Article

'I'm not gonna hit a lady': Conversation analysis, membership categorization and men's denials of violence towards women

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Abstract

This article examines the way male suspects deny accusations of assaulting women in interrogations by police officers. It draws on a large corpus of British police interrogation materials, and uses conversation analysis to shed light on the location and design of, and responses to, suspects' 'category-based denials' that they are not 'the kind of men who hit women'. Two sections of analysis identify how, first, such denials routinely follow police officers' direct questions about violent behaviour, and, second, how they become embedded in extended narratives that are not directly describing violence. In contrast to other discourse-analytic studies of men's accounts of violence towards women, the article unpacks the component features that comprise what others might label grossly as the 'discourse of gendered violence'. Rather than see how such 'discourses' operate in interview contexts, it shows how suspects construct, in a high-stakes setting for a particular purpose, different categories of men, claiming membership in one (who do not hit women) by recruiting the notion of the other (who do). Thus, in addition to its contribution to the study of gender and violence, the article takes new steps in the ongoing development of membership categorization and conversation analysis, showcasing a type of systematic sequential analysis that can be done with membership categories.

Keywords

conversation analysis, gender, membership categorization, neighbour complaints, police interrogation, violence

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Introduction

This article examines the topic of gendered violence. In particular, it examines the way men who have been arrested deny accusations of assaulting women in subsequent interrogations by the police. Drawing on a large corpus of police interview materials, the analysis will focus on the location and design of, and responses to, suspects' denials. It will also examine the way suspects draw distinctions between the types of men who do, and do not, perpetrate violence towards women.

The article has two main aims. First, by examining the way denials of assault are designed, and the accounts that are used to shore up such denials, it contributes to the study of gender and violence. Within the massive, interdisciplinary literature on gender, domestic and public, physical and sexual violence, there is already a wealth of discourse-based research that examines (mostly) heterosexual (mostly) men's accounts of such violence against (mostly) women. Much of this work elicits narrative descriptions of violent events from participants, and identifies the types of accounts and explanations men give for them. The most commonly reported accounts include blaming the victim, minimizing the violence, claiming a lack of control, and remorse (e.g. Adams et al., 1995; Cavanagh et al., 2001; Eisikovits et al., 1999; Pogrebin et al., 2006; Wood, 2004). Analysis of grammar, rhetoric and other linguistic features that comprise such accounts often focus on the way perpetrators and others (e.g. judges, lawyers) evade responsibility for, and remove agency from, their acts (e.g. Coates et al., 1994; Coates and Wade, 2004; Ehrlich, 2001; Frazer and Miller, 2009; Wallach and Sela, 2008).

Within this literature, many researchers have made the connection between accounts of violence and the discourse of hegemonic masculinity (e.g. Boonzaier, 2008; Connell, 1995; Mullaney, 2007; Wood, 2004), as well as between violence and identity more generally (e.g. Buchbinder and Eisikovits, 2004; McKenedy, 2006; Pogrebin et al., 2006). It is widely reported that 'men who harm women often do so when their sense of traditional manhood – such as being a breadwinner or having women meet their often-unspoken needs – is threatened' (Schrock and Padavic, 2007: 628). Anderson and Umberson (2001: 359) similarly claim that 'batterers attempt to construct masculine identities through the practices of violence and the discourse about violence that they provide' (see also Adams et al., 1995). Other types of identity matters were identified in Wood's (2004) analysis of interviews with men who have committed 'intimate partner violence'. Wood claimed that, in addition to victim-blaming accounts, the men described themselves as 'not the abusive type', or 'not a violent person'. These sorts of claims, she argued, 'functioned to differentiate or disassociate participants from "real abusers"' (p. 561). Wood includes such claims in the same category as other 'dissociative' strategies such as formulating disbelief (e.g. 'Was that really me?', 'Did I actually do what I did?') or claiming that the person who committed the assault was 'not their real self'.

This article also focuses on men's identity claims and the way their denials of violence trade on being 'not the type to hit women'. However, unlike Wood's analysis that groups such a claim with other strategies of 'dissociation', the current article examines how such claims are designed to accomplish a *specific* action (denying an accusation) in a *specific* context in which the outcome of the interaction is highly consequential for the man in question. This takes us to the article's second aim, which is to encourage the study of

men's accounts of violence based in the naturally occurring institutional settings in which they are produced, and away from the collection and analysis of experiential narrative-elicited research interviews. The majority of the research reviewed above involves researchers interviewing men who have admitted the violent or sexual assault of a woman, often their partner (e.g. Adams et al., 1995; Anderson and Umberson, 2001; Boonzaier, 2008; Bostock et al., 2009; Cavanagh et al., 2001; Eisikovits et al., 1999; McKenedy, 2006; Pogrebin et al., 2006; Wood, 2004). While participants are often drawn from the prison population or domestic violence programmes, very few analyse, say, the encounters between men and the professionals that deal with them (notable exceptions include Auburn and Lea, 2003; Auburn et al., 1995; Ehrlich, 2001; Schrock and Padavic, 2007).

Although the social sciences are dominated by interview methods, their limitations are also well-documented (e.g. Potter and Hepburn, 2005; Rapley, 2001). One problem is that the analysis of interview materials often disregards the researcher-saturated setting of the data's production. Even if the interviewer's questions are included as part of the analysis (which they often are not), the data produced is a researcher-guided interaction that has *no other purpose* than being a research interview. The stakes are low, for the men being interviewed. Yet interview-based researchers often treat accounts as unproblematically meaningful beyond the context of their production. There is little reflection on the way accounts might be designed differently for particular recipients (e.g. a police officer, a lawyer, a therapist, the victim's family and so on). There is also little discussion of how the design and function of accounts might differ according to the differing institutional and interactional contingencies that are relevant to, say, minimizing one's crime in a police interrogation, versus being seen to 'accept responsibility' in an offender treatment programme.

By studying the institutional setting of police interviews with suspects, this article examines encounters in which suspects' accounts, and the responses they receive from police officers, matter for the trajectory of the interaction. It is in these interviews that 'real life events' are narrated and formulated to fit 'categories of crime' (Edwards, 2008). A common feature of police interviews is that suspects and police officers may negotiate the category or level of crime a suspect ends up being charged with (e.g. 'reckless' versus 'intentional' criminal damage; 'racially aggravated' versus non-aggravated assault – see Stokoe and Edwards, 2008). Thus, the language used and accounts constructed by suspects may be powerful in determining the type of crime they are charged with, or, indeed, whether they are charged at all.

Data and method

The UK data set comprises approximately 120 tape-recorded interviews between police officers and arrested (but not yet charged) suspects, which took place at police stations in the Midlands area of the UK during 2003–4, and were collected as part of ongoing research on neighbour disputes and conflict.[1] The recordings were made by police officers as a routine procedure for potential use in court. The topics under discussion were mainly neighbourhood crime and other community or 'antisocial behaviour' problems including assault, harassment and criminal damage. The interviews were digitized on-site at the Constabulary's data storage department, anonymized, and transcribed using Jefferson's (2004) system for conversation analysis. I examined episodes of talk in which

gender categories and category-implicative descriptions cropped up in conjunction with talk about violence. I identified numerous instances of the phrase 'I wouldn't' or 'I don't hit women' and its variants, which are the focus of the current article. For each instance, I examined its location in the ongoing interaction, the design of the turn in which it appeared, and the action(s) being done in that turn. I also examined the design and action-orientation of police officers' responses, and whether they topicalized the categorial phrase itself or responded to the 'primary action' (Robinson, 2004) of the turn.

I combined this sequential analysis approach with Sacks' (1992) and subsequent insights about membership categorization (e.g. Hester and Eglin, 1997), focusing particularly on the way speakers assembled category, activity and predicate combinations in aggregate with their sequential organization to accomplish social action. Sacks' interest in categories was in the way they are hearably linked together by native speakers of a culture. He provides this now-classic example taken from a published collection of children's written stories: 'The baby cried. The mommy picked it up' (Sacks, 1972). Sacks claimed that we hear that the mommy is the mommy of the baby because of an explanatory apparatus he called the Membership Categorization Device (MCD). In this case, the MCD of 'family' collects together the categories 'mommy' and 'baby'. Categories are linked to particular actions ('category-bound activities') or characteristics ('natural predicates') which, in turn, proffer conventional expectations about what constitutes a 'mommy's' or 'baby's' normative behaviour, such that absences are accountable.

In the data examined, suspects treat the category 'man' and the activity 'hitting women' as tied in such a way that formulations in which such items appear can be put to practical use. The reasoning by which categories and activities go together is not, however, a strictly linguistic or logical kind of entailment. Rather, it is a common sense, normative practice in which inferences and implications are generated and managed in actual stretches of talk, with regard to particular states of affairs or narrative accounts (Stokoe, 2004). Thus, any analysis of categories does not assume from the outset which ones will be relevant to any interaction, and which categories and activities participants may combine. As Schegloff (2007a: 475) argues, we need evidence that the 'participants' production of the world was itself informed by … particular categorization devices … that the parties were oriented to that categorization device in producing and understanding – moment-by-moment – the conduct that composed its progressive realization'.

In addition to focusing on the particulars of gender-based talk about violence, a subsidiary aim of this article is to contribute to the ongoing development of work on membership categorization and conversation analysis; what Wilkinson and Kitzinger (2008: 565) describe as one of the 'most vibrant areas' in contemporary conversation analysis. The analysis presented demonstrates the way categories like 'gender' can be analysed systematically, as they get embedded in the sequential organization of talk (see Schegloff, 2007a; Stokoe, 2006). It will do this by showing how the same categories appear in the same sorts of phrases, and in the same action-oriented environments – in contrast to the notion that 'categorial' topics are not systematically capturable beyond the research interview (see Stokoe and Edwards, 2007, for more on this debate). This type of analysis is facilitated, in part, by the fact that institutional materials share distinct, overarching structural organizations; that is, police interviews contain the same basic phases (e.g. opening identification sequence, suspect's initial narrative testimony, questioning and presenting

counter-testimony, etc.) with action types occurring predictably (e.g. questions, accusa-
tions, denials, mitigations, etc.; see Heritage, 2005; Zimmerman, 1992, on the structural
organization of talk in a variety of other institutional settings). As I will show, this means
that numerous candidate examples of the phenomenon of interest can be juxtaposed, and
it is partly through this juxtaposition that the case can be made for claiming a general
practice.

The analysis is divided into two sections. The first section examines how category-
based denials are occasioned in response to questions about a particular allegation of vio-
lent or abusive behaviour. The second focuses on men's denials of violence towards women
in extended narrative accounts that are not responsive to any question in particular.

Analysis

Accounting for denials of violence in response to questions

In Extract 1, the suspect (S) has been arrested for criminal damage following a confron-
tation with a male neighbour, Richard, and his partner, Jane. S tells the police officer (P)
that Richard already has an assault charge against S, and S claims that the couple have
been intimidating him and his girlfriend. S admits to ripping up the couple's fence. S has
admitted to verbally abusing Richard. Here, P is asking S if he also abused Jane.

Extract 1: PN-63

1	P:	What about Jane.=what about ab<u>u</u>se towards Jane:.
2		(0.8)
3	S:	(Well-) when she started abusing <u>m</u>:e I believe I
4		said some things b<u>a</u>:ck.=Yet when she says he's got
5		a <u>r</u>ight to go where he wants, he's with me: well,
6		(.) I believe I said some things back yeh.
7		(0.2)
8	S:	D'you know warramean.
9		(0.3)
10	P:	You <u>thre</u>aten 'er at all.
11		(0.4)
12	S:	No I didn't threaten 'er.
13		(0.8)
14	?:	.hhhhh
15	S: →	I've got no reason to threaten 'e<u>:r</u>, I've never 'it a
16		woman in my life.=an' I never will 'it a woman in my life.
17		(0.8)
18	P:	( ) heard the front door. ((reading from statement))

Unsurprisingly, the suspects' main business in police interrogations is often denying the
charges put to them. In this extract, the police officer (P) asks two questions of the suspect
(S). The first, at line 1, takes the form of a wh- question, rather than the interrogative

format we see at line 10. Yet its function is to ask S whether or not he abused Jane. S's answer is an admission, but embedded in an account: he reciprocated verbal abuse that was *initiated* by Jane, not him. Note also the repeated use of the epistemic marker 'I believe', which downgrades or hedges his responsibility for his verbal abuse of Jane. His turn ends with the 'answer' to the function of P's question ('yeh'), but only after he has established the circumstances for this admission.

P's second question asks S whether or not he 'threatened' Jane. In this case, S first answers the question with a denial (line 12) and then provides an account (lines 15–16). While P's question is about a *particular* person, S's response moves from the particular to the *general* via categorization. Here, then, is a first instance of how 'the ordinary workings of talk and other conduct in interaction serve to get categorization devices made relevant or activated' (Schegloff, 2007a: 477). S's account is built as three items in a list, the first of which attends to the police-relevant issue of 'motive' and addresses the woman in question ('I've got *no reason* to threaten 'e:r'). The second item, 'I've never 'it a woman in my life', addresses a generalized category using the indefinite article 'a' ('a woman'). The third item ('I never will 'it a woman') includes the modal term 'will' (of which 'would' is a past tense form). Edwards (2006: 475) has shown how, when denying a charge put to them, suspects may use such modalized declaratives to 'claim a disposition to act in ways inconsistent with whatever offence they are accused of'. Here, because S *would not in general* do the action he is charged with, he *did not do it this time*. Taken together, items two and three categorize S as the *kind* of man who, as a part of his *disposition* or *character*, does not 'hit women' *in general*. This is because the 'I' is an instance of what Jackson (2010) calls a 'gendered I', a self-referential pronoun which 'can be rendered hearably gendered in the context of its production'.

In S's answers to P's questions, two types of activity are constructed. While 'verbal abuse' is formulated as an activity of mutual engagement, S constructs 'threats', upgraded to the actual action of 'hitting', as something that men should not do to women. Note that P does not respond to S's self-categorization as the type of man who does not hit women (line 17); that is, he neither accepts nor rejects it as a piece of evidence but instead launches a new sequence about further witness testimony (see Edwards' [2006] analysis of other types of dispositional denials and police officers' responses to them). But neither does P display any trouble in recognizing the account by responding with, say, a repair initiator (e.g. 'huh?'). The recognizability of his account rests on shared knowledge of S's pairing of a 'category' with an 'activity'. That 'men' may 'hit women' is proffered as a possible category-bound activity; yet S denies membership in the category. S simultaneously recruits the culturally familiar notion that men perpetrate violence towards women (that is, there are gender-specific slots that map onto the categories 'perpetrator' and 'victim'), and uses it to deny that he is such a man, taking up a moral stance against 'men who hit women'.

In Extract 2, the suspect has been arrested on suspicion of the assault of a woman neighbour and for causing her actual bodily harm during an argument. The argument took place while both women's children were playing at S's house one evening, and S's husband was also present. S has denied assaulting the woman, who has injuries. This is the only example in which the suspect is a woman, but her denial is made, by proxy, for her husband.

Extract 2: PN-111b

```
    1    P:      Is there a- (0.2) do ↑you think there's any chance
    2            that anybody else could've hit her, (.) I mean
    3            whether it was:: I don't know whether your- ↑husband:
    4            had to use any force,
    5    S:      ~N(h)o.~
    6                    (0.4)
    7    P:      D'you think [your husband hit her¿]
  8 S: →                    [ N- my husband      ] would n:ever hit
    9       →    a woman,
   10                    (0.3)
   11    S:      He would never EVer
   12                    (.)
   13    S:      That's why he g- he like he grabbed hold of their
   14            .skuh um:: wrists to get them ~o:ff me.~
   15                    (0.2)
   16    S: →    Bu- that w- (0.4) (h)he would never EVer (0.4) hit
   17       →    anybody, (0.3) like that, (0.4) not a wo:man, (0.3)
   18       →    not ~ever.~
   19                    (1.3)
   20    P:      So,
   21                    (0.4)
   22    S:      .shih
   23                    (0.6)
   24    P:      How can you account for this woman's injur[ies.
   25    S:                                                [I ca:n't.
```

This sequence starts with P's interrogative-formatted question and candidate answer: that if S did not hit the woman perhaps S's husband did. S's tremulous '~N(h)o.~' (line 5) rejects the candidate answer (logically, she is not denying that someone other than someone else hit the woman). P then formulates his candidate answer into a direct question about the possible involvement of S's husband. The beginning of S's response (line 8) overlaps P's turn before it is possibly complete (it is neither grammatically, prosodically or action complete), and it is likely that the account she builds is tied to her first denial at line 5. We can see a pattern emerging across Extracts 1 and 2, in which P asks an interrogative-formatted question, S produces a preferred response (a 'no' denial), followed by a category-infused account for the denial, expanding the question–answer adjacency pair.

S's account, like the suspect's account in Extract 1, proffers a recognizable category–activity combination ('men' + 'hitting' + 'women'), but uses it to deny that her husband hit their neighbour because he is the kind of man who 'would n:ever hit a woman'. S reformulates her denial by, as we saw in Extract 1, repeating and upgrading claims ('He would never EVer'). S therefore moves from a *general* dispositional claim about her husband to a *specific* example of how his disposition as such a man accounts for his

actions in trying to stop the ensuing fight (lines 13–14), and then further upgrades the category-based denial (lines 16–18). Like Extract 1, while there is no uptake from the police officer at transition-relevant places (lines 10, 12, 15, 19), who continues to question S (lines 20, 24), neither is there any sense that P does not recognize this categorial formulation and S's moral stance towards men who hit women.

In Extract 3, S has been arrested on suspicion of causing actual bodily harm to his male and female neighbours, a couple. The incident took place after S spotted the couple taking photographs of him while he sat naked in his living room at night with the curtains open. According to witness testimony, the couple were trying to collect evidence that S exposed himself; S's version is that he has a skin condition that makes wearing clothes uncomfortable. S has admitted assaulting the man, but, in the extract that follows, is denying assaulting the woman.

Extract 3: PN-61

```
 1    P1:    .hhhh D'you remember kickin' 'er:=
 2    S:     =No. Not he:r.
 3                   (0.9)
 4    S:     I do the man but not 'er no.
 5                   (1.7)
 6    P1:    .pt so you've not kicked her at all.
 7                   (0.9)
 8    S:     °No.°
 9                   (2.2)
10    S:     Swung 'er about, kept 'er off me that's all.
11                   (2.4)
12    P1:    D'y'member 'er falling down to the gro:und.
13    S:     .hhhhhhhh
14                   (0.3)
15    S:     ↑M:ye:ah. >See I wer-< I was pullin' 'er u- (0.2) ar- ar
16           pullin' 'er arm t'kee- keep 'er awa:y from me like.<an'
17           I swung 'er a:rm like that.=Don't forget I'm still this
18           ra:ge, an- (0.4) an: uh she fell t- fell t- fell to the
19           la:wn.
20                   (1.1)
21    S: →   But the way's not to kick a ↑wo↓man as you
22           might say.
23                   (.)
24    S: →   I wouldn't d:o that..shih
25                   (0.8)
26    S: →   Wouldn't be ri:ght (0.2) tuh- f'me to do ↓that.
27           ((papers rustl[ing))
28    P2:→              [But [you'd kick a bloke] in the 'ead three=
29    S:                     [(            )]
30    P2:    =ti:mes.
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31                      (0.3)
32    S:    .hhhhhhh HHH well, hhhh he was my main concern of what
33          was: (0.5) my main upset at the time was the bloke
34          that- wh- he was the one with the camera.
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This sequence begins after P1 has read out the female neighbour's statement, in which she alleges that S has kicked her to the ground. P1 asks S if he remembers 'kickin' 'e:r'. S's answer is built across two turn construction units: 'No. Not 'er', and another turn which follows a lack of uptake from P1 (line 4). S's answer therefore reiterates his earlier admission of kicking one neighbour, but not the other. At line 6, P1 formulates S's testimony: 'so you've not kicked her at all', which S treats as a redoing of the question. Again, he denies the action of 'kicking' (line 8), but this time, after a lengthy gap develops, he admits to a much-downgraded action (with regards to its seriousness and criminal relevance) designed to halt the incident: 'Swung 'er about, kept 'er off me that's all'.

P1 then asks if S remembers the woman 'falling down to the gro:und'. Note P1's use of the intransitive verb 'fall' at this point: S might well state that he saw his neighbour 'fall' (which does not imply agency on S's part), while not admitting to 'pushing' her to the ground. S answers '↑M:ye:ah', then elaborates upon his earlier description at line 10, claiming to 'pull' the woman on her 'arm' to 'keep 'er awa:y from me like' (line 16). S states that he 'swung 'er a:rm … an' uh she fell t- fell t- fell to the la:wn'. Note the details of this formulation: S also uses the intransitive verb 'fell', and reformulates P1's locative term 'ground' to 'lawn', which further works to: downgrade the potential seriousness of S's actions, given that 'lawns' provide a relatively softer landing.

After a gap and no uptake from either police officer, S produces the target utterance, which further accounts for his answer at line 15: 'But the way's not to kick a ↑wo↓man as you might say. (.) I wouldn't ↑do th:at' (lines 21–24). As in previous extracts, note S's move from a general, scripted claim ('the way's … '; cf. Edwards, 1994) to a specific one ('I wouldn't … '), and the coupling of 'wouldn't' with a generalized formulation of the gender category 'a ↑wo↓man', rather than the particular woman he is accused of kicking. S then reiterates his denial: 'Wouldn't be ri:ght (0.2) tuh- f'me to do ↓that'. In his follow-up question, P2 invokes S's denial: 'But you'd kick a bloke in the 'ead three ti:mes' (lines 28–30), which S does not challenge. Note that P2 also uses a generalized gender category – 'a bloke' here, that orients to 'a woman' as a member of a contrastive relational pair: both S and P are therefore oriented to the same membership categorization device.

Here, then, S admits assaulting another 'man', but denies assaulting a 'woman', making his own gender identity relevant. Such a denial works on the basis that assaulting members of *equivalent* categories – with regards to power, physical strength and vulnerability – is a more morally acceptable position than assaulting members of relatively 'weaker' categories (see Stokoe, 2009, on 'young' suspects' denials of assaulting 'old' people). Note the way S's denial is built: it starts with 'But the way's' and ends with 'as you might say'. These parts of the turn work to formulate the middle bit – 'not to kick a ↑wo↓man' – as commonsense and *idiomatic*, and, as such, reality-constructing with regards to the asymmetrical organization of a culture's categories. Indeed, all of these denials have an idiomatic flavour, which is evidenced partly by the juxtaposition of three different extracts in which the same kind of formulation is used.

In the next extract, S has been arrested on suspicion of criminal damage. S said that, on his way home to his mother's house, a neighbour and his friends (some 'Asian lads') watch him return. S asks the 'lads' 'what they are looking at' and a fight ensues. S admits to smashing the neighbour's window. P has been asking S about the extent of his actions – whether he tried to get into his neighbour's flat; whether he threatened him with a hammer. We join the interview as P puts a next question to S, and launches a new sequence.

Extract 4: PN-107

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  1                   (4.4)
  2    P:     .shih um: (1.6) did you say I'm gonna (0.2) terrorize
  3           ↓you now.
  4                   (0.2)
  5    S:     N:o.
  6                   (0.3)
  7    S:     I'm not a- hh (huh).
  8                   (0.4)
  9    S:     We 'ad an argument wiv 'im before ↓↓right [an' it=
 10    P:                                             [(Mm.)
 11    S:     =was 'is mi:ssus givin' y'mouth that time [like:
 12    P:                                              [Yep.
 13                   (0.2)
 14    S:     An' I said to 'er then I said look I (haven't)- I'm
 15           not about *↓trouble wiv you.*
 16                   (0.4)
 17    S: →   I said *if you: 'it me: I will go t'y'↓boyfriend.*
 18    P:     Yeh.
 19    S: →   Which is- (0.7) I'was- (.) I'm sayin' to 'er I will
 20        →  sort it out wiv y'boyfriend.=↑Not fightin' but- (0.3)
 21        →  I can't talk to a woman.
 22                   (0.2)
 23    P:     *Yeh*
 24                   (0.3)
 25    S:     An' (right/like-) (0.2) even (though) I- I will swear
 26           t'God (0.4) ↓I'm gonna fuckin' (.) (torture) 'im.
 27                   (1.2)
 28    P:     Yeh,
 29                   (1.0)
 30    P:     .shih um: ((moves on to another topic))
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After a long gap, P launches this new sequence with an interrogative, asking S whether he said he would 'terrorize' his neighbours (lines 1–3). The rest of this extract is given over to S's denial (line 5) and subsequent account that is punctuated with continuer turns from P (lines 10, 12, 18, 23, 28). At line 7, S begins what might be a self-categorizing turn ('I'm not a- hh (huh)', which, with its embedded laughter particle, displays an ironic

stance towards the key word in P's question ('terrorize'). S might have been headed for 'I'm not a terrorist', but instead treats the question, and the allegation it formulates, as laughable.

S then develops a narrative account in which he reports the man's 'mi:ssus' as 'giving him mouth' (line 11). However, S reports his response to her, saying that he has no '*↓trouble wiv you.*' and that if she hits him he will 'go t'y'↓boyfriend.*' (lines 14–17). S reiterates his position that he will not engage with the woman, but will 'sort it out wiv y'boyfriend' (lines 19–20). Note that S hurriedly fixes the possible resonances of 'sorting things out', and this will not include 'fighting'. Yet naming this activity makes it relevant, as S produces the category-based denial that he 'can't talk to a woman' (line 21). So here, although S is not in the business of denying violence towards the woman, his descriptions nevertheless construct him as the type of man who, when disputes arise, does not get into conflicts with women *in general*, such that he has not been in any such dispute with this woman *in particular*.

The final extract comes from an interview with a suspect arrested on suspicion of assaulting a police officer. The police officer was called to S's house after neighbours heard screams from his girlfriend, Angela. According to the officer, he tried to enter S's house to check on Angela's 'welfare', and S pushed him away. S denies this. We join the interview at a point where S and P are discussing how many other officers were present: S claims there were two, in contrast to the officer's claim that there were three.

Extract 5: PN-98

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 1    P:      Did you get their collar numbers,
 2                     (0.3)
 3    S:      No I di:dn't.=but one of 'em was a ni:ce (0.3)
 4            decent gee:zer.h
 5                     (0.3)
 6    S:      I- ( ) he said what's all this (ravin') about.
 7                     (0.8)
 8    S:      He- (0.9) ↑like I say I c'n- (.) understand (0.4)
 9            bein' (0.7) concerned for this-
10                     (0.4)
11    S:      [Angela because- (0.3) she- we were 'avin' a-=
12    P:      [(yeh.)
13    S:      =(.) argument.=know wharramean.
14                     (0.3)
15    S: →    She weren't gettin' beat up,=I don't 'it women,=you
16       →    know whadda mean.
17                     (0.7)
18    S:      Simple as 'at.
19                     (0.2)
20    P:      No 'e's not [sayin' that y'beat 'er up cos i-=
21    S:                  [( ).
22    P:      ='e didn't chance t'speak to 'er. (…)
```

P's opening question here is not about S's alleged assault itself, although it is notable that, as a man who may have hit his girlfriend, S produces the target category-based denial at a point where it may be less relevant to do so than in earlier examples. But like previous extracts, S responds to P's question and then launches an account. Here, S's account deals with the reason he allegedly assaulted the officer, and he admits that he was having an argument with his girlfriend prior to the officer's arrival (lines 11–13). S begins his account by describing the couple's activities as 'all this ravin'', and recruits the attending officer's own words to formulate the description. Notably, then, the attending officer does not describe a scene of 'domestic violence', but one of ordinary arguing. S orients to the possibility that a heated argument between a man and a woman may be cause for concern, but deletes such inferences as he continues with his account. At line 15, S contrasts the activities of 'arguin'' and 'ravin'', which he has admitted to, with the activity of 'beating', which he denies. As in previous extracts, S moves from denying an allegation about a specific person ('She weren't gettin' <u>bea</u>t up') to a generalized category-based denial ('I don't 'it women').

By contrasting the categories 'beating' with 'raving' and 'arguing', S proffers two possible readings of the scene encountered by the police officer, and suggests that while the 'domestic violence' scenario is one possible interpretation, in fact the parties were engaged in the usual sorts of arguments that couples have. At lines 13 and 15–16, S appeals for P to display a shared understanding about what 'arguments' are typically like ('know wharramean') and to understand that he is the kind of man who does not hit women ('you know whadda mean'). This might be a subtle appeal on the part of S to the category membership that he assumes he and P share – heterosexual men who know what relationships are like, and that he is the moral type of man, rather than the type who hits women. Note that P does not produce continuers following either of S's attempts to get P to affiliate with his claims (lines 14, 17). Instead, P continues to question S about the events in question.

In each of Extracts 1–5, we have seen that suspects' category-based accounts follow a question–answer adjacency pair. In each case, the suspect supplies a preferred response (either 'yes' or 'no') but then *expands* this basic sequence with an account (see Schegloff, 2007b, on the 'post-expansion' of basic adjacency pairs of turns). None of the police officers' questions, which are about specific persons, make relevant a generalized, *categorial* answer. Yet suspects *build* category-relevant environments from officers' questions in their accounts. Such accounts contain categorizations understandable only in a culture in which men frequently hit women, with *these* gender categories, in *this* order, with *this* particular agentive relationship. The categories 'men' and 'women' map onto another 'standardized relational pair' of categories: 'perpetrator–victim' (see Lee, 1984; Wowk, 1984). In other words, when violence is the activity, and the parties to the activity are men and women, it is readily 'seeable' which party is likely to assault the other. It is because of this normative relationship that 'women who hit men' is a newsworthy combination (e.g. Cook, 1997; Dowd, 2001). But suspects also partition the category 'men' into two kinds: those that hit women and those that do not.

In the second section of analysis, we examine the same category-based denial as it crops up in a less focal way; that is, in the midst of extended narratives about the events under description, rather than in response to questions about the specifics of the events per se.

Denials of violence in extended narrative accounts

In the first extract in this section, a suspect is in the midst of a narrative account of the events leading up to his arrest for criminal damage to his neighbour's car.

Extract 6: PN-6

```
 1    S:    I went round my mate's for a few beers hh
 2                  (2.5)
 3    S:    So I started about (0.2) four o'clock summat like that,
 4                  (1.9)
 5    S:    I don't know what time I got 'ome (.) (I-) wen' 'ome
 6                  (0.2)
 7    S:    S- started arguin' with my girlfriend over summat
 8          stupid. hh
 9                  (1.0)
10    S:    Can't really remember now, hh
11                  (0.4)
12    P:    Yeh
13                  (0.3)
14    S:    So I took it out on the front because mum an' dad didn't
15          wannit, (0.3) Dad's goin' bed, f- (0.2) for wh- bit o'
16          quiet, (1.0) u:m (0.8) 'is- 'is white Rover was outside
17  → (1.4) I was goin' mad hh (0.4) an' I'm- not gonna 'it
18  → my gi:rlfriend hh an' I seen 'is car there an' I- (0.5)
19          crunched (0.2) both of his: windows through.
20                  (0.6)
21    S:    °Simple.° that's how tha– ho:w it was,
22                  (1.9)
23    S:    Chhan't really remember much that hap– (but I know)
24          that's how it went: s'my'girlfriend told me. hh
25                  1.1)
26    P:    Ri:ght. okay,
27                  (0.4)
28    S:    She'll (sa:y the same thing,)
29                  (1.5)
30    P:    So y'say you took it out on the- (0.2) on a white Rover.
```

This extended turn follows P's invitation to S, at the start of the interview, to describe what happened on the day in question. So P's question, which occurred some time before the extract presented here, was designed to elicit a long narrative account from S. S reported that he visited a friend, and later had an argument with his girlfriend who presumably visited S at his parents' home (lines 1–10). So as not to disturb his parents, S reports that he 'took the row out on the front', where the neighbours' Rover car was parked. S further reports that he was 'goin' mad' (line 17) but, rather than ''it my

gi:rlfriend', he damaged the parked car. Although S remains with the specifics of hitting his girlfriend, rather than denying hitting women in general, he does generalize his claim to not hit her with the word 'gonna', which implies an ongoing disposition not to do so. At the end of the sequence, P formulates S's actions: that he 'took out' his aggression on the car (line 30).

In this instance, S's claim that he's 'not gonna 'it my gi:rlfriend' is a denial of a possible activity: that, in the middle of an argument, he might physically assault her. Like the suspect in Extract 5, S constructs a recognizable scene – an argument between a romantically involved man and woman – but denies engaging in one of the possible component features of such arguments. In contrast to Extract 5, the only denial that is relevant to the business of the interview is not damaging the car. However, S admits the damage. His denial of something he is not accused of therefore does other, moral, characterological work, constructing him as someone who does not hit other people when he is 'going mad' but inanimate objects. In so doing, S orients to a hierarchy of types of crime, in which assaulting another person is more serious than damaging property.

In Extract 7, S has been arrested on suspicion of using threatening and abusive words to a neighbour, under the Public Order Act. The police have also arrested and interviewed S's wife, about her alleged assault of her female neighbour following a long-standing neighbour dispute about noise. S has admitted using abusive language but denies any involvement in the assault itself. Here, S is in the midst of a long narrative account of the events in question.

Extract 7: PN-13

```
 1                    (1.5)
 2    S:    I- I got invo:lved (.) jus' t'pull my wife off.
 3                    (0.8)
 4    ?:    .shih
 5    S:    I- I- never got involved with a:nything else in there I
 6          never: (1.6) I- I went into the woman's house (0.6) t'get
 7          my wife ou:t.
 8                    (1.2)
 9    S:    *So like-* lea:ve it, (1.0) you know I– I– I've come round
10          to sa:y what I've got to say, (0.7) leave it at that.
11                    (4.1)
12    S:    Gets outsi::de an': (0.5) HHhh a little bit o':: (0.5)
13          mouthin' off going on: (2.3) Katy: jumps in– my wife
14          jumps in agai:n (1.6) seein' re:d, (0.8) same thing again.
15                    (0.6)
16    S:    Jus- (0.8) anything I was involved with (1.3) was t'get
17    →     my wife off her.=I'm (0.7).hh(h)h I'm not a handy person.
18                    (0.8)
19    S: →  [If you know wha'I mean.
20    P:    [(Mmm)
21                    (1.1)
```

```
22   S:      Y'know I– I– I didn't go round (1.4) to cause trouble.
23                      (2.0)
24   S:      It happened but it's:: not the way.
25                      (2.0)
26   S:      You know:
27                      (4.3)
28   S: →    My i- my involvement wasn't hittin' a woman.
29                      (0.5)
30   S:      (But/look) that's what I'm tryin' t'say.
31                      (0.2)
32   S:      I went in to– to keep my wife away from it, (0.3) try an'
33           separate it.
34                      (2.1)
35   S:      I don't know what else to:: to add to that.
```

This extract, like Extract 6, is the suspect's first account of events following P's invitation to describe them. Like the suspect in Extract 6, S has not been arrested for assaulting anyone, and not a woman. In the first part of this sequence, S minimizes his involvement in his wife's dispute with the neighbour, claiming his role was solely to halt their fight. He twice denies, without the accusation having been formulated, that he hit the woman. First, at lines 17–19, he moves from a description of his actions with regards to the particular people involved, to a general claim that '.hh(h)h I'm not a handy person. (0.8) If you know wha'I mean'. This turn is prefaced with a laugh, and the category is a 'handy person'. In this context, 'being a handy person' is an idiomatic phrase that refers to someone who is predisposed to enter into fights. Like the suspect in Extract 5, S follows this self-categorization with an appeal for P to display his understanding of the idiom and the meaning S is making with it ('If you know wha'I mean'), and note that P has already produced a continuer receipt at line 20 (in contrast to no such turns taken in Extract 5). Combined with the laugh, then, S's use of an idiomatic phrase, and orientation to his membership of the category 'people who do not seek fights', seeks a category-based affiliation from P. Before the sequence ends, S produces a second denial, which formulates explicitly, and specifies, his idiomatic denial: 'My i- my involvement wasn't hittin' a woman'. Like other examples, S uses the indefinite article 'a' to generalize his claim that he is someone who does not typically hit people in general, and women in particular.

One feature of S's account is, like earlier extracts, the orientation to a culture in which co-members of a category (here, women – S's wife and female neighbour) can more legitimately engage in physical aggression than members of different categories. While the categories 'men' and 'women' are normatively paired, the data presented show how asymmetrical arrangements between the sexes are oriented to as a practical concern. We can see the same orientation in the next two extracts, which come from a different, but crime-relevant, interactional context. In order to show the 'all-purpose' cultural utility of categorizing oneself as a 'man who does not hit women', we leave police interviews temporarily to consider two telephone calls to a neighbourhood mediation centre. These calls were collected as part of the larger corpus of materials on 'neighbourhood disputes', of which the police data was one subset.

In Extract 8, the caller has been recommended to telephone mediation by various other local authority organizations about a neighbour, who is a council tenant. The caller (C) says he has tried to approach the woman, but she is very aggressive. The main problems are loud music, verbal abuse, vandalism and that her children bully the caller's children. The caller has spent over 30 minutes describing his problems to a mediator (M: 'Tom') and here is complaining that his neighbour's new 'fancy man' has been giving another neighbour 'verbal abuse'.

Extract 8: EC-13

```
 1   C:      .hh uh- because >I tell ya< if ↑'e ever t- talked to me
 2           like that.=To:m,
 3   M:      °Mm°
 4                   (0.9)
 5   C:      I'll uh- get- an' I'll get- an' I'll- I'll b- I wi:ll end
 6           up gettin' ni:cked for it.
 7                   (0.8)
 8   C:      Cos I'll whack 'im one.
 9                   (1.0)
10   M:      Ye:ahh. Hh
11                   (0.2)
12   M:      [Yes. an'- ]
13   C:      [Y'know? ]
14                   (0.2)
15   M:      Ob[viously you don't want to but you-]
16   C: →      [ I- I will n- I- I-              ob]viously: I'm not
17      →     gonna h- hit a lady: at all: in my li:fe?
18                   (.)
19   C: →    .hh I: never have do:ne?
20                   (.)
21   C: →    .hh I'm not like tha:t?
22                   (0.2)
23   C: →    .hh bu' if a ma- if a ma:n comes in my face, (0.6) an' he's
24           got attitude:
25                   (0.3)
26   M:      °M:m.°
27                   (0.2)
28   C:      We will have fisticu:ffs.
29                   (0.9)
30   M:      .hhh
31   C:      Especially if (he) don't live there. Hh
32                   (0.4)
33   M:      .pt.hhh Ye::ah.=so that's (0.2) particularly aggravating,
34           the fact that he doesn't live the:re.
```

The extract starts with C's formulation of his response to a hypothetical situation: that if his neighbour's boyfriend gave him verbal abuse, he would end up 'whacking' him. At lines 1–2, C produces the first part of an if–then formulation: 'if ↑'e ever t- talked to <u>me</u> like that.' He latches a second turn constructional unit (TCU) onto the end of this, naming the mediator '=To:m', to which M replies with a continuer. By naming his recipient, C invites M to participate in C's ongoing formulation, as a collaborative activity. This works to subvert the mediators' general practice to remain neutral in as many ways as possible.

At lines 5–6, C produces the upshot of the action launched in lines 1–2: 'I wi:ll end up gettin' ni:cked for it' (getting 'nicked' is an activity tied to the category 'police'). His turn is littered with repair initiators, displaying some trouble in its formulation. At the start of the turn, 'I'll uh-' may be the start of what does come next, or it may be the abandoned start of 'I'll whack him one' which is uttered subsequently. Perhaps because the reason why C would 'get nicked' is unclear, there is no response from M, so C formulates the reason – that he will 'whack' his neighbour's boyfriend (line 8). There is a long gap after this, before M does a minimal receipt (line 10). It is hard to substantiate a claim that the gap at line 9 is 'disapproving', but the lack of immediate uptake, plus the voice quality of his eventual response, shows some difficulty M has with responding to the caller's admission that he might be violent. This lack of response from M is sustained throughout the sequence, and M's formulation at the end focuses on the practical grievance that C has, rather than with the type of person C is.

At lines 12–13, C and M begin to talk at the same time, and continue in overlap (lines 15–16). Let us deal with C's turns first: 'y'know' is an appeal for alignment from M, and C then begins to formulate the target line 'I'm not gonna hit a lady'. Meanwhile, as C says 'y'know', M repeats his confirmatory 'yes' and begins a new TCU which continues on line 15, formulating the gist of what C has said: 'Obviously you don't want to but you-', formulating C's character in a positive way as someone who does not engage in violence. M drops out of the overlapping talk as C continues, but note that as C moves out of overlap, he is reformulating and repairing the original start of his turn, from 'I will n-', plausibly the start of 'I will not hit a lady', to insert 'obviously', repeated from M's turn. This close monitoring in overlap and recruitment of M's words is a further way of developing or pursuing alignment between speakers.

C's category-based denial, like the previous police interview extracts, occurs in an extended narrative about events, rather than in response to an accusation that he has actually 'hit a lady'. Like other extracts, C's denial contains more than one TCU (lines 19–21), in which he claims a general, category-warranted disposition as the kind of man who does not hit women. At line 21, he states explicitly that he is 'not like tha:t?', where being 'like that' refers to men who do hit women. However, he contrasts this dispositional claim with another that he would have '<u>fisticu:ffs</u>' if a '<u>ma</u>:n comes in my face'. So, like the speakers in Extracts 3 and 4, S builds a moral hierarchy of categories, in which asymmetrical category members ('men' and 'women') should not engage in physically violent activities, but co-members of a category ('men') can more legitimately do so.

A similar categorical relationship is built in Extract 9. C has been describing a dispute with a neighbour with whom he had a business arrangement. According to C, his neighbour bought some goods from him but wanted a refund and made threats to C. C called the police who warned the neighbour. We join the call as C continues with his account.

Extract 9: EC-25

```
 1    C:      But now what happened: (0.5) two o'three weeks ago,
 2            (0.8).hh now the wife's start giving me trouble.
 3                      (0.2)
 4    ?:      .hhh
 5    M:      The- the wife.
 6    C:      Yeh.
 7    M:      Oh:. [°r(h)ig(h)ht,°
 8    C:           [Okay that's the- (0.2) big (0.3) problem.
 9                      (0.3)
10    C: →    Uh- with a man you can sort it out.=with a wife (.)
11            .hh (.) is hard.
12                      (0.3)
13    M:      .hh Ah:.
14            ((-- 4 mins cut: C describes the woman trying to run
15            him over and giving him verbal abuse--))
16    C: →    Because uh- if it's the ma:n if he punch me I'll punch
17            him ba:ck.
18                      (0.2)
19    C: →    .hh but ↑what can I do to he:r..hhh
20            ((--4 mins cut: C says he's scared the woman will call
21            the police and get him arrested for arguing back--))
22    C:      You know, maybe somebody advise them all right. send
23            your wi:fe,.hh (0.2) if he touch or anything all
24            right? (0.4) he probably end up in r- the station or
25            police station?. hhh or prison.=y'understa:nd.
26                      (0.9)
27    M:      .pt ye::ah.
28    C: →    Yeh but I'm [↑never touch: or I'm not gonna hit or
29    M:                  [°yeh°
30            anything?.hh
31    M:      Ye:[ah: ]
32    C: →       [Cos] uh- I'm not one o'those guys uh- who believes
33            in violent-
34    M:      No:.
```

C is narrating the events in his dispute and, at line 1, is moving on to describe a new phase in the dispute in which his neighbour's wife started 'giving him trouble', after things had quietened down with her husband. M's response implies that there is some puzzle in C's naming of 'the wife', as he produces a repair initiator: 'The- the wife', which is confirmed by S. M then confirms he has understood what C is saying with his turn on line 7 – 'Oh:. °r(h)ig(h)ht,°' – but the laughter particles suggest he finds it ironic, or perhaps incongruous, that C should be getting 'trouble' from his neighbour's wife. In C's subsequent account, he unpacks what he assumes is M's trouble with this description – that C cannot 'sort things out' with the wife because she is a woman (lines 10–17).

This is reminiscent of the suspect in Extract 4, who claimed that he would not 'sort things out' with a woman, but talk to her boyfriend. Also like previous extracts, C constructs a hypothetical scenario in which co-members of the category 'men' can punch each other in a reciprocal way (lines 16–17), but asks '↑what can I do to he:r' (line 19). He then makes a general, dispositional claim that he is not 'gonna hit' a woman because he is 'not one o'those guys uh- who believes in violent-' (line 32). Here, then, C formulates explicitly what the participants in previous extracts have implied in their category-based denials; that they are members of the category 'men who do not hit women'. C partitions 'guys' into two types – the 'women-hitters' and the ones who only hit other men.

In the final extract, we return to the police interrogation materials. The suspect has been arrested on suspicion of assaulting his girlfriend with a wine bottle. S has admitted spitting in her face after she spat at him.

Extract 10: PN-66

1	P:	<u>Wh</u>at happened after y'd spat in 'er face.
2		(0.5)
3	S:	Bu'- (.) w'll. (.) (it wasn't really me).
4		(1.0)
5	S:	↑I di- ↑I did throw a- I (didn't) throw a wine bottle.
6		(0.4)
7	S: →	But b'lie:ve me (0.4) if I was gonna hit a woman mate
8	→	I'd <u>p</u>unch 'er face in.
9		(0.6)
10	S: →	Cos I ne<u>v</u>er liked the lady anyway.
11		(1.1)
12	P:	So you admi:t that you've thrown the wine bottle
13		at 'er.
14		(0.4)
15	S:	I- No:- no- ( ) did I <u>s</u>ay I admitted that.
16		().2)
17	P:	Yes you did.=
18	S:	=<u>No</u>: I didn't.
19		(0.3)
20	S:	(I never) I said (0.3) that I: (0.4) threw a wine
21		bottle at 'er.
22		(1.6)
23	P:	So you're <u>n</u>ow saying that you <u>di</u>dn't throw a bottle.
24		(0.2)
25	S:	I said I throw a bottle- (0.2) ↑n- ↑no ↑don't ↑try and
26		twist me words mate.
27		(0.4)
28	S:	I said I <u>thr</u>ew a wi:ne bottle.
29		(0.2)
30	S:	>But not at-< not- not at her:.

```
31                       (0.7)
32    P:      Righ'.
33                       (.)
34    P: →    So you say that you threw a bottle but it wasn't at
35            [Milly.]
36    S:      [Ye::s ] that's correct mate.=>yeah you've< got me
37            right there mate.
38                       (0.7)
39    P:      Why did you throw the bottle.
40                       (0.3)
41    S:      ↑( )- (.) cos she was pissin' me off mate.
42                       (1.7)
43    S: →    She's like a bloke. You know she'd have a pair of
44            bollocks down'ere.
45                       (2.8)
46    P:      .hhh when you threw it were you aimin' for Mi:lly.=
47    S:      =No: mate.
```

The general activity in this sequence is S's denial that he threw a wine bottle at his part-
ner. However, rather than claiming that he 'would not throw bottles at women' in gen-
eral, to shore up a denial of the particular action he is accused of, S claims the opposite:
that he did not throw the bottle because if he wanted to 'hit a woman', he would 'punch
'er face in' (lines 7–8). S therefore *takes up* incumbency of the category 'men who hit
women', in contrast to the claims made by participants in all the previous extracts. This
denial works on the basis that if S would admit to *punching* a woman in the face had he
done so, a more serious act than throwing a bottle, he would presumably admit to throw-
ing the bottle at her, if he had done that.

    Between lines 12–37, P and S clarify what it is that S is claiming with regards to
throwing the bottle (indeed, S's claims do appear contradictory in places, e.g. line 5, 15).
S states that he threw a bottle, but not at his partner (lines 28–30, 34–37). P then asks
S to account for throwing the bottle at all (line 39). S's account comes in two parts. At
line 41, he tells P that his partner was 'pissing him off', making his actions responsive to
hers, and attributing blame for initiating the dispute to her. This is a 'live' example of
what interview-based studies find repeatedly, that men's accounts for their violence
towards women blame women for initiating it (e.g. Anderson and Umberson, 2001;
Wood, 2004). After no response from P (line 42), S extends his account further, claiming
that his partner is 'like a bloke. You know she'd have a pair of bollocks down'ere' (lines
43–44). In this case, then, S neutralizes 'the applicability of the presumptive knowledge'
(Schegloff, 2007a: 469) about his partner as a member of the category 'woman', by trou-
bling her membership of such a category. The long gap at line 45 may be indicative of
P's trouble in recognizing his category-predicate combination. His description of her as
being 'like a bloke' with 'bollocks' works as a category 'modifier', providing 'that what
it is that may be said about any member is not to be said about the member in hand'
(Sacks, 1992: 44). Here, then, any engagement in physical violence between S and his
partner is legitimized by virtue of the fact that she is not a 'vulnerable', 'un-hittable' type

of woman and is not a proper woman at all; rather, she has the attributes for incumbency in the category 'man'. And, as we have seen, co-members of the same category may more legitimately engage in violence: S's moral identity as 'the type of man who does not hit women' remains protected.

Concluding remarks

This article has examined an area of social life in which men's violence towards women is routinely handled – police interrogations of suspects in assault-relevant crimes. The analysis of multiple instances of suspects' denials that they are not the kind of men who hit women has shed detailed, empirical light on a highly recognizable cultural practice. This practice is the 'category-based denial' (Stokoe, 2006), in which speakers accomplish the social action of *denying* by making claims about their character, disposition and identity memberships. In addition to its contribution to the study of gender and violence, this article has also taken new steps in the ongoing development of membership categorization and conversation analysis, focusing particularly on the types of systematic sequential analysis that can be done with membership categories.

In the first section of analysis, we saw how category-based denials routinely followed police officers' questions, and contained the direct denial followed by an account. In the second section, suspects produced the same category-based denials in the midst of a narrative rather than in response to a direct accusation. In both cases, suspects created category-relevant interactional environments out of police officers' non-categorical questions and indirect prompts for narrative descriptions. Suspects' claims not to be 'the type of man who hits women' partitioned the category 'men' into two kinds: those that hit women and those that do not. In so doing, the participants took a moral stance towards their own and others' masculine identities.

In contrast to other discourse-analytic studies of men's accounts of violence towards women, this article has started with a practice – the category-based denial – and unpacked it in terms of interactional location (when in the world do men make such claims?) and action orientation (what do such claims accomplish for the speaker?). The analysis has therefore unpacked an aspect of the 'discourse of male dominance and entitlement to power' (Adams et al., 1995: 387). If there is a 'discourse of male violence' (see Hearn, 1998), then that 'discourse' must have its origins in, and be sustained through, ordinary talk of all kinds across many settings. Baker (2000: 112) has argued that the analysis of categories shows how discourses are 'locked into place'. She writes that:

> When speakers 'do describing', they assemble a social world in which their categories have a central place … these are powerful statements about what could be the case, how the social order might be arranged, whether or not it really is. The artful production of plausible versions using recognizable membership categorization devices is a profoundly important form of *cultural competence*. (Baker, 2004: 175, my emphasis)

In each of the examples presented, it was noted that while recipients of category-based denials (both police officers and mediators) did not topicalize the issue of whether suspects or callers were, indeed, the type of men not to hit women, neither did they initiate

repair on such accounts. Formulating the words 'I'm not gonna hit a lady' produced *recognizable* actions, sequentially produced by culturally competent members. Such categorical claims were therefore somewhat ordinary and mundane. This mundaneness is important in the perpetuation of gendered assumptions and practices: 'the more natural, taken-for-granted and therefore invisible the categorization work, the more powerful it is' (Baker, 2000: 111).

The juxtaposition of data extracts, each containing a phrase built with the same grammar and component features, provide evidence for the pervasiveness and durability of particular category–activity pairs, such as 'men' + 'hit' + 'women'. The pairing of the categories 'men' and 'women', in this context, mapped indirectly, but plausibly, onto the pairing of 'perpetrator' and 'victim'. In these data extracts, then, we find the forensic details that comprise what others might label grossly as 'discourses' and hence a world in which such activities are somewhat 'naturalized': men are the perpetrators of violence towards women. Participants' categorization work is central to the organization of discourses because categories and their associated predicates are 'quiet centres of power and persuasion' (Baker, 2000: 99–106). However, rather than see how these discourses operate in interview settings to 'resource men in their violence towards women' (Adams et al., 1995: 387), we have seen how suspects construct, in a particular context, for a particular purpose, different categories of men, claiming membership in one by recruiting the notion of the other.

Note

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