute. The initial disputable is  
 27 Maggie's standing up from the table where she has been sitting since the  
 29 beginning of the meal. Russell tells her to "sit down" (line 2), which involves  
 the invocation of another mealtime rule. The dispute then "takes hold" in  
 31 line 3 when Maggie disputes both his right to invoke the rule and the  
 veracity of his claim that she has broken a rule in the first place. She does so  
 by offering an account for the fact that she is standing up. For Russell, her  
 33 account is disputable, and so he extends the dispute by challenging it (lines 5  
 and 6). Maggie, in turn, re-asserts, elaborates, and dramatizes (lines 7 and 9)  
 35 her account which is then met by Russell's recycling of the original directive  
 that she "sit down" (line 11). At line 12, Maggie makes an attempt to "turn  
 37 the tables" on Russell through her invocation of another mealtime rule,  
 namely, "not talking with one's mouth full." Unfortunately, she states  
 39 this incorrectly and Russell is presented with an opportunity to ridicule her  
 (lines 14 and 18).

1 Several asymmetrical SRPs can be seen in use in this extended dispute.  
2 First, at the beginning of the excerpt (line 2), it can be seen that Russell  
3 assumes incumbency of the category “rule-enforcer,” as he did in Excerpt 2,  
4 this time directing Maggie to sit down. His directive involves, then, another  
5 imputation of deviance to Maggie: she has broken another mealtime rule by  
6 standing up instead of remaining seated. She is therefore not only an  
7 offender against whom the rule can be invoked by the enforcer, she is also in  
8 the position of someone who can be told, instructed, and directed as to what  
9 they must do. As rule-enforcer, Russell assumes the “right” to censure  
10 Maggie who, as an imputed incumbent of the category “rule-breaker” or  
11 “deviant,” is required to “comply.” In resisting the directive, Maggie also  
12 resists the imputed incumbency of the categories of “deviant” and “person-  
13 who-can-be-instructed-directed-and-be-told-to-comply” that comes with it.  
14 Her resistance involves, first, saying that she “knows” what the rule is and  
15 therefore is not someone to be instructed and directed about it. She  
16 therefore resists not only her categorization as one who can be properly  
17 directed but also his presumed self-categorization as rule-enforcer and  
18 director. Second, her resistance involves offering an account for her  
19 ostensible infraction, namely, that she “slipped.” Her “excuse” means that  
20 she is a “victim” of circumstances beyond her control; she is not the deviant  
21 that Russell claims that she is.

22 We have said that her account becomes another disputable for Russell.  
23 He endeavors to expose not only its fallaciousness but also the claimed  
24 incumbency of the category “victim” that it implies. For Russell, slipping  
25 would not have produced the end-product of standing up, as Maggie claims.  
26 Persons do not accidentally stand up. Standing up is the outcome of  
27 deliberate and intentional action. She is therefore not a victim but an  
28 offender who can be properly directed. She may even be a liar. Again,  
29 Maggie resists Russell’s various categorizations of her, offering an elaborated  
30 account and an enactment of her “slipping”; she “went backwards like  
31 that.” Unfortunately, this account and the accompanying enactment again  
32 produces a standing up, thus making relevant a recycling of the original  
33 directive from Russell that she should “sit down,” which he duly produces.  
34 He therefore retains incumbency of the categories “rule-enforcer” and  
35 “director” and she correspondingly remains in the asymmetrically paired  
36 category position of one who is an “offender” and who may therefore be  
37 directed and made to comply.

38 Maggie’s response to the recycled directive is a recycling of her original  
39 resistance, namely, she “knows” the rule about standing up. She therefore  
40 disputes again his presumed incumbency of the category rule-enforcer and

1 the activity of directing that is here predicated of it. She then attempts to  
2 “turn the category tables,” so to speak, by issuing a directive of her own. In  
3 doing so, she can be understood as attempting to switch places in the  
4 asymmetrical category arrangements that have so far constituted the  
5 produced structure of this episode of talk-in-interaction. Thus, she invokes  
6 the mealtime rule “no talking with your mouth full,” issuing a directive to  
7 Russell, “don’t talk with your mouth open.” In invoking this rule and in  
8 issuing this directive she is attempting to locate herself within the category  
9 “rule-enforcer” with its attendant entitlement to engage in the category-  
10 bound activity, “issuing directives” and to allocate to Russell the  
11 asymmetrically paired categories “offender” and “one-who-can-be-direc-  
12 ted-and-told-to-comply.” Unfortunately for her, this attempt to switch  
13 category positions with Russell fails because she states the rule incorrectly.  
14 It can be assumed that she meant to say, “don’t talk with your mouth full”  
15 which is a rule, like the sitting down rule, that has been invoked several  
16 times previously in the meal by the mother. Instead, in saying, “Don’t talk  
17 with your mouth *open*,” she presents Russell with an opportunity to make  
18 fun of his sister, an opportunity that he loses no time in grasping. In  
19 countering her directive with “how am I meant to talk then” he regains the  
20 categorical advantage; she is now “reduced” from a rule-enforcer to an  
21 incompetent speaker. Despite her attempt to correct herself by saying “you  
22 have got a mouthful,” he nevertheless enacts compliance with Maggie’s  
23 inept directive, showing what it would be like to talk with his mouth closed,  
24 the incomprehensible, “ner ner ner ner ner ner.”

25 We conclude this section by noting that a variety of asymmetrical  
26 standardized category relational pairs are key organizational features of the  
27 disputes exhibited in the excerpts we have analyzed. Thus, Russell attempts  
28 in his various oppositional turns to “degrade” his sister in some way. He  
29 tries to enforce a rule, call her deviant, hurt her, ridicule her, tease her, etc.,  
30 and in so doing variously constitutes himself as a rule-enforcer, a director, a  
31 strangler, a teaser, and so forth. In these actions, he allocates Maggie to  
32 some category lower than his in the local categorical order. She is  
33 someone who can be told what to do, who can be made to look stupid,  
34 and who can be physically overpowered. Yet Maggie, even though she is  
35 put on the defensive, resists; she does not accept his attempted cate-  
36 gorical asymmetries. She resists the degradation and sometimes attempts  
37 herself to reverse the attempted alignment of categories. Sometimes she  
38 enlists the support of her mother (to even things up), and along with her  
39 resisting, thereby constitutes herself as an incumbent of an oppositional  
category.

1 In the next section, we will consider how the asymmetrical category  
 3 relations and the degradations through which they are realized are omni-  
 relevant for these members and remain “on the table,” so to speak, throughout  
 the meal.

## 7 CHILDREN’S DISPUTES AND OMNIRELEVANT 9 CATEGORY RELATIONS

11 So far, we have analyzed some disputes, paying particular attention to the  
 asymmetrical category relational pairs used in their organization. We have  
 13 sought to demonstrate that these category relations are those which are  
 relevant to the parties involved in the disputes. Thus, while the parties may  
 15 be “correctly” categorizable as children, and related to each other as brother  
 and sister, these membership categories are not by themselves the relevant  
 17 ones for the organization of these disputes. The relevant categories comprise  
 a collection of asymmetrical standardized relational pairs: rule-enforcer/  
 19 deviant, director/directee, offender/victim, teaser/teased, and so on. These  
*do not* negate their incumbency of the category collections “children” and  
 21 “siblings” but such incumbency does not provide the categorical context for  
 the conduct of their disputes. In the second part of the paper we wish to  
 23 consider the connection between the asymmetrical category relational pairs  
 which are demonstrably relevant for, and which are used in organizing the  
 25 disputes, and a wider context of oppositional social relations between the  
 participants.<sup>6</sup> We seek to show that the disputes emerge out of and reflexively  
 27 constitute an omnirelevant oppositional category relational pair, “parties to  
 an oppositional relationship.”

29 Our starting point would seem to be fairly uncontroversial: children’s  
 disputes do not exist in isolation. They develop out of and contribute to  
 31 larger contexts of children’s lives. However, while this observation may  
 seem, on the face of it, to be uncontroversial and innocuous, the analytical  
 33 task of establishing a connection between the local ordering of disputes and  
 some wider context of children’s lives is, on reflection, less than straight-  
 35 forward. This is because any attribution of a contextual orientation to  
 the participants also has to comply with the methodological constraints of  
 37 demonstrable relevance outlined earlier in connection with membership  
 categories. As Schegloff (1992, pp. 196–197) writes:

39 If one is concerned with understanding what something in interaction was for its  
 participants, then we must establish what sense of context was relevant to those  
 participants, and at the moment at which what we are trying to understand what

1 occurred. And we must seek to ground that claim in the conduct of the participants; they  
show (to one another in the first place, but to us as a by-product) what they take their  
3 relevant context and identities to be.

Just as it is, then, for membership categories, so it is also that any  
5 attribution and analytical use of social context must subscribe, at least in  
ethnomethodology and conversation analysis, to the principle of demon-  
7 strable relevance: it has to be shown in the particulars of persons' talk-in-  
interaction that some context is relevant for them on the occasion of their  
9 production of those particulars. There are two aspects of demonstrable  
relevance here. The first concerns how the parties to some scene or setting  
11 demonstrate for one another that a particular sense of social context is  
relevant for them, while the second refers to the methodological problem  
13 for the analyst of how to demonstrate that a particular sense of context is  
relevant for those participants. The authority for any claim for the latter  
15 clearly rests upon the transparency and availability of the former. Thus, it is  
one thing to assert that analysts should only deal with context as a members'  
17 phenomenon and not as a theoretically driven imposition, but it is altogether  
a different matter to produce analyses which satisfy such a constraint and  
19 which can adequately display members' orientations to social context as  
constituents of their talk-in-interaction or other activities.

21 There are various kinds of context to which members may be oriented.  
For any particular utterance or activity, the relevant context may be the  
23 preceding turn or configuration of turns at talk, it may be the local scene or  
setting, such as a lesson in a classroom or an examination in a doctor's  
25 surgery, it may mean something situationally more diffuse, such as "our  
family" or "this relationship," or it may be the sort of object more traditio-  
27 nally associated with sociologies of a more structural inclination, such as the  
global oil economy, the American housing market, or the twenty-first  
29 century capitalism, to name just a few possibilities. Likewise, the analyst can  
have no assurance that these various levels operate independently of one  
31 another. Talk-in-interaction may be oriented to several contexts simulta-  
neously, occurring not only "at this late hour" but also "in this family" and  
33 "within this relationship," such that a multiplicity of contexts may be  
demonstrably relevant for the participants. Nevertheless, whatever level of  
35 context one is referring to, the point is that its availability as something  
that the parties are oriented to can only be witnessed in what the parties  
37 do and say.

39 With respect to the notion of demonstrable relevance in relation to social  
contexts, Sacks' writing on the subject of "omnirelevance" is especially  
instructive. In the 1964–1965 lectures (1992a, p. 515), for example, the  
discussion is developed from the question as to whether the analyst has any

1 right to formulate a particular occasion, setting, or context when the  
participants in it do not so formulate it. He asks (Sacks, 1992a, p. 515):  
3 “have we any special rights to assign name formulations to the actions,  
upon, say, occasions when they are *not* assigned by the participants?” This  
5 question can be heard, on the one hand, to allude to the problem of  
demonstrable relevance, and on the other hand, to raise the issue of the use  
7 of “formulations” in talk-in-interaction. The two issues are linked. Since  
“members can’t do pure formulating” (Sacks, 1992a, p. 521), because  
9 formulations of some setting are not done for their own sake but are always  
done as some action for a particular purpose, is the analyst only justified in  
11 “assigning name formulations” to occasions and settings when they are so  
formulated as a course of action other than mere formulating? The problem  
13 is that it is frequently the case that persons do not so formulate their  
settings, either merely or for other purposes. Rather, it would seem that they  
15 take them for granted, and so how then can it be shown that they are  
oriented to a setting?

17 One direction might be to assume that if the analyst can see “it” (a  
particular sense of an utterance, a category incumbency, a setting) in some  
19 way, using their own cultural commonsense knowledge, then it can be  
assumed that the participants themselves see it that way too. However, this  
21 hardly amounts to a *demonstration* that some members actually display in  
their talk-in-interaction their orientation to a setting. Another direction,  
23 pursued by Sacks, is concerned with the question of whether members can  
be said to be oriented to a setting or context *even though* they do not make  
25 use of explicit formulations of its character. Sacks addresses this question in  
his discussion of the concept of the “omnirelevance” (1992a, p. 594) of a  
27 membership categorization device. As Sacks points out, the omnirelevance  
of a membership categorization device means two things. The first concerns  
29 its “effectiveness” – that is, that the device allows the activities within a  
setting to be “seeable,” intelligible, recognizable, that is, accountable  
31 (Garfinkel, 1967) as comprising or constitutive of a particular type of setting.  
Seeing what the setting or the occasion is involves seeing the participants as  
33 incumbents of particular membership categories which are constitutive of the  
setting. However, the effectiveness of a category collection in “seeing” some  
35 activity as an activity of a specific sort does not, of course, mean that the  
category collection is omnirelevant for a particular occasion or setting. It  
37 only means that it is effective for the accountability of the specific instance  
of the activity in question. The *omnirelevance* of the category collection  
39 and hence the setting accomplished via the activities predicated of its  
membership categories lies then not just in their occasional use in making

1 sense of instances of talk-in-interaction but in the “anytime invocability”  
2 of those categories, that is, the device or collection may be invoked at any  
3 time. In other words, the accountable production of specific sorts of talk-in-  
4 interaction is provided for by the omnirelevance of particular membership  
5 categories and the collections of which they are a part. Omnirelevance means  
6 then that for a given setting or occasion there are activities or actions that  
7 are “invocable,” that is, doable at any time, and these are provided for  
8 and seeable as “effective” by virtue of their being tied to and expressive of  
9 omnirelevant categories and the collections they are a part of and whose  
10 enacted incumbency constitutes the setting for what it is.

11 There are, then, two tests for the omnirelevance of a social context. One is  
12 that the parties analyze each other as having produced category-bound  
13 activities bound to the categories comprising the collection parties to a  
14 particular context. The second test is that of anytime invocability. However,  
15 where Sacks addressed issues of omnirelevance in relation to social context  
16 in the sense of “setting,” the type of context that we wish to analyze here is  
17 the *social relationship* between the children in our data. Our argument is that  
18 it is the nature of their social relationship as oppositional that comprises an  
19 omnirelevant context of their interaction.

## 21 22 23 **THE OMNIRELEVANCE OF “PARTIES TO AN 24 OPPOSITIONAL RELATIONSHIP”: EFFECTIVENESS**

25 With respect to the “effectiveness” of the relational pair, “parties to an  
26 oppositional relationship,” the issue is whether it is possible to see that this  
27 relational pair is the demonstrably relevant context of their talk-in-interaction  
28 for the participants themselves. Our claim is that this relational pair is indeed  
29 relevant in this way and that this can be seen in how they analyze and respond  
30 to each other’s talk-in-interaction. That talk-in-interaction is analyzable by  
31 the parties in terms of the device “parties to an oppositional relationship.” In  
32 particular, it can be shown that in producing their responses both Russell and  
33 Maggie display their analysis of the membership category in terms of which  
34 the just completed turn was produced. Such turns are analyzed by the parties  
35 as activities bound to the categories comprising the collection “parties to an  
36 oppositional relationship.” These categories are effective in making account-  
37 able, that is, recognizable, the character of the turn having been taken as  
38 oppositional. So, in the response to an activity engaged in by a first party, if the  
39 second party responds in such a way that this displays their analysis of the first

1 party's action, and if that analysis is one that shows the second party analyzed  
the first party as the incumbent of an omnirelevant category, in this case  
3 "party to an oppositional relationship," then we have a demonstration.

In nontechnical language, there is an underlying, ongoing struggle and  
5 opposition between these "siblings" which "erupts" occasionally (for much of  
the rest of the time the children ignore each other). Opportunities for  
7 expressing this underlying opposition are taken. More technically, when they  
are taken they are analyzed by the recipient as "first-turn-oppositionals" and  
9 they exhibit their analysis by producing a "second-turn-oppositional"  
themselves. Furthermore, this opposition is often asymmetrical in that the  
11 parties do not just oppose one another but do so in terms of an asymmetrical  
oppositional pair of categories consisting of one who seeks to "get the upper  
13 hand," so to speak, and the other who resists (and occasionally attempts  
to turn the category tables). As has been shown in the previous section,  
15 oppositional talk that arises in this way sometimes develops into dispute. If  
the excerpts analyzed above are considered again, it can be seen that the  
17 sequences which eventually result in dispute commence with some talk or  
action that is analyzed as asymmetrically oppositional by its recipient.

19 The analysis of an action as a first-turn-oppositional and as having been  
produced under the auspices of "parties to an oppositional relationship"  
21 can be seen in Excerpt 1 (above), for example, in the two complaints that  
Maggie makes, first to her mother that "he strangled me" (line 1) and  
23 second to Russell himself (line 6) – "But you strangled me, it hurt." In both  
cases, Maggie's response to Russell's "strangulation" is not just that it was  
25 an attempt to strangle her – she is not just *reporting* the strangulation – but  
that it is a cause for complaint. He is not described as having "played" with  
27 her, "touched" her, "messed about" with her, or even "teased" her. The  
analysis of Russell's actions that she produces in her complaint is not, say,  
29 that they have just been role-playing a scene from some movie in which he is  
the "murderer" and she is the "victim," or that they have been playing a  
31 computer game in which Russell's character has just "strangled" hers. To  
say that "he strangled me" against such a background would be to report  
33 what occurred in the scene, it would not be a complaint about personal  
injury. Maggie's complaint, then, exhibits her analysis of the offensiveness  
35 of the action complained about. That action was, in other words, produced  
by an offender, not by a game- or role-player. In responding in the way that  
37 she does she is claiming that he has produced an activity which is bound to  
one of the categories of the asymmetrical oppositional relational pair, bully  
and victim. In complaining that "he strangled me," she is describing herself  
39 as a victim which is paired with offender (bully in this case). She is analyzing  
him as someone who is trying to be offensive toward her. The asymmetrical

1 oppositional relational pair, offender and victim, is therefore “effective” *for*  
2 *the members* in understanding the nature of this piece of interaction because  
3 the actions produced are analyzed as category-bound to those categories.  
4 Furthermore, in addressing her complaint to her mother, Maggie can be  
5 heard to enlist her support against Rowan, and this suggests it is not a  
6 “fight” among equals.

7 Similar conclusions can be reached with respect to Excerpt 2 in which  
8 Maggie’s response to Russell’s initiating oppositional turn where he accused  
9 her of “not asking” is evident. Russell’s turn is thus analyzed by her as an  
10 oppositional one, putting her in the position of an offender and subject to  
11 the enforcement activity of her accuser. “You could have asked” is not,  
12 then, as far as Maggie is concerned a “reminding,” it is rebuking; it is not a  
13 piece of neutral running commentary, it’s an instance of a rule-invocation.  
14 The relevant and effective membership category for rebuke and rule-  
15 invocation is not “reminder” or “commentator,” it is rule-enforcer.  
16 Furthermore, such a category is paired with “offender.” Her analysis, then,  
17 is that he sees her as having broken a rule and is now enforcing that rule,  
18 while she is being allocated incumbency of the category “offender” or  
19 “deviant.” As we have seen, this analysis is made evident in her counter to  
20 his enforcing turn: she did not break a rule; she behaved properly in terms of  
21 the rule’s jurisdiction and did “ask” as required by it. Again, then, the  
22 asymmetrical category relational pair “rule-enforcer/offender” is displayed  
23 by her as effective in understanding his action toward her and her response.

24 Finally and similarly, in Excerpt 3, Maggie’s response, that is, what we  
25 have referred to as her “resistance” indicates her analysis of his prior turn as  
26 something to be resisted, something that is produced in opposition to her,  
27 and which attempts to put her in her place. In saying she knows what the  
28 rule is she resists his self-categorization as a rule-enforcer. The point is that  
29 her resisting turn can be seen to display her analysis that his turn was  
30 produced in terms of the auspices of the SRP “parties to an oppositional  
31 relationship.”

33

35 **THE ANYTIME INVOCABILITY OF “PARTIES TO AN**  
36 **OPPOSITIONAL RELATIONSHIP”: THE**  
37 **NONCONTINGENCY OF FIRST-TURN**  
38 **OPPOSITIONALS**

39

It has been shown that the two siblings make use of the asymmetrical  
oppositional relational pair – “oppositional siblings” – in analyzing each

1 others' actions, that is in making them seeable, recognizable, intelligible,  
 3 etc., and that therefore this relational pair is "effective" as a method for  
 5 producing and understanding their actions. However, by itself, this  
 7 effectiveness of the category relational pair would not indicate that this  
 category relationship was omnirelevant. In this section we will show that  
 their oppositions meet the second "test" of the omnirelevance of a category  
 collection, namely, its "anytime invocability."

9 *Excerpt 4.*

- 11 1. J: No (1.5) nobody's noticed [anythin']  
 2. M: [Oo:::oh ]  
 13 3. J: heh-heh-heh-heh you you just noticed Maggie was  
 4. swinging round the pole where it used to be and  
 5. didn't even mention it  
 6. R: Which pole?  
 15 7. J: Next door's washing line pole  
 8. R: hhhh.  
 9. J: Do you notice anything Maggie?  
 17 10. M: ((shakes head))  
 11. J: No?  
 19 12. M: What do you say?  
 13. J: Do you notice anything outside?  
 14. M: No  
 21 15. R: Huh thicko::  
 16. J: What have I done then Russ?  
 17. R: Nu - thing  
 23 18. M: Don't know - tell me please please quick  
 19. J: Cut down the tree heather  
 25 20. (2.5)  
 21. M: Mmm ooh yeh hah hah the tree  
 22. J: Let's see if Daddy notices  
 27 23. R: Don't tell him okay Maggie? 'cause you spoil every  
 24. little ((high voice)) "Guess what Dad ner ner ner ner"  
 29 25. J: No she won't she doesn't spoil things when she says  
 26. guess what she's just (6.0)

31 On two occasions in the course of this excerpt, Russell uses the planned  
 33 surprise for "daddy," namely, to see if he "notices" that a tree has been cut  
 35 down, to degrade his sister. First, at line 15, he calls her a "thicko:~" and  
 37 then at lines 23–24 he describes her as someone who spoils "every little  
 39 'guess what dad ner ner...'" The first of these degradations is not  
 contingent on anything oppositional that Maggie has said to Russell in the  
 present context. It is a comment on Maggie's conversation with her mother,  
 and specifically her failure to notice that her mother has chopped down  
 a tree-heather in the garden. As a "first-turn oppositional" Russell's  
 derogatory name calling clearly comes "out of the blue." That it does so, of

1 course begs the question of how it is understood by its recipients. Even  
 3 though “thicko::” is said in response to Maggie’s admission that she had not  
 5 seen the tree stump, it is not Maggie who produces an analysis of the  
 7 degradation, but Jen, the mother. She can be understood to be speaking on  
 9 behalf of Maggie at this point when she says “What have I done then Russ?”  
 11 (line 16), a question which can be heard to say, “it’s all very well to degrade  
 her, but have you actually seen what I have done?” and by implication if  
 not, “are you ‘thicko’ too?” In other words then, Jen takes up the  
 oppositional character of Russell’s name calling and counters it with a  
 challenge to him to demonstrate that he is not also an incumbent of the  
 category that he has attributed to Maggie.

As regards the second degradation, namely, Russell’s first-turn  
 13 oppositional that Maggie “spoils every little thing” (line 23), this again  
 15 is not contingent upon anything oppositional that Maggie has just said to  
 17 Russell but is rather a recollection of how she has behaved on previous  
 19 occasions. From Russell’s point of view she “spoils” these guessing  
 21 games by giving the game away. It is, then, an opportunistic derogation,  
 23 occasioned not by anything that Maggie has actually done *in opposition* to  
 25 Russell; it is not contingent on her having occasioned the relevance of  
 27 their oppositional relationship. Rather, it is something that Russell non-  
 contingently chooses to invoke himself. Again, it can be seen that his first-  
 turn oppositional is met by a response from Jen which displays *her*  
 analysis of its oppositionality. Thus, Jen contradicts Russell’s claim not  
 only that Maggie will spoil *this* game but also that she generally spoils  
 “everything.” Clearly, Jen analyzes Russell’s derogation as having been  
 produced in terms of the relational pair of categories, “degrader” and  
 “degraded.”

29 *Excerpt 5.*

31 1. R: Can I [have] that?  
 2. M: [K k ] p-ink  
 3. R: `cause I’m sad (0.5) The Famous Five: Five on a Secret  
 33 4. Mission i-[i-it’s]  
 5. J: [you’ve] probably got that one  
 6. R: It’s a computer game  
 35 7. J: Huhhh. ((sighs))  
 8. M: Her-he’ her-he’ her-he’ [her-he’] ((sings loudly))  
 37 9. R: [when a ]plane crashes on Kerian  
 10. Island the Famous Five discover that the pilot is a  
 11. secret service agent who thinks he’s on a secret  
 39 12. mission but he’s actually been tricked into smuggling.  
 13. The Five quickly get involved in trying to solve the

- 1 14. clues to prevent the criminals from succeeding ((reads  
15. from catalogue))  
16. M: Aaa::wama  
3 17. R: Am I allowed that?  
18. J: Is that the same one you've just been talking about or  
19. something different ((in a fast voice))  
5 20. R: It's the same one I jus' ma ma ma ma ((mimicking  
21. previous talker))  
7 22. J: Right well you've got the book haven't you?  
23. R: ((s.v.)) No I haven't  
24. J: You have you've got a Five or Seven book on [Kerian]=  
9 25. R: [Yes but]=  
26. J: =[Island]  
27. R: =[I have]n't got a Five which a plane crashes na na na  
11 28. na with a secret service man in there [hmmm]  
29. J: [I'm ]sure Enid  
13 30. Blyton didn't write it like that  
31. (1.5)  
32. M: Ha ((s.v.))sucker sucker  
15 33. (1.5)  
34. R: Shu'up  
35. M: Shuddup you too  
17 36. J: Sitting there saying shut up to each other is not very  
37. nice  
19 38. R: ((high voice)) My name is Maggie and I'm a stupid girl  
39. J: Russell if you're going to wind her up then she's going  
21 40. to do the same to you isn't she

23 This excerpt confirms the findings which we have made in connection  
25 with Excerpt 4. Just as Russell's degradations in Excerpt 4 were produced  
27 opportunistically and without reference to any prior oppositional, so here  
29 Maggie's derogatively calling Russell "sucker sucker" (line 32) is produced  
31 not in response to something directed at her by Russell. Rather, it seems to  
33 take advantage of an opportunity afforded when the mother comments that  
35 the original author of the "Famous Five," Enid Blyton "didn't write it like  
37 that" (line 30) in response to Russell's reading of the description of the  
39 Famous Five video game included in a catalogue. There is no evidence that  
Jen intends this is as some kind of put-down or rebuke; it is not that Russell  
got something wrong here, it is simply that the kind of language used by  
Enid Blyton in the "adventure" stories about the Famous Five is a far cry  
from the kind of language used in advertising and promoting video games.  
Furthermore, the described content of the game indicates that the "Famous  
Five" are engaged in activities very different from those found in Enid  
Blyton's books. However, while this is not a criticism of Russell, Maggie  
nevertheless produces an oppositional turn by calling him a name: "sucker  
sucker." It can be heard to attempt to belittle him, to portray him as foolish,

1 and thereby to invoke their opposition. As we have said, this name-calling is  
 2 not produced in response to a prior oppositional and is therefore “not  
 3 contingent” on his action toward her (even if it *is* contingent on something,  
 4 i.e., the “opportunity” at hand to make an oppositional remark). As  
 5 Russell’s response indicates, he certainly takes it that way, telling her to  
 “shu’ up.”

7

*Excerpt 6.*

8 1. J: Do you want one Maggs (2.0) [do you?]  
 9 2. R: [Can I ]have a side plate  
 3. please mother?  
 10 4. M: Thank you ((falsetto))  
 11 5. (12.0)  
 12 6. R: (...) yuch!  
 13 7. M: Huh huh huh huh yey!  
 8. R: ((s.v.)) Yuch  
 14 9. J: Do you want some  
 10. R: No thank you  
 11. J: Try a bit  
 12. R: No thank you  
 13. (1.5) ((cheering is heard on the radio))  
 14. M: Yey! I like this ((cough))  
 15. R: You’re weird  
 16. M: Wha?  
 17. J: Get a side plate please (2.0) do you want some baked  
 18. beans Maggs?  
 19. M: No thank you (in a false voice) (3.0) Am I allowed a  
 20. side plate?  
 21. J: Can you get one for Maggs please

27 A similar state of affairs is found in this excerpt. Here, again, the cate-  
 28 gorization “you’re weird” appears “to come out of nothing.” Minimally, it  
 29 comes out of Russell’s previous characterizations of the food with “yuch.”  
 30 With Russell having made his assessments, then possibly those of Maggie  
 31 are now relevant, but not conditionally so. As it happens, her “yey” can  
 32 be understood as a response to the previous turn which is the actual serving  
 33 of the food that she now greets with enthusiasm. Rather than being an  
 34 oppositional to which his response is an oppositional of his own, her  
 35 nonoppositional assessment is met instead by a unilateral derogation of her  
 36 as “weird.” He does not like the food and his assessment is the “correct”  
 37 one. The fact that Maggie likes the food is an indication that she is “weird.”  
 38 Again, it would seem to be the case that the any time invocability of the  
 39 context of their oppositional relationships has to do with the ability of the  
 children to find opportunities to turn some or even any previous utterance,

1 into an oppositional. In this particular case it is his categorization of her as  
weird which invokes that category relationship. He is the “normal” one,  
3 whereas she is something lesser in the scheme of taste in relation to items of  
food. The simple expression of the fact that she likes the food is turned into  
5 an opportunity to put her down, to call her a name, to characterize her in a  
negative way. In other words, it is another instance of the underlying  
7 asymmetrically oppositional category relational pair being invoked non-  
contingently but opportunistically at any time.  
9

## 11 CONCLUSION

13 In the first part of this chapter we analyzed some demonstrably relevant  
membership categories which were used in organizing some disputes  
15 between a brother and his sister. One implication of our analysis is that  
no matter whom disputes are between, the persons involved are not just  
17 disputants. They are engaged in disputes about something-or-other and it is  
that something-or-other which provides the categories in terms of whose  
19 incumbency the disputes are then produced. For example, a dispute might  
be about the ownership of some object such that one of the organizing  
21 categories is “thief” and the other “victim of theft.” Or it might be about the  
disproportionate use of violence such that what was at issue was one party to  
23 the dispute had “bullied” the other. In our data, by using asymmetrical  
standardized relational pairs of categories such as “offender-victim,”  
25 “teaser-teased,” and “rule-enforcer-deviant,” these “disputants” demon-  
strate their competence in using categorical resources in their everyday social  
27 relationships and, in particular, in analyzing each other as having produced  
activities under the auspices of category collections and membership  
29 categories. In short, they demonstrate their ability to use formal structures  
of membership categorization as well as those of a sequential character.

31 In the second part of the analysis we indicated that these local expressions  
of asymmetrically oppositional category relational pairs were “mapped”  
33 onto an omnirelevant oppositional social relationship between the disputants  
(Watson & Weinburg, 1982). The omnirelevance of this relational pair of  
35 categories was shown to consist in its effectiveness in analyzing (by the  
participants) their talk-in-interaction as oppositional and in its invocability  
37 at any time.

The relationship between the local expressions of opposition analyzed here  
39 and an omnirelevant category collection “parties to an oppositional relation-  
ship” also serves as a reminder of the “occasionality” of category collections

1 (Hester & Eglin, 1997). Oppositional relationships can be constituted in a  
 3 variety of ways, and thereby oppositional categories can have various  
 5 activities predicated of them. The relationship between predicates, categories,  
 7 and the collection “parties to an oppositional relationship” is a contextual  
 9 rather than a decontextualized one. In the instances analyzed here, the  
 predicates of the categories in the omnirelevant collection “parties to an  
 oppositional relationship” considered in the second part of the chapter  
 are those produced in terms of the various SRPs analyzed in the first.

## 11 NOTES

13 1. The major source here is Sacks (1992a, 1992b), though he did not distinguish  
 15 “MCA” as a field of inquiry in its own right. His studies in this area were part of his  
 wider interests in the analysis of conversation. For more recent works, see, for  
 example, Jayyusi (1984), Hester and Eglin (1997), Antaki and Widdicombe (1998),  
 Eglin and Hester (2003), Francis and Hester (2004), and Butler (2008).

17 2. The history of various “revolutionary” struggles can be seen as methods for  
 rectifying these categorical asymmetries. See also Sacks (1979).

19 3. The transcript was reviewed with one of the participants – the mother – who  
 also provided valuable information about some of the gestures and other nonverbal  
 actions which accompanied the talk, some of which turned out to be relevant for our  
 21 analysis. Pseudonyms are used for the participants.

23 4. It might seem that the status of Russell’s utterance as a “deviance-imputation” is  
 equivocal, and could perhaps be described alternatively or additionally as a  
 “complaint.” However, the “test” for the resolution of any such equivocation lies  
 25 with what the recipient of the utterance makes of it rather than with the analyst. As the  
 excerpt shows, Maggie resists and denies having done what Russell accuses her of.

27 5. In saying that this is a “dinner-time rule” we are referring to the fact the mother  
 invokes this rule and several others, such as not talking with a mouthful of food, at  
 various points in the course of the meal.

29 6. We are grateful to an anonymous reviewer for bringing to our attention the  
 work of Marjorie Goodwin on the constitution of oppositional relationships among  
 children. It is, however, beyond the scope of this paper to explore the compatibilities  
 31 between Goodwin’s analysis of the production of oppositional relationships through  
 talk and our own analysis of the invocation of such omnirelevant relationships in  
 33 talk at this point.

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