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HANDBOOK OF COMMUNICATION AND SOCIAL INTERACTION SKILLS

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CHAPTER

15

HOW TO "DO THINGS" WITH NARRATIVE:
A COMMUNICATION PERSPECTIVE
ON NARRATIVE SKILL

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In the 1960s and 1970s our understanding of communication took a linguistic turn (Rorty, 1967/1992). In response to the work of Wittgenstein, Austin and others, the discipline came to recognize that language use is central to communication, and increased its attention to both features and structures of language. In recent years, our understanding of how communication works has taken a narrative turn (Fisher, 1984, 1985; Hinchman & Hinchman, 1997, p. xiii; Mishler, 1995). We have come to see narrative as central to such communication processes as the transmission of culture, the organization of social knowledge, and the structure of experience. We have also recognized its central role as a form of entertainment in social life. Hinchman & Hinchman (1997, p. xiii) suggested that the human sciences "have assimilated the idiom of literary criticism in which narrative has always played a very big part." Mumby (1993) noted that since Fisher (1984, 1985, 1987) invoked the "Narrative Paradigm," scholars have been alerted to "possibilities inherent in the development of a more literary, aesthetic approach to human communication" (p. 1). Bruner (1986) compared two ways of knowing: the narrative mode of knowing, and the logo-scientific mode. Along similar lines, Fisher (1986) suggested that whereas the natural and social sciences have emphasized and privileged "rational action" as our principal way of knowing, we more aptly capture the character of human life when we characterize ourselves as proceeding according to the "narrative" paradigm. That is, we understand, come to know, and formulate our lives and actions as stories.

Although the concept of narrative is clearly a powerful metaphor for understanding and explaining human conduct and reasoning, the influence of literary criticism on how we think about narrative in this context may be problematic, because it may lead us to see narratives as static and like literary texts, rather than as dynamic and interactively constructed in communication. Reconceptualizing narrative outside of a literary frame, as an interactive activity through which experiences are shared as a way of undertaking other social activities, complicates the notion of narrative skill. In

this review, I show how a literary view of narrative may have led to misconceptions regarding narrative skill in everyday conversations and show some of the dividends of transposing a literary view of narrative into a communication perspective, in which narratives are seen to be interactively constructed, told as part of some social occasion, and serving specific communication purposes. In the course of laying out this perspective, I explain the complications for the idea of narrative skill brought by a more dynamic and interactive view of narrative and explore their implications.

Examination of work on narrative in a broad range of fields (anthropology, folklore, performance studies, education, cognitive science, sociolinguistics, literary theory, cultural studies, and communication) reveals that in both vernacular and scholarly conceptions, narratives are seen as monologues. These conceptions are strongly influenced by a literary view of narrative. This is manifested in the following ways: First, often we see narratives as crafted or constructed by an author for a reader, an audience, or a listener, often before the occasion of its telling. Second, frequently narrative is viewed as a monological activity, something an active teller does "to" a passive audience. Clearly if narratives are constructed and produced by tellers, skills of construction and production can be addressed quite explicitly. Thinking of narration as a *communication* activity, however, puts us in the position of seeing storytelling as an interactive, rather than a monological activity. Although stories in conversation may be more or less interactive, they can never be monologues if recipients are present. Once seen as something tellers and recipients construct together, it becomes apparent that storytelling does not simply entertain or reconstruct past events. Rather, communicators produce stories as a method for undertaking a variety of other important activities. The purpose of this chapter is to show that storytelling is a basic method by which we share experiences, and in sharing experience we undertake such important social processes as joking, performing delicate activities, complaining, accounting, telling troubles, gossiping, and constructing relationships, social roles, and social and institutional realities.

Some work on narrative skill or competence has suggested that skill in telling narratives involves the ability to reconstruct past events. Schank (1990) suggested that both lay and professional measures of the ability to tell and respond to stories competently provides information about the intelligence of the storyteller or recipient. This review suggests that communication scholars can see narrative as a communication phenomenon by examining instead how communicators use reconstructions of past events to do communication tasks. Close examination of how narratives are interactively constructed reveals that narrative is a collaborative enterprise between teller and recipients. What a narrative comes to be about is constructed between teller and recipient. Even narratives in which a teller makes a clear point may, through recipient responses, come to be about something else. The "audience" is, in this sense, "co-author" (Duranti & Brenneis, 1986). This suggests that a communication perspective on narrative skill is one that accounts for the interactive work of both the teller(s) and the recipient(s) in working together to construct the meanings of past events, as they are relevant in the service of some present set of activities.

WHAT IS NARRATIVE?

For narrative to have a distinctive character, it is important to have an understanding of it that clearly distinguishes it from other related phenomena. If all of discourse or interaction, or even social life, is subsumed under the rubric of narrative, the concept loses its informative power.

The word *narrative* is derived from the Indo-European root "gna," which means both "to tell" and "to know" (Hinchman & Hinchman, 1997, p. xiii). In determining how narrative should be defined, it is useful to distinguish between scholars' definitions and communicators' definitions. By communicators' definitions, I mean practical, enacted definitions that are clearly displayed, and oriented to, by interactants. These "lived" definitions are discovered by close examination of naturally occurring narratives, rather than by postulating native theoretical or vernacular definitions.

Scholars use many terms in referring to the recounting of past experiences. Narrative, narration, account, tale, folktale, myth, discourse, anecdote, replaying, story; "stories, plans, simultaneous blow-by-blow descriptions, generic narratives about 'the way it used to be' or 'what usually happens' and reporting past activities are all *narratives*—kinds of discourse organized around the passage of time in some world" (Polanyi, 1985, p. 9). Extended units of talk in which past experience is recounted are variously referred to and defined. A feature of this list of terms for *narrative* is that no distinction is made between literary and interactionally produced narratives. This is also the case in many of the definitions of narrative that are offered.

In classic work on the subject, Labov defined narratives of personal experience as "a method of recapitulating past experience by matching a verbal sequence of clauses to the sequence of clauses which (it is inferred) actually occurred" (1972, pp. 359–360). Goffman offered a similar definition:

A tale or anecdote, that is, a replaying, is not merely any reporting of a past event. In the fullest sense, it is such a statement couched from the personal perspective of an actual or potential participant who is located so that some temporal, dramatic development of the reported event proceeds from that starting point. (1974, p. 504)

Brockmeier and Harré (1997, p. 266) offered the following description of narrative:

narrative is the name for an ensemble of linguistic and psychological structures, transmitted cultural historically, constrained by each individual's level of mastery and by his or her mixture of social-communicative techniques and linguistic skills—*prosthetic devices*, as Bruner (1992) has called them by such personal characteristics as curiosity, passion, and, sometimes, obsession.

These definitions encompass narrative phenomena from the written to the spoken. Stories produced in interactional settings have often been regarded as "the unwritten counterparts of written or literary narratives, with which it is felt they share common formal features and narrative devices" (Georges, 1969, p. 322). Narratives are seen as structured by the experience they recount, rather than as structured by the interaction through which they are produced. Alternatively, they are seen by some researchers as structuring the experience they recount. This treatment of them may be reflected in the term *oral literature* (Ong, 1982, pp. 10–15). The influence of a literary perspective on research into narrative produced in interactional settings is manifested in various ways: through the terms used in the description of it; through the "dramaturgical" view of narrative in which the teller is the active *performer* or *speaker* and recipients are the passive *audience*, or *listeners*; and through the treatment of narratives as proceeding according to "scripts" prescribed by the activities they represent.

Terminologically, *narrative*, *narration*, *discourse*, *story*, *anecdote*, and *storytelling* are used interchangeably. Rarely is a term designated specifically to distinguish a

literary telling from one occurring in interaction. Thus, stories produced orally as performance, those produced in casual interactional settings, and those that are written are treated as the same thing—"kinds of discourse organized around the passage of time in some world" (Polanyi, 1985, p. 9).

Brockmeier and Harré (1997) quoted Harris's (1996) observation that with regard to the study of language, *word*, *sentence*, and *proposition* are "imposed categories." That is, they are theoretical categories that linguists have attempted to graft onto real life. They suggest that in trying to understand narrative, we may run the risk of "a similar process of transubstantiation, changing from a metalinguistic category into a seemingly real entity" (p. 272). That is, we run the risk of reifying narrative or story, when in fact it is something more complex and necessarily located in particular communication moments. They pointed out that it is helpful to remember when trying to understand narrative that, "we are primarily dealing not with a mode of representing but with a specific mode of constructing and constituting reality" (p. 275). That is, there is a fundamental difference between "representing reality," which can be thought of as simply "reporting what happened," and narrative, in which a version of some past event may be interactively reconstructed in such a way as to offer a version of it, often in the service of doing some activity *other than* reporting. Narrative then is not simply reporting. They suggest that we might best understand what it is by looking at "the concrete situations and conditions under which [people] tell stories and in so doing implicitly define what narrative is" (p. 275). Thus, what narrative is can be discerned from people's occasioned telling of stories.

From examining tape-recorded naturally occurring conversations, it becomes apparent that storytelling involves a temporary change in the way turns are taken so that a story can be told. Ordinarily, one speaker speaks at a time, taking fairly brief units of talk, or "turn constructional units" (Sacks, Schegloff, & Jefferson, 1974). After that minimal unit of talk is complete, another speaker may take a turn. If they do not, the current speaker can continue. This arrangement for turn taking has the implication that if a speaker needs to take a longer turn at talk—that is, one that consists of multiple turn constructional units—they must do something "special" to temporarily suspend turn taking and to alert their potential recipients so that they can attend to the storytelling properly (Sacks, 1974, 1978, 1992). At the possible end of the story, teller(s) and recipient(s) work together to accomplish the resumption of turn-by-turn talk. It is these extended, multi-unit turns that interactants treat as storytellings that provide for an interactive definition of storytelling. In these cases (as I describe in detail later), prospective tellers and recipients work together to take steps to suspend, and later resume, regular turn taking. We also see a range of activities in addition to entertaining being co-constructed by tellers and recipients in and through storytelling. These include joking, inviting, blaming, complaining, accounting, telling troubles, and gossiping, as well as constructing selves, relationships, and institutional settings.

This discussion of narrative indicates two central problems in conceptualizing narrative skill from a communication perspective. First, throughout its course narrative is produced interactively by (prospective) teller and (prospective) recipient. Even if a teller projects a story to tell, or indicates the point or the possible ending of the story in the most skillful way possible, the skillful application of a method (e.g., attempting to force the fellow interactant into recipient position by calling him or her by name, or clearly indicating what is to be made of the storytelling) does not guarantee the particular outcome that the turn can be shown to seek (Lerner, 2002). For instance, even

with the clearest and most compelling of story projections, a fellow interactant cannot be interactionally "forced" into recipient position by a prospective story telling. This is because storytelling, like all interaction, is fundamentally interactive, and is thus based in the to-and-fro between conversation participants. The second difficulty in dealing with narrative skill lies in the fact that, as the excerpt of conversation discussed later shows, although we can say canonically and fairly simply what is involved in "successfully" or "skillfully" bringing a story to the floor, telling it, and getting recipient responses during or after the telling, this view of narrative skill ignores the fact that storytelling is not usually (or perhaps ever) an activity in and of itself. That is to say, storytelling, in the sense of taking an extended turn at talk in which some event is recapitulated, is almost always taken to be a way of undertaking some kind of social activity, such as complaining, blaming, accounting, telling troubles, doing delicate activities, etc. In this sense, then, it is difficult to separate the form and function of narratives. Rather, they need to be understood as a package. Given this, there are times when the teller not introducing the point of the story in an overt or easily graspable way can be seen to be skillful, because it puts recipients in the position of showing their understanding of the teller by discerning a somewhat obscure point. Seeing storytelling as a method for doing other activities seriously complicates how narrative skill can be addressed.

This local, interactional view can be contrasted with another popular view of narrative. As Czarniawska (1997) pointed out, "The idea of social and individual life as a narrative can be found in many texts throughout history" (p. 11). "Metanarratives," "grand narratives" or "grand récits" are society's own accounts of the way things are. According to many theorists, although they may obscure the way things really are, all of human social life can be conceptualized in story form. Gergen (1991) suggested that humans have long been prone to think of their lives as "stories." Giddens (1992) described the "quest romance" as one way that people (typically women) think about their relational futures. Lyotard (1984) distinguishes the grand narrative and the story. Although the grand narrative stabilizes and provides a unitary experience, the story *destabilizes*, is *locally determined* and *temporal*, and disturbs the order of "reason" (Lyotard, 1984, p. 61, in Browning, 1992). Mumby (1993) pointed out that the current interest in narrative provides us with an opportunity to reflect on the current "crisis of representation" (Jameson, 1984, p. viii). Part of the postmodern move in the social sciences is to officially call into question the status of "objective truth" and reality. Narrative, construed interactively, gives us some empirical purchase on just how, through particular ways of talking, "reality" may be constructed and reconstructed. It shows that often these constructions and reconstructions of reality are embedded in a social context, as part of the ongoing social or relational activities that communicators are undertaking.

Difficulty defining just what narrative is indicates some tensions in the study of narrative. Despite the fact that the "Narrative Turn" has made the concept of narrative an increasingly important explanatory rubric in a number of fields, in each of these fields, similar issues are raised. The issues with regard to narrative revolve around the following questions:

1. Do narratives have generic, abstract (or abstractable) structure? How do they achieve their structured character?
2. What is the relationship between a narrative and the "reality" it recapitulates?
3. For what purposes are narratives told?

A great deal has been written about narrative. Much of it concerns narrative as a literary device (Genette, 1980, 1988; Mitchell, 1981). Some excellent reviews of narrative have been written in folklore (Georges, 1969; Robinson, 1981), anthropology (Goodwin, 1990; Polanyi, 1985), linguistics (van Dijk, 1976), education (Mishler, 1986), literary theory (Linde, 1986), and performance studies (Langellier, 1989, 1999). After a discussion of the complex nature of "narrative competence," I show how a variety of different approaches to these questions have an impact on what we can take to be narrative skill. I then describe the view of narrative and narrative skill from a communication perspective.

NARRATIVE SKILL

Three ways in which narrative skill can be examined are the cognitive view, the literary view, and the communication view. First, cognitive scientists have examined the ability to recognize and produce narrative. They take these competences to be evidence of mental structures. Taking Chomsky's position, they see it as part of our innate ability to process and produce language. Polkinghorne (1988) noted that, "The process of seeing human actions as meaningful sequences of events linked together in a causal chain requires cognitive skill, judgment, and the application of previous experiences" (p. 112). According to cognitive scientists, then, narrative skill enables us to process events in everyday life in such a way as to come to terms with causes and consequences, enabling us to make sense of events and their relationship with one another.

Second, the literary view of orally produced stories as a *performance* activity results in the ability to tell and recognize narratives being viewed as a "skill." "Competence in . . . narration is an essential skill for members of a speech community" (Robinson, 1981, p. 58).

All the problems of coherence, chronology, causality, foregrounding, plausibility, selection of detail, tense, point of view, and emotional intensity exist for the natural narrator just as they do for the novelist, and they are confronted and solved (with greater or lesser success) by speakers of the language every day. (Pratt, 1977, pp. 66–67)

Communities, and individuals within communities, may be judged as "good verbal performers" (Heath, 1983, p. 173). Thus, orally produced stories, like written narratives, may be judged by critical acclaim; they are "successful" or "unsuccessful" (Pike, 1982). The development of narrative skill has been widely studied in research on child language. Often studies have focused on skill in producing and reproducing narrative structure in a non-naturally occurring, and often decontextualized, setting (cf., e.g., McCabe & Peterson, 1991a). In studies of this kind, the goals of narrative may not be articulated. In line with a literary view of narrative, its goal is frequently portrayed as that of entertaining.

That narratives should entertain is emphasized in the criterion stipulated by some researchers that the event recounted should be "remarkable" (Labov & Waletzky, 1967/1997; van Dijk, 1976; Robinson, 1981, p. 59). It should be presented as exciting or out of the ordinary, designed "for the edification of listeners" (Goffman, 1974, p. 506). This suggests a dramaturgical view of the functions of narrative that echoes Aristotle's and contrasts with observations of ordinary conversation, which suggest that we tend to tell stories about the mundane details of our lives, packaging them as "news" (Sacks, 1984). This "ordinariness" of narratives in everyday conversation

in both casual and institutional settings leads us to a third conception of narrative skill.

Narrative skill can be thought of as the ability to "use" the sharing or retelling of past experiences for interactional ends. Many have noted that it is difficult to define, let alone measure, competence (Spitzberg & Cupach, 1989); however, communicators may display, in their talk, the extent to which they take others to be competent. The issue is complex. For instance, does a joke after which no one laughs indicate a lack of skill in joke telling on the part of teller or recipients? It is possible that it displays communication competence on the part of a recipient not to laugh at an off-color joke told on the wrong occasion, for instance? Skill, then, is a complex concept. Our skill or lack thereof may be made apparent to us through social sanctions embedded in talk.

Labov was concerned with what constituted an *effective* narrative. He analyzed the structure he found in terms of how it contributed to forestalling a recipient's "so what" (M. H. Goodwin, 1990, p. 232). This embodies a particular approach to the concept of skill with regard to narrative. It recognizes that narratives are built for particular recipients on particular occasions but does not take the position that the recipient may be key to constructing what it is the narrative comes to be about. For instance, some work on narrative skill takes it to be "decontextualized language, or language that relies minimally on listener inference" (McCabe & Peterson, 1991b, p. 218). In telling stories, communicators accomplish many different activities, however.

A naturally occurring story told at the dinner table illustrates some important considerations in the discussion of narrative skill. The description shows that throughout its course, the teller and recipient are "unskillful" in how they tell and respond. The teller does not produce his storytelling in ways that make it completely clear what he is trying to do with the storytelling. The recipient does not produce immediate or enthusiastic uptake of the beginning, middle, or end of the story. She responds to the telling in inapposite ways. This could indicate a lack of skill on the teller's part in introducing, telling, and completing the story, and a lack of skill on the recipient's part in responding to it. On one hand one might consider this a lack of skill, but the description of the social activities accomplished through the narrative and responses to it shows that interactants are undertaking other social activities through the specific ways that the story is told and responded to. This suggests that addressing the skillfulness or lack of skill indicated in the ways in which telling and responding are done is no simple matter, for despite a marked lack of "skillfulness" in the canonical sense, the teller gets his story told and his point across. The recipient responds, and an array of "relational" activities is accomplished through the particular ways of telling and responding used here. This suggests that narrative skill may best be applied as a unilateral concept that is more suited to literary narrative than to the kind of interactional storytelling that occurs in everyday social communication. The skilled beginning, telling, and ending of a narrative, or skilled uptake of the beginning, telling, and ending of a narrative, would seem to preclude the kinds of collaborative nuances of action we see enacted in the telling reproduced here. A brief account illustrates this claim.

The following excerpt is transcribed from a videotape of a couple eating dinner together in their home. It is transcribed using the transcription conventions of conversation analysis. Underlining indicates stress on a word. A colon indicates that a sound is stretched. Square brackets show speaker overlap. Silences are measured somewhat roughly in tenths of seconds (see Atkinson & Heritage, 1984, for further details). The couple has been eating ravioli that the husband, Mike, has brought

home from the bar he runs and talking for about 15 minutes. The story transcribed here begins after a gap of about 35 seconds.

- 1 Mike: Dennis came in today:=uh:m (0.2) He wrote this big
 2 letter to Ford,
 3 (1.4) ((Kate lifts her eyes to gaze at Mike's face))
 4 Mike: Cuz his car's been in the sho:p ya know,
 4a (1.5)
 5 Mike: for so long,
 6 (.)
 7 Mike: Took 'em like two weeks to fix his transmission.
 8 (0.4)
 9 Mike: H[e hadda rent-
 10 Kate: [So he wrote a complaint?
 11 (2.0)
 12 Mike: ·hh Mm hm?
 13 (4.0)
 14 Mike: ↑We:ll, (0.5) he has like: eight hundred dollar in:
 15 (.) rental cars fer (.) two weeks.
 16 (0.4)
 17 Kate: That he has to pay:?
 18 (1.5)
 19 Mike: So fa:r,
 20 (2.0)
 21 Kate: Then why (°didn't he e-°)
 22 (8.0)
 23 Kate: It's just uh transmission an' it takes that lo:ng?
 24 Mike: No: they screwed up on it twice they ha- they gave
 25 it- (.) said it'd be ready (at sof-) at one time and
 26 then they (1.0) ·hh redid it,
 27 (1.0)
 28 Mike: Kept saying Oh: it'd be another two days, >another
 29 two days, another two day:s.<
 30 (0.4)
 31 Mike: Didn't do anything to it.
 32 (1.0)
 33 Mike: Then they put one in,
 34 (0.5)
 35 Kate: Then they should [pay for the rental car,
 36 Mike: [The next MORning,
 37 (2.5)
 38 Mike: he goes out an' there's a big puddle in his
 39 driveway.
 40 (0.3)
 41 Mike: Transmission (0.2) leaked all over his driveway.
 42 (.)
 43 Mike: He had t'take it back 'n they kept it for another
 44 five (to) six days.
 45 (3.6)

- 46 Kate: Hm.
 47 (1.5)
 48 Mike: °I'd be fuming.°
 49 (3.5)
 50 Kate: Why couldn't that guy just do it. that- thuh guy
 51 you get.
 52 (1.3)
 53 Mike: What.
 54 (.)
 55 Mike: Who does my stuff?
 56 Kate: Mmhm?
 57 (0.5)
 58 Mike: Cuz, (1.5) it's under:- warranty.
 59 (1.3)
 60 Kate: Oh..
 61 (4.0)
 62 Kate: Uhhhh.
 63 (6.0)
 64 Mike: Ribbon ravioli stuffed with eggplant parmesan.

By producing an incremental story preface, that does not put Kate in the position of *having* to forward a storytelling (as a strong story preface such as, "Wanna hear what happened at work today?" might), although he may not provide for uptake unequivocally, Mike can test the extent to which Kate might be interested in hearing further details of the possible telling. In addition, without a strong, overt forwarding of the story by Kate, he can shape the story as he wishes, unconstrained by what Kate might have called for in her response to a story preface. In this way, his indication that he may have a story tell is noncoercive and has the potential to be collaborative. Furthermore, it does not strongly project the "point" of the prospective story. While this could present a problem for Kate in figuring out what the story might be about, again, it leaves open the possibility that Kate can participate in collaboratively shaping what the telling comes to be about. Kate's show of attention by lifting her eyes to Mike, but not taking a speaking turn, is similarly collaborative and noncoercive. It is simultaneously, however, a way of displaying minimal interest in what he may have to tell. A prospective teller could treat such a minimal display as a lack of interest and choose not to elaborate on the mentioned news. These deviations from what might canonically be called "narrative skill" in bringing a story to the floor at the beginning of a storytelling show that skillfulness is a tricky concept in this environment. By not offering and forwarding the story in a "successful" way here, interactants maximize the possibility for collaboration. In this sense, it is difficult to propose what could constitute skillfulness in storytelling, because the outcomes are arrived at interactionally, on the spot, moment by moment. The concept of narrative skill, as it is canonically used, then, seems to embody an evaluation or judgment regarding what is "better" or "best" done in a given communication situation. This is problematic, because what may be "best" done is interactively shaped and negotiated. In measuring skill we must look at outcome—at the very least, the ability to get done that for which the skill is required. For interactants, however, simply getting done the activity of, for instance, bringing a story to the floor, successfully or unsuccessfully, is rarely the only thing that is at stake in beginning a story. Rather, how the story is

brought to the floor is shaped by a range of other considerations, such as the activity a speaker might be taken to be doing by bringing the story to the floor in a particular way, the relationship implications of that method, how it makes the speaker “look,” and so on. This is to say, to claim that a speaker can be more or less skillful in bringing a story to the floor may cause the researcher to overlook the full range of activities a speaker may be undertaking in bringing it to the floor. The concept of “skill” involves an evaluative judgment that may result in our overlooking the methods by which and purposes for which narratives are produced, interactively, by communicators. Its not that narratives are produced more or less skillfully, but that the different ways in which narratives can be produced may result in different interactional or relational outcomes.

Part of the import of producing a story that does not have a “strong” story preface in which the teller projects what the story is “about,” or what its point might be, is that the recipient must try to figure out what the point could be. Although it begins as a story about Dennis having written to Ford, it becomes an account of the troubles Dennis had with his car. It is hearable that in recounting these details, Mike is making available to Kate what it was that led Dennis to write to the car company. He seems to be attempting to secure Kate’s understanding of why Dennis would do this, and perhaps also to establish that it is justified. In recounting what happened to Dennis’s car, however, Mike relies on Kate’s knowledge of cars, car rental, and car repair for her to infer how to evaluate the details he is reporting to her.

In line 38, Mike produces what could be heard to be a climax in the story: “tlk goes out an’ there’s a big puddle in his driveway.” Although Mike could be faulted for not providing enough information for Kate to figure out that this is a transmission leak, it could also be said that in producing a somewhat incomplete description of the circumstances, he allows his recipient to bring to bear and display her knowledge of cars by producing an appropriately shocked or surprised response. This could be regarded as a skillful narrative technique. She does not show the proper uptake, however. This could be brought as proof that Mike was “unsuccessful” in producing a “skillful” climax to his story, one that was sufficiently recognizable that the “appropriate” response, the one indicated by the details of the story, could be given. Similarly, Kate could be indicted for poor reciprocity, but her lack of immediate response could also be an indication of her lack of interest in the details of the telling, rather than any lack of skill on his part or hers. Similarly, Kate’s questions in lines 10, 17, and 23 might be taken as “unskillful” in the sense that they have the potential to derail the storytelling and display some disjuncture with both the state and content of the storytelling. Yet they display for the teller what she is making of the telling so far, and, without her having to confront him overtly, put him in the position of providing her with more information and guidance regarding what she might make of the storytelling.

At the end of the storytelling too, a disjuncture is apparent between the kind of reaction that might be indicated by the length of time Mike reports it took to fix the car another time: “He had t’take it back ’n they kept it for another five (to) six days” (lines 43–44). This occurrence is clearly egregious in itself, and all the more so on top of the previous failed repairs to the car and the length of time repairs took. Yet there is a 3.6 second gap in line 45, and then a minimal “Hm” from Kate in line 46. This is perhaps the most minimal uptake that Kate could provide—a token that might indicate that she takes this last reported event as news, but shows nothing more about what she makes of it. It shows no uptake of the *character* of the story, or the kind of reaction a reasonable recipient might have to it. This could be construed as unskillful

reciency, but it enables Kate to demonstrate a marked lack of interest in the facts of the storytelling, and some lack of affiliation with, or detachment from, Mike and Dennis.

Although it is possible to critique both Mike and Kate for lacking skill in storytelling, to do so would be to overlook what is accomplished interactionally and relationally by both how Mike tells the story and how Kate responds to it. Mike's and Kate's turns as teller and story recipient could be critiqued for lack of skill in storytelling, but it quickly becomes clear that the way they speak has implications that go beyond simple storytelling and that to critique their storytelling skill would belie the character of the kind of actions that storytelling is used to undertake; the specific ways of doing the conversational activities that telling a story involves (for the teller, beginning, unfolding, and bringing the narrative to a close; and for the recipient, showing uptake, ongoing reciency including a display of what she makes of the storytelling, and participating in the return to turn-by-turn talk) may have implications for these actions that go well beyond simple storytelling activities.

What is skillful or unskillful, then, is difficult to determine, because of the complex range of interactional tasks that interactants are undertaking in the course of the storytelling. Although there is a canonical way that stories generally unfold, it is clear that interactants can "play" with this structure so as to undertake an almost infinite range of other activities. These may involve affiliation or disaffiliation with the teller, interest in the topic, attitudes toward a protagonist in the telling, and so on. These concomitant activities, which are undertaken through the sharing of experiences, may shape how a storytelling is undertaken. This suggests that there may be serious problems involved in trying to assess narrative skill. The root of the problem might best be captured by the observation that in the course of telling a story, a teller is never simply telling a story, and a recipient is never simply responding to a story. Rather, to understand narrative, one must understand how the story is told and how the kinds of response that are given are woven through the particular set of activities that telling a story is part of the method for accomplishing.

This chapter, in attempting to build a communication-centered view of narrative skill, first briefly reviews literary critical, cognitive scientific, and anthropological approaches to narrative structure and then focuses primarily on how narrative is used to conduct such delicate actions as inviting, complaining, and blaming; to manage accounts, troubles tellings, and gossip; and to construct selves, relationships, family, and institutions. The particular ways in which the story is told, and responded to in its course, shape the actions that are accomplished by the telling. Presumably, the action that is being undertaken also influences how the story is told; however, as the instance discussed in this section has shown, there is often more than one "layer" of action going on. Not only is there the teller's recounting of the event—Dennis having written a big letter to Ford—but there is also the issue of what the recipient shows herself to be making of the story—her level of interest in it, her affiliation or lack of affiliation with Mike. One party may be pursuing an apparent "agenda," or trying to get done something particular and discernible through the storytelling (such as defending against an accusation (c.f., Mandelbaum, 1993), and could therefore be thought to be more or less skillful in telling the story and accomplishing what he or she purports to be trying to accomplish. Nonetheless, the success or failure of that action relies on the responses of fellow interactants. We may therefore need to reconceptualize narrative skill in a dialogic format, because it becomes clear on examining naturally occurring narratives that they are dialogic communication events. It is possible that the difficulty in applying the concept of skill to conversational narrative derives from this:

Skill traditionally conceived is a person's enacted possession; it is a facility in doing a particular action or activity. The description of a naturally occurring storytelling makes it clear that narrative is not simply a matter of a teller telling a story successfully or unsuccessfully. Rather, it is the sharing of experiences, in which the experiences, and what they come to mean for the current interaction, are interactively constructed by teller and recipient(s) working together. It therefore creates a false dichotomy to look at form separately from function, or function separately from form, in attempting to come to an understanding of narrative skill, despite traditional separation of form and function in narrative research. Without consideration of the actions that are being undertaken in and through the telling of the narrative, it is impossible to make any kind of assessment regarding skillfulness. The complexity of judging skillfulness is compounded by the fact that, as is illustrated in the story discussed above, the actions the storytelling accomplishes shift as the telling progresses, as the story-in-progress is interactively constructed by teller and recipient.

THE STRUCTURE OF NARRATIVES

Next, I describe a variety of approaches to narrative, with particular regard to how narratives are structured. These include the view of narrative structure as universal, narrative as evidence of scripts and abstract structures, and the interactional structuring of narratives. The view of narrative as structured, with a somewhat invariant structure or a consistent set of "universal" components, has motivated the research of theorists in folklore and in artificial intelligence.

Narrative Structure As "Universal"

Folklorists' research on myths suggests that they may be structured by the society and culture they represent. Research into myths and folktales has isolated "universal" features of narrative (Campbell, 1966; Lévi-Strauss, 1955, 1979; Malinowski, 1926; Propp, 1968). Malinowski (e.g., 1926) treated myths as "universal" phenomena, the function, social meaning, and significance of which are identical in all societies (Georges, 1969, p. 325). Campbell (1968), Propp (1968), and Lévi-Strauss (1955) culled "invariant" features of the structure of myths and folktales from their analyses.

Campbell's (1966) "monomyth" describes such generic features of the structure of classical myths as the hero's "separation and departure," "trials and victories of initiation," and "return and reintegration with society." He proposed that these features characterize a multiplicity of myths and are a basic structural feature of them.

Propp (1968) and Lévi-Strauss (1955, 1979) also examine myths to find the formal, abstract structural patterns underlying them, thus locating them with respect to one another. Their focus is on the language of myths, their constituent units, or "mythemes," and the "relations" between these mythemes (Lévi-Strauss, 1955, p. 210). Although the approaches to myth of Campbell and Malinowski differ from each other and from the approach of the structuralists, each researcher nevertheless attempts to show how the various internal, structural features of the myths that they examined can be abstracted to reveal a universal, underlying structure to all narratives. Although Malinowski and Lévi-Strauss studied myths performed in the particular culture they were examining, they nevertheless treated them as literary texts as distinct from treating them as interactional achievements. In their analyses, the mechanisms through which meanings and structures are achieved are not explicated. Thus, the meanings and structures described are those which are available to the analyst. They

are seen to be inherent properties of the myths, produced by the culture, rather than being produced by the participants in the interactional event in which the myth was performed.

Similarly, researchers in artificial intelligence (AI) regard narrative as having invariant structural features. They have postulated abstract discourse structures (such as "macrostructures"; van Dijk & Kintsch, 1977), external to the event of the narrative's recounting, in an attempt to understand the production and comprehension of narratives.

Narratives As Evidence of Abstract Structures

Narratives have been treated by researchers in artificial intelligence (AI) as having "rather simple forms . . . [and] identifiable "schematic" structures" (van Dijk, 1980, p. 2). Researchers have studied subjects' abilities to remember and reconstruct narratives, thus revealing mental schemata or scripts for "chunking," "packaging," and "framing" units of experience (Abelson, 1976; Polanyi, 1981; Rumelhart, 1975; Schank, 1982, 1990; van Dijk, 1976). Discussion of studies of the "universal" components of narratives, and the ways in which they may provide evidence of abstract mental structures suggests that narratives may be seen as structured events. These descriptions propose them to be structured by cognitive predispositions of storytellers, the societies in which they occur, the events which they recapitulate, or by the purposes for which they are recounted. That is, in each case they are seen as constructed by factors exogenous to their actual recounting. AI researchers have sought to produce models of narrative structure. The structure of narratives has been viewed as "abstractable" so that a system of "macrostructures" can be developed to represent the overall global semantic organization of discourse "macrorules." This understanding of the structuring of narratives was strongly influenced by Minsky's notion of frames (Minsky, 1975), Schank and Abelson's (1977; Schank, 1990; Schank & Abelson, 1977) theory of scripts, and the work of Rumelhart (1975) concerning schemata. Each of these constructs aims to achieve "the effective representation of knowledge or beliefs in the memory of language users" (van Dijk, 1980, p. 4).

Winograd (1986, p. 83) suggested that Rumelhart's (1975) theory of the "story grammar" divides stories into "a sequence of episodes, states, events, and plans, according to a phrase structure grammar" and deals with the organization of stories in terms of time sequence, plans, causality, action, and so on. In this approach the structure of narratives is treated as evidence of cognitive structures for the organization of knowledge and experience. According to many theorists in AI, our ability to encode and decode narratives using story scripts and schemata indicates our competence with the narrative mode of communication.

For researchers in AI, then, narrative structures provide evidence of features of mental processes. These abstract structures are thought to represent the structures with which we understand and produce narrative.

The studies referred to above provide strong evidence for a determinate structure to narratives; however, these studies use narratives of a particular kind, which may differ from narratives in ordinary conversation. Usually the stories used in such studies are invented by researchers or by subjects instructed by researchers to write about a recalled occasion or to reconstruct the story of a book they have read or had read to them or a cartoon or short movie they have seen. Research procedures may involve studying subjects' abilities to recall, recognize, and summarize stories (Haslett, 1986, p. 88). Research may also be based on the grammatical structure of

reconstructed children's fiction (e.g., Bamberg, 1987). Thus, the stories examined are not naturally occurring. The data are created to fit the contingencies of the study, rather than being produced as part of, contingent on, and exerting contingencies on, some actual ongoing interactional event. It is possible, then, that narratives produced in conversation may be structured *by* the interaction. This suggests a possible distinction between narratives produced as monological creations of an "author" and those that are produced as part of interaction. Narratives produced in ordinary conversation may be found to be structured differently from those treated as reified, "generic" objects, produced by and instantiating universal abstract structures. This is because, as the storytelling reproduced earlier illustrates, a monological, literary narrative is not produced interactively with the recipient and is thus not subject to the kind of *in situ* revision and collaborative construction that naturally occurring narratives are.

The view taken by much of the research described here suggests a static communication model, whereby a sender has a message to send to a receiver, who is more or less successful in retrieving the intention behind the sender's message. This model may be applied to written narratives produced as monologues by their author and is clearly consonant with a literary view of narrative. A dynamic view of communication suggests that narratives are interactive creations of tellers and recipients, however, produced specifically for particular occasions rather than being "prepackaged." Research has shown that even narratives that may be retold on different occasions are tailored to each occasion on which they are shared (Goodwin, 1981).

In contrast to the monological approach to the structure of narrative, some research has examined structural features that provide a point of access to aspects of interactional behavior. The linguistic structure of narratives has been examined in detail in such a way as to come upon their functions in the cultures in which they occur. Thus, the form of narratives as performances has been examined to delineate their function in displaying features of cultures and language (Bauman, 1977, 1986; Hymes, 1962; Labov, 1972; Sherzer, 1983, 1990).

The Interactional Structuring of Narratives

Sociolinguists, ethnographers of language and communication, and folklorists have looked at the language of narratives. It is described as evidence of aspects of culture-in-use and language-in-use. Researchers have shown how knowledge of a culture may explain its narratives. This approach contrasts with that of the work mentioned earlier because of its treatment of narrative as *performed*, which enables it to take into account the fact that narratives are produced in *interaction* (Bauman, 1977, 1986; Labov, 1972; Labov & Waletzky, 1967/1997; Sherzer, 1983, 1990).

Bauman (1975, 1977, 1986) wrote that "oral literary texts" are analyzed to develop an understanding of "verbal art as performance, as a species of situated human communication, a way of speaking," (1975, p. 291), for "performance sets up, or represents, an interpretive frame within which the messages being communicated are to be understood" (p. 292). Narratives are described as "framed," made recognizable to audiences, by way of "culturally conventionalized metacommunication" (p. 295). Bauman provided a list of "formal and conventional" devices that accomplish this framing, including special codes such as archaic or esoteric language, special formulae that signal performance, figurative language such as metaphor, formal stylistic devices (such as rhyme and vowel harmony), and special patterns of tempo, stress, or pitch. Presumably a skilled narrator of stories in this genre is one who is best able to combine these elements in the telling of a story; however, research in this

domain has focused less on the aesthetics of performance and more on the cultural information embedded and transmitted in the stories and their telling.

Although narratives are seen to have some generic features, as in AI descriptions, these generic structural features have interactional motivation. In his chapter on the "frame analysis of talk" (1974, pp. 496–559), Goffman took a similarly "dramaturgical" view of storytelling. He described how storytellers may enact different characters by producing talk in a particular way so as to "key" for listeners that they are enacting a different character (see also Holt, 1996).

Another instance of the linguistic features of narrative which have been examined appears in Sherzer's (1983, 1990) description of tellings and retelling of narratives of the Kuna Indians of South America. He described details of Kuna narratives' linguistic construction in an analysis of the relationship between tellings and retellings. He showed how such details as "the interplay of allusive and non-allusive language, rhetorical strategies in speech, the verbal expression of news or new information, and the Kuna theory and practice of magic and of narration" are revealed through narratives' linguistic details. Sherzer described not only what these details show about the culture in which they occur, but also what they mean to the audience of the performance. In this respect, the presence of an audience is integrated into the analysis of the narrative's structure, showing it to be an interactional structure.

These ethnographies of performance describe how performances are communicatively keyed in particular cultures and communities. Performances are described as patterned by setting, act sequence, and cultural rules for performance. In this approach, the narrative is understood as the performer's responsibility: "performance as a mode of spoken verbal communication consists in the assumption of responsibility to an audience for a display of communicative competence" (Sherzer, 1983, p. 293). Thus, this work shows a concern for the narrative as the teller's performance for an audience. The recipients' work is to understand what the teller is keying or displaying, rather than to participate in its creation. This is also the case in Labov's (1972) analyses of narratives of personal experience.

Labov's work represents an important departure from traditional linguistics, in that he moves sociolinguistics to the analysis of units larger than the sentence (M. H. Goodwin, 1990). In analyzing narratives, Labov posited an abstract structure that describes his collection of narratives and enables them to perform their "evaluative" and "referential" functions. Labov's discussion of these abstract structures should be distinguished from the macrostructures and scripts of artificial intelligence theorists, because Labov is dealing with structures of narrative that enable them to perform evaluative and referential functions.

Labov noted that the narratives he analyzed "occur in response to a specific stimulus in the interview situation" (the question "Were you ever in a situation where you were in serious danger of being killed, where you said to yourself, *This is it*?"). In response to this question, the speaker "seems to undergo a partial reliving of that experience, and he is no longer free to monitor his own speech as he normally does in face-to-face interviews" (1972, p. 355). Labov examined the narratives elicited in this way "to see what linguistic techniques are used to evaluate experience within the black English vernacular culture" (p. 355). A definitional property of personal narratives for Labov and Waletzky (1967/1997) and Labov (1972) is that they are structured in the same chronological order as the events they relate. Rather than being modeled on mental schemata, templates, or scripts as AI research proposes, Labov's linguistic model sees past experience as recapitulated "by matching a verbal sequence of clauses to the sequence of events which (it is inferred) actually occurred"

(1972, p. 360). Labov described narratives as generically consisting of the following form: (a) abstract, (b) orientation, (c) complicating action, (d) evaluation, (e) result and resolution, and (f) coda. Labov proposed that narrative is organized around a framework of these listed components, and forms a series of answer to underlying questions:

1. Abstract: what was this about?
2. Orientation: who, when, what, where?
3. Complicating action: then what happened?
4. Evaluation: so what?
5. Result: what finally happened (p. 370)

Labov did not specify *whose* questions these are, the narrator's or listener's. If they are seen as interactants' questions to which narratives provide answers, some empirical evidence for them might be found in stories in which certain parts of the narrative do not occur and recipients seek them by way of such questions.

Labov provided an account of the form of narratives elicited by the "Danger of Death" question. He was also concerned with their function. Labov treated narrative as an interactional activity insofar as it is discussed as the product of an elicitation question. The turns of the listener are included in parentheses in the transcriptions of narratives. Although this acknowledges their presence, it subordinates them to the teller's turns. His description is of the form and function of the narrative itself. The influence of the listener's turns on the shape of the narrative is not described. So far, then, the research discussed has taken narrative structure to be largely exogenous to the occasion of telling, if sometimes influenced by it in particular ways.

NARRATIVE AS THE INTERACTIVELY CONSTRUCTED SHARING OF EXPERIENCES

Schegloff (1997) pointed out that storytelling is studied widely as a discursive unit, a genre, and an activity. It is as a genre that it has been studied most widely in a broad array of fields. Yet when we look at ordinary talk, we see that for everyday interactants storytelling is primarily a discursive unit and an activity. In addition, it is an activity through which other activities may be carried out. It is helpful to think of narrative as "sharing experiences." Framing it in this way puts it firmly in the realm of social actions, formulating it as a fundamentally interactive occurrence. This puts us in the position of asking how, when, and for what purposes do interactants share experiences so that we can further our discussion of narrative skill.¹

How and When Experiences Are Shared

Labov and Waletzky's (1967/1997) finding that narratives are structured by the time sequence of the original event that the story recapitulates contrasts with Sacks's treatment of stories in his lectures (1992) and elsewhere (1974, 1978, for instance). Sacks has shown how, rather than seeing something outside of the occasion of

¹It is important to distinguish narrative as a discursive unit through which communicators share experiences, so as to avoid assuming either that all communication involves sharing experiences or that all communication is narrative.

the storytelling as structuring it, we can look at the storytelling itself to see how, at each point, interactants work together to structure it. The anthropologists and sociolinguists whose work was discussed earlier in this chapter collect their stories in various ways from informants in the field, often asking that they tell a story. This may explain why research has tended to focus on the story and its production at the expense of the interactional situation storytelling is usually part of, and the social activities storytellings may undertake. A by-product of this method of collecting storytellings is that the processes through which storytellings are occasioned and warranted often cannot be studied (Goodwin, 1990, pp. 234–235).

Narratives in conversation generally fall into three parts that involve different kinds of interactive work. First, a prospective teller offers to tell a story or indicates that there may be something to tell. This can be forwarded or not by prospective recipients. Next, the teller recounts the event, and recipients produce turns that range along a continuum from "passive" to "active" with regard to the extent to which their turns shape what the teller says next. Finally, the teller may show that the telling is possibly complete. Recipient uptake of or alignment with the possible ending of the story is necessary for the resumption of turn-by-turn talk. I outline each segment of the storytelling more fully in the following sections, to show the extent to which one can discern how storytellings may be undertaken more or less skillfully.

Beginning a Story. Sacks (1974, 1978, 1992) pointed out that, as Sacks, Schegloff, and Jefferson (1974) had observed, ordinary conversation unfolds one minimal unit of talk, or turn constructional unit (TCU), at a time. A TCU can consist of a word, a clause, or a sentence. At the end of each TCU, the next speaker can take a turn. Ordinarily, a speaker needs to do something special (such as initiate a list or rush through into the next unit (Sacks et al., 1974) to indicate that he or she wants the floor for more than one minimal unit of talk. To tell a story, then, which consists of more than one TCU (a story is a multi-unit turn), a prospective teller needs to do something special to get the floor to take a turn with more than one TCU.² Prospective tellers' attempts to get the floor for an extended turn can be described as falling along a continuum from turns that actively request to tell, to those that simply indicate that there may be a tellable, to a series of turns that simply begin a story by moving stepwise into it.

Sacks (1974) showed that we can offer or request to tell quite overtly ("You wanna hear a story my sister told me last night?"). This puts recipients in the position of forwarding the story, or not. Cohen (1999) explored utterances in which speakers indicate that there may be more to tell, but these *could* be treated as complete announcements in their own right. For example, turns such as "My husband said something really funny last night," or "Shane ate lobster (.) this afternoon" *could* be heard as brief announcements in their own right but may be followed either by a recipient turn that forwards a telling or simply by an elaboration by the same speaker in the form of a telling. Where more than one party knows of the events alluded to, such a turn can work as a "story prompt" (Lerner, 1992), putting the other knowledgeable party in the position of telling a story. Jefferson (1978) showed how a prospective teller may move stepwise from some related topic through a series of turns into a storytelling. Each of these options has as a crucial feature the fact

²A story may also be elicited by a prospective recipient, such as when a police officer or a therapist encourages a prospective teller to tell a story; however, there has usually been some prior indication that there is, indeed, a story to tell.

that prospective tellers and prospective recipients must work together to suspend regular turn taking in favor of one party taking the floor for an extended turn at talk, with fellow interactants aligned as recipients. At its beginning, then, conversational storytelling is interactively constructed.

The Body of the Telling. The body of a telling may consist of distinct sections (C. Goodwin, 1984, pp. 226–227). It may begin with relevant background information, and then proceed to a climax. If, in the course of telling, the teller realizes that more information is needed for recipients to be able to understand the details of the account, a parenthetical section may be inserted. This usually takes the form of further background information that is embedded disjunctively into the ongoing telling. The story proceeds as a “series of connected sentences that have that connectedness built in such that it is required for the understanding of any one of them” (Sacks, 1992, p. 232). That is, one of the constitutive features of a storytelling is that the separate sentences are heard as part of an ongoing whole. Each individual sentence in a storytelling makes sense only when understood as part of an ongoing whole. C. Goodwin (1984) pointed out that part of the work of being recipient of a story is showing, through particular kinds of responses, what one takes the teller to be doing in a given part of the narrative. That is, different sections of the story make different requirements of recipients.

The recipient role is thus an interactive one in the body of the story also. Research has shown that recipients’ turns have an important impact on how the storytelling unfolds. Recipient responses can range along a continuum from “passive” to “active.” In storytellings, a passive response is one that minimally constrains what a teller can do next. Often these turns consist of “mm hm” or “uh huh” (Schegloff, 1982). Through turns of this kind during the course of a storytelling, “[their] producer is proposing that his coparticipant is still in the midst of some course of talk, and shall go on talking” (Jefferson, 1983, p. 4). A response of this kind contrasts with more “active” reciprocity, in which the speaker produces a turn that requires a particular kind of response from the teller and may thus influence the course of the storytelling to come. Active recipient turns may even “exhibit a preparedness to shift from reciprocity to speakership” and in this way threaten the storytelling. Although such turns as “mm hm” and “uh huh” may seem negligible in terms of their semantic content (and are often referred to as *back channels*) they clearly play an important role in the continuation of the storytelling, because they show that the recipient is attending and expects the teller to continue (see Drummond & Hopper, 1993, for a treatment of problems regarding the concept back channels). Their impact on an ongoing storytelling is minimal, because they do not show what the recipient is making of the storytelling beyond that they expect it to continue. In this way, they do not constrain the talk that the teller can produce next; however, their consequentiality is evident, Schegloff (1982) shows, when they come at the end of a storytelling when the recipient could (or should) show the understanding that the story may be complete. Producing a continuer such as “mm hm” or “uh huh” displays the expectation that the storytelling is ongoing. This puts the teller in the position of recompleting the storytelling, because it shows that the recipient is aligned as the recipient of an ongoing storytelling, rather than one that is possibly complete (Schegloff, 1982). This demonstrates that tellers monitor recipient responses closely. The experience that occurs on the telephone, when one party is taking a multiunit turn, does not hear an “mm hm” from a recipient for some period of time, and asks, “Are you still

there?" adds anecdotal weight to the analytic observation that tellers monitor closely even apparently minimal recipient responses.

More active recipient responses (that is, turns that exert more of an influence on what tellers can say next) include assessments, such as "wow!" or "how awful!" (C. Goodwin, 1986a; Pomerantz, 1984), because they show what the recipient is making of the events of the storytelling. Recipients can affiliate or disaffiliate with the line a teller is taking, and that alignment will often be displayed in an assessment. If a report of bad news gets a "great!" the teller may shift the way the story is being told so as to get a more affiliative response.

The most active recipient responses are first pair parts (Schegloff & Sacks, 1973) such as questions. These actively shape or constrain what the teller can say next and may actually shift the course of the storytelling. The impact of a recipient turn on the course of the telling can be seen in the telling discussed above. Other work has shown how the recipient of a storytelling can ask questions that result in a story shifting from apparently being about how someone had an unfortunate restaurant encounter with a lobster, to how they got a good deal on their lobster lunch (Mandelbaum, 1989). These active recipient responses, which actually shape what the teller can do next, highlight the interactive character of storytelling.

This is also revealed at the end of a storytelling, where, as an "mm hm" demonstrates, the recipient needs to show that they take it that the story is over, and that turn-by-turn talk should resume after what has been told has been assessed. The consequences of a recipient turn that does not show full uptake of the story ending is also illustrated in the storytelling discussed earlier. After a story is shown by the teller to be over and treated by the recipient as over, it may be followed by a second story (Ryave, 1978; Sacks, 1992; Schegloff, in press). Here, a story is told that is clearly constructed as related in some way to the prior. In the way that it makes that connection, it may show the second teller's understanding of what was consequential about the first telling.

Throughout its course and in its aftermath, we see that conversational storytelling is not a preconstructed monologue. Rather, the storytelling itself, and what it comes to be, are interactively shaped by teller and recipient working together.

ACTIVITIES ACCOMPLISHED THROUGH SHARING EXPERIENCES

Labov and Waletzky (1967/1997) saw the functions of narrative as referring to and evaluating the experiences that the tellings they looked at recapitulated. We can sometimes see these elements in storytellings; a concern by the teller to get the order of events right can be shown when, for instance, a teller stops, backs up, and inserts a detail that is thereby produced as having been missing. This suggests that tellers are presenting their story as related to some actual series of events. Also, in the way that the events are recounted, tellers clearly indicate for recipients what they could or should be making of the story. Yet these functions of narrative are the tip of the narrative iceberg. Schafer (1983, p. 240) pointed out that Freudian psychoanalysis relies on analysts assisting analysands in transforming their narratives as told into others that are "more complete, coherent, convincing, and adaptively useful than those they have been accustomed to constructing." Psychoanalysis thus takes as central the role of narrative in constructing everyday lives. The precise nature of these narratives is unclear, however. Narratives told to analysts in the office are different in various respects from the narratives constructed with other communicators in everyday casual and professional settings. They may serve the explicit function of

trying to make sense of one's life. In everyday conversations, stories are occasioned in different ways and may be methods for enacting a variety of activities.

Storytellings in conversation are rarely, if ever, taken by interactants as told just to "tell a story" or entertain. Rather, storytelling in everyday conversation often occurs as part of some line of action and in this way is often a method for doing some other practical activity. Storytellings may be used to do joking (Sacks, 1974, 1978, 1992), but even in a case that we think of as the epitome of entertaining, we find that these narratives perform some subtle social "tasks." Narratives may also be used as an interactive method for undertaking delicate activities, such as inviting, blaming, complaining, telling troubles, accounting, and gossiping. Additionally storytellings and how they are responded to by recipients may show us practices through which reality, self, and relationship may be interactively constructed, as well as activities in families, organizations, and other professional settings such as the legal and medical settings. I address briefly each of these in turn. Fuller discussions of the different actions interactively accomplished in the course of sharing experiences shows how sharing experiences is an important resource for accomplishing these actions. I also discuss implications for narrative skill.

Joking and Laughter

The claim that storytelling, as an interactive practice in everyday conversation, is not simply a medium for entertainment but rather is used to enact a range of social activities is reinforced by looking at joke telling in everyday conversation. Conventionally, jokes are regarded as a mode of entertaining fellow interactants. Joke tellers are commended and may be renowned for their skill at joke telling; however, jokes produced in conversation can be seen to perform social tasks in addition to simply entertaining. In fact, whether they are entertaining to those to whom they are told is partially shaped by social factors.

Sacks (1974, 1978, 1992) examined some technical and social aspects of the telling of a dirty joke. First, he suggested that jokes, unlike storytellings, can be produced almost anywhere in conversation. Sacks claimed that they are unlike storytellings in this regard, because prospective tellers often go to great lengths to make a story part of ongoing talk. Sacks showed how jokes are brought to the floor in much the same way that storytellings are; the prospective joke teller must seek a suspension of regular turn-by-turn talk, and fellow interactants can align or not as prospective recipients. Then, the joke teller produces the joke. Sacks (1978) showed in detail how each part of the tight structuring of the joke provides for its understandability. In this way, jokes may be more tightly structured than ordinary stories, with little room for deviation in each retelling. Joke telling differs from storytelling in that recipients of jokes, unlike recipients of storytellings, who can produce a range of turns that have an impact on the course of the story, have limited ability to produce turns that shape the joke as it is produced. Also in jokes, unlike storytellings, the teller is rarely if ever the hero of the telling. The endings of storytellings and jokes both rely on recipient responses. In the case of jokes, appropriate recipient responses ordinarily consist of laughter (and possibly groans). If they are missing at the conclusion of a joke, this may be a measure of the joke's success or failure. In structural terms, then, there are points of similarity and points of difference between jokes and storytellings.

Sacks (1978) pointed out that in addition to entertaining, jokes do some particular kinds of "social work." He showed how a joke he examined is designed as a kind of "newsletter" for girls in early adolescence. Although the joke might be glossed

as a joke about oral sex, when examined carefully it becomes clear that although it is ostensibly about oral sex—and “tests” recipients’ knowledge of oral sex—it simultaneously takes up various issues that might be relevant to girls in early adolescence. These include the relationship between mother and daughter; girls’ concerns about losing their friends when they marry; the difficulties children experience in trying to figure out which parental rules are the ones to follow on a given occasion, etc. It addresses fears, concerns, and mysteries experienced by 13-year-old girls that they would not be able to put into words. In joke form, these issues are addressed *sub rosa*, thereby providing the intended recipients with reassurance and information. The “packaging” of this “information” in the format of a dirty joke provides for limits on to whom it is told. Mandelbaum (n.d.) showed that jokes told by college students display similar “social work.” Many of the jokes examined concern sex but pick up particular aspects that are specifically relevant to many college students: fear of getting pregnant, issues of contraception, managing multiple partners, which sexual activities are appropriate and which are not, and so on. The jokes also pick up quite subtle aspects of the life experience of college students. This is embodied in the fact that a large number of the jokes concern toys, superheroes, sex, indestructibility, or combinations of these. That is, the jokes college students tell reflect the liminal stage that college represents in their lives. They seem to be specifically designed so as to capture such complex elements of the experience of late adolescence and early adulthood as sexual activity, while managing a lingering interest in the toys and fantasies of childhood. Similarly Mandelbaum (n.d.) found that older people told jokes that take up such concerns as memory problems, whereas young children told jokes about such things as “finding words”—the kinds of mysterious activities children are sometimes asked to engage in at school.

This discussion of jokes indicates that even these rather formulaic conversational objects constitute more than simply entertainment. Rather, they also perform a social “job” in interaction. Foot (1997) suggested a number of social tasks for which humor, more broadly, may be used. These include searching for information (including social probing and social acceptance); giving information (including self-disclosure, self-presentation, denial of serious intent, and unmasking hypocrisy); interpersonal control (including expression of liking and affiliation and dislike and hostility, controlling social interaction, and ingratiation); group control (including intragroup control and intergroup control); anxiety management (including saving face, coping with embarrassment, and as a safety valve for under- and overarousal); and changing and sustaining the status quo (including freedom from conventional thought and reinforcement of stereotypes). Foot also outlined several psychological tasks that laughter may fulfill: humorous, social, ignorance, evasion, apologetic, anxiety, derision, and joyous forms of laughter (pp. 273–275).

Jefferson (1985) showed how laughter can be precisely placed and that we can learn a lot from examining its precise placement. For instance, she showed how the placement of laughter particles on the word “organ,” which can be heard as a sexual double entendre, partially obscures the problematic word. In this way, it puts interactants in the position of applying their “dirty minds” to understanding the word as “organ.” When they show this understanding of the word that is partially obscured by laughter, they engage in a collaborative arrival at an obscenity. This case shows that we can learn about quite unexpected aspects of social organization through the close examination of the exact placement of laughter. Jefferson, Sacks, and Schegloff (1987) described how laughter may be used in the interactive construction of intimacy, where the withholding of laughter after an impropriety may constitute a rebuff of

an attempt at intimacy embodied in the impropriety, whereas joining in laughter at an impropriety may constitute a complicitness that may be taken as intimacy. These findings suggest that there is a great deal of interactive subtlety associated with the use of humor and laughter in interaction.

The multiple functions that humor and laughter may perform indicate that pragmatic knowledge is necessary for the deployment of laughter and humor in the appropriate environment. More work needs to be done to come to an understanding of how laughter and humor are interactively enacted (cf. Glenn, 1992, 1995). To date, research has not addressed issues of skillfulness regarding the telling of jokes and the production of laughter in conversation. It is clear from the description above, however, that skillfulness in joke telling cannot be captured simply in terms of the logistics of production, for joke telling and laughter both have complex social functions that may not be measurable in terms of success and failure.

The Bipartite Structure of Storytelling As a Resource in Sharing Experiences

I have discussed the bipartite, interactive character of storytelling. The description shows that the ways in which a storytelling comes to have meaning are interactively arrived at. This characteristic may become a resource for both tellers and recipients. This is most clearly apparent in the case of brief reports. Next I describe how the interactive character of storytelling may provide a resource for inviting, blaming, accounting, complaining, telling troubles, and gossiping.

Inviting. Reduced stories, or reportings, may be used in a bipartite technique for managing invitations (Drew, 1984). By reporting a candidate social event, such as, "Uh nex'Saturday night's s'prize party here fer p-Kevin" the speaker can put the recipient in the position of inferring that the social event may be available for him or her. The recipient then has the choice of treating the report simply as news, which the potential inviter could take as an indication that the recipient is not interested in attending or alternatively respond by self-inviting, or at least indicating some interest. In this way, a minimal report of a potential social event, followed by self-inviting or some other invitation-relevant uptake, or alternatively treating the report simply as news, provides a collaborative method for managing invitations without explicitly engaging in an activity that could result in the inviter being turned down.

Blaming. A similar bipartite technique may be used for managing blame. For instance Pomerantz (1978) showed how a speaker may take the first step in indicating that something blameworthy has happened, without officially laying blame. This may be accomplished when a speaker reports an "agentless, unhappy event"—some "negative" circumstance for which the agent is not officially designated. This puts the recipient in the position of inferring from the reported circumstances that someone is to blame. In turn, they could assign responsibility, or report some other circumstance that shows they are not to blame.

[In Pomerantz, 1978, p. 118, instance (4)]

R: L:liddle (kaak) has been eading pudding.

C: You've been *feeding* it to im.

Here in R's turn she offers a minimal report of an agentless unhappy occurrence, the baby eating pudding. Here the object to whom something happened (the baby) is

referred to as a subject. The protagonist in the feeding of the baby is the candidate blamed party. In the next turn, the recipient transforms that event into a consequent event by describing an event that is chronologically prior to the "unhappy incident," R feeding pudding to the baby. If an event can be turned into a consequent event, then an agent for it can be specified. C, the recipient of the report of the agentless unhappy event thus attributes blame for it by describing the preceding event. Reporting here provides a method for a speaker to make attributing responsibility relevant, without overtly engaging in blaming. Claiming responsibility thereby becomes voluntary and collaborative. In both inviting and blaming, the technique of presenting a neutral brief story or report, that puts the recipient in the position of inferring the "upshot" or consequences, provides a method for undertaking a delicate activity.

Accounting. Managing issues of responsibility is often dealt with under the rubric of *accounts*. Although the term accounts is used to characterize a variety of actions (described in the paragraphs that follow), in its strongest sense it refers to stories with which we attempt to remediate some wrong. Deriving the concept from Burke (Scott, 1993), Scott and Lyman (1968) examined "talk that shore[s] up the timbers of fractured sociation" (p. 46). Often, they found, this involves telling some aspect of the event that occurred that provides an explanation or justification for its having happened. A great deal of work in a number of fields has examined this phenomenon.

Buttny (1993) described four ways that the concept of accounts has been taken up. First, the telling of accounts in conversation has been seen by some as strongly related to remediating social wrongs, especially as this activity relates to matters of face preservation (Goffman, 1967). Within the communication field, work has focused in this domain (Cody & McLaughlin, 1985, 1988, 1990; McLaughlin, Cody, & O'Hair, 1983; McLaughlin, Cody, & Rosenstein, 1983). Second, in the work of Antaki (1988) and Harvey, Weber, and Orbuch (1990), accounts focus on explanation of everyday activities, with less of a focus on remediating social wrongs. A third sense of accounts forms part of the attribution theory literature, where accounts as explanations of actions, whether the actions are problematic or not, are not limited to verbal accounts but may form part of private cognitions (Antaki, 1987; Tedeschi & Reiss, 1981; Weiner, Amirkham, Fokes, & Verette, 1987). Fourth, for ethnomethodologists, social actors treat their everyday activities as "accountable"—that is, sensible, normal, and proper. Accounting processes offer one method by which everyday persons treat and come to see their actions as ordinary. Rather than being a feature only of remediation, for ethnomethodologists, they are part of the everyday work of constructing the social fabric of everyday life, even though they are often "seen but unnoticed" (Garfinkel, 1967; Garfinkel & Sacks, 1970; Sacks, 1972, 1984).

For obvious practical reasons, much work on accounts has relied on reconstructed or remembered accounts, or accounts produced in response to hypothetical situations. As they occur in naturally occurring interaction, however, accounts are often found in narrative structures. Labov and Fanshel (1977) found them in the psychotherapeutic setting as part of justifications for actions. Gergen and Gergen (1983) and Weber, Harvy, and Stanley (1987) found them being used to explain failed relationships. Buttny (1993) pointed out that "Narratives as a discourse genre work as accounts when tellers re-present past events in such a way to defend their conduct. Narratives allow the teller to offer explanations at a greater length" (p. 18). Work on how accountings are produced targets excuses and justifications, explanations, and so on, often told in narrative form. Again we see a focus on the teller as primary communicator, with the active role of the recipient disattended. In this sense,

accounting is seen as consisting of strategies, often used in narrative form, with research offering the possibility of predicting which strategy might be used in a particular situation (Cody & McLaughlin, 1985, 1988, 1990; McLaughlin, Cody, & O'Hair, 1983; McLaughlin, Cody, & Rosenstein, 1983). In this research, situation is often glossed as "the activity for which an account is being used." This line of research could usefully be extended by examining the sequential environment and actual circumstances in which the account becomes necessary.

Complaining. Although not formally addressed as accounts, some work on how interactants manage issues of responsibility in longer stories shows that accounts may be brought to the floor in a way that provides for the delicate management of complaints. Here, a structure is used that is similar to that described earlier with regard to the use of short reports in constructing blame, in which the story is told neutrally, leaving the recipient to infer what is being done. In these longer complaints, however, tellers may first set up a frame that provides for recipients to infer the negative or problematic character of the neutrally recounted events. The frame puts recipients in the position of collaborating with the teller to discern, and show the appropriate reaction to, the complainable events the teller recounts. In Mandelbaum (1991/1992) we see a teller, Ronya, setting up a frame for the events she is about to tell: "n he really doesn't know where he is. He always gets mixed up." This puts the recipient in the position of listening to the story, with this frame in mind, for events in the telling that could be understood to be evidence of the fact that "he really doesn't know where he is. He always gets mixed up."

Here we see a method for complaining that is similar to the one discussed above with regard to blaming, where a brief reporting leaves the recipient to formulate its implications. In this particular instance, the recipient, Marilyn, does not take up the complaint-worthy character of the reported protagonist's actions. Instead, she ultimately asks a question that results in a shift to a story of her own, about what *she* did that afternoon. Accounts of why Marilyn does not take up the complaint and tells a neutral story of her own next are speculative, but it is possible that the relational complications of engaging in criticism of her brother-in-law (by affiliating with Ronya's complaint) outweigh the consequences of disattending the complaint. Nonetheless, it is clear that this method for providing a frame and then laying out a story in a neutral fashion involves the recipient in co-constructing with the teller what the story comes to be about. It is likely that interactants are sensitive to the relational delicacy of affiliating and disaffiliating with complaints and that whether a complaining story is treated as a complaint or simply as an account of an activity may be shaped by relational considerations.

Thus, one begins to see that how stories are told and responded to—the interactive work engaged in by teller and recipient—may be shaped at least partially by relational considerations. In this way, we come to see sharing experiences as a way of engaging in relationship-relevant activities. In the case of complaints—sharing a kind of trouble—multiple relational issues may be at stake. These might include affiliation between teller and recipient and also relational issues with regard to those about whom the complaint is made. Again, the multiple activities that are accomplished in a storytelling make it difficult to address the issue of narrative skill in this environment.

Telling Troubles. Clearly, telling personal troubles is a delicate matter; it is not simply a matter of conveying information or "getting something off one's chest." Rather, as the communication view of storytelling suggests, when a teller reports troubles, the

recipient must choose to align in a particular way. Each choice embodies a particular alignment (affiliative or disaffiliative) between interactants. Jefferson (1980a, 1980b, 1988; Jefferson & Lee 1992) pointed out that the telling of troubles is managed as a delicate matter. Telling another our troubles can constitute an imposition, in the sense that in doing so we put the recipient in the position of offering, for instance, advice or sympathy. Choosing to treat another's report of troubles simply as "news" may also embody a stance with regard to that other person. Telling and responding to troubles, then, like complaining, is laden with relational significance. The complicated social nature of the activity of telling troubles may explain why it is that, as Jefferson described, we often enact a sequence in which troubles are interactively brought to the floor step-by-step, rather than simply announcing them. Jefferson (1980a, p. 163) found that troubles announced "cold" are often met with resistance. Instead we may premonitor troubles by offering a downgraded response to "how are you," such as "Oh, okay I guess," for instance. The downgraded response may make it hearable to a prospective troubles recipient that there could be some sort of trouble to tell. Prospective recipients can then choose whether or not to take up the troubles. In the next example, the downgraded response to inquiry is taken up as indicating possible troubles to tell:

(Jefferson, 1980a, p. 153, instance [1])
 Bob: How Are you feeling now.
 → Jayne: Oh::? pretty good I gue:ls::
 → Bob: [Not so hot?
 (0.8)
 Jayne: I'm so:rt of waking u:p,
 Bob: Hm:m,

In the following example, it is not taken up:

(Jefferson, 1980a, p. 15, instance (3))
 Pete: How'r you.
 Marvin: I':m great,
 Pete: Go:d.
 Marvin: How'r you.
 → Pete: Pretty good?
 → Marvin: Hey we're having a meetin:g Tuesday ni:ght,

Coming to talk about bad news, then, can be a collaborative effort. When prospective troubles tellers make it available that they may have troubles to tell, recipients may either forward talk about the troubles or turn to some other matter. The delicately downgraded response to inquiry alerts the prospective troubles recipient to the possibility that there may be troubles to tell, but does not coerce them into the position of troubles recipient. Rather, its subtle character provides for the voluntary character of troubles reciprocity, because not taking it up is not an overt turning down of someone's offer to tell a trouble. Thus entry into a somewhat delicate activity, the telling of troubles, is managed in a delicate way that may be taken to preserve the social fabric of cooperation and affiliation. If collaborative arrival at troubles talk is valued, this would be regarded as a technique that is indicative of competence; however, if recipient uptake is the goal for a troubles teller, more "coercive" or less "collaborative" techniques may be necessary. This may be seen in the case of young children who

burst into tears to gain the floor to tell troubles to a parent or caretaker. Clearly, the ability to both tell and encourage the telling of troubles is enormously consequential in the domain of social support. Issues of collaborativeness and coerciveness make judgments about skillfulness in this activity particularly complicated.

This discussion further indicates the interactive character of storytelling and the social ramifications that it may have. This is similarly illustrated in a use of storytelling that is often regarded as storytelling at its lowest: Gossip.

Gossip. Some extensive studies of gossip have shown it to be a complex social activity with a particular structure that relies on the interactive character of storytelling. Bergmann (1993) pointed out that gossip involves “morally contaminated material” (p. 85). Indeed, it has been defined as, “nasty, deprecatory, ugly talk about one’s neighbor.” (p. 26). Yet gossip is an important ingredient in social life. What is transmitted, and to whom, both constructs and informs us about social networks and relationships and about social norms of appropriateness (Bergmann, 1993, p. 48).

Descriptions of how gossip is enacted show that it is a tightly structured activity that may involve a series of steps. First, there is some complexity associated with determining who is a suitable recipient of gossip. Appearing too eager to tell or too eager to be the recipient of gossip each has its own moral consequences. Bergmann suggested that “the gossip producer’s morally contaminated information can also, à la radioactive substances, morally “pollute” anyone who reaches out for it unprotected” (p. 91). The telling of gossip therefore involves a careful invitation by a potential gossip recipient, or a careful proposal by a potential purveyor of gossip. In addition to establishing a mutual willingness to gossip, a prerequisite for gossip is that both parties have some familiarity with the prospective subject of gossip. This must be established also. This, and the actual purveying of gossip are done following a series of interactive steps (Bergmann, 1993). Bergmann suggested that gossip may work as a form of social control by establishing what is socially appropriate and what will be judged inappropriate. It may also preserve social groups by reinforcing the validity of the moral norms and values of a group (p. 144) and by limiting the right to gossip about one another to members of the group (p. 145).

M. Goodwin (1990) showed that gossip may be used strategically, describing how young teenagers may use a report of what a third party said about the gossip recipient as a means of “instigating” a confrontation between the gossip recipient and the third party. The interactive structure of the gossip telling allows the teller to structure it in such a way as to attempt to put the recipient in the position of committing him- or herself to confronting the third party at some future time. In this way, the study of storytelling as part of gossiping shows how it may be used to pursue social relational activities. Who tells what to whom has symbolic ramifications that participants seem to manage delicately in how they tell their gossip stories and to whom.

CONSTRUCTING SOCIAL REALITIES THROUGH STORYTELLING

Berger and Luckman (1966) first began to formalize the claim that reality is socially constructed. Since that time, it has been amplified and explored in various branches of the social sciences particularly through ethnomethodological approaches and through social constructionism. Because narrative deals with the reconstruction of past events in communication, it provides a useful site for investigating the specific details of just how reality might be reconstructed in and through particular ways of

talking. It is rare, though, that the explicit purpose of communication is the construction of reality. Rather, we see issues of reality construction embedded in other social activities (Mandelbaum, 1993). In the following sections, I show how storytelling provides a resource for constructing and managing self, relationships, family, organizations, legal settings, and medical settings.

Social Construction of Self and Relationships

Gergen (1991) proposed that the postmodern age, in which our lives have become saturated with numerous social contacts, helps us to see the "self" as "relational." That is, he suggested that we construct multiple selves in a somewhat fluid and contingent manner in and through our relationships with multiple others. Gergen wrote of "multiphrenia." We consist of a "multiplicity of self-involvements." Along similar lines, Davies and Harré (1991/1992) distinguished between the "E-" or "enlightenment-" model of the self, and the "P-" or "post-structuralist" model. The "E-" model sees the individual as a "unitary rational being who is separate from the social world and its discursive practices" (p. 8). In contrast, the "P-" model shifts the focus from the person to the discursive practices through which personhood is constructed. Narratives provide ways for interactants to present and negotiate versions of "self" in multiple relationships. In recounting an event in which a person participated in some way, he or she offers a version of him- or herself. Given the interactive character of storytellings in conversation, when a version of an event is negotiated, the "self" of protagonists may be negotiated also. For instance Mishler (1986) offered the symbolic implications of a lengthy story told by an interviewee in the course of an interview. The interviewee recounts in some detail how (among other things), despite an adverse financial situation, he rejects a doctor's offer to reduce his medical bill. Although the interviewee does not explicitly state the implications of his storytelling, (except, at the interviewer's prompting, that this is "a low point" in his life), Mishler suggested, "It becomes a narrative of triumph over adversity while at the same time it presents the respondent as a person with a valid social identity, as a responsible man who pays all bills, including the "monster" doctor's bill, despite financial strain" (1986, p. 73). A teller may attempt to portray a particular version of self through a narrative, but there are two considerations that have an impact on what we can learn about the self from looking at narratives. First, although narratives may portray versions of self, they often are designed to accomplish some other activity, such as to defend against an accusation (e.g., Mandelbaum, 1993). Second, what that version of self comes to be is often negotiated through recipient responses to the narrative.

Storytelling provides us with particularly compelling insight into how these inferential processes regarding the self may work in talk. In particular, stories about the actions of someone other than the teller, told in the presence of that actor, show how strong inferences about issues of the self may be made available. In responding to tellings about themselves, recipients display the extent to which communicators are alert to implications regarding their "self" that may be presented in talk. C. Goodwin (1984) described how recipients may demonstrate their alignment through their body movements while a story about them is recounted in their presence. This is further illustrated in the phenomenon of responses to teases. The mildest of indictments is a tease: One party censures another in a joking way, calling attention to some mildly egregious action. Drew (1987) pointed out that responses to teases are notable because despite the fact that a prerequisite for a tease is that it should be done in a joking fashion, teases very frequently are responded to seriously. We could infer that

interactants may be showing a concern for self-presentation when they replace the teasing version of their action with a serious one.

In the following instance, Annette offers a teasing formulation of two people stopping to chat: “you started yacking.” Immediately this is rejected by the recipient of the tease (“No(hh)o”), who then proposes an alternative version of what occurred: “I give her a lift back.” Although laughter tokens are incorporated in the rejection of the teasing version, “No(hh)o”, suggesting the recipient’s recognition that “you started yacking” may be offered in jest, the recipient nonetheless offers a serious response. She rejects the teasing version of what she did and replaces it with what “actually” happened.

- Drew (1987, p. 222, fragment (2))
 (The visitor has just come into the house with Annette’s mother).
 Annette: Hell_o,
 Visitor: He:ll_o: how are you:[:.
 Annette: Al_{right} thank you?
 Visitor: I saw your Mum at the bu:s stop so I
 [(give her a li(h)ft)]
 Annette: [(and) you started ya_lcking
 => Visitor: No(hh)o I give her a lift ba_lck
 Annette: Oh:::

In replacing “yacking” with “giving a lift,” the alternative version of what happened is clearly one that replaces a “negative” version of the visitor’s action with one which casts her in a positive light. Given the action of replacing a description with possible negative implications, albeit a joking one, with one that has more positive implications for the “self” of the protagonist, we have some grounds for claiming that the work of self-construction may be going on here. Again, though, along with the interactants, we are left to infer a possible concern with self.

Sometimes what appears to be a relatively simple case of a story being told to make fun of another becomes more complex in terms of its relational implications. For instance, when a storytelling is told in such a way as to tease someone present, the teased party may respond with an alternative version of the events that put them in the position of being teased, one that potentially exonerates them (Mandelbaum, 1993). The first story, then—the tease—is a way in which one party can attribute responsibility to the other. The retelling of the event by the “accused party” is a rebuttal. In this particular case, we see storytelling as a method for dealing with issues of responsibility. Competing versions of reality are consequential for the implications they make available about the protagonists in the event being told and then retold. In this way, through their conduct, interactants show their alertness to the implications that may be drawn about them from a storytelling. In such cases, storytelling may become a way of constructing competing versions of self and reality, in which “what really happened” is tied up in issues of responsibility. Again, theoretical concepts can perhaps be documented by seeing storytelling (here, specifically in the environment of teasing) as a method through which self and reality are managed.

Here, storytelling provides interactants with a means to propose and correct versions of actions. The correction appears to address not just the facts of the occurrence, but its *symbolic implications* as well. In this way, storytelling can provide for implications and inferences about the self in a collaborative, yet unspoken way. It should

be noted, however, that social roles often are best thought of as by-products of some main activity. Sacks (1984) showed how, by choosing to recount unusual events in a matter-of-course fashion, interactants construct themselves as ordinary members of society, or "do being ordinary." The way people tell stories about their experience becomes a way of positioning themselves. As noted in the discussion of storytelling and complaints, in the telling of and responding to storytellings, relational activities may be managed (Mandelbaum, 1991). In this way, we begin to see that conversational storytelling is one among a collection of communication practices for interactively proposing, constructing and enacting relationships.

Cohen (1999) further showed this to be the case. In describing the sharing of experiences in infertility support groups, Cohen showed that the ways women in these groups tell and respond to stories about injurious comments made to them constitutes an important way in which empathy, a kind of social support, is interactively constructed. By telling stories neutrally, injured parties put others who may have had similar experiences in the position of using their own experiences as a resource for understanding when a display of sympathy is relevant. In this way storytelling structures allow participants to display empathy rather than simply claiming it.

Relational matters may also be dealt with through other activities that storytellings are designed to accomplish. For instance, I showed how the "butt" of a tease that is done through a storytelling may be "rescued" when a recipient asks questions of the teller that result in a shift in the direction of the storytelling (Mandelbaum, 1989).

Storytellings may also be methods for constructing social roles. Mandelbaum (1987) and Lerner (1992) showed how particular ways of telling stories about shared events can be methods by which interactants produce the appearance of, in Goffman's terms, being in a "with" or being "together." For instance, one member of a couple may recognize another's remote reference to a tellable shared past event and forward a storytelling about it. In this way, the couple displays "private" understanding. The ability to recognize the tellable shared past event from a remote reference and forward a telling about it may constitute a kind of "couple expertise," because it involves a close monitoring of ongoing talk for couple-relevant material and constitutes a display of mutual understanding. In these cases, however, the production of the appearance of being together is not the main business of the storytelling.

Blum-Kulka (1997) described family stories, showing how stories told among family members at the dinner table are often what she calls "today narratives"—narratives told about what happened during the day when family members were apart. These may be initiated by "self"—the person whose day is being recounted, or by "other," as in the question, "So how was your day." She suggested that "today narrative events act as critical socializing contexts for the acquisition of narrative skills" (p. 112) and showed how conversation over the family dinner table can become an opportunity for family members to model for one another what constitutes appropriate responses to "How was your day?" In telling stories in response to this question and in recipient responses to the tellings, children learn how to tell stories. Blum-Kulka explained that young children may be taught how narratives proceed by having them elicited (Ninio, 1988; Sachs, 1979) or through stories told jointly with adults (Heath, 1982, 1983; Snow, 1991). Children are also shown how to order the events of the story, how to show that they have reached the story's climax, and so on.

Blum-Kulka suggested that today stories serve different functions in families than they do in the workplace, for instance. She suggested that in the workplace, they may "serve mainly phatic interactional goals, aimed predominantly at the maintenance of social relations rather than the transmission of information" (p. 119). In families, the

information contained in the tellings is important. In addition, the telling of the today story "provides conventionalized ways for the show of reciprocal interest and affect in the family, simultaneously serving as a socializing context for transmitting cultural notions of appropriate ways to transform tales into tellings" (p. 120).

Family dinner time is an "opportunity space" in many families (Ochs, Smith & Taylor, 1989, p. 238) in that families may come together at the end of the day, providing a time when family members can talk. Gergen (1991) suggested that with the advent of the postmodern era, and the speeding up of everyday life, this previously inviolate opportunity may become rare. Ochs et al. named the genre of stories they see occurring at dinner time "detective stories" because they involve family members acting as conarrators by eliciting information that will help the primary teller solve the problem raised in the narrative. They suggested that "joint problem-solving through narrative gives structure to family roles, relationships, values, and world views" (Ochs et al., 1989, p. 238). Through conarration, family members come to co-own these roles, relationships, values, and world views.

Taylor (1995) showed how storytelling at the dinner table, and co-constructing the meaning of stories in their aftermath, may be an important way for parents to teach children how to understand and manage the emotional impact of events in which they coparticipate. She suggests that storytelling and the reframing of it in its contested aftermath may provide a method for parents to rationalize, reassure, and restore family face in the aftermath of a troubling interaction (p. 312).

The various sets of activities that can be conducted in and through conversational storytelling suggest that close examination of storytelling puts us in a position to add to the body of work that is beginning to lay out the details of the kinds of interactional work that may be involved in constructing relationships, selves, and reality. One begins to see these concepts, then, as collections of interactional practices (of which storytelling is but one example).

Although the account so far of the variety of activities for which narratives are used locates them in casual, everyday conversations, clearly they are widely used in professional settings as well. Drew and Heritage (1992) described how ordinary talk can be used in specialized ways so as to construct and sustain professional settings. In the settings discussed in the following sections, it becomes clear that tellers construct narratives in professional settings in ways that are attentive to distinctive features of the particular setting. Here, I review work on narrative in the business, legal, and medical settings. The discussion suggests that narratives in these settings involve specialized forms of storytelling procedures within ordinary conversation (Heritage, 1984; Maynard, 1990).

Constructing Social Realities in Organizations

Czarniawska suggested that, "[t]he claim that the main source of knowledge in the practice of organizing is narrative is not likely to provoke much opposition" (1997, pp. 5–6). She illustrated this by asking how academics learn their dual research and teaching profession: "From the two-by-two variable models, or by asking their colleagues how they went about it? In all their different versions, organizational stories capture organizational life in a way that no compilation of acts ever can; this is because they are carriers of life itself, not just "reports" on it" (1997, p. 21). Drawing on Bruner (1986), Czarniawska suggested that narrative is particularly useful in the organization because multiple narrative versions of a singular event allow for negotiation and management of "reality."

Browning (1992) cited Lyotard's (1984) claim that "lists and stories are the language game in organizations." Lists have the rational, orderly character that is stereotypical of "business" communication, whereas stories are characterized by a relaxed requirement for carefulness (Weick, 1980). Browning suggested that people see stories as "flexible, evolving, and changing" (p. 287). Their role in organizations is crucial in orienting newcomers. "Stories fill the breaks in technical rationality" (p. 292). Furthermore, stories are widely used in organizations as a means for constructing and passing on organizational culture.

Research has attested to the important social roles of well-constructed narratives. They are useful for "emotionally involving both teller and listener, provoking attention, interest, and absorption" (Bormann, 1983; Wilkins, 1978, cited by Witten, 1993). Witten (p. 98) explained that the co-orientation of teller and listeners around a narrative's central characters and events may result in their achieving "a sense of collective participation, shared experience, and psychological investment" (Bormann, 1983; Fisher, 1984; Martin, 1982). Narratives may also be powerful vehicles for the exercise of covert control in the workplace. Through the telling and retelling of narratives in organizations, "hierarchical relationships . . . are imaged, workers are taught the parameters and obligations of their roles, and behavioral norms in service of the organization's ends are conveyed" (Witten, 1993, p. 98). Witten described how these organizational narratives provide a means for social control within the organization, providing exemplars of permissible behavior, imparting values affecting problem definition, and embodying anticipated reactions. Thus, narratives, although told for many different social interactional reasons, may become a tacit means for constructing and reinforcing ideologies.

Reconstructing Reality in the Legal Setting

In building legal cases in courtrooms, witnesses and defendants reconstruct past events. Often, these narratives are elicited by lawyers, utterance by utterance. In this respect, narratives in the courtroom are "driven" by one recipient, for a number of "overhearing" parties—judge, jury, defendant, attorneys, and so on. Drew (1985) showed that quite subtle features of how an event is retold may have a great deal of impact on the case being made. For instance, lexical choice may be consequential. Using the word *bar* instead of *club* to describe where the victim met the defendant before the rape may portray the victim as the kind of person who frequents bars. Drew showed how a victim replaces the word "bar" from the defense attorney's question with "club" (p. 138) in responding to a question about where she met the defendant. Lawyers and witnesses may produce alternative competing descriptions and thus show alertness to the consequentiality of lexical choice in reconstructing the crime for the court.

The role of narrative is also seen as crucial in the informal, negotiative activity of plea bargaining in the legal system. "[T]hrough narratives and narrative structure, as elements of a robust and impermeable interaction order, participants bring to life such factors as the law, organizational 'roles,' and even the identity of a defendant, as part of mundane negotiational discourse" (Maynard, 1990, p. 66). Maynard pointed out that unlike the personal narratives found in everyday conversation and the law courts, in plea bargaining "third person narratives" are found, because storytellings are "parasitic on the tellings and writings of primary observers (offenders, witnesses, victims) and secondary interpreters (e.g., police)" (1990, p. 67). He found that these narratives are adapted to the purpose they serve and have an identifiable format that

differs slightly from the format of narratives in casual conversations. Narratives in plea bargaining have the following format (Maynard, 1990, p. 68):

- A. Story entry devices by which participants warrant the telling of a story, such as
 - Naming of the case
 - Synopsis
 - Transition to story
- B. The story itself, including
 - A background segment
 - An action report
 - A reaction report
- C. Following the story, a defense segment, which consists of
 - Denial
 - Excuse

In explicating these sections, Maynard showed that “from the outset stories are not neutral renderings of “what happened” but aim toward or intend the kind of bargaining stance that teller ultimately takes” (p. 70). In this regard plea bargaining stories resemble the accounts given in law courts as well as in everyday conversation: They are told in such a way as to make a particular point. Maynard also noted that the use of narrative is sensitive to who the audience is. Narratives are recounted when judges (who may not be familiar with the case) are present at plea-bargaining sessions, but very rarely when the session is held with only attorneys (who are familiar with the case) present. Thus “through narrative and other interactional structures, participants constitute the reality of facts, character, rules, and law as features of situated activity” (p. 88).

Constructing Symptoms in the Medical Setting

Halkowski (in press) pointed out that patients going to the doctor’s office face a dilemma. While on the one hand they must be sufficiently attentive to their bodies’ functioning to be aware of symptoms when they develop, they should not be overly attentive to their bodies, since that would constitute hypochondria. One of the tasks that patients must manage in the doctor’s office is the “accurate and appropriate witnessing and experiencing of their bodily state” (Halkowski, forthcoming, p. 2). Through their narratives of symptoms they portray themselves as “reasonable” patients. Two forms that these narratives may take are (1) packaging the narratives as “a sequence of noticings,” and (2) a format consisting of “at first I thought “X”, and then I realized “W”” (Halkowski, in press, p. 5). Where in the course of the office visit a narrative of symptoms occurs also is important. It may occur in response to a physician’s eliciting question such as, “How can I help you?” If it comes at the start of the visit in response to the doctor’s question about what brought the patient in, it may have the character of the patient trying to discern whether what he or she is feeling is indeed medically relevant. Formatting one’s concern as a “narrative of problem discovery” may be a way for a patient to solve the problem of how to formulate a health problem, the name of which one does not know (Halkowski, in press, p. 9). When narratives of problem discovery come during the history-taking component of the medical interview, they attend to the likely medical relevance of the problem because the doctor has already treated the problem as possibly medically relevant. Halkowski emphasized that in formulating their narratives of symptom discovery,

patients are managing the "patient's dilemma" and that medical professionals should attend to this aspect of their possible enterprise, rather than assuming that patients are not telling their stories in the most useful clinical way possible.

The ways narratives are told in organizations and in legal and medical settings indicate that tellers are alert to particular "problems" posed by participation in these settings. The adaptations of storytelling format and use are adapted to, informative about, and participate in constructing the particular character of the respective institutions.

Storytelling as Methodology. Narratives in monological form are often used as ways of working through or inspecting certain issues. Hanne (1994), quoted by Geist (1999), said of college professors: "Their narrations can be viewed as a prime mechanism by which they negotiate their way through dilemmas, searches, tensions, and challenges of their daily lives as academics within established contexts of power." Bochner and Ellis (1992) showed how independently and then cooperatively narrating an abortion experience can be a way for a couple to work through the experience and make sense of it in retrospect. Narrative is frequently used to gain access to people's reasoning and sense-making processes in retrospect. Theorizing that people naturally tell stories to make sense of their experiences, many researchers use this resource to understand a variety of personal and interpersonal issues. Bruner (1992) described having families tell their stories in an attempt to understand how identities are constructed within families. Mishler (1992) showed how a narrative told to the researcher displays the well-constructed format expected of narratives in Western culture. It consists of a temporally ordered series of events (Labov & Waletzky, 1967/1997), is coherent at several levels, and has the expected agent-conflict-action structure (Rumelhart, 1975, 1977). Furthermore, it has a "point" (Polanyi, 1985). After pointing this out, Mishler cautioned that as researchers it is important to sustain a reflexive awareness of the role of the interviewer and interview situation on co-producing with the narrator these features of the story's orderliness (1992, p. 35). Thus, narratives provide a resource for research by virtue of the way in which they package information and reconstruct events. They also provide a resource for researchers to trace how orderliness is constructed in and through methods of data collection.

CONCLUSIONS

The point here regarding both how we tell stories and what we use them to do is that storytellings and the activities we undertake when we share experiences are interactively constructed. Looking at the details of interaction puts us in the position of laying out the details of how these various activities are done by tellers and recipients working together. Conversational storytelling provides a particularly nice method for undertaking such delicate activities as inviting, blaming, and complaining because events can be laid out neutrally, putting recipients in the position of formulating the possible implications available in the storytelling or simply treating the account as news. Sharing experiences is one member of the collection of practices involved in a range of social activities, including accounting, telling troubles, and gossiping, as well as constructing selves, relationships, family, organizations, and legal and medical settings.

Narratives of personal experience, then, for communication scholars, are markedly different from narratives within a literary genre, for they show themselves to be collaborative constructions, deployed in the service of conducting the interpersonal

business of everyday life. Understanding how conversational narratives are undertaken and what they are used to do may provide insight into a range of conceptual taken for granted, including relationships, selves, and reality.

NARRATIVE SKILL REVISITED

I have made the claim that a communication conception of narrative involves seeing it as an interactive, situated activity, that is, although the teller may produce the narrative, it is produced in and through interaction with recipients, who have a defining role in co-constructing what a narrative comes to be. The "audience" is the "coauthor" (Duranti & Brenneis, 1986). An interactive view of narrative has important implications for our understanding of narrative skill. This is demonstrated in Halkowski's (1999) account of the narrative produced by a man with aphasia. He showed that although on objective measures the man does not have the linguistic or narrative competence to produce a narrative, he is able to tell an interviewer about how he knew he was having a stroke. Halkowski pointed out that tests often measure linguistic competence in a "desocialized and detemporalized" situation by looking at it only as "the sole product of an individual's speech" (1999, p. 265). In contrast, narratives are produced interactively. They are produced for and with other people, in social settings, to undertake discernible interactional tasks. Because telling a story seems never to be an end in itself or a singular activity but is rather a method for undertaking a broad range of other activities, often shifting and negotiated in their course, narrative skill goes beyond the individual's ability to construct a coherent, cohesive narrative that makes a point. From a communication perspective, narrative competence involves the ability of tellers and recipients to "do things" with narratives in interaction.

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