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Mundane morality and gender in familial neighbour disputes

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Introduction

The term 'mundane morality' refers to the practices of everyday life in which people mix moral evaluations, a sense of right and wrong, blame and culpability, etc., with ordinary accounts and descriptions of persons, actions and events. It is designed to contrast with the more abstract, philosophical and universalizing sense of morality and moral reasoning that has dominated the psychology of child development since Piaget (1932). The focus of this chapter is on family, morality and gender in neighbour disputes. The first part develops an argument about the study of the links between gender and morality, starting with the pioneering work of Carol Gilligan (1982/1993) on the gendered 'voices' of moral reasoning, and the substantial feminist critical analysis that it provoked. We focus particularly on criticisms of Gilligan's methodology, her implicit gender and moral essentialism, and her disattention to everyday social interaction and morality-in-action. This latter theme was taken up more recently in conversation analytic studies of gender and morality, yet this work also falls into the pitfalls inherent in Gilligan's original work. We therefore work towards finding a more robust analytic framework for studying gender and mundane morality, drawing on developments in discursive psychology, membership categorization analysis and social constructionist accounts of gender.

Gilligan's theory and responses to it

In the 1980s Carol Gilligan published a key study in feminist psychology. She was a research assistant to Lawrence Kohlberg (1981) whose theory of moral development, grounded in Piaget's pioneering work, had dominated the psychological literature in that area. Based on studies in which he posed hypothetical moral dilemmas to children and adults, Kohlberg identified a series of developmental stages of moral reasoning. Higher stages were characterized by reasoning based on fairness, impartiality, abstract thinking, and the ability to apply universal principles. Kohlberg claimed that while most people do not reach the highest stages, boys and men reached higher levels than girls and women. We might note briefly at this point, before turning to Gilligan, that developmental stages that most adults fail to reach are already questionable; what are these stages *of*? There is already a problem with the status of Kohlberg's scheme as any sort of description of how people think.

Gilligan (1982/1993) objected to Kohlberg's work for good feminist reasons: it was based on male participants, the hypothetical dilemmas were based around the activities of male characters, and the dilemmas were abstract rather than 'real life'. She therefore conducted a different study that had girls and women as its participants and interviews about 'real-life' moral dilemmas as its data. Like Kohlberg, Gilligan found distinct stages in the development of moral reasoning, but their basis was different. She drew on Nancy Chodorow's (1978) object-relations theory of mother-child relations, in which a mother's differing treatment of boys and girls produces gender differentiated behaviours that are

underpinned by connectedness for girls and separatedness for boys. These deep-seated gender differences give rise to cognitive differences in moral reasoning. Whereas a fully developed male moral reasoner articulates an 'ethic of justice', women possess a *different moral voice* and articulate an 'ethic of care'. The justice voice is characterized by a focus on fairness, justice, rights and reciprocity, whereas the care voice is characterized by relational concepts such as attachment, connection, loving, responsiveness, sensitivity to individuals, and a concern with security. Although Gilligan modified and qualified her claims over the years, suggesting, for instance, that moral voices are too complex to reduce to gender alone, her work continued to link 'care' with the feminine (Tong, 1993).

Gilligan's work prompted a massive response from other feminists, psychologists and philosophers. On the positive side, many treated it as a blow to masculinist traditions in psychological method and theory, and as a 'paradigmatic case of exposing male bias in scholars' claims about "the norm"' (Fulani, 1998, p. 140). Gilligan was seen to succeed in modifying commonly accepted theory, in identifying a different moral 'voice', and even as challenging 'positivist science' and 'providing the new framework for a new epistemology' (Fulani, 1998, p. 141). Her work was praised for replacing the abstract and universalistic ethic of justice with a contextualized ethic of care (Clement, 1996). Her findings chimed with other cultural feminists who celebrated women's 'relational' 'rapport-based' culture, in contrast to those who unfavourably compared women's thinking with a masculine culture of 'report-based' competition and hierarchy (e.g., Coates, 1996; Holmes, 1995; Noddings, 1984; Tannen, 1990). Gilligan was also praised for using a less abstract method of data collection and for highlighting the importance of talking to people about real-life dilemmas. Her work has been treated as fundamental to the recent emergence of a narrative approach to moral development and a dialogical concept of moral selves (e.g., Day & Tappan, 1996; Hekman, 1995).

In subsequent testing, some researchers claimed to find support for Gilligan's ideas, whereas others argued that 'justice' and 'care' voices are not gender correlated (see Moshman, 1999; Tong, 1993). However, several commentators argue that whether or not actual statistically significant gender differences are found, a difference remains in the way moral norms and values are associated with each gender. Norms about appropriate conduct, virtues and vices are woven into social constructions of femininity and masculinity (Friedman, 1995). The ethic of care is culturally coded as female morality, and 'undeniably captures a widely-held view of what women are and ought to be' (Clement, 1996, p. 3). Such cultural identifications of women with care and men with justice have negative consequences for women (Davis, 1992; Tong, 1993). For instance, such assumptions underpin the idea that women are best suited to childcare and the caring professions, to do the emotional work in relationships, such that they lack 'the capacity to participate in the basic political and legal institutions that structure our society' (Goodwin, n.d., p. 2).

One reason that Gilligan's work remains the target of critique is because it relates directly to a wider feminist debate about whether or not women and men possess an 'essential' feminine or masculine nature (Wood, 1992). The issue of making universalising, essentialist claims about women and men has long since been a critical issue for feminist researchers. An essentialist epistemology treats gender as a fixed 'trait' or property that resides in individuals, which can be correlated with assorted behaviours, experiences and psychologies. This sort of thinking underpins the type of 'sex difference' research that emerged to develop and test Gilligan's theory. Although Gilligan was often careful to claim that the two moral voices were 'gender-related' rather than gender-specific (e.g., Brown, Gilligan & Tappan, 1995, p. 323), a close reading of her work reveals generalizations and dualistic rhetoric about women's distinctive experience and ethics (Houston, 1987). Some feminists strongly support the idea of a uniform women's nature, because it affirms women

and promotes unified political action. However, most reject this position because it implies a trans-historical and quintessential nature for women, using an oppositional representation that obscures diversity and leads to the exaggeration of sex differences (Hare-Mustin & Maracek, 1994). In this way, social scientists are responsible for both creating and maintaining stereotyped ideas about gender (Crawford, 1995).

If one accepts these criticisms, it makes no sense to assume that *all* women and *all* men share traits, behaviours and so on, so there is little point in asking 'gender difference' questions (Wodak, 1997). Instead, one might ask 'how is gender produced and sustained by human agents in interaction with one another?' (Hare-Mustin & Maracek, 1994, p. 533). It has become commonplace for feminist psychologists to take up 'performative' notions of gender-as-enactment, a discursive construction or product of social interaction (cf. Butler, 1990; West & Zimmerman, 1987). From this perspective, gender is not a free-standing phenomenon that resides in individuals but 'an agreement that resides in social interchange; it is precisely what we agree it to be' (Bohan, 1997, p. 39). Social constructionists therefore examine what it takes, in terms of social practices, to make gender something real and solid. It is members' 'reality analysis' that is the target of constructionism: people's skills for constituting the world as the taken-for-granted world of facts in which we operate (Hester & Francis, 1997), including how, in everyday life, they constitute the world, themselves, and other people, as recognizably, take-for-grantedly, gendered (see Stokoe, 2008).

Gilligan's theory of morality, as well as her theory of gender, has also been criticized for its essentialism. Any statement about distinct modes of moral reasoning is essentialist in so far as it assumes that an identifiable, tangible moral domain exists, that people possess one of two strategies for reasoning about that domain, and that certain ideas, actions, etc., are inherently moral or immoral (Bohan, 1997). Studies that test Gilligan's theory, to see whether men and women (or other groups of persons) reason one way or another, accept *a priori* that such modes exist independently of their social construction. Whereas Gilligan may have challenged the sexist content of morality research, her work did not challenge 'the *institution* of morality' (Fulani, 1998, p. 148). By substituting one moral system for another, Gilligan implicitly accepted the idea that 'morality is an abstraction, a wrenching out of the continuous cultural-social life process of certain behaviours, acts, values and beliefs which are then reified into a code or system of conduct' (Fulani, 1998, p. 144). It is just those practices of abstraction and codification that underpin most of the interview and questionnaire-based studies that dominate psychological research in this area. Morality is treated as an abstract product of socialization that is revealed to the researcher and subsequently categorized into hierarchical stages and transitional levels of cognitive ability.

Some writers have criticized such studies for focusing on reasoning *about* morality and accounts of moral ideas, rather than on *moral action* itself; for missing the actual everyday practices within which morality is lodged (e.g., Goodwin, 2002; Kurri & Wahlström, 2001). For example, in her analysis of community mediation interactions, Garcia (1996) explored moral reasoning at the missing level of social interaction. She investigated actual scenes of social life in which moral arguments and counter-arguments get made and have practical consequences. Garcia located her study in the 'ethnomethodological' tradition, and used narrative analysis to see whether and how participants in mediation, women and men, clients and mediators, employed Gilligan's modes of justice and care. She found that all parties used both modes to accomplish a variety of interactional goals. Garcia therefore rejected a gender-based explanation of morality, and instead claimed that the interactional context determines what sorts of arguments get made. However, despite her disclaimer that she did not use Gilligan's modes in a preconceived way, it is hard to see how Garcia avoids this in her own analysis which tracks and 'spots' such modes in use. Neither does Garcia present the 'modes'

in their sequential context, which somewhat undermines her argument that it is the interactional level which is missing from Gilligan and rectified in her own study.

In another study, Goodwin (2002; n.d.) combined ethnographic methods with conversation analysis to study groups of bilingual girls playing in a variety of school contexts. Like Garcia, Goodwin studied morality as a social process. She found that girls were 'intensely concerned with an ethic of justice… [and] display an intense engagement with rule-governed behaviour' (n.d, p. 2), and that her data 'call seriously into question the essentialist legacy of Gilligan which argues that an altruistic group dynamics, rather than justice and abstract rules, are at the core of female morality' (n.d, p. 10). Goodwin further argued that 'by examining actual instances of negotiated interaction, we can avoid perpetuating essentialist generalizations about the nature of girls' groups' (2002, p. 394). However, it seems that Goodwin, like Gilligan herself, replaces one type of generalization about gender with another by claiming that, for instance, 'girls are equally as concerned as boys with issues of rights and rules in the midst of spontaneous play' and that girls' 'forms of exclusion and ridicule... are clearly not oriented to an ethic of care' (Goodwin, 2002, p. 396).

What is still missing from the gender and morality literature, then, is a serious attempt to investigate what, *for members*, counts as 'morality', 'gender', etc., what such concepts might look like and how they might be managed and maintained in everyday talk. This will require bracketing off the category 'morality' in its philosophical sense, in favour of studying the range of mundane practices in which people judge everyday actions in relation to what people should or should not do. It is an approach in which analytic attention is directed away from pre-theorized notions of what a moral argument is, or what a moral reasoning strategy ideally looks like, and toward the 'mundane morality' of everyday accounts and categories, and how these might invoke gender.

Mundane morality in talk

> Any consideration of the accountability of social conduct brings directly into focus moral dimensions of language use: in the (interactional) circumstances in which we report our own or others' conduct, our descriptions are themselves accountable phenomena through which we recognizably display an action's (im)propriety, (in)correctness, (un)suitability, (in)appropriateness, (in)justice, (dis)honesty, and so forth. Insofar as descriptions are unavoidably incomplete and selective, they are designed for specific and local interactional purposes. Hence they may, always and irretrievably, be understood as doing moral work – as providing a basis for evaluating the "rightness" or "wrongness" of whatever is being reported (Drew, 1998, p. 295).

Drew (1998) convincingly makes the case for the pervasive relevance of morality in everyday talk. Yet his claim leads us to question how we, as analysts, *know* when members are oriented to issues of 'morality', given that speakers rarely categorize their own talk in this way. There is a problem here for analysts in demonstrating that speakers are oriented to the specifically *moral* nature of their accounts or descriptions, as opposed to, say, their rationality or reasonableness (Nikander, 2002). Although we can argue that the study of morality should be grounded in participants' rather than analysts' orientations to salient features of interaction, such an approach still seems to treat 'morality' as a given of the social world. This might be a feature of any work that starts with a 'topic' such as 'morality', in which the analyst (simply by virtue of writing *on* the topic) is likely to ascribe such an evaluative gloss to what speakers are doing. And, of course, this is in part what we are doing in this book chapter.

Drew makes a distinction between 'implicit' and 'explicit' types of moral work, the first of which raises these sorts of analytic issues. He notes that, despite the fact that we (the reader, analyst or those co-present in the interaction) may recognize when speakers convey moral points; their implicit moral work may not 'rise to the interactional surface of the talk'

(p. 296). He suggests that the moral flavour of the account is understandable only through the import of 'cultural and interactional knowledge' (p. 306). Similarly, Jayyusi (1991) suggests that because 'one cannot get out of the moral order to talk about the moral order', the analyst must use 'her/his moral membership, her/his moral knowledge of the mundane organization of the practico-moral order as a *resource*, even as s/he turns it into a *topic*' (p. 247). For hard-line conversation analysts, this imputation of analysts' knowledge will at best appear to be a fudge, or at worst be an instance of what Schegloff (1997) calls 'theoretical imperialism'.

Leaving this issue aside, a number of researchers have endeavoured to identify how the moral order is produced (e.g., Housley, 2002; Nikander, 2002), some of which has its basis in Sacks's work on membership categories. Sacks (1992) developed membership categorization analysis (MCA) as a way of explicating the rules people draw upon in the course of talking together and going about their everyday lives. MCA is organized around the notion of the membership categorization device (MCD), which explains how categories are hearably linked together by members of a culture. For example, in this example from a child's story: 'The baby cried. The mommy picked it up', Sacks (1972) claimed that we hear links between 'mommy' and 'baby', specifically that the mommy is the mommy of the baby. The explanatory apparatus that allows this 'fact' to occur is the MCD 'family', which normatively collects together the categories 'mommy' and 'baby'. Categories (including 'members') are linked to particular actions ('category-bound activities') or characteristics ('natural predicates') such that there are conventional expectations about what constitutes a 'mommy's' or 'baby's' normative behaviour. Categories can also sit together in paired relationships called Standardized Relational Pairs (SRPs, such as 'mommy' and 'daddy', 'husband' and 'wife'), each with duties and obligations in relation to the other.

Because activities are category-bound, the naming of present or absent activities is central to praising or complaining about members. Sacks discusses this idea in the context of 'positioned' categories (i.e., those arranged in logical progression such as baby, adolescent, adult). If someone says "You're acting like an X!" where X is a category positioned lower than Y, of which the person is an incumbent (e.g., X is 'baby', Y is 'adult'), then it is a degrading remark. Sacks's ideas about membership categories have been extended to focus directly on the moral features of members' category work. For instance, Jayyusi (1991) argues that:

> Sacks's notion of category bound actions, rights and obligations… points out the moral features of our category concepts… His elucidation of the notion of certain categories as standardized relational pairs… not only uncovers features of the organization of members' conventional knowledge of the social world, but clearly demonstrates via empirical analysis, how that knowledge is both morally constituted and constitutive of moral praxis – it provides for a variety of ascriptions, discoveries, imputations, conclusions, judgements etc. on the part of mundane reasoners. (Jayyusi (1991, p. 240)

Jayyusi notes that, given the indefinitely extendible number of ways people can be correctly categorized, the categories that are used in descriptions and accounts are central to the emergence of morality in interaction. Members' categorization work is therefore embedded in a 'moral order' (Jayyusi, 1984, p. 2). For example, a particular 'woman' may also be categorized from an indefinitely large range including 'mother', 'daughter', 'teacher', 'wife', 'neighbour' or 'slut'. Each of these categories carries with it a set of category bound activities, predicates, or 'rights and obligations' that are expectable for a category incumbent to perform or possess (Watson & Weinberg, 1982). From the category 'mother', we can impute the motives, expectations and rights that are conventionally associated with such a category (Widdicombe & Wooffitt, 1995). The categorization process makes available a frame of reference within which the proper or expectable actions and activities of a person can be inferred.

One study that analyses gender and morality in this way is Wowk's (1984) MCA study of a murder confession. Wowk examined the way the suspect allocated blame for his actions onto his female victim via a sexual description of her that relied, via subtle categorization work, on moral and normative conceptions of gender. Wowk's central point was that the suspect's account turned on the categorization of the victim as a 'slut' and 'tramp', yet he never used these words explicitly to describe her. Instead, through the delicate manipulation of categories, and by relying on the cultural knowledge that is imbricated within them, the suspect was able to draw upon conventional knowledge about how 'moral types of women' can be expected to behave. Wowk shows how 'certain attributes or actions are bound to the categories of the device 'gender' and in particular to the category 'female' or transforms of it such as 'girl' or 'woman'' (p. 76; cf. Edwards, 1998). She argued that the participants, whose inferential work in successive turns of talk makes the account 'pass' as an adequate description of events, are 'involved in producing a moral order out of the particulars provided by the suspect. They are making moral inferences about the character of the "girl"' (p. 77).

Our aim in this chapter, then, is to examine the workings of everyday reasoning about gender and mundane morality, and any links between them, in a context where they regularly crop up as members' concerns. Rather than try to identify ideal types of argumentation (e.g., based on 'justice' or 'care'), or seek to assign types of 'moral reasoning' to men and women speakers, we show how a kind of mundane moral reasoning, with links to gender, come to life within actual social interaction. We demonstrate the argumentative points we have made by examining a context of interaction in which mundane matters of complainable behaviour, accountability, competing versions, justifications, motives, etc., are central to the business at hand: neighbour dispute mediation.

Data and method

The data are drawn from a corpus[1] of over 120 hours' of neighbour dispute interactions across a variety of settings including community mediation, telephone calls to mediation centres and police-witness/suspect interviews in neighbour-relevant crimes (see Edwards, 2005; 2006; Edwards & Stokoe, 2007; Stokoe, 2006, 2009; Stokoe & Edwards, 2006, 2007, 2008 for various systematic analyses on these data). Many of these interactions have children, family and parenting matters at the heart of disputes about noise, vandalism, trespass and so on. For the purposes of this chapter, we have selected one illustrative extract, which comes from an 'initial interview' mediation session. Mediation is a dispute resolution process in which people can discuss neighbour problems with trained mediators who attempt to find a solution. Mediators interview disputing parties individually to obtain their accounts of the dispute, before meeting with both parties.

The interactions were audio recorded and transcribed using Gail Jefferson's (1984) conventions for conversation analysis. Our analysis draws on CA's principles of turn design, action orientation and sequential organization (e.g., Sacks, Schegloff & Jefferson, 1974; Schegloff, 2007), on MCA's focus on the inferential properties of social membership categories, and on discursive psychology's concern for the ways in which factual and narrative descriptions attend to psychological considerations such as identity and motive (e.g., Edwards, 1997, 1998). The general relevance of gender to neighbour disputes has previously been studied by one of us (Stokoe, 2003, 2006), but in the following analysis we focus closely on the management of gender and morality as they crop up in the participants' talk, illustrating one possible discourse-based approach to this topic.

Analysis

We present one quite lengthy extract, split into sections, in which two married couples (pseudonymized as Graham and Louise, Bob and Elaine) are talking with the mediator (M)

about a family in their street.[2] The complaint is that the children of the family are vandalizing their properties.

(1) DM Case 102 Party 1 25.11.97 (1-14)

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 1 G:  °Y'know it's gettin'- <it's gettin' real se:rious this
 2     is:[.°
 3 ?:     [°°Yeh.°°
 4     (0.9)
 5 G:  But the la:d keeps gettin' away with it.
 6     (0.4)
 7 G:  Unfortunately,
 8     (0.6)
 9 G:  'is mother 'asn't got a bloke there. (0.2) so she is
10     ta:lkin' [in front of the chi:ldren.]
11 L:           [  She's not li:vin' there ] 'alf the time is
12     she.
13 G:  No: she's o::ut at ni:ght and they are using it as a- a
14     rendezvous for the ga:ng.
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Section (1), the first part of our long extract, provides a neat synopsis of the mundane moral and gender-relevant work done in this neighbour complaint, and is fleshed out as we track through the rest of the sequence. At line 1, Graham is providing an evaluation ("gettin' real se:rious") of the events he has earlier been describing, in which the 'lad', who is the eldest son in the family, has been vandalizing Graham's driveway and fences. Note that 'lad' is no mere synonym for 'boy', 'son' or 'teenager'; it carries its own associations with laddish behaviour, as indeed does the category 'gang'.[3] Graham also implies that the lad's ongoing bad behaviour is attributable to the mother of the family (lines 5, 9-10, 13-14) and, specifically, to the lack of 'a bloke' (line 9) in the lad's life. The category 'mother' (line 9) forms part of 'standardized relational pairs' such as 'mother-child' or, relevantly here, 'mother-son', but also 'mother-father'. This makes the absence of 'a bloke', at just this juncture where the lad's behaviour is being described and explained, invoke the absence of a father, or someone occupying that family role. Graham implies that if a 'bloke' were present, the 'lad' would be less likely to keep "getting' away with it". His categorizations invoke normative notions of family relations, in which a mother *and father* should be present if children are to be properly brought up. The mother is accountable for failing to supply a father figure for her children; "a bloke" is not merely absent, but is something that, accountably, "'is mother 'asn't got… there" (line 9). As always in this kind of analysis, the details are crucial. Note that the category 'bloke' *instead* of 'father' provides for additional inferences: it implies that the mother is separated, divorced, or perhaps an unmarried mother, where any 'bloke' who might be around is probably not her son's father. Graham's detailed, mundane category choices demonstrate the subtle inferential work that everyday categorization performs, as part of a mundane normative order of right and wrong behaviour.

Louise develops the substance of Graham's complaint (lines 11-12), claiming that the mother is "not li:vin' there 'alf the time", where what makes such a thing remarkable (i.e., worth saying) is that living at home with your children is standard and normative for mothers. Graham adds that "she's o::ut at ni:ght". Again, this is not merely a factual description of events, but one that is heavy with moral implications. As with all descriptions, whatever their accuracy, they do not have to be said; they are always examinable for precisely how they are framed, where they occur, and what they do. For a 'mother' to be 'out at night' (and specifically "at ni:ght", when a different range of activities are available from during the day), or to not live in the house with her children "'alf the time", is to fail in her mundane, category-bound maternal obligations of care and responsibility. It is in the participants' procedures of linking particular activities to categories that we can see moral work being

done. Failure to fulfil category-bound duties is sanctionable, and this is central to the working of normative understandings of what 'mothers' appropriately do (Heritage & Lindström, 1998). By lining up lists of activities not properly associated with the category 'mother', participants can establish a negative moral identity for the target of their complaint. As White (2002) points out, 'if "mother" is associated with nurturance and care, a description of behaviours departing from these expectations will serve to reference deviance' (p. 414). Again, it is significant that the participants use the category 'mother' here, rather than 'woman' 'neighbour', 'Mrs X' or whatever, as the complaint turns on this particular category's relevance.

In contrast, along the lines of Garcia (1996), we might use *as an analytic resource* Gillligan's concepts such as 'ethic of care', which could plausibly be seen in the extract and use to characterize participants' moral reasoning. It might be noted that both a man (Graham) and a woman (Louise) use those kinds of arguments. Others might selectively attribute a 'justice' argument to Graham ("the la:d keeps getting away with it") and contrast that with Louise's attention to the mother's lack of care for her family (by "not li:vin' there 'alf the time"). However, these kinds of observation are made on the basis of the *speaker's* gender, require fitting what they say to rather vague analytic categories (it is not always clear whether 'care' or 'justice' is the best coding category), and miss the subtle, sequential negotiations of gender and morality that we find in ordinary talk. We can see in the extract the mundane, ordinary way that gender issues can get connected to moral ones as part of talk's practical business – in this case, the business of making a complaint, and building its seriousness, in the context of defining problems in need of mediation. As we shall see in the rest of the extract, the participants produce coordinated descriptions and complaints against their neighbour, with scant sign of the speakers using different senses of moral order.

Section (2) rejoins the participants several minutes later.

(2) DM Case 102 Party 1 25.11.97 (15-55)

```
15 M:   So ↑when you say the mother goes ou::t,
16      (0.2)
17 L:   She's u[s u a l l y      o u : t   ] at ni:ght[s.
18 G:          [We >don't know whether sh-<]          [We don'
19      know whether [she's working] w- I: ↓think she's working=
20 L:                [some ni:ghts.]
21 G:   =in [a pub.
22 L:       [She's spending ni:ghts away isn't she.=
23 M:   =°Ri:[ght.°
24 G:        [I reckon she might be as well= [bt she's comin'
25 E?:                                       [°Yeh°
26 G:   'ome at (.) I think (.) I think next door's seen her
27      com- (0.3) seen ['er comin home at-]
28 E:                   [ Well   Eileen    ]
29      (.)
30 G:   [Eileen]
31 E:   [Eil:ee]:n that side has had plenty to say about that
32      because (.) heh they have a ↑bedroom at the front.
33 L?:  Ye:h
34 G:   'n [she's making a ↑right [racket isn't she
35 E:      [ She   says   ni:ght  [after   ni:[ght,
36 B:                             [They- they've moved to the
37      back now.
38      (0.3)
39 E:   ↑Have the:y?=
40 G:   =Yeh!
41      (0.2)
42 L:   Yeh (.) [>cuz THE< NOise]
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43 E:          [WELL THEY USE:d] t'have a bedroom at the
44      fro:nt. And she use't' complain to me that the mother
45      use't' come an' she use't'be bashing on the door.= Why:
46      (.) she couldn't have a key cut I don't know.
47      (.)
48 M?   [°Mm.°
49 E:   [But she couldn't.
50      (0.6)
51 E:   An' >what she did was< (.) bash (.) on the door an'
52      y:ell (.) through the letterbox.
53      (0.6)
54 E:   For the kids t'come and let'er in.
55 M?   °Mm.°
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In section (2) the participants further develop their description of the mother's absences. These are occasioned by the mediator's prompt (line 15, "So ↑when you say the mother goes ou::t,") which notably omits the significant detail "at ni:ght" from the prior turn (Section 1, line 13), which Louise then re-inserts (line 17), characterizes as routine ("usually"), and re-asserts with an upgrade to "spending ni:ghts away" rather than just going out for the evening. Louise is clearly working up the mother's moral accountability in a concerted manner, in which the absences are to be noted as nocturnal and regular.

Graham's initial "We don' know whether" occasions a softening from Louise ("some ni:ghts"), although it turns out that Graham's modification is directed not at the absences, but at what they are claiming the mother might be doing when out. This is something he can only surmise ("We >don't know whether sh-< We don' know whether she's working w-"), but offers "I: ↓think she's working in a pub." Although going out to work would (normatively) be a more responsible maternal activity than, say, going out and having a good time, it remains something done at night, and "in a pub" – a locus of alcohol-enhanced sociability unlike, say, an office cleaning job. While managing to display a concern for not jumping to conclusions about what the mother is up to, or not saying more than they know, the complainers manage to build a picture of a mother who is routinely not where mothers ought to be – "out at night" and even the upgraded, more damaging "spending ni:ghts away" with its implication of more than merely going to work.

Graham produces a hedged agreement on nights away (line 24, "I reckon she might be as well"), but returns to what they have eyewitness evidence of from a neighbour, itself sufficient grounds for complaint, which is the mother's late and noisy (line 34) returns home. The image is that of a mother who, even if not staying out all night, which she may sometimes do, regularly stays out late at night, leaving her kids alone and unsupervised, and thus free to engage in gang-based activities (Section 1, lines 13-14). Graham's turn "I think next door's seen her com- (0.3) seen 'er comin' home at-" projects that a specific time of night will be provided, but Elaine's interruption (line 28) picks up on the details via which this neighbour, jointly identified as "Eileen" (lines 28-31), is in a position (literally) to provide reliable reports. Graham introduces Eileen not by name, but via the metonym 'next door' – "I think next door's seen her…". The identity "next door" places Eileen as close as she can get, establishing her entitlement to know and report what happens in the adjoining house. Louise elaborates that entitlement, using another metonym 'that side' – "that side has had plenty to say about that because (.) heh they have a ↑bedroom at the front" (lines 31-32).

The complainable (and therefore mundane moral) nature of the late night noise, made by the mother's return, is enhanced by the extremity of its description, produced in overlap by Graham and Elaine ("making a ↑right racket", "ni:ght after ni:ght", lines 34-35), based on what next door neighbour Eileen tells them ("she says", line 35), and by the consequence reported by Brian and Louise, that Eileen has "moved to the back now (…)>cuz THE< NOise" (lines 37, 42). Further details are then provided where the mother, arriving home late

and inexplicably without her keys, would "be bashing on the door (…) An' >what she did was< (.) bash (.) on the door an' y:ell (.) through the letterbox (lines 45, 51-52). The details "bashing" and "yelling" (rather than, say, knocking and calling) signal the extremity and uncontrolled nature of the noise being made, while the mother's puzzling lack of a key tells us that she was doing something easily avoidable, with a bit of forethought. Again, these activities are presented as routine, 'scripted' and thereby character-implicative (Edwards, 1995; cf. Smith, 1978), as things she not only did but regularly 'used to' do. And rather than seeing that her children got a good night's sleep, they were the ones that had to come and let their mother in (line 54), in which case they must also be up late, or be woken up late.

These various activities, when directly attached, as here, to the category "the mother" (line 44), further function to build a negative moral identity for her. She not only stays out very late, leaving her children unattended, but also fails by the normative spatial and temporal rules of being a 'good neighbour' (e.g., neighbours should not make noises that disturb the people next door, activities should happen at their proper time, and so on: see Stokoe and Wallwork, 2003; Stokoe and Hepburn, 2005). The fact that her children have to let her into her own house reverses the normative order of things. Within Sacks's 'positioned categories', 'mothers' are 'adults' and 'parents', a higher category than 'kids', yet here the mother is engaged in activities more usually associated with kids or teenagers – coming home late, making a racket and having to be let in. As Sacks noted, if category members engage in the activities customarily bound to a lower-positioned category, the account works as a complaint or degradation.

In section (3) Elaine picks up and re-topicalizes the issue of time-of-night which Graham was introducing when she cut in at lines 27-28.

(3) DM Case 102 Party 1 25.11.97 (56-90)

```
56 E:  So:: uh wh- ↑↑What time'd that be?= ↓Two three o'
57     [clock in the morning,]
58 G:  [Two or three o'clock ] in the [morning.
59 L:                                [Ye:h.
60 L:  °Yeh°
61 E:  Yeh.
62     (0.3)
63 B:  °Yeh°
64     (0.4)
65 E:  That's how long they're left unat[tended.
66 G:                                  [I did-
67     (.)
68 G:  [she-
69 E:  [And because he's of a certain a:ge its all right you
70     see.
71     (0.2)
72 L:  ↑But some days she jus seems to be there: (.) away for a
73     week, 't a time you don't see her [at all.
74 G:                                    [You don't see her at
75     [all you know.
76 E:  [Yeh she ↑did go on ↓holiday din't she in:
77     (0.5)
78 B:  [(Was it then she) left the ki:ds ]
79 E:  [ I  was  told  she  went on  holi]da:y.
80 G:  What an' left them 'ere?
81 E:  An' left them he[re yeh.
82 G:                 [I wouldn' be a bit surpris[ed,
83 E:                                            [I don't know
84     about the little ↓lad but the other two[:.
85 G:                                          [(Eeyeh.)
86     (0.3)
87 G:  Yeh.=
```

```
88 E:  =Of course all hell breaks ↓loose when that happens, n'
89     we: cop it.
90     (.)
```

Further details of the mother's routine absences establish her as a bad member of the category 'mother'. The time "↓Two three o'clock in the morning", is vague enough to allow a range of particular times for what is clearly a repeated activity, where all times within that range are hearably late, in fact probably more like club time than pub time.[4] In any case, the relevant upshot for judging bad mothers is produced by Elaine: "That's how long they're left unattended." The participants then jointly produce a second story pointing to still greater neglect, in which the mother apparently (from what Elaine was "told", line 79) went on holiday for a week, leaving her children home alone. So this time it is a whole week, and not for any potentially mitigating reason such as going to work, but to go on holiday. Again a morally relevant upshot is formulated, this time in terms of the children's consequent unruly behaviour ("all hell breaks ↓loose", line 88), and its consequences for the neighbours ("we: cop it.", line 89).

The turns through which these reported facts, upshots and evaluations are produced display some interesting features of collaborative co-production that we will consider briefly. For example:

```
76 E:  [Yeh she ↑did go on ↓holiday din't she in:
77     (0.5)
78 B:  [(Was it then she) left the ki:ds ]
79 E:  [ I  was  told  she  went on  holi]da:y.
80 G:  What an' left them 'ere?
81 E:  An' left them he[re yeh.
```

The moral relevance of Elaine's information in line 76 is picked up by Brian in 78, by Graham in 80, and confirmed by Elaine in 81. The mother's crucial action was not going on holiday as such but, formulated as upshot by three speakers, leaving her kids at home. This kind of joint production of stories and complaints is a regular feature throughout and beyond this long sequence. It tends to blur any clear division of labour between the men and women (if those are relevant speaker categories) who are making the various complaints and condemnations, while displaying the complainers as consensual and, by implication, factually grounded and correct (cf. Edwards & Potter, 1992, on the factual rhetoric of consensus). However, gender relevance is powerfully present. It resides in the categories, actions, and their normative associations, through which anecdote, evaluation, complaint and blame are assembled. The basis of these culpable actions in the mother's moral character and known ways of behaving (rather than, say, in circumstances or necessity) is projected by Graham in line 82, "I wouldn' be a bit surprised".

One detail we have neglected so far is Elaine's contribution on lines 69-70: "And because he's of a certain a:ge its all right you see." Elaine is not endorsing the mother's neglect here, as being "all right", but referring obliquely to legality. We take her to be saying that the troublesome boy is *legally* old enough to be left alone, which also means that the neighbours have no easy access to, say, police or social services for intervention. What we have here, implicit though it may be, is a participants' distinction between the law, according to which the mother is "all right", and a sense of category-bound mundane morality, by which she is culpable, and a bad mother. Although the participants do not employ the term 'bad', such an adjective provides a useful gloss for 'indicating in broad terms' how they might be assessing incumbency of the category (Cuff, 1994, p. 53).

At this point in the long extract we will gloss about 30 lines of talk between sections (3) and (4). The mediator asks whether they have tried talking to the woman (a mediation-

relevant question), to which the complainants respond that any such overtures merely receive "a mouthful", "a lot of abuse", "shouting" and "effing and blinding" (i.e., swearing).[5] Elaine then provides an example of this, when she "tackled them about the do:g (…) an' the dog muck on the fron:t." That takes us to section (4).

(4) DM Case 102 Party 1 25.11.97 (122-137)

```
122 E:  >SHE DIDN' ACTUALLY< COME OU:t t'me:, n' say what is the
123     problem. It was jus- (.) she was backing up her son who
124     was giving me a load o' lip.
125     (0.6)
126 E:  So: (0.3) well that's just fantastic isn' it.
127     (0.8)
128 G:  'n then she called him in did she not, (0.2) El[aine?
129 E:                                                [She did
130     ye:h.
131 G:  I reme- ↑I was there, I sa- I [heard] him (0.2) call=
132 E:                               [Ye:h.]
133 G:  ='er- ca- (0.2) you gerrin'ere or [somethin of the sort,
134 E:                                    [Is if somebody has a
135     problem: (.) w-with a child of mi:ne I w'd (.) want to
136     kno:w what it was all abou:t.
137     (0.8)
138 E:  Bu- (.) she's- I don't think she's interested.
```

Again, the picture produced here is that of a mother or parent who fails to act as a proper, responsible member of that category. Instead, she supports her son in the act of doing something wrong (lines 123-124), indeed the classic category-bound bad child activity of 'talking back' to an adult, in this case "giving me a load o' lip". This is just the kind of thing a proper mother ought to be training her children *not* to do. The child's failure is clearly, and emphatically, the mother's; a moral failure of the expectable ties between the relational category pair parent-child. Elaine locates the mother's behaviour within a generalized, moralizing, category-bound principle: "if somebody has a problem: (.) w-with a child of mi:ne I w'd (.) want to kno:w what it was all abou:t." (lines 134-136). The mother is deeply culpable, because it is not only her actions that are bad, but also her intentions and dispositions; the pinciple is formulated not only as a behavioural code but as what Elaine "w'd (.) want" to do (line 135; cf. Edwards, 2006, on modality and morality), against which the bad mother stands in stark contrast: "Bu- (.) she's- I don't think she's interested" (line 138).[6]

What we have here is a piece of mundane moral reasoning, produced not as abstract theory but as category-tied principles by which actual, situated complaints are made, while also attending to the live interactional matters being addressed – this is still hearably attending to the mediator's inquiry about whether they have tried talking to the woman. Interestingly, Elaine also provides a case where the speaker's own category membership is made relevant ("w-with a child of mi:ne", line 135). The analytic point here is that, rather than seeing the speaker's category membership (as woman, mother, parent, neighbour, or whatever) as pervasively relevant to everything she says, we have grounds for seeing its relevance as an occasioned and performative feature of her talk. In this case, it provides a basis for her being in a position, as someone who may have children of her own, for making an informed, contrastive judgement. A further advantage of finding category relevance in the talk itself is that it allows us to be specific about what the category actually is. In this case it appears to be 'parent' rather than 'woman' or 'mother' – someone who may have "a child of mi:ne". Indeed, invoking parenthood rather than motherhood may itself be some kind of orientation to the co-production of her complaint with Graham and the others – this is not to

be heard as a complaint by mothers as such. So gender irrelevance can also be an analysable members' production.

Section (5) completes the long extract, and introduces a category ("tart") that specifically characterizes how the woman dresses, but that also fits with, and perhaps formulates as a conclusion, much of what they have been saying about her.

(5) DM Case 102 Party 1 25.11.97 (137-155)

```
138 E:  Bu- (.) she's- I don't think she's interested.
139     (0.7)
140 E:  d'↑I don't think she cares actually she's not spoken to
141     any of all of us has she in [all the time=
142 L:                              [No:,
143 E:  she['s be]en here[.
144 G:     [No,  ]       [never spoke.
145     (0.8)
146 G:  Never spoke.
147     (.)
148 G:  She jus' dresses up,
149     (1.4)
150 G:  [(What's it,)]
151 E:  [Like a tart.]
152     (0.4)
153 L:  °Ye:[h.°
154 G:  [Hehaheh.
155     (0.2)
156 G:  Yeh
```

The actual contrast produced here is not one that would occur in any discussion of abstract categories, outside of a study of situated practices. It is a contrast between someone who, out of disinterest, "never spoke" (lines 140, 144, 146), but rather "jus' dresses up… like a tart" (lines 148, 151). It is neither empirically obvious, nor logically-semantically required, that people who dress like tarts do not speak to their neighbours. It is a category and contrast produced for its occasion (cf. Watson, 1997).

Again, note the sequential organization of the jointly produced category-activity pair, in which Graham describes an activity, Elaine provides the candidate category ("tart") to which it might be tied, and Graham and Louise establish it as the correct one with their laughter and 'yeh' receipts (see Stokoe, 2009, on the way speakers move between description and categorization in the accomplishment of particular social actions). The logic of the contrast lies in its specific application to this woman that they have been talking about. Rather than being a person like they imply themselves to be (considerate, civil, responsible, interested in their children's welfare and neighbourliness, neighbourly), her interests lie elsewhere, in some kind of wanton and irresponsible self-indulgence. The way she dresses, and the membership category that it invokes, are tied to the same range of behaviours in which she goes out at nights, comes home late, makes a racket, goes on holiday leaving her children at home, and fails to discipline them properly. Her inadequacies are not only behavioural but moral, psychological, and generalized: it is her nature.

Conclusion

In this chapter we have developed and illustrated a particular approach to the empirical study of morality and gender. We started with a classic study in this area, which was Gilligan's (1982) timely corrective to what she saw as a male-dominated trajectory of moral-developmental research and, in particular, Kohlberg's 'finding' that boys develop superior moral reasoning skills to girls. What Gilligan did was to start with Kohlberg's work and find it sexist, a study and celebration of male rather than female moral reasoning. But there is a different, or additional, problem with Kohlberg, which derived from Piaget before him, and

two thousand years of moral philosophy before that. Piaget's project was not, primarily, to describe how people think and reason. Rather, it was the project he termed 'genetic epistemology' (Piaget, 1972), whose aim was to provide a developmental account of what makes epistemology possible, and especially the highest forms of abstract, rational thought (science, logic, mathematics). Kohlberg inherited from Piaget a concern with the developmental origins of philosophical reasoning. This was always likely to be a different enterprise from studying how people actually think and reason, within, and *as*, mundane practices of accountability.

When Gilligan developed her contrast between male and female morality, she relativized Kohlberg by noting a male bias in his studies. But she retained Kohlberg's conflation of everyday moral reasoning with moral philosophizing, a matter of off-stage thoughtful reflection of the kind that can be elicited in standardized tests using dilemmas, or in interviews or discussion groups. This in turn produces a broader and deeper problem, in how moral reasoning tends to be studied outside of historically sedimented cultural practices. There are probably many sets of values very different from the Platonic tradition of western thought within which both Kohlberg and Gilligan worked, that are nevertheless no less male-dominated. There are contrasts between East and West, for example, which are very relevant in the current climate of world politics, yet themselves only a small indication of the differences available to anthropological research. The fundamental problem with Kohlberg's approach is not merely a gender bias, but the promotion of a philosphized conception of moral reasoning outside of its roots in cultural practices, and outside of the availability of those practices to a study of everyday, situated talk-in-interaction.

We have produced a discursive psychological take on this topic, informed by CA and MCA, focusing on the location of 'morality' and 'gender' inside ordinary practices, and on the performative, indexical nature of those practices. In writing a chapter for a book that takes 'morality' as its central topic, we have tried to be tentative, or provisional, in using that term as an adequate or well understood gloss on members' everyday practices of describing and evaluating each other's conduct and character. We have focused on how senses of right and wrong, or of blame and culpability, are accomplished in actual, situated complaints, and shown how strategies such as subtle category work, coordinated joint production, descriptions and evaluative upshots, the use of scripts and dispositional inferences, listing features not normatively tied to categories, and so on, all work to produce these mundane moral senses.

Finally, we have shown how culturally familiar categories (including gender categories) such as 'mother', 'bloke', 'lad', 'tart', 'woman', 'parent' and 'son', and the characteristics, duties, obligations, etc. that are normatively (and mundanely morally) associated with them, functioned in a particular institutional setting: an example of neighbour dispute mediation. What people produce as evidence for their everyday grumbles and complaints tells us something about the culture we live in. In the case presented, it is a culture in which mothers are accountable for behaving in certain ways, where 'accountable' means both describable (their actions can be placed under a range of vernacular descriptions) and being held to account (mundane morality). Future research might focus on the implications of this kind of analysis for the practices of mediation, for the study of mundane morality in other settings, and for the study of the cultural production of common sense knowledge about gender, family and parenting matters.

[1] Most of this corpus was collected as part of ESRC grant number RES-148-25-0010 "Identities in neighbour discourse: Community, conflict and exclusion" held by Elizabeth Stokoe and Derek Edwards.

[2] The data analysed here were discussed at a meeting of the Discourse and Rhetoric Group at Loughborough University. We would like to thank members of the group for their helpful observations.
[3] In *The Lord of the Rings*, Tolkein's orcs refer to each other as 'lads'.
[4] In England pubs close by 11.30pm, and bar staff would expect to be away by midnight, whereas clubs typically stay open until 2pm or later. We are stretching the proper bounds of analysis here, but any implication of clubs rather than pubs would carry implications about what kinds of activities the mother might be engaged in.
[5] Further moral category work is done by use of direct reported speech and its delivery and prosody (cf. Drew, 1988), in which the bad mother/neighbour is reproduced as shouting from her doorstep in what we might call a 'fishwife' manner "you gerrin'ere'", etc. Once nice feature is how her actual swearing is indirectly glossed as "effin and blindin" rather than directly reproduced; this indexes the current speakers as folk who, *unlike her*, do not use that type of language, at least to a mediator (see also Stoke & Edwards, 2007)
[6] In Piaget's (1932) account of children's moral development, the *intentionality* of an action is a key feature in mature moral reasoning. With regard to mundane morality, it is also a key feature of action descriptions in the production of complaints (Drew, 1998).

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