

**THE INTERACTIONAL DYNAMICS OF PARENTAL
IDENTITY PERFORMANCES: A STUDY OF
NARRATIVES OF FIRST-TIME PARENTS**

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Summary

This study explores how parental identities are constructed, negotiated and contested within narratives. By approaching identity as emergent and circulated within interaction, I offer an alternative perspective to the largely static view of parental identities as biologically ascribed with the conception of a child or institutionalized via structured positions within society. Turning to collaborative and individual narratives of six pairs of first-time Singaporean parents elicited through a series of interviews, I analyze how the interactional devices made available through the narrative, the interview and the broader sociocultural contexts are used for performing and negotiating their parental identities. Adopting an integrative approach that is informed by narrative analysis, conversation analysis, critical discourse analysis, interactional sociolinguistics and sociocultural linguistics, I examine the micro-level narrative interactions and explore the link(s) between the micro-level narrative interactions and extant macro-level discourses, social categories (e.g., gender and parenthood) and relations.

I focus on how these first-time parents position themselves and others through voicing, framing, interactional roles and membership categorization within the micro-level interactions. These are linked to macro-level discourses – the discourse of competence, discourse of traditional gender roles, discourse of contemporary gender roles and the discourse of family cohesion which I suggest, operate to create and/or reinforce asymmetrical positions in child-caring for these first-time parents.

Keywords: narrative analysis, interview, family, parenthood, identity performances

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Chapter 1

Introduction to Study

1.1 Introduction

In this study, I explore the parental identity performances of six first-time parents through an examination of the narratives produced both individually and jointly by these parents. I focus particularly on how respondents position themselves and are positioned within the narrative interactions intersubjectively. I seek to explore the different ways parents perform and negotiate their identities within narratives and argue for an approach which is sensitive to the immediate interactional context and the larger sociocultural context within which narrators are situated and narratives are produced. Thus, I approach identity as a discursive construct that emerges in interaction (Bucholtz and Hall, 2005). By turning to interactions to understand the concept of identity, I seek not to deny the biological or institutional basis for understanding parenthood but to highlight the complexities of identity research and the value of understanding parental identities as social categories that are made relevant within interaction. A comprehensive study of parental identity construction must turn to how parents talk about their roles and responsibilities respectively as fathers, mothers and collectively as parents as well as how meanings that are attributed to these social categories are negotiated within their interactions. Many narrative researchers have demonstrated that a primary way through which individuals make sense of their experience is by casting it in narrative form (Bruner, 1990; Gee, 1985; Mishler, 1986; Riessman, 1993). Stories tell us who we are and are central to our social and cultural identity (Thornborrow and Coates, 2005). Thus, one way that parents make sense of their identities is through the process of narration – by

articulating their experiences, they are not merely recounting past incidents but also enacting certain social identities, encoding evaluation, and bringing coherence and meanings to these experiences. As previous research based on identity and discourse have suggested, investigating verbal strategies and conversational moves can deepen our understanding of interactional patterns and moment-by-moment instantiations of identity as it is constructed and performed.

1.2 Why narratives of first-time parents?

First-time parents are an interesting group to analyse because it is in their coming to terms with their first child that we can understand how they make sense of their responsibilities, roles and experiences as parents. Narrative is a process not merely for the reconstruction of lived experiences but also for the fixing of life direction (Chan, 2000). An understanding of how parents position themselves with respect to their first-born will have implications for how they conduct their parental identities subsequently with future births and/or with the development of their first-born over time. Narrative interviews can give parents the opportunities to reflect upon their parenting experiences, evaluate their roles and significance as parents and draw connections between the past, present and future.

Although there have been many studies conducted on family narratives, these have often centred predominantly on an understanding of parental identity construction as a whole and/or on the role of the mother. But less attention has been placed on the role of the father and more particularly, on his experiences as a first-time parent¹. Thus, this study attempts to analyse family, mother and father identities

¹ The only discourse analysis study that focuses on father's construction of identity I have found is Marinova (2007). Another related study would be Gordon et al. (2007) but they focus more on one father's family-related workplace discourse.

as they are enacted within interactions, giving equal emphases to how these are negotiated within individual and joint narrative tellings.

Also, this study arises in response to many narrative works which have focused on disruptive life experiences or subjects that are deviant, abnormal or non-mainstream (See for e.g., Atkinson, 1993; Becker, 1997; Fludernik, 2007; Riessman, 1989, 2000). While many narrative works have brought important insights through working within these parameters, such a focus seems to suggest that what constitutes reportable and worthy of telling is limited to what is not commonly experienced- that which is out of the ordinary² and not “plain, humdrum, everyday or run-of-the-mill” (Labov, 1972:371). For example, Fludernik (2007) says that “happy couples are not storyworthy – their lives are a routine of placidity that withers in the mouth of the storyteller” (264). This implies that happy couples’ narratives are mundane, not worth telling and therefore not worth studying. Yet, it is within the implicit supposed day-to-day monotony that identities and ideologies manifest themselves strongly. To assume that narrators only share incidents in their lives that deviate from expected norms in their daily living experiences is to undermine the theoretical insights that researchers have contributed to family and linguistics research based on narratives occurring within ordinary family conversations (See for e.g., Ochs and Taylor, 1992, 1996 and Tannen, 2003a, 2003b, 2004). It is important to note that “identity is discursively produced even in the most mundane and unremarkable situations” (Bucholtz and Hall, 2005: 589). Following their point of view, I suggest that it is in examining the seemingly unremarkable and mundane situations and interactions that we can achieve two important goals-firstly, an understanding of the embedded assumptions that

² I also note here that terms like ‘reportability’ and ‘storyworthy’ (and we may include ‘ordinary’ as well) are subjective concepts and thus the delimitation of a narrative on these premises become highly contestable.

structure relations in a way that they become accepted as conventional, routine and not worth questioning. Secondly, a more dynamic view of identity as not necessarily biologically fixed or stipulated by social structure but discursively negotiated even within the supposedly mundane verbalization of parenting experiences.

1.3 A working definition of narrative

There seems to be an intuitive sense as to what constitutes a narrative. But yet, there has been considerable disagreement about the precise definition of a narrative. The issue of how to define a narrative becomes increasingly complex if we consider the different forms of narrative that have emerged and been researched on, including but not limited to literary narratives (with these being further subdivided into science fiction, mystery, autobiographical, historical, etc), narratives in media and film, conversational narratives and narrative interviews. To add to this extensive list, Kern and Quasthoff (2004) mention habitual narratives, fictitious narratives, hypothetical narratives. With the enormous range and diversity of narratives, including their potential for intermixing, some scholars have questioned whether there is a need at all to maintain a firm structural definition of narrative, arguing instead for a more flexible and perhaps, more inclusive definition of narrative (Ochs and Capps, 2001; Ryan, 2007) based on variations by degrees rather than upholding distinctions between narratives and other forms of discourse.

The definition of narrative has been quite restrictive among one group that assumes that all narratives are stories about a specific past event and have common structural properties (Labov, 1972; Labov and Waletzky, 1967). Most scholars in this group treat narratives as discrete units, with clear beginnings and endings, as detachable from the surrounding discourse rather than as situated events and many

have adopted the Labov-Waletzky framework successfully for their own studies (See Polanyi, 1985; Johnstone, 1993; Linde, 1993; Rymes, 1995; Coates, 1996) although they have also raised some issues with adhering to such a strict definition. For example, Edwards (1997:276) claims these categories are “idealised as well as empirical...they define the kinds of things a story ought to contain, theoretically, in order to count as a story”. He argues that they are very difficult to apply consistently to every example and suggests that to study narratives in this manner, researchers are imposing structure rather than revealing it.

Other analysts focussing on the formal features of narratives have shown that tellers sometimes let listeners know a story is coming and indicate when it is over with entrance and exit talk (Jefferson, 1978). Typically, for a story to end, the narrator needs to bring recipients back into the real time from past events (Thornborrow and Coates, 2005). Of course, not all narratives are so clearly bounded. Riessman (1991) notes that not all narratives follow the same generic conventions and some examples include habitual narratives (where events happen over and over and consequently there is no peak in the action); hypothetical narratives (which depict events that did not happen) and topic-centred narratives (snapshots of past events that are linked thematically). She argues for the view of narratives as “modes of representation that tellers choose...based on their intentions and the market” (1991:18).

Additionally, researchers who study narratives in non-elicited conversations have observed that narratives are dynamic, open-ended and often collaborative ways of sense making. Conversational stories are often reshaped as they are told and retold, and can be used to entertain, point to a moral or be part of an explanation without necessarily abiding by structural constraints of well-formedness (Blum-Kulka 2004,

Eggin and Slade, 1997; Martin and Plum 1997; Ochs and Capps 2001). Another criticism raised is with the restriction of the term "narrative" to accounts of past events (Goodwin, M., 1990; Riessman, 2008) because they fail to consider the use of hypothetical scenarios and fantasy sequences and their significance for their teller's purposes.

In spite of the disagreements in the definition of narrative, most scholars agree that sequence is necessary, although how it is to be sequenced is not limited to one particular way. Labov and Waletzky (1967) argue that stories follow a chronological sequence where the order cannot be changed without changing the inferred sequence of events in the original semantic interpretation. The model they propose is based on the following components: abstract, complicating action, evaluation, resolution and coda³. The evaluation component within narrative is analysed by Labov (1972) as a secondary structure. However, as has been noted by Wortham (2000), this puts too much emphasis on (near) explicit evaluations based on denotational cues and fails to consider that interactional positionings of narrators and audience are mediated, emergent and contextualised within interaction. This extends Jefferson's (1978) assertion that the point of a story cannot be determined solely by examining its internal components but emerges from the "sequential implicativeness of the story" (231). Thus, the boundaries and functions of a story cannot be fixed on a purely structural basis because boundaries and meanings of stories emerge and are dynamically determined and negotiated within ongoing interactions.

I argue that the usefulness of maintaining a strict definition to narratives depends crucially on the aim(s) of the research. For instance, if a study takes as its

³Although they also pointed out that it is not necessary to have all the components; only the complicating action and resolution are essential.

objective a comparative perspective of narrative through focussing on its form or structure, then it would be important to maintain the definition of narrative used within a previous study for a systematic comparison of the structural differences and/or similarities across different narratives. However, for the purpose of understanding identity construction and negotiation within interaction, a more permissive working definition would be more productive, rather than risk eliminating valuable data which may usefully illustrate the sense-making processes of parental identity performance. In addition, such a view privileges the points of view and the experiences of the speakers, instead of trying to force their articulations into labels and in the process, mould the data to suit the researcher's categorisations. Nonetheless, it is still important to be clear about the conceptualisation of narratives in this study.

For this study, my definition of narrative will be deliberately broad: "A narrative is a retelling or recounting of a sequence of events typically (but not necessarily) realized as occurring in the past and related by one or more narrators which can be interspersed by comments by all participants within the interaction". As a working definition, this would allow me to examine the narratives as well as all other aspects of talk occurring within the interviews.

1.4 Narrative as performance

To date, narrative remains an elusive, contested and indeterminate concept (Georgakopoulou, 2006). Several narrative theorists have called our attention to the small stories perspective (Bamberg, 2004; Georgakopoulou & Bamberg, 2005) as opposed to the conventional well-formed big stories that are non-shared, based on personal experience and focused on single past events, as typified by narratives

elicited through interviews (For examples of more formal narrative research, see Labov, 1972, 1982; Johnstone, 2006). Some narrative researchers have argued that traditional narrative approaches leave out the relationship between the teller and the listener. For example, Langellier (1989) critiques Labov's (1972, 1982) assumption that a narrative is a relation among clauses rather than an interaction among participants. He argues that such an approach misses the importance of the power relations between participants in the production of personal narratives. The small stories perspective has also crucially pointed out that narratives are done in social interactions (Bamberg, 2006; Georgakopoulou, 2006). This is not to say that the conventional big stories perspective with its focus on the formal aspects of the narrative is less useful. One of the strengths of its more formulaic orientation is that it makes available systematic analyses of the structuring of the narrative and possible predictions of the functions and relationships of various narrative clauses and their connections to internal psychological workings (e.g., Labov, 2006).

In this study, I do not make a distinction between big or small stories, because by definition, narratives elicited from an interview context which allows for a single narrator to complete a narrative in an extended turn should be classified under the traditional big stories research, but yet my emphasis on the interactional negotiation of identity among multiple interactants is more typical of what the small stories perspective advocates. Thus, I argue that a loosening of the boundary between big and small stories perspectives while maintaining the emphasis on the contextual basis upon which the narrative occurs would be more beneficial. For this study, I consider both conventional "solo" narrative interviews (with one narrator) as well as "joint" narrative interviews (with more than one narrator) within the data as narrative performances. I argue for the view of narratives as performances based on three major

considerations – firstly, narrators are sensitive to the interactional features of an interview regardless of whether it occurs in conversational or more formal interview contexts. The presence of the interviewer, for instance, will inadvertently affect the way experiences are narrated even if the narrator keeps completely silent. In the view of Tannen (2007), “both speaking and listening include elements and traces of the other...(listening) is an active not a passive enterprise, requiring interpretation comparable to that required in speaking” (27). In this sense, all narratives elicited within interviews are produced in a context where narrators are conscious in varying degrees of their being assessed. Baker and Johnson aptly point out that interviews are “*interactional events* in the social world which in themselves provide telling evidence of how people make sense of each other and what resources they use to do this” (1998: 230; emphasis my own).

Secondly, the focus on identity performances emphasises how narrators can actively draw on interactional resources to enact various types of temporal discourse stances and display various aspects of their identities within interaction. Similarly, narrators can downplay aspects of their identities that they want to disalign with within interactions. Thus, a performance perspective views identity as dynamic and intersubjectively negotiated within interactions. Storytelling triggered by the presence and questions of the interviewer within the context of an interview can be said to be a form of performance (Goffman, 1974; Toolan, 1988) because the meanings within the narratives are interactionally accomplished by the interviewer and the narrator. Also, adopting this perspective will mean expanding on the view of the interview as not merely a methodology for the researcher to gather data but also as an interactional resource for the narrators’ identity performances.

Thirdly, the act of narration in itself necessarily means a recontextualisation of the actual event as the event is transferred into speech and given an interpretation. Thus, narratives are necessarily subjective and their veracity is not so much an issue. Individuals construct very different narratives about the same event (Chafe, 1980). Thus, the same event can be narrated in various ways depending on the values and interests of the narrator. A narrative can thus be deemed as a selective reconstruction of past events (Riessman, 1993). I argue that rather than trying to contest the validity and accuracy of these representations, it is more useful to focus on how narratives can be used for identity performances through an examination of the intersubjective positionings within narratives. A performance perspective means that all narratives are viewed for their identity performance potential and not necessarily as fully factual accounts of past events.

1.5 Identity as negotiated within interactions

In this section, I aim to clarify what I mean by identity or at least, which aspects of identity I will focus on in this study. Bucholtz and Hall (2005) argue that there is more “analytic value of approaching identity as a relational and sociocultural phenomenon that emerges and circulates in local discourse contexts of interactions rather than as a stable structure located primarily in the individual psyche or in fixed categories” (586). Due to space constraints, I will not repeat all of their points here but draw on the main conceptualisation of identity mentioned in their work. Identity is the emergent product of intersubjectively negotiated practices and ideologies. To approach identity as an outcome of intersubjective negotiation within interaction also implies that identity is relational. At the most basic level, identity emerges in discourse through the temporary roles and orientations assumed by the participants although these interactional positions may be assumed and discarded just as quickly in

accordance to the contingencies of the unfolding interaction. Nonetheless, some positions accumulate ideological associations with both large-scale and local categories of identity through indexicality. Indexicality can be conceptualised as operating at two semiotic levels – direct indexicality occurs when linguistic forms are associated with interactional stances (i.e., orientations to ongoing talk) while indirect indexicality operates when these stances accrue into more enduring ways of being – that is, identities, which are in turn ideologically associated with particular social groups or categories (Ochs, 1992). However, adopting the identity-in-interaction approach does not imply merely placing all our analytical focus on micro-level interaction, but must factor in the ideological links between micro- and macro-level social categories. This is important because as Bucholtz and Hall (2005:592) remind us, “(i)dentities encompass macro-level demographic categories; local ethnographically specific cultural positions *and* temporary and interactionally specific stances and participant roles” (emphasis my own).

1.6 Research Question

The study seeks to address the following research question:

How are parental identities constructed, negotiated and resisted within narratives of first-time parents?

I will attempt to address the main research question through examining:

- 1) The interactional resources made available through the narratives that are used for parental identity performances which I will refer to more broadly as micro-level interactions.
- 2) The connection between identity negotiations within micro-level interaction and macro-level structure of social relations.

1.7 Organization of Thesis

The thesis is divided into five main chapters. Chapter 1 provides the motivation for the study, a working definition of narratives as well as the research question. Chapter 2 focuses on the methodology, literature review, theoretical and analytical frameworks to be used for the study. This is followed by the analysis of the micro-level interactional features in Chapter 3. The implications of these interactional features and its connections to macro-level social categories and discourses are addressed in Chapter 4. Chapter 5 concludes the study, discusses the limitations of this study as well as points out possible areas for further research.

Chapter 2

Methodological and Conceptual Orientations

2.1 Methodology

Both narratives collected from relatively spontaneous conversations (See for e.g., Ochs and Taylor, 1992, 1996; Tannen, 2007) and elicited within interviews (See for e.g., Koven, 2002; Wortham, 2003; Petraki, 2001) have been established as useful methodologies for the understanding of identity construction within narratives. For my study, I collected narratives elicited via interviews. Rather than to deny or downplay how elicitation procedures may influence speakers' response (and hence their narratives), I also analyze how the interviewer's presence can actually become an interactional resource that narrators draw upon for their parental identity performances and their relative positioning.

Prior to conducting the interviews, I developed an interview guide with broad-based questions with the objective of eliciting narratives from the parents. I used a semi-structured interview approach where questions are left deliberately open-ended. This served as a way for inducing narratives and evaluations from the informants but gave them the space to digress to whatever they felt comfortable sharing about. It also allowed me to ask relevant questions pertaining to a specific topic for further clarification during the interviews. The list of broad-based questions can be found in Appendix (B). However, it must be noted that the questions do not always lead immediately to a narrative (if at all). The narrative modes were often embedded within non-narrative comments which serve two important functions – firstly, they highlight the conversational interview context in which narrative production is situated so that a narrative cannot be examined without acknowledging the context of

its production and secondly, many of them serve an evaluative function which is critical for our understanding of how parents make sense of their identities within the narratives. Commentaries made by informants have become widely accepted within narrative research as evaluations (Labov and Waletzky, 1967). Evaluations are part of the narrative performance – as important co-texts framing the occurrence of the narratives which form an important way (but not the only way) of understanding how parents assess their actions and the actions of others within the narratives as well as how they engage with the interviewer within the interaction (For further elaboration, refer also to section 1.3: A working definition of narrative).

Once the boundaries of the narrative segments were identified, I re-transcribed the data into numbered lines which correspond to the narrator's intonation unit, typically a grammatical phrase or clause, following Chafe (1980). The transcription conventions I have adopted are based on Sacks et al. (1974) and can be found in Appendix (A).

A list of the participants' profiles is tabulated in Appendix (C). Here, I will give a brief introduction to how they were approached as well as provide some background information on the families involved in this study. In identifying participants for my research, I decided that the respondents had to: 1) be Singaporeans 2) be first-time parents 3) have (only) one child between the age of 1-3 years. I used a snowball sampling methodology for locating informants using familiar contacts to access less familiar ones. While random sampling might arguably be more objective, this study is not situated as a quantitative piece of research running statistical analyses and drawing generalizations for a specific social category. Snowball sampling was also useful for securing the couples' agreement to be interviewed as well as

heightening their level of ease in sharing their experiences; hearing about a research project from a friend tends to increase the willingness of the respondents to participate rather than if approached to do so by a researcher whom they are not acquainted with. I first contacted a relative, Olive and her husband George for help. Olive helped to rope in a colleague Ken and his wife Ling for this study. I also sought the help of a fellow church member Shaun and his wife, Gena, who managed to get their neighbours Paul and Fiona to help with the interview. The final two couples were Dan and Sheryl as well as Carol and Ray whom I got to know many years ago through working together on a volunteering project. In total, 6 couples were recruited for the study⁴. Over the course of two weeks, I met up with each couple twice informally to get to know them and their family situations as well as to talk generally about my study. I told them that I was interested in collecting their experiences as first-time parents and listening to stories of how their lives have been impacted by the entry of a child. All of them seemed excited to share about their lives as first-time parents which resulted in recordings ranging from 70 to 90 minutes long⁵. The interviews were all conducted in the homes of the respondents. The interviewees were assured of the confidentiality of their identities and all the names used within this study are fictitious.

As the setting of the interview forms part of the analysis for this study, I now discuss various aspects of the interview settings. The narratives are situated within

⁴ With the exception of George who is Eurasian, the rest of the respondents are ethnically Chinese; all participants are middle-class professionals. Also, it must be clarified that not all the respondents are linked by religious affiliation – i.e., Christianity. Only Shaun, Gena, Paul, Fiona and I are Christians. Further details of the respondents can be found in Appendix (C).

⁵ Due to the constraints of space and time, it is also not possible to include all 18 lengthy transcripts (Three from each couple). Thus, I will be displaying the specific segments of the transcripts that support my assertions, giving the relevant context of the setting and topic of discussion leading to the particular narratives.

sociolinguistic interviews. As the narratives occur in speech form within an interactional context, there are tendencies for the narrators to exhibit specific conversational traits like pauses, false starts and overlaps. Just as possible would be digressions, sudden topic switches or/and an abrupt end to their tales as narrators attempt to recollect and make sense of their experiences. I argue that these elements should not be omitted from the analysis because they can provide researchers with important insights into identity performances as well as serve to contextualize how we can understand these narrative performances. This is in line with the observation by Taylor and Cameron (1987) that “the further away the analysis gets from the specific and situated characteristics of conversational acts, the more distorted becomes the understanding of the original function of those acts” (20).

The importance of interviewing both the men and the women together as well as separately cannot be overstated. Both mothers and fathers have distinct and complementary perspectives on what actually occurs in domestic as well as public spaces, and both have vantage points on how mothering and fathering, as practices and identities, intersect, run parallel or diverge from each other. Thus, I have decided to conduct both solo interviews⁶ (without the presence of a co-narrator) as well as joint interviews (with the presence of a co-narrator). Also, from a critical discourse point of view, interviewing the parents separately also works to ensure that both parents have the chance to hold the floor for narrating their experiences so as to ensure more equitable access to talk-turns. I am aware that the order that the joint and single interviews are conducted may have an effect on the data. Consequently, I have interviewed them in different sequences, alternating between conducting joint

⁶I use the term “solo interviews” here to mean interviews conducted by an interviewer with one respondent and in no way does this imply that only one person is involved.

interviews and single ones. However, as this is not a quantitative study, any generalization of this factor would not be credible. An independent study of the difference in the sequential ordering of the narrative would constitute a different research question in itself, which I intend to investigate in the future when more samples are collected. However for this study, one of the merits of using both single and joint narratives is that it allowed me to capture a wider range of narratives and evaluations that might have been omitted if narrators were to collaboratively articulate their experiences and share the floor.

The audio material was transcribed by me, and the transcriptions and recordings were later shown to the respondents so that they could clarify the meanings of various comments made during the interview with them. In so doing, I tried to acknowledge the respondents' agency and make their agenda part of the research agenda. Thus, any parts deemed problematic by the respondents were clarified and then ratified. In addition, this also ensured that data which the respondents were uncomfortable with sharing as part of this study were discarded and also allowed me to collect post-interview feedback from them regarding their comfort level and eagerness to be contacted again for subsequent follow-up studies. Upon a Likert scale of 1(very uneasy) – 5(very easy) to the question “On a scale of 1 – 5, what would you rate your level of comfort and ease during the interviews?”, 10 respondents gave a feedback of 5, while 2 gave a feedback of 4. In addition, all agreed to take part in follow-up studies in the future. The feedback is important because it serves as an indicator that they did not feel they were placed in a particularly formal or obtrusive environment and that the elicitation of their narrative did not create undue unease for them when they were telling their stories.

Having discussed the methodology, I now provide an outline of the framework and theoretical orientations for this study.

2.2 Framework and Theoretical Orientations

2.2.1 The multi-layers of contexts of narrative

It is now widely claimed and accepted that narrative plays a key role in the construction of self (Brockmeier and Carbaugh, 2001; De Fina, 2003a) and in the location of the emergent self in a social and cultural world (Chafe, 1994). In addition, others as well as self are positioned intersubjectively within narratives (For further discussions of intersubjectivity, see Bucholtz and Hall, 2004). The interactional perspective underlines how responsibilities and roles of parents are contingent and discursively negotiated rather than normatively defined.

I am interested not only in the content of the narrative and plot line (that is, what is said within the narrative) but also in how the story is told – that is, how the story is organized and how the narrator transits in and out of the story world.

If we recognise that narrative interviews need to take into account an interactional context (i.e. between the interviewer and the interviewee(s)) besides the "story world" context, then the role of the interviewer during the narrative interview needs to be considered. Here, a self-reflexive examination of the interviewer's participation and how that may impact upon the narrator(s) and affect the processes and outcomes of the narratives become of theoretical significance (Etherington, 2004). In addition, narrators draw on ideological, sociocultural and historical discourses in their storytelling. "Our culturally available and appropriate stories about personhood and about relationships have been historically constructed and negotiated

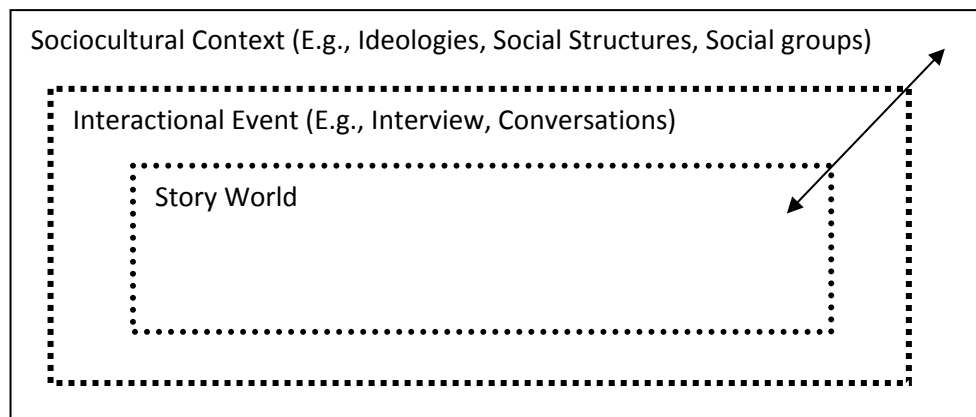
in communities of persons, and within the context of social structures and institutions” (White, 1992:124). Thus, narratives of these parents must be interpreted with reference to the broader social discourses and politics framing parenthood – for instance, the transformation of marriage and gender relations in contemporary Singapore with the entry of women into the workforce and the retention of the traditional family arrangement where the men are the heads of the household.

Thus, in every narrative analysed in this study, I posit that there are three layers of context in operation: the sociocultural context⁷, the interactional event and the story world. The three layers are distinct but interrelated categories and I find it useful to frame the story world and the interactional event as porous (indicated by the use of dashes as frames) in order to illustrate that a narrative is framed by all three contexts but shifts within these layers can occur (See Diagram 1). However, it is also important to note that the relationship is not unidirectional but bidirectional as the interactions as well as narrators’ understanding of the larger sociocultural context are also influenced by the way the narrative develops. In other words, how the narrative develops influences the contexts as well. This necessarily implies that we need to go beyond merely looking at the narrative "text" to expanding our theoretical and analytical frameworks to consider the identity positionings made available due to the (interplay of) different contexts. Thus, conceptualising narrative as produced within multi-layers of context means we can examine how a narrative is co-produced in a complex choreography (Riessman, 2008) where different positions can be taken and

⁷ In this study, the sociocultural context would refer to identifiable social groups related to parents e.g., other mothers, fathers, children, colleagues, domestic helpers, in-laws and relatives as well as dominant discourses that frame Singaporean society e.g., the discourse of traditional role distribution of fathers and mothers. While general social groups are usually referred to, discourses are often indexed and less explicitly referred to. Of course, reference to general social groups and their expectations can also index certain discourses.

shifts can occur between narrator, co-narrator and characters, temporality and spatiality, interviewer with interviewee(s), ideologies associated with globalisation and structurally institutionalised positions.

Diagram 1: Narrative within multi-layers of context



2.2.2 Drawing connections between micro-level interaction and macro-level structural relations

Taking the perspective that identity is made relevant within interactions is not to deny the existence of social structure within the physical environment nor the ideologies acting upon parents. Instead, as will be seen in the narratives, it is often through interactions that actors make relevant their orientations and negotiations to specific material and ideological constraints as well as their relationship with each other.

To analyze the connections noted within micro-level interactions to larger structural relations, I draw from analytical tools from conversation analysis, critical discourse analysis, and interactional sociolinguistics. The connections that are made from the micro-level interactions to the macro-level structure and relations can be traced to the understanding of language as multifunctional (Jakobson, 1960).

Language can create meaning referentially and also indexically. Through narratives, narrators can perform a variety of meaningful social action (Koven, 2002). Thus, an integration of various analytical and conceptual tools is needed for examining these complex identity performances operating at multiple levels.

Conversation analysis (CA) as developed by Harvey Sacks, Gail Jefferson and Emanuel Schegloff, attempts to describe the social organization of talk-in-interaction from the perspective of the participants themselves. Their emphasis on limiting their observations to what emerges within the data reflects their concern that researchers tend to allow their theoretical alignment and biases to influence the interpretation of the data without considering whether the participants orient to these points of views themselves. However, some researchers have extended the use of CA to develop critical versions such as “feminist conversation analysis” (See for e.g., Kitzinger, 2000; Speer, 1999; Stokoe and Smithson, 2001), which explores how participants invoke and orient to gender categories in interaction. As Kitzinger (2000) observes, “sexism, heterosexist and racist assumptions [can be]...routinely incorporated into everyday conversations without anyone noticing or responding to them that way” (171) and that conversation analysts should also consider what is not said and taken for granted in interaction besides what participants explicitly attend to. Park (2004) also adopts conversation analytic methods to explore how the conversations of Korean language learners may instantiate various language ideologies. Conversation analysis is useful particularly for bringing attention to the act of narration as situated within interactional contexts and the subsequent interactional developments that may be occasioned by the act of narration (Goodwin, M., 1990). In so doing, CA becomes a useful approach for exploring the links between micro-level interactions and the larger social order.

For Fairclough (1995), who is widely recognised as one of the main developers of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), the micro-event and the macro-social structures are inextricably linked. He reminds us that "micro" actions or events, including verbal interactions, can in no sense be regarded as merely having "local" significance to the situations in which they occur, for any and every action contributes to the reproduction of "macro" structures (34). Thus, the study of the interactional dynamics of narrative performances can arguably shed light into the assumptions that embed ways that parents negotiate their roles and responsibilities and assimilate macro-structural assumptions as part of representation of selves. Exploring the connection between micro-level interaction and macro-level social structure can contribute to addressing some of the phenomena observed by family and gender sociologists. For example, Scott Coltrane (1996) observes that "the underlying equation for men with work and women with home has been surprisingly impervious to the labour market changes that have occurred over the past few decades" (26). With systematic shifts within various industrialised societies in terms of women's participation in the workforce, higher education and feminist movements, can we expect to see more systematic shifts towards more equitable distribution of domestic and child-caring responsibilities between parents? To address some of these issues, we need to understand how first-time parents talk about their roles and responsibilities as well as examine the fine mechanisms of talk and its link to broader identity projects, relations and ideologies.

A multi-level analysis of how parental identities emerge and are negotiated in interaction requires close analysis of the interaction as it unfolds, a critical perspective that explores the larger implications of how relations are structured, inequalities are perpetuated and alternatives obscured and an interactional sociolinguistic approach

which analyses how narrators position themselves (and others) within the story world, the interview and the larger sociocultural context. Thus for this study, I draw on the notions of framing (Goffman, 1974; 1981; Tannen, 1993), interactional roles (Ochs and Taylor, 1992, 1996), membership categorization analysis (Sacks, 1992) and voicing (Bakhtin 1981; Wortham, 1999, 2000, 2001; Wortham and Locher, 1996; Koven, 2001) as these have been demonstrated to be very useful for understanding how the micro-interactional roles assumed are linked to macro-level discourses, social structure and relations. For the macro-level discussion, I approach the data from a more critical slant and integrate the conceptual toolkit of the tactics of intersubjectivity (Bucholtz and Hall, 2004) (refer also to Section 2.4).

2.3 Literature Review

In this section, I review works pertaining to the study of narratives, sociological and linguistic works on parenthood and family as well as recent developments in gender and identity research. As this study straddles research from various fields, it is impossible to fully review all the relevant literature. The main purpose of this section is to allow me to situate my study in light of the developments in research in these various areas. I begin by first reviewing some studies done on gender and discourse, narrative analysis, family narratives and ideologies affecting the family in Sections 2.3.1 – 2.3.4. Subsequently, in Section 2.4, I review the relevant conceptual tools I will draw on for the study.

2.3.1 Gender and discourse

A study of parental identities will have to examine how gender is implicated within the interactions. Thus, a brief review of gender studies is in place here. Under

variation studies in sociolinguistics, gender is examined as a variable (e.g., Labov, 1990; Trudgill, 1974) to be examined for its correlation to a certain speech forms. Language and gender studies began to take on a more critical perspective and this is reflected by Robin Lakoff's (1975) influential contribution to feminist research. Her argument soon became developed by other researchers and became known as the deficit theory, which argues that men were in a more dominant position within the social hierarchy while women were marginalized and both their language practices reflected and perpetuated this asymmetry.

In contrast, Tannen (1986, 1990) has been generally identified as representing another group that supports the difference model. In this paradigm, differences in men and women's conversational styles are tied to their metafunction or purpose of the talk. She argues that these are not necessarily tied to the relative dominance of men to women in society and has conducted extensive research on gendered tendencies for particular speech patterns as well as the complex connections between power and solidarity (2003a; 2003b).

Informed by post-structural conceptions of identity, the essentialist view of gender as innate was challenged by several identity and gender researchers who assert that gender is construed as a something which is "done" – gender is viewed as a performance (Butler, 1990) and interactional achievement (West and Zimmerman, 1987; Bucholtz and Hall, 2005). Butler (1990) argues that gender as a process can be seen as “the repeated stylization of the body, a set of repeated acts within a rigid regulatory framework which congeal over time to produce the appearance of substance, of a "natural" kind of being” (33). Gender is never static but produced in daily interactions and can be seen as performances of masculinity or femininity.

Recent work has shown that performativity of gender cannot be limited to merely the masculine or the feminine but includes other forms in response to these categories (For example, see Hall and O'Donovan, 1996). By taking the perspective of identity as emergent within interaction, researchers are able to resist attributing particular speech patterns and interactive strategies to a particular gender. Instead, gender is viewed as variable and social actors can perform different identities in different contexts for different purposes while responding to particular constraints. It is within this complex interactional interplay that power and relationships between subjects are negotiated and enacted.

2.3.2 Narrative Analysis

Conversation analysts have coined the term 'recipient design' to understand how talk can be used to get a sense of a speaker's own understanding of their audience's knowledge (Schegloff, 1972; Goodwin, 1981; Duranti, 2003). This highlights the importance of understanding the role of the interviewer and how it affects the narrative production, process and completion. More crucially, within a narrative, an interviewer is almost obliged to express signs to indicate comprehension so as to facilitate the narrative because the narrators picks up cues (linguistic or otherwise) that indicate to them whether to continue their stories. To stay silent and expressionless throughout the narrative is as marked a choice as responding to the narrator. As Watts (1991:111) has noted, it is usually the case that "speakers developing a turn at talk which is socio-pragmatically recognizable as a specific type of speech event (like a narrative) that will involve them passing over several transition relevance places expect supportive turn-internal interventions...and will pause to allow listeners to make them before continuing". Thus for this study, I will adopt a

post-hoc self-reflexive analysis of the interaction between interviewer-interviewee and suggest that it constitutes a viable alternative to assuming that non-response constitutes an unproblematic stance on the part of the interviewer within the interaction.

It has also been argued that the meaning of the narratives cannot be fully understood without making reference to wider social processes that frame the experiences of narrators. Narrative is thus a social practice – when narrators relate their experiences, they also create new meanings by building and communicating images of themselves and others, interpretations of the process and their roles in it. Thus narratives must be seen as both reflecting and constituting social reality. De Fina (2003a; 2003b) points to the importance of noting the set of shared assumptions and ideologies that are made relevant by participants in these interactions. Thus, family storytelling can contribute to constructing a collective frame of reference for the interpretation of verbal interactions and social practices that situates participants within sets of parental responsibilities.

Researchers like Mattingly (1988), Ochs and Capps (2001) and Georgakopoulou (2002) have shown that narratives exhibit complex and fascinating relationships with different contexts, and that their functions and structure vary tremendously as a result of their insertion in different interactional situations. An awareness of the embedding of narratives within contexts has important theoretical consequences and these researchers have argued for the analysis of narrative as a type of discourse practice (De Fina, 2003a; 2003b), not as a genre with fixed structure and characteristics. One way of looking at narrative as practice is to ask what specific functions they carry out (and for our purposes more specifically, how does it

contribute to our understanding of parental identity performance?) and what types of relationships can be established between these functions and the structure and content that the narratives exhibit.

Schiffrin (1996) and Dyer and Keller-Cohen (2000) have also identified narratives as a means by which speaker's manage contradictory aspects of their self-presentation. "Narrators are figures of authority attempting to construct selves both by displaying their authority and at the same time downplaying it, because of the democratic society they live in. Such dilemmatic discourse may therefore characterize the construction of self in a situation where the speaker is in a position of authority in the narrative, but is cautious about how this should be presented" (Dyer and Keller-Cohen, 2000:300).

Labov's later works in narrative analysis show increased attempts at explaining how larger social issues and ideologies may impact upon the narrative. For example, Labov (2003) analyses the underlying event structure to show how a narrator consistently transformed his account of events to minimize his own assignment of guilt for the actions involved through the use of two narrative techniques: deletion of events and exploitation of ambiguous constructions. Labov points out that the interlocking and overlapping linguistic structures across sentence boundaries left traces that point to the nature of the deleted material. He asserts that such transformations of narratives are automatic features of the organization of narratives. The narrator is unconsciously directed by a normative ideology that assigns praise and blame for actions involved in ways that are sensitive to the social relations of the narrator, his or her immediate addressees, and the wider potential audience. Linear sequences that correspond more or less to what happened and to

what the narrator would like to have understood about what happened. However, what can be noted here is his focus on the structure (or form) of the narrative, which, although useful, neglects the pragmatic and indexical functions of language and its implication of our understanding of how narrators' position themselves. Since all talk (including narrative) is multifunctional (Jakobson, 1960), in the same stretch of discourse, speakers can perform a variety of socially meaningful actions through both denotational and indexical cues (Wortham, 2000; Koven, 2002). More crucially, the interactional devices used within the narratives allow narrators "to simultaneously communicate propositionally explicit information, show their stance towards that information and towards the ongoing interaction as well as point to some aspects of a socially recognizable identity" (Koven, 2002:168). As such, the features of the narratives can "point" to broader structural relations and how narrators position themselves in relation to these provides justification for an integration of both micro- and macro-level analyses.

The studies reviewed here point out how the act of narration is a highly contextualized activity – narrators are sensitive to the interactional and situational contexts and also aware of the broader societal developments. In their narratives, narrators position themselves in various ways through both referential and indexical functions of language.

2.3.3 Family and Ideology

Bernardes (1997), a family sociologist, concludes that "the single clearest inequality between the genders in contemporary society relates to parenting" (187). Thus, a study of parental identity performances also inevitably becomes a study of how gender relations are formulated, negotiated and understood within interaction.

The arrival of children most profoundly marks long-term systematic inequalities between women and men (Brannen and Moss, 1991; Dowd, 2000; Fox, 1998, 2001; Hochschild, 1989; Doucet, 2006). A study of parental identities in interaction becomes crucial for our understanding of gender relations. Schiffrin (1996) notes that stories are often told “to justify one’s own actions” both during overt family conflicts and during “subtle disputes over rights and obligations” (171). Family storytelling becomes a crucial site for analyzing how these parental identities are performed and negotiated because “our personal identities and self concept [are achieved]...through the use of narrative configuration” (Polkinghorne, 1988:150). The production of narrative can affect the way the body is lived and imagined and how the views of others and ourselves can construct and craft the hegemonies and the regularities of the social (Threadgold, 2005).

Various sociologists have suggested that mothers themselves are gatekeepers to family work. Mothers are doing more family work than fathers, not just because men don’t help much, but because women value being able to influence the internal, domestic domain. They hesitate to share family work because they enjoy the authority, privilege and status their position gives them in the family (Kranichfeld, 1987; LaRossa, 1997). The ideas of women as nurturers of home and children and men as breadwinners came to represent an ideal in which women, by being central to the home and family, were given the opportunity to wield some domestic power and privilege over men (Grisworld, 1993; LaRossa, 1997). The result is maternal gatekeeping which acts as a constraining force to fathers’ involvement in family work. Maternal gatekeeping is a collection of beliefs and behaviours that ultimately inhibit a collaborative effort between men and women in family work by limiting men’s opportunities for learning and growing through caring for home and children (Allen

and Hawkins, 1999). However, such a position fails to consider that mothers can highlight and downplay certain aspects of their identity in different situations or that identities are negotiated within interactions. Also, maternal gatekeeping seems to imply that mothers are the agents preventing fathers from carrying out their share of parental responsibilities without careful consideration of the father's involvement within these interactions. I argue that a study which recognizes the interactional positioning of parents as intersubjective, dynamic and contingent on situations is a more nuanced way of understanding parental role construction and negotiation.

Within studies focusing on Singaporean families, Quah (1988) asserts that women are caught between worlds: the modern, contemporary society which cries for equality of the sexes, and the traditional norms of patriarchal society which dictates that women should be submissive to their spouses. This is supported from a CDA analysis of media ads by Lazar (2000) who examines the representation of parenthood in a Singaporean national advertising campaign and asserts that two potentially contending discourses of egalitarian gender relations and conservative gender relations are working in tandem to maintain a largely unchallenged gender order in Singapore. I aim to contribute to extending her study by analyzing how parents represent themselves as well as looking at what other potential discourses may be at work in establishing the gender order in parenthood.

The family is the social institution where gender roles are observed most rigidly (Sim, 2001). Yet, individuals have the agency to perform various aspects of selves that challenge or run contrary to the status quo. These have been well represented by various works by gender theorists (See for example, the concepts of performativity by Butler, 1990 and tactics of intersubjectivity by Bucholtz and Hall,

2004). As agents of their own identities and subjects of social structures and ideologies, parents negotiate these complex identity positions within interactions and I propose turning to narrative interactions to examine some of these issues.

2.3.4 Family Interactions

Tannen (2007) points out that language plays an essential role in the establishing, maintenance and negotiation of family relationships. She proposes that involvement strategies – that is, linguistic elements such as repetition, dialogue, and details are crucial for our understanding of relationality, interconnectedness and interdependence.

In addition, some researchers have also noted that within family interactions, interactants sometimes speak for one another (Schiffrin, 1993), talk through another by using constructed dialogue where people animate the speech of another (Tannen, 1995, 2003; Koven, 2001) or through ventriloquizing whereby family members communicate with each other using a non-verbal third party like preverbal children or pets (Tannen, 2004).

Some other works focus on collaborative talk within the family. Gordon (2003) examines how family members are aligned or disaligned to one another within talk by studying how step-families form teams and alignments based on shared knowledge of topics brought up within their conversations. Coates (2005) asserts that co-narration or "duetting" (Falk, 1980) between couples allow men to perform hegemonic masculinity; that is, it provides space to perform heterosexual connection with a female partner, whereas co-narration with other males is avoided precisely because of the performance of connection which heterosexual men tend to avoid. In mixed conversation involving heterosexual couples, male speakers seem happy to

engage in collaborative narration...where male speakers can co-narrate with a female partner, they will often choose to do so [and] they avoid co-narration where co-participants at talk are male. The co-construction of stories is recognized as a key way for couples to "do" their relationship in public (Mandelbaum, 1987).

Several researchers have also pointed out that family interactions serve as a site for socialization and construction of gender and family identities. Ochs and Taylor's classic work on family narratives produced over family dinner demonstrate that "family exchanges do not simply exemplify gender relations otherwise shaped by forces outside the family, but, rather, are the primordial means for negotiating, maintaining, transforming and socializing gender identities" (1996:100). They assert that the "father knows best" ideology may be getting daily reinforcement in the everyday narrative practices of American families, especially through the help (often unconsciously) of mothers and/or wives. They also point out that there can be socializing effects associated with women frequently getting their narratives problematised by their spouses, especially when children are observers to these family interactions. Blum-Kulka (1997) observes that there are cultural differences in dinnertime discourse among Israeli and American families within the family where mothers in Israeli families were more active in initiating stories than fathers while fathers within the American families contributed more to initiating narratives. Kendall (2006) reconceptualizes family dinner to include meals in which all family members are present but not everyone is eating, and considers the wider context in which these interactions occur; that is, as part of homecoming transitions when one parent arrives home and the child and other parent are already there. Using the concept of frames and footing, she focuses on the strategies employed by parents to create and maintain family solidarity. I will now move on to a review of framing as well as other

conceptual tools in Section 2.4 and integrate these with the theoretical framework and conceptual orientations discussed in Section 2.2 for my analysis in Chapters 3 and 4.

2.4 Review of conceptual tools used in analyzing interactions

2.4.1 The application of framing to discourse

Goffman (1974; 1981) has argued that storytelling is not so much about the plot or the description of the propositionally explicit information about a past event but more about social interaction and dramatic performance. Using a participant framework analysis, Goffman proposes the concept of framing which includes the display of footing, stance and alignment. Frame analysis is used to track the organization of experience (Goffman, 1974) where he proposes a frame of an activity as the organizational premises into which individuals fit their actions. According to him, everyday activities contain quickly changing frames and thus, frames can shift rapidly between literal to fictive and to the somewhat fanciful realms in between. He also introduces the concept of “footing” – where “a change in footing implies a change in alignment we take up to ourselves and the others present...and a change in footing is another way of talking about a change in our frame of events” (Goffman, 1981: 128) . Thus, his idea of footing is closely connected to the notion of framing. I prefer to see them as different in focus – while footing can be conceptualized as focusing more on speaker roles, framing is more concerned with the entire situation.

As insightful as Goffman’s initial observation of the role distinctions between author, animator and principal may be for the study of certain interactional contexts, some narrative researchers have argued that the distinctions are difficult to operationalize (Levinson, 1998), in part due to Goffman’s vagueness about the role

that language plays in speaker's performances of footing and changes in footing and advocate a more rigorous discussion of the indexical categories in language that presuppose and/or instantiate them (Levinson, 1998; Wortham and Locher, 1996; Wortham, 1996).

Tannen expands on Goffman's notion of framing and utilizes it as a tool for tracking the relationships between men and women in family settings. For example, Tannen (1993) adapts the idea of framing to describe everyday conversation through the analysis of spontaneous spoken discourse. Following Bateson (1972), frame is understood by her as a metamessage on what was being said: "Bateson demonstrated that no communicative move...could be understood without reference to a...metamessage about what is going on – that is what frame of interpretation applies to the move" (1993:3). She makes a further distinction within frames into knowledge schemas, which are structures of expectations associated with situations, people, objects and interactive frames, which refers to a sense of what activity is engaged in and how speakers mean what they say.

In this study, I apply the use of frames to track positioning in narrative interactions. Speakers can make their positioning salient within multi-layers of contexts in narrative through frame shifts. By shifting from one frame to another, I mean here that the narrator can make certain discursive choices that makes explicit that s/he is operating more in one frame than another with not much overlap – for example, through direct address of the interviewer. When this is done, usually it means that a narrative that has started is not progressed by these turns or clauses. However, at certain times, narrators can also make salient their roles within two frames – e.g., by making evaluative comments that might simultaneously progress the

narrative and still index involvement within the interactional context. This is because words are multifunctional (Jakobson, 1960). In this case, “with the same words, the speaker tells us what happened in the past *and* what [the speaker] currently makes of it” (Koven, 2002: 185; italics in original). Goffman (1974; 1981) proposes that in most interactions, participants do not simply change frames and footings, but actually embed one within another, or "lamine" experience. He suggests that “...within one alignment, another can be fully enclosed. In truth, in talk it seems routine that, while firmly standing on two feet, we jump up and down on another” (1981:155).

2.4.2 Voicing

Bakhtin (1981) distinguishes between the speech of the author, the narrator, as well as those of the characters, all oriented to a listener, and each as a relatively autonomous sphere that can be brought into relation with each other in a variety of ways to produce potentially conflicting social positions and values. Complex social meanings are transferred into and emerge from narrative discourse through the use of indexicality in language use (Lucy, 1993; Silverstein, 1993; Wortham 1994; 1996).

For example, Wortham and Gadsden (2006) develop the notion of voice for their study of narrative self-construction to refer to a recognizable social type, associated with a character primarily through indexical cues – which they further subdivide into quoted speech and evaluative indexicals (which are evaluative terms that associate characters with a recognizable type of person). In the process, speakers can take a position with respect to those voices. In addition, related work by Jakobson (1957) and Voloshinov (1973) on the binary distinction between the narrated event and the event of speaking or narrating speech event, or between the reporting and reported speech events have been used to help explain the relationship between the speech event and the speaking roles in narrative analysis. Using these distinctions,

researchers have been able to discuss how narrators integrate a prior narratable speech event into the current storytelling speech event (Bauman, 1986; Silverstein, 1993; Wortham, 2001). These researchers have focussed on how voicing allows the narrator to operate at the "here and now" (i.e., reporting speech event) by talking about the "there and then" (i.e., reported speech event).

However, as Koven (2002) points out, these distinctions remain binaristic while Bakhtin's (1981) own work on voicing has suggested that the participation frameworks and production formats are possibly more complex. Following her suggestion, this work attempts to further explore the concept of voicing by integrating it with the notion of stances. I propose narrators may at times simultaneously align and distance themselves as well as others using voicing within the narratives and through indexing their stances.

2.4.3 Interactional roles and discourse analysis

In a study of family dinnertime narratives, Ochs and Taylor (1992, 1996) analyze the interactional roles made available (e.g., protagonist, introducer, primary recipient, problematiser and problematisee) and argue that interactional identities produced via stance taking can accrue into more enduring identities like gender as well as create asymmetries in relationships. For example, fathers often assume the role of problematiser while mothers may at times take up the role of introducer to set children up to assume the role of protagonist. In this way, children and at times mothers find themselves subject to the evaluation of fathers. The researchers argue that a hierarchy within the family is set up by participants themselves in which unequal roles and privileges (i.e. who can judge whom) are established and possibly routinized through the way they relate to each other in dinnertime conversations.

Their work has also been extremely insightful in demonstrating that gender ideologies and broader social asymmetries are intricately linked to mundane small-scale activities (like family dinner) and the interactions between family members during those activities. Petraki (2001) extends the examination of interactional roles through examining storytelling by Cypriot-Australian families. She uses these along with other analytical tools to explore intergenerational relationships and identities across three generations of women within interactions.

2.4.4 Membership categorisation analysis (MCA)

MCA (Sacks, 1992) allows for the tracking of the emergence of gender as it is made relevant within interactions by participants. This can be usefully applied to track how particular attributes, stances and roles are systematically attributed and subsequently linked to gender. Sacks (1992) in developing MCA, noted that many categories, including “women”, “husband” and “mother” constitute one-half of a standardised relational pair (SRP). For example, by explicitly naming the co-speaker as husband, the speaker’s status as his “wife” is also strongly inferable and thereby making both wife and husband as well as their relationship relevant to the interaction. MCA can be said to be focussing on the local management of speakers’ categorisations of themselves and others in talk and through talk.

2.4.5 Tactics of Intersubjectivity

Informed by pioneering work on identity that include speech accommodation theory (Giles et al., 1991), theories of language ideology (Gal and Irvine, 1995; Irvine and Gal, 2000) and theories of audience design (Bell, 2001), Bucholtz and Hall (2004; 2005) propose a framework to analyze the ways speakers position themselves and other speakers through establishing identity relations that are established along a

continua within three intersecting dimensions: sameness-difference; genuineness-artifice and institutional recognition-structural marginalization. These are done through three corresponding sets of tactics.

The first set of tactics is called adequation and distinction and they refer to processes in which subjects construct themselves or are constructed as being sufficiently similar to or substantially different from another. The two processes are paired together in that “the construction of sameness requires the obscuring of difference” (Bucholtz and Hall, 2004:495). Thus, speakers can try to highlight aspects of the self that are similar to the other while erasing any discordant element. The authors use Queen’s (1998) study of a group of lesbians and gay men to illustrate how a series of tropes were collaboratively invoked and relied on shared knowledge and stereotypes of lesbians and gay men. In doing so, they highlight similarity based on their sexual identity and minimized the differences in their various gender, occupational and racial identities. Conversely, distinction occurs when for example, a lesbian decides to further distinguish herself from other lesbians by insisting that she isn’t just any lesbian, but a butch.

The second set of tactics is authentication and denaturalization, which are related to the processes of realness and artifice. Authentication is concerned with the construction of veracity. For example, Hall’s (1995) work on phone sex workers illustrate how these workers used gendered and ethnicized language to portray themselves as Asian or African-American women for the purposes of making the client believe they were talking to exotic females but they did not claim these same identities after they were done with work. Denaturalization refers to the rupturing of on-going identity claims through foregrounding falsity. Barrett’s (1999) study of drag

queen shows how the men dressed in drag combine features of femininity with homosexual desire, thereby denaturalising what could in other circumstances be a straightforward self-presentation as women.

The final set of tactics is authorization and illegitimation. Authorization is the use of power to legitimate certain social identities as culturally intelligible, while illegitimation is the revoking or withholding of such validation from particular identities. An example would be Kitzinger's (2005) study of phone calls from married couples to the hospital after office hours. Authorisation is demonstrated in how (heterosexual) married identities are authorized by the speakers in making their relationship with the patient known to the physician. The use of "heteronormative" terms such as husband and wife when speaking with the physicians usually meant that no further elaboration was necessary regarding their relationship while relationships such as boyfriend or neighbour would result in lengthier turns in order to explain their relationship and other circumstances surrounding why they are calling on behalf of the patient. For illegitimation, they cite Park's (2004) study on ideologies of English in Korea. Focusing on a group of Korean nationals attending graduate school in the US, Park shows how these speakers draw on a shared national language ideology of Koreanness to illegitimate the inappropriately Americanized identity a mutual friend of theirs adopts through his pronunciation.

For this study, I focus only on the tactics of adequation and distinction and explain how the two tactics work together to structure parental relations. Although the other tactics are in operation within the data as well, given limitations in space and time, I have chosen to focus on the tactic-pair that I have observed to be operating more prominently within the data. I will revisit the concepts of adequation and

distinction again during my analysis of parental relations at the macro-level in Chapter 4.

In this chapter, I have surveyed a variety of studies on narrative and family interactions as well as reviewed key analytical tools used in narrative analysis, conversation analysis and interactional sociolinguistics which include MCA, interactional roles, frames and voicing. In the next chapter, I analyze the micro-level interactions of the 12 first-time parents interviewed, using these tools.

Chapter 3

Analysis of Micro-level Interactions

In this chapter, I focus on eight examples I have selected from the data to illustrate my analysis and findings. I have converted the examples into table format (Tables 1 – 8) to better capture the turns and transitions. Within these examples, I concentrate on analysing the ways in which participants interact with each other during the storytelling as well as how the narrative context (i.e., the story world), the interactional context (i.e., the interview) and the sociocultural context make available interactional resources for first-time parents' identity performances. To do this, I apply the analytical toolkit comprising of frames, interactional roles, voicing and membership categorisation analysis (MCA). However, as MCA is one of the analytic tools I used, I was careful not to include the use of the specific terms “father” or “mother” and chose to use the umbrella terms “parents” and “parent” when I asked my questions. In this way, if speakers used these more specific roles within their narration, speakers can be said to be orienting to these membership categories themselves.

3.1 Analysis of Narrative Interview (1)

In Table 1, I assumed the role of the “elicitor” by setting Olive and George up to narrate incidents where they felt they had not performed their roles up to their expectations. The question is set up as a narrative prompt which predisposes the couple to talk about occasions when they felt negatively about their role fulfilment. In this case, I can also be seen as the “problematizer” not necessarily through my evaluative role but by setting up a narrative predisposed towards admissions of failings or disappointments.

Table 1 Collaborative Interview between George, Olive and Yoke.			
Line	Speaker	Utterance	Observations
1	Yoke	Can you share with me a time when anyone of you felt disappointed in yourself as a parent or when you felt you could have done more?	
			Pause (1.0)
2	George	Hmm (.)	
3		I guess (.) that was on her birthday,	
4		We wanted to spend some quality time	
5	Olive	=yah. All of us together.	
6	Yoke	Mmm.	
7	George	I thought (.)	
8		Wah _j Nothing better come up last minute in the office.	
9		But then [↑] you know how things always happen when you don't want them to happen?	
10	Olive	hh ^o yah ^o	
11	Yoke	└Mm(h)hmm.	
12	George	YAH LAH	
			(1.0)
13		Last minute got tasked to vet through documents,	
14	Olive	=All the paper work,	
15	George	└Got emails to send out [↓]	
16		Then after that (0.5)	
17		MEE:TING _j	
18	Olive	hhhh. LO:NG MEE:TING _j	
19	George	By the time I came back,	
20		Sheila she was- asleep	
21	Olive	└yah she slept.	
22	George	Ah:h [↓] (0.2) I wish I could be home early to see her.	
23	Olive	=Yah(.) He is kept in the office till about 9 ((pm))most days.	

As has been noted by some researchers, collaborative narratives constitute a powerful display of ‘togetherness’ (Tannen, 2007; Coates, 2005)⁸ and this is evident in the data where George and Olive adopt a collaborative stance indexing their solidarity. George assumes the roles of the interviewee and also the protagonist within the story world by beginning a narrative in response to my question. He sets up the narration by explicitly denoting the involvement of the entire family through the use of the first person plural pronoun “we” (line 4) which is supported by Olive through

⁸ Coates (2003) also suggests that collaborative narratives by couples could serve as displays of heterosexuality.

the use of “us” in the subsequent turn (line 5). This is further accomplished through Olive’s role as a co-narrator where she provides support by employing a series of involvement strategies (Tannen, 2007). These strategies index affiliation and encourage George to continue without disrupting the flow of his narration. These involvement strategies include using latching (lines 5 and 23: =yah) which signal support as well as acceptance on her part as co-narrator and participant within the interaction to allow the narrator to continue his turn on the floor; elaborative comments (line 14) which demonstrates “that one has knowledge of someone else’s thoughts...[and] implicitly claims intimacy with them” (Mandelbaum, 1987:163); she also maps his volume and tone raising, lexical repetition and vowel lengthening pattern (lines 17 and 18: e.g., MEE::TING_i) as well as through executing a collaborative completion (line 21: “she slept”). These elements create what DuBois (2007) calls “dialogic resonance” (161) which marks intersubjective alignment. Through these devices, Olive displays solidarity with George and indexes her involvement within the interaction.

One of the ways George comments on his responsibility as a parent in response to my narrative prompt is by indexing a stance of a father who wants to be around for his daughter and is disappointed that he cannot do so. He explicitly expresses this in line 22 “Ah::h↓(0.2) I wish I could be home early to see her”. More significantly, he shifts out of the frame of the story world, to assume a position within the present interview context as indicated by his address of the interviewer (me) and the co-narrator (Olive) through using a question – “But then you know how things happen when you don’t want them to happen?” (line 9). Concurrently, this is followed by a shift from using the first person pronoun “I” (line 7) to the use of the discourse marker “you know” (line 9) which creates more salience of his position within the

interactional frame through addressing the interviewer. Using the same question mentioned, he draws on a popular (but subjective) social discourse of Murphy's law⁹ in "But then you know *how things happen when you don't want them to happen?*" (line 9: italics my emphasis) and attempts to align the other participants within the interaction to this presupposed world-view through employing the use of the second person pronoun and presumptive question format¹⁰ (i.e., "you know how...when...?") which predisposes participants to answer in the positive as the preferred response. By laughing as a response and by answering in the positive, Olive and I demonstrate that we recognise the world-view he is referring to (lines 10 and 11) and index our shared alignment to George in terms of our position within the interview (i.e., we agree to the question he has raised to us in our interaction and allow him to continue his turn) and our shared position within the sociocultural context (i.e., we agree to his position that social actors do not always have control over what happens). In so doing, George is able to apply these shared positions back to the story world in his next turn to explain his own unavailability during a significant event such as his daughter's birthday by projecting it as due to circumstances beyond his control. Through the use of the presumptive question format, George was able to secure our alignment and then apply it back into the story world to justify his non-involvement within the event. He was able to employ the other participants to collaboratively downplay his responsibility and highlight the helplessness of his predicament. Thus, his inability to be around is attributed to circumstances and not due to his own doing. His experience is also

⁹ The origin of Murphy's Law is uncertain but it draws on a rather pessimistic view of the world where "if anything can go wrong, it will".

¹⁰ I use the term "presumptive question format" here to refer to a topic introduced by one speaker in a question format which assumes some degree of familiarity between interlocutors with regard to the topic introduced. The purpose of the speaker posing the question would then be more to elicit confirmation rather than new information. In this case, answering in the positive becomes the preferred response because a negative response will mean further elaboration is required on the part of the speaker posing the question.

portrayed as one which other participants can identify with and as not merely his personal opinion (that is, it is expected that things will go wrong and that coming home late is beyond his control).

Notice also the omission of “I” from George’s last minute tasks (lines 13, 15 and 17) which obviates agency in his staying back for work. Within these lines, it could be argued that George might be operating within both the story and interactional frames here as he is progressing the plot by describing what he had to do in the office and yet through stress and intonation (e.g., line 15: “Got emails to send out↓” and line 17: “MEE::TING₆”), he is also simultaneously conveying his stance of dreariness towards those tasks and influencing how the other participants should evaluate his attitude towards those tasks. In addition, by employing the use of a list-like structure in his delivery of those lines, he also creates emphasis on the volume of work he needed to do¹¹.

Olive offers a non-elicited third-person clarification in line 23 which accomplishes several interactional acts simultaneously and indexes a supportive stance on the part of the spouse. This is accomplished because her ability to offer the clarification to someone not within the family allows her to position herself as someone who knows of George’s daily schedule which indexes affiliation and their family identity. By the use of the third person reference “He” (line 23) as well as the shifting of tenses to the present “is”, Olive indexes that her clarification is meant for the interviewer and at the same time, she shifts the focus from the story back to the current interactional event; she is also able to position George’s heavy work involvement as a routine which is on-going rather than as a one-off event through the

¹¹ The list structure within its structural organization and the way it is delivered in closely packed lines can be suggested to enact the piling up of work.

use of the phrase “most days” and by marking it with the present tense “is”. Also, crucially, her non-elicited clarification is headed by “yah” which marks an uptake – that she has accepted George’s display as a victim of work who can only make it back home late with her lexical choice in “he is *kept* in the office most days” (line 23) suggesting that she perceives George as retained in the office against his will and that this routine is unavoidable. Her supportive stance maintained through involvement strategies, the use of the tense shift, pronoun shifts and the lexical choice “most days” all work together to signal inability to come home early not as an isolated incident but as an ongoing phenomenon. More importantly, it suggests a phenomenon that she has come to terms with and/or does not fault him for.

Thus, through strategic frame shifts out and then back into the narrative, the indexing of stances, the deployment of a societal discourse posed as a presumptive question and the sequential co-construction of affiliation between both co-narrators (and at one point, the interviewer), George is able to draw from various interactional resources in his narratives to position himself as a "willing father who is expectedly held back by his work commitment" and is also able to align other participants to co-construct this positioning.

3.2 Analysis of Narrative Interview (2)

Table 2 illustrates my attempt to elicit narratives that highlighted challenges that both parents might have faced in raising their first-born through the use of the phrase “share some incidents” (line 1).

Line	Speaker	Utterance	Observations
1	Yoke	Interesting Ok (0.5) Can you share some incidents or challenges that either of you faced when you first had the child?	
2	Sheryl	I think being like what..what they call,	
3		The new age the new generation woman,	
4		You kind of expect that,	
5		The man of the now is different from the man of the past.	
6		Where the man of the past is just like OKAY ↑	
7		You know(.)	
8		Where, OH ↑ Parenting and mothering is just the woman's job ↑	
9		You know(.)	
10		And I <u>thought</u> ↑ that the moment Jeff is born,	
11		We would be like a happy tag team	
12		You know, together.	
13	Yoke	Mmm.	
14	Sheryl	<I mean Dan has been a great help,	
15		Tremendous help.	
16		But I guess at that point in time,	
17		My expectations... I was expecting much more.	
			(1.0)
18		Yah.	
19		Like can't you help me carry the baby now that you're home?	
20		I've been doing that the whole day YOU KNOW?	
21		Can't you like come back earlier to relieve <u>me</u> ?	
22		So that I can do simple things like BATHE?	
23		hh(.)	
24		Like bathing was a luxury to me.	
25		Yah (.)	
26		So to me,	
27		It's like the challenge is in managing <u>my</u> expectations,	
28		And I learnt along the way,	
29		That I should not place my expectations too high.	
30		So yah.	

Table 2: (Continued)

Line	Speaker	Utterance	Observations
31		When Jeff arrived,	
32		It was mostly me.	
33		Dan helped whenever he could.	
34		But for <u>me</u> there was so much more I- had to do.	
35	Dan	I mean at that point in time,	
36		I wanted to (.)	
37		But I just couldn't help very much.	
38		There was work,	
39		And I mean, at first, when I first held my son,	
40		I was very nervous.	
41		I also didn't know how to hold him _i	
42		His body was so <u>small</u> ,	
43		so fragile(.)	
44		I was worried I might hurt him accidentally.	
45		I was afraid that he would cry. (.)	
46		My wife on the other hand,	
47		She's a pro _i	
48		Jeff loves snuggling up to her,	
49		And she will be cradling him.	
50		It's like second nature to them you know?	
51	Yoke	Mmm.	
52	Dan	Yah.	
			(1.0)
53		So of course,	
54		Initially,	
55		I left most of the nurturing to her to do la.	
56		Plus cos she needs to breast feed the baby (.)	
57		But I feel quite bad also.	
58		Cos I mean I... I couldn't connect with the child physically when he was born.	
59		It took me quite a while to finally pick him up from the bed for the first-time.	
60		But now, I'm getting better at it °(hh)°.	
61		I'm still learning though.	

However, Sheryl resists launching into a narrative but instead gives her opinions about what she found challenging. She begins by projecting what she is saying as a personal point of view – “I think” (line 2) and then locates herself as

“being” a “new age the new generation woman” (line 3), thereby invoking membership categorization (Sacks, 1972; 1992). She also invokes a general voice, “they”, from the sociocultural context which does not have any definite referent within the interaction¹² to claim that others in general would label her as such. Thus, through evoking a general social voice – “they call” (line 2) and positioning herself within the particular membership category (i.e., I am part of a group of what they call the new age new generation woman), she frames her subsequent expectations (line 4) as representative of those that would be espoused by new generation women in general. Here, she also employs the use of the generalized “you” to once again cast her expectations as being shared by other new age women like her. The Standardised Relational Pair (SRP) to woman (i.e., “man”) is also referred to explicitly (lines 5 and 6) and further divided into the man of the past and the man of the now.

She then draws on the sociocultural context to ventriloquate (Bakhtin, 1981; Wortham, 1999) the voice of the man of the past who says “OH ↑ Parenting and mothering is just the woman’s job↑” (line 8). Through this, she is able to appropriate a symbolic voice of patriarchy, index her stance towards it as well as attempt to align the other participants to her evaluation by highlighting the voice as oppressive towards women. Her performance of the stereotypical traditional male voice executed through the exaggerated use of rising intonation contours and increase in volume indexes her mockery of the traditional man’s stance of non-involvement (and male chauvinism) thus problematising it and subjecting it to the other participants’ evaluation. She continues to express her expectation of more equality in their parenting role distribution through her lexical choices in “happy tag team” (line 11)

¹² Although “they” can be established as referring to people within the larger sociocultural context and not to participants within the interaction, its scope is relatively indeterminate. ‘They’ may be referring to Singaporean society, women as a general group, to people belonging in modernized societies or a combination of some of these categories.

and the addition of the term “together” for emphasis (line 12). She indexes her disappointment through highlighting her expectations – “I thought↑that” (line 10) and delivering these lines with a stress and rising intonation on “thought ” suggesting that these did not in fact materialize. Also, if her expectations had already been met, she would be likely to present these lines as statement of facts rather than as her expectations of the situation (i.e., “The moment Jeff is born, we have been a happy tag team” rather than “I thought that the moment Jeff is born, we would be like a happy tag team”)

After my acknowledgement token (“Mmm”) in the next turn, Sheryl quickly rushes in with a clarification – “I mean Dan has been a great help” (line 14). She elaborates by subsequently adding “a tremendous help” (line 15). These can be interpreted as attempts at doing pre-emptive face-repair to disclaim any negative evaluation that might have been presupposed by what she might have said. “>I mean” (line 14) thus can be interpreted as Sheryl back-tracking on her negative evaluation (of the current family situation and indirectly Dan) through rushing in with a qualifier. In this case, she makes a reassessment and confers a positive evaluation of her husband’s contribution to child-caring although it is one relegated to that of a helper. The choice of the term “help” in itself indexes that between the two of them, she assumed more of the responsibility of child-caring while her husband assumed a more supportive role. In line 16, she uses the contrastive conjunction “but” to demonstrate that this was not what she had hoped for. She indexes a tentative stance through her use of “I guess” and then situates her failed expectations *as occurring within a specific point in time in the past* (line 16: At that point in time / line 17: my expectations...I was expecting much more).

Here, I argue she employs double voicing by enacting herself complaining about what she had to do and could not do “at that point in time”. Both the story and interactional frames are “laminated” (Goffman, 1974: 157) when she voices herself (in the story world) to be complaining about her child-caring involvement but at the same time expressing her current evaluation towards the situation. The story world frame is indicated by her situating herself as the protagonist lamenting about her predicament “at that point in time” (line 16) as well as her use of the temporal marker “was” (line 24) to index that she was referring to herself in the past where she was deprived of bathing when taking care of Jeff. Her positioning within the interactional context is made salient by the ability to evaluate herself retrospectively – “bathing was a luxury to me” (line 24), while her choice of intonation stresses and increase in volume within her enactment index her current stance towards what she is narrating. I suggest that this double voicing of self is done because it allows her to cast an evaluation of her husband “indirectly” and index her disappointment and frustration without a direct confrontation. By voicing herself speaking within a narrative, she is able to exploit the ambiguity created by her double positioning within the frames to ask rhetorical questions (which function as lamentations) which are not necessarily directed to the husband within the interactional context. Through situating her rhetorical questions as how she would react during a specific period in the past, Sheryl is able to cast the negative evaluation as belonging in the past and not necessarily applicable to her current self within the interactional context (i.e., those were what I thought at that point of time but I may be thinking differently about it now). Her enactment is also an attempt to project her as making reasonable demands as she depicts herself to be requesting to perform simple tasks like bathing or getting help with carrying the baby and indexes incredulity through her raised intonation and

increase in volume – e.g., “BATHE?” (line 22). In doing so, she assumes the role of problematiser to problematise her husband’s level of involvement but she does this indirectly through voicing her past self complaining about her husband’s lack of involvement and indexing her disappointment through describing her expectations and subsequently, qualifying them as expectations she had at that point in time (line 16); but not through explicit evaluation of his actions within the narrative.

However, she goes on to perform self-problematisation when she says, “the challenge is in managing my expectations” (line 27) and evaluates these expectations as “too high” (line 29). Her views may be viewed as sarcastic considering that she had earlier just brought up demands that she considered highly reasonable. However, within the interview, I have observed that Sheryl takes on a "matter-of-factly" stance and delivered this line without any drastic change in volume or intonation. In this way, not only does she situate her disappointment with the distribution of parental responsibilities to her own high expectations, but also situates it to the expectations that come with being a new generation woman. Although, Sheryl explicitly points out that the expectations were her own, by revisiting the earlier part of the interaction, there is some basis for believing that these expectations are problematic in part due to her being a new age woman (lines 2 – 3).

Thus, even though she situates her need to manage her expectations as a highly personalized affair, I argue that her expectations are nonetheless projected as *gendered* expectations. Attributing “new age new generation” to her “woman” identity can be regarded as Sheryl engaging with the discourse of contemporary womanhood. Thus, when she is problematising her expectations, she can be interpreted in part to be problematising the discourse of the “new age new generation woman” by claiming that it gives her unrealistic expectations.

Dan's turn overlaps with Sheryl's as she is completing her turn in lines 34 – 35. He acknowledges his limited physical involvement with the child but assumes the stance of a victim by highlighting his intention (line 36: "I wanted to") and then showing how he is limited by circumstance (line 38: "there was work") as well as lack of competence indexed through his choice of modals (line 37: "just couldn't help"). He then launches into a narrative where Sheryl, Jeff and Dan are characters in the story world. Dan addresses her as "my wife" (line 46) thereby evoking categorical references and indexing expectations for relevant social role obligations to come by stating that she is a "pro" (line 47). By implication, the SRP "husband (him)" is less of a "pro" and this contrast between the two is explicitly set up through his use of "on the other hand" (line 46). Subsequently, Dan narrates how both the child and the mother are mutually engaged and proactively seek out each other. In line 48, the child Jeff is placed in the position of an agent who snuggles up to Sheryl while in line 49, Sheryl is the agent performing the act of cradling to Jeff. He attributes the competence of the mother and the bond between child and mother as based on notions of (gendered) physiology. The mother can "breastfeed" (line 56), the mother can carry the baby like it is her "second nature" (line 50). He also evokes the membership category of mothers within the sociocultural context by first making salient Sheryl's title as "wife" and then through his depiction of his wife's closeness to his child, making relevant her role as "mother". Thus, via extension, the use of "them" (line 50) refers to a general group of mothers. Through associating the act of caring for the child to the category of mothers, he substantiates his claim (i.e., Sheryl just like any mom will be very good at caring for the child compared to me (Dan, a dad) because it is second nature to them) but at the same time, reinforces the association between mothers and child-caring through stereotyping (i.e., most moms in general should be

very good at taking care of the child compared to the dads (including Dan) because Sheryl is a mother and it is second nature to her).

What is interesting is the contrast set up through how Dan accounts for his incompetence and Sheryl's competence in different tense/aspect. While holding positions within laminated frames, he switches to the present tense when describing aspects of Sheryl's interaction with the child as seen in "she's a pro" (line 47); "Jeff loves snuggling up to her" (line 48); "It's like second nature to them" (line 50) and "she needs to breastfeed the baby" (line 56) to mark a continuation of her involvement that is not limited to a specific past event but extends to the present.

This is in contrast to his own narrative strategy where he shifts into the story frame to admit to his failings in handling the child in the past – "I couldn't connect with the child physically when he was born" (line 58); "It took me quite a while to finally pick him up" (line 59). Note that prior to this, he had indexed his current stance of remorse within the interactional context by using the present tense (line 57: "I feel quite bad also"). This seems to suggest that he is willing to be more involved from "now" on and functions to separate his current remorseful self who desires to improve from the past incompetent self (Goffman, 1971). This is a significant discourse move if we consider that in front of a male interviewer, Dan is willing to admit to his failings and suffer a face-loss (Brown and Levinson, 1987). I suggest that perhaps the threat to face that comes with the admission of weakness is dissipated by his careful positioning of self as located in the past (within the story world) and the current/present (in the interactional context). Through this, he is able to resignify his experience from a negative one to a positive one. The weakness he previously had becomes a learning experience which contributes towards a new and improved self – a

transformation from the past self. In addition, by further constructing self as a learner (line 61), he exploits the grammatical temporal marking of narratives to mark his role as a "parent-in-construction" through the use of the present continuous tense – “still learning”. The use of the present progressive indexes an on-going process – one with an indefinite end state; thus the future self may continually be in a state of progression which he may never evolve from and which therefore excuses him from being held responsible for the child-caring (or the lack of it). Through a combination of temporal shifts that allow him to distinguish between different aspects of self and through lexical choices and self-evaluations that index his stance of remorse, Dan is able to project that it is not that he does not care but that he is still learning how to do it properly.

I call such a move "retrospective distancing" – the act of narration allows the narrator to look back at events that have taken place. In the case of Dan, admitting to his lack of involvement but situating that in the past allows him to create a distance between his past and his present self as well as his present and his future self. The present self is separated and evolved from the past while the link between his future self and his present self is left vague due to the indefiniteness of the progression occurring in his present state. Also by positioning himself as a learner, he is able to project himself to be less competent compared to the mother and therefore never meant to take over the primary role of caregiving. Yet, he is able to position himself as an involved father, one who has the desire to help and to improve but who is limited in his ability to do so.

3.3 Analysis of Narrative Interview (3)

Table 3 shows me again assuming the role of elicitor, and attempting to draw self-evaluations out of the narrators about their ability to handle the child. Ken

responds to my question and attempts to evaluate his own child-caring ability through a narrative, thus assuming the role of protagonist and evaluator at the same time.

Line	Speaker	Utterance	Observations
1	Yoke	Mmm(.)	
2		Okay. So how would you guys assess your ability to handle the child when he first arrived?	
3	Ken	Well...I al-...I had wanted to hug the baby for the longest time,	
4		But (.) I...I din quite know how to hold him properly.	
5		C-cos you know,	
			(0.5)
6		Cos as a guy,	
7		W-we don't have much experience with such stuff (.)	
8		But I think I am getting better at it.	
9		Dear? Hor?	((Turns to Ling))
10	Ling	hhh. Yah. He is <u>much</u> better now compared to last time	
11		Last time whenever he carries the baby I will be like	
12		EI WATCH HIS NECK... HIS NECK↑	
13	Yoke	°hh°	
14	Ling	But now I have learnt to trust him more,	
15		I will let him help me carry the baby <u>all</u> the way ↑	

In lines 3 and 4, Ken expresses his desire to hold the baby but highlights his lack of competence in executing the desired action. He shifts out of the narrative frame to occupy a position more salient within the interactional context through the use of “you know” (line 5). Ken also employs the use of the collective pronoun “we” (line 7) which in this extract will refer to an alignment between himself and other guys in general, but because of my presence within the interview may also be suggested to refer to me as well. Also, within this sequence, membership categorisation (Sacks, 1972, 1992) is used which allows for generalisations to be made relevant by the narrator. Ken makes the male gender relevant and creates specific gender(ed) alignments between the narrator, the interviewer and also the

larger social group (i.e., the category of “guy” evoked in line 6). Through shifting out of the narrative frame where he narrates his lack of competence in handling the child and into the interactional frame, my position as a *male* interviewer can be suggested to be sequentially engaged, associated and positioned by Ken in alignment with his position (lines 5 – 7). Further, he also evokes the generalised social group of “guys” within the interaction to support his generalisation that typically, males (including himself and myself) are inexperienced in handling their new-born (line 5: “you know”, line 6: “as a guy” and line 7: “we”). He accomplishes this alignment between himself, myself and the general social category of men through making connections between his self in the story world, his self in the interactional context (to the interviewer) and his self as located in the sociocultural context (to me as male and to the larger gender category of men).

In addition, within the data again, there are deictic shifts seen here in the shift in verb tense (contrast *din/didn't* in line 4 and *don't* in line 7), as well as a shift in his role as protagonist characterised by the use of mainly 1st person personal pronouns “I” (lines 3 and 4) to his role within the interactional context through the use of the discourse marker “you know” (line 5) which indexes a shift of frames from the distal (story world) to the proximal (interactional context) (Wortham, 1994). The manipulation of the temporality element in narrative allows for the positioning of self as emergent from an incompetent past self to a present self that is getting better (line 8). This is also accomplished in part by Ken occupying the interactional role of self-assessor. The juxtaposition of the present continuous tense “am getting” and the use of an adjective that indexes progress in “better” (line 8) again mark an indefinite time-frame as observed in the earlier dataset (Table 2).

Ken then assumes the role of elicitor and sets Ling up to verify his progress by explicitly addressing Ling through a term of endearment “dear” (line 9), thereby making salient their close relationship, positioning her as co-narrator as well as setting up an assessor-assessed role pair. Ling confirms Ken’s self-assessment and introduces a narrative of her own (which parallels the one Ken produces). Within her narrative, Ken is placed in the role of protagonist while she positions herself as an assessor who was previously dissatisfied with how her husband was handling the baby. She then occupies positions within laminated frames of the story world and the interactional context to execute a self-assessment: “But now I have learnt to trust him more” (line 13). Through the use of the parallel narrative, she projects herself as developing into a better parenting partner concurrently with her husband. While her husband is growing better at handling the child, she has “learnt to trust him more” (line 14) and is more assured of her husband’s handling of the baby¹³. Similar to Ken, Ling employs the use of deictic shifts of temporality (i.e., last-time vs. now). In addition, she uses the contrastive conjunction “but” (line 14) to depict her stance of initial panic and worry “last-time” (Line 10) as different to the current one which is more trusting “now” (line 14). This allows her to execute that parallel performance of transformation.

However, in spite of the transformation, she still positions herself as the one bestowing the rights to handle the baby to Ken when she says “I will let him help me” (line 15).

¹³ It raises an interesting question as to whether Ken has indeed become better at handling the child or whether it is a matter of Ling who has learnt to be more trusting in the way he handles the child and thereby evaluating his handling of the child positively. However, the point remains that Ling is the one set up by Ken to validate and/or confirm his ability to handle the child within this interaction.

3.4 Analysis of Narrative Interview (4)

Table 4 Collaborative Interview between Fiona, Yoke and Paul			
(Same question as Table 3 above: How would you guys assess your ability to handle the child when she first arrived?)			
Line	Speaker	Utterance	Observations
1	Fiona	In terms of physically handling the baby,	
2		as the <u>mother</u> ,	
3		I am of course much better at handling the child <u>la</u> .	
4		But in terms of dealing with the baby chores	
5		like preparing the milk feed,	
6		changing diapers,	
7		bathing Karyn,	
8		I would say Paul is as good as I am at handling these things.	
9	Yoke	Mm. Okok (.)	
10	Paul	EI↑actually I'm also quite good at handling the baby ok?	
11		Just that most of the time,	
12		She gets too anxious (.)	
13		Like there was one time,	
14		I put Karyn on my shoulders	
15		and swung her round	
16		and round hh	
17		she was like going WH:EE↑	
18		But her mother was like	
19		STOP STOP↑	
20		WHAT are you DOING?	
21		she may get HURT↑	
22		And I was thinking(.)	
23		She so <u>small</u> size,	
24		How to fall off? (1.0)	
25		I mean you see for yourself	
26		How to fall off?	((Pats shoulders))
27	Yoke	hhhh	
28	Fiona	YAH <u>la</u> ↑	
29		See what I mean?	
30		As guys ah	
31		You all are used to playing rough	
32		And think like as long as she don't fall it's O::K	
33		But she still so <u>small</u> ,	
34		Her bones are still developing,	
35		Playing so rough may injure her,	
36		And you may not even know it.	
37	Paul	Yah lah↓ my wife is more sensitive than I am in these things	
38	Yoke	Mm(h)mm.	

In response to the same question, Fiona assumes the role of evaluator and makes a self-assessment as well as an assessment of her husband (line 8) by responding to my elicitation without necessarily transiting into a narrative at this point to do so. However, she makes relevant the membership category of “mother” (line 2)

and draws an association between that category to herself and to the physicality of child-caring. This is in part accomplished by her use of structure where the clauses in lines 1 – 3 are linked by the use of "In terms of X, as the Y, I am Z". She evaluates herself as being "much better" and her stance that this is a commonly accepted view is indexed by her use of the evaluative term "of course" (Line 3: said with intonation stress). In other words, through the use of sequential placement and membership categorisation, she can be re-worded as saying, "I am much better at physically handling the child, just like all mothers ought to be". In the subsequent lines, she evaluates Paul to be as good as her in handling the baby-related chores. Earlier, by locating herself within the category of "mother", she makes salient the SRP "father". Thus, when she evaluates herself to be better in physical child-caring as the mother but Paul is as good as she is in handling the chores, she evokes the SRP "father" and makes salient that gendered comparison (i.e., I am better than Paul in physically handling the baby, just like mothers are better than fathers). Fiona thus draws from the sociocultural context to position herself (and Paul by association) in alignment with the general social group of mothers (and social group of fathers).

After my use of acknowledgement tokens in the subsequent turn, Paul takes the next turn to defend himself and challenges her assessment of him by retorting with the discourse marker "EI¹⁴" (said with raising intonation) and placing his assessment as a correction of what Fiona has said through the use of "actually"(line 10) and executing a positive self-evaluation. He then sets out to attribute Fiona's negative assessment of his handling of the child as due to her being "too anxious" (line 12) and uses narration to perform his competence at handling the child by ventriloquating

¹⁴The equivalence would be the use of "HEY" said with rising intonation as a response to a problematic assessment.

baby Karyn exclaiming “WH::EE” and indexing her stance of enjoyment and excitement to justify that he is adept at physically handling the child. He also ventriloquates Fiona intervening with “STOP STOP[▲]/WHAT are you DOING?” using increase in volume, imperatives and an interrogative to substantiate his evaluation of her as “too anxious”. In this way, Paul is able to exploit his positions both within the interactional context as well as the story world to “double voice¹⁵” (Bakhtin, 1981) – portraying a character’s reaction within the story world while at the same time, indexing his current evaluation towards the character and attempting to align me to his evaluation within the interactional context. Notice here that Paul utilises the membership categorical title “mother” (line 18) to refer to Fiona rather than her name. In doing so, Paul positions Fiona and her supposed exclamation as a socially recognisable voice (of mothers) within the sociocultural context. Paul associates his voicing of Fiona’s exclamation to how a mother would typically react. Through evoking the voice of “a common mother”, Paul can also be said to be “triple voicing” by simultaneously evoking a generic mother’s voice, Fiona’s voice and his own. In this way, he draws association between Fiona being overly anxious to how mothers typically are. Using this, Paul is then able to set up a contrast in the next few lines where he proceeds to index a stance of rationality by describing how he had thought through the implications of his actions (lines 23 – 24). Through strategically positioning himself and his wife using voicing, Paul projects himself as rational while his wife (like other women) is too anxious and therefore justifying his claim of competence as more believable.

¹⁵ Bakhtin (1981) speaks of “double voiced discourse” where different intentions are expressed – “the direct intention of the character that is speaking and the refracted intention of the speaker” (324). While doing this, speakers may also evoke associations and speak from a position within a social group. In this study, I expand on this by showing how this can be done within narratives when speakers utilize their positions within the different frames of the story world, interactional context and the sociocultural context.

Paul then transits out of the story world to engage the interviewer (i.e., me) directly through the use of the direct second person address “you” (line 25) and positioning me as an evaluator in order to validate his position within the story world. In doing this, he is also seeking for my alignment to his point of view and validation for his claim from a “third party’s” perspective which would arguable give his claim more credibility than if he attempts to do this via self assertion. Here, in my position as an interviewer, I was aware of the positioning that was set up and I attempted to resist assuming the roles of the evaluator and validator that he sets up for me by laughing and not explicitly committing to an answer in response to his question (line 27). However, it can be argued that this laughter indexes positive alignment for the participants and this is how Fiona interpreted it as seen in her uptake when she says, “YAH la/ See what I mean,/ As guys ah,/ You all are used to playing rough” (lines 28 – 31)¹⁶.

Fiona takes the subsequent turn within the interactional context to position Paul’s behaviour within the narrative as supporting what she has been asserting all along – that is, mothers are better at physically handling the child through the use of the rhetorical question “see what I mean?”(line 29). She then positions Paul and myself as belonging to the membership category of men through the use of “guys” (line 30), the generalised plural pronoun “you all” (line 31) and then, attaching an attribute “used to playing rough” to this category through the attributive verb “are”. At the same time, through invoking the male gender group from the sociocultural context, making salient my gender within the interactional context and reframing

¹⁶ Nonetheless, as the interviewer, I had decided not to explicitly agree or disagree and I had laughed because I had found his enactment amusing. However, Fiona’s (the co-narrator) stance in the subsequent turn indicates that my laughter was taken to be an alignment to what Paul was saying. Her uptake thus ‘resigned’ my own stance to be an alignment to Paul. This illustrates how my role as an interviewer and my gender can be made salient within the conversation without me consciously intending this alignment.

Paul's behaviour within the narrative as supporting her point of view, she attempts to naturalise the link between gender (line 30: "guys") and behaviour (line 31: "playing rough"). Subsequently, in lines 33 – 36, she links "guys" and their "rough play" to their being less sensitive to the delicate nature of the child by pointing out that the child may be prone to injuries that can remain undetected due to their rough play (lines 31 – 32). Through pointing this out, she positions herself as more aware and sensitive to the child in relation to her categorical reference of guys.

Towards the end of the exchange, it can be suggested that Paul employs strategic use of double voicing to index a potentially ambiguous stance – he can be seen to be taking on a supportive stance towards Fiona by accepting her point of view (line 37: "Yah lah↓") and at the same time, invoking the relevance of another membership category "wife" (line 41) instead of the use of a pronoun or her name. By making salient Fiona's role as his wife, he asserts their identity as a couple¹⁷ and reinstates that position which might have been potentially threatened by their tussle over their respective role claims. In the face of an interviewer who can be seen as an "outsider", the use of the categorical term "wife" might be to index their togetherness to the interviewer and can be regarded as an attempt to perform solidarity as a couple to an "observer" in light of their negative appraisals of each other. The change of his viewpoint at the end of the exchange can thus be interpreted as him "backing-down" to avoid a potentially long drawn argument between the two of them.

However, he can also be using double voicing to achieve that while simultaneously indexing his critical stance implicitly. I argue that this is possible

¹⁷ An alternative interpretation is that the use of the categorical reference "wife" instead of establishing a "couple identity" might be used to index more specific forms of hierarchical "role obligations". However, I did not note any stress or change in intonation to increase the emphasis on the reference term "wife" and thus, I find the alternative interpretation of the function of the term "wife" as a way of stressing on the obligation of a wife (e.g., to be subservient to the husband) to be less likely than a presentation of their togetherness.

because the use of the term “more sensitive” can be said to have "inter-textual undertones" to his previous evaluation of her as “too anxious” (line 12). Thus double voicing allows Paul to “voice” himself as agreeing with Fiona in order to re-establish solidarity and the same time may be operating to reinforce his previous point that Fiona is “too anxious”.

In addition, Paul’s reference to his “wife” as “more sensitive” to her, implicitly invokes the SRP “husband” and the relevant attribute “less sensitive” (i.e., within the relationship, as a wife, she is more sensitive while as a husband, I am less sensitive). This is contrary to findings about gendered differences in talk where women are less confrontational compared to men and tend to assume a lower position by backing down on their assertion or by apologising. Rather, within the relevant situation, a man can also project himself as willing to back down and agree that her claims are right in order to avoid a potentially long drawn argument between them. I suggest that perhaps this is made more possible because of the availability of double voicing to index more than one stance so that the social actor can project agreement to achieve an interactional aim while still holding on to his or her own point of view.

3.5 Analysis of Narrative Interview (5)

Table 5 Collaborative interview between Carol, Ray and Yoke.			
(Same question as Table 3 and 4: How would you guys assess your ability to handle the child when she first arrived?)			
Line	Speaker	Utterance	Observations
1	Carol	Ray is very special.	
2		He is a very hands-on kind of dad.	
3	Ray	=hhh. I can tell the difference between whether Karen is having <u>wet</u> poo or <u>hard</u> poo just by sniffing!	
4	All	HHHHH	((Loud laughter)) (2.0)
5	Yoke	So ↓share with me how your first experience of changing diapers went	
6	Ray	hhh.	
7		I attended those- I don't know...is it ante- err-post-natal classes?	((Looks to Carol))
8	Carol	mm	((nods))
9	Ray	Yah. And over there, they teach you how to change the diapers,	
10		And you know,	

Table 5: (Continued)

11		And how to tell when the baby is going to poo,	
12		And what to pack in the diaper bag when you go out,	
13	Yoke	Ohh↑okay okay.	((nods))
14	Ray	Yah. But what they don't teach you is why the baby cries so much	
15		What the different kinds of cries are,	
16		I still can't tell the difference(.)	
17		But Carol does.	
18		Think it's the maternal instincts.	
19	Carol	=Mmm	((confirmation))
20	Ray	But I know what the different kinds of poo are ↑	
21		Hhh. There was that one time when Karen was sitting there	
22		And there was that look on her face	
23		Like THIS	((Contorts face for depiction))
24		Then before I knew it	
25		I smelled something	
26		And I was like	
27		SHIT↑it's the <u>worst</u> poo	
28		You know how those can create a <u>mess</u>	
29		So I rushed to her,	
30		Lifted her up,	
31		And quickly helped her change out of the diaper.	
32		And HEY I was RIGHT	
33	Carol	=cept he isn't around to change them all that much! Hhhh.	
34	Ray and Yoke	HHHH.	

In Table 5, Carol introduces Ray as the protagonist and explicitly evaluates Ray as different from the typical father by describing Ray as “very special” (line 1) and a “very hands-on kind of dad” (line 2). In doing so, she creates a position for Ray which is distinct from his membership category (line 2: “dad”) but by implication, she also simultaneously makes salient the category of “dad” and associates it with being typically not “hands-on”.

Ray accepts his role as protagonist in the next turn and demonstrates his involvement by giving explicit details about diaper changing and indexing his competence as well as close relationship with Karen by being able to not only handle the task but being able to tell the difference between her “poo” (line 3). In addition, he

demonstrates willingness to attend antenatal classes (line 7). Yet, by his next turn, Ray positions Carol as the expert in child-caring when he meets with some difficulty in naming the child-caring course that he had attended.

The question-answer sequence (lines 7 – 8) positions Carol as a validator whom Ray looks to for confirmation. This interactional role is taken up by Carol who verifies this with an agreement marker (line 8: “mm”) and nods. I suggest that this tendency to look to Carol for confirmation could be due to his association that a term rather specific to childcare would be known by the mother. In addition, Ray frames Carol as belonging in an exclusive domain that is accessible only by mothers by narrating how Carol is attuned to the cries of Karen (line 17) and attributing this ability to “maternal instincts” (line 18). It is noteworthy that although Ray does not make explicit mention to any particular membership category, his use of the definite determiner “the” rather than the pronoun “her” with “maternal instinct” suggests that he is making reference not just to Carol’s maternal instinct but more generally to the maternal instinct that mothers have. In relation to that, by portraying himself as helpless in this situation, he also simultaneously implies that in general, men would not be able to tell the difference like mothers can, thus setting up a relational asymmetry in competence.

At the end of Ray’s narration, he attempts to articulate his competence at changing diapers but this encounters a negative evaluation by Carol (line 33) who uses her position as co-interviewer to take a turn within the interactional context to explicitly make the distinction between his involvement in the story world and his actual daily involvement. However, the comment is quickly accompanied by laughter which mediates the negative effect of the evaluation. A direct negative evaluation

would threaten the positive face needs (Brown and Levinson, 1987) of Ray and directly affect their portrayal of themselves as a family unit in front of an interviewer.

By constituting the negative evaluation as a jibe through laughter, an ambiguous space is created where multiple interpretations of the speaker's intentions are possible. This is evident here with the laughter serving as post-completion stance marker (Schegloff, 1996) where Ray portrays that no offence is taken by laughing along with me at Carol's remark (line 34). By pointing out that his involvement in diaper changing is more occasional than frequent, Carol downplays her husband's involvement and emphasizes her role in care-giving with respect to his, without overtly confronting and contesting for narrative turns to do so or resorting to explicit positive evaluation of self.

3.6 Analysis of Narrative Interview (6)

Line	Speaker	Utterance	Observations
1	Yoke	Can you share about any particular arrangement between the two of you that you did not particularly like?	
2	Gena	Oka:y(.)	
3		I'm usually the one that picks James up from the childcare.	
4		Even though I come home later than Shaun.	
5		Cos this particular childcare,	
6		hh.	
7		I don't know WHY ↑	
8		Is filled with <u>mothers</u> .	
9		Mothers picking up their children after work.	
10		Of course at the start,	
11		We din know.	
12		So Shaun was the one that would go and pick James up	
13		But one day ↑	
14		He came back and told me he was the <u>only</u> man there picking his son up ↑	

Table 6: (Continued)

Line	Speaker	Utterance	Observations
15	Yoke	hh	
16		O:kay ↓	
17	Gena	YAH ↑	
18		I mean can <u>you imagine</u> those STARES from the other moms?	
19	Yoke	hh.	
20		Oh goodness;	
21	Gena	Like they must be like,	
22		How come the <u>mom</u> isn't the one who comes from home to pick up the son?	
23		And the father has to do it?	
			(0.5)
24		I felt so bad for him	
25		I mean HOW can any wife bear to put her husband through THAT ↑right? Hhhh	
26		hh	
27		So I volunteered to pick James up after work.	
28		Even though most days I come home later than Shaun	

In Table 6, I attempted to elicit a narrative from Gena about any particular arrangement between the two of them that she didn't like. In doing so, I set Gena up to potentially assume the role of problematiser.

She makes salient her position within both the story world and the interactional context where she talks about her routine of picking James up from childcare. Her position within the two frames allows her to describe her routine and her encounters while at the same time indexing her stance towards these situations. For example, she questions what she had observed (line 7) – that the childcare was full of mothers picking up their children after work (lines 8 and 9). In doing so, she indexes a disapproving stance towards what she has observed.

Gena also makes relevant several membership categories pertaining to gender – “mothers” (lines 8 and 9) and its equivalent “mom(s)” (lines 18 and 22) as well as

its SRP “father” (line 23); “man” (line 14); “son” (line 22); “wife” (line 25) and its SRP, “husband” (line 25). Through the use of hypothetical scenarios¹⁸ (line 17: “can you imagine” and line 20: “Like they must be like”) that depict her husband’s involvement in a mother-dominated setting as disruptive and potentially transgressive, Gena effectively creates gendered spaces within her discourse. She is able to do this by drawing from resources within the sociocultural context through invoking the generic group of mothers and attributing a negative reaction (line 18: “STARES”) which she deems to be typical of mothers if they saw a father intruding into their space. In addition, she ventriloquates other moms commenting, “How come the mom isn’t the one who comes from home to pick up the son? And the father has to do it?” (lines 22 and 23). In other words, Gena sets up a general group of mothers as problematisers by presenting them within hypothetical scenarios. Through drawing from her sociocultural knowledge, she attributes to them reactions that mothers would typically have within the particular situation.

It is hard to determine Gena’s purpose of setting up stereotypical reactions of other moms. One can suggest that double voicing offers a way for her to convey an opinion without necessarily committing her personal stance to it. In this way, through ventriloquating other mothers, Gena may be hiding behind other people’s opinion (the social voice) in order to justify her decision. In this case, Gena is the one that problematises Shaun’s child-caring involvement but does so by attributing it to other moms.

¹⁸ Being uncertain whether these were actual accounts that Gena had cited from Shaun or based on general impressions of mothers, I asked Gena post-interview whether Shaun had explicitly discussed his encounter with the other moms and Gena had replied that Shaun had told her “he felt awkward being the only man waiting at the childcare but had otherwise, no direct encounters with the other moms”.

This is puzzling if we consider that Gena has indexed stances that are disaligned towards the stereotypical beliefs of mothering responsibilities. For example, although Gena says she “volunteered” (line 27) to pick James up, she does this not quite as willingly as she would admit through adding two qualifiers (lines 4 and 28: “even though”) and indexing that she is aware that in purely pragmatic terms, Shaun should pick James up since he gets off work earlier. Also, her questioning (line 7: “I don’t know WHY↑”) of the phenomenon of mothers being the dominant group picking their children up after work indexes a disapproving stance.

I suggest that Gena engages both seemingly contradictory positions so that she is able to portray herself as someone who does not embrace traditional notions of mothering blindly but that social forces and structured gendered practices binds both Shaun and herself to their social roles as they are judged according to their role obligations. The use of hypothetical scenarios becomes a resource for Gena to claim herself as an unwilling victim of social judgment who is obliged to accept her parental obligations.

By ventriloquizing the “other moms”, Gena is able to accomplish several identity positioning simultaneously – firstly, she is able to make an evaluation of the mothers and use it to illustrate how their dominant voices limit her ability to make a decision based strictly on rational distribution of responsibilities. Secondly, she is able to project herself as a victim – someone who is aware of alternative arrangements but succumbs to the status quo due to constraints. Thirdly, it can also be suggested that she is able to position Shaun to be subjected to the social role obligations as well which viewed in light of my question (about an arrangement she did not like) helps to absolve Shaun of responsibility or blame for the arrangement. In this way, she

balances up the two forces that are operating which draw from two different discourses – the discourse of egalitarianism and also the discourse of traditional role distribution. By invoking the voices of “other moms”, she is able to position herself in part as someone who is aware of equal distribution and at the same time, someone who had to comply to the traditional role distribution.

3.7 Analysis of Narrative Interview (7)

Table 7 Solo Interview between Shaun and Yoke.			
Line	Speaker	Utterance	Observations
1	Yoke	What have you found to be the most challenging thing for you in your role as a parent?	
2	Shaun	Finances is <u>always</u> a challenge.	
3		I mean I was born in quite a poor family,	
4		We didn't have much↓	
5		In the end, I had to drop out of school early↑	
6		And find work↑	
7		ever since I was 14.	
8		THANK GOD↓ All the hard work has paid off.	
9		And now (.)	
10		I have enough to support my own family.	
11		So I know how <u>important</u> it is to be able to provide the child with <u>the best</u> ↓	
12		Especially now that Gena is not working full-time.	
13		All the MORE there is pressure to work harder,	
14		With three mouths to feed.	
			(1.0)
15		Nowadays there is no↓ such thing↑ as job security.	
16		So it's good at your age now to start saving.	
17	Yoke	=hhhh	
18		O:kay ↑	
19		Yah(.) I am trying to.	
20	Shaun	So you have a girlfriend?	
21	Yoke	hhh. ERRR... ya(h)h	
			(0.7)
22		But it's still early days— ((to be thinking of getting married)).	
23	Shaun	Yah. Wait till you build up your career first.	
24		You will <u>know</u> what I'm talking about when <u>you</u> become a father yourself la.	

Within this solo interview reflected in Table 7, I attempted to elicit a narrative from Shaun about a challenging event for him. Although I make explicit reference to the category of “parent”, I was careful not to evoke the notion of fatherhood unless he chooses to do so himself.

He begins his turn by identifying the challenge he has which is “finances” (line 2). He then transits into the story world as marked by the temporal shifts indicated by the use of past tense (line 3: “was”). He then uses the narrative to elaborate upon his opinion that finances have always been a problem (line 2). He assumes the role of the protagonist and draws from the experiences of his past family experiences and his experiences with poverty. He then transits from being within the story world to holding salient both frames within the interactional context and the story world by talking about his own current family situation. By transiting to talking about his present family situation, he is still narrating an event in his life but simultaneously indicating what he currently perceives of it within the interaction. The two family situations can be seen as parallels where his experience as a child who was poor and had to drop out of school early gives him the rationale to prevent his own child from suffering the same fate that he had as a child. The two scenarios are linked by his presentation of his current epistemic stance (line 11: “I know”) and can be seen in his use of the coordinating conjunction “So” (line 11). His story world experiences thus can be argued to be used for justifying his own role as a provider (line 11: “So I know how important it is to be able to provide the child with the best” and lines 11 – 13). By bringing up the category “child”, he is able to define his role of provider as linked relationally to the child. He provides further justification for his provider role by pointing out that Gena does not work full-time and also makes salient the sociocultural context through his generalized assertion of the current socio-economic

state of affairs through “Nowadays there is no such thing as job security” (line 15). The pressure to “work harder” (line 13) is tied to the dependence of the child and mother as well as a result of the instability of the socioeconomic situation of Singapore.

Then, after using the narrative of his childhood family situation and his current family situation to justify his position as provider, he switches to making explicit reference to the interviewer (line 15: “your age”), thus explicitly indicating a shifting of frame to the interactional context. An aspect of my biography is made salient as part of his performance. He uses this as well as the epistemic stance he has previously justified to position himself so that he gives advice to the interviewer and takes on an interactional position akin to “a father teaching a child (or teaching a potential father)”. By constructing himself as having experienced hardship early in life and as knowing the significance of his role as provider to his family, he positions himself to be in the capacity to mete out advice on the virtue of saving. In addition to this, Shaun actually performs a subversion of roles by executing a role shift and setting himself up as the interviewer. He positions me within a question-answer sequence and assumes that my decision not to get married yet was linked to the role of the provider and my inability to fulfil that role at that point (as a student).

It must be noted that this is an assumption of the part of the Shaun because when I said it was early days, I had meant that I was still too young to think about settling down but he was able to interrupt me by first agreeing with me (line 23: “Yah”) and then subsequently projecting his own assumption onto me – that is, that I am (or should be) concerned about career issues. He then positions himself as being an authority in fathering in this exchange by making salient the member category “father” (line 24) that I am not a part of, thus disassociating with me and assuming

the stance of an experienced and wise father who has been through the hardship of working and supporting the family. At the same time, he continues to create strong associations between the role of the father and career (line 23) through invoking the membership categorization.

3.8 Analysis of Narrative Interview (8)

Line	Speaker	Utterance	Observations
1	Yoke	I mean does it get tough on you guys to balance up work and family commitments?	
2	Fiona	hhhh. I definitely THINK it's tough	
3		But definitely <u>not</u> impossible.	
4	Yoke	Mmm.	
5	Fiona	I think it boils down to learning <u>how</u> to balance between family and work.	
6		A woman these days can have BOTH	
7		And to handle them both <u>well</u>	
8		I mean I only made sure I went back to work	
9		When my <u>mom</u> was able to help us take care of the baby when we are at work	
10		<u>Of course</u> it's not the same as when I am at home	
11		But I make (sure) I <u>rush off</u> from work at about 5	
12		So [↑] I still have time to bathe and read to Karyn before Paul comes home,	
13		And we take our dinner.	
14	Paul	Yah we do dinner at about { eight?	((Turns to Fiona))
15	Fiona	} Eight. Yah.	
16	Paul	Yah.	
17	Fiona	=yah. Followed by some sing-along on TV that Karyn loves,	
18		And then we will both tuck Karyn into bed by about 10,	
19		And Paul will sleep in the room with her,	
20		While I tidy up the house and the work from the office.	
21		And prepare the milk for next morning.	
22	Yoke	Mmm.	
23	Paul	Or like... like if I am ((home)) early,	
24		I come back I will play with her	

Table 8: (Continued)

25		Then sometimes at <u>night</u> I will take Karyn out for a <u>walk</u> ,	
26		If I'm not too busy that day	
27		Or when I don't have to work like in the weekend,	
28		I will bring her out to swim	
29	Yoke	Ok.	
30	Fiona	Yah we are quite fortunate though	
31		Like even though my mom spends quite a bit of time with her,	
32		She is closer to us.	
33		Whenever we want to carry her	
34		She prefers us over my mom	
35		She will look for us.	
36	Paul	That's the AMA:ZING thing la.	
37		Remember the lift incident?	
			(0.5)
38		There was this little boy that,	
39		The mother was carrying him,	
40		But he keeps <u>leaning</u> towards the maid	
41		And I thought like	
42		Wah lau better <u>don't</u> la	
43		Cos I don't want that to happen.	
44		So if I can help it,	
45		I want to make sure I can bring in enough ((money))	
46		So that the Fiona gets to spend more time at home	
47		And not feel obligated to go and work	
48	Fiona	°hh° Ya la (.)	
49		Although I go to work not because I HA:VE to but because I <u>want</u> to maintain my contact with my colleagues and the outside world hhh	
			(0.5)
50		But true la... usually if the mother works the whole day,	
51		then you may be faced with that kind of problem	
52	Paul	Yah (.)	
53	Fiona	Like if the child has extended time with the maid alone	
54		It's inevitable that the child will bond with whoever the caregiver is.	
55		That's why I try to make sure I don't work weekends.	
56		So I can spend more time bonding with Karyn when Paul is at work	

I began this exchange in Table 8 by attempting to elicit incidents where involvement in both work and family has been a struggle. Thus, the "readily-available" position in this instance would be that of a victim. Either parent could have

easily assumed this position to relate narratives where they faced adversity (and possibly triumph over them).

However, both Fiona and Paul do not take their narrative along this direction. Instead, Fiona assumes the role of the protagonist but also takes the opportunity to do a positive self-assessment of her ability to juggle obligations within both the domestic and working spheres. Fiona identifies herself as a contemporary woman through the invocation of the membership category “a woman these days” (line 6) and associating it with the ability to balance between family and work and “to handle them both well” (line 7). Her confident and self-assured stance is indicated by volume-raising (line 6: “a woman these days can have BOTH”) and emphasis (line 3: “not impossible” and line 7: “handle them both well”). She then launches into a narrative where she “lists” her involvement (lines 12, 17, 18, 20 – 21: bathe, read, sing-along, tuck Karyn into bed, tidy up the home, tidy up work in the office and prepare milk for next morning) in the home in spite of her commitment to work.

Paul makes a short entry into the narrative at line 14 through attempting to elaborate on Fiona’s point about their family dinner-time. He initially begins the line by agreeing with Fiona. However, he then pauses mid-sentence and reformulates his statement into a question posed to Fiona for confirmation, thereby setting Fiona up as the validator to confirm the exact timing they have their family dinner. Fiona confirms the timing through producing an overlap with Paul’s question (line 15) and resumes her turn at sharing her narrative about balancing work and family (line 17).

In lines 23 – 28, Paul then begins his turn at narrating his involvement with the child. If we compare the way Paul and Fiona narrate their involvement with the child, an interesting observation arises. While Fiona structures her narration of child-caring

involvement using a series of coordinating conjunctions to link the activities – e.g. lines 17 – 21: “Followed by..., And..., And..., While..., And...”, Paul’s narration is headed by many conditionals and qualifiers. For example, line 23: “if I am ((home)) early”; line 25: “Then sometimes at night...”; line 26: “If I’m not too busy”; line 27: “Or when I don’t have to work...”. This difference can be suggested to be linked to the nature of the activities they are involved in. While Fiona seems to be describing routines that she is involved in on a daily basis, Paul seems to be describing particular activities that he participates with Karyn when the opportunity arises outside of work.

Fiona then evaluates both of them as “quite fortunate” (line 30) that Karyn remains close to them in spite of their involvement with work. At this point, Paul launches into a new narrative which does not involve either of them and attempts an alignment strategy with Fiona by presupposing that what he is about to relate was also similarly witnessed by her (line 37: “Remember the lift incident?”). Within the narrative, he makes salient the category of “mother” (line 39) as he describes a boy who wants the maid to carry him when he was carried by the mother. This story allows him to convey his authoritative stance “Cos I don’t want that to happen” (line 43) but he assumes that his proposed solution to the problem is one that benefits both Fiona and himself. He proposes working harder to make sure he can bring in enough money so that Fiona gets to spend more time at home and not feel obliged to work. This becomes problematic for Fiona who executes a repair – “I go to work not because I HA::VE to but because I want to maintain my contact with my colleagues and the outside world” (line 49).

However, Fiona then focuses back on the centrality of her primary role as a caregiver by employing the membership category of mother and problematising a

scenario where the mother is at work all day – “if the mother works the whole day, then you may be faced with that kind of problem” (lines 50 – 51). Also, by reconstituting her work as an individual pursuit (i.e., to keep in touch with colleague and society (lines 49) and not obligatory (line 49: “...not because I HAVE to but because I want to...”), she suggests that her work is not essential to the family. In this way, Fiona can be said to be making salient her identity as a contemporary woman who can perform well in both family and work spheres. However, her tendency to maintain her centrality of her commitment to the home necessarily means that while her involvement in child-caring is essential, her work commitment is relatively less so. Thus, while she is involved and aspires to perform well in both spheres, the domestic sphere is constructed by both Paul and herself as more obligatory than the work sphere for her role as a mother.

3.9 Conclusion to Chapter 3

As shown through the analysis, parental identities are dynamic and contingent upon the interactions as they unfold. In particular, identity performances of these speakers are complex because they operate at various levels. A speaker can index a variety of stances, occupy a variety of interactional roles within the story, interview and sociocultural frames as well as position themselves and other speakers through role categorization and voicing. In the next chapter, I explore the larger implications of these micro-level interactions for our understanding of macro-level structural discourses and social relations.

Chapter 4

Connecting to Macro-level structural relations and discourses

After examining the discursive resources that speakers utilize for their first-time parental identity performances, I now explore the connections between the micro-level interactions and larger structural identity categories and relations. The link between the two can be said to be due in part to language having an indexical function (Ochs, 1992; Silverstein 1976; 1985); because of this, language is viewed as “a primary vehicle by which cultural ideologies circulate...a central site of social practice, and...a crucial means for producing sociocultural identities” (Bucholtz and Hall, 2004:492). Within narratives, narrators are not only representing actions and events that have occurred but simultaneously, projecting a perspective through what they are saying. Through depiction of events and projection of stances, narrators both draw on and create conventionalized associations between social categories and attributes and/or practices to construct their own and others’ identities which may reproduce discourses but may also challenge them. In this chapter, I focus on how local and temporary subject positions assumed by narrators within narrative interaction can index macro structural categories and relations. To do so, I first organized the data thematically to identify the possible discourses that are operating within the data. Subsequently, I attempted to analyze how these are enacted within the micro-level narrative interactions.

For this study, I define discourses as statements that organize societal and/or cultural conceptualizations of meaning and knowledge often though not exclusively realized through language (Foucault, 1984; Pennycook, 1994). Although larger

sociocultural discourses can structure a subject's interpretation of reality, I agree with Gee (1999) that an individual can also bring certain subjectivities to a discursive act, thus assuming positions relative to these discourses. In other words, discourses may induce and/or constrain ways of interpreting reality but are open to negotiations by social actors. As Fairclough warns, the identification of discourses within texts is "obviously an interpretive exercise" (1999: 207). I am aware that there is a great deal of heterogeneity within the experiences of first-time parents and I do not assume that any generalizations based on the data I have collected would hold for other first-time parents. Therefore, the analysis here should be treated as highly context-specific and does not foreclose other possible interpretations. However, it would still be useful to point out the ways that narratives make certain enactments available and point out the possible implications that these micro-level interactions have for our understanding of macro-level sociocultural discourses and identity relations. As suggested by the micro-level analysis earlier, some useful ways of examining parental identity positioning is by analyzing their interactional roles, the stances that narrators assume, their use of voicings as well as their invocation of membership categories and their (dis)affiliation to these categories. How are these linked to the macro-level sociocultural discourses and parental identity relations?

I begin by first identifying the macro-level discourses that seem to be operating within the data. Following Menard-Warwick (2007), I created a tentative list of coding categories (e.g., work, childcaring, play, nursery) related to the content of the interview data and assigned the relevant thematic codes to each segment of the data. Where relevant, some extracts were assigned more than one thematic code. Then, I looked for trends within the themes I have identified. After reviewing the categories, four principal discourses were tentatively identified. I have labelled them as the

discourse of competence, the discourse of contemporary womanhood, the discourse of traditional gender roles and the discourse of the cohesive family unit. I will examine each in detail as well as examine the relationships between some of these discourses. For this section, I draw on the identity relations of adequation and distinction (Bucholtz and Hall, 2004; 2005) and integrate them into the discussion where relevant. As mentioned earlier, “adequation” is used to position groups and/or individuals as having “sufficient similarity” (Bucholtz and Hall 2004:495); by contrast, “distinction” is “any process that creates social boundaries between groups or individuals” (ibid).

4.1 The discourse of competence

Within the narrative interactions in this study, the discourse of competence is used as a basis for supporting the asymmetry of parental responsibility and child-caring distribution. Parents’ perception of their relative level of competence in child-caring is used to justify their level and nature of their involvement. A question one can then ask is: how is the discourse of competence and the related gendered asymmetry built up within micro-level interactions? I will examine this by focusing on the functions of interactional roles assumed by the parents.

Like Ochs and Taylor (1996), I noted that “narrative practices may instantiate gender-relevant narrator and family role identities of women and men as mother and father, wife and husband” (100). However, contrary to what Ochs and Taylor (1992, 1996) have observed within dinnertime narratives, where the role of the problematiser is often assumed by the husband, it is observed within the dataset that when a negative or less positive evaluation is made, it is usually the mother who does these through assuming the role of the primary assessor and problematiser in relation to the father. In addition, fathers generally look to mothers for validation when it comes to issues

related to child-caring. However, no negative evaluation is made on the mother's child-caring competence by the father within the data and hence, fathers never assume the role of problematiser when evaluating their spouses' child-caring competence. In fact, in the few occasions that fathers do assume the role of the assessor, they have given positive assessments to the mother's ability in handling the child relative to themselves. Thus, the different interactional roles assumed by either parent set up an asymmetrical interactional exchange where women are positioned (either by themselves or by their spouses) as the ones more likely to assess, problematise and/or validate their spouses' attempts at child-caring. I suggest that these positions tend to be occupied by mothers because they are positioned to be the "experts" in child-caring relative to fathers within interactions. I will not be examining the individual datasets and every interactional role assumed in detail again as I have already done so in the previous chapter. Rather, I focus on specific interactional roles that are assumed by the narrators that may induce parental role asymmetries. Examples 1 – 3 listed here are all segments that can be found in the previous chapter. Besides the main interactional roles that Ochs and Taylor (1996) have observed to be in operation in family dinnertime narratives (e.g., the introducer, the protagonist, primary recipient and the problematiser), I attempt to expand on their work by introducing some additional interactional roles I have found within the family narratives elicited in interviews. For example, interactional asymmetry is not just enacted via the problematisation of another's discourse but can also occur when one party nominates another to assess and/or validate the former's child-caring competence. Also, as noted in the earlier chapter, narrators can assume dual positions within the interactional role pair – for example, when a narrator problematises his or her own competence, the narrator can be said to be assuming both the roles of the problematiser and the

problematisee. I now turn to the examples within the data to examine these interactional roles.

Example 1: (Extract 7: lines 7 – 8)

Ray: I attended those-I don't know...is it ante-err-post-natal classes?
((Looks to Carol))
Carol: mm ((Nods))

In example 1, Ray is describing his experience in attending an antenatal class. He indexes an uncertain stance towards the specific terminology as noted in the dysfluency as well as the self-repair, “err-post-natal classes?” However, he addresses Carol and positions her as a validator through using the rising question intonation and as I have observed during the interview, by turning his head to look at her instead of looking forward to direct the question at me, although I was seated opposite the couple. This is salient because within the interview, both Carol and I are available participants to be posed this question. Although, Carol would be the seemingly unproblematic choice to confirm his doubts as she would probably have attended the classes with him, nonetheless, within this interaction sequence, his directing the confirmation at Carol sets her up as the validator and by subsequently responding with a confirmation token “mm” and nodding, she assumes this interactional role. This puts her in a position where she can confirm and thereby endorse what is said or potentially problematise his statement. I suggest that this is in part due to Ray's assumption that Carol would be more certain of these terminologies that are more specific to child-caring.

Example 2i: (Extract 3: line 8 – 10)

Ken: But I think I am getting better at it
Dear? Hor? ((Turns to Ling))
Ling: hhh. Yah. He is mu::ch better now compared to last time.

In 2i, Ken begins with a self-assessment of his own child-caring competence where he positions himself as “getting better at it”. He then nominates Ling as the validator of his childcaring competence through specifically indexing their close relationship with the term of affection “Dear” and the use of the confirmation particle “Hor?”¹⁹. This is similar to example 1 above except that besides simply validating what was said, Ling is also put in a position to give an assessment of his child-caring ability and which she evaluates positively to be “much better now compared to last time”.

Example 2ii: (Extract 4: lines 1 – 3)

Carol: In terms of physically handling the baby.
As the mother,
I am of course much better at handling the child la

Example 2iii: (Extract 7: lines 1 – 2)

Carol: Ray is very special
He is a very hands-on kind of dad

Example 2iv: (Extract 7: lines 16 – 19)

Ray: I still can't tell the difference
But Carol does.
Think it's the maternal instinct
Carol: =Mmm

The three examples above are taken from exchanges between Carol, Ray and myself. However, they show different interactional roles in operation. In 2ii, Carol does a self-assessment and evaluates herself to be “much better at handling the child la” while indexing a confident stance through the use of “of course”. She assumes the role of the assessor voluntarily in response to my elicitation (targeted at both parents) “How would you guys assess your ability to handle the child when she first arrived?”.

¹⁹ The English equivalent in the use of the “hor?” in this sentence would be the use of the confirmation particle or question tag, “right?”.

In 2iii, Carol does an "other-assessment" and positively appraises Ray for being "very special" and simultaneously defining the attribute that justifies such an assessment – "He is a very hands-on kind of dad". Example 2iv depicts an instance where Ray executes a negative self-assessment²⁰ about his inability to understand the cries of the child before switching to positively assess Carol to be better than he is in this aspect. She assumes the role of a validator by confirming Ray's positioning for her through her acknowledgement token "Mmm".

Example 3i: (Extract 3: lines 11 – 12)

Ling: Last time whenever he carries the baby I will be like
EI WATCH HIS NECK...HIS NECK↑

Example 3ii: (Extract 4: lines 18 – 21)

Paul: but her mother was like
STOP STOP
WHAT are you DOING?
She may get HURT↑

Example 3iii: (Extract 4: lines 30 – 31)

Fiona: As guys ah,
You all are used to playing rough ((cf. use of membership category))

Example 3iv: (Extract 7: lines 32 – 33)

Ray: and HEY I was RIGHT
Carol: =cept he isn't around to change them all that much! Hhhhh

Example 3v: (Extract 2: lines 39 – 41)

Dan: And I mean, at first, when I first held my son,
I was very nervous.
I also didn't know how to hold him.

Examples 3i – 3v are all instances where the problematiser-problematisee interactional role are enacted but have slight variations among them. 3i depicts Ling

²⁰ This can also be regarded as self-problematisation. But the point is clear that the father's self-evaluation is negative while he assesses her wife's child-caring competence positively.

narrating how she used to problematise Ken's attempt at carrying the baby. 3ii shows how Paul occupies both the position of the protagonist as well as the narrator and voices Fiona within his narrative to be problematising his attempts at having fun with Karyn as unsafe while in 3iii, Fiona maintains the problematiser position within the interaction and problematises both Paul, me (the interviewer) and men in general as "used to playing rough". This example also illustrates how problematisation occurs not only upon the protagonist but can be extended to include the interviewer and the co-narrator within the interaction context as well as the generic category of guys within the sociocultural context. Example 3iv is representative of the more conventional problematisation noted in Ochs and Taylor's study with Carol assuming the role of problematiser to problematise Ray's assertion as a protagonist²¹ while 3v demonstrates how Dan executes a self-problematisation of his ability to handle the child. Amidst the variety of ways that problematisation can be executed, it can be noted that within the data, there are no instances where the father problematises the mother's child-caring competence²².

These interactional roles have been argued to be tied to levels of access and tend to be occupied by certain social groups within specific interactions. For instance, within dinnertime narratives, Ochs and Taylor (1996) note that it is men who often assume the role of primary recipient and this makes available the position of the problematiser to them. They also argue that it is too simplistic to explain the link between primary recipient-becomes-problematiser as such and suggest that we should

²¹ There are of course differences in how this is done as well. For example, the problematisation is mediated through the use of laughter and the sequential placement of the problematisation close to the end of the exchange. I will discuss this in more detail later.

²² We can also extend this to say that for the role of self-problematisation, the only instance of a mother assuming that role was limited to Sheryl suggesting that she has too high expectations (to expect Dan to help her more) and this is not about her child-caring competence per se.

conceptualize the recipientship “as differing dispositions and perhaps entitlements to problematise, with men in privileged critical positions” (114). Within the data, as I have attempted to demonstrate, it is not only the role of the problematiser that is made available, but that assessments and validations, be it more negative or positive, can occur as well. This is tied to the interactional roles of validators and assessors that are typically occupied by women within the data. Also, I argue that these are *not* necessarily “privileged critical positions” because through these, parents can be said to be engaging in the discourse of competence which carry with it ramifications of greater expectation and greater responsibilities as a parent being placed on mothers who are projected as the authority in child-caring relative to fathers. Thus, the asymmetrical interactional roles are linked to the unequal distribution of child-caring responsibilities.

However, the question remains as to why greater child-caring competence is accorded to mothers relative to fathers. I suggest that one of the reasons could be due to the distinction between parental roles that are played up which allows for specific attributes to be associated with particular membership categories. For example, greater competence in child-caring is attributed to mothers relative to fathers based on physiology. Distinction helps to justify that there should be different levels of expectation in terms of child-caring from either parent as their child-caring competences are tied to physiological differences. Within the data, mothers’ supposed greater competence is linked to physiological distinctions as mothers have “maternal instincts” (Table 5: line 18) and need to “breastfeed the baby” (Table 2: line 56). In some instances, these physiological-based activities are expanded in scope within the interactions to “naturalize” mothers’ competencies in other child-caring activities as well.

For example, in Table 2, Dan first evokes the use of the membership category and creates a relationship of distinction between the evoked category and the standardized relational pair “husband” through the use of the line, “My wife on the other hand”(line 46). That this association is not limited to just Sheryl and Dan but also refers to mothers (or more specifically wives with children) as a generic category is made relevant explicitly through his use of the third person plural pronoun “them” (line 50). Then, by juxtaposing attributes and activities to the category, his “wife” is described as a “pro” (line 47) thereby evoking the discourse of competence; in addition, Sheryl is portrayed to cradle Jeff with ease because Sheryl, like all mothers, will find child-caring to be “second nature to them” (line 50). Thus, her superior ability to execute the act of cradling the baby is attributed to physiology. Dan can then be argued to be stating that he, “on the other hand” (line 46), cannot be expected to be as competent because he, as a father, has no "physiologically-based" child-caring competence. I argue that fathers can claim the learner position more easily while mothers may find it more difficult to do so because the physiological-based arguments "naturalise" child-caring as “second nature” to mothers. In addition, it is important to note that through linking the discourse of competence to physiology, fathers occupy a position where they will never be as "natural" as mothers in child-caring (i.e. having to learn implies that they may never be as good as someone who has the innate ability for child-caring).

Other examples also demonstrate how the discourse of competence is reflected in the connection between particular attributes and specific membership categories (e.g., mother, guys, wife). Within these data, adequation can be argued to be at play when speakers identify themselves by their sociocultural roles and distinction operates when contrasts between these roles are made (e.g., through the use of comparative

terms like “my wife on the other hand”, “my wife is more sensitive than I am”, “as the mother/I am much better at handling the baby”). More importantly, the juxtaposition of certain attributes with specific membership categories creates a naturalized association between the identity category and the attribute. In this case, the use of identity categories associated with gender for identifying self and others means that the discourse of competence is also a *gendered* discourse of competence. I have listed out some examples that show how attributes and gendered categories are used and linked to each other within the participants’ formulations (Diagram 2).

Diagram 2: Membership categories and associated attributes

Legend: ○ represents membership category

□ represents attribute

Extract 3: (lines 5-7) Ken: “C-cos you know/ cos a guy W-we don’t have much experience with such stuff (.)

Extract 4: (Lines 1-3) Fiona: “In terms of physically handling the baby/ as the mother I am of course much better at handling the child la.”

(Lines 30-31) Fiona: “As guys ah / You all are used to playing rough”

(Lines 18-21) Paul (double-voicing Fiona): “but her mother was like/ STOP STOP? WHAT are you DOING?/ She may get HURT”

(Lines 37) Paul: “Yah la, my wife is more sensitive than I am in these things”

Diagram 2 shows how participants orient to gender within interactions and in the process create and reinforce certain ideological beliefs about parents by their gender. This does not necessarily occur through explicitly juxtaposing certain

attributes to role categories. As noted in Extract 4 (lines 18 – 21), Paul does not explicitly make an association between a gender category and an attribute. Instead, he makes use of indexicality to attribute an anxious and authoritative stance to Fiona through voicing her within the narrative, thus presenting her as such.

4.2 The discourse of traditional gender roles

Another emergent discourse that narrators can be seen to engage in is the discourse of traditional gender roles. Within the data, I examine how speakers maintain the traditional role distribution with fathers still located predominantly within the working sphere while mothers are located as the primary caregivers and located within the domestic sphere.

In Table 7, Shaun responds to my questions of what he found most challenging in his role as a parent by asserting that “(f)inances is always a challenge” (line 2) because there are three mouths to feed (Line 14), thus explicitly highlighting the challenge and the centrality of his role as a breadwinner. He also evokes strong association between his identity as “father” (line 24) and his “career” (line 23) through the use of membership categorization. More crucially, Shaun does not only refer to the importance of fathering and work but *performs* this, which tallies with Wortham’s (2001) observation that tellers not only report events, but also enact them. Narrators can represent themselves within story world depiction and simultaneously enact parallel performance within the interactional context (for example, narrating a sad event and crying within the interactional context while narrating this). Here, this notion of parallelism can be seen to be expanded through how Shaun narrates a story of poverty and family provision to justify how he has learnt from the experiences of the past to understand the importance of being able to provide for his own family (shifting from his past experiences and applying it to his role as a provider within his

present family). This is followed subsequently by his shift out of the story frame to address the interviewer (me) within the interactional context to enact the role of "a father giving advice to his son"²³ through the use of a reversal in interviewer-interviewee role-shift and a question-answer sequence to justify that he is an authority in fathering because of his rich experiences and that therefore, he is in a position to teach me the importance of the career to his role as a father. Shaun thus not only makes the traditional role of the provider salient to himself but also increases its scope by making it salient to me as well through the use of interactional strategies that align us by our gender.

Other examples that demonstrate the prevalence of work as part of the identity of the father can be seen in Table 1 where George depicts himself as caught up inevitably with work commitments and indexes himself (with the help of fellow interactants, Olive and myself) as a victim to the demands to work. Also, in Table 2, Dan explains why he couldn't help Sheryl more with the child-caring by stating his first reason as "there was work" (line 38).

Mothers, on the other hand, are projected as primary caregivers. Although almost all the fathers have narrated incidences where they have helped with child-caring in different extents, they represent their ability to be more involved as limited. One of the ways in which this is done is through engaging in the discourse of competence mentioned earlier that creates more expectations for the mother to be the primary caregiver because she is "physiologically empowered" to do so and less for the husband to do so because he is still very much a "learner".

²³ An alternative interpretation is to regard this exchange as more fraternal than paternal due to the proximity of age between the interlocutors. However, it must be noted that the emphasis is on the *performance* of identity here and this has less to do with age and more to do with Shaun meting out instruction on fatherhood and talking from the voice of experience (and authority).

Other aspects include evaluations by mothers using marked lexical choices to index the centrality of her role as caregiver in relation to the father. For example, in Table 2, Sheryl executes an assessment of Dan, “<I mean Dan has been a great help” (line 14) while in Table 3, Ling assumes the central role of the protagonist – “I will let him help me carry the baby...” (line 14). Thus, the lexical choices used here (i.e., “help”) to refer to men’s lack of involvement does not simply reflect the gender division of infant care, it constructs that division of infant care by situating the fathers’ help as peripheral and supportive to mothers’ main role in child-caring (LaRossa et al., 1991).

In addition, it is noted that the discourse of traditional gender roles can also be reflected in the structural organization of the conversation. For instance, looking at a segment from Example 4, we can note that the narration is marked with qualifiers:

Example 4: (Table 8: lines 23 – 28)

Paul: Or like...like if I am ((home)) early,
 I come back I will play with her
 Then sometimes at night I will take Karyn out for a walk.
 If I’m not too busy that day
 Or when I don’t have to work like in the weekend,
 I will bring her out to swim

Paul’s narration of his child-caring is accompanied by several conditional clauses – “Or like if...”, “Then sometimes...”, “If I’m not too...” and “Or when I don’t have to...” and these suggest that his child-caring commitments are subject to his availability – that is, it is subject to his being free from work – when he can be “((home)) early”, when he is “not too busy that day” and does not “have to work like in the weekend”. Hence, the working sphere and the demands of work are projected as constraints to the fathers’ ability to be more involved in child-caring.

Although the discourse of traditional gender roles operates to locate men within the working sphere and women within the domestic sphere, the kinds of stances that speakers assume relative to the discourse is just as important. For example, within the data, some of the fathers tend to index their willingness to be involved by projecting a victimized stance in terms of being held up by work against their choice. Similar to the discussion within the discourse of competence where the levels of involvement are justified to be different based on ability, I suggest that by highlighting the obligations required through the discourse of traditional gender role, fathers within the data are able to draw attention to their constraints (their obligations at work) as well as their involvement (and/or their willingness to be involved) by highlighting instances of their interactions with their children and/or through expressing their willingness to be more involved. Thus, fathers narrate incidents where they are playing with their child (Table 4); taking the child out for walks (Table 8); exhibiting willingness to pick the child up from childcare (Table 6), attending antenatal classes and changing diapers (Table 5) or by positioning themselves in a way that indexes a desire to be around more often but highlighting the constraints that they face as unavoidable (e.g., work as necessary (Tables 1, 2 and 7) or indexing their fear of hurting the child while carrying him due to the lack of knowledge of how to do so (Tables 2 and 3)). In these cases, adequation can be observed to be operating within the narrative interactions through the projection of their involvement as parents – that is, the father, like the mother, is an involved parent and he expresses the desire to be even more involved with parenting. However, work obligations that are tied down to his traditional role obligation as a father (as well as his incompetence in childcaring relative to the mother) limit his ability to be equally involved. These justifications operate via distinction. Through maintaining stances that indexes

involvement as a parent while highlighting constraints due to gendered role obligations (as well as distinctions in competence), adequation and distinction can be argued to shift attention away from gender equality.

In addition, forms of resistance are also observed within the stances of various mothers in the data that reflect a departure from but not a rejection of the discourse of the traditional gender roles. I now shift to examining the discourse of contemporary gender roles before further analyzing the relationship between the two discourses.

4.3 The discourse of contemporary gender roles

Rapid industrialization within many contemporary societies has resulted in the increased participation of women in the workforce. The entry into the sphere of work by women, coupled with the increased momentum of feminist movements and educational advancements of women required adjustments in the roles of men and women towards egalitarian ideals, where “women were no longer confined to the home and men are not exempted from domestic duties” (Straughan, 1999:12). Here, I define the discourse of contemporary gender roles broadly as the belief in the egalitarian principle that women and men can both be primary caregivers and primary breadwinners. Within the data, I focus on the use of membership categorization by parents, the interactional roles assumed as well as the stances they project to indicate how parents are engaging in both the discourses of contemporary gender roles and the traditional gender roles.

Example 5: (Table 8: lines 5 – 7)

Fiona: I think it boils down to learning how to balance between family and work.
A woman these days can have BOTH
And to handle them both well

In Example 5, Fiona engages directly in both discourses of traditional and contemporary gender roles and indexes a confident stance in her ability to balance her obligations. She attributes competence in both work and family as one of the definitive traits of “a woman these days”, while her stress on “BOTH” and “well” can be suggested to imply that the woman in the past used to operate in only one particular domain or that she typically performs well in only one (but not both) domain. In this way, she can be said to be making references to a discourse of traditional gender roles but strategically using it as a point of contrast to align herself with the contemporary discourse of gender roles where a woman can excel in both domains.

However, it is not always a straightforward matter of embracing the new gender roles discourse. Instead, speakers tend to assume complex positions relative to the contemporary gender discourse. For instance, in Table 2, Sheryl identifies herself explicitly as a “new age new generation woman” (line 3) and projects a disapproving stance towards “the man of the past” (line 5) by voicing her discontent through using heightened intonation – “Where, OH[↑] Parenting and mothering is just the woman’s job[↑]” (line 8). But subsequently, after problematising the discourse of the traditional male role, Sheryl shifts to self-problematising – “And I learnt along the way not to place my expectations too high” (line 29) and in the process, can also be said to be problematising the discourse of contemporary gender roles for creating a new set of expectations that resulted in the asymmetry in her expectations and her experiences. In this way, Sheryl projects herself as being disapproving of more traditional discourses of gender roles but at the same time, she expresses her disappointment as a result of her high expectations created in her by the discourse of contemporary gender roles. Alternatively, it can also be suggested that the macro-level contradictions

created through the assimilation of both contemporary and traditional ideals at the level of discourse are individualized as personal issues that Sheryl takes upon herself to resolve (i.e., the need to adjust her expectations). In this case, the larger implication is that the structural inequalities may remain unchallenged as speakers may tend to adjust their stances in attempting to address the problems they face.

In Table 6, Gena projects her stance of disapproval towards the inequality of the role distribution between Shaun and herself. She identifies herself as “usually the one that picks James up from the childcare” (line 3) but indexes that she is aware of the unfairness of this arrangement by stating “Even though I come home later than Shaun”. She reiterates this point at the end of her narration by restating that she “volunteered to pick James up after work/ Even though most days [she] come[s] home later than Shaun” (lines 27 – 28). Within the extract, she also expresses a questioning stance indicated through rising intonation “I don’t know WHY↑” towards her observation that mothers are the ones who pick up their children after work and not the dads. Her belief in the more pragmatic and egalitarian aspects of child-caring reflects the discourse of contemporary gender roles. However, she also voices “other moms” as problematisers who cast negative evaluations on the protagonist Shaun for intruding into a mother-dominated setting (Table 6: line 18: “I mean can you imagine those STARES from the other moms?) and herself as a mother for working late, not finding time to pick the child up and instead relying on the father to do it (Table 6: lines 21 – 22: “Like they must be like, How come the mom isn’t the one who comes from home to pick up the son?”). She indicates within her narration that in the end, she had to abide by more traditional gender role obligation where the mother is the one that is expected to be around for the child. Like I have suggested previously, Gena can be seen as assuming a position within both the discourses of traditional gender

roles as well as the contemporary gender roles by portraying herself as someone who does not embrace traditional notions of mothering blindly but is bound to her social roles by social forces and structured gender practices. The use of voicing allows her to position herself and to project her stances relative to the two gender role discourses. In this case, through attributing the discourse of traditional gender role to “other moms”, she is able to position herself as being aware of alternative role distributions but as someone who has little choice but to comply with the social forces that espouse a more traditional role distribution.

The discourse of contemporary gender roles is not limited to mothers but is reflected in the representation of fathers as well. For example, in Table 5, Carol assesses Ray as “very special” (line 1) and as “a very hands-on kind of dad” (line 2). Ray contributes further to this portrayal of a father who is involved in child-caring by situating himself as a protagonist and depicting his experiences in attending antenatal classes and changing diapers while at the same time, indexing a stance of excitement in his narration as noted through volume and intonation rising.

As evident within the data, it is not simply a matter of shifting away from the discourse of traditional gender roles to espousing a discourse of contemporary gender roles. Rather, like many family and feminists researchers have noted, the problem may lie in the assimilation of *both* traditional and contemporary gender roles and expectations (Hochschild and Machung, 1990; Hays, 1996; Lazar, 2000; Kendall, 2007). While women have the right to work, they are also expected to retain their centrality within the domestic sphere. This is evident in examples 6 and 7 below:

Example 6: (Table 6: lines 3 – 4)

Gena: I’m usually the one that picks James up from the childcare.
Even though I come home later than Shaun.

Example 7: (Table 8: lines 8 – 12)

Fiona: I mean I only made sure I went back to work
When my mom was able to help us take care of the baby when we are at work
OF COURSE it's not the same as when I am at home
But I make (sure) I rush off from work at about 5
So[↑]I still have time to bathe and read to Karyn before Paul comes home

On the other hand, through engaging in both the discourse of contemporary gender roles and traditional gender roles, fathers within the data are able to identify themselves as "learners" when it comes to child-caring. However, this identity claim is asymmetrical as there are no instances of mothers assuming this same position²⁴. At this point, we can ask another relevant question: Which parent is better able to assume the role of a learner? This question can be made more pertinent to the study by being elaborated as such: Given that both parties are first-time parents, why does the role of a learner tend to correlate more with fathers than mothers within the data?

To address this question, the role of the learner needs to be explored in light of the discourse of contemporary gender roles as well as the conventional expectations associated with the discourse of traditional (gendered) parental roles. Firstly, these conventional expectations that stem from the discourse of traditional gender roles create asymmetrical positions for fathers and mothers that limit parental performances. For instance, as mentioned earlier, by playing up their willingness as fathers to learn to be more involved in child-caring, the present-day fathers can set themselves up to be evaluated as an improvement from the father figure of the past based on normative sociocultural expectations associated with the discourse of the traditional father's role as the provider and whose responsibilities are located outside the domestic sphere. In fact, as seen in Table 5, Ray is evaluated as "special" because "he is a very hands-on

²⁴ The instance of Ling producing a parallel narrative to Ken was specific to her learning to trust Ken more with the handling of the child (i.e., his competence in child-caring) and was also not about her own child-caring competence.

kind of dad” which presupposes that the father of the past tend to be less (or simply not) hands-on. Further, the fathers within the data are not merely structured by the discourses but are able to assume various positions with respect to the discourses. One of the implications of assuming the role of the learner is that it allows for the responsibility of child-caring to be temporally suspended from these fathers until they become better at it. At the same time, they are also able to downplay their lack of involvement in the past by attributing it to their lack of knowledge in child-caring. As observed within the data, some fathers are able to play up disjunctions between the self in the past-present-future so that they can position themselves as learners while simultaneously indexing a willingness to admit to their failings and to learn to be better at child-caring. This means that through assuming the stance of a learner, negative evaluations can be reconstituted as *potentially* positive changes. As discussed, the main issue is that these are *changes-in-progress* which makes it difficult to cast any definite expectations of change upon fathers. At the same time, the position of the learner allows fathers to index willingness to learn and improve, so that the issue is not that they don’t *want* to be more involved but that they *cannot*. This serves to justify that it is not "fair" to expect equal distribution of responsibilities.

Mothers, on the other hand, will find it hard(er) to occupy this similar learner position because under the discourse of traditional gender roles, the mothers have traditionally been situated within the domestic sphere. Thus, mothers of the present-day cannot mark an improvement over the mothers of the past by simply demonstrating their desire to be around more as these have become normalized expectations due to the discourse of the traditional role of the mother as the homemaker. Instead, they have to find alternative ways of indexing greater competence – perhaps by demonstrating they can competently fulfilling their

domestic and child-caring responsibilities and *then* showing they can still cope with a career on top of that. For mothers, occupying the learner role in parenting does *not* index an improvement over the mothers of the past and will in fact tend to draw greater negative evaluation because of the different levels of expectations associated with the traditional roles of father and mothers. Thus, the discourse of contemporary gender roles operates along with the discourse of traditional gender roles to make more accessible the role of the learner for the father relative to the mother.

Therefore, parental identity performances are in part constrained by the structural gendered positions and expectations that are encoded to the discourse of traditional gender roles in parenting and in part, constrained by the "naturalization" of competence as physiological and gendered.

4.4 The discourse of family cohesion

The final discourse I have identified is the discourse of family cohesion. For example, in Table 1, Olive and George perform a collaborative narrative that has dialogic resonances (DuBois, 2007) through employing a number of involvement strategies (Tannen, 2007) to mark the couple's solidarity and joint identity. Similarly, in Table 3, Ling performs a "parallel narrative" where she depicts herself as developing into a more trusting spouse at the same time that Ken is developing greater competence in handling the child.

The discourse of family cohesion posits that the family is supposed to be united and supportive. Thus it is also linked to the preservation of face for family members and to the avoidance of potential threats to face. The discourse of family cohesion can be seen to be operating in several instances within the narrative data. For

example, in Table 2, Sheryl casts an implicit negative evaluation on Dan's involvement in parenting but she quickly back-tracks by qualifying her statements by saying "<I mean Dan has been a great help" (line 14) as well as "Dan helped whenever he could" (line 33). Also, her choice to use indirect voicing to cast a negative evaluation and her situating the criticism to be specific to a particular point in time in the past can be suggested to be attempts at avoiding making a direct negative evaluation to Dan. In so doing, Sheryl enacts the discourse of family cohesion where confrontations should be avoided.

Similarly, in Table 5, Carol uses humour to moderate her negative evaluation of Ray – "cept he isn't around to change them all that much! Hhhh" (line 33). Her evaluation can be said to be operating in an ambiguous mode where the speaker can obscure whether the evaluation was meant to be serious or simply said in jest. I will suggest that Carol's use of humour to mask her negative evaluation reflects her way of fulfilling two requirements operating within the discourse of traditional gender roles and the discourse of family cohesion. Firstly, it allows her to reinstate her higher level of commitment to child-caring in light of Ray's self-appraisal of his ability in diaper changing. Secondly, she is able to do so while still preserving presentation of the family as a cohesive unit. The use of humour to potentially reconstitute the negative evaluation can be said to be an exploitation of ambiguous space to challenge otherwise strict social hierarchies. However, as the stance of the speaker is made potentially ambiguous because it works through indexicality, the flip side of the coin is that although it may create greater awareness of social issues, by being packaged as a jocular comment, it can also be interpreted as non-serious and thus not deserving of any further reflection or practical changes.

In the narrative in Table 6, Gena's decision to pick James up from the childcare although she comes home later than Shaun, can also be interpreted as her adhering to the discourse of family cohesion. In addition, she indexes an empathic stance by explicitly attributing the rationale for her decision as being based on consideration of her husband's plight (Example 8).

Example 8: (Table 6: lines 34 – 35)

Gena: I felt so bad for him

I mean HOW can any wife bear to put her husband through THAT right↑ Hhhhh

In Table 4, Paul can be suggested to employ double voicing to cast his criticism of Fiona indirectly as "too anxious" by rewording his claim as "my wife" is "more sensitive". Yet, at the same time, Paul is also able to use the double voicing to index their identity as a cohesive couple by agreeing with Fiona (as more attuned to the child) and thereby avoiding a potential argument in front of an interviewer. In this case, (double) voicing can be argued to "support" the operation of the tactic of adequation through allowing for the downplaying of differences and the highlighting of consensus between the two of them so that "the presentation of competing standpoints does not necessarily occur at the expense of the construction of solidarity" (Moore, 2006: 627).

One potential counterargument to the claim that the discourse of family cohesion is in operation is that this could be a face issue occurring more generally between speakers. For example, what is the difference here between general face maintenance between co-workers versus what is being discussed here? However, I argue that this is not merely an issue of general face-work as what I have discussed is connected to more specific issues within the family. One of the ways to illustrate this is to show how specific gender roles are preserved within the family and how family

members attempt to minimize the potential threat to these familial roles in their attempt to maintain their cohesive family front. For example, the role of the father as the head of the household and/or the mother as the primary caregiver might be reaffirmed for maintaining an image of a cohesive family unit. This will also suggest that the discourse of family cohesion has consequences that extend beyond the immediate interactional context as it may lead to reinforcing conventional structural positions between parents.

There is some evidence for the reinforcing of conventional parental roles within the data. For example, some mothers explicitly highlight the centrality of their positions in caregiving and relegate the father's role to that of a helper. In terms of the provider role, in Table 7, Shaun stresses the importance of his provider role because there are "three mouths to feed" (line 14) and downplays Gena's work contributions because it is not full-time. In Table 6, Gena narrates within her solo interview how she picks James up even though she comes home later because she is expected as the primary caregiver to be there for the child while her work obligations are not considered as legitimate excuses for not being there.

Finally, in Table 8 (lines 30-56), Fiona, who explicitly employs contemporary gender role discourse can be seen to nonetheless highlight the centrality of her primary role as a caregiver by stating that "if the mother works the whole day, then you may be faced with that kind of problem" (lines 50-51). Also, by reconstituting her work as an individual pursuit – that is, to keep in touch with colleague and society (line 49) and not obligatory (line 49: "...not because I HA::VE to but because I want to..."), she suggests that her work is not necessary to the family which also partly explains why the option is more available for her not to work on weekends (line 55)

as compared to Paul. Paul also creates centrality to his role as a provider by stating that he wants to make sure he can bring in enough money (line 45) so that Fiona gets to spend more time at home (line 46) and not feel obliged to work (line 47). However, his authoritative stance indexes that he seems to be speaking from the position of the head of the household and the ultimate decision-maker for the family. For instance, when he brought up a third-person narrative to get his point across that neglecting the child may potentially threaten family cohesiveness, he explicitly indexes his authoritative view “Cos I don’t want that to happen” (line 43) and then unproblematically projects his decision to work harder so that Fiona can stay home with the child more as *the* solution without consulting her about this arrangement (lines 44 – 46: “So if I can help it, I want to make sure I can bring in enough money so that Fiona gets to spend more time at home”). Within this negotiation of identities, Paul is able to project his central role as head of the household as well as the economic provider while Fiona situates herself as primary caregiver. Thus, despite their earlier narration being focused on Paul’s involvement in child-caring and Fiona’s work commitments, these are nonetheless projected as less central than their original family roles. I suggest that narrators perform traditional family hierarchical roles (mother as primary caregiver and father as the head of the household and provider) due in part to the need to maintain the image of family as typical (i.e., not transgressive) and cohesive. This may sometimes occur at the expense of downplaying differences and potentially non-conventional arrangements in order to maintain the image of the family as united.

4.5 Conclusion to Chapter 4

The analysis in this chapter shows that macro-level discourses and micro-level interactions are mutually constitutive. The interactional roles (validator, problematiser, assessor and their counterparts) assumed by the parents and the membership categories that they employ, set up asymmetrical interactional positions which may accrue into larger structural relations through creating and/or reinforcing discourses that position the mother as the "expert" in child-caring (or the "natural" caregiver) and the father as the "learner". At the same time, the discourses at the macro-level to a certain extent, can structure the ways speakers interact, with different discourses (which are tied to self and others' expectations of the positions they are supposed to occupy) constraining different speakers in terms of the interactional positions they can (or feel they should) occupy. Further, the asymmetry is exacerbated by the tactics of adequation and distinction which highlights greater involvement or willingness to be involved by the father and shifts the focus away from issues of gender equality in child-caring.

Chapter 5

Conclusion

5.1 Concluding Remarks

The study of identity using narratives requires that I expand the scope of analysis to go beyond the more formalistic Labovian type of approach to narrative analysis. It can be seen in this study that narrators often transit in and out of the story world to make their point during the act of narration. At times, they occupy a position in between the story world and the interview context and in addition, draw on resources from the sociocultural context by making reference to general groups or popular beliefs.

Thus, for my study, I conceptualised that there are three layers of context in operation during the production of any narrative: the sociocultural context, the interactional event and the story world. The three layers are thought of as distinct but interrelated categories. Recognising the complexities of identity and narrative research, I have shown how an analytical toolkit that draws from the notion of frames, voicing, interactional roles and membership categorisation analysis can be usefully applied to examine the identity positioning and complicated transitions occurring within narrative interactions.

In addition, speakers are able to draw from a variety of resources for identity performances including those from the actual interview context. At specific times during the interview, my gender, age and even laughter can be made salient and be used to form (dis-)alignments for the speakers' identity displays. As Rapley and

Antaki (1998) argue “some of the things in interviewer’s talk...do not so much solicit views as act positively to generate and shape them” (605). My study hopes to have expanded on the view of the interview simply as a methodology in social research by illustrating that identity works are contingent upon the unfolding of the interactions within specific contexts and this crucially includes the role of the interviewer.

This study has set for itself the task of examining the identity negotiation within first-time parents because I wanted to understand the discourses that are driving the gender inequalities in parental child-caring responsibilities. If both parents are parents for the first-time, how did they arrive at certain conclusions about who should do what and why? One of my main findings was that the tactics of adequation and distinction are operating simultaneously to create interactionally or situationally sufficient alignments by allowing fathers within the data to index willingness to being more involved as a parent and disalignments in terms of physiological differences and work obligations. I suggest that these are highlighted so that issues of equality in child-caring responsibilities are downplayed. These are supported by various discourses operating in tandem (Lazar, 2000). For example, I have observed that the discourse of the family as a cohesive unit and discourse of the traditional gender role operate to sustain the traditional model of the family at the expense of the individual while the discourse of competence naturalizes the distinction in level of competence on physiological grounds and thus differentiates between the levels of involvement required from either parent. The discourse of contemporary gender role allows the father to project himself as increasingly more involved but at the same time, allows him to occupy the position of a learner where any eventual "mastery" is indeterminate.

I also explored the connection between discourses at the macro-level and interactions occurring at the more micro-level. Similar to the observations of some other family researchers, I found out that certain discourses are instantiated and linked to the asymmetrical interactional patterns of these parents. However, the similarities end there. While Ochs and Taylor (1996) observe that within their data, “(f)athers are regularly reinstated as arbiters of conduct narratively laid before them as in a panopticon” (119), within the data I have collected, fathers tend to assume the second position within the interactional role pairs and is thus subjected to assessment, validation and problematisation. Any instances of self-assessment on the part of the fathers have also been rather self-deprecatory relative to their positive evaluation of their spouse. To borrow the concept of the panopticon from Foucault (1977), perhaps, it can be suggested that fathers cannot be said to be the only ones maintaining a panopticon position with respect to mothers but that the reverse can also hold true, at least in the interactions between parents captured within the data.

Membership categorization analysis has also been useful for illustrating how speakers continually refer to themselves and their spouse by their role category (e.g., wife, mother, father) and are equally quick in associating certain attributes, voices, stances and activity types to particular role categories. In the process, ideological beliefs about gender can be potentially created or reinforced by the use of role categorization within interactions. More specific to the data, one of the implications is the construction of competence along physiological (gendered) lines by speakers themselves.

I have also attempted to take a more integrative approach that explores the connection between micro-level interactions and macro-level structure and discourses

in contrast to the rather disparate positions typically assumed by CDA and CA which tend to highlight the macro and micro-level organization of discourse respectively. I attempt to bridge the two perspectives in two general ways by firstly, taking a view of discourses and subjects as mutually constitutive. By this, I mean how the interactional sequences can accrue into larger structural relations and how the discourses at the macro-level to a certain extent, can structure the way speakers interact. Secondly, I have analyzed the ways subjects can assume positions (via indexing stances, voicing and assuming particular interactional roles) vis-à-vis both of these discourses whereby the multitude of positions that speakers can occupy reflect how speakers do not simply assimilate and operate under these discourses but can be seen within interactions at times, to align themselves to one discourse, at times to index a disapproving stance to both and at other times, to project themselves as victims of either one or both discourses. However, particular interactional positions may be less available to a particular parent based on gender and these are linked to the discourses in operation.

In conclusion, the complexities of identity negotiation are centrally located within interactions. Through examining the narrative interactions, I hope to have been able to shed light into some of the complex issues pertaining to identity performances of first-time parents.

5.2 Methodological limitations and suggestions for future studies

Although I make some reference to gaze and body language in the study, these were based on my field notes and recollections of the interviews. This could be better substantiated through the use of video captures. A greater focus on gestures, gaze,

bodily stances as well as other semiotic mediums within the interviews could be a way of building on the study.

Research studies on elicited narratives are faced with limitations of time which guide decisions about whom to interview as well as the frequency and duration of interviews. Ideally, longitudinal studies with a bigger sample comprising more diverse social categories could be included. Also, parents' involvement with children may change over time as children start participating in outside activities consisting of friends. It would be interesting to examine whether these would result in shifts in roles and how parents evaluate themselves in light of these changes.

In addition, even though I have stressed that this study is not meant to result in any form of generalisation of a parenting group, focussing on a mainstream parenting identity may sometimes put other family groups under erasure (Gal and Irvine, 1995) especially those with alternative family configurations. Thus, this study and its observations could then serve as a starting point for examining the interactional dynamics of other family groups not covered in this study like gay families with children, single-parent families or step-parents and children. Such studies can build upon the negotiation of identities in interaction and potentially offer alternative possibilities regarding the construction of parental identities.

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Appendix A:

Transcription Conventions (Adapted from Sacks et al, 1974)

[the beginning of overlapped talk
(0.0)	length of silence
(.)	micro-pause
<u> </u>	relatively high pitch or volume
::	noticeably lengthened sound
CAPS	relatively high volume
-	sudden cut-off of the current sound
=	'latched' utterances
?	rising intonation
.	falling intonation
,	continuing intonation
¿	rising stronger than a comma but weaker than a question mark
↓	inflected falling intonation contour
↑	inflected rising intonation contour
(words)	unintelligible stretch
((words))	comments by the transcriber
(hh)	laughter within a word
hh	audible outbreath
.hh	audible inbreath
° °	quieter than the surrounding talk
><	increase in tempo
<>	decrease in tempo
<	rushed start

Appendix B:

Preliminary Interview Questions:

The following are some questions asked during the joint interview:

- Can you share what typically happens on a family day out together?
- Can you share with me a time when anyone of you felt disappointed in yourself as a parent or when you felt you could have done more?
- Can you share some incidents or challenges that either of you faced when you first had the child?
- How would you guys assess your ability to handle the child when he/she first arrived?
- Can you tell me about your experiences balancing work and family commitments?
- What do you think are the main similarities or differences in the ways you interact with the child?

The following are some questions asked during the solo interview:

- Can you share with us how life has been as a father/ mother so far?
- What have you found to be the most challenging thing for you in your role as a parent?
- Can you share about any particular arrangement(s) between the two of you that you did not particularly like?
- Do you think your spouse handles the baby in the same way as you do?

Appendix C:

Respondent Profile:

No	Name	Age	Gender	Ethnicity	Profession	Child's Name	Child's Age	Child's Gender
1	Shaun	41	M	Chinese	Manager	James	12 mth	M
2	Gena	38	F	Chinese	Locum			
3	Paul	36	M	Chinese	Financial advisor	Karyn	13 mth	F
4	Fiona	30	F	Chinese	Marketing Executive			
5	Dan	35	M	Chinese	IT analyst	Jeff	22 mth	M
6	Sheryl	28	F	Chinese	Biomedical Assistant			
7	George	33	M	Eurasian	Manager	Sheila	26 mth	F
8	Olive	31	F	Chinese	Accountant			
9	Ken	34	M	Chinese	Engineer	Leonard	15 mth	M
10	Ling	32	F	Chinese	Investment Analyst			
11	Ray	30	M	Chinese	Doctor	Karen	16 mth	F
12	Carol	28	F	Chinese	Teacher			