

1 Jessica S. Robles* and Evelyn Y. Ho

2 **Interactional formats and institutional** 3 4 **context: a practical and exploitable** 5 **distinction in interviews** 6

7
8 **Abstract:** This paper applies practically oriented discourse analysis to focus
9 group interviews using conversation analytic principles to show how interac-
10 tional qualities demonstrably different to analysts are also treated as such by
11 participants. We take a grounded practical theory perspective to claim that the
12 empirical and a practical distinction is an exploitable resource for participants,
13 with important implications for the goals of research interviewing, interviewee
14 participation in focus groups, and analyses thereof. We identify participant tech-
15 niques for doing and attending to conversational and institutional interaction
16 formats, including turn-taking organization, embodied acts, addressivity, and
17 emotion displays, and how those techniques allow participants to co-construct
18 emergent stances alongside answering questions.

19 **Keywords:** research interviews, focus groups, discourse analysis, grounded prac-
20 tical theory, institutional discourse, alternative medicine
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22 DOI 10.1515/text-2014-0011
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25 **1 Introduction** 26

27 This paper analyzes discourse in research focus group interviews to consider how
28 participants construct and orient to their own ways of talking as “like an inter-
29 view” or “like an ordinary conversation.” The paper examines this difference as a
30 resource for focus group interviewing practice. We identify specific participant
31 techniques – turn-taking organization, embodied acts, addressivity, and emotion
32 displays – which exploit the distinction between interactional format and institu-
33 tional context to get important work done which is relevant to the multiple par-
34 ticipant goals. We consider how interviewers can attend to these moments and
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37 ***Corresponding author: Jessica S. Robles:** Department of Communication, University of
38 Washington, Box 353740, Seattle, WA 98195, USA. E-mail: roblesj@uw.edu
39 **Evelyn Y. Ho:** College of Arts and Sciences, University of San Francisco, 2130 Fulton Street,
40 San Francisco, CA 94117, USA. E-mail: eyho@usfca.edu

strategically encourage them during interviewing. We also demonstrate how analysts can gain important insights from such moments.

These findings address at least two important research areas. Firstly is the ongoing interest in localized enactments of taken-for-granted communicative genres/frames such as ordinary/institutional in data (see DeFina and Perrino 2011; Hester and Francis 2001; Speer 2002; Watson 2009). Secondly is a theoretical/practical interest in how to conduct and analyze focus group interviews regarding the apparent dilemma between moderator constraints and participant interaction (e.g., Kitzinger 1994; Myers 1998; Markova et al. 2007). This is relevant to Morgan's (2010) proposal for more research into how *specific* strategies for conducting focus groups affect their interaction. The value of co-construction in interviews has been championed at least since Briggs's (1986) classic work, but specific strategies for how this can be encouraged, achieved, and analyzed in focus group interviews – as well as what it specifically accomplishes interactionally – demands more attention.

We use grounded practical theory and discourse analysis to analyze audio/video-recorded focus group interviews with people who have HIV-related neuropathy (numbness, tingling, and/or pain in extremities) before and after a series of acupuncture and massage treatments at a public health clinic in California. In the first section of this article, we review literature on institutional talk and interviewing practice. The ensuing analysis uses conversation analytic techniques to discuss how participants build different formats of interaction and orient to their features as more or less institutionally relevant. Finally, we conclude with implications of this analysis for focus group practice.

2 Institutional talk and interview practice

This paper analyzes the usefulness of focus group interview moments during which participants construct and orient to their interaction as more conversational within the ongoing interview context. This section therefore considers how language and social interaction research (particularly conversation analysis, CA) has articulated distinctions between ordinary and institutional talk specifically with regard to interviews, and implications of this for focus group research practice and analysis.

Context in institutional settings is a resource for interpretation, locally produced turn by turn. If talk and social roles have “institutional character” (Drew and Heritage 1992: 21) – if “participants’ institutional or professional identities are somehow made relevant to the work activities in which they are engaged” (1992: 3–4) – then the format of talk can be deemed institutional. Schegloff's

1 (1992) characterization of this CA approach to institutional talk is that institution-
2 ality as a feature of context/social structure must be analytically demonstrated to
3 have procedural consequentiality. Rather than assuming talk is institutional be-
4 cause it occurs in an institutional context, CA studies focus on how the actions in
5 talk orient to the institutional character of the situation.

6 A variety of ways of taking and designing turns, organizing and advancing
7 sequences, and choosing what to say can all be institutionally specific, relevant
8 to situated goals, constraints, and inferential practices (Heritage 2005). There is
9 not a clear line between what counts as institutional or conversational talk but
10 there is a “defensible distinction” (2005: 141). As Drew and Heritage (1992) point
11 out, participants have methods for interactionally achieving institutional talk
12 and constituting themselves as part, for example, of an interview process. Talk
13 constructs institutionality in situated instances, but also reflects or is “institu-
14 tionally inflected” by institutional contexts and members (Tracy and Robles
15 2009). Institutional settings are marked by metacommunicative awareness of
16 some purported link between what happens in the situation and how that should
17 match the purpose of the situation.

18 Most methods of focus group interviewing involve an interviewer who sets
19 the agenda to some extent and at least two interviewees (ideally six to ten)
20 (Morgan 1998). Focus groups are seen as uniquely valuable due to the interaction
21 among interviewee participants (e.g., Kitzinger 1994; Markova et al. 2007). This
22 interaction can allow participants to speak with their own voice (Wilkinson 1998)
23 and manage their identities and alignments with regard to important life issues
24 such as health (Ho and Robles 2011). In addition to these goals, interaction pro-
25 vides insights for ethnographers and analysts (Kratz 2010). These points empha-
26 size the extent to which interviews can be creative research tools for the joint
27 construction of meaning among participants as well as with the interviewer
28 (Briggs 1986; Douglas 1985; Holstein and Gubrium 1995).

29 However, in social science research it has been the norm to do focus group
30 interviews in a relatively structured manner (Morgan 2002). Practical consider-
31 ations for focus group interviewers thus often involve methods of control: keep-
32 ing talkative people from rambling, encouraging shy people to speak up, stimu-
33 lating waning discussions, and reigning in tangents. These goals lead to the
34 assumption that “focus groups will fail without the active direction of a highly
35 skilled moderator” (2002: 148). While the purpose of having a focus group is to
36 encourage multiple voices, the general advice in conducting focus group is that
37 useful discussion can only occur with proper monitoring (Myers 1998).

38 Puchta and Potter (1999) identify this tension in focus groups as being be-
39 tween the structured element (in which predefined topics and/or questions are
40 meant to guide or control discussion) and the interaction element (in which talk

is ideally meant to be spontaneous and conversational). This apparent dilemma 1
between participation and constraint (or as Markova et al. [2007] put it, “free but 2
moderated”) is a theoretical concern related to the goal of focus group interview- 3
ing, a practical concern in terms of running focus groups, and an analytic concern 4
for working with focus group data. This tension results in disagreements 5
among scholars as to what counts as a focus group, including assertions that a 6
focus group without interaction defeats the purpose of the method, but also that 7
discussions not strongly guided by a researcher take the “focus” out of focus 8
groups (e.g., Morgan 2002). 9

Practitioners have responded to this problem with different strategies. For 10
example, asking elaborate multi-unit questions can provide a range of potential 11
responses to participations and manage difficult tasks in institutional contexts 12
(Linell et al. 2003; Puchta and Potter 1999). This attention to strategies for engag- 13
ing with particular interactional moments dovetails with this paper’s analytic 14
aims. Rather than starting with focus group interview goals and methods, this 15
paper begins as the aforementioned researchers do by analyzing first what partic- 16
ipants (interviewers/interviewees) actually do in focus group interaction, and 17
what that accomplishes. 18

We approach the challenge of practical import through grounded practical 19
theory (GPT) (Craig and Tracy 1995) which recognizes espoused goals of institu- 20
tional settings and the extent to which interactional choices accomplish, chal- 21
lenge, or reveal different goals. Thus we address how relevant sequential actions, 22
institutional context, and ostensive aims can be mutually informing, with impli- 23
cations for practice. GPT focuses on three levels, beginning by looking at troubles, 24
dilemmas, or challenges in a particular setting (problem level), for example, 25
the idea of “answering interview questions” versus “getting off track.” GPT recon- 26
structs instances across multiple cases as more general problems, matching troubles 27
with the practices participants employ to enact and manage them (technical 28
level). Finally the norms and ideals which shape the setting are examined and 29
critiqued (philosophical level). 30

Markova et al. (2007) – countering Myers’s (1998) assertion that focus group 31
interviewees do not engage in many so-called “conversational” commonplaces of 32
ordinary interaction – suggest that participants attend to institutional goals *and* 33
sociability of everyday talk. Furthermore, Sarangi (2003) proposes that interview 34
participants orient to the task-oriented, informational exchange of interviews, 35
but often *through* social and relational practices and by shifting in and out of 36
different conversational frames (similar to Markova et al. [2007], “communicative 37
activity types”). This paper analyzes such moments of “shift” and examines how 38
marking of the shift functions as an exploitable practical and analytic distinc- 39
tion. Can this distinction be useful for the goals of interviewing in general, and for 40

1 focus group interviewing in particular? How can focus group interviewers and
2 analysts attend to conversational moments in institutional contexts in order to
3 generate or examine what is accomplished by these shifts?

4

5

6 **3 Methods**

7

8 We address how research focus group interview participants display in their talk
9 an awareness of distinctions between interaction formats, and how these dis-
10 plays can be useful to interviewees, interviewers, and analysts. Discourse analy-
11 sis in GPT takes a practical approach grounding analysis in empirical observation
12 to develop a normative discourse for improving practices. This paper's discourse
13 analytic method is similar to action-implicative discourse analysis (AIDA), a GPT
14 method which uses the details of everyday talk attended to in discourse analysis
15 to form the basis of conceptualizing dilemmas and strategies and reflecting on
16 how to improve communication to accomplish situated institutional goals (Tracy
17 1995). Taking this approach in this paper means seeing focus group interview-
18 ing as a practice which faces various challenges, and within which participants
19 deploy techniques for managing those challenges. It also means being oriented
20 to the practical usefulness of analytic results, while grounding those analytic
21 results in analyses of situated discourse.

22 The discourse analysis constituting basis of this paper's analysis is more con-
23 versation analytic than a typical GPT/AIDA study. This is because the argument is
24 based upon a CA distinction regarding what constitutes institutional interaction
25 or ordinary conversation. CA studies have been important in demonstrating this
26 distinction with empirical rigor, but have been less attentive to practical concerns
27 (but see Antaki 2011); therefore, this paper employs CA conventions within the
28 GPT perspective described, including Jefferson-style transcription of talk and
29 nonverbal actions (Jefferson 1984), and an empirical concern with making visible
30 how participants achieve and orient to talk distinctions in interviewing proce-
31 dures. This involves treating interaction as a sequentially organized endeavor
32 through which participants conduct practical activities. The resources for orga-
33 nizing interaction involve the taking of turns at talk, the designing of actions for
34 opening particular projects, and the addressing of relevant next turns toward the
35 progressivity of situated activities.

36 Data for this project come from a larger research study examining the use of
37 acupuncture and massage therapy for the treatment of HIV-related neuropathy
38 that was approved by the University of San Francisco's Institutional Review
39 Board (see Ho et al. 2007). Participants were interviewed both in small groups
40 and individually at the beginning and end of the 12-week trial. Interviews

were semi-structured and included questions regarding participants' experiences of neuropathy, knowledge/use of various treatment options, and sources of information/communication for/about that knowledge. Focus group interviews comprised two–four participants with one facilitator/interviewer. The focus groups lasted 20–50 minutes and were videotaped. Individual interviews lasted 10–25 minutes and were audio-taped. In total, 51 interviews were recorded and transcribed.

The next section presents excerpts from two interviews during the study's end (Group A and Group B). These group interviews were selected to discuss in detail because participants were highly interactive. We found these groups useful for a deeper investigation into what participants might be doing to give an observer the sense of an interactional quality. While we focus the presentation of our analysis on these two groups, there were interactive moments like these in other groups as well. Group A lasted 40 minutes and included the interviewer (I, Ho: off-camera) and participants Donna, Carter (who requested to be off-camera), Sean, and Kevin. Group B lasted 50 minutes and included the interviewer (I, Ho: off-camera) and participants Bill, Henry, Anne, and Leland (all on-camera) (all participant names are pseudonyms). The first part of the analysis illustrates key distinctions in the data by analyzing how one focus group accomplished different interactions in two different instances. The second part focuses on two particularly salient examples which demonstrate multiple ways participants distinguish their engagement, and how this distinction is made relevant.

4 Doing interviewing, doing conversation

This section begins with a typical example of focus group interviewing where the participants manage their talk in more structured ways. This is followed by an example later in the interview where interviewees orient primarily to meanings they work out among themselves rather than to the interviewer's questions. The purpose of these first two examples is to demonstrate key distinctions across the data where interactional practices occasioned more conversational talk. These examples are followed by an analysis of two excerpts highlighting a range of practices.

The allocation of turns in interview situations can be markedly different from ordinary situations (e.g., Tracy and Robles 2009, 2013). Mundane group talk certainly includes questions and selections of next speakers to provide answers; but it would be strange if someone at a dinner table asked a question, and then each other person answered one at a time, one after another, in seating order. Yet this sort of sequential distribution of turns does occur in group *interviews*, and was

1 common in many of the focus group interviews. The interviewer would ask a
 2 question, sometimes (not always) selecting a speaker from the small group of in-
 3 interviewees. Unless selected by the interviewer, one interviewee would ultimately
 4 self-select, generally following a brief period (often nonverbal, sometimes verbal)
 5 of negotiation among the interviewees for who would take the turn. Following the
 6 initial interviewee's answer, another interviewee would be selected by the inter-
 7 viewer or would self-select to provide their answer, and so on "down the line"
 8 (the initial answerer at one end of a row of chairs or immediately to the side of the
 9 interviewer if seated in a circle, then progressing one by one down the row or
 10 clockwise/counterclockwise until everyone had given an answer). The first ex-
 11cerpt below is a typical example (see the appendix for transcription notations).

12

13 (1)

14 209 I: are you doing anything different in terms of
 15 210 treatment for your neuropathy including
 16 211 different medications or holistic treatments or
 17 212 self treatments than you were when you
 18 213 started

19 214 Kevin: yep (.) yeah the only thing I do for my
 20 215 neuropathy- and it really works well for me is
 21 216 when I get in the shower I scrub

22 ((six lines omitted))

23 223 I: and do you do that every day

24 224 Kevin: um just about (1.0) when I'm having-
 25 225 when it's really bad I'll do it twice a day (1.0)
 26 226 I have really clean feet

27 227 Carter: I think the only thing- the only treatment
 28 228 I've done as I mentioned was one treatment

29 ((three lines omitted))

30 232 I: okay that's good

31 233 Donna: I've been using the exercises and the uh
 32 234 roller

33

34 The example in Excerpt (1) displays many of the features of institutional
 35 interviews attested in the literature (e.g., Drew and Heritage 1992; Heritage 2005;
 36 Hester and Francis 2001) and present across most of the data. Information-
 37 seeking questions are initiated by the interviewer, as in lines 209–213. In this case
 38 Kevin, the first to provide a response, self-selects and addresses the interviewer
 39 with his turn (lines 214–216). The interviewer expands the sequence with a
 40 follow-up question (line 223) to which Kevin replies (lines 224–226). Carter then

self-selects to take the next turn (lines 227 and 228). At the close of his turn, the interviewer provides an acknowledgement (line 232), and then Donna self-selects in line 233 and the pattern continues. The remainder of the analysis presents examples where participants organized their turn taking, embodiment, addressivity, and emotion displays to achieve/shift between conversationally marked and institutionally marked forms of interaction.

In Excerpt (2), in Group A, the interviewer had asked Donna whether she was feeling better because of her regular acupuncture/massage treatments. Following the selection of Donna as next speaker, the interviewer engages in insertion sequences within the larger question, asking follow-up questions of specific individuals. In this excerpt, Donna responds that she was feeling better because of “the acupuncture and massage and the little green pills” (line 147), after which the interviewer asks another follow-up question regarding the name for the little green pills. At this point in the conversation, Donna’s manner changes: she ceases to speak to or even to notice the interviewer, even though the interviewer asked her the question; instead, she orients in embodiment and addressivity to her fellow interviewees as potentially sharing relevant background knowledge about pills.

- (2)
- 147 Donna: the acupuncture and massage and the little green pills
- 148 I: what are the little green pills
- 149 Donna: you know those (1.0) little green pills
- 150 ((to the group)) those little ((hand gesture))
- 151 Sean: [((looks at Carter, leans toward Donna))]
- 152 Kevin: [((raises left hand, thumb/index
- 153 finger 1/2 inch apart))]
- 154 Donna: [((points at Kevin’s hand, imitates gesture))]
- 155 ((group leans in))
- 156 Kevin & Donna: ((same positions as lines 152 and 154
- 157 respectively, making small movements over
- 158 series of turns))]
- 159 Kevin: hh yeah ((nodding))
- 160 ((group nodding, Donna nods once))

Rather than explaining that she forgot the name of the pills, Donna invites the other group members to help by stating, “you know”, and turning toward them in line 149. From the moment of Donna’s verbal and nonverbal orientation to the group, the interviewees enact an almost entirely silent co-investigation into “the little green pills”. They engage in a series of simultaneous and nearly identical gestures as well as more subtle nonverbal mimicry (such as leaning forward

1 – a move Donna often makes in this extract and elsewhere). Kevin takes up the
2 role of jointly identifying the pill with Donna, and indicates satisfaction with the
3 conclusion even though no one says the actual name of the drug (line 159).

4 By the end of the short extract, everyone was nodding (line 160) reaching an
5 acceptable resolution to the question of the little green pills. The common refer-
6 ence to (presumably) the same pill is enough to satisfy the group while the inter-
7 viewer still does not know what it is. Donna does not address her response to the
8 interviewer nor provide an answer to the question, returning to a previous topic
9 after this. The interviewer does not pursue a response or participate noticeably:
10 though she was off-camera and we cannot tell how she might have been engaging
11 nonverbally, she does not speak and none of the interviewees look in her direc-
12 tion during their quasi-silent discussion about the pills. For the moment, the in-
13 interviewer is positioned as an outsider (Modan and Shuman 2011).

14 What about this exchange is relevant to the institutional nature of the situa-
15 tion? The action undertaken by the group was initiated by the interviewer, who
16 ostensibly occupies the position of being “the one who asks the questions.” The
17 participants’ uptake is relevant to the question. “What are the little green pills”
18 (line 148) is an information-seeking question. Reasonable responses might in-
19 clude a name or a description (beyond their being little and green), or a descrip-
20 tion of what they are for. But the group never provides such responses, instead
21 working to establish shared understanding of what pills are being talked about.
22 Furthermore, the response is not directed to the interviewer. Finally, the inter-
23 viewer does not ask the question again or indicate that the response is problem-
24 atic. When Donna resumes talking, addressing her subsequent verbal turns to the
25 interviewer, she does so by expanding her earlier turn (from line 147).

26 This example indicates a format distinction regarding distribution and rele-
27 vance of turns:

- 28 1. One format where the interviewer asks a question, a participant answers
29 (sometimes with follow-up questions from the interviewer), the participant
30 indicates turn completion, and the next participant begins a turn to start the
31 process anew.
- 32 2. Another format where the interviewer asks a question but the interviewees
33 direct their responses to each other, their responses are not unambiguously
34 relevant, and a relevant answer is not pursued by the interviewer.

35

36 There is also a difference in addressivity. It is not unusual for an interviewee
37 to confer with other members when they share similar background knowledge.
38 But the shift in address being *accompanied* by a subsequent lack of providing the
39 delayed response *to the interviewer* recasts Donna’s shift in address as away from
40 the task at hand of “being an interviewee.” Donna’s body and gaze shift toward

her co-interviewees is another indication of attending to them as her primary audience and joint-conversants. When Donna re-orient to the interviewer, she addresses her next turn to the interviewer as if the prior interaction had not occurred. This example illustrates some of many recognizable techniques for realizing a conversational moment within an institutional interaction. Such moments got something done: they establish understanding among the interviewees such that they can carry on with the substance of the interview about how their neuropathy has or has not improved, even though a response to the interviewer's specific but ultimately less important question (about the little green pill) was not specifically provided as an "answer."

The next section analyzes two longer interactions where multiple techniques accomplish "doing conversation" within the interview context. These examples demonstrate the range of techniques across the data, and illustrate how these enact and constrain disagreeing and agreeing stances (respectively) and how orienting to talk as interview-like or conversation-like serves as a strategy for doing these emergent stances while accomplishing the institutional business of responding to interviewer questions. Excerpt (3) is also from Group A, later in the interview. Kevin has self-selected to tell a story about losing neuropathy in his hands after taking a drug (lines 514–547).

- (3)
- 512 Kevin: I just wanted to say quickly um
- 513 (0.5) I- I heard you ((gestures to Donna))
- 514 mention that you have neuropathy in your
- 515 hands (.) and years ago I had neuropathy
- 516 in *both* of my hands and I was (0.5) going
- 517 to ((clinic name)) at the time (0.5) and the
- 518 nurse practitioner that I was see:ing (0.5)
- 519 um (1.0) prescribed uh (.) Elovil which is
- 520 a (0.5) uh mood? Elevator?
- 521 I: mmhmm
- 522 Kevin: and uh but in a very sma:ll dose
- 523 I: mm hmm
- 524 Kevin: so it wouldn't cross the barrier an- to
- 525 become ((waves hands in a circle)) a mood
- 526 (.) elevator
- 527 I: mm hmm
- 528 Kevin: it worked directly on the neuropathy [(1.0)]
- 529 I: [ah↑hh]
- 530 Kevin: and I haven't had it (.) it disappeared (0.5)

- 1 531 I haven't had it in ((shakes head looks at Sean))
 2 532 uhhtttfffff
 3 533 I: Wow. [And are you still taking that drug or?]
 4 534 Kevin: [a decade ((shaking head))] No
 5 535 I: So it maybe cured? It
 6 536 Kevin: Right right but I had it in both hands and I
 7 537 couldn't figure out why my hands were
 8 538 asleep all the time (.) that's what I thought
 9 539 (.) a::nd he explained to me that it was neuropathy
 10 540 and that's what he prescribed?
 11 541 Donna: mm
 12 542 Kevin: and I took it for a while [I can't]
 13 543 Donna: [mm]
 14 544 Kevin: remember how long I took it
 15 545 I: uh huh
 16 546 Kevin: but (0.5) in my hands (.) I have (.)
 17 547 thankfully I have (0.5) no problem
 18 548 I: that's great (.) great
 19 549 Kevin: °so I just wanted to say°
 20 550 I: ok
 21 551 (1.0)
 22 ((10 lines omitted))
 23 561 Carter: [So (0.5)] and I know there are those (0.5)
 24 562 pills that they give you and I went through
 25 563 all of them to (0.8) for treating well it's not
 26 564 really treating neuropathy I guess it's just
 27 565 (0.5) masking the (.) sensation or some[thing
 28 566 Kevin: [I y'know
 29 567 I really don't know (0.3) what it ifit- I can't
 30 568 say it masked the- th-e the pain an th- the
 31 569 discomfort because I don't have it now
 32 570 I: Mm[m
 33 571 Carter: [yeah
 34 572 Kevin: it was a very small dose it was like (1.0)
 35 573 twenny five milligrams?
 36 574 I: hmm
 37 575 Carter: huh?
 38 576 Kevin: um just a very very (.) very small dose
 39 577 but today I (.) I heard you talking about it
 40 578 in your hands and I remembered (.) having

579	it and (0.8) how uncomfortable it was for	1
580	me now I have it in my feet but (0.5) um (0.8)	2
581	it (.) it- it addressed the problem and today it's-	3
582	it's (.) fine as far as my hands go	4
583 I:	mm hmm	5
584 Kevin:	because we filled out those green sheets	6
585	[and it said] numbness and=	7
586 I:	[yeah mmhmm]	8
587 Kevin:	=whatever in your hands (.) I always put never	9
588	(0.8) or you know	10
589 I:	uh huh	11
590 Kevin:	at this point in my life (.) never doesn't bother	12
591	me in my hands	13
592 Carter:	°mm°	14
593 I:	that's great	15
594 Kevin:	but it's always (.) it's always hurt me in my feet	16
595 I:	yeah yeah	17
596 Carter:	It's probably something that they massaged or a	18
597	needle in your <u>foot</u> that went up to your hands	19
598	((group laughs))	20
599 Kevin:	(could) be eh- na- uh cause I've only been coming	21
600	here about a year and a half	22
601	[(.) an this was like thirteen years ago	23
602 I:	[ah so this was like before then?] Oh ok.	24
603	[Ok] [W↑o::w]	25
604 Kevin:	[this was way] [this was] =	26
605 Carter:	[Oh really?]	27
606 Kevin:	= long cause I no longer I've been with	28
607	((hospital name)) for about nine years (0.5)	29
608	switched from ((hospital name)) out to	30
609	((hospital name)) this was well before I switched.	31
610 I:	Okay	32
611 Donna:	It would be nice to find medication (.)	33
612	where you don't have to take medication to	34
613	counteract the medication	35
614 I:	Ye::s	36
615 Sean:	Yeah	37
616 Kevin:	Isn't that the truth	38
617	((group laughter))	39
618 I:	Very good point yeah does anyone have	40

1 619 anything final to say in the group? Before
 2 620 we go on to individual interviews?

3

4 Carter expresses doubt toward Kevin's story in lines 561–565. After discussing
 5 his own health regimen with the interviewer (omitted lines), Carter calls Kevin's
 6 information into question (line 563 and 564, “not really treating neuropathy”),
 7 indirectly referencing “those pills that they give you” (lines 561 and 562). Even
 8 after Kevin proffers several accounts for his apparent cure, Carter dismisses the
 9 remedy (lines 596 and 597). In his dismissal, Carter rejects premises of Kevin's
 10 evidence (lines 515, “years ago I had neuropathy” + lines 528 “[Elovil] worked
 11 directly on the neuropathy” and “[the neuropathy] disappeared”, line 530). The
 12 content Carter rejects is not so much the drug itself, but that the drug could cure
 13 neuropathy, which Carter, preferring alternative treatments (e.g., diet: omitted
 14 lines), does not accept.

15 Kevin apparently realizes Carter's stance: he tries repeatedly to reclaim the
 16 efficacy of his remedy, downplaying the “drugness” of the drug (line 572) and
 17 reiterating its success (line 581 “it addressed the problem”). Kevin reasserts the
 18 factuality of his claim by restating it as a real, recordable part of his past (line
 19 578), which could not have been induced by acupuncture/massage, and was
 20 listed in the larger study's measurement tool (line 584). Thus Kevin challenges
 21 Carter's assumption that any form of biomedicine cannot directly treat neuro-
 22 pathy. The conversation takes a turn to the hassle and side effects of taking
 23 medication in general rather than whether it can treat neuropathy or not.

24 The disagreement Carter and Kevin accomplish through their series of dis-
 25 alignments, challenges, and accounts is marked by various conversationally
 26 oriented practices. This shift occurs primarily around lines 565 and 566. The
 27 practices employed in this shift are not *a priori* conversational rather than insti-
 28 tutional, but for this interview, participants treated what they were doing as a
 29 “disagreement with each other” rather than as “answers to the interviewer's
 30 questions.” Kevin hears Carter's turn (lines 561–565) as disagreement and begins
 31 to formulate an expansion of his point to counter Carter. He addresses Carter;
 32 Carter demonstrates that he hears Kevin's turns as addressed to him, address-
 33 ing Kevin verbally with “your” in his response (line 597). Similar patterns oc-
 34 curred across the data: even in cases where participants largely addressed
 35 their disagreeing-with-other-interviewees responses to interviewers, they still
 36 acknowledged/addressed/oriented to interviewees with whom they disagreed,
 37 for instance, by gesturing or turning their head briefly.

38 The way turns are allocated and who takes them is also distinct: the inter-
 39 viewer, for instance, does contribute throughout, but often minimally through
 40 continuers such as “mm hmm” “mm” and “yeah.” Also Kevin addresses the group

as a whole rather than the interviewer (verbally in lines 513, 514, 577), and other participants demonstrate their awareness of this by responding nonverbally (gaze, body orientation, also Donna's continuers, lines 541, 543), as if in conversation with Kevin (rather than as observers of Kevin's responses to interview questions. The presence of overlap during this period of disalignment and mutual addressivity between Kevin and Carter demonstrates that they are attending closely to each other's turns and turn completions, and is also a way of doing-wanting-to-make-a-point. Kevin and Carter's talk at this point, Kevin's in particular, also displays markers of emotionality through disfluencies (lines 566–569, 581, 582, 599) and extreme case formulations such as “very very” and “always”, “never” (lines 576, 587).

That this interaction is also treated as disagreement between Kevin and Carter by the rest of the group is further evinced by how it is closed. Although Carter's “oh really” in line 605 could be a partial mitigation of the disagreement, Donna's comment in lines 611–613 seems to occupy “saying something everyone can agree with” in this position as a way of closing the argument or affirming that it is closed and can be transitioned out of. This also marks a potential topic closing, which the interviewer utilizes explicitly (lines 618–620). She makes a quick acknowledgement, ends the topic, and previews an end to the interview, asking for final comments. This is a typical way an interviewer might attempt to shift or end a topic, while still allowing for more to be said – so as not to be seen as cutting people off. This does not mean that the interviewer saw this segment of interaction as inapposite to the goal of the interview, but her framing of the activity and reference to the next phase (individual interviews) is the first moment in several turns that the interview is clearly identifiable “as an interview.” The disagreement in the interview may seem off-topic, beside the point, or even like bad data, bringing up a possibly too-subtle distinction between what constitutes a “cure” compared to what the interviewer's question may have been looking for. But the moment revealed a central conflict about drugs among people with HIV (see Ho and Robles 2011), a conflict which could have been elided or simplified if this moment had not happened.

The next excerpt from Group B features similar practices which do agreeing stances. This excerpt begins with Leland telling a story about the difficulty with drugs: disliking, but at the same time, being alive because of them. This leads to a discussion of drug side effects, a common gripe among people taking multiple medications for HIV.

(4)
 528 Leland: and then he say something (0.5)
 529 ((Name)) you are concerned (0.5)

- 1 530 about things that they sa:y you might
 2 531 [have but]
 3 532 Bill: [you might have ((nodding))]
 4 533 Leland: you might ne↑ver have↑ them
 5 534 I: That's true that's true [mm hmm]
 6 535 Leland: [You know?]
 7 536 (.3) And then he says the same thing
 8 537 ((extends an open hand at Henry))
 9 538 [you might be alive today thanks to the
 10 539 Henry: [hm ((nods))]
 11 540 Leland: medication you go to ((sweeps hand into air)) South Asia
 12 541 or Africa they don't even have medi-
 13 542 [even you know] they don't even=
 14 543 Bill: [yeah ((shakes head)) yeah no]
 15 544 Leland: = have it. Hhhhh [so]
 16 545 Anne: I make myself read all the [small] print
 17 546 ((holding hand in the air like holding a
 18 547 pamphlet)) on the printout that I get (.
 19 548 when I have new medication
 20 549 Leland: uh huh
 21 550 Anne: once
 22 551 Leland: uh huh
 23 552 Anne: and then I throw it away
 24 553 [((throwing gesture))]
 25 554 Leland: [yeah]
 26 555 Anne: [because because ((nod))]
 27 556 Bill: [I throw it away ((small tossing gesture))]
 28 557 Anne: I jus I know I wanna know ((looks at I))
 29 558 but I don't really [wanna] um ((finger
 30 559 snapping motions))[(2.0) ↓]
 31 560 Leland: [I know]
 32 561 ((slaps hand onto palm)) [I'm reading]=
 33 562 Henry: [((nods))]
 34 563 [do I really wanna?
 35 564 Bill: [the minute that I know]
 36 565 Leland: = I'm reading [all those labels and I'm]
 37 566 going crazy ()
 38 567 Anne: [to dwell on em (.) yeah]
 39 568 Bill: ((hand palm up)) the minute that I kn:ow
 40 569 ((Henry, Anne, Leland look at Bill))

570	Bill:	((hands mimic skimming a list))	1
571		I start having them (.)	2
572		((I, Bill, Henry, Anne laughs, Leland smiles))	3
573	Bill:	I have a::ll this ((hands like checking	4
574		an item off a list)) Right now.	5
575		[Even before I take]	6
576	Leland:	[Yeah but (0.2)]	7
577	I:	[Yeah you're like 'I am] feeling itchy'	8
578		((I, Bill, Leland laugh, Henry,	9
579		Leland smile and look down))	10
580	Bill:	Eh [haa haa haa haaaaaaa]	11
581	Leland:	[Yeah but. But I would like to say something]	12
582		what was the original question	13
			14

Leland's utterance (line 528) is relevant to what the interviewer just asked, while directing gaze intermittently at other interviewees. By line 535, however, Leland's turns are primarily addressing other interviewees, with the interviewer almost a peripheral participant. Though present (off-camera) and possibly engaging nonverbally using eye contact or nodding, the interviewer makes no verbal contributions after that point until line 577, silent except for one line of laughter alongside others (line 572).

The interviewees address one another verbally and nonverbally throughout, overlap in almost every turn, and display emotions of being amused and frustrated toward the topic. They also display a sense of being animated, emotionally invested. This is the clearest of several moments when this group do mundane conversation in ways indistinguishable from ordinary talk (Koven 2011) regarding sequential actions, turn taking, and embodiment. Even the interviewer, when contributing, did so *as* an ordinary participant – her utterance is formulated in a conversational style, not through her role as interviewer.

The participants recognize a distinction between an interview framing, and what they have been doing. This is partly marked by their response to the interviewer's contribution, which is not enthusiastic, followed by laughter but no uptake. When the interviewer speaks (line 577), it signals a break in the interaction (line 578–582). The participants may be treating her contribution as relevantly linked to her role as the interviewer. Certainly they do not ratify her joining the sharing of experiences which, indeed, she does not share. The interviewer neither has HIV, nor neuropathy, nor complicated regimens of drugs. Though speaking for someone's experiences to align with them is a feature of ordinary talk, its problematic occurrence here suggests the interviewer is not quite distinct from her institutional role. The interviewer's contribution is received with laughter,

1 but Leland does not display uptake and his next turn asks about the original
2 question, orienting to the business of the interview (line 582). The interviewer
3 repeats the questions and the group returns, albeit briefly, to responding one-at-
4 a-time, as on a panel, orienting to the interviewer as the addressed recipient. It is
5 not clear exactly when Leland began to re-orient the group to the institutional
6 format. In line 576 for instance he says “yeah but”, and we might see line 581 as a
7 repair of that. In either case, his utterance explicitly marks a format shift and
8 displays noticing the difference.

9 In this analysis, illustrative excerpts from the data displayed ways partici-
10 pants do institutional and ordinary talk in a focus group interview setting through
11 turn allocation, verbal and embodied orientation/addressivity, and emotion dis-
12 plays. In conversational moments participants did not talk “as interviewees” or
13 “as interviewers.” They did not orient to institutional goals, identities, or con-
14 texts. They did not remark on their own talk as “on record” or “in answer to a
15 question.” Certainly in many cases their talk was (or began as) being relevant to
16 a prior question by the interviewer, and certainly the topics they talked about
17 were relevant to the frame of the interview in general and its clinical setting
18 (though as people who all share medical concerns this does not preclude their
19 covering the same topics in a mundane setting). Participants did treat this way
20 of talking as distinct from an “institutional format.” “The interview” was treated
21 as being linked to answering questions, one at a time, in response to the inter-
22 viewer’s questions. Thus, deviations from this were often explicitly commented
23 on at some point, as when someone says “what was the original question?”.

24 Of significance is that by enacting and orienting to these format distinc-
25 tions, participants demonstrated an array of techniques for managing the co-
26 construction of stances while ostensibly delivering answers to the content of
27 interviewer questions. The institutional context was foregrounded and back-
28 grounded variably across turns. This shifting between formats, and attending to
29 those shifts, offered participants methods of jointly formulating emergent top-
30 ic-relevant stances indirectly to interviewer questions. This is of practical use to
31 participants in the Garfinkelian (1967) view that it is part of how they make sense
32 of ordinary activities, but is also practical in that it offers material which may be
33 useful for focus group interviewers and analysts.

34

35

36 5 Discussion

37

38 In discussing how analysts can account for content *and* interaction in interviews,
39 Tracy and Robles (2010) offer one suggestion to consider “news at an angle” –
40 that the content sought through questions may be produced in interaction, but

emerge in indirect ways not obvious in participants' ostensible answers. Furthermore, Morgan (2010) claims that while many studies have championed the value of analyzing focus group interaction, not enough studies offer detailed ways such analyses can guide interview conduct. This paper analyzed the sequential production of the very distinction focus group practitioners label "more interactional" and considered specific ways participants orient to and accomplish that. This section reflects on these findings, considers limitations and future directions, discusses contributions and implications, and offers suggestions regarding practical use of the findings.

Focus group practitioners, scholars, and other professionals can easily articulate a difference between what appears to strictly "do the interview" and what does not. This analysis furthered empirical evidence that such differences exist and how they are produced (see Hester and Francis 2001), and suggests these differences have value for how interviews unfold, how participants can make use of conversational resources for ongoing institutional business, and how analysts can make sense of interviewee "answers" in light of content-related goals.

This analysis has limitations. For example, though the claims are based on a range of data, the analysis focuses on a few key cases. However, these were selected deliberately: we do not make any claims regarding generalizability (see Jaworski and Coupland 2006), but rather characterize how particular moments unfolded across these data using excerpts where such moments were salient. Furthermore, we offer reconstructions of a particular interactional and analytic distinction relevant to the field. Specifically, this paper contributes to ongoing discussions regarding the nature of institutional context and its procedural relevance for talk.

This paper also contributes to focus group practice and research in interactional and institutional goals of interview conduct. From a GPT perspective, analysts identify participant techniques for dealing with a situated problem and how their techniques relate to local ideals of practice. Though none of the practices in this analysis were treated as highly problematic, the received view for focus group interview practitioners is that conversational interactions and interview goals may be in tension. Participants certainly treated their talk as potentially "off-track." Whether constituting a dilemma, the *distinction* provides an available resource, one which is drawn on by interviewers and interviewees to conduct themselves together. When engaging in acts locally produced as institutional asking-and-answering of questions, or doing moments of mundane conversation, participants can shift their footing (Goffman 1981; Koven 2011), locally attending to the institutionality recognizable *to them* and constructed *by them*. The institutional format for interviewing was treated as situationally consequential, and thus distinctions from it were marked as being built in different ways and with

1 different features. Interviewees in this analysis recognized goals and roles of the
2 institutional setting; their talk was organized to at times match those expecta-
3 tions, and at times to disregard them.

4 Finally, this paper offers findings which may be useful to focus group partic-
5 ipants and analysts. Morgan (2010) argues that interaction does not always need
6 to be a foregrounded goal of focus group conduct/analysis – depending on
7 research goals, content alone and quoting selected interviewee responses in
8 write-ups often suffices. However, Morgan identifies one kind of interaction he
9 suggests is “almost always” important to attend to as interaction: when partici-
10 pants rapidly give multiple, chaining responses, as analyzed in this paper. Ana-
11 lysts of discourse and others who value interaction in focus groups suggest that
12 fostering interaction in focus groups is important in many ways, but many stop at
13 the stage of planning focus groups (e.g., Kratz 2010), offer inexplicit suggestions
14 (e.g., Markova et al. 2007), or do not explain how their findings can be used in
15 practice or in analysis (with exceptions to the last point, i.e., Puchta and Potter
16 1999; Tracy and Robles 2010).

17 Interviewers may see it as their institutional task to frame interviews
18 (Wadensjö 2008), often as distinct from ordinary conversation (Roca-Cuberes
19 2011); while interviewees frequently attend to expected interview norms (Blum-
20 Kulka 2009), they do not always do so. Of what potential practical use are
21 participant orientations to and shifts between interactional formats? How can
22 researchers make the most of this when it is unexpected, or foster it when it is
23 desired? For interviewees, these format resources allow participants to switch be-
24 tween “giving answers to the interviewer for institutional goals” and “having a
25 conversation.” If interviewees sometimes “get conversational” in interviews it is
26 probably for a reason. An approach to research which aims to serve participants
27 as well as researchers should provide interviewees with the context and resources
28 to formulate their experiences and construct their stances jointly, together and
29 with/to one another (e.g., Ho and Robles 2011).

30 For interviewers seeking to attend to these concerns, looking closely at when
31 and how format shifts occur is pertinent to maintaining interaction *and* institu-
32 tional focus. Learning to identify when participants orient to interviewing (inter-
33 viewees orienting to the interviewer and institutional goals, one-after-another
34 turn distribution, low displays of emotion) or conversation (interviewees orient-
35 ing to one another, high overlap, co-constructed narratives, emotion displays)
36 can help interviewers more readily track participants’ meaning making as it
37 unfolds. It also provides opportunities for interviewers to respond in different
38 ways. The interviewer’s moves in these data indicated attentiveness to the
39 ideal of fostering interaction by at times encouraging the conversational format
40 (minimally participating, not pursuing uptake, contributing as a co-participant

rather than as an interviewer) but also by eventually reorienting to the institutional nature of the interview (participating more substantively, pursuing uptake, marking interviewer status, remarking on format shifts). In conducting focus group interviews, moderators who attend to these moments can develop skills in encouraging and reorienting. This can make attention to guiding interaction a more explicit and teachable body of knowledge rather than relying on interviewer talent or serendipity.

Attending to format shifts can also signal to analysts when participants are providing useful answers to question content, and when they might be providing an unexpected angle by constructing a stance the interviewer would not have known to seek and would not have designed into questions. Zorn et al. (2006) argue that by moving from data collection (research-focused) to interaction (participant-focused), scholars can use focus groups to simulate everyday interaction, examine social processes, and analyze effects of influence in non-decision making groups. Modan and Shuman (2011) also suggest that interview participants may have their own equally relevant goals as much as the interviewer does. Making space for the possibility of multiple goals among all participants allows the ongoing experience of the interaction to be just as fruitful as what is gleaned from it.

6 Conclusion

A special issue of *Language in Society* (2011) investigated interviews as a site of research analysis. In returning to Speer's (2002) questioning the "natural" and "contrived" data distinction, DeFina and Perrino (2011) proposed that interviews be on equal footing with so-called natural data in narrative analyses. These scholarly conversations and others (e.g., Hester and Francis 2001; Watson 2009) indicate ongoing practical and analytical issues to consider when it comes to conducting and using research interviews, and that the issue of how to characterize interaction and its relationship to institutional contexts continues to be one of lively debate.

This paper used grounded practical theory and discourse analysis to analyze focus group interviews in a public health clinic. Using conversation analytic techniques within grounded practical theory we discussed how participants build different interactional formats, with implications for interviewing, analysis, and participation practices in interview contexts.

Acknowledgment: The University of San Francisco's Jesuit Foundation Grant provided funding for this research.

1 Appendix: Jeffersonian transcription notations

2

3 Source: Jefferson (1984).

4

5	Text [text]	Brackets	Indicates the start and end points of overlapping speech.
6	[text]		
7	=	Equal sign	Indicates no hearable pause between utterances.
8			
9	(# of seconds)	Timed pause	A number in parentheses indicates the time, in seconds, of a pause in speech.
10	(0.0)		
11	(.)	Micropause	Indicates a brief pause, usually less than 0.2 seconds.
12			
13	.	Period	Indicates falling pitch utterance-final.
14	? or ↑	Question mark or up arrow	Indicates rising pitch utterance-final or internal (respectively).
15			
16	-	Hyphen	Indicates an abrupt halt, cut-off, or interruption in utterance.
17			
18	°	Degree symbol	Indicates whisper or reduced volume speech.
19	<u>text</u>	Underlined text	Indicates the speaker is emphasizing or stressing the speech.
20			
21	:::	Colon(s)	Indicates prolongation of an utterance.
22	(text)	Parentheses	Indicates speech which is unclear or in doubt in the transcript.
23			
24	((text))	Double parentheses	Annotation of nonverbal activity such as smiling, laughing, pointing, etc.
25			
26			
27			

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26 Bionotes

27 *Jessica S. Robles* (PhD, University of Colorado at Boulder) is Lecturer at the Uni-
28 versity of Washington. Her research looks at the moral implications of discursive
29 and embodied communicative practices in various institutional, interpersonal, and
30 cultural contexts. Address for correspondence: Department of Communication,
31 University of Washington, Box 353740, Seattle, WA 98195, USA <roblesj@uw.edu>.

32 *Evelyn Y. Ho* (PhD, University of Iowa) is Associate Professor at the University of
33 San Francisco. Her research examines the intersections of culture, health, and
34 communication and is focused on the use of holistic therapies in the United
35 States. Address for correspondence: College of Arts and Sciences, University of San
36 Francisco, 2130 Fulton Street, San Francisco, CA 94117, USA <eyho@usfca.edu>.

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