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Knowing how to present yourself by knowing how to recognize false true facts

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ABSTRACT

The presentation of self is a specific kind of knowledge of how to appear and speak publicly in the face of inferences of what can be drawn about how you have appeared and what you have said. As a specific case of the latter, there are things you cannot say publicly even if—or, in particular, when—they are true. This can be called recognition of false true facts. Of course, it could be claimed that knowing false true facts is just knowledge of a type of fact which does not require know-how but plain knowledge. In this article, we try to show that knowing false true facts is part of the presentation of self, which is based on know-how of telling false true facts from other facts (i.e., what you should never say publicly, however true it might be). Regarding our data, we analyze a videotaped interaction among a group of young females discussing what would be different in life if they were men. In their group discussion, they make a distinction regarding how a woman could answer that question and what could not be answered. Through defining what women could publicly say, the group performatively defines how women can present themselves. In that way, the presentation of self is based on know-how of the distinction between false true facts and other facts. At least on occasion, there does exist gender-specific expertise that delimits public performance of gender.

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1. Introduction

Knowing how to present yourself in the face of inferences of how you have appeared and what you have said requires social skills. We face countless expectations surrounding social skills in our everyday lives. In order to credibly present yourself as a member of a certain social group, people expect you to act in a specific way, including demonstrating relative knowledgeability in the areas of knowledge associated with that group (Heritage and Raymond, 2005; Heritage, 2012). This can most clearly be seen in institutional settings, such as where the roles of a doctor and a patient, for instance, are constructed during each new encounter by the parties' orientation to expert knowledge and institutional norms (Arminen, 2017). However, it can be claimed that more mundane social roles or categories are also brought alive in the same manner (Antaki and Widdicombe, 1998). For example, presenting yourself as a good parent requires displaying affection toward your children and detailed knowledge about their behavior. Although there are no formal criteria for what counts as good parenting, its lack is immediately recognizable (Arminen and Simonen, 2021; Versteeg and te Molder, 2018). Moreover, in a complex social

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world, situational sensitivity is also needed, including a grasp of the fact that there are things you cannot say publicly even if—or, in particular, when—they are true (Levinson, 1992). This can be called recognition of false true facts.

In this article, we present a conversation between a group of young women in a game setting tackling the issue of a socially accepted way to answer the question: “What would be different in your life if you were a man?” We argue that in this conversation, the group orients to a distinction between correct but socially unacceptable information (from now on a “false true fact”) and more solid, acceptable knowledge, which might even be called expert vision (for the lay/expert distinction, see Arminen and Simonen, 2021). By defining what women could publicly say, the group performatively asserts how women can do their presentation of self. Subsequently, we aim to show that knowing false true facts is part of the presentation of self, which is based on know-how of telling false true facts from other facts (i.e., what you should never say publicly, however true it might be). Since the topic concerns the presentation of gender, our analysis pinpoints how the interactional construction of gender as a social group category is carried out (Stokoe and Smithson, 2001). We ask whether there is gender-specific expertise that delimits the public performance of gender and, if so, how it becomes relevant in everyday interactions.

The reason why “false true facts” are interesting is that they connect to the generic issue of epistemic domains and cultures. One classic formulation of this issue is Harvey Sacks's (1979) discussion on hotrodders. Essentially, he asks why a group of (young) people coined a set of categories, such as hotrodders, and by doing so he opens the question about politics of categories and their ownership (Suchman, 1993). Sacks himself pointed out that for “hotrodders,” their knowledge and categories allowed to “recognize whether somebody is a member of one or another category, and ... what's known about hotrodders – what they do with their cars, how they look, how they behave – these are things that hotrodders can enforce on each other and defend against nonmembers” (Sacks, 1979, pp. 11–12). We will point out one empirical detail of the maintenance of epistemic domains, that is, a set of situated practices through which members of a group can note a perceived falsehood of something that some other group may hold as a fact. This is something that can be called a false true fact. All boundaries between incompatible epistemic domains may potentially be open for the emergence of false true facts. Not least due to morality of social facts (Stivers et al., 2011), the alleged falsity of a social fact is rarely articulated. If it were established as a social fact that a person is not a snitch, you had better not call a person that, even if you knew it (Goffman, 2015). Though there are social media sites where parents discuss about regretting their parenthood, it is unlikely to find anybody stating that publicly (Matley, 2020). On occasion, the moral status of social facts may also be legally sanctioned. After the outbreak of Russia's war against Ukraine, it was declared to be false news in Russia, the distribution of which was sanctioned with penalties of up to 10 years in prison. The morality of social facts may also simply open a social polarization that prevents discussion between opposite sides. Two years after the 2020 US Presidential Election, three quarters of Republicans believe that Joe Biden did not win legitimately (for background, see Williamson, 2022).

In the article, we explore the interactional process through which a false true fact is recognized and confirmed. In the study, we use ethnomethodological conversation analysis, or EM/CA (Sidnell and Stivers, 2013), to discuss the relevance of a distinction between propositional (know-that) and procedural (know-how) knowledge in interaction as the theoretical foundations for false true facts (Arminen et al., 2021; Ryle, 1946). After a brief discussion of key theoretical issues, we will proceed by introducing the concept of a false true fact. We will demonstrate that the recognition of false true facts is not only essential for the presentation of self but also reveals the moral foundations of social identities as a key to social group boundary work.

1.1. Know that, know-how and expertise

Knowledge—and, more recently, expertise—has been discussed within the tradition of conversation analysis from multiple perspectives (Heritage, 2012, 2013; Versteeg and te Molder, 2018; Stivers et al., 2011). This line of studies explores how everyday knowledge is treated and made relevant and consequential in situated interaction. Social structures, such as group categories and institutions, are activated in interaction by actors, for whom they are relevant in the formation of their actions (Arminen, 2017). Therefore, the perceived knowledgeability is maintained and managed socially (Heritage, 2012). Furthermore, based on Gilbert Ryle (2009/[1949]), knowledgeability can be divided into two forms: “knowing that,” which includes propositional or factual knowledge, and “knowing how,” including the practical capabilities of performing actions. When it comes to knowledge about social groups, know-that often includes stereotypical knowledge about the qualities and actions of the social group members. We assume, for example, that men are usually taller than women, that Finns enjoy saunas, or that doctors use a stethoscope to listen to their patient's heart and lungs. In some contexts, this beer-mat knowledge may be enough to acquire a relatively knowledgeable position, even if it is not accurate in every case. Stereotypes can also be harmful, especially if used to classify others (Brubaker, 2004; Widdicombe, 1998). If we want a more granular view of the social group, we have to address the practices through which group membership is presented. Credible presentation of self as a member of the group is based on know-how as an “application of skilled perception, action and reasoning” (Bassetti, 2021). From this perspective, presenting yourself as a member of a social group is a skill, something more than having access to propositional knowledge of the group attributes.

The idea of presentation of self as a skill is not new in itself; for instance, Goffman (1959) and Butler (1990) have discussed the active accomplishment of managing one's social appearances. The perspective of presentation of self as a performance ties it to know-how that can be exploited procedurally in interaction, enabling the parties to orient to their experience and propositional knowledge in socially sensitive ways. In this way, know-how and its conventionalized form, expertise, become relevant for the presentation of self. The practical difference between propositional knowledge and expertise is that the latter

enables comprehension of the meaning of facts; simply put, an expert can both know facts and know how to evaluate their consequences by taking into account moral aspects and inferring their implications, whereas plain propositional knowledge concerns only facts. Consequently, expertise allows a stance on what should or should not be done in a certain situation, including also how to present oneself. This potential to be actualized in performance establishes a link between expertise and deontics/power (Stevanovic, 2021), which makes expertise contestable. Who has the right to determine how the facts should be interpreted, and who is responsible for the subsequent consequences (Arminen et al., 2022)? Through moral grounds of self-presentation, social identities become embedded in societal morality. The more tightly procedural reasoning is tied to mundane matters, the more prone to controversies it becomes. While relatively often it is unproblematic to credit a medical doctor's expertise, and sometimes also a psychotherapist's, mundane experts are far more controversial. Mundane social categories related to religion, ethnicity, age and gender carry a bundle of expectations that “constrain the types of action that participants can or should perform” (Rossi and Stivers, 2021). When category incumbents respond to and apply these expectations, they form the standards for the presentation of self. Among these category sensitivities are gendered knowledges and the consequent roles that form the basis for gendered presentations of self (Ostermann, 2017; Raymond, 2019). The following example displays two different ways of interpreting a fact, by a mother and a father of a newborn baby while discussing with a health visitor (Heritage and Sefi, 1992, p. 367; Arminen and Simonen, 2021).

(1) [4A1:1]

- 01 HV: He's enjoying that [isn't he.
 02 F: [əYes he certainly isə=
 03 M: =He's not hungry 'cus (h)he's ju(h)st (h)had='iz bo:ttle .hhh

The health visitor's remark on line 01 is seemingly innocuous, but it receives opposite responses. Here, both the mother and the father have access to the same phenomena: the suckling baby and the health visitor's assessment. However, the parties appear to interpret the situation in contradictory ways. The father appears to hear the health visitor's remark innocuously, whereas for the mother it contains a kernel of criticism. It could be claimed that the example brings out the expertise gradient between the parties (Arminen and Simonen 2021). The mother presents herself as a care-provider, displaying expert vision and countering criticism, whereas the father presents himself as a social conversationalist with a naïve interpretation of the situation. The example seems to provide a glimpse of a gendered distribution of labor and, accordingly, gendered social worlds in the 1980s. Following both Ryle (2009[1949]) and EM/CA tradition, this type of excellence in performing learned practices, or a sort of everyday expertise, can be found in presenting oneself as a member of a seemingly ubiquitous social group (Arminen and Simonen, 2021)—in this case, the expertise of demonstrating the practice of parenting.

Neither of the responses in the previous example are wrong or completely irrelevant; they are simply performing different actions. The mother's concern for the well-being of the baby presents her as a care-provider involving ubiquitous expertise, amounting to vision for the baby's welfare, which implies that there might be some type of gendered experience and expertise. The mother's turn uttered, without a break, latching onto the father's turn, displayed that it had been, if not wrong, at least blatantly insufficient. Though there are no explicit limits for a right or wrong way, there is a pressing sense that something was still not enough and a demand that something more be stated. This is often the case; there are not explicit rules to cover all the variables of real social life, but what is acceptable and rejectable are still distinguished (Dreyfus and Dreyfus, 2005). There are multiple ways to perform the act of being a good parent. On occasion, there are also false ways to present oneself as a member of a social group, in which the demonstrated knowledge is situationally improper.

1.2. Epistemic and activity-specific constraints on questions and answers

Similarly to social categories, epistemics and activities are also morally grounded and constrain what kinds of contributions are considered allowable. Depending on their epistemic design, both the question and the answer can be treated as unwarranted or lacking moral justification if they are seen as unfit regarding the set of epistemic relations between the parties in interaction (Kevallik, 2011; Stivers and Hayashi, 2010). A linguistically correct and understandable question may be considered unnecessary, and even offensive, if the person asking the question is considered to have known better—that is, that they should not have asked the question in the first place (Stivers, 2011). Questions are morally embedded, for they do more than ask; they also presuppose by conveying beliefs and expectations (Ostermann, 2017).

Specific activity contexts or types are known to entail restrictions that narrow what kinds of actions are allowable. In courtrooms, for instance, yes/no answers may be presupposed at certain moments, making more elaborate answers rejectable. Therefore, an elaborate answer that may have been right can become unacceptable due to the constraints in force in the courtroom. In the following sequence from a courtroom (Cotterill, 2003, p. 104), Mr. Cochran's question (l. 1–2) can be heard as requiring a yes/no answer. Consequently, the “wrong” type of answer quickly provoked an objection from the prosecuting attorney, Mr. Darden (l. 7).

(2) [Witness direct examination, 19 July 1995]

- 01 Mr. Cochran: All right. Now, in the course of your preparing or shooting the video that day,
 02 did you ever have occasion to either touch or bump into Mr. Simpson at all?
 03 Witness: There was one situation. It was a break, whether they're relighting or redoing
 04 cameras or whatever it was, and they asked us to stay on the floor,
 05 stay in our spots because, as you saw the videotape, each person has a spot
 06 and –
 07 → Mr. Darden: Objection, your Honor. Pardon me, sir. This is non-responsive.
 08 → Mr. Cochran: Your Honor, this is – he's responding seems to me.
 09 → Mr. Darden: The question called for a yes or no answer.
 10 The Court: Sustained. The witness may answer yes or no.
 11 Witness: I'm sorry, I've forgotten the question.

The prosecuting attorney, Mr. Darden, challenges the witness's answer, not because of its propositional content but based on its type non-conformity. The judge (l. 10) accepts the prosecution's appeal, rejecting the witness's answer. Here, the type conformity trumps the propositional content of the answer. We can start to see that acceptability of utterances may depend situationally on issues other than propositional content.

Classroom interaction is another well-known activity type in which the relevancies of contributions depend on several aspects apart from their propositional rightfulness. Consequently, students' acceptable participation in the classroom activity requires more than just knowing an answer; also in the classroom, a "right" answer may be recognized and still considered false. The pedagogical goal is to elicit "a certain type of answer, given by students in a certain manner and located in a particular place in the interaction" (Margutti, 2006). Levinson (1992, p. 87) presents a famous example of a right but unacceptable answer.

(3) [Invented example]

- 01 T: What are the names of some trees?
 02 C1: There are oaks.
 03 C2: Apples!
 04 T: Apple-trees, yes.
 05 C3: Yews.
 06 T: Well done Johnny!
 07 → C4: Oak trees!
 08 → T: No Sally, Willy's already said that.

Here, C4's answer is right (l. 7) but fails to be adequate. The example shows how an answer may be acceptable in a certain moment and unacceptable in the next. Knowing how to respond requires more than knowing what to answer; it entails knowing how to participate, presupposing the understanding of the rules of the activity type, or if you prefer, the language game. Propositional knowledge is not enough.

1.3. Know-how in the presentation of self

The presentation of self is open to the local, situated relevancies of the parties in interaction; in other words, it has situated sensitivity. Therefore, the felicitous presentation of self requires successful management of self-conduct depending on procedural knowledge of how to do it. One aspect of the presentation of self concerns the selection of appropriate social categories and address terms in interaction. Levinson (1992, p. 69) describes this phenomenon, using himself as an example: his colleagues may address him as "Steve" in the common room but are expected to call him "Dr. Levinson" in a formal faculty meeting. Both are equally true at any moment in time but addressing someone either too casually or too formally in relation to contextual norms is considered a breach of tacit social norms; it would not feel "right" and might jeopardize acceptability of presentation of self (Goffman, 1971). No less saliently, a high number of social categories are always available for parties in interaction, but not all of them are relevant in any given situation. For example, gender, ethnicity or age can be attributed to a party in interaction at any moment, but there may be rules of relevancies that frame what kinds of presentations are considered appropriate in any given moment (Goffman, 1961).

Parties in interaction are held accountable for their self-presentations in terms of their attributions and the categories made relevant in the situational interaction. The social actor's predicament is to manage the impressions drawn about their own conduct. The appropriateness of situated behavior and self-presentation may be judged by imposing category-sensitive norms that can be applied to make a character assessment of the person. Schegloff (2005, p. 453) analyzes a moment where the categories of a student (l. 20) and a photojournalist (l. 23) are contrasted to account for and make sense of the negative assessment of a person's character (l. 7, 10).

(4) [Tom and Nol]

06 Nol: Yeah man w- w- w- we're working on that <this guys is
 07 → is being really hard to work with [ma]n, this guy Tim.
 08 Tom: [w-]
 09 Tom: why.
 10 Nol: He's just like hhh he's really touchy about like (.)
 11 sending out his pictures hh (.) like
 12 (1.0)
 13 Nol: umm
 14 (0.5)
 15 Nol: unle- unless he like approves of 'em or som- <we're
 16 gonna hafta get another person is what it is:
 17 (0.7)
 18 Tom: why wh- I don unnerstand why is he bein' so difficult?
 19 Nol: Well he just um
 20 → Tom: .hhHH [HE'S JUSTA] student ri::ght?=
 21 Nol: [he's just]
 22 Nol: =yeah he's a yeah he's a student yeah
 23 → Tom: Aspiring to be the next photojournalist of any
 24 major trade magazine in the world or what(h)?

Nol is assessing the third party's character by stating that he is difficult to work with, due to his touchiness (l. 10–16). On lines 18–24, Tom displays his understanding of the character by drawing on the pair of categories of a photojournalist and a student. In this way, a complaint constructs social category membership as relevant in the interaction at hand and defines the limits of proper behavior of the category incumbents—in this case, the limits for self-presentation as a student.

There are vast amounts of propositional knowledge regarding social group categories; most of us are aware of the stereotypical features attached to men and women, for example (Birdwhistell, 1970; McKinlay and Dunnnett, 1998). In many cases, however, this stereotypical propositional knowledge does not match the individual experiences of the people who identify themselves with these social groups. In order to present yourself credibly as a member of any social group, it is important to display sensitivity as regards the implications of the categories used. McKinlay and Dunnnett (1998) point out how differently gun owners and others in the US may understand and describe the relationship between gun-related violence and gun ownership. For owners, guns create safety; for non-owners, guns and gun ownership may stand for violence. In that way, "social facts" become moral constructs that index social groups and their differences, and the other group's version of the social fact may be seen as false, albeit both groups might agree on the statistics of gun-related violence.

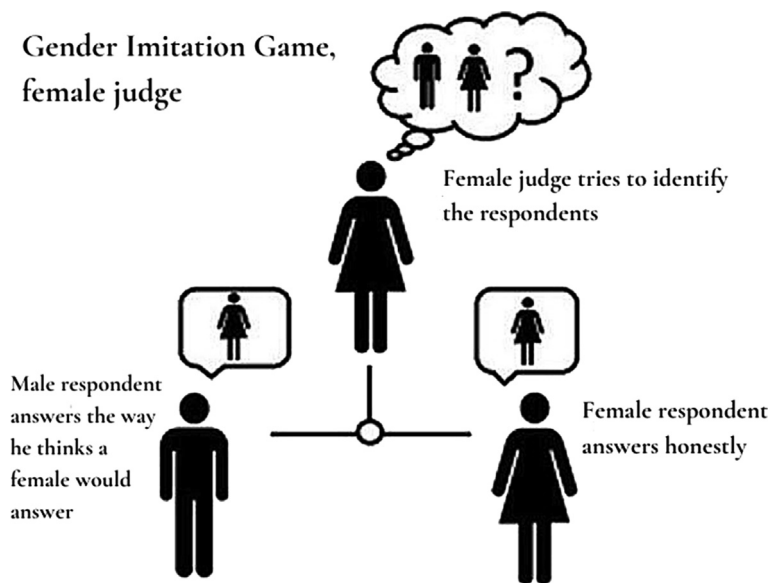
So far, we have accomplished that there are some limits of presenting yourself as a member of a social group: a student photographer should not present himself as an acclaimed photojournalist, and a gun owner needs to know how to interpret statistics of gun-related violence to be able present themselves as an upstanding citizen. We will ask, could there be similar kinds of social constraints when it comes to gender? If so, what kinds of knowledge or skills are needed in order to perform gender with social credibility?

2. Data and methods

Our data comes from a videotaped sequence from a gender Group Imitation Game, played in [town] in April 2018 (see Heino, 2020). The sociological Imitation Game (IG) is an experimental method originally designed by Alan Turing (1950) and refined by Harry Collins and his colleagues for studying social groups (Collins and Evans, 2014). The game is played with three roles: the judge, the non-pretender and the pretender. The judge and the non-pretender are both from the same social group (i.e., profession or, in this case, gender) while the pretender is not.

The judge asks questions to determine which of the respondents is a group member and which is just pretending to be one. The non-pretender is instructed to answer sincerely as themselves, whereas the pretender's task is to answer the way they believe an actual group member would (Arminen et al., 2018). To succeed, the pretender has to imagine what it would be like to live their life in someone else's shoes, which often moves beyond stereotypes and may raise awareness of different perspectives (Airaksinen and Koponen, 2020).

The group categories are always formed according to self-identification to avoid any false labeling and stereotypical assumptions; here the volunteer participants themselves had identified their gender during the recruitment, and they were grouped accordingly as women and men.¹ In this experiment the participants are young adults, 19–30 years old, students or university graduates. The experiment and recruitment took place on university premises. The recruited parties were informed that they would be participating in a computer game in which the task is to determine which of the other two players is the man and which is the woman (see also Turing, 1950) when both players present themselves to be members of the same gender group (either women or men), so that one player is a non-pretender and the other is a pretender. When acting in the role of non-pretender, they were instructed to be as sincere as possible and to avoid thinking too much about “correct” or “expected” ways of presenting their own gender. In addition, they knew that the game would be played in groups. We had eight groups of three: 12 women and 12 men. Participants were also told that the group decision-making processes would be filmed as a part of the study. The group interactions were not instructed, and the participants were free to ask whatever questions they liked, organize their group interactions as they pleased, and make decisions as they wished. Despite the given task of the game group, interactions were completely uncontrolled and informal.



(Arminen and Segersven, 2019.)

In a Group Imitation Game, each role is played by a group of three players instead of an individual. Group games allow the researcher access to the decision-making process of each group of players regarding how they decide their answers, questions and assessments. This sheds light on the dynamics of knowledge connected to the social group by highlighting the group members' varying experiences. Disagreements between the group members open up processes through which members try to convince others of their views; also, they are allowed to state in their answer that they did not reach agreement, which may highlight the heterogeneity of the group.² The task is simply to ask questions, give answers and assess answers, but the contents of the game turns and the group interactions are undetermined and non-structured. This way, the Group Imitation Game interaction offers exciting video data for studying epistemics in a conversation. (Heino, 2020)

From a CA point of view, the IG can be described as an institutional setting that includes similar structural asymmetry as, for example, a courtroom situation (Ehrlich and Sidnell, 2006): the judge retains control of the interaction by asking the questions, thus setting the agenda for the ongoing game. In order to succeed in presenting themselves as the non-pretender, the respondents of IG are expected to display epistemic access and understanding of the question. In this article, we will analyze a sequence where three women play the role of a judge, deciding which of the two respondents provided a more credible answer to their question: “What would be different in your life if you were a man?” This is their fourth question during the game. By defining how women could answer that question, the group of women performatively define how women can do presentation of self. For analysis of the videotaped data, we utilized multimodal CA (Jefferson, 2004; Heath

¹ In another classroom gender IG experiment, we also had a group “other”; here, none self-identified as gender “other.”

² In the game, the players have to also assess how certain their answer is. Occasionally, the player (or in the group game, the group of players) may remain uncertain. It does happen that certain answers to a certain question do not enable the player to make the choice between the non-pretender and pretender.

et al., 2010; Streeck et al., 2011). The game was played in Finnish, but the analysis can be followed with the translation. To ensure the anonymity of the participants, the players are named A, B and C, from left to right.

3. Analysis

In our analysis, we will concentrate on the group interaction, but we start from the written Imitation Game (IG) sequence, which both provides material for the groups interacting and records the game outcome (Segersven et al., 2020). The IG interaction proceeds in turns. First, the judge formulates a question—here, it is “What would be different in your life if you were a man?”—which is made available to both respondents through computers. The respondents then formulate their answers, which the game software simultaneously displays to the judge, who then reasons which respondent is the pretender and then gives a written account of the choice. In our group IG, each moment of the game sequence is accomplished by a group. The judge group, here three women, has to deliberate on the question, and the respondent groups of men and women have to design their answers, and the judge group then decides which answer seems (more) genuine. After we have discussed the game sequence, we explore the judge group's interaction in forming their assessment. In fact, all IG group interactions make observable the aspects of group decision-making processes (see, e.g., Stevanovic et al., 2020). However, as the assessment interaction displays parties' interactional work to determine the acceptability of claims, we will focus on that and have to pass on the other interactional segments.

3.1. The written game sequence

The IG sequence consists of a question (l. 1), respondents' answers (l. 2–7) and the judge's assessment (l. 8–11). The judge's assessment reveals the account by which the pretender and non-pretender are distinguished. Here, the assessment is based on the group deliberation, to which we will return.

(5) [uid=14208Q4]

- 01 Judge: Mikä olisi elämässäsi toisin, jos olisit mies?
What would be different in your life if you were a man?
- 02 R1: Vaatteiden ostaminen olisi paljon helpompaa. Ei tarvitsisi meikata aamuisin.
It would be much easier to buy clothes. I wouldn't have to make-up in the mornings.
- 03 R2: Omaa asemaa yhteiskunnassa joutuisi reflektoidaan vähemmän.
I wouldn't need to reflect on my position in society as much.
- 04 Uralla eteneminen saattaisi olla helpompaa, kun ei tarvitsisi todistella itseään niin
It might be easier to advance in my career, when I wouldn't have to prove myself as
- 05 paljon, eikä yhteiskunta asettaisi yhtä suuria odotuksia koskien perheen perustamista.
much, and society wouldn't set as high expectations regarding starting a family.
- 06 Toisaalta esimerkiksi suomalaisessa kulttuurissa tunteiden osoittaminen olisi miehenä
On the other hand, for example, expressing your feelings as a man in the Finnish
- 07 rajoitetumpaa. Omaa sukupuolta ei korostettaisi niin paljon ylipäättäen.
culture would be more limited. Overall, my own gender would be highlighted less.
- 08 → Judge: Vastaus 2 on samaistuttava, uskottava, reflektiivinen ja monipuolinen.
Answer 2 is identifiable, believable, reflective and versatile.
- 09 → Siitä välittyvä valvetuneisuus naisena olemisesta yhteiskunnassa. Vastaus 1 on
It conveys awareness of being a woman in a society. Answer 1 is
- 10 → pinnallinen ja stereotyyppinen. Emme ymmärrä, miksi ei-teeskentelijä
shallow and stereotypical. We don't understand why the non-pretender
- 11 → vastaisi vastauksen 1 mukaisesti.
would respond like answer 1.

Here, the judge's question (l.1) is responded to with two very different answers (l. 2–7). Albeit they are both type-conforming, the judge makes a strong assessment, describing the second assessment positively, including it being identifiable, and concluding that the answer “conveys awareness of being a woman in society” (l. 8–9). The first is accounted for with opposite terms of being “shallow” and “stereotypical” (l. 10) and concluded with a revelation that the judge group is unable to grasp the sense of the first answer, had it been given by a non-pretender. In this way, the assessment describes the judge's relation to the answers in an asymmetrical way: they claim to have had access to the meaning-making of the second answer by identification and, conversely, failed to grasp the sense of the first answer. It appears that their question had provoked answers that made visible their asymmetrical access to the respondents' experiences (see Arminen, 1998; Peräkylä, 1995; Pomerantz, 1980). The assessment also opens the judge group to be accountable: its members appear to find identifiable the answer that addresses issues, such as “a position in society,” “career advancement” and “societal expectations” (Whitehead, 2009). Thus, we can also see that even though the game is supposed to be about identifying the gender of the answerer, it is difficult for the players not to be influenced by other categorical attributes. Here, the judge group finds identifiable the answer that uses terminology of meritocracy and reflects on its ethical dilemmas (see Sandel, 2020), while having difficulty in making sense of the other answer that thoroughly lacks all meritocratic aspirations. In that way, the social attributes given by the answers may become relevant for the assessments. Moreover, the assessment may include aspects that are revealing of the social attributes of the judges, i.e., their habitus (Joseph, 2020), and the judge group's meritocratic orientation is noticeable. Next, we turn to explore how this asymmetry between parties was found and formulated in interaction. We will proceed by exploring the group interaction, which leads us to the issue of “false true facts.”

In the next sections, we will move on to the analysis of the videotaped group interaction. The analysis will proceed in phases to provide an account of the decision-making process of the judge group. First, we will show the judges' pre-answer, during which parties start to organize themselves as a group. In the second extract, we concentrate on how the parties form their shared focus, which establishes the common ground for them to start to prepare their answer. Third, we explore how they assess the answers, in order to judge them, and through the fourth (and final) extract we pay attention to how they reach moral certainty regarding their assessment.

3.2. The judges' pre-answer

In IG, the computerized system delivers the respondents' answers simultaneously for the judge, who still has to press the assessment button to make the answers visible (extract 6, l. 1). Subsequently, the judge group members can start to read the answers from the computer screen (l. 2.) to initiate their task of making an assessment of the answers. Not untypically, interactants may start to indicate their affective stance before the production of the verbal turn (Kaukomaa et al., 2013). Here, the group members burst out laughing; this is started by C, but A and B soon join in (l. 3–5).

(6) [uid=14208_GVQ4a]

- 01 ((C clicks the tab open with the mouse))
- 02 (3.0) ((group reads the answers))
- 03 → C: hh hhä Khä kkä hhä hä hä ähä ähä käh käh hhhh [(.) hhhhh hhh
 (((covers mouth with hand))
- 04 → B: [heh he|h
- 05 → A: (((silent laughter))
- 06 (4.4)
- 07 C: .mth hhh [heh heh heh [€ant(h)eeeks€
 I'm (h)sorry
 (((gazes at B)) (((covers mouth))

C's loud, lengthy laughter, partly muddled with coughing, displays her stance and makes the other group members' stances relevant. B and A then join C in laughter, though less strongly. Nevertheless, the response of joined pre-response laughter forms an initiation of a highly disaffiliative, affective stance (Clift, 2016). After this joint display of their stance, it becomes distinctly clear to each group member that there is something upsetting in the answers. None of the group members, however, immediately initiate the launch of verbal assessment (l. 6). Indeed, C seems to initiate the turn first, but she is still partly out of breath and her laughter commences again (l. 7). After C covers her mouth with her hand, the floor is opened for the others.

3.3. Establishing the common ground

In (7) on lines 8–9, B and C start co-constructing the assessment (Lerner, 2004). C continues B's initiation and makes a meta-assessment of the type of the answer, and B then expresses her agreement (l. 9–10). The singular reference shows that the parties are focusing on just one of the answers. The focus on just one answer remains throughout the initial state of the assessment (l. 8–16). At line 16, A concludes that the answer is not reasonable for a non-pretender.

(7) [uid=14208_GVQ4b]

08 B: €joo (.) mä sanoisin et (.) tää on,€
yes I would say that this is

09 → C: .hhh hhh joko [tää on joku tosi monimutkainen] [HÄMY[(.) tai] sitten tää on ilmiselvä.
either [this is a really complicated] [BLUFF [(.) or] otherwise this is obvious.
[((looks at B))] [((turns gaze towards the screen))]

10 B: [()] [joo]
[()] [yes]

11 B: ojooo.
yes

12 (1.5)

13 C: her[ran jumala]
oh [my god

14 B: [tää on niinku [() () ()]
[this is like [() () ()]

/Figure 1

15 → A: [mut ku (.) [mut ku tää on] (.) ei-teeskentelijällä ei olis mitään niinku
[but eh- (.) but this is] (.) the non-pretender would have, like, no reason
[((Leans towards the screen; points with hand))]

16 → A: [ei-teeskentelijällä ei oo mitään syytä vastata vastauksen [yks mu[kaisesti
[the non-pretender doesn't have any reason to answer like [Answer 1
[(((B and C turn towards A))] [(((A leans back
[(((B shakes her head))]

The joint focus on just one answer marks common ground that forms the basis for their shared understanding. As an unmarked foundation for a sequential progression, it also points out the target of their laughter, and as a joint background, it establishes the basis for their further activities. One of the answers appears to have invited joint, disaffiliative laughter from the female judge group. At line 13, C moves on to express her consequent moral outrage. In overlap with C, both B and A initiate a turn (l. 14–15). The overlap continues throughout the turn construction, despite A's recycling of turn-initiation (Goodwin, 1981; Schegloff, 1987). But by raising her pitch, while leaning forward and gesturing toward the screen (Fig. 1), A continues to compete for the floor, and finally manages to resolve the overlap and gain the other group members' attention at line 16 (Schegloff, 2000). A had initially spoken with a soft voice, perhaps out of her orientation to other groups in the same space, but also exposing herself to overlaps.



Fig. 1. A leans forward and gestures toward the screen (l. 15).

At line 16, A's account of the unreasonableness of the target answer also justifies the moral condemnation expressed by the group. In this way, the group had established a common ground to make their assessment of the answers.³

3.4. Accounting for the answers

After having established that one of the answers is unreasonable for a non-pretender, the judges continue to render an account of the answers. As they begin to compare the two answers in (8), A suggests that they both could be pretense (l.19). At line 30, B provides an account for the unreasonable answer by stating that it may tell how the behavior may look to outsiders.

(8) [uid=14208_GVQ4c]

17 A: [ni[inku et tavallaan
[so[in a way

18 C: [↑nii
[↑yeah

19 → A: [kumpiki näist voi olla teeskentely] [mut ei-teeskentelijällä ei ei
either one of these could be pretence [but the non-pretender has no no
[[reaches forward and points at the screen]] [[points a different part of the screen]]

20 → [oo mitään syytä vastata n]äin,
reason to answer like this
[[taps the screen three times]]

21 B: =nii [se on totta]
yep [that is true]

22 C: [nii ku ohje on] kuitenkin silleen että vastatkaa [aidosti] ja oman kokemuksen ja]
[as the instruction], however, is to answer [sincerely] according your own experience and]
[[hand gesture, looks at A and B]]

23 ajatusten mukaisesti
thoughts

24 B: joo(hh)
yes(hh)

³ On the basis of the subsequent assessment, we can infer which answer they are referring to here; see the written sequence (6).

- 25 C: [nii kyllä mä tän nyt niinku] ostan ihan
 [so I would buy this now, like]
 [((points at the screen))]
- 26 B: joo
 yes
- 27 C: täysin
- 28 B: joo [ja tää on siis just se että mitä niinku] (0.2) et jos miettii et mitä <niin kun>
 yes [and this is just what you would] if you think (like)
 (((hand gesture toward the screen)))
- 29 (2.2)
- 30 → B: niinku omast toiminnast näyttäytyy ulkopuolelle (.) nii nää on varmaan niinku ne mitä tulee heti
 how your actions seem from the outside (.) then these would probably come first
- 31 → mieleen (.) tulee tota (0.4) niinku ensin (.) jotenki,
 To your mind (.) come erm (.) like first (.) somehow
- 32 C: .hhh mth jop ja m-[musta (--)]
 and I [I think (--)]
- 33 B: [no oletan todel-] (.) mä oon sitä mieltä et kyllä (.)
 [well I assume cert-] (.) I think that yes (.)
- 34 C: joo (.) [sinne] ja [(.) noin]
 yes (.) [there] and [(.) that way
 (((points at the screen))) (((points at a different part of the screen)))
- 35 ((B clicks the mouse to open assessment writing space))

On lines 19–20, A reasons that even though both answers could have been given by the pretender, one of the answers is such that a non-pretender would have no reason to utter it (i.e., the answer is such that, according to A, no woman would ever say it). B and C (l. 21–23) express their agreement with the unreasonableness of one of the answers. On lines 28–31, B accounts for the unreasonable answer as being how their actions might seem to outsiders (i.e., what might occur to the mind of an outsider). Through her account, she categorizes the giver of the unreasonable answer as an outsider, and also portrays it as being a first-hand impression. The expression is also laminated with the verb *näyttäytyä*, which in English might be “to appear as if” or “to seem,” which projects epistemic skepticism and strengthens the speaker’s opposition to the view (on epistemic skepticism projectors, see Arminen, 2001). Thus, the group has established that no group member could describe their actions in the way they might seem to outsiders, and as the agreement had been achieved and no divergent views had been presented, the group becomes ready to start giving their assessment.

3.5. Moral certainty

After the group had managed to build a unanimous account of both answers, they continue to express their moral condemnation, which then turns into a joint certainty of their assessment (l. 46–47), enabling them to start writing it down (9).

(9) [uid=14208_GVQ4d]

- 36 C: tai (.) näin.
or (.) like this
- 37 A: °mm° (.) €>toi on kyl vaa< sillee et KAMOON€ hhhh [hh hhh
that is just like COME ON
- 38 B: [hhe hhhe hhheh
- 39 C: ↑MUA vähän [nyt niinku (.) mä oon (.) mua jotenki <suututtaa>,
↑ I AM a little like (.) I am (.) I feel somewhat pissed off
[[points at the screen]]
- 40 B: =joo:
yes
- 41 → A: .hh joo:: (.) niinku et onks toi [(1.2) mitä (.) jos toi on ei-teeskentelijältä nii se on vaa
like is that [(1.2) what (.) if that is from the non-pretender then it is just
[[gesturing with both hands
- 42 → täydellinen provo [ku ei] ei-teeskentelijän pitäny käyttäytyy tolleen (.) °nii sit°
a perfect provo [since] the non-pretender wasn't supposed to behave like that (.) so then
- 43 B: [nii:]
[yep]
- 44 C: tshk (.) .hhhhhh hhh
- 45 (3.0)
- 46 → B: noh (.) olen varma [vast(-)]
well (.) I'm sure (of my answer)
- 47 → C: [KYLLÄ]
YES
- 48 ((C takes the keyboard and starts to type the assessment))

On lines 37–40, all the group members join to display their affective stance of being offended by what has been presented to them. On lines 41–42, A articulates the basis for the moral stance, stating that the answer could have been said only as a provocation. By ascribing the category of provocation, A describes the giver of the answer as malicious if they are a member of the group, that is, a competent agent; alternatively, A's account on lines 41–42 enables viewing the answerer as not malicious but incompetent, an out-group member, who just lacks the sufficient expertise and is not aware of the stir and rage they might provoke. B and C's responses on lines 43–44 express their sharing of A's stance. B and C then (l. 46–47) verbalize the joint assessment achieved, and C starts typing the assessment the group had arrived at (l. 48).

4. Discussion

In the segment analyzed, the first answer (in excerpt 5) evoked a strong affective outburst (6). Quickly after reading the answer, one by one the members of the group joined in laughing at the answer, without any verbal coordination, having tacitly directed their attention to the same object they all considered laughable. Their quick joint response shows the unified negative stance toward the object noticed. The question had been about how their life would be different if they were men. The answer they focused on was about make-up and clothing, suggesting “womanhood” to be just that. The group does not completely exclude that a woman's life could appear the way the first answer suggests (see extract 9, l. 30–31), and perhaps some other women in another context might find the answer identifiable. However, the group in our data unanimously rejected multiple times that any woman could ever sincerely say such a thing, constructing a boundary for a justified way of

self-presentation as a woman, portraying the limit of acceptable social facts for a group of female university graduates and students. Therefore, we have observed a phenomenon that we have titled a “false true fact.”

By a false true fact, we refer to a proposition that stands for an observable state of matters that a group of people declare to be unstateable. That is, false true facts refer to propositions that are not considered untrue but which at least a certain group of people under some conditions or occasions hold to not be publicly mentioned. The divisiveness of false true facts makes them potentially apt tools for social group formation; insofar as the able and knowledgeable members of the group share the vision of the nature of the facts, they can display ubiquitous expertise, which for its part may manifest as an expert gradient between the group and others. Furthermore, as a distinct vision that proffers the expertise of the group, it forms a stepping-stone for building a division between the group as a community of practice with an insight and those who lack it, and in that way it works to build a reality disjuncture between groups (Pollner, 1975). That is, when parties see “the same” they see the same same, but differently; both the mother and the father equally see the baby sucking, but they see something different. Alternatively, applying make-up and shopping can be propositioned in different ways according to different views, which builds the know-how of the group to be able to publicly self-represent in appropriate ways; only the group members’ ubiquitous expertise can tell the difference between the appropriate and the inappropriate (Arminen and Simonen, 2021).

In a broader sense, the issue concerns the rules of relevance in “activity types” or “language games,” which set numerous constraints on utterances beyond propositional facts, so that a local contextual configuration forms relevancies for the action formation (Levinson, 1992; Goodwin, 2000). Institutional settings, such as schools or courtrooms (see examples 2 and 3), have their own sets of rules and relevancies that supersede the propositional factuality of claims, and competent agents have to display an ability to play by the rules or else their participation is severely handicapped. Without the ability to recognize what is presentable and how, you remain an outsider who may have a belief in your ability to act but who in a real test may fail miserably without even realizing it.

False true facts have also an interesting relation to unconscious stereotypical biases. In alignment with Implicit Association Tests (IAT), here the parties have a very fast, almost automatic recognition of stereotypes (Banaji and Greenwald, 2013). Make-up-applying, shopping women are a stereotype which the female group unanimously and affectively recognized in a quick way. However, the women’s affective response was also unanimously and immediately negative. They recognized the stereotype, and as IAT tradition would suggest, the parties reacted faster to the stereotype than its opposite. Nonetheless, the affective stance was an inherent part of the response and would complicate the IAT tradition’s view, which tends to show that people’s visions are affected by their unconscious biases. Our data would suggest that people indeed recognize stereotyped biased views but that their responses can be shaped through their participation in communities of practice, involving inherent axiological configurations (Lave & Wenger, 1991). For that reason, IAT studies are right that people are bound to rely on almost automatic responses to stereotypes, but the studies could pay more attention to the nature of affective responses, which may vary according to group-based axiologies. Here, the group of women responded swiftly to a stereotype, but just to refute it. The recognition of stereotypes may be very fast, almost in an automated manner, but this does not rule out interactants’ stance-taking, which may also reject the proposed position.

Finally, our case relates to the formation of relations between social groups (Brubaker, 2004). According to the theory of expertise by Collins and Evans (2008), minority groups learn to act according to the mindset of a majority group in their interactions with it. The theory defines a specific type of expertise learned through interaction with the target group as interactional expertise. Here, the male group members had had interactions with members of a female group, and they believed that they had learned to know the other group and thought they had a source and basis for their views (Pomerantz, 1984). Due to space restrictions, we are unable to show their reasoning, but in practice it proved to fall short; their learning of the other group was superficial, and their interactional expertise was no better than beer-mat knowledge. Nonetheless, false true facts are also learnable objects. Indeed, Collins and Evans (2014) noted that interactional expertise concerning the other genders grows with age. Historically, there have been changes in how ethnic or gender groups can be described and referred to, as well as what kinds of discourses are considered appropriate (Sotirakopoulos, 2021). False true facts are also bound to be situational and changing, thereby being gliding signifiers for identities (Brubaker, 2018). The frontiers of identity struggles continue to shift and move. When Heritage and Sefi published a study of health visitors’ home visits, they (1992, p. 365) generically referred to fathers as husbands and called them a “third party.” In the 2020s, the term “husband” can no longer be generically applied, although in a reference to a gendered world of UK households in the 1980s, it was a fit and relevant aspect of the organization of the interaction where the mother was held responsible for the wellbeing of a baby and the father’s role was to entertain guests, such as the health visitor (excerpt 1).⁴

We are not the first ones to inquire into the consequences of epistemic disjunctions for social facts. In his book *Marilyn*, Norman Mailer coined the term “factoid” already in 1973. Mailer attached the *-oid* suffix to the root of “fact,” similarly to how the neologism “humanoid” was built. Mailer pointed out that there are issues that are believed to be factual but are not.⁵ In some sense, we have been working to uncover the underpinnings of the social process through which a claim becomes refuted as not acceptable. We do not dispute the fact/factoid distinction, but our social ontology is more situated and practice-based. Following EM/CA, we are not addressing the generic difference between facts and factoids but instead explore the interactional work through which the group defines itself by articulating its stance toward something presented as a fact. In

⁴ We thank the reviewer of the perceptive comment concerning the use of categories.

⁵ “Factoid.” *Merriam-Webster.com Dictionary*, Merriam-Webster, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/factoid>. Accessed May 18, 2022.

our data, the group of women refuted the stereotypical view of women applying make-up and shopping thereby displaying their social control of what they as a group accept to be taken as social facts. The enforcing of group-specific epistemics articulates expertise by way of distinguishing between those who know the fact and those who know the inappropriateness of the fact. False true facts thus have potential to display identity-based differences between members of social groups, as they invoke the epistemic perspectivism of facts (Sacks, 1979).

5. Conclusions

The shared ability to interpret perceptions and to effortlessly accomplish common understanding could be described as expert vision. As an answer to our question about the existence of gender-specific expertise, we argue that at least in some instances, ownership of experience can be attributed to gendered agents, and in that sense it does exist. The presentation of self as a woman requires more than superficial observations; one needs to be able to interpret the knowledge at hand in a way that is socially acceptable and intelligible to others in the shared situation. In this manner, the presentation of self is a skill, including know-how instead of mere propositional knowledge. When mastered at the level of complete social fluency, it can be characterized as expertise. When it comes to the presentation of self, false true facts are an essential part of the required know-how. In order to present yourself as a member of a social group, you need to be able to tell facts from false true facts (i.e., what you should never say publicly, however true it may be). This know-how is what constructs the social groups: if all representations of each gender were equally valid, all gendered group identities would cease to exist. By telling apart the acceptable and unacceptable ways of performing gender, gender as a category is constructed as consequential for the ongoing interaction in the group performance. Thus, false true facts are a substantial part of the interactional process of building and rebuilding any social group category. In this article, we have demonstrated how presenting yourself as a member of a social group requires both propositional knowledge and know-how of how to first interpret this knowledge and then shape your actions accordingly. Furthermore, through this process expertise becomes morally grounded; in self-presentations, technical truthfulness is superseded by ethical appropriateness, which distinguishes facts from false true facts.

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Conflict of interest statement

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Data availability

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