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In the heat of the sequence: Interactional features preceding walkouts from argumentative talk

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ABSTRACT

This article examines complaint sequences that terminate with one party's walking out, unilaterally, on the other. The analysis of three such extended sequences, using the Conversation Analytic approach, reveals interactional parallels among them. The complaints that precede the walkouts are constructed so as to identify deleterious and generic personal deficiencies. As these sequences develop, they come to focus on faults in the current behavior of those involved. In their final stages, the actions of the leavers appear sensitive to the persistence of behavior that has been deemed to be at fault. This combination of features seems connected to both the unilateral departure and the state of indignation that also becomes evidently present. This invites comparison with other forms of antagonistic dispute, such as those that lead to certain instances of murder. (Argument; complaints; communication breakdown; conflict; emotion.)*

INTRODUCTION

Most of the research that has examined the interactional detail of disputes has focused on the public face of conflict management, on what transpires when those in dispute attempt to resolve their differences by seeking assistance from others – usually in institutional settings such as courts or arbitration/mediation transactions (e.g., Brenneis 1988, Bilmes 1992, Firth 1995, Greatbatch & Dingwall 1997). The disputes in question usually emerge out of and are given their original shape and impetus by earlier confrontations and arguments between the principal parties. Much less is known about what takes place on these earlier occasions – about the course of events that results in the kind of impasse that may then lead to the use of conflict resolution procedures. Often, this has to be reconstructed on the basis of retrospective accounts provided later by those concerned, as we can see in much of the literature on domestic disputes (e.g., Dobash & Dobash 1979, Gelles 1987). Of necessity, such a procedure glosses over much of

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the original interactional detail, and it thus comes to disregard the potential significance of this detail.

The exploration of argument *in vivo* has been most systematically carried out in the context of children's behavior, especially by Maynard 1985a, 1985b, Corsaro & Rizzo 1990, and M. Goodwin 1990. They have addressed how arguments begin and end, the shape of oppositional moves and connections with social activities and identities. Of particular interest is the finding that termination appears to be achieved most often without the parties having resolved the dispute by moving into some state of agreement. Goodwin (1990:156–57), for example, writes: "On Maple Street the end of an argument generally occurs without any sharp indication that either position has 'won' or 'lost'. A conflict tends to terminate when one of the two disputing parties does not tie talk to the topic of the prior dispute, but instead produces an action that breaks the ongoing argument frame." In his examination of argument endings in adult family dinnertime talk, Vuchinich 1990 similarly finds that most of these episodes end with both parties continuing to hold contrary views. To some extent, this is likely to be associated with the systematic properties of certain sequence types that occur in arguments. Complaints, for example, have the capacity to foster subsequent opposition among the parties involved. Garcia 1991, following Atkinson & Drew 1979 and Coulter 1990, notes that the common response to a complaint is a denial. Complainees standardly reply to overt complaints either by denying that they did the act in question, or by claiming that, if they did do it, then they were not at fault (Dersley & Wootton 2000; on accounts more generally, see Scott & Lyman 1968; for useful overviews, see Antaki 1994 and Buttny 1993, Chap. 2). When confronted by such forms of defense, the original complainer, in his or her next turn, overwhelmingly maintains the original line of complaint, while complainees continue to construct forms of defense against the line of attack (Dersley & Wootton 2000). In this way, we have the beginnings of what comes to be a "normal" feature of complaint sequences in which at least one of the parties develops a LINE of complaint that is sustained over the course of several turns – a pattern that displays a continuing state of opposition on the part of those involved.

Although argument sequences most often end with the parties still holding contrary views, the shape of the endings can vary. Vuchinich 1990 draws distinctions between endings in which a third party intervenes, those in which one of the parties initiates closure through offering a concession, stand-offs (in which one of the participants changes the topic at a time when it is evident to all that those in contention remain poles apart), and withdrawals (in which one party either withdraws entirely from the conversation or physically leaves the location in which the dispute is taking place). The ending scenario that most concerns us here is the last one: that in which one of the parties brings matters to a close by unilaterally walking out on the other. Within a large corpus of antagonistic arguments collected by the first author (Dersley 1998), there happen to be several that contain this outcome, and it is these on which we focus here. In a way, to speak of

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such departures as "endings" of arguments is obviously incorrect; to end an argument in this way is to set up an expectation that, on some next occasion, the nature of the division will need to be readdressed. Little is known about the modes through which conflicts are renewed or reconciliations achieved, but there can be little doubt that exits of the kind we examine can create appropriate conditions for their subsequent deployment. One reason for choosing this manner of "ending," therefore, is its intimate association with the creation of a more enduring impasse between people.

The argument sequences that terminate in such unilateral departures[1] contain within them, at least in our data, transitions from conversations that appear to be running in relatively low-key ways to ones that are highly antagonistic; in the latter, consistent with the observations of Vuchinich (1990:132), at least one of the parties is evidently in a state of emotional turmoil. Examination of these sequences permits, therefore, not just the identification of those interactional features that precipitate this kind of departure – a matter not dealt with in existing research – but also of the transformation in the nature of an affective relationship between people. In this regard, three further traditions of research provide useful inputs for analysis. The first comprises more linguistically based studies that identify the various channels through which affect can be coded (for overview, see Besnier 1990). Such studies provide a useful set of tools for identifying possible linguistic exponents of emotion, although their bearing on such matters as transitions in emotional display clearly needs to be taken alongside some examination of the interactional dynamics of the occasions on which such transitions are evident. Second are approaches that focus on the ways in which avowals and ascriptions of emotionally related categories are designed and achieved within discourse, an approach most recently exemplified within discursive psychology (for overview, see Edwards 1997, Chap. 7; Buttny 1993, Chap. 6). This draws our attention to the different ways in which emotional experiences can be talked about, and to the ways in which these interconnect systematically with the performance of different activities in conversation. A third strand of research places less weight on problems involved in the identification of emotions and more on the interactional circumstances associated with their expression. Drawing in part on both Goffman and Conversation Analysis, Heath 1988, 1989, in particular, has shown how the exhibition of pain and embarrassment is conditioned by specific kinds of interactional configuration (see also Wootton 1997, Chap. 4). This suggests that the precise sequential placement of emotional displays will hold important clues about the circumstances that shape the kinds of transition with which we are concerned in this report.

Within our database, there are three occasions on which extended sequences end in one of the parties walking out on the other. All three occur in an environment in which the argument principally involves two people, and where one or both parties are laying complaints against the other. The analysis of these three sequences suggests certain parallel interactional features running through them

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which contribute to their evolving acrimonious nature. This article is concerned with identifying these features and with considering their significance for our understanding of how these sequences come to end as they do.

DATA

The sequences that precede the three walkouts are quite long, extending over several pages of transcript. As we approach the analysis of this material from a Conversation Analytic viewpoint, then the detail of what takes place is central both to how the analysis was constructed and to the forms of evidencing necessary to support our claims. For the purely pragmatic purpose of presenting our analysis here, we have chosen to provide the full data relating to just one of the three sequences, in ex. 1 below. We present summary outlines of the remaining two sequences.

Transcription conventions are those that have become standard within Conversation Analysis (see Atkinson & Heritage 1984:ix–xvi). Underlining indicates stress; capital letters mark loudness; colons give an indication of sound sustension; ° marks subsequent words as being spoken quietly; ⟩⟨ are boundary markers of stretches of talk that are spoken rapidly; [marks points of overlap; punctuation marks (? , .) are used to mark upward, level, and downward pitch patterns on the immediately prior tone unit; ↑↓ denote sudden pitch rises or falls; (.) indicates a brief but noticeable pause, while all other pauses are timed in seconds; = indicates no gap between the words on either side; ( ) empty parentheses indicate spoken but untranscribable words; words in single parentheses are ones of which the transcriber is not sure.

Joel/Mum

Joel, about 19 years old, is sitting alongside his mother in the front seat of a car. The transcript begins about 40 seconds into the video clip, at the point at which the talk immediately generating the complaint gets started. The camera is fixed in a position on the dashboard in front of them, trained on Joel, who sits on the passenger side. His mother is only occasionally in camera shot, when she leans toward him. No one else is present.

(1) [IAD:JM:1B:4]

34	Mum:	whA : T abou' goin' back t' this : youth education. (0.4)
35		programme.
36		(1.4)
37	Joel:	We' i' d- epe:ns on how ah'm trea::ted 'n all th-at.
38		(.)
39	Mum:	>w- ↑how y' m[ean< how y'r treated dj- °dj° you hea:rd what-
40	Joel:	[°y' know°
41	Mum:	sh' said the man (0.8) is a disciplina:rian really,
42		(0.8)
43	Mum:	he's not- gonna hit you ([ )
44	Joel:	[well no (wait), (0.7) as th' thought

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of living in a hou:se with having hatred in it (1.0) it j's
breaks you- down.
(1.5)
Joel: living in a hou::se (0.4) where there is a::nger and pai::n
(0.4) it- breaks you- down no matt-er what- .hh
(.)
Joel: 'n then you go to- school? Its gonna ee-ffect all a' that-
(.) 'n th- en y'r not gonna learn anything because y'r
thinkin' about all a' that.
(.)
Joel: .hhh like when people- are- hittin' you- y're gonna be
thinkin' about it.
Joel: .hh look (0.2) I- I- might- a' broke a window y' did-n' 'ave
t' cuff me up in the head.
(2.0)
Joel: why::,
(0.4)
Joel: I w's a litt-le chi::ld I d'n know w'- I w's doin' maybe I
w's (0.7) vacuumin' 'n (.4) (from) oo:ps I did'n mean t' do
that,
(0.9)
Mum: look (.) whenev' I hit you- >i' w's becau'< y' lie y'know,
(0.9)
Mum: you' a l::ia' y'know, (.) [an' I will: not have anybody lyin'=
Joel: [e x a c'l y be ca us e I ' m=
Mum: =t ' me]
Joel: =sca::red.]
(0.3)
Joel: because I a[m s c a :] r:ed.
Mum: [scared what]
(0.6)
Mum: scared f ' what?
(0.4)
Mum: scared f ' whAt?
(0.2)
Joel: the feeling of hatred an' (fear) [ness of you comin t' hit me.
Mum: [nobody hA:tes YOU,
(0.4)
Mum: you (.) l:isten you- wanna put me on a guilt trip or what-,
(0.2)
Joel: ah-'m not- sayin' th-a'.=
Mum: =whEn we were in England th-ere w's no:>body i-n de- house<
so you can't say the' w's ha:tred .hhh an' there was this
an' that. .hh an' all you did (0.2) w's lie t'me.
(0.6)
Mum: you spent a lot a' time LYin'? [.hh (0.7) an' doin' ev'ry
[((Joel nodding))
evil thing you can to- me.
(0.6)
Joel: ((unvoiced snort))
(0.3)
Mum: an' a:ll I w's doin' (0.3) w's >doin' th-e best< I can.
(0.4)
Mum: b't it- ↑WA:SN'T good enough fo' you.
(1.8)
Joel: you weren't th- ere.
(0.8)

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101 Mum: PRECISELY,
102 (0.3)
103 Mum: if I w's not if I w's there (1.0) there would'n a' been no
104 money 'n' we'd a' been on th-e goddamn do::l:e.
105 Joel: ((unvoiced snort))
106 (1.6)
107 Mum: I hhad to- go- out t' earn money.
108 (0.5)
109 Joel: °mhm°
110 (.)
111 Mum: because ah'm NOT a taker (.) an' I don' sit an' let people-
112 .hhhh (0.2) GIVE me.
113 (0.3)
114 Mum: I wo::r:k f' my money.
115 (1.2)
116 Mum: you have no apprec-iation of what I ever did fo' you boy.
117 (0.9)
118 Mum: you don't have that apprec-iation.
119 (0.9)
120 Mum: I'm sorry but it's true.
121 (1.4)
122 Mum: an' it's HIGH TIME (0.4) th-at- y'pull up y' socks an' sit
123 an' think (0.4) wha'- a::ll what- (0.8) I or A:nybody in this
124 fam'ly has ever done for you.
125 (0.9)
126 Mum: an' stop actin' like a- big arsehole th-at y'seem t' be doin'
127 right now.
128 (1.3)
129 Joel: that's what- I am (0.3) that's the- correct- word,
130 (.)
131 Mum: (w'-) yes you' geETTIN' ON LIKE ONE?
132 (0.9)
133 Joel: [w h y : : : ,]
134 Mum: [AND YOU HA] VE [BETTER T' GET ON TH-[AN THAT?
[((emphasizing hand gestures)) [
135 Joel: [DO:N' shout mum.
[((+ hand gestures))
136 Joel: don' shout,=
137 Mum: =BECAUSE Y'TELLIN' ME- [SHIT?
138 Joel: [do::n' SHOUT,
[((emphasizing hand gesture, head inclined
away, displaying discomfort))
139 (1.8)
140 Joel: y'see this is what- I don' like is when you'start -(ed)
141 raisin' your- voice, ((upset voice, hand emphasis throughout))
142 (0.2)
143 Joel: .h .h[↑THAT'S WHAT] – HURTS ME, ((upset + hand emphasis))
144 Mum: [( )]
145 (0.5)
146 Mum: No! [I can(t j's-)
147 Joel: [↑↑I ↑CAN'T ↑↑TAKE ↓IT ((screaming, starts to leave car after
the word 'I'))
148 (0.7)
149 Joel: ↑↑CAN'T FUCKIN'↑TAKE IT ((screaming, walking away from car))
150 (0.2)
151 Mum: ((Joel no longer present)) ah- oh- don't take it then.

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152		slam out?
153		(0.4)
154	Mum:	that's y' business.
155		(1.7)
156	Mum:	JE:sus CHRIs'! as soon as you- [ar::gue wi' th-at- boy.
157	Joel:	[( )
158		(ev'ry time I) FUCKIN' TALK T' y' ALWAYS GET ANGRY
159		(y' just don') shit- !! ((all done from a distance, away from the car))

Milly/Clara

Milly and Clara are sisters, aged about 21 and 18 respectively. The clip begins when they enter the kitchen of their family home, where their mother and a cameraperson are already present. From the outset, it is evident that an argument is already taking place between the two girls – it probably relates to Clara having sat in a chair that Milly felt that she had only temporarily vacated. Milly complains that Clara instigates quarrels in such a way that she, Clara, comes across as the innocent and victimized party. In the course of this, Milly identifies various further deleterious qualities in Clara. Clara denies these various claims and strongly defends herself throughout the conversation. The mother's only brief involvement is early on, when she urges them, unsuccessfully, to quarrel outside, where less damage might be done if things become violent. It is Milly who leaves the room unilaterally. The clip lasts 2 minutes 50 seconds.

Pete/Jill

These are two well-known international ice dance skaters, filmed during a practice session. Their coach is also present, but although nearby when they stand at the edge of the rink, he is very little involved in the conversation. During the clip, which lasts for 4 minutes 8 seconds, the two skaters practice a particular short step sequence four times; on each occasion, problems with the execution of the steps are identified, especially by Pete with regard to Jill's actions. The postmortem on the first failure focuses on technical matters to do with leaning and lifting. In the discussion after the second failure, the talk becomes more personal; Pete accuses Jill of developing a negative attitude toward the current practice of the step, and Jill counters that she has not had enough practice. These lines of argument are also echoed after the third failure. At the beginning of the fourth, Jill, now crying, aborts the sequence, whereupon Pete moves to another part of the ice. Shortly afterward, Jill leaves the ice.

All three sequences are available as audiovisual recordings and were derived from documentary television programs. No editing is apparent within them except for one cut in the Pete/Jill tape. This takes place as they begin their third practice of the dance segment; the video record appears to resume shortly afterward, at the point of breakdown in this practice. The fact that, in all cases, the participants knew they were being filmed, and that the film might be televised, could clearly have a bearing on their conduct during the recordings. This be-

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comes most evident on occasions like line 156 of ex. 1, when Joel's mother says *Jesus Christ as soon as you argue with that boy* shortly after Joel has exited from the car in a heated state. Such an account of the causes of Joel's exit could well be designed for a viewing audience, and, as will become evident, there are other places in the data at which the presence of the camera and/or camera operators is oriented to by the participants. The fact remains that, within these sequences, acrimonious arguments develop between the parties in question, and that these are a product of their shaping the conversations in particular ways. Our analysis does not turn on claims about the frequency with which particular acts occur; it focuses on identifying the procedures that appear to inform those actions they choose to take. There may be other actions that are usable in events of this kind; if so, our analysis is necessarily limited to the extent of being able to address only those which are made evident within our recordings (see Drew 1989:99–100 for useful discussion).

Already we have used the phrase "complaint sequences" to characterize the data to be addressed. Within Conversation Analysis, the identification of broader units of talk that comprise utterance arrays is approached emically, with a view to identifying the procedures through which people orient to such broader units and the kinds of units thereby revealed. Although it is recognized that there are important ways through which referential coherence and "topic" are constituted through the design of talk (see especially Halliday & Hasan 1976, Sacks 1992), there are also various difficulties in treating units like "topic" as pervasively being the locally relevant macro-unit for the speakers in question. Such difficulties have been described by Schegloff 1990, and he demonstrates how adjacency pair structures (such as question-answer) can contain within them, and turn into a coherent sequence, talk that includes diverse topical concerns. Heritage and Sorjonen 1994 further show that speakers have ways through which both diverse topics and diverse sequences can be linked so as to display an orientation to an underlying activity or course of action (see also Goodwin & Goodwin 1990; for other delineations of the significance of activity types, see Levinson 1979, Gumperz 1982, Ochs 1988). In our own data, the extent and direction of the talk is given its initial impetus by the complaints that occur at an early stage. We have already noted that complaints have the capacity to generate sequences in which contrary alignments are developed over a number of turns. So, although the coherence within our data is more akin to that form of sequential coherence described by Schegloff 1990, it is given a distinctive cast by the capacity of complaint–defense structures to generate further talk subsequent to the completion of a complaint-admission/defense adjacency pair.

Even a cursory glance at ex. 1, the transcript of Joel and his mother, will reveal that the talk ranges over quite diverse topics – for example, violence toward Joel (lines 48–64), whether or not Joel was a liar (lines 66–88), and the mother's approach to her employment during Joel's childhood (lines 95–114). The sequence-like character of this talk is evident through the way in which the participants

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come to adopt and maintain linked but conflicting alignments. The initial complaint begins to get formulated at line 37, in Joel's reply to his mother's initial inquiry about returning to the youth education program.[2] Initially, there is some apparent misunderstanding of this turn. At lines 39, 41, and 43, Mum treats Joel as referring at line 37 to the man in charge of the youth education program. But then, in lines 44–64, Joel makes clear that his allusion had been to his mother rather than to the man, and he spells out his complaint against his mother, though it is still loosely packaged as addressing her original educational inquiry. This line of complaint is met by the mother's identifying shortcomings in Joel, notably his lying; this is constructed as a counter-complaint against him. These two lines of complaint and counter-complaint become invoked at various points within the subsequent talk. For example, Joel returns to his critical line about his mother's violent behavior toward him at lines 73–80 and 135–143. Even where fresh themes are raised, as when mother talks about her past efforts to keep the family off the dole (welfare) at line 103 and following, it is clear that this is constructed as a response to Joel's further complaint (line 99), which itself is an attempt to undercut the line of defense Mum has been trying to mount to his earlier complaint. These kinds of internal evidence suggest, then, that for the participants the spate of talk amounts to some kind of internally coherent unit, which we can call a sequence; and there are ways in which this is true for each of the three sequences we address, even though we forgo the documentation of this for the remaining two.

GENERIC DEFICIENCIES

What it is that is complained of – the complainable – varies greatly within complaint sequences. Within our corpus, some complaints are about quite specific things. For example, in one case the employee of an organization who does his work at home complains to his boss about the fact that his work telephone, situated in his home, has been cut off in connection with a pending inquiry into his work behavior. In such cases, the complainer may cite a number of problematic facets pertaining to the issue in hand, but the complaint remains relatively focused over all on matters concerning the specific events in question and how they have been handled. Within the three sequences on which we focus here, there is a departure from this pattern in that all the complaints, and at quite an early stage, come to focus on more generic, enduring deficiencies that are claimed to be discernible in the behavior of the complainee (the person complained against). We will identify where and how this becomes apparent in each of our three sequences.

Joel/Mum

In ex. 1, the Joel/Mum transcript, Joel's early formulation of his complaint at lines 44–49 implies that the relationships within the family home, during the

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time he was there, were not good; he was *living in a house where there is anger and pain*, and his approach to his schoolwork was affected by this. Even though he goes on, at lines 57–64, to frame the complaint through the description of what may be a specific incident – he was hit because he broke a window – it is clear enough that his line of complaint is not just about this incident but about a pattern of such events that took place when he lived at home. At any rate, this is the way in which his mother treats the complaint at lines 66–70 – especially in *whenever I hit you it was because you lie you know (0.9) you'a liar y'know*, which recognizes that the circumstance being alluded to was a recurrent one. In the course of this counter-complaint, she identifies an enduring deficiency in him, his lying, which she cites as warranting her violence toward him on those occasions when she admits this took place. So we now have both the original complainer, Joel, and the counter-complainer, Mum, each finding enduring faults within the other's conduct. Because the maker of each of these complaints does not accept the defenses put up against them and persists with them, these complaints form continuing themes within the subsequent discussion: for example, Mum returns to the theme of Joel's lying at lines 88–90. Furthermore, subsequent failings that emerge in the course of this discussion are also cast in generic terms – for example, in Mum's formulation of Joel's lack of appreciation for her earlier contribution to the household (lines 116–124), which begins at line 116 with *you have no appreciation of what I ever did for you boy*.

Pete/Jill (the skaters)

In the sequence involving the two ice skaters, Pete and Jill, we find generic failings being alluded to after their second attempt to master the dance sequence has broken down. As they are standing by the side of the rink, Jill says to Pete, at line 44 of ex. 2, *don't look at me like that*, a complaint that treats Pete's manner of gaze and orientation to her as accusatory, as indexing a fault that he is finding in her. Pete's lines 45–6 – *you're just acting like it's not my responsibility (.) I'm not changing it*' – can thus be recognized as both a defense against Jill's complaint and an explication of the fault that forms the basis for him to be looking at her in the way he is.

(2) [IAD:TD:1A:5:2]
After their second attempt at the step sequence, the two dancers skate to the side of the rink. Pete leans one arm on the perimeter rail, holding a long look towards Jill. She stands about three feet away.

39	Jill:	((blows her nose))
40		(12.5)
41	Jill:	.hhhh hhh
42		(1.3)
43	Jill:	.hhh .hhhhh
44	Jill:	HHHHdon't look at me like tha:t. hhhh
45	Pete:	w' you- j's acting like it's not my responsi-bility (.) I-'m
46		not chang'n it- I'm not- g-onna- do anything,=

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47 Jill: = I am tryi [ng t' cha:nge it.
48 Pete: [I'm lea:ving it- no you're not=
49 Jill: =I a:m,
50 Pete: You're no:t,=
51 Jill: = b'i's not- g'nna go li' that- is it,
52 Pete: Wel' you j's got- 'n att-itude already that- y're not- gonna
53 try:.

Here, *I'm not changing it- I'm not gonna do anything* (lines 45–6), and the first part of line 48, *I'm leaving it*, which is constructed as a continuation of line 46, are recognizable as versions of Jill's thought processes, reports of her attributed subvocal speech. Through such reports, Pete appears to treat Jill's shortcomings in the practice as shaped by, and a product of, this negative attitude. This line of argument is given further expression and made even more explicit at lines 52–3, when Pete says *Well you've just got an attitude already that you're not going to try*. Furthermore, it is reinvoked after the next (third) attempt, and failure, at the dance sequence; part of this exchange is presented below as ex. 3. Here it is important to note that Jill has already proposed that the third attempt broke down through a technical failing on her part. Therefore, Pete's pursuit of the trouble source, from *What's your problem*, at line 111 onward, conveys a sense that, for him, there is an insufficiency in any mere technical account of the breakdown of the kind she has offered. Through the description offered in lines 116–7 and 119, Pete constructs the technical flaws as self-evidently absurd, as incongruous with what he knows of their standards of skill and aesthetics. This again paves the way for him to offer an alternative account of the trouble they – more specifically, she – are having; at line 121, he says *you just don't wanna be here do you*, which stands as a further negative characterization of Jill's mental approach to the current occasion.[3]

(3) [IAD:TD:1A:5:5]
The third attempt at the step also goes awry, the problem lying in the insufficient length of time Jill held her leg in a particular position. Jill has already agreed that the fault in this case was hers. Pete initiates the following exchange, which takes place as they move toward the edge of the rink. Note that *they* in line 113 refers to Jill's legs (line 113 being a sarcastic comment); *it* in line 115 refers to the leg in question; *one* in lines 116 and 117 refers either to a beat of time or to a kick action.

111 Pete: What's y' ↑PROB↓lem
112 (0.7)
113 Pete: >Are- they-< HEAVY?
114 (1.4)
115 Jill: No I w's holdin' i'- up before remem [ber.
116 Pete: [D'y'- did O:NE th-en
117 DROPPED it on O::NE,=
118 Jill: =Ye:h I [did- the:n.
119 Pete: ['n it looked STUpi::d.
120 (4.5) ((During this they arrive at the side of the rink))
121 Pete: I- uh- y- do- y- y' j-us' >don' wanna< be here do you,
122 (0.5)
123 Jill: Ye:es.

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Milly/Clara (the sisters)

Within the Milly/Clara sequence, ex. 4, we again find an early move toward the identification of some deleterious generic propensity. After Clara comes into the kitchen and accuses Milly of touching her in the course of doing so, Milly denies this and constructs a related complaint against Clara, which treats Clara's complaint as further evidence of complainable behavior in Clara. This becomes most fully formed at lines 34–7. Here, an unfortunate tendency or propensity of Clara's is being identified by Milly, something she *constantly* does, the impact of which is strengthened through the list-like[4] mentioning of three classes of persons in front of whom Milly has been humiliated in this way.

(4) [IAD:2S:2A:4:1]
This follows on Clara's accusing Milly of touching her on entry to the kitchen, and Milly's denying this. Mum has refused to get directly involved in the argument. The transcript below is slightly simplified.

24	Mum:	C'N YOU BOTH GO OU:TSI:DE,
25		(0.3)
26	Milly:	I:'m s:ick (.) an' ti:red of [you abs'lutely,
27	Clara:	[why sh'd I: 'ave t' go
28		outsi:de!!=
29	Mum	= >BECAUSE [I DON'T WANT [(THINGS BROKEN) IN HE[RE
30	Milly:	[j's [listen t'me [oka:y=
31	Mum:	=ou[tside
32	Milly	[I j's want you t' listen t'me,
33		(0.3)
34	Milly:	I'm sick 'n tired of you constantly (.) putt-in' me
35		down in front of yo[ur ↑FRIENDS in front of MY=
36	Clara:	[I'm not putt-in' you down
37	Milly:	=friends and in front of [them.
		[((M points at the camera))

Although Clara at line 36 denies the imputation in Milly's complaint, the deficiency in Clara that has been identified by Milly continues to form the main axis of her grievance against Clara within subsequent events. For example, in ex. 5, at lines 100–101, Milly again invokes Clara's TENDENCY to put down other people *to make yourself look good*, though here the generic nature of this propensity is further highlighted through claiming that this is a complainable matter not just for her, Milly, but also for whoever those *people* are who are indexed by the use of that word in line 100.

(5) [IAD: 2S:2A:4:4]
Immediately prior to this Clara has produced her version of how she came to occupy a chair that Milly had been sitting in, a matter that has obviously been in dispute prior to the beginning of our film record, but which Milly chooses not to dispute directly here.

92	Clara:	SO I DIDN'T THINK [YOU WERE COMING BACK IN,
93	Milly:	[YOU DIDN'T LET ME FINISH
94		(.)
95	Milly:	WHAT [I W'S SAYING
96	Clara:	[ALL YOU HAD T'DO WAS A::[SK
97	Milly:	[you (.) didn't (.)

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98 let me (.) finish (.) what I w's saying. (.) okay?
99 (.)
100 Milly: people don't like you putt-in' down o↑ther people
101 t' make yourself look good.

At this stage, it is worth making two further points that arise from our observations relating to the three incidents under examination. We have noted that, within all three sequences, fault in the behavior of another person is made identifiable through specific acts being grounded in egregious and generic tendencies; the corollary of this is that such tendencies account for and explain a range of more specific, though related, acts. To shape up the nature of offenses in this way is, of course, to select a particular version of the offenses in question. It turns a recent happening into an added instance of an earlier happening – a repeat offense. Moreover, instead of treating the most recent offense as independent of the earlier one, it turns both the earlier and later offenses into ones that arise from a common egregious source. This places the offender in a tricky position with regard to the construction of defenses. Goffman (1971:118), in writing about offenses, has noted that "the job of the offender is to show that it (the offense) was not a fair expression of his attitude, or, when it evidently was, to show that he has changed his attitude to the rule that was violated." Goffman's main concern in the relevant essay was with offenses that were initially oriented to as such by the offenders themselves, whereas in our cases it is the offended rather than the offender who, through the complaint, is exhibiting some initial orientation to the offense.[5] Nevertheless, the considerations mentioned by Goffman are still pertinent in that offenders, in their defenses, have the opportunity to display their orientation to the "rule" or other precept or expectation that informs the basis of the complaint. However, if the complainer constructs the complained-of action as arising from an underlying tendency of the complainee, that forestalls those forms of defense that treat what has happened as a one-time lapse of some kind, a temporary aberration not to be taken as indicative of a broader "moral" stance.[6]

The second point arises from the ways in which complainers formulate the nature of these underlying, generic tendencies. The invocation of attitudes or dispositions to act in particular ways can be done so as to serve a variety of interactional purposes. In a useful discussion of these matters, Edwards (1997, Chap. 6) shows how, at times, the actions of one of the parties in a counseling session can be constructed as an outcome of that man's endemic and pathologically jealous "nature," while at other times, the actions of the same man are shaped as connected to, and arising out of, specific features of the sequential context in which they occurred. When the "jealous nature" version of his activity is promulgated, then, this can be used as a means of attributing the blame for certain events to him, but in another way, it exonerates him of responsibility by treating his behavior in these events as beyond his control. By contrast, within the three sequences we have been examining, we find a different way of working up the dispositional tendencies attributed to complainees. Here, although generic

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and enduring dispositional features are being identified, as in some of the cases examined by Edwards, their detailed formulation is such as to highlight the PURPOSIVE, DELIBERATE, and INTENDED nature of the complained-of actions. In ex. 1, lines 90–91, Mum says *you spent a lot of time lying and doing every evil thing you can to me*. In ex. 2, lines 45–6 and 52, Pete says *well you're just acting like it's not my responsibility I'm not changing it I'm not gonna do anything*, and *Well you've just got an attitude already that you're not gonna try*. In ex. 4, Milly's use of the phrase *putting down* (lines 34–35) clearly implies intent on Clara's part, and this becomes even more transparent at lines 100–101 of ex. 5, where Milly refers to Clara as *putting down other people to make yourself look good*.

Two properties have now been established for complaints of the kind we have examined that operate through the identification of generic tendencies. First, they are resistant to being defended on the grounds of being one-time lapses. Second, the offender's actions are constructed by the complainer as purposive and deliberate. This serves to turn the highlighted offenses into more than just infractions of some local precept or rule; it calls into question the nature of the offender's involvement in the local moral order.

FOCUS ON CURRENT ACTION

There are obvious differences between our three sequences in the extent to which the primary complaints focus on forms of behavior taking place within the immediate situation. In the ice dancing sequence, the conversation revolves around the dancers' ongoing, immediate attempts to perform the step sequence, whereas with Joel and Mum, it is the past behavior of the two parties that is under principal scrutiny. In these respects, the Milly/Clara sequence falls somewhere between the other two. In this section we show how, irrespective of these differences between the sequences, the talk in all three contains segments that come to focus on deficiencies that reveal themselves within the immediate interaction; we go on to examine the ways in which these deficiencies are constructed.

Joel/Mum

Within the Joel/Mum conversation in ex. 1, the focus on current behavior emerges quite late in the sequence. At line 97, Mum negatively assesses Joel's past appreciation of her contribution to the family, with *but it wasn't good enough for you*; later, at line 116, she switches to a similar version of his inadequacies formulated in the present – *You have no appreciation of what I ever did for you boy (.9) you don't have that appreciation*. She further treats his current behavior as problematic by constructing a solution that fits this order of problem – *and it's high time that you pull y'pull up y'socks and sit and think what- all what I or anybody in this family has ever done for you* (lines 122–24). After this, at lines 126–27, she deploys a turn that explicitly characterizes his talk within this interaction in the most pejorative terms, *and stop acting like a big arsehole that y'seem to be doing right now*; see also *because y'telling me shit* at line 137. Here, then, a trajectory is

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discernible in which the mother focuses increasingly on the ways in which Joel's failings in the past are echoed within his doings in the present. This focus on current behavior is soon matched by Joel, who at lines 135, 136, 138, and 140–43 identifies his mother's current *shouting* as offensive to him. Indeed, it is his mother's unwillingness to accede to his requests for the cessation of shouting (line 146) that appears to prompt his exit from the car at line 147.

Pete/Jill (the skaters)

As already noted, the ice skaters' problems revolve for much of the time around Jill's alleged shortcomings with regard to mastering the step sequence, shortcomings which Pete attempts to convert into an attitudinal problem on her part, and which Jill mainly attributes to lack of practice. In the final phases of this recording, on their fourth and last attempt to master the step sequence, further aspects of their current behavior come into prominence. What appears to prompt the initial abandonment of the fourth attempt is Jill's crying, a form of behavior that Pete's reactions at lines 146 and 152 of ex. 6 treat as non-sympathizable and as posing an impediment to the continuation of the practice:

(6) [IAD:TD:1A:5:6]
Pete and Jill begin their fourth practice of the step sequence, but this is aborted by Jill before it is completed. They then skate a short distance side by side, during which Jill has her left hand on Pete's right shoulder. Her other hand is disengaged from his, but remains raised and extended, approximately in dance position.

146	Pete:	It's no good (fuck)in' cryin:' I've got [no sympathy:.
147		[((Pete disengages and moves
148		away, turning sharply to his left. This is accompanied by a dismissive
149		gesture with his right hand. As he turns, Jill's left hand remains on his
150		shoulder and her right arm remains extended))
151		(0.5)
152	Pete:	[No (0.6) do:n't cry: on me.
153		[((makes dismissive gesture with his right hand with the word 'no', as
154		though to decline her wish to continue; at the same time also turns
155		and then skates away from her))
156	Jill:	((as Pete skates away Jill's arms remain raised and extended in dance
157		position for 2 seconds: she initially allows her skating momentum to
158		take her in the same direction that Pete has taken when moving away))

It is Jill's tears that form Pete's stated grounds for withdrawal from the immediate vicinity (line 152), and it is his nonpreparedness, at that moment, to continue with the practice that touches off Jill's departure from the ice. The details of the latter will concern us later, but, in general, we can note that, at lines 149–50 and 156–58, Jill makes it evident nonverbally that her expectation was to have continued.

Milly/Clara (the sisters)

In the Milly/Clara sequence, complainable matters concerning current behavior, notably Milly's having just allegedly *touched* Clara, figure in the earliest stages of the available data; indeed, it seems quite likely that this in turn arises from a just prior incident in which Milly took offense at the fact that Clara was sitting in

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a chair that Milly felt she had just temporarily vacated. One or other of these incidents, or both, is clearly being alluded to later by Milly when she accuses Clara of trying to show her up in a bad light in various ways (ex. 4, lines 34–37). However, two later phases of the talk of these sisters also merit special discussion with regard to the ways in which participants find fault in the other party's current behavior. In the first, ex. 7, the key part is at line 42 onward, where Milly depicts Clara as *butting in* (line 43) to the talk. Clara replies with a correction of Milly's pronunciation of the word *courtesy* (line 44), which Milly then treats as itself an offensive act.

(7) [IAD:2S:2A:4:2]
This extract follows directly from the end of #4 above.

37	Milly:	friends and in front of [them. .hh=
		[((points at camera))
38	Milly:	=['n makin me
39	Clara:	=[I'm not putt-in' y[ou dow:n.
40	Milly	[SHUT (.) UP.
41		(0.3)
42	Milly:	oka:y? I gave you th' cooert'sy of list'nin' t'you
43		j's now so you c'n listen t'[me without butting in.
44	Clara:	[°th'word's courtesy°
45		(0.4)
46	Milly:	((threatening voice)) don't you (.) da:re correct me.
47		(0.3)
48	Milly:	[don't you da:re
49	Clara:	[oh b't its (.) alright f'you t'do it t'me?
50		(.)
51	Milly:	[let me ((slow, deliberate prosody here and at line 54))
52	Clara:	['cause you do:,
53		(.)
54	Milly:	finish (.) speaking

One of the jobs done by lines 42–43 is to provide a basis for Milly's use of *Shut up* at line 40 – a basis which, especially through the inclusion of the phrase *without butting in*, turns Clara's prior conduct (especially her *I'm not putting you down* at line 39) into an unwarranted breach of conversational manners. Clara's response to this, at line 44 (*the word's courtesy*) is to correct Milly's unusual pronunciation of the word *courtesy*. Such a correction, performed in this sequential position and serious manner, is of course provocative, a kind of insolence. In part, this is connected with the fact that it finds a way of speaking in a position in which Milly's preference is for non-speech on the part of Clara – *I gave you the cooertsy of listening to you just now so you can listen to me*. The presence of a turn by Clara at line 44 defies the action trajectory that Milly is trying to engineer. But WHAT Clara says at line 44 also contributes to this. To say *the word's courtesy* is to perform an act of other-correction (see Schegloff, Jefferson, & Sacks 1977). Unless matters of pronunciation are of particular interactional moment, as in foreign-language teaching, people generally overlook minor lapses in the pronunciation of words where it is clear what the speaker means. In the absence of such special circumstances, Clara's nonhumorous exposure of the infelicity ren-

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ders it a willful and contentious act. In creating this new basis for dissension in a situation where dissension already exists, such an act can potentially derail and redirect the original shape of the sequence. In effect, the repair sequence initiated by Clara's correction could have developed into the main line of dispute, instead of the more normal pattern in which repair is constructed as subsidiary to the line of talk on which it is parasitic.[7] This potential is suggested in the threatening and confrontational manner of Milly's reaction at line 46, *don't you dare correct me*, which bestows gravity on the offensive aspect she finds in Clara's correction. Subsequent turns, however, manage to defuse this potential, and the talk returns to the topical line that preceded Clara's correction.

The second section of the Milly/Clara recording, which is also relevant to the theme of current behavior, takes place at its end, and is presented in ex. 8. Here, Milly returns to the capacity of Clara to put other people down in order to make herself look good, which she has identified earlier (lines 100–101 of ex. 5). What is of particular interest is the way in which Clara's current behavior is constructed as bound up with this pattern.

(8) [IAD:2S:2A:4:5]
This is the last part of this recording. Milly starts to walk out at line 128.

113	Milly:	'cause you're ↑still playing on the fact [that,=
114	Clara:	[NO
115	Milly:	=on [Sunday,
116	Clara:	[I:'M NOT,= ((slow, deliberate prosody))
117	Milly:	=you had an ↑argument ↑on camera an' so y're usin' it
118		a↑ga [in?
119	Clara:	[WHAT ↑ARE ↑YOU [↑↑TALK↓ING= ((shrieking))
120	Milly:	[t' make you=
121	Clara:	=[ABOU:::T.
122	Milly:	=[look like a put down (.) little (.) kid=
123		=['n I'm fed up with it. ((then immediately begins to exit))
124	Clara:	=[WHAT ARE YOU TALK-
125		(.)
126	Clara:	WHAT ARE YOU TALKING A [BOUT.
127	Milly:	[you know what-
128		I'm talk [in' about. ((here with her back to Clara, on way to door))
129	Clara:	[NO I DON'T HAVE A ↓CLUE

Over a series of turns constructed as a single grammatical unit (lines 113, 115, 117–18, 120, 122–23), Milly identifies a pattern she finds in Clara's recent behavior, and she builds this in such a way as to make it recognizable as offensive. Importantly, this pattern alludes, at least in part, to Clara's current behavior on this occasion: *you had an argument on camera and you're using it again to make you look like a put down little kid*. This stance is clearly connected with Milly's departure, and so it will be further discussed below. In addition, what is of interest here is Clara's reaction to this version of Milly's complaint. Initially, only shortly after the complaint gets underway, she denies it with *No I'm not* (lines 114 and 116). But then, on three occasions, she comes up with versions of *What are you talking about*. This kind of repair initiator has not yet been subjected to system-

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atic analysis within the literature on repair. Forms like *What?* and *Pardon?* seem like close relatives and are referred to by Schegloff et al. 1977 as "open class" next-turn repair initiators – open in the sense that they leave it open for the prior speaker to identify and remedy, in the next turn, the nature of the trouble source that gives rise to *What* or *Pardon*. These forms can be used when a speaker is confronted with various trouble sources (Drew 1997), including occasions on which their producer may have heard the words in the prior turn but be unable to attach an appropriate meaning to them. In ex. 9, for example, Emma agrees to return Gladys's newspaper to her house later that day, but when Gladys says *Alright dear and uh front or back*, she appears momentarily nonplused as to what Gladys means, as exhibited by her *What* at line 5. We can say this because, at line 9, Emma does a late recognition of what Gladys means prior to Gladys's giving any further explicit clarification.

#9 [NB:IV:5:2; cited in Drew 1997:72]
1 Emma: Well [th:a:nk you dear I'll be o:ver
2 Gladys: [So u- eh
3 Gladys: Alright dear a:nd uh front er back.h
4 (1.0)
5 Emma: Wu:t?
6 (.)
7 Emma: .h[huh
8 Gladys: [I s[ay f:-
9 Emma: [OH::::: AH GUESS th' FRO:nt. be better

The use of *What are you talking about* in ex. 8 clearly shares with *What* in ex. 9 the property of being produced in an environment where the trouble in question is not that of hearing the words the prior speaker has used. But whereas the *What* in ex. 9 conveys some genuine difficulty in understanding the meaning of the words *front er back*, there is little suggestion of this kind of difficulty in ex. 8. The trouble source indexed through *What are you talking about* focuses more on the connection between what Milly is saying and the state of affairs in the world to which her words purportedly relate – a state of affairs that concerns the meaning of certain actions that Clara herself has engaged in. By using *What are you talking about*, Clara is treating Milly's claims as unrecognizable to her as a version of what has transpired in her world, and as constituting, here and now, wild and ungrounded claims. It is this order of unintelligibility that such a repair can be recognized as identifying – an implication of unintelligibility that also calls into question the current judgment of the person whose talk is being addressed.

Several general themes emerge from this section of our discussion. The first is that, within all three sequences, and particularly in their closing stages just prior to the departure of one of the participants, concern is displayed about the current behavior of one or both of those involved. There appears to be a propensity within them for fault to be found not just with regard to the complainable matters that form the principal themes of these sequences, but also with regard to the manner

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in which the parties are currently conducting themselves in the course of these arguments. Such failings can also occur earlier in the sequences – as when Jill accuses Pete of glaring at her in ex. 2, or Milly takes Clara to task for correcting her in ex. 7 – and it is important that, where this occurs, it gives the talk what, for want of space to elaborate this, can be described as an inflammatory edge. However, issues concerning the current manner of conduct become especially salient at the ends of these encounters.

A second theme arises in connection with failings in current conduct. This concerns a kind of non-straightforwardness in the ways in which at least one party to the interaction is behaving. We have seen that Jill is accused by Pete of *acting like it's not my responsibility (.) I'm not changing it I'm not gonna do anything* (ex. 2, lines 45–46), a formulation that, as has been noted, chooses to highlight the deliberate and willful nature of Jill's stance. Given that this alleged cause contrasts with the explanations offered by Jill herself, which allude to matters like lack of practice, this can locate Jill's overt claims as misleading and disingenuous. In their case, this forms a major line of tension running through most of the sequence. With Joel and Mum, this lack of straightforwardness is evident in the way that Mum treats what Joel has been saying in the sequence as a willful distortion of the true picture of their earlier home life, a line of argument that culminates when she says that he is *telling me shit* (ex. 1 line 137). In the Milly/Clara data, there is ample evidence that each sister treats the other as acting in a disingenuous manner. This forms a key ingredient of Milly's main line of complaint, which culminates in lines 117/120/122 of ex. 8 with *you had an argument on camera and you're using it again to make you look like a put down little kid*. It is matched by Clara's identification within what Milly is saying (lines 119, 124, and 126 of ex. 8) of claims that are remote from the truth. Running through all three sequences, therefore, we find not just that fault is found in the manner in which one participant or other is conducting himself or herself, but also that this fault incorporates signs of alleged deviousness.

A third theme concerns the connection between forms of current conduct that are found to be at fault and the principal lines of complaint constructed within these sequences. Broadly, what we find here is that forms of current behavior that are found wanting, especially those at the ends of these sequences, have an intimate connection with faults and shortcomings identified earlier. Thus, in ex. 1, there is an obvious symmetry between *shouting*, which Joel objects to from line 135 onward, and his earlier picture of the home situation when he was young, a *house where there is anger and pain* – indeed, Joel makes this connection explicit at lines 140–43 of ex. 1, when he says *y'see this is what I don't like is when you start (ed) raisin your voice (.) that's what hurts me*, and it is a connection he continues to make even after his departure from the car, when he can just be heard to shout *(every time I) fuckin talk t'y' always get angry* at lines 158–59. Similarly, there is a recognizable symmetry between faults his mother has earlier identified in Joel, namely, his lying, and her claim that he is distorting the truth,

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which comes to preoccupy her late in the sequence when he is accused of *telling me shit*. Within the ice dancing sequence, Jill's main line of defense against Pete's complaint about her approach has been that she needs more practice. Pete's break-off from the fourth practice, coupled with Jill's evident intention at that point of continuing with it (see ex. 6), forms a further site in which it is possible for her to recognize in him those signs of noncooperation she has highlighted earlier. In the Milly/Clara sequence, the symmetry between current behavior and earlier complaints again occurs most clearly at the end of the sequence. In ex. 8, at lines 113–23 (especially 117–18), Milly is identifying in the current episode further evidence of behavior she has been able to identify on other occasions and has had cause to complain about earlier on this occasion (see lines 34–37 of ex. 4), namely Clara's exploitation of an argument taking place on camera. The upshot of these observations relating to our third theme is that, on each of these three occasions, at the time when one party exits from the encounter, that party – though not always only that party – has a basis for recognizing a continuity between an earlier line of complaint and the recent conduct of the other party.

EXIT CONFIGURATION

In all three sequences under examination, one of the parties terminates the encounter by leaving the immediate vicinity. Although each of the sequences in its detail has features that make it distinctive, it is also possible to discern some common elements in the events immediately preceding the walkout. We have already seen that the one who eventually leaves (the "leaver"), and sometimes also the "remainer," has a basis for finding in the current behavior of the other party signs of forms of behavior that have been the focus for complaint earlier in the sequence. In the terminal phases of these sequences, there is further evidence available to the leaver that the remainer is construable as persisting in the production of offensive behavior. This is most obvious when the remainer declines to take up opportunities offered by the leaver to cease the production of such behavior. It is the remainer's declining to take up such opportunities that appears to form the trigger and the warrantable basis for the leaver's departure. In the last analysis, the departures appear to be intrinsically bound up with such specific sequential features as obtain in the terminal phases of these sequences. In this section, we delineate this configuration for each sequence.

Joel/Mum

In ex. 1, in which Joel is the leaver, he initially draws attention to his mother's currently offensive behavior by saying *Don't shout Mum* (line 135), then repeating part of this at line 136. At line 138, and again positioned in overlap with behavior recognizable as exhibiting the offensive feature, he repeats his injunction, *Don't shout*, thus constructing his mother's talk at 137 as a second offense. Then, at lines 140–43, Joel explicitly connects these forms of current offensive behavior with his much earlier line of complaint. Critically, however,

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his mother's loud and emphatic *No* (line 146) both displays and projects unwillingness to accede to the forms of restraint that Joel has been identifying as desirable. Prior to line 146, he has twice made evident to her the requirement for her not to shout; so at line 147, Joel has an immediate sequential basis for finding his mother not only to be persisting in offensive behavior, but, by virtue of having been made aware of this, to be DELIBERATELY doing so. Joel's audible talk on leaving the car also seems consistent with the notion that it is his mother's behavior in the terminal phase of the sequence on which his walking out turns. The most obvious referent for *it* in *I can't take it* (line 147) seems to be his mother's current behavior toward him, her shouting; and this becomes more explicit a little later when, at lines 158–59 he says *(every time I) fucking talk to y' always get angry*.

Pete/Jill (the skaters)

In the ice skating sequence, it is Jill who is the leaver, though this is connected to the fact that, just before her leaving, Pete breaks off from their dance position and skates to some other part of the ice (see ex. 6 above); in a sense, then, he is also a kind of leaver, though the manner in which he conducts himself is consistent with an expectation of eventual dance resumption rather than with the final termination of the practice. By contrast, Jill's exit marks termination of the practice itself. We have already noted a connection between Jill's earlier line of argument and Pete's actions here. Further details of what happens in these final phases now also merit consideration. After Pete's initial disengagement with her (lines 147–49 of ex. 6), Jill keeps her left hand on his shoulder and her right arm in an extended, dancelike position. Pete's *No*, together with a dismissive gesture with his right hand (lines 152–53), is constructed as reactive to, and dismissive of, Jill's attempt to continue holding him in dancing mode. After this second rejection, Jill acts as though an anticipated line of action, dancing, has been prematurely and noncollaboratively brought to an end, as having been left high and dry. After Pete has detached himself, her arms initially remain in dance position and her line of movement on the ice alters so as to follow the direction he has taken. She moves her fingers as though then realizing that there is now nothing there to hold, then lowers her arms to a slightly lower though similar configuration, pausing briefly before lowering her hands to her sides. She then looks in the direction he has moved for three seconds before beginning to skate steadily toward the exit from the ice. As she does so, she studiously gazes away from the area in which he is skating. Here, then, there is every suggestion that a key role in Jill's exit is played by Pete's second rejection of her displayed willingness to continue the dance practice (line 152 of ex. 6). Her displayed willingness to continue (lines 149–50) occurs after his initial decoupling lines (146–49). She thus creates a second chance for him to rectify the situation. At line 152, he declines to take this second chance to continue what is constructed by her, both then and subsequently, as the expected line of action.

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Milly/Clara (the sisters)

In the previous two sequences, and more clearly in the case of Joel and Mum, there is some suggestion of the remainers' declining opportunities created for them by the eventual leavers to curtail their problematic behavior just prior to leaving. It is through their declining these possibilities that the deliberate and continuing nature of this problematic behavior becomes highlighted. In the terminal phase of the Clara/Milly sequence, the sense of the remainer's persisting in problematic behavior is created differently: through the details of Clara's talk during Milly's formulation of her complaint (lines 113–23 of ex. 8). We have already noted that Milly is here identifying Clara as using the current talk to create a particular kind of impression – *you're using it again t'make you look like a put down little kid*. In the course of this, Clara comes up with three versions of *What are you talking about*, two of which are emitted prior to the moment at which Milly starts walking out. The nature of the querying activity conducted through these words has been examined earlier in this article. Here we can note that, at lines 127–28 of ex. 8, in saying *you know what I'm talking about*, Milly treats this querying as disingenuous, as acting as though Milly's complaint is unrecognizable and bizarre when in fact Clara is perfectly capable of recognizing what it is that Milly is talking about. In this way, the formulation of Clara's stance here by Milly, that of playing the innocent, becomes recognizable as congruent with, and further evidence for, the nature of the complaint that Milly has just been constructing (lines 113–23), *you're using it again t'make you look like a put down little kid*.

We have argued that what takes place in the terminal phases of these three sequences is of potential importance to any consideration of the leaver's departure. During these phases, the leaver is confronted with some kind of willful continuation and persistence in forms of behavior that are shaped so as to resemble forms of behavior already found objectionable within the sequence. This can create a basis for the leaver not just to leave, but to leave in a state of righteous indignation, with the sense that the remainer's behavior just prior to departure in some way bears out the leaver's earlier concerns – that it further exemplifies behavior already found wanting. But self-righteousness is not the monopoly of the leaver. The remainers, equally, have warrantable bases for orienting to matters in the ways they do. For example, in two cases, the lines of argument being deployed by the remainer during this terminal phase are recognizably congruent with lines of argument they have been deploying throughout: Mum has been accusing Joel of producing a distorted version of their family life, and she thus is predictably unwilling to accept his renewed complaint about her behavioral tendencies at lines 140–43 of ex. 1; and Clara has consistently denied all claims by Milly that she has been exploiting the presence of other people and the TV camera to present herself in a favourable light. As in all tragedies, all parties have warrantable grounds for self-righteousness.

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DISCUSSION

We have been exploring the properties of three conversation sequences in which arguments are terminated by one of the parties unilaterally walking out on the other. It so happens that, in the earlier parts of each sequence, one or both of those involved has been finding fault in the conduct of the other; they have been engaged in the activity of complaining. This suggests that the kind of interactional impasse we find in the later parts of these sequences represents one kind of sequential trajectory that can arise in the course of complaining. We know that in complaint sequences, there is a propensity for the principal complainer to develop a LINE of complaint over a series of turns, and that the construction of defenses by the complainee leads to a sustained division in the stances of the parties involved.[8] In this sense, complaint sequences have an obvious potential for generating confrontation, and thus may be a type of sequence that poses special difficulties for collaborative resolution and termination.

Our examination of the linguistic and nonverbal detail in these extended sequences has, of necessity, been somewhat restricted and patchy, and much remains to be discovered about the orderly properties of the forms of turn and sequence design that operate in such environments.[9] Our analysis has focused on delineating a configuration of features that to some degree runs through each of the three sequences we have examined – a configuration that seems integral to the ways in which these sequences shift from less to more argumentative modes, and eventually to the unilateral departure of one participant. Because the features in question have been highlighted at the end of each empirical section above, together with various corollaries and implications, we restrict ourselves here to a synopsis of them.

We have shown how complaints within these sequences are constructed so as to identify GENERIC deficiencies within the conduct of the other party, a ploy that treats the offender as having repeated the type of offense in question. The formulation of this generic deficiency draws on the language of dispositions and attitudes, treating the offensive acts as arising from an enduring psychological propensity, though a propensity compatible with the offensive acts being deliberate and intended. The complaints then come to focus on the CURRENT behavior of the offender. That behavior can be constructed as further exemplifying the generic deficiency, though it can also involve the manner in which the other person is conducting the argument. In the course of this, the complainee's actions are treated as non-straightforward and improperly motivated. In the events preceding the exit itself, we find that the one who remains has declined a further opportunity to rectify his or her offensive behavior, and this then forms a warrantable basis for the leaver's departure to be enacted as though the basis for it were self-evident. Finally, we have shown how, within these sequences, the roles of complainer/complainee patterns are not neatly mapped onto the two principal participants. BOTH participants engage at some time in complaining about and

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finding fault with the other party, in ways along the lines described above. When compared with other recordings of complaint sequences available to us, the consistent presence of this configuration of features seems to be distinctive, which suggests that these features are likely to be pivotal for those complaint sequences that have this type of trajectory.

As well as ending in walkouts, these sequences end with one or both of the participants evidently in an indignant or distraught state. Our analysis has demonstrated that the emergence and expression of such emotional states is intimately linked to particular kinds of interactional configuration, and that their appearance in the later phases of these sequences is connected to patterns that have been identified in the course of the analysis. To highlight this, consider again the position of Joel in ex. 1, the fully transcribed sequence. We can already see signs of his becoming upset at line 143, when he says *That's what hurts me*, but it is significantly upgraded at line 147 when, in a screaming, high-pitched voice, he says *I can't take it* at the same time as he gets out of the car. Our argument has been that this transition needs to be considered in the light of its preceding sequential environment. His mother's anger toward him has formed an important parameter of his complaints about her from the beginning of ex. 1. More recently, at lines 148–53, he has made clear to her the offensive nature of the loud tone of voice in which she is conducting the argument. Mum's response to this (line 146) is to produce an emphatic *No*, clearly marking a deliberate refusal to conduct herself in the way Joel requires. It is this configuration of events that plays a key role in generating Joel's *I can't take it* and his departure from the car. Although such actions may appear (or subsequently be construed) as heated actions taken on the spur of the moment, in fact they are better viewed as bound up with the sequences that precede them. It is the heat of the sequence that makes it possible for the heat of the moment to arise.

One reason for being interested in the shape of arguments preceding walkouts is that they may hold clues as to how more serious argument escalations occur. In this respect, although retrospective accounts of such matters are often hazy, it is suggestive that there are certain resemblances between the interactional configurations that occur in our sequences and those reported as present in many nonpremeditated criminal homicides, in which much appears to turn on the nature of the encounter immediately preceding the murder. From what we know of this (see especially Luckenbill 1977 and Katz 1988), it seems that the murderer frequently finds a fault in the victim which further instantiates faults previously identified, either in the current interaction or previous ones (or both). The eventual murderer articulates this through the expression of anger and contempt, in which the victim is frequently spoken of as a generically unworthy person. The victim's response to this, in what is close to being his or her last act, is to display intransigence with regard to the actions the murderer has found offensive. The analogies here with the sequences we have been examining are self-evident. Indeed, it would be of interest to know whether certain other features revealed by our own analysis also

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figure in pre-murder interactions, especially the ways in which the complainee's behavior is found to be devious and non-straightforward. But there are also some interesting contrasts between the two in the details of how the remainer/victim acts in the final stages. Within homicides, it is sometimes the case that, subsequent to the victim's having the offensive behavior re-drawn to their attention the victim teases, dares, or in some other way provocatively defies the imminent murderer (Katz 1988). Within our data, the closest we come to this is the mother's rejection (line 146 of ex. 1) of Joel's demand that she lower her voice – intransigent defiance of a sort guaranteed to further the state of acrimony, but not perhaps constructed in an otherwise provocative way.

This report has focused on the specification of interactional features that contribute to one kind of social conflict; complaint sequences in which an impasse is created by one party's walking out on the other as a way of terminating, if only temporarily, an argument. Our analysis has dwelt mostly on features common to the three occasions around which the analysis revolves. There are also relevant differences among these occasions. For example, in the Milly/Clara episode, it is clear from the beginning of the available recording that an argument is already well under way, whereas there is no suggestion of this within the early stages of the sequence involving Joel and Mum. Whereas the initial lines of complaint have a direct bearing on the talk that immediately leads to the walkout by Joel, this is not the case with respect to the interaction between Pete and Jill. Our analysis does not claim, therefore, to have identified an entirely standard shape in the trajectories of this kind of complaint sequence. Nevertheless, we think there is enough of a shared configuration of features in them to suggest that this plays a role in bringing about their common sequential outcome, unilateral departure, and that this merits careful examination in subsequent studies of varieties of human conflict where similar kinds of interactional impasses arise.

NOTES

* The authors would like to thank Paul Drew for his important input in the early phases of the analysis of the data in this report. Two anonymous referees also made useful suggestions regarding the presentation of the argument. An earlier version of this article's themes was included in Dersley 1998.

[1] Unilateral departures can also take place in sequences in which argument is not the prevailing activity. In group therapy, for example, even when not directly involved in the current line of talk, people can sometimes leave the room in a state of evident or non-evident distress. The only detailed examination of non-argumentative unilateral departures known to us is Goodwin 1987. He examines the design and placement of the words "Need some more ice," said just after a woman has poured herself a drink and while she is leaving the table where she has been seated with several others. Goodwin shows how the woman's action is designed so as not to disrupt the adjacent talk, and how, in this way, it displays that others present are not required to display an orientation to what she is doing. By contrast, the departures we examine in this article are organized to be recognizable as deeply embedded in adjacent lines of talk and action.

[2] Joel's reply to his mother's inquiry about his returning to the youth education program, *Well it depends on how I'm treated an' all that* (line 37 of ex. 1), makes it an initiation of what Schegloff (1990:64–71) calls an "insert expansion," a way of replying to the first part of an adjacent pair, the mother's inquiry, which postpones the production of an appropriately fitted second part of the pair. In

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fact, within the subsequent development of this sequence, the second part never gets done: Joel does not return to constructing a reply to his mother's original inquiry. In this sense, the construction of the complaint, in this sequential position, appears to have the capacity to create a subsequence that abrogates the locally relevant and sequentially fitted action. We are not arguing that there are resemblances among our three sequences with regard to these kinds of sequential feature. For further discussion of the analysis of extended sequences from a Conversation Analytic viewpoint, see Jefferson 1988, Psathas 1992, Sacks 1992, vol. 2:354–59, and Jacoby 1998.

[3] One thing that contributes to the contentious nature of Pete's actions within this sequence is that he is choosing to convert what could have been instruction into a more personalized form of fault-finding. Instruction and the identification of shortcomings can bring into question the competence of the one under instruction (see Jacoby & Gonzales 1991, Heritage & Sefi 1992), but this is not normally constructed in the manner that Pete does here, so as explicitly to highlight underlying personal inadequacies.

[4] On the properties of three-part lists, see Jefferson 1990, Atkinson 1984, and Heritage & Greatbatch 1986.

[5] Goffman's work on "remedial interchanges" (1971, Chap. 4) has formed an important input into our thinking about the exchanges under examination. For example, it was he who first noticed the significance of repeat offenses and the import that such sequential positioning may have for the ways in which offenses are construed, and it was he who picked up on the moral implications that attach themselves to the WAYS in which an offense is dealt with. However, the limited nature of the evidence available to him also limits the usefulness of his discussion; for example, his examination of the defenses deployed by defenders relies heavily on legal texts rather than on what demonstrably occurs in interaction (on which see also Schegloff 1988). Moreover, in his brief discussion of walkouts (Goffman 1971:152), he acknowledges that they fall outside the scope of the remedial cycle that stands at the core of his analysis.

[6] In itself, this does not, of course, make it impossible for the complainee to mount a defense. For example, in ex. 2, after Pete has accused Jill of not trying to improve her mastery of the step sequence, Jill initially denies the accusation and then shifts to *but it's not gonna go like that is it* (line 51), meaning that the mastery of the steps will entail practice, that early perfection is not to be expected. In her saying this, the step sequence itself (*it's*) becomes the subject, and the difficulties being faced are turned into a generic property of the subject, thus applying both to Pete and herself rather than to herself alone.

[7] Clara's *the word's courtesy* is also recognizable as intentionally discourteous in a number of other ways. It omits words like *I think* or *I mean*, which often package other corrections; and it is not preceded by any of the other devices, such as a clarification check, that can precede other corrections (see Schegloff et al. 1977, sec. 6). Clara's turn is also shaped to highlight the incompetent quality of her elder sister's pronunciation, thus proposing an inversion of the normal relationship between seniority and competence.

[8] Throughout our discussion, we have emphasized the significance of the stances and alignments taken by speakers over the course of several turns. It is through the speaker's orientation to such matters that visible lines of argument become recognizable within the talk. Though some have found the notion of "face" and face preservation useful in understanding such matters (Brown & Levinson 1987, Tracy 1990, Muntigl & Turnbull 1998), for us these notions do not give analytic purchase on central aspects of these sequences. For example, understanding the escalation in emotional upheaval that takes place in the later parts of these sequences involves much more than a consideration of the properties of particular (more or less face-threatening) conversational acts. For participants, it is the connection between such acts and properties of the sequences from which they emerge that holds the key to how such acts come to be treated as they are. Whether someone is recognizable as DELIBERATELY provoking the other party, for example, is a matter that is embedded in what has previously transpired, in the kinds of warning that have been issued, and so on.

[9] We stress that much remains to be discovered about the ways in which the dynamics of such sequences are bound up with the detailed linguistic organization of turns. For example, in our initial section on the the presence of "generic deficiencies," it became clear that the nature of such deficiencies could be formulated in rather different ways (compare, for example, Joel's depiction of his mother's deficiencies in lines 57–64 of ex. 1 with his mother's depiction of Joel's deficiencies in lines 66–68). Although we have begun elsewhere to identify the sequential properties of such different forms of turn organization within complaint sequences (Dersley & Wootton 2000), the nature of the

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present article often leaves open the ways in which such matters intersect with the patterns we have been concerned to identify here.

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