Storytelling, self, and affiliation : conversation analysis of interactions between neurotypical participants and participants with Asperger syndrome

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STORYTELLING, SELF, AND AFFILIATION:

CONVERSATION ANALYSIS OF INTERACTIONS BETWEEN NEUROTYPICAL PARTICIPANTS AND PARTICIPANTS WITH ASPERGER SYNDROME

Emmi Koskinen

ABSTRACT

This dissertation examines interpersonal affiliation and the reciprocal protecting of selves and their worthiness, i.e., face-work, during conversational storytelling and story reception. The method utilized is Conversation Analysis (CA), which is a qualitative method for studying audio and video recorded interactions. CA's purpose is unravelling recurring interactional practices through which social actions are constructed. The dataset analyzed in the study consists of ten video recordings of 45- to 60-minute dyadic conversations, where one participant has been diagnosed with Asperger syndrome (AS) and the other participant is neurotypical (NT), and nine video recordings, in which both participants are neurotypical. The participants were adult males, aged between 18-40 years. The participants received instructions to talk about happy events and losses in their lives in a freely chosen way.

Storytelling and story reception practices have previously gained considerable attention in CA, as have the interactional practices of participants diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder or AS. The investigation in the current study, however, involves a unique combination of these elements. Studying AS–NT interactions can increase our understanding of the underlying structures and norms of conversational storytelling and help reveal the taken for granted aspects of 'commonsense' that usually go unquestioned. The aim for the study is thus twofold: to investigate the face-work, storytelling and story reception practices of individuals diagnosed with AS, and to increase our understanding of these phenomena in general. More specifically, the focus of the study is on the displays of (non-)affiliation and on the differing degrees of affiliation conveyed by different interactional practices. Since the study compares the interactional practices of NT and AS participants in the same interactional setting, it inherently involves categorizing the participants. CA has generally followed the policy of 'ethnomethodological indifference' toward the participants' identities and predominantly focused on how participants themselves categorize each other in their talk. However, in this study the empirical observations of the participants' talk have been interpreted in the light of different contextual factors, which include the participants' neurological statuses.

The dissertation consists of four research articles. The first concerns stories in which the AS participants are in the spontaneously assumed role of the recipient. The results are discussed in relation to earlier CA findings on story reception and affiliation in typical interaction, as well as on AS and its specific interactional features. The second article compares the affiliation and topicality of the questions that AS and NT story recipients ask after their co-participants' tellings. The article shows that the affiliative import of story-responsive questions can only really be seen in retrospect, because the

questioner can cast their action in an affiliative or non-affiliative light in subsequent turns. The third article investigates how story recipients manage to display the right level of access to the events the teller describes in order to achieve affiliation. The article describes two main ways to accomplish this in a responsive utterance: fine-tuning the strength of one's access claim and adjusting the degree of generalization. The fourth article explores the differences in the ways in which the AS and NT participants recognize and manage face threats in interaction, in their role as both storytellers and story recipients.

The study shows how affiliation and the establishment of empathic communion between participants has several intersecting levels, as refraining from endorsing the affective stance displayed in the co-participant's telling can sometimes be a prosocial move that protects the selves of the participants. In addition, the study suggests that the difference between the NT and AS participants lies not in the amount of affiliation *per se* but in the subtle use of conversational practices to manage their non-affiliation. The study proposes that future CA studies of asymmetric interactions may consider more theory-laden approaches in addition to the traditional 'ethnomethodologically indifferent' perspectives.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I wish to thank all my friends who listened when I needed to talk and—more importantly—gave me space when I hoped to avoid the topic of my thesis entirely. Finally, I would like to express my deep gratitude to my family who have always supported me in many different ways, no matter what I have decided to do. Special thanks to my sister Jenni, who told me about sociology.

Helsinki, March 2022
Emmi Koskinen

CONTENTS

LIST OF ORIGINAL PUBLICATIONS

This thesis is based on the following publications:

I   Koskinen, E., & Stevanovic, M. (2021). Tarinan vastaanotto ja affiliaatio autismikirjon häiriössä. [Story reception and affiliation in autism spectrum disorder]. *Puhe ja Kieli*, 41(1), 3–22. https://doi.org/10.23997/pk.107689

II   Koskinen, E., Stevanovic, M., & Peräkylä, A. (2021). Affiliation, topicality, and Asperger's: The case of story-responsive questions. *Journal of Interactional Research in Communication Disorders*, 11(1), 52–77. https://doi.org/10.1558/jircd.20903

III   Koskinen, E., & Stevanovic, M. (2021). Epistemic calibration: Achieving affiliation through access claims and generalizations. *Pragmatics*. https://doi.org/10.1075/prag.20036.kos

IV   Koskinen, E., Stevanovic, M., & Peräkylä, A. (2021). The recognition and interactional management of face threats: Comparing neurotypical participants and participants with Asperger's syndrome. *Social Psychology Quarterly*, 84(2), 132–154. https://doi.org/10.1177/01902725211003023

The publications are referred to in the text by their roman numerals.

TRANSCRIPTION SYMBOLS AND GLOSSING ABBREVIATIONS

Transcription symbols

.	falling intonation
,	level intonation
?	rising intonation
↑	rise in pitch
↓	fall in pitch
sp<u>ea</u>k	emphasis
>speak<	faster pace than in the surrounding talk
<speak>	slower pace than in the surrounding talk
°speak°	quiet talk
SPEAK	loud talk
sp-	word cut off
sp'k	vowels omitted from pronunciation
spea:k	sound lengthening
#speak#	creaky voice
£speak£	smiley voice
@speak@	other change in voice quality
.h	audible inhalation
h	audible exhalation
he he	laughter
sp(h)eak	laughter within talk
[	beginning of overlap
]	end of overlap
=	no gap between two adjacent items
(.)	micropause (less than 0.2 seconds)
(0.6)	pause in seconds
(speak)	item in doubt
(-)	item not heard
(( ))	comment by transcriber (sometimes concerning embodied behavior)

Glossing abbreviations

Case endings

ACC accusative
ABL ablative ('from')
ADE adessive ('at, on')
ALL allative ('to')

COM comitative ('with')
ELA elative ('out of')
GEN genitive (possession)
ILL illative ('into')
INE inessive ('in')
PAR partitive (partitiveness)
TRA translative ('to', 'becoming')

Verbal morphemes

1SG 1st person singular ('I')
2SG 2nd person singular ('you')
3SG 3rd person singular ('she', 'he')
1PL 1st person plural ('we')
2PL 2nd person plural ('you')
3PL 3rd person plural ('they')
COND conditional
FREQ frequentative
IMP imperative
INF infinitive
PAS passive
PPC past participle
PPPC passive past participle
PST past tense

Other abbreviations

ADJ adjective
ADV adverb
CLI clitic
CONJ conjunction
COMP complementizer
CMP comparative
DEM demonstrative
DEM1 demonstrative ('this')
DEM2 demonstrative ('that')
DEM3 demonstrative ('it', 'that over there')
LOC location
MAN manner
PRT particle

1 INTRODUCTION

According to Émile Durkheim, members of advanced societies with specialized, diverse roles must be "imbued with common sentiments and values" in order to avoid structural differentiation to reach pathological proportions (Durkheim, 1956, pp. 117–123; see Hawkins, 1979). Individuals can produce and maintain such common sentiments and values in moments of *empathic communion*, which are fundamental to the creation of social relationships, to social solidarity, and to an enduring sociocultural and moral order (Heritage, 2011, p. 160–161; Durkheim, 1915). Furthermore, the maintenance of social order and the foundations for recognizing others in everyday life are underpinned by rituals that guide people's conduct in their encounters (Jacobsen, 2009; Jacobsen and Kristiansen, 2009). These rituals include the reciprocal protecting of selves and their worthiness, i.e., *face-work*, which, according to Goffman (1955, 1956), is a constant task for all interactants (see also Peräkylä, 2015).

Humans create relationships with each other by sharing experiences. Experience-sharing involves the desire and skills to be a reciprocal interaction partner who values others' points of view (Gutstein and Whitney, 2002, p. 163; see also Emde, 1989; Fogel, 1993). Shared experiences are also crucial for forming friendships (Asher, Parker, and Walker, 1996). One fundamental vehicle for humans to share experiences and thus create *empatic moments*, during which they can find their common sentiments, is telling and receiving stories (Heritage, 2011). Storytelling can be seen as "*the* way through which human beings make sense of their own lives and the lives of others" (McAdams, 1995, p. 207, emphasis in original). Furthermore, in telling others about their experiences and sharing their private emotions, individuals do more than just convey information; they put their *selves* on the line for others to judge (Goffman, 1955). When the story recipients then reciprocate the teller's emotions, they protect the face of the teller, mitigate the threat to social solidarity, and thus strengthen the social relationship in question (Peräkylä et al., 2015; Stivers, 2008; Stivers, Mondada, and Steensig, 2011; Lindström and Sorjonen, 2013).

However, it seems that some individuals and members of society do not relate toward experience-sharing and the rituals of interaction in the exact same way as described above. It has been suggested that the hallmark of a neurodevelopmental disorder called Asperger syndrome (AS) (see Section 1.4 for description of AS and autism spectrum disorder) is a lack of spontaneous motivation for experience-sharing (Gutstein, 2000; Gutstein and Whitney, 2002). This atypical orientation toward experience-sharing may also reflect on AS individuals' need for interpersonal recognition and reciprocation of emotions in storytelling contexts, as compared to neurotypical (NT) individuals (Fasulo, 2019). The current study aims to shed light on this aspect

and thus complement the previous sociological understanding of human coexistence. By investigating and comparing the storytelling and story reception practices of AS and NT participants side by side, we may see things that we would not, and perhaps even could not, see by only looking at typical interaction. As Douglas Maynard (2019, p. 11) noted: "Commonsense is the domain of the taken for granted; and because, as its very name indicates, the taken for granted needs no inquiry or articulation, it requires special procedures to make it manifest—to make it 'anthropologically strange' (Garfinkel, 1967, p. 9) and thus visible for purposes of sociological analysis."

1.1 AIMS OF THE STUDY

Storytelling and story reception practices have previously gained considerable attention in Conversation Analysis (CA) (e.g., Stivers, 2008; Mandelbaum, 2013; Peräkylä, 2015), as have the interactional practices of participants with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) (e.g., Maynard, 2005). The investigation in the current study, however, involves a unique combination of these elements. Examining quasi-natural interactions with participants with and without AS can increase our understanding of the underlying structures and norms of conversational storytelling and help reveal the taken-for-granted aspects of *commonsense* that usually go unquestioned (cf. Maynard, 2019; Garfinkel, 1967). The purpose of the current study is thus twofold: to investigate the face-work, storytelling and story reception practices of individuals diagnosed with AS, and to increase our understanding of face-work, storytelling, and story reception practices in general. More specifically, the focus is on displays of (non-)affiliation and the differing degrees of affiliation conveyed by different practices (see Section 1.2 for a definition of storytelling and Section 1.3 for a detailed discussion on affiliation).

The study relies on a working hypothesis that analyzing actual, turn-by-turn, unfolding storytelling sequences with participants with and without AS will provide us with more variation in storytelling and story reception practices, and open up new avenues for investigation that might otherwise go unnoticed (cf. Pomeranz, 2005, p. 93). By learning to understand specific interactional practices and their effect on the relationship between the participants, we may discover some of the more specific interactional features that relate to ASD, and better comprehend the interaction between different participant groups and different interactional styles.

1.2 STORIES AND STORYTELLING

Storytelling can be seen as a fundamentally human endeavor, as "there is not, there has never been anywhere, any people without narrative" (Barthes and Duisit, 1975, p. 237). One classic definition comes from William Labov, who

stated that narrative is "one method of recapitulating past experience by matching a verbal sequence of clauses to the sequence of events which actually occurred" (Labov, 1972, pp. 359–360). In a similar vein, Livia Polanyi defined narratives as "kinds of discourse organized around the passage of time in some world" (Polanyi, 1985, p. 9). Many narrative theorists, however, have since suggested that stories are more than just recapitulations of past events and episodes; they have a defining character: "Our narrative identities are the stories we live by" (McAdams, Josselson, and Lieblich, 2006, p. 4, see Bamberg, 2011, p. 13). Autobiographical narratives are thus an important part of the creation of the narrator's sense of self or identity (Bamberg, 2011).

Narrative analysis has studied stories on two possible levels: The first takes its starting point from *what* was said (and the way it was said) and works toward why it was said; the second focuses more on *how* the stories were performed, i.e. the interactional, context-, and performance-oriented aspects of narration (Bamberg, 1997; 2011, p. 15). On the latter level, the audience is an extremely relevant factor that impinges on the shape of the narrative, and the actual content of the story is just one of the many different performance features that the speaker is aiming to achieve (Bamberg, 1997, p. 335). Furthermore, the latter type of analysis also aims to turn the page from *big story* narrative research to an approach that regards the way that stories surface in everyday conversation (*small stories*) as the locus in which identities are continuously practiced and tested out (Bamberg, 2011, p.15; cf. Goffman, 1959). This view has similarities to the CA perspective in that it considers stories as interactional achievements.

In CA studies, stories are often conceptualized and analyzed in relation to their sequential structure. To make space to tell a story, storytellers need to create an environment for an extended period of talk without interruption (Sacks, 1992; Hall and Matarese, 2014). In this sense, stories can be called *big packages* (Sacks, 1992; Jefferson, 1988) that are constructed as "a recurrent series of components that are oriented to as roughly ordered" (Couper-Kuhlen and Selting, 2018, p. 1). Storytelling is a social action that can also be seen as belonging to the generic category of tellings (Couper-Kuhlen and Selting, 2018; Schegloff, 2007, p. 43). Other members of this category include troubles telling, joke telling, gossiping, announcing, etc. (ibid.). According to Edwards (1997, p. 273), CA scholars have not been very concerned about defining what is or is not a narrative; their focus has been more on how the participants treat a certain stretch of talk as storytelling by the nature of the turn allocation and the negotiation about its significance (Edwards, 1997; see Hall and Matarese, 2014). However, when examining interactions with AS and NT participants, with an aim to compare their storytelling and story reception practices, a collection of cases must be built that enables assessment of the full breadth of the practices. For this, the definition of a story should not only focus on sequentially distinct, collaboratively-achieved, clear-cut storytelling instances. How, then, can we define a story for this purpose?

Many CA scholars have followed the classic descriptions of Labov (1972) and Polanyi (1985) described above, and defined stories as, for example, descriptions of (past) events that are organized around some passage of time (see e.g., Routarinne, 2003, p. 36; Hakulinen, 1989, p. 55; Voutilainen et al., 2014, p.5; Vepsäläinen, 2019, p. 39). In the book *Conversational Narrative: Storytelling in Everyday Talk* (2000), Neal R. Norrick set out to expand the catalogue of conversational storytelling types, and in addition to personal stories of past experiences, surveyed dream telling, third-person stories, generalized recurrent experiences, collaborative retelling, and collaborative fantasy, as well as "diffuse stories which flow and ebb during topical conversation" (Norrick, 2000, p. 135). Ochs and Capps similarly expanded the concept in their book *Living Narrative* (2001). Although the book focused on narratives of personal experience, the authors had an otherwise extremely broad concept of narrative. According to Ochs and Capps (2001, p. 20), personal narratives vary in terms of five dimensions that they display to differing degrees and in different ways: 1. tellership (one active teller -> multiple active co-tellers), 2. tellability (high -> low), 3. embeddedness (detached -> embedded), 4. linearity (closed temporal and causal order -> open temporal and causal order), and 5. moral stance (certain, constant -> uncertain, fluid). The authors noted that, in social sciences, the default narrative tends to exhibit a cluster of characteristics that gather at one end of these continua: one active teller with a highly tellable account that is relatively detached from surrounding talk (ibid.).

Especially useful for the current endeavor are Ochs and Capps's (2001) dimensions of *tellability* and *embeddedness*: "A highly tellable narrative of personal experience relates events of great interest and import to interlocutors. […] In addition, a narrator may use rhetorical skills to transform even a seemingly prosaic incident into a highly tellable account." (p. 34). A narrative of low tellability, in contrast, may concern barely reportable incidents (e.g., answering the question *what did you do today?*) without bothering to dress up the events. The concept of embeddedness relates to turn organization, thematic content, and rhetorical format of the narrative. Relatively detached narratives recount an experience in one or more lengthy conversational turns, which sets the narrative apart from the shorter turns that usually characterize conversational interaction (cf. big package), and also relate events in a distinct rhetorical format, with possibly differing thematic content from that of the surrounding talk (Ochs and Capps, 2001, p. 36). Relatively embedded narratives, in contrast, do not have a distinct turn-taking format. They are told over turns of varying length, they are thematically relevant to the activity or topic already underway, and their rhetorical format takes on features of the surrounding talk (ibid.). As I point out later, these descriptions of embedded narratives with relatively low tellability were helpful when I was working with the dataset of this thesis.

Another important angle from which to analyze stories is their affective meaning. Couper-Kuhlen and Selting (2018) have noted that stories can occur

with or without displays of affectivity. When Heritage (2011) analyzed *accounts of personal experience*, he specifically focused on the recipients' displays of affiliation and empathy in what he called *empathic moments* in interaction. One of the examples that Heritage used was a case originally presented by Goodwin and Goodwin (1987) that concerned a description of an asparagus pie, which attracted an affiliative response from the interlocutor (in line 3):

(1) (Heritage, 2011, p. 168; Goodwin and Goodwin, 1987, p. 24)

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1 Dia: Jeff made en asparagus pie
2      it was s:::so [: goo:d.
3 Cla:           [I love it. °Yeah I love [tha:t.
4 Dia:                                    [< He pu:t uhm,
```

This account would hardly qualify as an instance of storytelling in the CA definition of a *big package*. The focus of the analysis, however, was not on the sequential structure. Heritage utilized Tanya Stivers' (2008) definition in his analysis: In these sequences, there is a telling "that both takes a stance toward what is being reported and makes the taking of a [complementary] stance by the recipient relevant" (Stivers, 2008, p. 32, quoted by Heritage, 2011, p. 164). Peräkylä and Ruusuvuori (2012) made a similar choice in their paper that investigated facial expressions as means of pursuing a response. Building on Anita Pomerantz's (1984b) analysis of *assertions* and responses to them, Peräkylä and Ruusuvuori (2012) based their collection of cases on *tellings with a stance*, which consisted of stories, anecdotes, complaints, and self-blaming remarks that make relevant the recipient's affiliative response (Peräkylä and Ruusuvuori 2012, pp. 66–67).

With all the above in mind, in the current study I chose an inclusive strategy in terms of the structure of the stories in creating the collection. The stories collected include first-person descriptions of past events (cf. Labov, 1972), but also tellings of future plans, or generic narratives about what usually happens (cf. Polanyi, 1985) and third-person narratives (cf. Norrick, 2000). The stories can be relatively detached narratives with a distinct turn format that sets them apart (cf. Schegloff, 2007), or relatively embedded narratives that are told over turns of varying length (cf. Ochs and Capps, 2001). However, since the focus of the current research is on displays of (non-)affiliation, I only included tellings in which the teller displays an affective stance (cf. Stivers, 2008; Heritage, 2011; Peräkylä and Ruusuvuori, 2012) and can therefore be seen as *affiliation implicative* (Jefferson, 2002). In many cases, the affective stances are clearly evident in the evaluative words that the teller uses to refer to happy, sad, funny, etc. stances toward the events that are told. In some cases, the stances are more implicit or embedded in the narrative (Labov, 1972). In these cases, the analysis also relies on *members' knowledge* of what is usually seen as happy/sad in Western culture (cf. Voutilainen et al., 2014), like reporting the death of a family member, for example, and on the participants' nonverbal

displays of stance (such as prosody, gestural displays and gaze behavior). Thus, the term *story* in this study refers to tellings in which the teller displays a stance to what is being told and makes the recipient's *affiliation* with that stance relevant.

1.3 AFFILIATION IN STORYTELLING

The concept of affiliation I use in this work is close to the everyday concept of *empathy*. According to Batson (2009), the term empathy has been used in several academic disciplines to describe at least eight different but related phenomena, ranging from purely cognitive processes of knowing another person's mental state to feeling emotional distress for them. Batson also describes several other closely associated terms, such as *sympathy* (Scheler, 1970 [1913]), *compassion* (Hume, 1896[1740]), and *emotional contagion* (Hatfield, Cacioppo, and Rapson, 1994). Empathy-related responding plays a central role in prosocial behavior, which can be defined as voluntary behavior intended to benefit another (Eisenberg, Losoya, and Spinrad, 2002; Eisenberg and Fabes, 1998). The focus of the current study is on empathy-related responding in social interaction, where a similar phenomenon has been referred to as the notion of affiliation (see Lindström and Sorjonen, 2013, for an overview).

Affiliative actions in interaction can generally be seen to convey to the co-participant *I'm with you /I'm on your side* (Jefferson, 2002). According to Gail Jefferson (1988; 2002), a pioneer of CA, troubles tellings and other negatively framed utterances are affiliation implicative, which means that they seek support, agreement, and sympathy from the recipient (Jefferson, 2002, p. 1349). Sociologist Tanya Stivers (2008) brought the concept of affiliation into the analysis of storytelling in general. She made a further distinction between recipients' displays of affiliation and other types of structural support, such as maintaining the asymmetrical roles of the teller and the recipient (see also Steensig, 2019). Displaying affiliation, then, refers to sharing and endorsing the affective stance conveyed in the telling (Stivers, 2008). Tellers often describe events from a particular emotional perspective: The story can be presented as happy, sad, funny, etc. The recipient is expected to support this attitude both during the story and especially at the end of it (Sacks, 1974; Jefferson, 1978; Stivers, 2008; Stivers, Mondada, and Steensig, 2011).

The specificities of the concept of affiliation can be clarified by the notion of *preference*, which in CA refers to the idea that social actors readily follow different kinds of solidarity-promoting principles when they react in social situations (Clayman, 2002; Pomerantz and Heritage, 2013), dispreferred actions usually being accountable (Heritage, 1990). Importantly, the concept of preference does not refer to the participants' individual desires but to the social structures that govern interaction (Schegloff, 2007). The most powerful expression of these normative presumptions arises in the form of *adjacency*

pairs (e.g., Schegloff and Sacks, 1973), in which the production of a first conversational action (e.g., a greeting, a question) both projects and requires the production of a second (e.g., a return greeting, an answer) (Heritage, 1990, p. 27). A questioner whose question has not been answered is then allowed to request that the respondent answers it and/or to sanction the nonrespondent (ibid.). Storytellings, like many other social actions, can be viewed as having preferred and dispreferred response types (Stivers 2008, p. 33). In the context of storytelling, the preferred uptake at story completion is affiliation, and basically everything else at the end of the telling (e.g., silence) can be viewed as non-affiliative, and therefore as dispreferred (Stivers, 2008; Sacks, 1974). To summarize: Affiliative responses are pro-social in that "they match the prior speaker's evaluative stance, display empathy and/or cooperate with the preference of the prior action" (Stivers et al., 2011, p. 21).

It is important to note, however, that the sequential implicativeness of a storytelling and its reception is somewhat different from the more binding norms of adjacency pairs presented above. As Jefferson (1978) noted, storytellers do not explicitly challenge or complain about lack of affiliation[1], such as tangential recipient talk or recipient silence. Instead, they propose that the story was not yet complete by offering a next story component, providing the recipient with another slot in which to respond to the story (Jefferson, 1978, p. 234). Subsequent research has supported this idea and found that tellers can pursue affiliative responses from recipients by, for example, redoing their displays of affectivity, recycling the climax of the story, and altering the stance-conveying elements in the telling (Couper-Kuhlen, 2012; Peräkylä and Ruusuvuori, 2012; Selting, 2010). All these methods, however, are quite implicit in comparison to the overt complaining or sanctioning (*why aren't you answering my question?*) available to speakers after producing first-pair parts of adjacency pairs. Stivers (2013) has suggested that the possible reason for this is that a lack of recipient uptake in a storytelling context is already communicative in itself, and strongly implies a dispreferred stance: "Absence of response in the storytelling context is understood to be communicative in a way that failing to answer a question is not" (ibid., p. 204).

Another relevant point to make at this stage is that storytelling can be considered a *high-stakes activity* [2] in which the participants' selves are, in a very special way, under threat. Taking the time to tell a story can be seen as *imposing* on the recipient and limiting their actions by taking the conversational floor for several turns (in other words, the teller is threatening the *negative face* of the recipient, see Brown and Levinson, 1987). The

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[1] In this study I mainly use the terms *lack of affiliation* and *non-affiliation* instead of *disaffiliation*, because they are more nuanced and suitable for my argument that non-affiliative turns can sometimes be used to avoid even more dispreferred turns, such as overt disagreement or disaffiliation.

[2] The description of storytelling as high-stakes activity involving multiple face concerns is taken from a lecture course on conversational structures, taught by professors Steven Clayman and John Heritage at UCLA in 2017.

recipient's display of affiliation can thus be seen as legitimizing taking the time to tell the story, thus saving the face of the teller (or enforcing their *positive face* in Brown and Levinson's terms). The significance of this can also be seen on the participants' psychophysiological activation. Peräkylä and colleagues (2015) found that a lack of recipient affiliation increased the storytellers' level of psychophysiological arousal (as measured by skin conductance responses), whereas expressions of affiliation calmed the tellers down. One interpretation of these results is that the expected, affiliative response of the recipient leads to relaxation because it maintains the teller's face. A lack of affiliation, in contrast, increases anxiety because it is associated with the teller losing their face (see Peräkylä et al., 2015, p. 306). In light of this, it is understandable that, if story recipients withhold affiliative turns, the tellers do not explicitly pursue them, as it can make the situation even more face-threatening and anxiety-provoking. The more implicit ways of pursuing affiliation can be seen as 'safer', as they are take place off the record and are thus less accountable (for a discussion on actions that avoid accountability, see e.g., Seuren and Huiskes, 2017; Sidnell, 2017; Kendrick and Drew, 2016). To gain a deeper understanding of the accountability of affiliation, let us now turn to a participant group that can have atypical ways of expressing (see Belmonte, 2008) and recognizing (e.g., MacDonald et al., 1989) affect, both of which can be seen as preconditions for interactional displays of affiliation.

1.4 ASPERGER SYNDROME, AUTISM SPECTRUM, AND SOCIAL INTERACTION

Asperger syndrome (AS) is a neurodevelopmental disorder characterized by atypicalities in social interaction, average or superior intelligence, and no significant language delay (Hosseini and Molla, 2021). The condition was first discovered by Austrian pediatrician, Hans Asperger, whose PhD dissertation (1944) described four boys with atypical social and cognitive profiles. Lorna Wing (1981) was the first to use the term Asperger syndrome when describing a group of children and adolescents who presented features similar to those initially reported by Asperger (Wicker and Gomot, 2012). In the 1990s, AS was added to the two leading diagnostic manuals: the American Diagnostic and Statistical Manual (DSM-IV) and The International Classification of Diseases (ICD-10), the latter of which is still in use in Finland at the time of writing. In 2013, the AS diagnosis was replaced with a broader diagnostic category of autism spectrum disorder (ASD) in DSM-V (American Psychiatric Association [APA], 2013). This reform was based on the unreliability of the autism vs. AS distinction, such as the reported absence of distinctive cognitive profiles, the demonstration of which would have required a clear behavioral distinction between the two subgroups, which was not possible using the DSM-IV criteria (Mottron, 2020). The World Health Organization will follow this reform in ICD-11 (Hosseini and Molla, 2021; Smith and Jones, 2020).

In the current study, I mainly use the term AS (instead of ASD) when referring to the specific participants in the data, as they were diagnosed before the new diagnostic manual. In addition, the DSM-V also suggests keeping old diagnoses and not recoding them according to the new criteria (Mottron, 2020; APA, 2013). It is important to note, however, that a strong debate is still ongoing on the pros and cons of the DSM-V decision to remove the AS diagnosis, which is also sometimes fueled by information on Hans Asperger's role during World War II (Motton, 2020, see Czech, 2018). The literature on the potential impact of the DSM-V changes on AS individuals and their identity is still relatively limited (Hosseini and Molla, 2020), and adults previously diagnosed with AS have expressed a diverse range of opinions on the issue (see e.g., Smith and Jones, 2020).

The main diagnostic criteria for ASD include difficulties with social communication and social interaction (APA, 2013). Individuals with ASD are atypical in their management of conversational topic (e.g., Paul et al., 2009). These atypicalities can manifest in, for example, the persistent maintenance of a particular topic despite attempts by the co-interlocutor to change topic—especially if the topic under discussion happens to relate to the AS person's own particular interest (Attwood, 1998; Paul et al., 2009). Interaction of individuals with ASD may also be primarily instrumental in nature, meaning that it is more related to a particular goal or task (Tager-Flusberg, 1996) than, for example, sharing emotions and experiences (Gutstein, 2000). It is important to note, however, that the atypicalities related to social interaction in ASD are also very much socially (re)produced and can form vicious cycles: "When social affiliations are organized primarily by voluntary choice and contingent upon sustained mutual satisfaction, those who are slower to develop the kinds of competencies necessary to form and maintain such relationships are also systematically denied opportunities to develop them" (Fein, 2015, p. 83, see also Fein, 2020).

Individuals with ASD can be atypical in their interpretation and processing of interactional context (Norbury, 2005; Maynard, 2005). One extremely crucial aspect of interactional context is considering what the co-interactant knows, i.e., what belongs to the common ground between the participants (Clark, 1996). Heritage (2013, p. 370) noted that sociologists have long recognized the importance of epistemics: participants' ability to recognize what each knows about the world, for building mutual action and joint understandings in interaction (see e.g., Mead, 1934; Schütz, 1962; Garfinkel, 1967; Clark, 1996). This ability is sometimes referred to as theory of mind (Baron-Cohen, 2001; Astington, 2006), and has been seen as a precondition for many things that are taken for granted in social interaction (Heritage, 2013). Individuals with ASD may have weaker or differently acquired theory of mind, which means they can be atypical in the way they interpret other people's mental states and perspectives (Baron-Cohen, 1997; Saxe and Baron-Cohen, 2007). This may show in, for example, difficulties recognizing the communicative intention behind a speaker's utterance (Cummings, 2009, p.

14). Indeed, individuals with ASD have been observed as having difficulty interpreting irony (Cummings, 2009; Martin and McDonald, 2004). Some of these challenges, however, might be due to atypical ways of expressing affect instead of clearly defined deficits in theory of mind (see Belmonte, 2008).

Sperber and Wilson (1995; 1997) have claimed that the pursuit of relevance is a constant factor in human mental life and that this psychological claim has immediate sociological consequences. According to them, this principle of relevance is what makes it possible for an individual to infer what other individuals are paying attention to, even what they are thinking. Conversational irrelevance is a feature of many pragmatic disorders in children and adults, including individuals with ASD (Cummings, 2009, p. 22). As participants with ASD can have trouble determining relevant aspects of context, they do not always follow the communicative principle of relevance in the same way as NT individuals, which can lead to challenges in intersubjectivity (e.g., Loukusa et al., 2007; Cummings, 2009; Happé, 1993; Ochs and Solomon, 2005; 2010; Sterponi and Fasulo, 2010). When studying high-functioning children with autism or Asperger's, Ochs and Solomon (2005; 2010) found that the children's utterances sometimes fell in a zone between irrelevant and completely relevant—a zone they called proximal relevance (Ochs, and Solomon, 2005, p. 143). That is, their utterances drifted from the topic of the previous set of utterances. However, their study also showed how the principle of relevance actually has rather fuzzy boundaries, as the co-interactants often treated the ASD participants' proximally relevant turns as topically coherent. The study of individuals with pragmatic disorders such as ASD can thus be fruitful for testing and refining current theory on social interaction (Cummings, 2009; Happé, 1993).

In CA, autism has been a topic of extensive research efforts. The first systematic study of interaction with an individual with autism was conducted by Dobbinson, Perkins and Boucher, who identified atypicalities in, for example, topic maintenance, repair, overlap, latching, and pauses (Dobbinson, Perkins and Boucher, 1998; see also Antaki and Wilkinson, 2013). These findings added systematicity and detail to earlier, more general characterizations of 'autistic speech' as being marked by deficits, echolalia, and formulaic talk (Antaki and Wilkinson, 2013). According to Antaki and Wilkinson (2013), CA researchers have deliberately avoided using diagnostic categories (except for the broadest official diagnostic labels) in their analysis to prevent labels clouding their vision of what the participants can actually do. This, however, has also meant that CA findings form 'an ad hoc patchwork' of practices rather than a systematic survey of competences according to the type or severity of the person's diagnosis (ibid.; see Section 2.5 for a discussion on the use of diagnostic categories in the current study). Overall, most of the more recent CA findings have highlighted the subtle competencies of participants with ASD that have previously gone unnoticed (see e.g., Dickerson, Stribling and Rae, 2007; Dindar, Korkiakangas, Laitila, and Kärnä, 2016ab; Fasulo, 2019; Korkiakangas, Rae, and Dickerson, 2012; Muskett, Perkins, Clegg, and

Body, 2010; Muskett and Body, 2013; Sterponi and Fasulo, 2010; Sterponi and Shankey, 2013; Stribling, Rae, and Dickerson, 2007). Maynard has referred to these kinds of competences as *autistic intelligence* (Maynard, 2005) or *concrete competence* (Maynard, 2019; Maynard and Turowetz, 2017; see also Turowetz, 2015). One of his main insights is that clinical tests usually measure abstract competence, i.e., the ability to produce general answers to theoretical questions, which may obscure various kinds of more concrete forms of competences that a child with ASD displays.

However, many individuals with ASD are highly competent linguistically, and their competences are rather obvious. Focusing the study on the specific competencies of these individuals would therefore not provide similar new information, like many previous CA studies of interaction in ASD have done. These high-functioning individuals have nevertheless been diagnosed with AS or ASD, which is a priori related to their interactional practices (based on diagnostic criteria alone). But not much is yet known about their atypical interactional practices (see, however, Wiklund, 2016; Wiklund and Laakso, 2019). Research on these participants is the key to understanding the subtlety of interaction. While it is extremely valuable to also investigate communication in ASD *per se*, the specific research questions of the current study (see below) mandate a comparative setting.

1.5 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

In light of the discussion so far, the four main research questions of the study can be formulated as follows:

RQ 1. How do the participants orient toward the concerns of self and affiliation in the storytelling sequences?

RQ 2. To what extent, and how, do the AS participants' storytelling and story reception practices differ from those of NT participants?

RQ 3. How do these findings relate to the theories and clinical understandings concerning ASD?

RQ 4. What do the findings tell us about the norms governing storytelling sequences more generally?

RQ 1 is of course very general, and my exploration of that necessarily takes place in dialogue with a wealth of prior research on narration and affiliation. The other research questions are more specific and concern issues that can only be approached through the comparative research design involving NT and AS participants.

2 METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH, DATA, AND RESEARCH PROCESS

The method utilized in the current study is conversation analysis (CA) and the dataset analyzed in the current study consists of 19 dyadic interactions between either AS and NT individuals or between two NT individuals. The method will be described in more detail in Sections 2.1 and 2.2. The distinctive nature of the data also demands a discussion on how the CA analysis applied in the current study relates to experimentalism, which is addressed in Section 2.3. The dataset and participants are described in more detail in Section 2.4, and the analysis process in Section 2.5.

2.1 CONVERSATION ANALYSIS

CA is a qualitative method for studying video recordings of interactions that aims to unravel the reoccurring interactional practices through which social actions are constructed (e.g., Sidnell and Stivers, 2013; Schegloff, 2007). CA was developed in the late 1960s by Harvey Sacks, in association with Emanuel Schegloff and Gail Jefferson (Heritage and Clayman, 2010, p. 12). Sacks and Schegloff were students of Goffman at the University of California at Berkeley, and were also in close contact with Harold Garfinkel at UCLA (Schegloff, 1992, see Heritage and Clayman, 2010, p.12). The CA program combined elements from both Goffman and Garfinkel. The notion that talk-in-interaction is a fundamental social domain that can be studied as an institutional entity in its own right came from Goffman, and the notion that shared methods of reasoning are implicated in the production and recognition of contributions to interaction came from Garfinkel (Heritage and Clayman, 2010).

Today, CA can be regarded as the dominant approach in the study of human social interaction across the disciplines of sociology, linguistics, and communication (Stivers and Sidnell, 2013). CA has been applied to a great variety of languages and types of interaction, ranging from *ordinary conversations* to institutional interactions, and to the interactions between speakers with speech and communication disorders, for example (Haakana, Laakso, and Lindström, 2009). CA can be characterized as an essentially comparative method, as the analysis typically first identifies a phenomenon of interest in the data (e.g., a certain type of sequence), then advances by gathering a collection of relevant cases, and finally compares these cases with each other (Haakana, Laakso, and Lindström, 2009). This comparative work enables the analyst to identify the recurrent patterns of interaction and to generalize the analyzed phenomenon (ibid.).

2.2   STUDYING ASYMMETRIC INTERACTIONS

In their edited volume on comparative research in CA, Haakana, Laakso, and Lindström (2009, p. 17) describe several possible levels of comparison in which the analyst can engage. Comparisons can be made across different *types* of interaction (e.g., institutional talk versus ordinary talk), across participants' different *identities* and *competencies* (e.g., gender, native vs. nonnative speakers), and from a *cross-linguistic* or *cross-cultural* perspective. These dimensions of comparison, however, are often intertwined in the analysis, as interactions can be classified in several ways (ibid., p. 18). The dimension most relevant for the current study concerns the participants' identities and competencies. In CA studies, the analyst usually does not impose participant categories (such as age, gender, language proficiency) on the data, but instead focuses on the identities that the participants themselves orient to in their talk (ibid.). The rationale for this is quite convincing: "There are too many aspects of an individual's social identity that might be relevant at any given moment, so which aspects matter for a given action must be empirically demonstrated as relevant to participants" (Rossi and Stivers 2021, p. 2; see also Eglin and Hester, 2003).

There is one notable exception to this agnostic stance toward participant identities in CA. With the rise of the study of institutional interaction, participant identities and roles have been deemed extremely relevant also for the local sequential progression of interaction (see e.g., Heritage and Clayman, 2010). Some CA researchers, however, have remained wary of attributing actions to these institutional aims and roles. For example, Schegloff (2003; Wong and Olsher, 2000) has explicitly warned against invoking these kinds of external categories and letting a certain kind of material dictate the terms of the analysis. He has emphasized that it is not enough to know the contextual background; for example, that the interaction is from a radio broadcast. One needs to show evidence in the data of an orientation by the participants to a radio broadcast (Wong and Olsher, 2000, p. 113). This same idea has been applied to the analysis of atypical or asymmetric interactions with participants with different (dis)abilities. In the paper *Conversation Analysis and Communication Disorders*, Schegloff (2003, p. 45) states that what does and does not relate to a specific disorder should remain an open question, and that it is the analyst's job to show how the participants are oriented toward the differing competencies (see also Wong and Olsher, 2000).

CA studies of competence thus explore the ways in which competence is constructed by the interacting participants themselves (Haakana, Laakso, and Lindström, 2009). However, conversations that involve children, non-native speakers, and people with communication disorders have generally been considered asymmetric because the participants do not have equal linguistic competencies, and the findings regarding conversations between competent and less competent speakers are often at least implicitly compared to the existing knowledge of ordinary conversation between 'equal peers' (ibid., p.

26). As Schegloff (2003) has emphasized, it is very important to also look at materials that have no systematic contingencies of disability, as it enables us to recognize commonalities and to specify contrasts. Indeed, this is why the dataset utilized in the current study also has nine control discussions in which both participants are neurotypical. In this sense, by comparing quasi-natural interactions between AS-NT and NT-NT participants, the current study is not unlike traditional CA studies that examine asymmetric interactions in more natural settings.

2.3 CONVERSATION ANALYSIS AND EXPERIMENTAL SETTINGS

The data for the current study can be described as *quasi-natural*, as it was produced specifically for research purposes, but the discussion was conducted freely without any researcher intervention. Using contrived data goes against the tradition of CA using completely *naturally occurring* talk, i.e., talk that would still take place even if the researcher happened to get sick on the morning of the data collection (Potter, 2004, p. 191). In fact, as Susan Speer (2002) has noted, many definitions of the CA method describe naturally occurring interactions as the fundamental basis of analysis (see e.g., Schegloff and Sacks, 1973, Hutchby and Wooffitt, 1998, Heritage and Clayman, 2010, Psathas, 1995). This ideal is based on the reasoning that analyzing experimental situations can narrow the relevance of the data and the applicability of the findings (Heritage and Clayman, 2010, p. 13; Schegloff, 1987, 1991). CA's ethos of examining interactions as they happen *in the wild* (e.g., Albert et al., 2018) is an extremely valuable endeavor worth continuing, as CA findings regarding naturalistic data can often contradict some more general ideas about interactional competences and the findings of other disciplines, such as psychological tests (Maynard and Turowetz, 2017) or communication training (Stokoe, 2011).

Recently, however, as a field, CA has also begun to embrace a methodological pluralism that includes quantification, experimentation, and laboratory observation (see e.g., Kendrick, 2017; Kendrick and Holler, 2017; Stevanovic et al., 2017; Bögels and Levinson, 2017). Even though there are clear limitations to the generalizability of observations based on experimental or quasi-natural data, there are also obvious advantages. First, as is the case in the current study, as analysts we have access to the whole interactional history between the participants when the participants meet for the very first time as the cameras start recording. This offers a unique window, for example, to the real-world epistemic statuses (see Publication III) of the participants in relation to each other in a way that naturally occurring interaction between close friends or family members with extensive interactional history (unattainable to the analyst) would not. Second, and more importantly, as the interactional context is identical for every recorded dyad and the two

participant groups (AS and NT), it provides an extraordinary opportunity to make comparisons of the interactional practices of different participants, which would be impossible or very difficult using only naturally occurring data.

Another important perspective to this issue concerns the distinction between *natural* and *contrived* data which, under more intense scrutiny, is not as clear-cut or self-evident as it first seems. A more appropriate way of conceptualizing this distinction would perhaps be to describe a continuum between researcher-instigated data and naturally occurring data (Peräkylä and Ruusuvuori, 2011; Speer, 2002; Kendrick, 2017) since "no data are ever untouched by human hands" (Silverman, 2001, p. 159). Susan Speer (2002, p. 513) has argued that it makes little theoretical or practical sense to map the natural/contrived distinction onto discrete *types* of data. What constitutes natural data should, according to Speer, instead be decided on the basis of what the researcher intends to *do* with them (p. 520). One way to reframe the natural/contrived dichotomy is to see whether the setting is *procedurally consequential* for one's topic (see Schegloff, 1991, p. 54; Speer 2002, p. 520). In the current context, for example, one might ask whether the instructions given to the participants influence the affiliation-relevance of their tellings. It is certainly true that telling someone about your father's passing entirely on your own initiative is different to doing so when you have been asked to talk about losses in your life. The stories told, however, also dealt with many other topics than those the instructions explicitly mentioned, and typically occurred as rounds of stories (Goffman, 1974; Tannen, 1984) and second stories (Sacks, 1992), very much like naturally occurring interactions. Also the importance of displaying affiliation in these quasi-natural conversations has been established in a set of studies that found that the affiliative responses of the story recipients in these interactions reverberate in the (neurotypical) tellers' bodies, calming them down (Peräkylä et al., 2015; Stevanovic et al., 2019).

Even Emmanuel Schegloff, one of the most vocal promoters of using naturally occurring data, commented on interaction in a psychological testing situation as follows: "The testing interaction examined is naturalistic—just another genre of interaction, whose premises an observer must respect and study but not necessarily assume or subscribe to" (Schegloff, 2003, p. 27; see also Marlaire and Maynard, 1990). Speer (2002, p. 518) has suggested, in a very CA spirit, that one solution to this issue is to take into account the participants' own orientations when defining what an interaction is at any particular moment: "It would be interesting to explore how participants attend to the fact of their being involved in a social science investigation, looking at moments where they treat the setting as somehow non-natural, or attend to the occasion as a contrived one."

To explore Speer's suggestion, let us consider two (rather rare) examples from the dataset of this thesis. In these examples, the participants explicitly orient to the experimental nature of the situation at hand. Because the participants did not know each other beforehand, the conversations did not

always flow smoothly and there could be moments where they ran out of topics. The momentary awkwardness could sometimes be topicalized, as in the following extract:

(2) (A14; 26:35)

```
01 A: sano et ↑siel on kakskyt astetta £jahh heh£
      [she] said that it is twenty degrees there and heh

02 B: voi: terve. (.) £hhehheh n(h)iik(h)u)£. .hhh[hh
      oh hello. (.) hhehheh like .hhhhh

03 A:                                          [joo.
                                                yes.

04    (2.4)

05 A: #et <jee:s:#>.
       so ye:ah.

06       (0.9)

07 B: .mthh >tää o vähä< nyt tällee ehkä, (.) £keinotekonen
       .mthh this is a little bit now kind of like an, (.) artificial

08    puheeaihe sil[lee=puhut jonku <vieraa> henkilön kaa
      topic like=you're talking to some stranger

09 A:             [heh heh
                   heh heh

10 B: sil[lee£, .hhh #°en tiiä et mitäh°# (.) [#mitä
      like, .hhh I don't know what (.) what

11                                           [(jep)
                                              (yep)

12 B: ↑tähän nyt sanois.# (0.5) .ghhh [.mt hh
      to say to this. (0.5) .ghhh .mt hh

13 A:                                [.mt
                                      .mt

14 B: [mitään          ↑ne]gatiiv[isii.
       any              negative.

15 A: [>ei voi vaa olla va<]     [£hiljaa j(h)a[ha .hhh (.)
       (we) can't just be         silent and haha .hhh

16 B:                                          [£n(h)i£
                                                yeah

17 A: £kattoo mukavasti tohon k(h)a[m(h)er(h)aan£, haha .hh ]
       gaze nicely into the camera haha .hh

18 B:                             [mhehehe n(h)iin t(h)otta]
```

```
19 B: .hhh mitäs ne̲gatiivisii tapahtumii ↑no, (.) öö,
      .hhh any negative events well, (.) um,
```

Before the extract, the participants had been discussing whether they had siblings, and A mentions that his sister is now living in Spain, where it was twenty degrees Celsius at that moment (line 1). B responds to this with *Voi terve*/ "Oh hello" (line 2), conveying surprise or perhaps even envy of the heat in Spain compared to that in Finland at the time. What follows is a typical moment of *topic attrition*, consisting of pauses and turns that do not convey any new knowledge (lines 3–6), normally indicating the closure of the topic and perhaps even the closure of the whole conversation (Jefferson, 1993; Heritage, 2012; Schegloff and Sacks, 1973). However, in this instance, exiting the interaction is not really a possibility, as the participants have agreed to talk for at least 45 minutes. This prompts B to explicitly orient to the artificial nature of both the current topic under discussion and the situation more generally: "This is a little bit like an artificial topic like you're talking to some stranger... I don't know what I should say to this" (lines 7–12). B then initiates a new topic with "any negative" (line 14), most likely referring to the instruction to discuss losses in their lives, interpreting the instruction to talk about happy events and losses as positive and negative events. In overlap, A laughingly states "we can't just be silent and gaze nicely into the camera" (lines 15–17).

In the next example, the participants also orient to the abnormality of the situation. However, they end up having quite the opposite opinion, that the situation is actually in some ways very natural and offers a rare opportunity to speak openly to one another without the need to "keep up appearances". In the beginning of the extract (lines 1–5), the participants are finishing a long discussion about their parents' relationships being filled with arguments and conflict when they were growing up.

(3) (A17; 20:40)

```
01 A: nii säilyttää sen niinku:, (1.0) ((kohauttaa olkapäitään))
      yeah to keep the like (1.0) ((shrugs his shoulders))

02    tavallaa ra̲uhan (.) ei,=
      the peace in a way (.) not,=

03 B: =mm,
       =mm,

04 A: ei nost(h)a kissaa ↑pöyälle,
      not lift the cat on the table [Finnish idiom; not addressing difficult subjects]

05 B: mm,
      mm,
```

06   (2.1)

07 B: hmmh
      hmmh

08   (2.2)

09 B: (höm) (0.3) .mth #ha-# harvoin tulee juteltuus sill£eehh
      (um) (0.3) .mth ra- rarely does (one) talk with like

10   ↑tuntemattoman kanssa niinku£
      a stranger like

11   (1.0)

12 A: jo[o,
      yes,

13 B: [tälläsist asioist niin nopeesti.=tää o [itseas aika
         about these kinds of things so quickly.=this is actually quite

14 A: [joo tää o-
                                                   yes this is

15 B: hauska.]
      fun.

16 A: tää   ] on, (.) £↑t(h)ää on kyl epät(h)avallinen
      this is, (.) this is indeed an unusual

17   tilanne,£
      situation,

18 B: hehh ni(h)i. .hhh
      hehh yeah. .hhh

19   (0.6)

20 A: ↑tavallaan, (0.4) tavallaan se on ihan, (0.7) ihan niinku:,
      in a way, (0.4) in a way it's quite, (0.7) quite like,

21   (1.3) silleen #y-# luontevaaki (0.4) koska: .h (0.3) #eö- e#i
      (1.3) like (.) even natural (0.4) because .h (0.3) [one] does not

22   niinku, (0.9) toisaalt, #öö# tarvi ylläpitää
      like, (0.9) on the other hand, (.) um [one] does not need to keep up

23   minkäänlaist(h)ahh ↑vaikutelmaa, (0.5) [täs tilantees
      any kind of appearance, (0.5) in this situation

24 B: [mm,
                                              mm,

25 A: voi niinku, .hh voi: aika (.) aika niinku#:# (0.3)
      [one] can like, .hh can quite (.) quite like (0.3)

26   avoimestikki ↑kertoo.
      openly tell.

30

```
27 B: mm-m?
       mm-m?

28     (1.2)

29 B: ↑niinpä.
       yeah/I know.
```

After they are finished with the topic of their parents' tumultuous relationships, B expresses how rare it is to talk about such deep issues with a stranger so quickly (lines 9–13), and ends his turn with the evaluation "this is actually quite fun" (lines 13–15). Earlier CA research on speed dating has shown that unacquainted interlocutors treat personal and intimate topics as delicate and employ special conversational procedures to broach them in a cautious manner (Stokoe, 2010; Korobov, 2011). It seems possible that, in the current data, some of these conversational norms may have been relaxed, as the participants were 'allowed' or even instructed to discuss emotional topics with a stranger. A agrees that the situation is unusual (lines 14–17) and then makes a more elaborate positive evaluation, saying how the experimental situation of discussing one's emotions can be quite natural and perhaps more open in a situation such as this (lines 20–26). Notably, in both Extracts 2 and 3 the conversation has come to a halt. As Maynard (1980) pointed out in his study on topic changes, at these specific moments it is typical for participants (both acquainted and unacquainted) to engage in *setting talk*, which is exactly what happened in both of these instances. One way in which to interpret this is that the experimental nature of the situation is utilized as one resource among others to produce topical talk, instead of it being an omnipresent aspect that interferes with the 'natural' practices of interaction.

One interesting aspect of A's turn in Extract 3 is the lack of a need to maintain a certain impression or appearance, which I think warrants further discussion. Generally, the need for impression management during first encounters has received much attention in psychology (on *first impressions*, see e.g., Ambady and Skowronski, 2008). It could definitely be argued that in an experimental setting such as this, in which the participants have no real-life purpose (cf. Svennevig, 2014) for meeting, the importance of maintaining a good first impression can become less salient. However, as Maynard (1980) and Maynard and Zimmerman (1984) observed in their experimental setting, which consisted of both previously acquainted and unacquainted dyads, the acquainted participants formed their topic-changing utterances as claims to the conversational floor (announcements), while the unacquainted parties tended to construct them more cautiously as invitations (as in question format). Maynard and Zimmerman (1984) argued that by doing this, the interactants were ritually protecting the selves of the involved parties. It would therefore seem fair to assume that, even in experimental conditions, participants generally tend to orient to the same underlying norms as in more natural settings. Furthermore, as is later pointed out in the discussion of

Publication IV, the orientations to impression management are quite clear, at least among the NT individuals, also in the current dataset.

Hence, analysis of quasi-natural interactional data shows that participants may treat interactions as *real*, even when discussing their possible abnormalities. I strongly agree with Potter and Wetherell (1995, p. 217) who have pointed out that "what is going on is indeed genuine; it is genuine interaction in a laboratory" (see also Speer, 2002 p. 517). Future research on story reception, affiliation, and the autism spectrum can determine whether the hypotheses created on the basis of the current research are valid in different kinds of situations and different interactional contexts (cf. Maynard and Zimmerman, 1984, p. 302).

2.4 DESCRIPTION OF DATASET

The dataset investigated in the current study consists of ten video recordings of dyadic conversations, in which one participant has been diagnosed with AS, and the other participant is neurotypical (AS–NT dyads), and nine video recordings of control data, in which both participants are neurotypical (NT–NT dyads). The data were collected as part of a project investigating the psychophysiological underpinnings of talk-in-interaction. These conversations took place in an acoustically shielded room in which the participants sat in armchairs facing each other perpendicularly. The conversations lasted 45–60 minutes (after 45 minutes of discussion, the researcher asked whether the participants wanted to continue the conversation for a maximum of fifteen minutes more). The participants' psychophysiological activations were recorded during the discussions (see Section 2.4.2 below). The NT participants conversing with the AS participants were informed of the clinical status of their co-participants, and this setting was also clear to the AS participants.

The participants were instructed to talk about happy events and losses in their lives. The participants were told that the researchers were interested in the connections between interactional and psychophysiological events. They were also told that the researchers were not looking for any specific style in the discussion, and that the conversation was free to unfold in any shape or form. The conversations were videorecorded by three cameras: two facing each of the two participants, and the third providing an overall view. Even though the instruction was to talk about happy events and losses, this instruction was interpreted in different ways in different dyads (e.g., to talk about positive and negative things), and the participants also discussed many other ordinary topics, such as work, studies, and family during the discussions. In other words, these conversations were very similar to other *make-talk* situations in which unacquainted individuals generate conversation, such as on airplanes or in queues (see Maynard, 1980, 1989; Maynard and Zimmerman, 1984). The

instruction, however, worked very well, as the participants also ended up telling many stories about their personal lives.

The material analyzed in the current study was created specifically for research purposes (see Section 2.3 for a discussion on experimental settings in CA). Due to the partly experimental nature of the data, the participants were not previously acquainted with each other, which at times caused some awkwardness in the interaction—also in the conversations between two NT individuals. In fact, the basic dynamics of interaction (Sadler et al., 2009) in the NT–NT dyads or the AS–NT dyads in the current dataset did not differ to a great extent. This issue has been reported more extensively elsewhere (see Stevanovic et al., 2017). It is worth mentioning, however, that the similarities between the dyads may be related to the observations made by Ochs and colleagues (2004), who regarded *social as interpersonal* and *social as socio-cultural* as a relevant distinction for understanding the challenges that participants with ASD face. According to them, the same individuals can act very competently in the interpersonal domain (consisting of, for example, conversational turn-taking) and still encounter problems in the socio-cultural domain of sociality, which involves taking into account the participants' personal histories and other socio-cultural aspects of the interactional context (ibid.; see also Stevanovic et al., 2017, p. 10). It can be argued that the setting utilized here involves less socio-cultural aspects of context than completely natural interactions. Thus, although the differing neurological statuses and interactional competencies of the AS and NT participants in the current data were not highlighted, they did appear occasionally, sometimes through careful consideration, and other times very clearly.

2.4.1 PARTICIPANTS

All the participants were adults, aged 18–40, and male (since the AS participants recruited for the study were all male, it made sense to make the control group as similar as possible). The AS participants were recruited from a private neuropsychiatric clinic that offers diagnostic services and neuropsychiatric rehabilitation. The AS diagnoses were based on the ICD-10 (World Health Organization, 1993). The NT participants were recruited for the study via email lists and their NT status was confirmed using the autism-spectrum quotient (AQ; Baron-Cohen et al., 2001). The AS participants had significantly higher AQ scores ($F(2,31)=33.94$, $p<0.001$) than the NT participants. No differences were observed between the AQ ($p=0.57$) scores or the age ($p=0.55$, see Table 1) of the NT participants in the AS–NT and NT–NT dyads.

Table 1.   *Descriptive statistics of participant groups.*

	NT with NT		NT with AS		AS with NT	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Age	23.75	3.62	25.44	2.30	25.57	7.55
AQ	11.06	4.85	9.78	4.52	27.78	6.89

2.4.2 OTHER MEASURES

This dataset was collected as part of a larger project that investigates the psychophysiological underpinnings of talk-in-interaction (see e.g., Voutilainen et al., 2014; Peräkylä et al., 2015; Stevanovic et al., 2019), and therefore the participants' psychophysiological activations were also recorded during the discussions. These included heart rate, respiration rate, facial muscle activation, and skin conductance responses. The measurement devices were light, and the participants were allowed to move their hands freely. In order to calibrate the psychophysiological data, a five-minute baseline (sitting silent and still) was recorded at the beginning of the interactions. For the purposes of another study (see Stevanovic et al., 2017) we also measured the experiential outcomes of the conversations by asking the participants to fill in questionnaires after the conversation. Valence and arousal were measured using the Self-Assessment Manikin (SAM; Bradley and Lang, 1994), in which a participant is asked to assess—on a scale from 1 to 9—how good (valence) and how aroused (arousal) they feel at that particular moment. The questionnaires also included selected items from the Positive and Negative Affect Schedule (PANAS), two items adapted from the UCLA loneliness scale, and two items relating to interpersonal likeability. As the current study focuses solely on the qualitative analysis of videotaped interactions, I will not discuss the content of the questionnaires any further here.

2.4.3 ETHICS

The study had the prior approval of the Ethics Committee of the Helsinki University Central Hospital (date of the decision: 21.09.2011). All the participants were informed of the use of the data and signed a consent form. The identities of the participants were revealed to only a few members of the research group. It is important to note that referring to the participants as AS or NT in the analyses of the current research may potentially be interpreted as essentializing or reducing their characters and individual complexities to their (non)diagnosis. This, however, is definitely not the intention. The purpose of using the AS/NT categories in the analysis was to help the reader follow the

lines of argument without having to remember the diagnostic statuses of the participants. I wish to emphasize that not everything the participants say is related to their differing neurological statuses, and what does or does not relate to AS diagnosis should remain an open question (cf. Schegloff, 2003, p. 45). It is also important to note that, although I strived for an objective analysis, my position as an NT researcher obviously and inescapably affected the way in which I viewed and interpreted the data.

2.5   DESCRIPTION OF ANALYSIS PROCESS

First, all the videos were transcribed (six dyads by me and the rest by research assistants) using a detailed conversation analytic character set (see Atkinson and Heritage, 1984; Hepburn and Bolden, 2017). Then I created a collection of stories and other tellings (N=593) to which affiliation was relevant. Creating the collection was a challenging endeavor, as many stories seemed to escape clear-cut definitions. I completely concur with the remarks of Voutilainen and colleagues (2014, p. 5) in their struggles with defining (and coding) narratives: "There were cases in which it was difficult to the coders to decide whether a telling is a story or whether it is some other type of topic talk; let alone the start and end points of the story and story phases." I decided to be very inclusive in creating the collection and include many kinds of stories (also more embedded narratives, see Section 1.2 for a more detailed discussion of defining stories for this purpose). I then used this larger collection of stories to create several sub-collections for the more precise phenomena under investigation, which were then analyzed in Publications I–IV.

Publication I focuses on the AS–NT dyads (N=10) and the stories of the NT tellers, where the AS participants were the recipients. The concept of the paper (to use a single case to illustrate some distinct features of AS interaction) was developed quite early on, as the example chosen for the paper seemed to demonstrate particularly clearly some of the phenomena possibly related to AS diagnosis that were present in the collection. Publication II focuses on 63 cases in which a story has reached its completion and, instead of displaying affiliation, the recipient (either AS or NT) asks an *ancillary question* (Heritage, 2011) or a *factual follow-up question* (Couper-Kuhlen, 2012). This phenomenon caught my attention immediately as I examined the larger collection of tellings: In several instances, in the *slot* for displaying affiliation, the recipients asked questions. After reading the papers by Heritage (2011) and Couper-Kuhlen (2012), I wanted to see if these non-affiliative moves were more frequent in the AS–NT interactions. As I show later (see Publication II), this was not the case, as the differences were far more subtle. Publication III came about differently, as no particular sub-collection was created for the paper. The idea for the paper arose by *noticing* a few extremely interesting and similar cases in which something atypical seemed to be happening. I began to examine the features in the examples and wrote a draft focusing on the

different intersecting levels of agreement, affiliation and epistemics in story reception. The initial idea for Publication IV was born during our data sessions, in which we took an interest in the (lack of) face-work practices of the AS participants. For this purpose, I built a sub-collection of *face-threatening tellings* (N=60), in which the tellers described moments or situations in which their own selves were presented in an unfavorable light. The face-work patterns of the NT and AS participants were then compared in three sequential positions.

As one of the aims of the study was to compare the interactional practices of NT and AS participants in the same interactional setting, it inherently involved categorizing the participants. CA has generally followed the policy of *ethnomethodological indifference* (Garfinkel and Sacks, 1970, p. 345) toward the participants' identities and predominantly focused on how participants themselves categorize each other using explicit expressions in their talk (Rossi and Stivers, 2021; see also Section 2.2). In the interactions investigated in the current study, the participants themselves seldom explicitly refer to their diagnostic statuses (as AS or NT), and even when they do, they never use their clinical status as an explanation for why they interact in one way or another in the *here and now* of the interaction. However, when analyzing the details of the interactions, it would have been inattentive to ignore the differences in the practices of the AS and NT participants. Thus, even though using the CA methodological *rule of thumb* of indifference toward participant categories or identities has many advantages, it can sometimes also lead to the exclusion of some crucial issues that might affect or even direct the interaction on a more implicit level (cf. Peräkylä, 2009). In this study I sought to make empirical CA-grounded observations of the participants' talk, and, when patterns emerged, I interpreted them in the light of different contextual factors, which include the participants' neurological statuses.

As first author, I created the collections for all the papers and came up with the concepts for Publications II and III. The concept for Publication I was designed together with Melisa Stevanovic, and the concept for Publication IV was inspired by Anssi Peräkylä's ideas about face-work. I wrote the initial drafts of each of the papers, which were then edited and commented on by Stevanovic (Articles I–IV) and Peräkylä (articles II–IV). The argument made in Publication III was refined and further developed with Stevanovic.

3   SUMMARY OF THE RESULTS

I next present the results of the four sub-studies in relation to the research questions outlined in Section 1.5. All four articles describe, although in somewhat different ways, how the participants orient to concerns of self and affiliation in storytelling sequences (RQ 1). The aspect of comparing the practices of AS and NT participants is mainly dealt with in Publications II and IV (RQ 2). The question of how the findings relate to theories and clinical understandings of ASD is considered in all four publications (RQ 3). Finally, what the findings tell us about typical interaction and the norms governing story reception more generally is dealt with in Publications II−IV, whereas the focus in Publication I is more on the AS recipients (RQ 4).

3.1   STORY RECEPTION AND AFFILIATION IN AUTISM SPECTRUM DISORDER

The first article's (Publication I) focus is on the 10 AS−NT discussions, and the stories in which the AS participants are in the spontaneously assumed role of recipient. The article investigates how the AS participants receive stories, and the results are presented through an examination of one storytelling sequence, in which the patterns can be observed especially clearly. As the article only examines sequences in which the AS participant is the story recipient, the study has no aspect of data-internal comparison. However, the results are discussed in relation to earlier CA findings on story reception and affiliation in typical interaction, as well as earlier research on ASD and its specific interactional features.

  The article describes a story by an NT participant about a *close call* incident in which his friend was hit in the head by an excavator bucket on a construction site. The analysis shows how three features of AS interaction—rule-centeredness, local orientation, and egocentricity—are reflected in the AS participant's story reception turns in such sequential locations in which showing affiliation would be relevant. Rule-centeredness refers to the importance of routines, rituals, and regularity (Attwood, 1998; Gillberg, 2002). The AS recipient's rule-centeredness is illustrated in his topicalization of the use of hard hats over displaying affiliation. Local orientation can manifest in, for example, comments that are specifically relevant to something that has just been mentioned but not relevant to the topic of the conversation as a whole. Local orientation in this example was particularly evident in the passage in which the teller mentioned an ongoing lawsuit related to the incident, and the AS participant used it as a topical segue to the topic of the Bodom Lake murders. Egocentricity in interaction can take the form of, for example, sticking to one subject despite another participant's repeated efforts

to move the conversation on to a different topic (Attwood, 1998; Paul et al., 2009). Here, egocentricity is illustrated by the AS participants' topicalization of the physical properties of the excavator bucket (in which he might be especially interested) and not following the subtle signs of the interlocutor to change the topic. Overall, the non-affiliativeness of the AS participant's reception turns manifests quite seamlessly as a result of the specific interactional features related to ASD, in connection to the local properties of the story.

Because individuals on the autism spectrum have challenges both recognizing bodily activity and considering the context of interaction (APA, 2013), it is not surprising that they do not always recognize moments when they are expected to affiliate with their interactional partner's emotional experience. However, certain situations or the actions of the other party in a conversation can also play a key role in eliciting the kind of responses from people with ASD that are considered atypical. It is possible that the example analyzed in this study is especially difficult to affiliate with, as it describes not only a distressing incident but also gratitude that the outcome was not worse. Previous research that combines psychophysiology and story reception (Voutilainen et al., 2014) suggests that these kinds of ambivalent narratives that have both happy and sad aspects may require more advanced cognitive and interactional skills from the recipient than stories that are either exclusively happy or exclusively sad. From the perspective of CA, however, the question arises as to whether the high degree of variance in the story is a feature of the story itself or an interactional consequence of the actions of the teller and the recipient. One classic way in which speakers can react to a lack of affiliation and pursue a response is by adjusting their previously expressed stance (Pomeranz, 1984b; see also Peräkylä and Ruusuvuori, 2012).

Problems in interaction are not merely challenges caused by the shortcomings of individuals; they are interactionally constructed as participants approach a conversation in different ways, using different resources. In this study, we found clear asymmetries in the roles of the participants. It would be important to investigate these asymmetries even more closely in relation to the structures of the interaction. Recipients' contributions that do not express affiliation can, in the long term, lead to their interactional partner not sharing similar stories with them in the future. This, in turn, may have a negative impact on the relationship between the participants (Hobson and Hobson, 2008).

3.2   THE CASE OF STORY-RESPONSIVE QUESTIONS

Questions can perform many actions at once and contribute to interactional affiliation in different ways (Steensig and Drew, 2008). In the second article (Publication II) we analyze and compare the affiliation and topicality of the questions that story recipients ask after their co-participants' tellings. In the

CA literature, these kinds of questions have previously been described mainly as non-affiliative (Couper-Kuhlen, 2012; Heritage, 2011; Jefferson, 1984). The article describes three practices that NT participants use to manage the topicality and affiliation of their story-responsive questions in the data. Although both NT and AS participants utilized such questions, the questions of the AS participants were not similarly accompanied by the specific practices that the NT participants used to manage topicality and affiliation. The first practice is called *display of interest*. In this practice, the recipient asks for factual information related to the events mentioned in the telling and the question does not lead to a topical shift. In the practice *of backward linking*, a question that first appears topically ancillary and non-affiliative is subsequently made both a coherent and necessary component of affiliation. In the practice of *forward linking*, the recipient asks a question that, although non-affiliative, builds a link from the previous telling to a new topic that has potential for affiliation and shares the stance of the previous telling.

The differences we found between the NT and AS participants were subtle. Both groups topicalized items that were sometimes quite far from the *gist* of the previous tellings. The differences were mostly between the orientations to the questions' topicality: The NT participants utilized the materials mentioned in the previous telling to transition to a new topic without ignoring the previous telling, and they directed the talk in a direction in which affiliative actions were possible. The NT participants seemed to *engineer* (Holt and Drew, 2005, p. 45) the link from one topic to the next and to strategically forge connections between topics (see also Jefferson, 1984). Such orientations toward maintaining coherence were not clear in the questions posed by the AS participants, even though the questions themselves where similar to those asked by the NT participants. These differences in how the AS participants treated the topicality of their questions arguably influenced the eventual affiliative import of their questions in subtle but significant ways.

The article shows that the relation between the topicality of a question and the degree of affiliation displayed through the question is not straightforward. The affiliative import of story-responsive questions can only really be seen in retrospect, because the questioner can cast their action in an affiliative or non-affiliative light in subsequent turns. This is possible because questions, in addition to sequentially implicating an answer, project a post-answer slot in which the questioner has the right/obligation to talk again (Jefferson, 1984; Sacks, 1992). This slot can then be used to constitute the question as a display of interest (with an explicitly affiliative turn or a second story), to link it to the previous telling (by explicating its relevance), or to link it to something new (by launching a story that is *touched off* by the previous topic and shares the stance of the previous telling). These results are in line with previous observations according to which an ancillary question is an effective tool for recipients to decline affiliation with tellers (see Heritage, 2011). However, our data show that this might sometimes be done in favor of solidarity on another level: Recipients may pose questions in order to refrain from overt

disaffiliation (cf. McKinlay and McVittie, 2006) and thus protect the face of the teller, or they might try to find a way to empathize with the experience on a more independent level and establish a *likeness* (cf. Maynard and Zimmermann, 1984) with their conversational partner. These other levels of solidarity might be especially important in this context of unacquainted pairs, as the participants strive to find similarities with each other as part of relationship building (see Maynard, 1980; 1989; Maynard and Zimmerman, 1984; Svennevig, 2014).

Finally, the results resonate strongly with Ochs and Solomon's (2005; 2010) findings regarding *proximal relevance*: The questions of the AS participants were relevant enough to enable the conversational partners to cooperate and adapt to their topical line. Thus, the adaptive flexibility of the participants makes the continuing coherence of talk possible (see Goodwin, 1995), which in turn allows the interaction to continue without disruption. However, the adaptive moves by NT participants do not erase the AS participants' subtle breaches in topical coherence, which can affect the affiliative import of their questions and eventually undercut the solidarity between the participants.

3.3   EPISTEMIC CALIBRATION AS A VEHICLE FOR AFFILIATION

The third article (Publication III) investigates how story recipients manage to display just the right level of access and affiliation to the events the teller describes. We describe two main ways in which the recipients of the tellings of personal experiences fine-tune their responses: They manage (1) the strength of their access claim and (2) the degree of generalization in these utterances. Furthermore, we argue that these *epistemic calibration* practices essentially contribute to the hearing of these utterances as affiliative.

Previous studies have suggested that second speakers' upgraded epistemic stances serve as a resource of affiliation (see e.g., Stivers, Mondada, and Steensig, 2011). At the same time, these second speakers' epistemic stances can also be too strong to be fully affiliative (see e.g., Heritage, 2011, Raymond and Heritage, 2006). Thus, the careful fine-tuning of the strength of the recipient's *access claim* is an important part of the affiliative reception of the tellings of personal experiences. However, what we also argue in the article is that if a strong access claim is not backed up by shared knowledge about the recipient's epistemic status or followed by the unpacking of the access claim, the response can challenge the tellability of the event or even trivialize the teller's experience. *Generalization* gives recipients a means to make stance-congruent assessments from an independent position without stepping into the teller's epistemic domain (see Heritage, 2011, Couper-Kuhlen, 2012). However, this strategy risks not being especially attentive to the teller's specific experience (ibid.). What we also argue is that it is crucial for the

recipient to consider the main focus and affective stance of the previous telling when deciding *what* aspect of the telling is up for generalization. Figure 1 depicts all these dimensions of epistemic calibration.
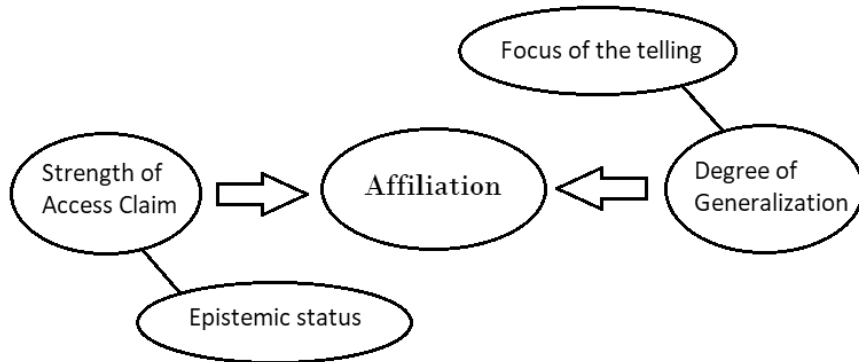

Figure 1   Dimensions of epistemic calibration.

The dimensions with which the AS recipients had some problems in our examples were *focus of the telling* and *epistemic status*. Even if the explication of the interactional deficits associated with AS was not the main focus of this particular sub-study, we may still ask what made the responses in these two AS examples exhibit more idiosyncrasies. One contributing factor could have been that the affective stances in these tellings were more embedded (cf. Labov, 1972) in the descriptions of specific experiences—they were not formulated as summarized assessments in search of agreement. Both examples had some affordances for generalization, but the tellers did not make them explicitly available for agreement at the end of the tellings. The AS recipients, then, seemed to have a way of finding *the general* in these specific instances of reports of experience. Future studies with possibly more controlled experiments are needed to determine whether this pattern holds.

The capacity to find the general in conversational interaction can be seen as one example of what Maynard (2005) referred to as autistic intelligence. In their linguistic anthropological perspective, Ochs and Solomon (2005) found that, when discussing emotional topics not related to the child him/herself, children with autism or AS sometimes make proximally relevant contributions, utilizing two strategies: "The first strategy is to make the interactional contribution locally relevant to what was just said or what just transpired, but not to the more extensive concern or enterprise under consideration. The second strategy is to shift the focus away from personal states and situations to topically relevant impersonal, objective cultural knowledge [...] Some children mixed the two strategies, proximally relating objective knowledge to a locally prior move" (Ochs and Solomon, 2005, p.

158). Their description seems to fit some of the examples investigated in this study. When the AS participants treat the teller's previous turn as seeking agreement instead of orienting to the whole telling as seeking affiliation, they are performing an action that is proximally relevant. They are also orienting to the more general aspects of the experience instead of its specific emotional content. Furthermore, it is important to note that even in the latter examples, the AS recipients showed concrete competence (Maynard and Turowetz, 2017) in several ways. They responded to the tellings in relevant places and performed preferred actions such as displays of agreement, which are usually considered affiliative (on the differences between agreement and affiliation, see Flint, Haugh, and Merrison 2019). Their ability to utilize access claims and generalizations can also be described as forms of concrete competence, even if their careful calibration caused challenges.

Epistemics in interaction is not simply about inferring *who* knows what; it also involves complex contextual considerations of *who is entitled* to know what (Heritage, 2013; Kamio, 1997; Stivers et al. 2011). Epistemic calibration in receiving tellings of personal experience thus involves a complex interplay between the strength of access claim, the degree of generalization, participants' epistemic statuses, and the focus of the telling. A division has sometimes been made between these kinds of expressions of knowledge and expressions of emotion. This idea has been described in reference to various concepts, such as the distinction between the phatic and informative functions of communication (e.g., Bühler 1934; Jakobson 1960; Malinowski 1923). As the analysis shows however, these distinctions are seldom clear-cut: The management of one function can serve as a vehicle for the management of the other (cf. Heritage, 2002; Stivers, 2005; Stivers, Mondada, and Steensig, 2011).

3.4 RECOGNITION AND INTERACTIONAL MANAGEMENT OF FACE THREATS

In the fourth article (Publication IV) we explore the possible differences in the ways in which the AS and NT participants recognize and manage face threats in interaction, in their role as both storytellers and story recipients. The focus is on a sub-collection of *face-threatening tellings* (N=60), in which the tellers describe moments or situations where their own selves are presented in an unfavorable light. These topics include, for example, losing one's job, not having friends (on the stigma of loneliness, see Lau and Gruen 1992), and failing a driving test or a subject at school. We were able to gain access to the participants' own orientations to the face threats through missing recipient affiliation, i.e., the recipients often had visible trouble endorsing the tellers' stances in these sequences. This is not surprising, as it can be difficult to affiliate with descriptions of failure with self-deprecating stances (see Pomerantz, 1984a).

In line with earlier studies (see e.g., Huang et al., 2017) of ASD's atypical relation to self in interaction, we found that the AS participants' orientations to face threats differed from those of the NT participants. Whereas the NT tellers utilized several face-work practices when describing their own difficult situations, such as mitigations, disclaimers, justifications, and explanations, the AS tellers did not utilize any of these practices when talking about the same topics. This is in line with previous experimental studies which have found that participants with ASD were less preoccupied with impression management than NT participants (e.g., Scheeren et al., 2010). As story recipients, the NT participants in our data remedied their initial lack of empathy by performing affiliative face-saving actions later in the tellings. Even though we found some subtle indications that AS recipients acknowledged the face threats, the AS recipients did not engage in similar face-work as the NT recipients, which sometimes led to the NT tellers producing such turns by themselves. This finding might be related to the challenges found in ASD in providing explanations for others' emotions of embarrassment (e.g., Hillier and Allinson, 2002).

The results concerning AS participants' atypical face-work both in the first position as teller, and in the second position as recipient, are in line with the suggestions of earlier experimental research. What is most intriguing, however, is that the AS participants did not 'accept' or follow the recipients' face-saving actions in third position either. There may be several, possibly co-occurring explanations for this new finding. First, the face-saving actions of NT recipients involve a change of perspective that requires cognitive flexibility that may be more characteristic of NT participants than AS participants. Second, the face-saving implications of recipients' utterances are often quite implicit. Participants with ASD are known to have challenges in interpreting non-literal meanings (Kalandadze et al., 2018), so responses that for the NT participants involve face-saving implications might not be such for the AS participants. Above, we interpreted our findings in the light of the assumed cognitive differences between AS and NT participants. However, another general interpretation is also possible. The AS participants may have been less preoccupied with maintaining face and more concerned with being genuine and staying true to themselves (cf. Cage, Bird, and Pellicano 2016). For them, face was not, after all, such an all-pervasive concern as it seemed to be for the NT interactants. This interpretation would be in line with a study by Scheeren and colleagues (2010), which found that some participants with ASD know very well what kind of self-presentation is expected of them, but that they prefer to be veridical rather than to adhere to audience preferences (see also Cage et al., 2013).

On a more general note, the article sheds light on the social construction of self, as it happens through the minor details of the turn-by-turn unfolding interaction. The self-images of (neurotypical) individuals arise from, and are offered for, acknowledgment in the interactional process of face-work (Goffman, 1955, 1956; see also Peräkylä, 2015). These face-work practices,

however, are usually so taken-for-granted by the participants themselves (as well as the analyst) that they can sometimes be hard to pinpoint in typical interactional data. It is therefore important to also examine different participant groups in order to reveal how face threats are (or are not) oriented to in interaction, and how the reciprocal maintenance of face is actually implemented in and through conversational practices. Furthermore, our study suggests that perhaps not all individuals rely on the same unspoken assumptions about the mutual avoidance of embarrassment (see Scheff, 2003). Even though the neurotypical *looking-glass self* (Cooley, 1922) might be very much in the hands of others, we agree with Fasulo (2019, p. 627) that it is possible that individuals with ASD "may develop a self more autonomous from the social environment than is generally the case for neurotypical individuals." The NT participants in our data, however, visibly engaged in face-work throughout the examined storytelling sequences, both as tellers and as recipients. For neurotypical individuals, then, the interactional management of face threats seems to be a real concern.

4 DISCUSSION

In this concluding discussion, I first (in Section 4.1) review the main sociological insights of the study in relation to the four research questions outlined at the end of the first section. Then, I discuss some methodological considerations for future CA research on affiliation, asymmetric interaction, and theoretically oriented CA (in Section 4.2). Finally, I suggest some practical applications on the basis of the results (Section 4.3).

4.1 SOCIOLOGICAL INSIGHTS FROM CURRENT STUDY

In response to RQ 1 (How do the participants orient toward the concerns of self and affiliation in the storytelling sequences?) the study described in detail some of the micro-level social practices that the participants used to tell and receive stories and manage affiliation in conversations. The study showed how the establishment of empathic communion (Heritage, 2011, p. 160–161; Durkheim, 1915) between participants has several intersecting levels. Telling a story to a recipient who affiliates with the affective stance of that telling might be one way to achieve such communion and share experiences or create an emphatic moment. However, as the study showed, not all stories receive these affiliative responses, for which there are several possible reasons. Sometimes, recipients might disagree with the stance of the telling and not wish to pretend otherwise. They might also not have experienced anything like it themselves, so they have to find a way to affiliate with the telling without actually sharing the stance or having direct access to it. Sometimes it might be that the recipients have experienced something very similar, and instead of affiliating with the experience right away, they turn to their own experiences and try to empathize with the teller by sharing their own story. Sometimes the teller's story concerns a topic so delicate, that affiliating with the stance could lead to the teller losing face. Avoiding affiliation (in the definition of *endorsing the affective stance*) can thus sometimes be a prosocial move that in fact protects the selves of the participants. The current study did not and cannot uncover the motivations that the interacting participants have inside their heads, but it could, and hopefully did, indicate how the options described above are interactionally accomplished. These options require some skillful *maneuvering* and competent use of different kinds of conversational practices that seem to preserve solidarity between the participants on another, perhaps more general level.

In response to RQ 2 (To what extent, and how, do the AS participants' storytelling and story reception practices differ from those of the NT participants?) the study showed how the orientations toward affiliation and protecting the selves of their co-participants as well as their own selves were

not as evident in the conversational actions of the AS participants as they were in the NT participants' turns. However, the differences were more pronounced in Publication IV, which dealt with explicit face-work practices, than they were in Publication II, which concerned the topicality and affiliative use of questions. Interestingly, in both of these sub-studies, the NT participants also rather frequently responded non-affiliatively (at least initially) to their co-participants' tellings. The main insight from this study could thus be formulated in the sense that the difference between the NT and AS participants lies not in the amount of affiliation *per se* but in the subtle use of conversational practices to manage their non-affiliation. This, I argue, can have consequences for relationship-building between NT and AS participants.

RQ 3 (How do these findings relate to the theories and clinical understandings concerning ASD?) was dealt with in all four publications: In Publication I, the findings are discussed in relation to earlier research and theory on ASD's relation to egocentricity, rule-centeredness, and local orientation. The main implication here is that these features can have a profound effect on the story reception of AS participants. In Publication II, the results were discussed in relation to the concept of proximal relevance formed by Elinor Ochs and Olga Solomon (2005; 2010). In line with their insights, the study showed how the continuing coherence of talk is made possible through adaptive moves by co-participants (cf. Goodwin, 1995), which allows the interaction to continue without disruption. In Publication III, the results are discussed in relation to the notions of autistic intelligence (Maynard, 2005) and concrete competence (Maynard and Turowetz, 2017), showing how AS participants have some fine-grained competences but also face some equally fine-grained challenges in story reception. Publication IV discussed the participants' different ways of handling face-threats with regard to the assumed cognitive differences between AS and NT participants (e.g., theory of mind) as well as in light of the possibly different levels of social motivation of AS and NT participants to impression management in interaction.

In response to RQ 4 (What do the findings tell us about the norms governing storytelling sequences more generally?), the study confirmed earlier insights into how storytelling can be seen as a locus of several intersecting moral orders (see Heritage, 2011). The participants need to protect each other's selves and maintain their face (cf. Goffman, 1955), respect their personal experiential and epistemic preserves, while simultaneously "striving for affiliation within a community of persons and a common social, moral and cultural heritage" (Heritage, 2011, p. 183). The study added to these previous insights by describing some detailed and complex norms regarding story reception and affiliation. For example, in line with earlier findings (e.g., Raymond and Heritage, 2006), finding the right balance of showing the teller that you agree with them and share their experience but are not replacing the experience with your own or generalizing it to the point of trivializing it can be a challenging endeavor. This study complemented earlier findings by emphasizing how displaying agreement with the teller also requires the

strength of the recipient's access claim to be either substantiated by the recipient's own experiences (epistemic status, which is available to the teller) or generalized on the basis of the main focus of the telling. These latter dimensions of focus of the telling and epistemic status were the ones with which the AS participants in particular had some challenges in our examples, and thus revealed the importance of these dimensions for sociological analysis. Respecting all the different principles, norms, and moral orders is an intricate part of the sometimes complicated and delicate task of story recipiency, to which the current research aimed to bring some light.

The study has two quite clear limitations that future studies should address. First, the dataset included only AS–NT dyads and NT–NT dyads. An obvious continuation would have been to also include AS–AS dyads to make the dataset more comprehensive. Some recent evidence (see Morrison et al., 2019) has shown that affiliation may increase among adults with ASD when they interact with other autistic people. Another limitation concerns the fact that the dataset only included male participants. Recent studies suggest that females with ASD are underdiagnosed, as they may be more equipped to *camouflage* their condition, which means that their interactional patterns and outcomes may differ from those of males with ASD (Bargiela, Steward, and Mandy, 2016; Lai et al., 2011; Sedgewick et al., 2016).

4.2 METHODOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS FOR FUTURE CA

In this section, I reflect on the significance of the results in relation to three methodological issues in CA: 1. the pursuit of affiliation in storytelling, 2. the analysis of asymmetric interaction, and 3. the relationship between CA and theory. Even though all these issues have been discussed to some extent in the study so far, this section hopefully introduces some further depth and insight into them, and suggests future methodological directions.

Even though storytellers have shown to readily pursue affiliation for their tellings through different means in mundane interactions (see e.g., Couper-Kuhlen, 2012; Peräkylä and Ruusuvuori, 2012; Selting, 2010), based on the current data it is also evident that, especially in the case of tangential recipient talk (see Publication II), tellers can sometimes just *let it pass* (Garfinkel, 1967). In other words, in some situations, tellers seem to prefer to go along with the new topical direction initiated by the recipient instead of pursuing affiliation for their tellings, even using implicit means. This finding might be related to the inherently face-threatening aspect of telling stories and sharing emotional experiences (see Section 1.3). However, earlier research has clearly documented that sometimes storytellers *do* make very explicit inferences about recipient silence (e.g., "and you could give a damn so", see Stivers 2008, pp. 51–52). This begs the question: Is the lack of recipient affiliation treated differently in the case of complete recipient silence, in comparison to turns

that deal with the content of narrative in at least some shape or form? Other possible contributing factors are the relationship between the conversing participants. Do explicit pursuits for affiliation occur, for example, more frequently between close friends and family members than mere acquaintances or strangers? A third possibly relevant aspect relates to the intensity of the topic (i.e., the emotional significance of the event). Does the teller treat more emotionally salient experiences differently, the lack of recipient affiliation leading to more explicit pursuits of affiliation in more intense topics? One further complication relates to the fact that, as argued in Publication II, story recipients might use tangential talk as a vehicle to avoid more overt forms of disaffiliation and thus protect the face of the teller. In this way they actually promote solidarity on another level.

In the case of asymmetric interaction, Ochs and Solomon (2005; 2010) have suggested that *generous interactional partners* (such as parents, teachers, clinicians, and close friends) often respond to the turns of autistic co-participants with interpretive acceptance that treats the prior turns as relevant, even when the turns could be considered incoherent. This observation, of course, can have profound consequences for the analysis of (non-)affiliation in an asymmetric setting, where the participants know about each other's differing neurological statuses. Moreover, the data analyzed in the current study showed that speakers can make things work even in situations that involve different types of asymmetries. This leads me to wonder whether the strict methodological rules of determining *participant orientation* or *next-turn proof procedure* could be somewhat more relaxed in the analysis of asymmetric settings containing participants with differing competences. I acknowledge that it is a risky endeavor to impose *trouble* into data in which there seems to be none (or minimally) for the participants themselves. However, this trouble might not realize itself immediately in the next turn; it may only emerge during a larger interactional trajectory. The recipients' non-affiliative turns, for example, do not necessarily go unnoticed even if the teller does not explicitly pursue affiliation, and the lack of affiliation or the normative practices to manage it can possibly cause ruptures in the social relationship between the interactants, perhaps preventing further sharing of emotional stories (cf. Hobson and Hobson, 2008). To conclude: The question of when tellers decide to pursue affiliation and when they decide to drop their line of action is a matter of complex contextual considerations and consequences, the unravelling of which will be the task of future research.

CA has traditionally worked to avoid premature and idealized theory construction in favor of the empirical identification of diverse structures of practices (Heritage and Clayman 2010, p. 14). As one of the objectives of the current study has been to compare the interactional practices of NT and AS participants, this has inherently involved some theory and hypotheses underlying the data collection, as well as a priori categorization of the participants. Although inevitable for answering these types of research questions, these aspects can nonetheless be regarded as limitations of the

current study in traditional CA terms. This warrants further discussion on the relationship of CA and theory. In the beginning, CA was a radically empirical enterprise, launched as an alternative to experimentally driven social psychology or deductive social theorizing (Haakana, Laakso, and Lindström, 2009). However, when doing qualitative comparisons of different participant groups, some kind of theory is required. Consider the following, somewhat simplified, example as a case in point. We find that in ten different dyads, A tells narratives that have an incoherent structure, whereas B does not. Then we find that participant A in every dyad has been diagnosed with a language disorder, but otherwise the participants are relatively similar (same age, same sex) and their discussions are in comparable settings. One could claim, based on earlier research and theory, that the incoherence in A's narratives could very well be related to the language disorder, and then focus the study on determining the very specific, micro-level differences in the narration practices of the participants. But what if the difference between the participants is that A (in all the dyads) is female, and B is male? This situation is very different, as no previous research or theory on narratives would suggest that the observed differences could be related to differences in sex/gender. But if, for example, B was A's superior (e.g., boss, supervisor), then we could wonder whether the power relationship between the participants might affect their ability to tell coherent narratives. This would, of course, also warrant control dyads with equal power statuses. The argument would have some support from earlier theory (for the relationship between language and power, see e.g., Ng and Deng, 2017), and still reveal something brand new. Theory construction of this kind could be referred to as *abductive reasoning* or *abduction* (Peirce, 1935, p. 525), as "it seeks a situational fit between observed facts and rules (Timmermans and Tavory, 2012, p.171), which can lead to theoretical innovations and new research hypotheses (ibid., p. 181). Of course, one relevant aspect of the argument developed here relates to the careful composition of the dyads and at least some controlling of other variables. For example, in our data, all the participants were adult males to reduce the effect of other possibly relevant categories. Moreover, in addition to the AS–NT dyads, we included NT–NT dyads for control. Qualitative comparative analysis of this kind is therefore a balancing act between controlling variables and preserving the maximal *naturalness* of the conversations.

   All the above might sound quite radical for empirically-oriented CA scholars. However, as Auli Hakulinen (1996, p. 22) has noted, also in CA, one has to resort to certain pre-existing categories, such as question, answer, particle, or even turn-taking, sequence, and adjacency pair. What is essential is that the researcher does not only attach these preconceived features to the data; they must be willing to change their perception through more detailed analysis (ibid.). This is also crucial in the case of abductive reasoning, which entails a process of revisiting, defamiliarizing, and alternative casing in light

of theoretical knowledge[3] (Timmermans and Tavory, 2012). Furthermore, in the tradition of CA analysis of institutional interaction, for example, the empirical findings are also interpreted against the background of the institutional task—a sort of *theory*, if you will. This includes evaluation of how the observed practices *fit* the underlying categorical identities of the participants, such as the seekers and providers of emergency services (see Heritage and Clayman, 2010, Zimmerman, 1984). In Schegloff's terms (See Wong and Olsher, 2000, p. 112), we need to ask: What does it require of us as analysts to figure out how to deal with the data adequately? The aim of the current study was to make CA-based observations regarding the participants' talk, and, when patterns emerged, to interpret them in the light of contextual factors, which include the participants' neurological statuses. This, I believe, is in concordance with many other strands of CA research. However, I also follow in the footsteps of Linell (2009) and Svennevig (2014), who argue that many analytically interesting questions "go beyond the members' perspective and call for situation-transcending theories about social interaction" (Svennevig, 2014, p. 306). The hypotheses created on the basis of the current study can guide future comparative work with a larger group of participants, including *completely* naturally occurring data, as well as more controlled experiments with quantitative investigations.

4.3   APPLICABILITY OF FINDINGS

Recent CA studies have described the often-ignored competences of individuals with ASD, which calls into question some of the ordinary perceptions of the *deficits* or challenges that individuals with ASD face (see Stevanovic and Koskinen, 2018, for a review). However, a deeper and more nuanced understanding of the specific atypicalities related to the interactions of individuals with ASD and the differences between the practices of AS and NT individuals may also provide useful new information. The findings of the current research can be utilized to update and revise diagnostic criteria, determine how certain experimentally discovered interactional features manifest in actual interaction, and to develop novel, more detailed interaction skills training for participants with ASD. In addition, revealing the micro-level details of the differences in the conversational practices of AS and NT participants will hopefully increase their understanding of each other and help reduce the *double empathy problem* (Milton, 2012) that sometimes characterizes interactions between NT and AS individuals.

Social skills interventions have shown to positively influence the mood of children and young people with ASD (Rumney and MacMahon, 2017). A more detailed understanding of the interactional practices of participants with ASD

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[3] Here Timmermans and Tavory (2012) are referring to Grounded Theory, but I consider the point also valid for other qualitative methods.

and the norms guiding interaction may be helpful for developing more effective social skills training (Ke, Whalon, and Yun, 2018). The take-away messages for social skills training of the four sub-studies presented here could be something along the lines of the following. When receiving a story, endorsing the affective stance of that telling is most often the number one task for the recipient, after which it is possible to deal with other, secondary issues regarding, for example, rule-following or other ancillary matters relating to the telling (Publication I). Questions can also be used to display interest in the story, but should be followed by some level of appreciation of the telling. However, if one cannot endorse the stance of the telling, or if endorsing the stance is somewhat problematic, the recipient can circumvent the moment of affiliation by story-responsive questions that subtly shift the topic. In these situations, it is worthwhile to show how the new topic relates to the previous one and to build a *bridge* or a *topical segue* in order make the transition smooth and other-attentive (Publication II). Furthermore, displaying strong agreement in interaction is, in most situations, considered an affiliative action, but in storytelling environments it can sometimes lead to trouble, as empathizing with other's experience involves the careful calibration of the strength of one's access claims and the level of generalization (Publication III). Finally, in situations in which the previous telling concerns or constitutes a face-threatening event, it can be more pro-social of the recipient to initially refrain from overly affiliative turns and instead engage in careful face-saving actions later in the tellings (Publication IV).

When conversing with individuals with ASD, NT participants could facilitate the interaction by focusing on making the affective stance of their tellings explicitly available for recipients to endorse, instead of embedding their stance in the telling or the use of non-verbal means of communicating (Publication III). In the case of missing recipient affiliation, the NT tellers can either choose to be generous interactional partners (Ochs and Solomon, 2005, 2010) and allow the flow of social action to continue without disruption, or they can choose to pursue affiliation for their tellings. In the latter situation, however, it should be remembered that the implicit means usually utilized in these situations (re-doing the displays of affectivity, recycling the climax of the story, and altering the stance-conveying elements in the telling) might not work as intended in these situations, and the third option (altering the stance) could possibly lead to further complications (Publications I, II and III). In talking about possibly face-threatening topics, NT interactants might benefit from the knowledge that the conversational turns which for them carry face-saving or face-threatening implications might not be interpreted as such by individuals with ASD, who possibly do not orient to the importance of maintaining face in the same way (Publication IV). NT individuals could then perhaps also relax in their own impression management and focus on being veridical and more 'genuine' in these interactions.

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