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Participation and Embodied Action in Preadolescent Girls' Assessment Activity

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Assessments provide a principal way in which girls in their peer group make sense out of experience. The grammar of an emerging assessment utterance provides for local social organization, as participants take up stances with respect to the target. In this article, I examine participation during assessments in the midst of a gossip session in which 11-year-old American girls evaluate the captain of a softball game and his girlfriend who have excluded them from the game. Through talking and embodied action, together girls articulate their moral positions regarding how members of their age cohort should treat one another. Differentiated forms of coparticipation occur. Not only what one says but also how one positions the body can display a participant's entitlement to perform negative commentary. As girls link assessments to categories of person, local notions of culture are made visible.

One of the favorite activities of girls is providing commentary on features of their social landscape (M. H. Goodwin, 1990). Through their talk about behavior of others, children actively create their own standards of action and notions of morality that guide action in their group (Kyratzis, 2004). Assessment descriptions (C. Goodwin & Goodwin, 1987, 1992) provide a principal way in which children in their peer group make sense out of experience and objects in it. In the midst of producing assessment (Pomerantz, 1984) moves, participants also make visible particular types of alignments toward the target. Not only do participants employ assessment

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adjectives that depict the target in a positive or pejorative fashion; in addition, they link what Sacks (1972, 1995a) has called “category-bound activities” (Sacks, 1995a, p. 40) with the target being assessed. While assessing group members, attributing certain features or explicit terms to the participant being discussed, children can take up a common or divergent stance toward the target. Such practices thus lie at the heart of processes of achieving intersubjective understanding. In the midst of assessment activity, children can, simultaneously, position those in their local social organization relative to one another and build their local social relations.

In this article, I investigate forms of participation that occur in the midst of the activity of gossip assessment among 11-year-old girls. With the assistance of Carleen Curley Veléz and Jill Kushner Bishop over a 3-year period, I observed and videotaped a friendship group of preadolescent girls on the playground at a school in Southern California, collecting over 60 hr of videotape and 20 hr of audiotape. At the same time that participants comment on the actions of (usually) absent parties, they make evident their stance toward others in the group who are making evaluative commentary. Through examining the work that participants in conversation accomplish in their turns, by examining sequential organization as well as their explicit use of membership categories, analysts can examine how membership to a category such as ratified or nonratified participant, friend or marginal group member, or other “relationship categories” (Pomerantz & Mandelbaum, 2005) is achieved (Evaldsson, 2007; Griswold, 2007; Kyratzis, 2007). Antaki and Widdicombe (1998) argued that “for a person to ‘have an identity’—whether he or she is the person speaking, being spoken to, or being spoken about—is to be cast into a *category with associated characteristics or features*” (p. 3). Antaki and Widdicombe (1998) added that “the force of ‘having an identity’ is in its *consequentiality* in the interaction” (p. 3). Conversation analysts have documented how in selecting recipients, designing talk and action for recipients, and in interpreting recipient’s talk, “participants use their understandings about the activities, motives, rights, responsibilities, and competencies associated with incumbents of particular relationship categories” (Pomerantz & Mandelbaum, 2005, p. 152).

Both language and embodied action are critical to the ways that participants achieve local social order. The forms of involvement displayed by parties within evolving structures of talk provide distinctive forms of participation (C. Goodwin & Goodwin, 2004). Next moves to assessments about absent parties can display either disdain or enthusiasm for the

position of one's fellow interlocutors; concurrently, one's use of the body during an assessment displays ranges of engagement or disengagement with one's interlocutors and may provide a public display of local identity arrangements (Antaki & Widdicombe, 1998; Evaldsson, 2002). Important in the construction of action are the contextual configurations (C. Goodwin, 2000)—the set of semiotic fields that entail not only language but also one's facing formation (Kendon, 1977), material environment, embodied actions such as posture and physical alignment (Griswold, 2007; McDermott & Gospodinoff, 1979; Scheflen, 1974), and gesture—that inform about one's status as a ratified or unratified participant (Goffman, 1963) to the interaction.

FOCAL AND PERIPHERAL PARTICIPATION IN TALK ABOUT EXCLUSION

As C. Goodwin and Goodwin (1987, 1992) have argued, in the midst of assessment sequences, participants make visible their differential access or perceived entitlement to make commentary on events being discussed. Examining the sequential organization of conversation, a member's position in the group is in part defined by the forms of contributions that she or he can make with respect to events or parties being talked about. Participants who have no standing to talk about certain types of events—for example, Cotillion dances, the rules of tennis, and so forth—because they lack knowledge about them (M. H. Goodwin, 2006, pp. 179–181) often remain silent in the midst of talk that involves specialized knowledge, either because no one selects them as next speaker or because they choose not to enter into talk. As is seen in the following examples, this occurs repetitively with a girl named Angela, even in the midst of gossip.

Actions treated as violations, such as excluding people from a school sport, provide a perspicuous site for the elaboration of group norms through evaluative commentary. In Example 1, three girls (Aretha, Sarah, and Angela) are sitting together talking about having been excluded from playing softball by Sean. Aretha and Sarah elaborate the ways in which they feel the team leader's (Sean's) treatment of them has been unfair and reprehensible ("being assholes"), whereas by way of contrast, Sean was "being nice" to Janis by letting her play. The girls link specific activities with members' ways of acting or "being." The discussion is heavily affectively laden; the talk brings tears to Aretha's eyes as she recounts the

differential ways that Sean treats his girlfriend Janis and herself, despite the fact that Aretha and Sarah are better athletes than Janis.

Angela was one of the excluded girls and thus had some standing to gossip about those who have excluded her. However, when Aretha and Sarah begin to talk about having been excluded, Angela does not participate with the other two girls in gossip. Aretha explicitly summons Sarah, as her addressee with her utterance: she states, “Sarah don’t you understand?” (Example 1, line 1). In what follows, Sarah (line 10) coparticipates with Aretha in the talk about Sean, and the girls together produce a collaborative utterance (Lerner, 2004; Sacks, 1995b, pp. 57–60, 82–83). To Aretha’s statement, “But he never plays with me,” Sarah appends “Even if we’re better than Janis.” Meanwhile, Angela remains silent throughout:

Example 1

- 1 Aretha: Sarah don’t you understand,
 2 Janis likes Sean because she’s always-
 3 *h protecting his- damn back,
 4 And he’s like- letting her play.
 5 And Sean’s always being nice to her.=
 6 And he’s always being assholes to us. (2.5)
 7 Whenever we play basketball
 8 He always tries to play with- Janis,
 9 But he never plays with me. ((*crying*))
 10 Sarah: Even if we’re better than Jan// is.
 11 Aretha: He’s letting Janis play baseball.
 12 He’s not letting- us- me play.

Aretha and Sarah display their similar stance of dislike for Sean’s treatment of them not only by engaging in the collaborative completion of one other’s utterances; in addition, as is seen in Example 2, they display their congruent assessment of the offending party, Sean, by producing gestures simultaneously with overlapping talk. In the following, Aretha and Sarah, make use of *format-tied* utterances (in lines 2 and 4)—utterances that make use of parallel structures, not unlike those discussed by de León (2007) for Tzotzil Mayan or Brown (1998) for Tzeltal Mayan speakers:

Example 2

- 1 Sarah: And then it’s like
 2 Why would you wanna play with somebody
 3 That’s all mad at you an everything. (0.4) Right?
 4 Aretha: Why would you wanna play with somebody,

- 5 Sarah: See! [He let's-
 6 Aretha: [Who only lets you play because-
 7 *h his girlfriend [suddenly-
 8 Sarah: [His so called- ((*small hand movements*))
 9 little- honey bunny is- eh heh heh!
 10 [eh heh heh!
 11 Aretha: [Eh heh hah hah
 12 So called little
 13 hon[ey bunny,((*sarcastically, hand movements*))
 14 Sarah: [Honey bunny, ((*small hand movements*))
 15 Ooo:::

In this sequence, utterances in lines 2 through 3 and 4 through 6 are built parasitically on prior ones, repeating the frame of the start of the utterance as follows:

<u>Why</u> would you wanna play with somebody	That's all <u>mad</u> at you
<u>Why</u> would you wanna play with somebody	<u>Who</u> only lets you play because his <u>girlfriend</u> suddenly-

One of the hallmarks of showing that people's minds are together is producing assessments in overlap (C. Goodwin & Goodwin, 1987). Initially Aretha uses the term "girlfriend" to categorize Janis's relationship to Sean (line 7). When Sarah selects an alternative membership category, "honey bunny" (line 9), both girls demonstrate a similar alignment through overlapping laughter (lines 10–11). Subsequently, on completion of their laughter, as Aretha (line 13) recycles "so called little honey bunny," Sarah (line 14) joins in the production of the term "honey bunny." As the girls produce this term, they make use of what could be interpreted as either quotation gestures or hopping movements of a small rabbit with their hands next to their faces (see Figure 1).

Thus, through two modalities, gesture as well as talk, Aretha and Sarah display their congruent alignment toward the object being assessed. The cutesy/quotation-like hand movements serve as additional commentary on the term selected to characterize Janis's relationship to Sean.

FACING FORMATIONS AND SOCIAL DISTANCE IN THE MIDST OF TALK

In Examples 1 and 2, although three parties are present, only Aretha and Sarah elaborate talk about the offending parties. The facing formations

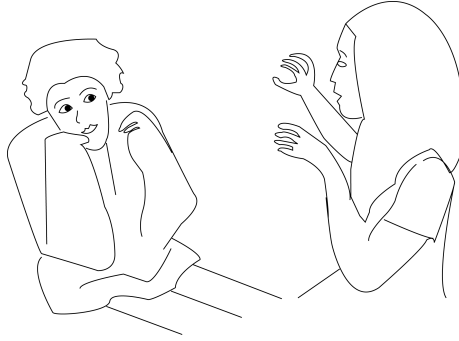


FIGURE 1 Quotation gestures.

(Kendon, 1977) of Aretha and Sarah, seated vis-à-vis one another on a bench, make visible their alignment of engaged coparticipation. By way of contrast, Angela stands next to them at the periphery of the duo, looking on (see Figure 2).

Across a range of social encounters, Angela is spatially positioned at the margins of the social group she attempts to affiliate with. While the girls have lunch inside the classroom and all sit around a small table talking animatedly, Angela sits on a table at some distance from the primary group (see Figures 3 and 4).¹



FIGURE 2 Aretha and Sarah positioned vis-à-vis one another during Example 1.

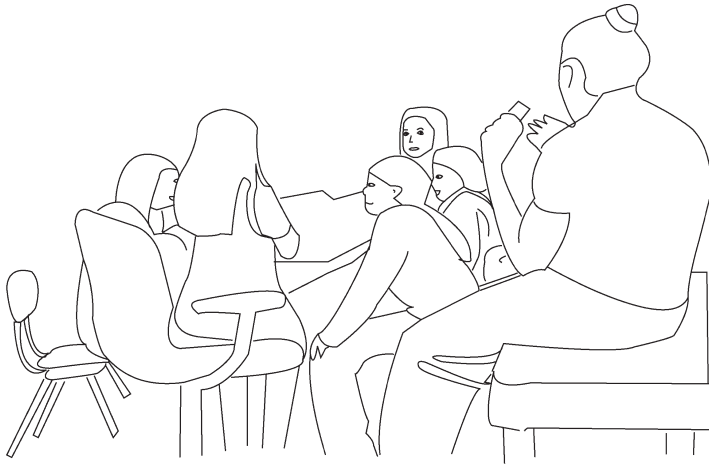


FIGURE 3 Seating positions of clique at lunch with Angela at the periphery.



FIGURE 4 Facing formations of clique at lunch with Angela at the periphery.

The line drawings from frame grabs allow one to look beyond talk itself to the organization of bodies in social space; through examining the postural configurations of bodies in addition to the sequential analysis of talk, we have access to how participants make visible a local social order of inclusion and exclusion.

SANCTIONING ANGELA'S ASSESSMENT MOVES

Across a range of interactions, the other girls distance themselves from the comments that Angela makes. Although it is customary to view gossip as an activity in which participants collaborate in ridiculing a common target, the girls critique the forms of commentary that a fellow participant, Angela, makes in the midst of the gossip.

In their evaluative commentary, girls make use of the publicly available resources of talk; through *format tying* (M. H. Goodwin, 1990, pp. 177–185), they produce next moves:

You	wanna		have <u>fun</u> in the game.
You	don't want	by Sean	to be like <u>yelled</u> at
I	don't want	him	to boss me around

Example 3

- 1 Sarah: You wanna have fun in the game.
- 2 You don't wanna like be like yelled at by Sean.
- 3 mean- I mean, it's like if you're gonna have- fun
- 4 Don't be mad at everybody.
- 5 Aretha: ((*crying*)) I don't want him to boss me around.
- 6 Angela: Sean ain't her daddy. Don't- don't you know that?
- 7 Sarah: WHAT ARE YOU SAYING. ((*bobs head*
- 8 *confronts Angela*))
- 9 eh heh-heh heh-heh! eh-heh heh-heh!((*points with arm at Angela*))
- 10 Angela: He's not yours either.
- 11 [He's not mine either.
- 12 Sarah: [I know. I'm glad he isn't. Trust me.

In response to Sarah's (line 2) "You don't wanna be like yelled at by Sean," Aretha states (line 5), "I don't want him to boss me around." Notice, however, that in Example 3, line 6, when Angela joins in the discussion, her talk is not tied to previous talk in the same way. In response to Aretha's statement "I don't want him to boss me around," Angela provides her own gloss of the activity, stating "Sean ain't her daddy. Don't- don't you know that?" Rather than providing a next move that demonstrates agreement or positive alignment, Sarah yells out to Angela "WHAT ARE YOU SAYING." As she produces this talk, she bobs her head in a confrontational gesture toward Angela (line 7) and then produces continuous laughter.

In Example 3, although Sarah critiques Angela and openly laughs at her in line 9, by line 12 she affiliates with Angela's stance and agrees with her. In Example 4, however, we find Sarah quite explicitly mocking Angela:

Example 4

- 1 Angela: No. No. You know what?
 2 Janis- lets Sean rule people.
 3 Aretha: *((blank look forward, not responding))*
 4 Angela: Okay? I'm just telling you that.
 5 [right now.
 6 Sarah: [You seem to have that down.
 7 Sarah: Aretha just said that.
 8 Angela: She's- No.
 9 See Sean? (.) lets Janis (.) control him.
 10 Sean (.) lets Janis (.) control (.) him.
 11 So Janis, What she'll do,
 12 Is she'll-
 13 Sarah: *((openly whispering to Aretha))*
 14 Angela: She'll say "Let's play. Let's play.
 15 Let's play. Let's play."
 16 Sarah: Eh heh-heh heh-heh ha ha *((laughing at Angela))*
 17 Angela: *((looks toward girls and stops talking as Sarah laughs))*
 18 Sarah: Eh heh heh hah-hah! Hah-hah!
 19 Aretha: *((looks up and stares at Angela))*
 20 Sarah: eh heh- heh hah-hah!
 21 hah hah!
 22 Ah ha hah hah!
 23 Aretha: °You're so rude. *((shaking head))*
 24 Sarah: I'm so rude?
 25 Aretha: For real.

In Example 4, Sarah states that Angela's statement that Janis lets Sean rule people is not news²: "You seem to have that down. Aretha just said that" (lines 6–7). When Angela further elaborates her talk (lines 8–12), Sarah whispers to Aretha (line 13) and then quite openly laughs, using her entire body (lines 16, 18, 20–22). The uptake she gives to Angela's talk is so overtly negative toward Angela that Aretha whispers to Sarah the comment "You're so rude." (line 23). On this occasion, different types of stances toward Angela's commentaries on absent parties are displayed here; although Sarah actively critiques her, Aretha does not take up a stance vis-à-vis Angela but rather sanctions Sarah. Quickly afterward, however,

both Aretha and Sarah immediately sanction a socially inappropriate activity Angela engages in. As the girls are complaining about Sean's treatment of them on the playing field, Angela takes play dough from her pocket and puts it in her mouth. Both Sarah and Aretha comment on her behavior by producing loud response cries (Goffman, 1978): "Oh Angela!" "OU::::! eh heh heh!" This critique of Angela preempts other talk, as the girls walk away from both the softball field and Angela.

ARTICULATING THE MEANING OF FRIENDSHIP BETWEEN RATIFIED PARTICIPANTS

Sean's breach of having excluded the three girls leads to a discussion by Sarah and Aretha regarding how members of a particular "relationship category" (Pomerantz & Mandelbaum, 2005)—friends—should treat one another. Through their commentary, they elaborate accounts for what motivates people to act as they do; in essence, a folk theory of friendship is put forward while commenting on the offense of exclusion. Sarah and Aretha make use of explicit address terms (Example 5, lines 15 and 24) to each other; no one addresses Angela, and she does not offer commentary into the discussion until the girls start to discuss alternative activities the girls could undertake:

Example 5

- 1 Aretha: I don't wanna play like that.
 2 I wanna play (.) where-
 3 No- nobody even wants to bribe
 4 them or something like that.
 5 To make us play.
 6 I wanna play because-
 7 I wanna have fun,
 8 *hh And they wanna have fun,
 9 *hh Playing with me.
 10 Sarah: No. Aretha- why are we doing this.
 11 'Cause they're like- letting us get to th-
 12 They're- getting to us.
 13 That shouldn't happen.
 14 We should go do something and have fun.
 15 (4.0) Right Aretha?
 16 Aretha: Only reason Kathy's over there
 17 Is she thinks Emi's the most popular-

- 18 So she wants to be with Emi.
 19 Sarah: [No. They're probably talking about us! I bet you!
 20 ['Cause everybody'll do what Emi says-
 21 Aretha: Emi thinks she's the most popular and you know it.
 22 Sarah: Let's go do something.
 23 Let's not let this bug us.
 24 Aretha: There's nothing else to do Sarah. ((*plaintively*))
 25 Sarah: Let's go-
 26 Sarah: Play on the [teeter totter.
 27 Angela: [We could play on the swings.
 28 Angela: What-
 29 Aretha: I like sitting here and being mad and talking about people.
 30 Sarah: Eh heh-heh!
 31 Angela: eh hih-hih!
 32 Sarah: I decided to leave. ((*getting up from bench and standing behind Aretha*))
 33 Angela: ((*puts leg over bench facing Aretha*))
 34 Angela: Well what can you do. I mean like
 35 I- I mean like- you guys are like-
 36 I don't judge anybody because you guys know,
 37 that like I just, you know, follow you guys.

In producing Aretha's talk, several contrasts are made explicit through the use of parallel structures. Aretha contrasts the way in which the girls are currently being treated with the way in which she would ideally like to be treated. In so doing, she makes use of *format-tied* structures that make vivid the type of social world she envisions:

- [I don't wanna play] [like that.]
 [I wanna play (.)] [where No- nobody even wants to bribe
 them or something like that.]
 [I wanna play because-] I wanna have fun *hh
 And they wanna have fun
 *hh playing with me."

The activity of evaluating someone who has offended the group, violating an implicit norm of not excluding people from play, occasions the discussion of other breaches of kids playing ball with Sean as well. In lines 16 through 18, Aretha launches a discussion about the pejorative aspects of two other girls, Kathy and Emi, who were permitted to play. As with other preadolescent children (Adler & Adler, 1998; Eder, 1985), being "popular" was a principal value of the clique, and many discussions centered on perceptions of popularity. Aretha critiques Kathy for wanting to be

with someone who is popular (lines 16–18) and Emi for thinking she is the most popular (line 21). In response to Aretha, Sarah reinstates her initial directive plea for doing something else (line 15) with “Let’s not let this bug us” (line 23). It is at this point that Aretha eloquently presents a meta-commentary on the activity at hand. With her statement “I like sitting here and being mad and talking about people,” she provides an explicit gloss on the activity at hand as well as her alignment, pleasure, toward that activity.

THE COLLABORATIVE CONSTRUCTION OF A RELATIONSHIP CATEGORY: *TAG-ALONG*

Pomerantz and Mandelbaum (2005) argued that participants to conversation achieve and renew their relationships with one another through the act of “talking and acting in ways that are recognizably bound with relationship categories” (p. 153). An explicit naming of Angela’s relationship category vis-à-vis others in the popular clique emerges from the ensuing conversation in Example 6 (a continuation of Example 5 previously). Following the girls’ complaints about having been excluded from the baseball game, Angela initiates talk about her status as someone who does not join in any judgmental commentary on others because her primary activity is to *follow* the girls in the popular clique (lines 1–5). Later in the conversation, she provides an explicit statement about her relationship category with “I’M A *TAG-ALONG* °girl°!” (line 21). Through this explicit reference to the category “tag-along girl” (line 21) and depiction of her activities of *following*, Angela collaborates in building a local portrait of herself as someone who is peripheral to the local social group:

Example 6

- 1 Angela: I- I mean like- you guys are like-
 2 I don’t judge anybody because you guys know,
 3 that like I just, you know, follow you guys.
 4 ((*shoulder moves in time with words*))
 5 [wherever you guys go, but um,
 6 Sarah: [You’re like a tag. You tag along. ((*left palm*
 7 *extended with arm bent toward Angela*))
 8 Basically- [Angela tags along.=
 9 Angela: [So,
 10 Sarah: That’s it.=right?

- 11 Angela: So li [ke- Yeah. ((*shoulder shrug*))
 12 Sarah: [Right Angela? Admit it. eh heh heh!
 13 Angela: Yeah like- [whatever.
 14 Sarah: [ADMIT IT ANGELA!
 15 Sarah: [ADMIT IT! ((*extends arms palm up to Angela*))
 16 Angela: [OKAY! ((*leaning toward Sarah*))
 17 Sarah: Say it. “You:: (.) are:: (.) I: am a: (.) ”
 18 ((*using hands as if conducting on each beat,*))
 19 *then extends hands palm up toward Angela*
 20 *as if asking her to complete the utterance.*)
 21 Angela: I’M A TAG-ALONG °girl°! ((*jerks body in*
 22 *direction of Sarah*))
 (0.4)
 23 Sarah: Good girl! eh heh!
 24 Angela: °°I’m gonna get you! ((*play fight*))
 25 Sarah: heh-heh Oka(h)y.
 26 heh-heh [hnh-hnh-hnh-hnh-hnh!
 27 Angela: [Okay!

In this example, Angela (lines 1–5) describes her position as someone who does not enter into the group by *judging* others but merely *follows* other girls. Sarah (lines 6–8) then provides an explicit commentary on Angela’s status in the group as someone who follows other girls with her utterance: “You’re like a tag. You tag along.” Sarah (lines 10, 12, 14–15) asks Angela to publicly “admit” to the identity (Antaki & Widdicombe, 1998) that she has explicated and that she takes up within the popular group: “ADMIT IT ANGELA!” Sarah tells Angela exactly what she needs to repeat (line 17). When Angela states “I’M A TAG-ALONG °girl°” (line 21). Sarah provides the evaluative commentary “Good Girl!”

Pomerantz and Mandelbaum (2005) argued that when participants engage in behavior appropriate to a particular relationship category, and one’s interlocutor ratifies the action or practice, participants establish “their incumbencies in their respective relationship categories” (p. 155). In this sequence the relationship of “tag-along” girl and the behaviors associated with it are made explicit. This members’ category provides a gloss that depicts the way that girls treat Angela as a peripheral group member throughout the afternoon’s interactions. When she makes comments into the talk about the excluders, her comments are either ridiculed or ignored. Although Sarah and Aretha summon each other’s attention, Angela is never explicitly addressed. Here the category “tag-along” into which Angela is cast and that she herself ratifies, is relevant to the interactional business of the encounter.

STANCE AND ALIGNMENT IN BODY POSITIONING

Alignment is displayed not only through the sequential organization of moves; in addition, it is made visible through body positioning in the midst of talk. In the following, Aretha begins to complain about how Janis (the girlfriend of Sean) positions herself as someone who is *popular* because she has Spice Girls paraphernalia everywhere (the latest fads) and wears *the most popular clothes*. Sarah contrasts her own world view with Janis's, saying "People like me for who I am and not how I look!" Next, Sarah explicitly summons Aretha as her addressee (line 3). Clearly indicating the girls' friendship alliance, she utilizes as her address term the identity category "Girlfriend!"(line 3):

Example 7

- 1 Sarah: BECAUSE I AM NOT TREN DY:!! ((*taps Aretha's knee*))
 2 People like me for who I am and not how I look.
 3 Girlfriend! Gimme some- ((*arm around Aretha*))
 4 ((*assumes glamor girl pose, hand behind head*))
 5 Gimme some sugah.
 6 ((*drapes body over Aretha, assumes glamor pose*))
 7 Aretha: Gimme some- Gimme some dap!
 8 ((*Aretha and Sarah execute a 3-beat hand clap game*))
 9 Sarah: Here's the sugar.
 10 Here's the su[gar! eh heh-heh!
 11 Angela: [Woe woe! Woe woe! ((*A and A clap*))
 12 Woe- woe-Ow!
 13 Aretha: eh heh heh!!
 14 Sarah: Neh neh! [ow:::!! ((*Angela and Sarah clap*))
 15 Angela: [Ow::: [;! !
 16 Aretha: [Eh heh-heh! heh-heh!

As she continues "Gimme some- Gimme some sugah," Sarah drapes her body around Aretha's body and assumes the position of a glamorous model while Angela looks on (line 6; see Figure 5).

Aretha's next move reciprocates with "Gimme some- Gimme some dap" (meaning *give me some love*). Sarah, who changes her draped position to face Aretha, next engages in a hand clap with her, as the girls pound fists in celebration of their agreement about Janis's character. Together Aretha and Sarah then begin a three-beat exchange of poundings with closed fists: a first player hits the partner's rounded fist from above, the players reverse



FIGURE 5 Sarah embracing Aretha during a glamor pose.

positions, and the second player hits from above; and then both knock fists sideways in the final move of the three-part fist pounding exchange (see Figure 6).

The exchange begins with poundings of paired fists between Sarah and Aretha; although Angela eventually joins in (line 11), chanting “Woe woe! Woe woe!,” she enters after Aretha and Sarah have collaboratively begun their moves together (see Figure 7).

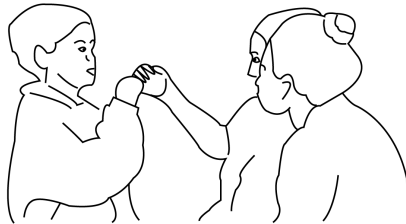
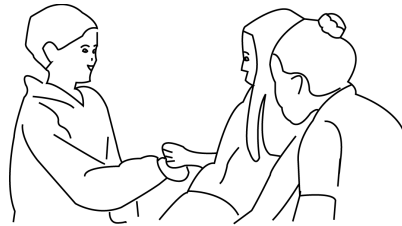


FIGURE 6 Fist pounding celebrating mutual alignment against Sean and Janis.

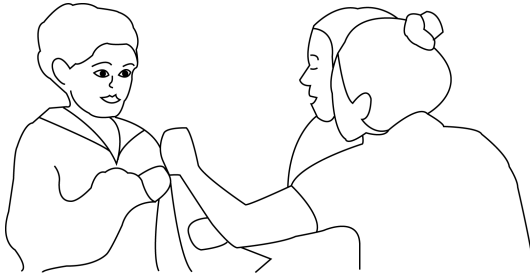


FIGURE 7 Angela's delayed entry into celebratory fist pounding.

In another related example, the girls discuss Janis's conception of herself as *popular*. Aretha states "Janis does everything that's trendy. She thinks she's so popular 'cause she stays up to date." The girls critique Janis, saying that she is trying to look like her boyfriend Sean by wearing trendy shorts (lines 1–4). As Sarah provides a next move to Aretha's condemnation of Janis, she states "Sean has a shirt like that! Sean has a shirt like that!" Next, she repeats "Girl!" six times and then the explicit identity category "Gi(hh)rlfriend!" (lines 7–9):

Example 8

- 1 Aretha: You know how boys wear their shorts?
 2 They look like she's trying to be like-
 3 She wants to- *h match Sean! ((*eyeball roll*))
 (0.8)
 4 So she's wearing some tren [dy-
 5 Sarah: ((*chanting*)) [Sean has a shirt like that!]
 6 Sean has a shirt like that!
 7 ((*high fives Aretha*)) Girl! Girl! Girl!
 (0.4)
 8 Girl! Girl! (0.3) Girl! eh heh-heh!
 9 Gi(hh)rlfriend!

As the girls celebrate their congruent negative assessment of Janis, they produce hand claps (lines 6–8; see Figures 8 and 9).

Initially, only Sarah and Aretha join together in the clapping. When Angela attempts to join such configurations, it is as a peripheral participant, over the shoulders of the girl she is sitting behind (see Figure 10). Quickly after Angela joins in the hand clapping, Aretha releases her hands from the endeavor, and the configuration is dismantled.

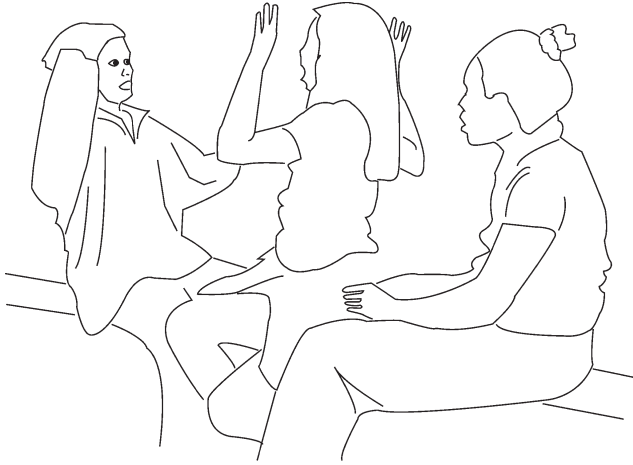


FIGURE 8 Aretha and Sarah's initial collaborative clap with Angela at distance.

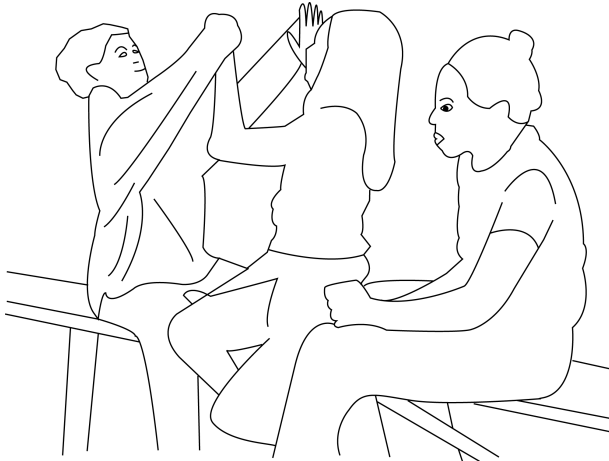


FIGURE 9 Stage 2 of Aretha and Sarah's collaborative clap.

Integrating the body into the analysis of talk-in-interaction has been important in a number of linguistic anthropological studies. Duranti (1992, 1994) has examined how through the interplay of speech, gaze, posture, and material resources, actors and action are defined in the Samoan Fono where important political events occur. Keating (1998) examined how



FIGURE 10 Angela's delayed entry into the celebratory collaborative clap.

hierarchy is collaboratively constructed in Pohnpei, Micronesia, by lower and higher status participants through honorific speech and body positioning.³ Here we see how the posturing of the body relative to other participants affords differentiated types of participation with respect to the activity at hand. Friendship between Aretha and Sarah is made visible through the orientation of their bodies as well as their talk. Whereas Aretha and Sarah are situated vis-à-vis one another, Angela is positioned behind Sarah. She is the last to join in fist pounding or hand clapping, activities that celebrate a congruent worldview with respect to the kids who have excluded the girls from the game.

CONCLUSION

As argued by Kyratzis (2004) in her important *Annual Review of Anthropology* article, children socialize one another and constitute their own notions of valued identities through interaction with peers. Assessments provide an important window into understanding the processes through which peers come to construe events and objects of value and thus lie at the heart of processes of achieving intersubjectivity. Through the use of *format tying*, a number of important concerns are openly discussed by the girls and presented as contrasting ways of organizing social experience. The girls voice a desire for a more equitable playing field in which participants

“want to have fun” and include others as contrasted with playing because someone “wants to bribe them or something like that.” They contrast the way in which Sean is “nice” to Janis with the way he is “assholes” to them despite their superior athletic ability. The girls critique other girls for thinking oneself more popular than others, wanting to put oneself above others by wearing the latest fashions and acquiring objects sporting symbols of popular culture. In that quite frequently complaints are articulated in terms of contrast classes of actions (I want X; I don’t want Y), the analyst has available a procedure for coming to terms with the moral framework that the girls themselves articulate in the process of formulating how they view the actions under review as offensive. When Sarah states “People like me for who I am and not how I look!,” she makes explicit two very different standards for evaluating one’s friends.

Providing a next move to an assessment entails important interactional competence, as the appropriateness of one’s move is itself subject to evaluation by interlocutors to the present interaction. Aretha and Sarah demonstrated their similar forms of alignment toward the objects being evaluated through repetition: They not only produced congruent assessments simultaneously but also provided gestures accompanying their talk that mirrored one another. Aretha and Sarah explicitly targeted each other as next speaker through address terms and body orientation, responded to actions soliciting them to be next speakers, and ratified the talk of the other. In these ways, they performed conversational actions that displayed and maintained incumbency in the relationship category of friends. By way of contrast, Angela was treated as marginal to the activity at hand and even ridiculed for the contributions she made into the assessment activity. After Angela defined herself as someone who did not enter into judging activities of the other girls, Sarah asked Angela to publicly go on record as occupying the incumbent relationship category of *tag-along*. Placing herself in the capacity of judge of Angela’s performance, she then evaluated her with “Good girl.”

Gossip is commonly considered an occasion for group members to express their common world view and “social bonds” with respect to someone not in the immediate presence who has violated group norms. In her examination of the sequential organization of talk in gossip events, Eder (1995, p. 110) noted that once someone supports a first critical remark, others follow suit and join in the initial criticism. Feelings of righteous indignation toward the offender generate similar types of stances with respect to an absent party whose actions are under scrutiny. The data presented here

supports studies that have argued that gossip provides forms of public actions through which girls can sanction behavior viewed as outside the bounds of acceptability (Eder, 1995; Tovares, 2006). However, my study does not agree with findings that gossip provides a way of “cementing friendship,” “creating intimacy” (Tovares, 2006, p. 467), or maintaining “good social relationships” (Coates, 1998, p. 244; Jones, 1980).

Although talk about absent others may indeed constitute a way to affirm friendships, it can also be used to create differentiated identities among those present to the gossip event. In the girls’ gossip sessions I have observed, although members of the group may position themselves in similar ways toward the target of the gossip, group members participate in vastly different ways. Aretha and Sarah’s bodily alignment displayed a facing formation that included themselves as principal ratified participants. By way of contrast, Angela’s position was peripheral to the primary dyadic unit. When Aretha and Sarah were seated vis-à-vis one another, at points with Sarah’s body enveloping Aretha, Angela was either standing or seated behind Sarah. When Angela attempted to join in the talk, she was frequently ridiculed, laughed at, or openly sanctioned. Her participation in the gossip talk was as a peripheral participant rather than a principal, ratified participant. Only by reaching her arms over the shoulders of Sarah did she gain access to Aretha’s hands in a high-five celebration of their mutual distaste for the way they had been treated by Janis.

Most studies of relationship categories as well as gossip deal rather exclusively with talk; few analyze forms of embodied actions that are interactively employed to enact incumbency in social identities (Pomerantz & Mandelbaum, 2005, p. 169). Through focusing on participation in the midst of assessment sequences, I have shown how participants can display their friendship and engagement with others, or, alternatively, their feelings of disdain and disgust toward present interlocutors. Through examination of body positioning and gesture as well as talk, these differentiated forms of participation become visible and call into question stereotypical notions of female gossip activity or relational talk (Evaldsson, 2007). Forms of disagreement, insult, and other face-threatening activities of children challenge notions of a social cohesion principle, the idea that underlying human activity is a bias toward promoting social solidarity and avoiding or inhibiting conflict (Lerner, 1996). In the midst of collaborating in gossip, an activity that bands individuals together against adversaries, one finds forms of social competition amongst the interlocutors, differentiating them. By moving children from the margins to the center of linguistic analysis and

including nonvocal as well as vocal forms of communication, one can refine their view concerning the micropolitics of social life, examining how competition and collaborative action coinhabit the interaction order.

NOTES

- 1 Angela is not only physically distant from the other girls. When Angela makes bids to talk, she is often treated as a peripheral participant whose contributions to the talk do not even warrant responses. For example, with respect to the interaction in Figure 2, although on the particular occasion of this interaction, Angela made five requests to have a potato chip from a bag that was being passed around for every other girl, her requests were never answered.
- 2 As Sacks (1995b, pp. 438–443) argued, one tenet of conversation is that one should not tell someone something they already know.
- 3 Other studies examining social space include Hanks (1996) who analyzed how spirit forces work in a Mani-Oxkutzcab Yucatec Mayan village through a form of participation that includes a configuration of spaces, objects, genres, and participants and Sidnell (1998) who showed how the interactional construction of space is tied to social power in a dispute in an Indo-Gyanese village.

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