

Two to Tango: Script Formulations, Dispositions, and Rhetorical Symmetry in Relationship Troubles Talk

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This study focuses on event descriptions in couples' talk about relationship troubles. Such descriptions define the specific nature of events, both their particularity and what general type of event they may be. For example, events can be descriptively offered as (1) particular, one-off occurrences or items; (2) instances of more generalized pattern; or (3) glossed by a description of the pattern itself. These are not definitive types of event description, but they draw attention to a pervasive theme in discourse, which is the status of described events with regard to how routine or exceptional they are, as items, instances, or generalized "script formulations" (Edwards, 1994).

Script formulations are descriptions of actions and events that characterize them as having a recurring, predictable, sequential pattern. Formulating actions as regular or exceptional provides a basis for actors'

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accountability within a normative and moral order. This article examines event descriptions empirically in terms of how they are built; how and when they occur within sequences of talk and text; how they are countered, defended, or made factual; and for the interactional business they perform.

One notable feature of everyday event descriptions is how they make inferentially available particular dispositional states of the actors; their moral character, personality, state of mind, or whatever (Smith, 1978; Edwards, 1994). For example, consider this piece of data from Dorothy Smith's (1978, p. 46) study of the descriptive construction of a person, "K," as "mentally ill": "K was unable to put on a teapot cover correctly, she would not reverse its position to make it fit, but would simply keep slamming it down on the pot." The specification of K as "unable" provides a dispositional basis for a series of actions that are formulated as regular and repeated by the use of *would*: she "would not reverse its position" and "would keep slamming it down on the pot." The use of *keep* reinforces the repetitive nature of the action and, together with *simply*, helps build a picture of irrationality and compulsion. Through these kinds of linguistic details, links are produced between a specified set of recurrent actions and the status of these patterns as documenting the actor's inner disposition (pathological, in K's case) to act in those ways.

The aim of the present study is to investigate these kinds of discursive patterns as a feature of talk about relationship troubles. An important element in the data analyzed here is that the *described actors are also current parties to the conversation*, such that the rhetorical, contentious, alternative stories dimension of such descriptions and inferences, although available even in one-sided accounts, is especially highlighted (cf. Buttny, 1990). It becomes more visible in these settings how event and disposition formulations are not only methodically produced for the characterizations and blamings that they accomplish, but designed in ways that specifically attend to, refute, and reciprocate counterstories and counterformulations. Also, the presence of a counselor as an ostensibly neutral recipient provides for a particularly focused and elaborated series of relationship accounts, whereas the therapeutic setting itself can be understood as oriented to, and even constituted by, the ways in which such accounts are produced and taken up as part of the counseling procedure.

The analytic materials are drawn mostly from a series of recorded counseling sessions between two different couples (Jeff and Mary, Connie and Jimmy) with two different Relate trained counselors ("Relate" is the United Kingdom's primary organization for the training and provision of couple counseling). These data are supplemented by reference to comparative materials from published reports dealing with couples counseling and relationship talk, and from the "Emma and Lottie" telephone conversations transcribed by Gail Jefferson and used in Edwards (1994). The analytical sections that follow start with an observation from the "Emma and Lottie" data: the use of a "two to tango" formulation for relationship troubles. This leads to a series of inferences about the discursive organization and interactional function of such expressions, followed by an exploration of those issues in the data from the couples counseling sessions.

The ensuing analysis builds links between participants' scripted action formulations and their constructions of actors' personality and enduring or recurrent mental states. This leads next into a consideration of the reciprocating nature of such formulations and upshots in blame-and-counterblame sequences in the counseling data, where both parties to described events are present and oriented-to by their partners in the production of descriptions. Finally, the analysis returns to the nature of explicit formulations of reciprocity such as "two to tango," as a feature both of participants' argumentatively competitive troubles talk and of their orientations, with the counselor, to the ostensibly more "cooperative" business of understanding each other and repairing damaged relationships.

SCRIPTS AND DISPOSITIONS: IT TAKES TWO

The start point for these analyses, and the article's title, was a series of "it takes two" kinds of formulations, often idiomatic, that Emma sometimes produces, mostly during complaints to her sister Lottie, about Emma's husband, Bud. Extract 1 is an example from a telephone call to their daughter Barbara.

Extract 1 (NB:IV:7:R:2)¹

- 1 Barbara: What's ↑wro:ng.
- 2 Emma: .hhhhh OH::: I DON'T KNO:W, hhHe jus' hhh
 3 hu-uh:::hh (.) I don' know he just tired o' me
 4 or ↓s*omething Barbara but I want him down here
 5 Thanksgiving an I: don' know whether he's gonna
 6 be here or no:*:t.
- 7 Barbara: What'd'you have a fi:ght?
- 8 Emma: .t.hhh He jus' wa:lkeđ out on ↑me yes we had a
 9 little: disa↓greement ↑ He's: getting kinda hard
 10 to live with an' sō am ↓I: I mean I can't say
 11 anything an' he ↓jumps down my throa:t'n:
 12 → .hhhhh VI:CE versa. Two to ta:ngo hhhhh
 13 (0.2)
 14 .hhh ↑Would you ca:ll Da::d toni::ght, hh
- 15 Barbara: Yea:h?
- 16 Emma: An do me a fa:vor,
- 17 Barbara: Yea:h?
- 18 Emma: .t.hhhhhh An' tell hi:m uh to come do:w::n hhh

The expression “Two to ta:ngo” (line 12) is an idiomatic phrase whose occurrence here fits a sequential pattern noted for idioms by Drew and Holt (1988). That is to say, it occurs at the end of a complaint sequence concerning Bud, in which Barbara takes no opportunities to display affiliation, and then, following a pause, Emma (line 14) switches the focus of her talk to making an overt request. One of the many things of interest here is certainly this sequential placement of the idiom and its relation to participants' actual or potential difficulties in producing complaints. Although nothing explicit is said about this in Extract 1, we should note that Barbara is Bud's daughter, as well as Emma's, and this may provide a basis for Barbara being problematically available for a complaint about Bud. In any case, the sequence contains some telling details. In line 7, Barbara's uptake of Emma's difficulties with Bud blends her parents together as actors: “Wha'd'you have a fi:ght?”, where *you* is plural, and *a fight* can be heard as a relationship matter, rather than something Bud alone did. One thing that Barbara does *not* do here is pick up on the personal descriptions of Bud as getting “tired” of Emma or possibly not joining her for Thanksgiving. Rather than taking the opportunity to offer details of what Bud might be doing, to assist Emma's “I don't know” expressions of puzzlement at him, Barbara offers as a formulation of those events something joint: “a fight.”

Emma's response to Barbara first reasserts the individual nature of Bud's actions: "He jus' wa:lked out on lme" (line 8), with the *just* reemphasizing Bud's action as unprompted or unaccountable as any kind of intelligible next thing to do. Emma then orients explicitly to Barbara's notion of a "fight." She downgrades that description to "a little disagreement" (lines 8-9) and starts to work on the reciprocal, two-sided nature of the problem: Being "hard to live with" and "jumps down my throat" (lines 9-11) are activities that Emma says both she and Bud perform. It is this reciprocity of actions, and sharing of blame, that the expression "two to tango" (line 12) idiomatically formulates, and in doing so, renders their dispute as an instance of a culturally recognizable, even proverbial, pattern.

The sequential occasioning of Emma's "two to tango" is evident not only in the talk that precedes it, but in what immediately follows: ".hhhh lWould you ca:ll Da::d toni::ght,hh". Emma has been providing the basis for a request for Barbara to intervene with Bud on her behalf. The idiomatically recognizable, even routine nature of Emma's and Bud's troubles, together with Emma's downgrading from "fight" to "a little disagreement," help make that request less difficult to comply with.² Barbara's response, "yea:h?" (lines 15, 17) is not immediately confirmatory of complying with Emma's request, though she does eventually agree to phone her father. Now, it seems clear that the expression "two to tango," as it occurs in Extract 1, is positioned to perform some interesting interactional work. One thing to pursue would be the general use of idiomatic expressions in complaint sequences and for topic change, as Drew and Holt (1988) have done. A second line of investigation, which I pursue here, is to start with the specific content of this expression, "two to tango," consider what kinds of interactional work it performs, and examine a range of materials that bear on those same interactional issues.

First, "two to tango" is an idiomatic expression that formulates interpersonal matters as jointly produced and as requiring, in any proper account of events, something about the reciprocal activities (like in dancing the tango, presumably) of both parties. Second, as an idiom, it reflexively formulates any specific activities to which it applies as being recognizable as instances of a general pattern, indeed a pattern that is common enough to have its own idiom. Third, the expression, like other such idioms, suggests some kind of upshot with moral or rhetorical force. It invokes a piece of folk wisdom, a lesson to be learned

or applied in some instance, and a counterposition to be denied, such as the assumption that one party to some activity is solely to blame. So this is the business I take up in the analyses that follow. It is not a pursuit of idioms, nor even specifically of “two to tango.” Rather, the focus is on the formulation of interpersonal difficulties as individually blame-worthy or joint; the description of such activities as recognizable instances of general sequential patterns (i.e., as to varying degrees “scripted”); the interactional and rhetorical business being done in producing such formulations and counterformulations; and the use of emblematic, generalized formulae such as “two to tango” in all of that.

A central issue here is the formulation of any actions or events as recognizable instances of some pattern or routine—that is, as “scripted” (Edwards, 1994). For example, talking now to her sister Lottie, Emma’s descriptions of Bud in Extract 2 build his actions as recognizable instances of a routine pattern.

Extract 2 (NV:IV:4:R:20)

- 1 Emma: But he gets !so MAD! at me Lottie ih-he !jus'
 2 gets s:l̄o: ma:↓:d. An' then he won't sp*ea(.)k
 3 youknow for hou::rs'n hours !This ih is .hhh
 4 !This is a !TERR!ible thing someti:mes ih °*e:u:°

The scripting is done here by the use of a generalized, iterative present tense (“gets so mad,” “won’t speak”) and by specific references to there being more than one occasion (“sometimes”). The expressions “!so MAD!,” “hou::rs'n hours,” and “!TERR!ible” make Bud’s scripted actions extreme. There is no simple, one-to-one correspondence between script formulations and items of lexis and grammar, though there are a variety of regular devices that may be used singly or in combination. These devices include the use of a continuous or iterative present tense; the similarly iterative, but past tense use of *would* (in the Smith data cited earlier); the reporting of events as plural; the use of temporal adverbs such as *sometimes*, *always*, and *often*; and the use of idioms such as *two to tango*. (A fuller list of the scripting devices used, in the data examined here, is provided in the final section of this report.) As always, any such devices work indexically in the contexts of their production, on whatever local content, or specific event, is at issue.

Script formulations are both disposition-implicative and fact-implicative, which also makes them rhetorically useful. If a description

identifies an event as part of a regular pattern, something that happens often or in a regular way, then that helps to bolster such a description against refutation. It solidifies it as part of a recognizable external world rather than a product of wrong or biased reporting. Formulating events as routine, and as recognizable on that basis, is therefore especially useful as a rhetorical device precisely when the credibility of a speaker, or the external reality of a description, may be in doubt. In relationship accounts, there is a rather obvious basis for such doubt, and that is the speaker's identifiable stake or interest in producing the report (Edwards & Potter, 1992, 1993). Any description of a partner's actions, especially one that is inferentially loaded with evaluation and blame, is also indexically available (i.e., potentially informative) about the speaker. As such, it risks being discounted as interested, self-serving, or biased.

Speakers have various ways of managing those issues of fact and interest. These include script-formulating the actions in question; formulating them as breaches of some recognized normative order; appealing to the presence and testimony of corroborating witnesses (Potter & Edwards, 1990); and, more subtly, dealing directly (and disarmingly) with the speaker's stake or role. This is one way in which an expression such as "two to tango" may work, in that when said of one's own behavior, it can display the speaker as evenhanded, as aware of the dangers of bias and interest, and therefore perhaps as having taken account of them. For example, Extract 2 continues:

Extract 2a

- 5 Emma: .hhh ↓Jus' because I sa:y gee: *it looks like
 6 RAI:N. (.) WELL it isn' gonna rai:n ho:w can it
 7 ↓rain ;n he goes th' baROmeter ↓what the HE↓*:ll.
 8 Lottie: °oh u [.hh°
 9 Emma: [Yihkno:w, then so ↓what. there's 'n
 10 → ↓argument. .hh.hh.hh.hh But it's me: too:,
 11 (0.3)
 12 Lottie: Yeah but you hate to be put down all the time,
 13 Emma: °↑I know it,°

Emma's complaint against Bud is formulated in terms of his scripted actions (Extract 2, lines 1-4) and then fleshed out by some specific reporting of dialogue, whose potential placement following the scripting provides for it to be heard as an *instance*. Bud's extreme and routine reactions are apparently unwarranted by anything Emma says, however

small (Extract 2a, lines 5–6). Her comment “gee: *it looks like RAI:N” (Extract 2a, lines 5–6), a recognizable example of fairly harmless small talk, is said to be taken up by Bud (Extract 2a, lines 6–7) as something to find fault with and check out, similar to his checking for dust after Emma had vacuumed (which was another of Emma’s stories). It is hearable as an instance of how Emma generally “can’t say anything” (Extract 1, lines 10–11; cf. how she “can’t do anything ri:ght” in Edwards, 1994, p. 238), without Bud jumping down her throat (Extract 1) or “Yihkno:w, then so ↓what. there’s ’n ↓argument” (Extract 2a, lines 9–10). So “arguments” are said to develop in a scripted (regular and sequentially unfolding) manner, following Bud taking unreasonable exception to little things Emma says.

The facts-versus-self-interest issue, and Emma’s display of even-handedness, arises to the extent that Emma’s account risks sounding one-sided and self-serving, and it could be that Lottie’s failure to provide early and strong affiliation with Emma’s story is interactionally relevant here. Emma’s assessment of Bud’s actions in line 4 (Extract 2) offers an opportunity for an immediate seconding by Lottie (Pomerantz, 1984), who nevertheless delays any clear affiliation until line 12 (Extract 2a). In any case, what Emma does is to signal that she shares some responsibility in these routines: “But it’s me: too:,” (Extract 2a, line 10). This move to share the blame is one that Emma does several times in these conversations, and again the details of how and when she does it are an interesting pointer to the rhetorical work done by script formulations. “It’s me too” is a very generalized, unspecific sharing of blame, comparable in that respect to an idiom such as “two to tango,”³ and contrasting with the more detailed, graphic narrative of Bud’s actions. Lottie then (Extract 2a, line 12) formulates Emma’s part as an understandable (“Yeah but”) response (“you hate”) to being “put down all the time,” and Emma quietly confirms this script-confirming formulation about Bud: “°↑I know it,°”.

We can begin to see in these materials a rhetorical, interactionally oriented variability in how events are treated as scripted, and what kinds of scripts they are (serious disputes, pathologically repetitive behavior, or just two persons tangoing). However, Emma (in these examples) talks of Bud in his absence. An orientation to competing accounts becomes much more explicit when both partners are present, such as in couples counseling. It is also in such settings that a “competing perspectives” version of relationship troubles, rather than being simply what is

objectively going on, may become visible as a concerted, therapy-oriented or problem-solving way of constructing them.

RECIPROCAL STORIES: ARGUING AND FIGHTING

Whereas Emma's complaints to Lottie and Barbara, about Bud, sometimes include interactionally sensitive moves to share the blame, in the counseling session materials both partners are present and in a position to hear and respond to any potentially objectionable stories and upshots. In Extracts 3 and 3a Connie and Jimmy, an Irish couple living in England, respond in turn to the counselor's invitation to provide some historical background to their problems. Connie begins by characterizing their marriage as having been "rock solid."

Extract 3 (DE-JF:C2:S1:7)

- | | | |
|----|------------|---|
| 1 | Counselor: | Whe:n: (.) before you moved over here hhow was |
| 2 | | the marriage. |
| 3 | | (0.4) |
| 4 | Connie: | ↑O↓h. (0.2) I- (.) to me: all alo:ng, (.) right |
| 5 | | up to now, (0.2) my marriage was <u>rock solid</u> . |
| 6 | | (0.8) <u>Rock solid</u> . = We had arguments like |
| 7 | | <u>everybody else</u> had arguments, (0.4) <u>buthh</u> (0.2) |
| 8 | | to me there was no major problems. Y'know? |
| 9 | | That's (0.2) my way of thinking but (0.4) |
| 10 | | Jimmy's thinking is very very different. |

Connie describes the marriage in extreme terms, as "rock solid." It is a picture of strong marital stability, maintained "all alo:ng," and "right up to now", which is to say, right up to their present difficulties. Their "arguments" (lines 6-7) are depicted as the routine sort, the kind that everyone has, the normal variety that says nothing against the general rock solid stability of their marriage. This acknowledgment of past difficulties is an important way of claiming that the relationship was *essentially* good, as it makes that claim more difficult to refute merely by citing any such difficulties. Rhetorical design is signaled also by the uses of extreme formulations such as "rock solid," "all alo:ng," and "right up to now," which, as Pomerantz (1986) has noted, tend to occur

when claims are being bolstered against doubt or disagreement. Such disagreement is not far away, as Connie states in lines 9–10; this is her version, and Jimmy’s “thinking” is different. The interesting thing is how Connie attends to what Jimmy might say (he is sitting next to her, and presumably they have argued these matters somewhat before coming for counseling). She does so in lines 6–7; note the latching, the immediate attachment of the statement about arguments to the claim about rock solidity; Jimmy’s versions of their marriage, of which Connie is well aware, focus on its lack of solidity, as evidenced by the frequency and severity of such arguments.

Jimmy’s contrasting account builds those “arguments” (Connie’s term) as recurrent and severe, and a pervasive feature of their relationship right from the start; a marriage more rocky than rock solid, perhaps. The episode he starts to cite is from the beginning of their relationship, and from that time on “We were at each other the who:le time” (lines 16–17).

Extract 3a

- 10 Connie: Jimmy’s thinking is very very different.
 11 Jimmy: Well (1.0)]Bein: (0.8)
 12 a jealous person, (0.8) u:m, (0.6) we go back- (.)
 13 back to: (0.6) when we were datin’ (1.0) when we were
 14 dating first (0.8) well we met in this: particular pub.
 15 (1.0) > When we start’d datin’ we was in there, < <EV’ry
 16 single week > we’d fight. (0.2) We were at each other
 17 the who:le time.

Connie’s formulation of a rock solid marriage interspersed with routine and unremarkable “arguments” is countered by Jimmy’s alternative account, an equally script-formulated version (“<EV’ry single week >,” “the who:le time,” lines 15–17), but one of perpetual conflict. The attention that both give to the scripted nature of events is part of their factual accounting; these are offered as long-term observations, covering many individual events, and provide the basis for a generalized characterization of the relationship itself. Note the specific contrast with what Connie characterizes as routine “arguments,” the sort that “everybody else” has (Extract 3, line 7). Jimmy also works up their repeated nature, but not as a means of normalizing them. Rather, Jimmy emphasizes their excessive frequency (“<EV’ry single week >,” “the who:le time”), and also their severity, replacing Connie’s term “argu-

ment" with "fight" (Extract 3a, line 16), thus producing a pathologizing, rather than normalizing kind of scriptedness, indeed more like the way K's mental illness was documented (Smith, 1978).⁴

We can begin to see that these are not merely different and inconsistent accounts, the stuff of communication failures and misunderstandings, say. They are *contrasting* accounts constructed precisely in relation to an actual alternative, in that they display an awareness of that alternative and its evidential-rhetorical grounds. Jimmy's self-characterization as "a jealous person" (Extract 3a, line 12) picks up from something Connie had said earlier. One of the key features of their talk is the way in which each deploys dispositional characterizations of the other, supported by script-formulated accounts of the sorts of behavior they each routinely get up to (cf. Edwards, 1994). As with the stories of their prior relationship, we focus on the reciprocal design of those dispositional formulations.

RECIPROCAL DISPOSITIONS: JEALOUSY AND FLIRTING

Jimmy's "jealousy" is descriptively built by Connie, both directly and evidentially, in terms of his recurrent actions. She describes it as an enduring feature of him, notably again something he "Has a:lways ↓been, from the da:y we met" (Extract 4, line 3).

Extract 4 (DE-JF:C2:S1:4)

- 1 Connie: At that poi:nt, (0.6) Jimmy ha- (.) my- Jimmy
2 is extremely jealous. Ex- extremely jealous
3 per:son. Has a:lways ↓been, from the da:y we met.

Connie describes Jimmy as possessing a deep-rooted personality disposition (not just jealous, but a jealous *person*), which is both extreme and enduring. It has been so "from the da:y we met," which places it prior to any subsequent marital difficulties. Connie thus provides a basis inside Jimmy for accounting for Jimmy's recurrent behavior *during* their marriage and for a variety of difficulties including the recurrent "arguments" or "fights" to which both have alluded. Such

recurrent patterns are exemplified by an instance, given in the form of a specific narrated episode.

Extract 4a

- 4 Connie: Y'know? An' at that point in time, there was an
5 episo:de, with (.) a bloke, (.) in a pub, y'know?
6 And me: having a few drinks and messin'. (0.8)
7 That was it. (0.4) Right? And this (0.4) got all
8 out of hand to Jimmy according to Jimmy I was
9 a:lways doin' it and .hhh y'know a:lways
10 aggravating him. He was a jealous person I:
11 aggravated the situation. .h And he walked out
12 that ti:me. To me it was (.) totally ridiculous
13 the way he (0.8) goes o:n (0.4) through this
14 problem that he ha:s.
15 (0.2)
16 And [(he) ()]
17 Counselor: [Was that] the time that you left? =
18 ((Apparently to Jimmy))
19 Connie: =He left the:n that was (.) [two ye]ars ago. He =
20 Jimmy: [°Yeh.°]
21 Connie: =walked out then. Just (.) literally walked out.

Connie's narration of a single "episo:de" (line 5) is used as the basis of a more generalized, scripted account of the kind of thing that Jimmy can be routinely expected to do (line 13, "the way he (0.8) goes o:n"), again deploying the continuous present tense ("goes o:n") and a characteristic activity generalizer ("the way"). Jimmy's extreme jealousy is cited as an explanation of this patterned conduct; he behaves that way "through this problem that he ha:s" (lines 13-14).

Jimmy's dispositional jealousy is descriptively grounded not only in the scripted nature of his actions, but also by the specific details of Connie's episodic example. The incident involved "a bloke" (Extract 4a, line 5), an anonymous, impersonal, anybody-would-do sort of category; "in a pub" rather than anywhere more intimate, and indeed a recognizably category-bound kind of place where people might be expected to socialize somewhat (cf. examples in Drew, 1992, and in Widdicombe & Wooffitt, 1995). Indeed Connie's specific activity was restricted to "having a few drinks and messin'. (0.8) That was it" (lines 6-7). "Messin'" is a nicely vague sort of description that accomplishes some rather precise rhetoric. While characterizing her actions as some sort of

pub-typical harmless play, “messin’” is broad enough to cover quite a large variety of specific behaviors of which she might be accused, while countering any suggestion that she was engaged in anything sufficient to occasion a strongly jealous reaction from her husband. His leaving was therefore precipitate, inadequately caused by anything Connie did: “He walked out then. Just (.) literally walked out” (Extract 4a, lines 19–21; cf. Extract 1, line 8, Emma’s formulation of Bud’s having “jus’ wa:lked out on 1me”). All this leaves Jimmy with quite a lot of work to do if he is to counter that story and reverse the direction of blame. We soon see how he goes about that.

The analysis thus far shows that Jimmy’s jealousy, as depicted by Connie, provides a damaging, pervasively applicable way of pathologizing his behavior and blaming him for various marital difficulties. The important thing, for the current analysis, is how Connie’s discourse possesses a reflexive, *rhetorically symmetrical* design of blaming Jimmy while at the same time protecting her own conduct from blame. Jealousy underlies not only his unreasonable behavior, but also his false accounts of *her* actions. And yet, it is an ascription that Jimmy himself sometimes endorses (including its pathological, endemic nature in him; this is in talk not examined here). Jimmy’s jealousy offers grounds for interactional delicacy beyond merely blaming him. Connie variously treats Jimmy’s jealousy as a “sickness” that needs to be recognized and understood. An insight into Jimmy’s rhetorical use of it is provided by Connie, in the form of a succinct characterization of the kind of thing Jimmy says.

From Extract 4a

- 8 according to Jimmy I was
 9 a:lways doin’ it and .hhh y’know a:lways
 10 aggravating him. He was a jealous person I:
 11 aggravated the situation.

It appears that being a pathologically jealous kind of person is not only something that Jimmy *counters*; he may on occasion assert and make rhetorical use of it. Later in the same session he refers to it himself, as something that “hurts inside ’n it gives me: ba:d pains. (.) Uh I I feel (.) if Connie does something to me I can- I’m hurt real bad” (DE-JF:C2:S1:27). His jealousy being a predictable reaction and painful *to him* can be turned around as a way of excusing him (he would not *want*

to be in pain) and of blaming his wife. He is a deeply jealous man, constitutionally so from way back (as Connie asserts), and can do nothing about it; so *she* ought to take that into account and not go aggravating the situation by flirting with other men. So it can be *her* fault when *he* has an unreasonable fit of jealousy, for getting him going, causing him pain (Extract 4a, line 10, “aggravating him”). If it is a predictable script in Connie’s eyes, then that places her in a position, and with a responsibility, to predict and avoid it.

Counterscripts and Dispositions: Connie as “Flirt”

The notion that Connie flirts with other men is not hers but Jimmy’s, and it is countered by her, as the product of his jealous imagination. This is the rhetorical symmetry again; accusations of unreasonable jealousy provide an account for the jealous husband’s perception that his wife is an incorrigible flirt, and vice versa. Again, what we have is a personality disposition (this time one for Connie, being flirtatious) that relies for its credibility on the flexibility of specific event descriptions and generalized script formulations. Jimmy produces his own detailed narrative, not fully reproduced here, of the pub episode mentioned in Extract 4a, in which what Connie called “messin’ ” is reworked as a sustained flirtation with a “bit of a la:d” called Dave.

Extract 5 (DE-JE:C2:S1:10)

- 1 Jimmy: Connie had a short skirt on I don’t know. (1.0)
 2 And I knew this- (0.6) uh ah- maybe I had met him.
 3 (1.0) Ye:h. (.) I musta met Da:ve before. (0.8)
 4 But I’d heard he was a bit of a la:d ().
 5 He didn’t care: (1.0) who he (0.2) chatted up
 6 (. . .)
 7 Jimmy: So Connie stood up (0.8) pulled her skirt right
 8 up her side (0.6) and she was looking straight
 9 at Da:ve (.) >°like that° < (0.6) and then turned
 10 and looked at me (1.2) and then she said w- (.)
 11 turned and then (.) back to Dave and said (.)
 12 by the way that wasn’t for you.

Jimmy’s extended renarration, only partially reproduced here, counters Connie’s by reformulating her story in various ways. We join Jimmy’s narrative where Connie’s anonymous “bloke, (.) in a pub,

y'know?" (Extract 4a, line 5) is fleshed out more personally, as "Dave," someone they had known previously and of whom Jimmy had "heard he was a bit of a la:d." This appeal by Jimmy to Dave's *reputation*, known also for his tendency to "chat up" women indiscriminately (Extract 5, lines 4–5), helps objectify this judgment of Dave's character, as stemming not merely from Jimmy's subjective viewpoint. Jimmy's description of Connie's "short skirt" and what she did with it (lines 1, 7–12) helps build an image of her also as flirtatious, in how she dresses and acts. Dave is introduced as a person to whom Jimmy has paid no specific attention, in that he signals an initial uncertainty about whether he had previously met him (lines 2–3). Similarly with Connie's short skirt, while managing to introduce such telling details, Jimmy manages to display himself as not particularly zealous in monitoring them (line 1, "Connie had a short skirt on *I don't know*), which works to counter any notion of a watchful and suspicious jealousy.

We turn now to how Jimmy deals with Connie's construction of him as dispositionally, irrationally, and extremely jealous. Jimmy builds a counternarrative of events in which his eventual emotional outburst occurs as a sequentially intelligible and appropriate reaction to her prior behavior.

Extract 5a

- 27 Jimmy: then we went back to the house (.) > °Connie and we
 28 all went back to the house at this point° < (0.6)
 29 Uh: (0.5) went back there 'n I was- I was si- um
 30 (.) John and Caroline were together () and
 31 Dave (0.2) and Connie were sitting. (0.4) °Talking.°
 32 (0.8) I was sitting on the floor playing records.
 33 (0.8) I sat there for (.) two 'n a half hours (0.8)
 34 uh (.) and no one come over (.) not once did they-
 35 (0.4) .h ANȲthing. (.) Just sat there. (.) Talking.
 36 (0.6) I was just completely ignored the whole time.

Connie's intimacy with Dave is further enhanced by its reported continuation throughout the evening. During this time Jimmy himself is contrastingly excluded, sitting alone on the floor, not by choice, but by being "completely ignored" (line 36) for a rather precisely specified (and thus credible) "two 'n a half hours" (line 33; cf. Sacks, 1992, on members' measurement systems). So he was not engaged, say, in any *social* interaction that might provide a basis for Connie's neglect of him. Lines 30–32 include a specific formulation of intimate couples. "John

and Caroline" are Connie's sister and her husband, a ready-made couple. Note how Jimmy describes them as "together," providing a category for how we hear about Dave and Connie.

From Extract 5a

- 30 (.) John and Caroline were together () and
 31 Dave (0.2) and Connie were sitting. (0.4) °Talking.°
 32 (0.8) I was sitting on the floor playing records.

The picture is of two couples, paired off as intimate twosomes, with Jimmy contrastively sitting alone, not even listening, watching, sulking, or whatever else he might be described as doing, but rather, performing the host's duty of putting the records on.

Jimmy's narrative then reaches the point where, having prepared some rational grounds for them, he introduces his own (re)actions, the ones that Connie has complained of, and used as evidence of his extreme, irrational, and dispositional jealousy.

Extract 5b

- 42 Jimmy: Uh: I was (.) boiling at this stage and I was real
 43 angry with Connie (). And uh went up to bed 'n
 44 (.) I lay on the bed. (0.7) °got in bed.° (0.6)
 45 I- uh (.) could hear giggling ('n all that)
 46 downstairs and then (0.5) the music changed (0.5)
 47 slow records. (1.2) And um: (1.2) > and then they
 48 changed to slow records < (0.8) I could hea::r (1.0)
 49 that Connie was dancing with (0.2) this blo:ke
 50 downstairs. (1.0) And Caroline turned around and
 51 said (.) something (.) about it (it was wha-) it
 52 was oh Connie look out I'm going to tell (.)
 53 Jimmy on you. (1.0) And (.) next thing I hear is
 54 (.) °what he doesn't know (doesn't) hurt him.°
 55 (0.2)
 56 Counselor: °I'm sorry?°
 57 Jimmy: What he doesn't know: doesn't hurt him. (0.8)
 58 Soon as I heard that I went- (1.6) straight down
 59 the stairs. (0.8) 'n uh (0.6) threw them out.
 60 (1.2) Took Connie up the stairs and threw her on
 61 the bed. (1.6) I kept trying to run to jump out
 62 the window. (1.6) But y'know: I I couldn't. (.)
 63 I couldn't (.) get myself (0.4) to go out. (.) I
 64 couldn't (.) do it.

65 Counselor: So that's what you felt like.

66 Jimmy: Oh ye:h.

Jimmy's eventual actions are displayed as an understandable result of sustained provocation by Connie over the course of a long evening. Both its sequential placing in the story and the expression "at this stage" (line 42) identify Jimmy's "boiling" anger as following a series of provocations. His anger builds up event by event (lines 42-43, 58-64), as a reaction to events; "at this stage" and "soon as I heard that." The extremity of Jimmy's response, including an aborted leap from an upstairs window, serves as an index of the extremity of that provocation. The failed leap from the window not only displays the genuineness and intensity of his emotional state,⁵ but its self-destructive nature would also detract from any alternative category that might arise here, such as that of a bad tempered wife beater. The counselor (line 65) picks up its indexical import as evidence of Jimmy's (reactive) emotional state, and Jimmy confirms that (line 66). The upshot is that these are not actions that tell us about him as a person; they are reactions to provocations by Connie, which tell of the emotional states he gets into through having a wife who behaves like that. So Connie's scripted-and-instanced depiction of Jimmy, as problematically and extremely jealous, is countered by Jimmy's detailed narrative, whose rhetorical force is to provide an alternative specification of events, as a sequence of provocation and understandable reaction.

Connie's Disposition: Not Flirty but "Sociable"

The thrust and counterthrust of episodic narrative, scripted sequences, and dispositional upshots, do not end with Jimmy's story. Connie, in turn, counters the notion that she is dispositionally flirtatious. Apart from providing alternative accounts of the same events, she works as Jimmy does to establish alternative stories as *emblematic instances* of general patterns, from which a different and more valid (both factually and morally correct) characterization of her as a person can be drawn. Extract 6 shows how her script-instancing and dispositional work on Jimmy accomplishes some fine-grained rhetorical and interactional business with regard to the kinds of counterstories and implications that he produces.

Extract 6 (DE:JF:C2:S1:28)

- 1 Connie: Uh I mean if somebody came up- I'm not the type
 2 that can- (0.4) I'll tell you just a quick
 3 instance now. A couple of weeks ago we went out
 4 (0.6) and he went up to the bar to get a drink
 5 and he said if anyone comes over (0.4) tell them
 6 to get lo:st or something like that. Right? (0.2)
 7 I was sitting there, he had s^taid it to me and
 8 stated it to me. (0.2) Goin' up, .hh I was
 9 sitting there and there was (.) three blokes
 10 standin- (0.6) to the side, (0.2) they had (.)
 11 similar shirts (.) and they were lau:ghing at
 12 one another saying something about- and the bloke
 13 said something to me: and I was c- talking (0.2)
 14 and (.) Jimmy came dow:n and he (0.2) he nearly
 15 went !ma!d > he said < I told you not to ta- .h =
 16 Jimmy: = It's not what I said.
 17 Connie: Well i- you say it.
 18 Jimmy: S- you (.) you jus- (.)
 19 Connie: I'M N!OT THE TYPE that'd turn round and ignore
 20 somebody. (.) Regardless who they are. I I jus'
 21 can't do it. =

Connie frames her narrative in Extract 6 rhetorically, as a denial of a counterproposition about her (lines 1–2, “I’m not the type that can-” and again in line 19). The narrative produced in support of that denial is offered as “a quick instance” (lines 2–3) of events in general, in other words a *script instantiation*. Both Connie’s and Jimmy’s reported actions are offered as emblematic instances of general action sequences. Note *how* the scripting is done – “if somebody came up- I’m not the type that can-.” The conditional *if* clause refers here to an action routine, *if X happens then I do/don’t do Y*; so this is another device for scripting action sequences. The expression “I’m not the type” also performs scripts and dispositions; reference to a type of person provides a basis for associated patterns of action and reaction.

Connie’s direct quotation of Jimmy’s words (lines 5–6), and her emphatic repetition that this is what he “s^taid” and “stated” to her (lines 7–8), draws attention to Jimmy’s strong position on these matters and to the fact that this is a ready-made, in-advance position, said “goin’ up” to the bar, prior to and not therefore merely a reaction to events. Rather than doing anything provocative, Connie also repeats that she had been

merely "sitting there" (lines 7, 9). Her interaction with the men was responsive, not initiative (lines 12-13). Note also the nicely relationship-neutral formulations for that interaction: "said something to me" and "talking" (line 13; cf. Drew, 1992). The brief description of the men is interesting too. It is emphatically "three blokes" (line 9) rather than a one-to-one encounter, and their "similar shirts" (line 11) further homogenizes them as individually unremarkable and undifferentiated.

The scripted upshot of Connie's narrative is that if she talks in response to people who are merely being friendly (lines 9-12, three anonymous "blokes" who were "lau:ghing at one another"), then she catches some highly charged trouble from Jimmy (lines 14-15, "he nearly went lma!d"), who was primed for trouble before anything happened. If she obeys Jimmy and ignores them, then she is forced into being rude, refusing a common courtesy. Note how the specific object of that refused courtesy is formulated as "somebody. (.) Regardless of who they are" (line 20), which again works against any notion that Connie may be singling out individuals for sexual interest. The detail "turn round and" (line 19) nicely specifies the action, that ignoring such people who talk to her would be abrupt, unoccasioned, or rude. Her *inability* (lines 1-2, 19-21) to comply with Jimmy's requirements, which is (under a different description of it) Jimmy's ground for criticizing her flirtatiousness, is precisely her own basis for an alternative dispositional account of herself as ordinarily sociable and polite, to folk in general no matter whom, and not at all flirty with flirty men.

The rhetorical organization in the details of Connie's story, with regard to Jimmy's, is remarkably precise and finely wrought, building a detailed series of contrast structures between her actions and his perceptions. In the course of her narrative Connie provides a descriptive basis, in terms of scripted action patterns and emblematic instances, not only for her own character but, reciprocally, for Jimmy's too. It is her sociability that he takes objection to, and the factual status of that sociability, underwritten by graphic narrative detail, is precisely what constitutes his reaction as one of unreasonable jealousy. Stories and counterstories, generalizations and countergeneralizations, upshots and counterupshots, are produced in ways that attend, in sensitive detail, to what the other partner may and does say, and to a clear-cut set of implications. That is to say, they display an interaction-orientation and rhetorical design that is realized at the level of fine-grained descriptive details.

RECIPROCITY AND THE COUNSELING CONTEXT

We have examined various ways in which partners in relationship disputes may construct script-formulating and disposition-warranting accounts of their activities, and how these attend in detail to the partner's counterdescriptions. A recurrent feature of relationship troubles talk, whether in formal counseling settings or in casual talk (such as that between Emma and Lottie), is an orientation to "what should be done." Displaying a concern for the future, for the possibility of making things better, can figure pervasively in such discourse—not only after the complaints are made, but also as a part of *making* complaints, a way of displaying positive concern and a constructive, cooperative attitude that may contrast with, say, a partner's continuing vindictiveness and obstructive emotions.

Such orientations to constructiveness can figure in counseling settings as orientations to the business of counseling; indeed, as *constituting* counseling and being counseled as the nature of the activity being done, for example, as a blame-avoiding and forward-looking kind of practice. The rhetorical symmetry of narrative and counternarrative may itself be harnessed for counseling-oriented formulations of a couple's "problem," thus defining problems as recognizably scripted kinds of phenomena for couples in general. Examining formulations of the *recognizably general nature* of a couple's troubles enables us to return to our starting point, the formulation of reciprocity done by an idiom such as "two to tango."

In Extract 7, the counselor formulates what had been said so far. As Heritage and Watson (1979) have shown, formulations of the content of prior speech are opportunities for constructive, consequence-oriented work on that content (cf. Edwards & Mercer, 1989).

Extract 7 (DE-JF:C2:S1:29)

- | | |
|----|--|
| 1 | Counselor: ((<i>addressing Connie</i>)) U::m:: (.) Y- you had used |
| 2 | earlier (.) the word >flirting you're saying< |
| 3 | being <u>nor:mally sociable</u> (0.6) you <u>don't</u> think |
| 4 | you're <u>doing anythin:g.</u> (.) But it's <u>upsetting</u> |
| 5 | Jimmy:. (.) U::mm (0.3) >and I'm saying that you |
| 6 | can <u>see</u> how those <u>two</u> things are connected.< And |
| 7 | <u>understa:nding</u> (0.2) <u>You</u> understanding what Jimmy |
| 8 | (0.4) is <u>seeing</u> and <u>feeling</u> (0.4) might help you: |
| 9 | (0.3) and <u>Jimmy</u> <u>understa:nding</u> about <u>your</u> need to |
| 10 | be <u>sociable</u> . |

The counselor picks up and quotes the couple's use of terms such as "sociable" and "flirting," and points to "how those two things are connected" (line 6). Rather than treating this as some kind of concerted disagreement, or as one person suffering unduly the unreasonableness of the other (or any other blame-locating gloss), the counselor frames it all as a matter of honest perspective (what Jimmy and Connie "think," "understand," "see," and "feel"), what they "need" (line 9), their genuine and understandable reactions (lines 4-5, Connie "upsets" Jimmy), and their lack of mutual understanding (lines 3-5, "you don't think you're doing anythin:g. (.) But it's upsetting Jimmy:.", also lines 7-10).

The analytical point here is not to disagree with such formulations, not to treat them ironically or as naive, nor as what the counselor may privately think is going on. Rather, the issue is what such formulations accomplish discursively, how they work interactionally.⁶ One thing they may do, for example, is define relationship trouble in a way that sets it up for some kind of amenable, cooperative solution. As we see, they make a potentially messy and unresolved situation amenable to counseling, and even to a particular variety of even-handed counseling, in which troubles are *descriptively produced* as a conflict of perspectives with shared blame or none at all (cf. Gale, 1991; O'Hanlon & Weiner-Davis, 1989).

Reciprocal Scripts and the Goals of Counseling

I pursue this notion of scripted formulations of a couple's troubles, and its orientation to counseling, with materials from a third couple. Mary and Jeff are an English couple, also in their first session with a relationship counselor. Like Jimmy and Connie, they build contrasting but reciprocally implicative versions of each other's conduct by way of narrated episodes that are offered as instances of generalized interaction scripts, together with thus-warranted dispositional upshots. The specific focus here, however, is on how this is picked up by the counselor and built into a counseling-relevant and counseling-ready scripted formulation of general relationship problems. One of Mary's complaints against Jeff is that he "just doesn't ever listen to me:."

Extract 8 (DE-JF:C1:S1:13)

- 1 Mary: It suh it sluddenly clicked to me::, (.) about a
2 couple weeks ago::, (0.6) >an' I was ly:ing in bed

3 'n I was thinking, < (0.2) he just doesn't ever
 4 listen to me:. (0.4) He: (.) he lau::ghs (0.3) or
 5 heh o:r, (.) uh^hh (.) > he says < oh d|on't be so
 6 st|u:|pid or .hhh oh th|at's n|o:n|sense or (.)
 7 youkno:w (.) >'n I say < if I don't wanna do something
 8 I don't wanna do it. I don't wannoo:, .h o::r (0.4)
 9 u::m (.) he'll say |of c|our:se you li|:ke |it. (.)
 10 |No I do|:n't well o' |course you |do:: that's- .hh
 11 that's st|upid if you don't like th|at.

Mary's story details are offered as an instance of a general, scripted sequence, whereas the notion of a sudden "click" of realization works against any notion that she might be artfully producing this account. She constructs the sense of a pattern, a scripted sequence of interactions with her husband, whose regularity and nature *as* that pattern is what suddenly falls into place in her mind. The narrative framing of that click of comprehension and the circumstantial details and character of the setting (lines 2-3, ">an' I was ly:ing in bed 'n I was thinking, <") provide the kind of graphic, storied backdrop that lends credibility to potentially disputed accounts (Atkinson, 1990; Edwards & Potter, 1992; Wooffitt, 1992). Jeff's lack of interest in what Mary has to say is routine (lines 3-4, he "doesn't ever listen" and "he lau::ghs"), and the sequential unfolding of a dispute about it is given in the form of an emblematic scripted dialogue, with lively intonation (lines 5-11).

This notion that one partner regularly fails to communicate can work as a double complaint, in these and other data sets, in that it blames that partner for relationship problems while also orienting to a definitional and value-loaded criterion for the current talk. Open talking and proper listening are generally treated as specifying proper relationships, as well as being required for solving problems and for cooperative, effective counseling. After a further series of interchanges, the counselor invites Jeff to respond to Mary's complaint that he does not take her seriously. Extract 9 is part of his response.

Extract 9 (DE-JF:C1:S1:15)

1 Jeff: I suppose it's (0.5) I just think that (3.6)
 2 >when I turn round and say well don't be sil<ly:
 3 (.) youkno:w, (.) I'm trying to: (1.) ascertain
 4 (0.8) why^hh >heh heh < whhy she's finding it
 5 particularly:: (0.5) tha:t she doesn't like it or
 6 why she shouldn't like it. (.) ((C clears throat))

7 > But I suppose I go about it sometimes in the
 8 wrong way < 'n just by lau:ghing or just sniggering,
 9 (0.7) it just makes her get a bit annoyed. = †But
 10 I d|on't do it every ti:me.

Jeff acknowledges Mary's complaint while at the same time downgrading its seriousness; he may do it regularly, but not every time (line 10). Note the descriptive details, how "lau:ghing" is reduced to "just sniggering" (line 8), and how Mary's own reaction is reformulated from "getting so a:ngry:" (her version) into becoming "a bit annoyed" (Extract 9, line 9). Jeff narrates his actions as understandable *reactions* to Mary.

Extract 9a

11 Jeff: you don't want to say well why: don't you like
 12 it, I mean, > Mary will answer well I don't li:ke
 13 it. < (1.0) And that (0.2) you kno:w and then > I'll
 14 just say well you've gotta have a rea:son if you don't like
 15 it, < (.) > well I just don't like it
 16 and that's [it. < ((said primly))
 17 Mary: | > Heh | heh heh heh. <
 18 Jeff: Do- heh heh ()

With marvelous reciprocity, Jeff's countercomplaint appeals to the norms of open communication—the very grounds of Mary's complaint against him. According to Jeff, Mary refuses to explain why she does or does not like something. Jeff uses direct quotation and impersonates Mary's vocal delivery (lines 15–16), which occasions laughter from them both. Again, as for Mary in Extract 8, direct quotation and vocal impersonation provide a strong warrant for vivid factual accuracy. Further, Jeff's use of it *reciprocates* Mary's, while engaging Mary in an enactment of the very thing he is accused of, which is laughing at what she says. Jeff's laughing at Mary is thus brought off as not very serious, understandable as a reaction to *her* uncommunicativeness, and even as something Mary herself might do.

The scripted sequences Mary and Jeff have identified here, in which each one's accusation of lack of proper communicativeness is presented as an understandable response to the other, again demonstrates a finely tuned reciprocity. It is this reciprocity that is then "picked up" (Extract 10, line 1) by the counselor as a recognizable pattern in troubled couples talk. As in Connie's and Jimmy's case, the counselor (a different one

here) takes their conflictual talk as stemming from mismatched perceptions of each other, and fits these to a recognizable, scripted pattern. In Extract 10, which closely follows Extract 9a, that pattern is articulated with respect to Jeff's and Mary's particular relationship.

Extract 10 (DE-JF:C1:S1:16)

- 1 Counselor: But what I pick up from that I I an' I'll feed
 2 that back to you right away is that (0.6) if in
 3 the first place Mary isn't sure that you're going
 4 to value what she has to say:, (1.0) it see:ms
 5 >to me that she's likely to say < (.) well I just
 6 don't like it. =She won't (0.3) be bothered
 7 (0.3) to go into detail [because] (1.0) she:
 8 Jeff: [Mm.]
 9 Counselor: (0.2) she has made the assumption that in the end
 10 you may not be listening in [any case.]
 11 Jeff: [°No I do]
 12 understand yes.°
 13 (0.6)
 14 Counselor: And an' I I guess that's what we d↓o: we get into
 15 a pattern of behaving, (0.6) that actually:
 16 separates us out from one another because we've
 17 made all these assumptions and predicted (0.2)
 18 what the next step will be:. (0.7) Well if I tell
 19 him he'll end up not listening and he'll >probably
 20 say well (0.2) hurry up because I've got to
 21 revi<:se o:r (0.5) so you're already predictin:g
 22 somebody's response in adva:nce.

The counselor in Extract 10 provides a formulation of Mary's complaint against Jeff. In fact, it goes further than Mary has yet done, in that it offers a response on her behalf to Jeff's claim that she refuses to explain her preferences (lines 6–10). The counselor attributes Mary's refusal to explain, to her anticipating Jeff's lack of interest, just as Jeff attributed that to Mary's lack of explanation. Having thus brought them full circle, the counselor begins to articulate a generalized script, a pattern of reciprocal behaving that "we" (presumably couples in general) get into (lines 14–18). The framing of this as "I I guess that's what we d↓o:" (line 14) conveys a sense of figuring things out, recognizing patterns, comparable to Mary's "click" of comprehension. Jeff and Mary are described as doing all of this cognitive work with regard to each other: predicting next steps in scripted interactions and acting them

out. The counselor depicts herself as doing it now at a metalevel, seeing the whole thing as a very general pattern. The pattern itself is recognizable as a kind of recursive knot or bind, familiar in therapeutic discourse (e.g., Watzlawick, Beavin, & Jackson, 1967), in which one person's talk or action triggers a reaction that reinforces the first, and so on.

The status of such a generalized script need not be understood as an objective view of this couple's relationship, their mental representations, or their situation (Edwards, 1994). Rather, the formulation of scripted versions can be seen as an activity in itself; a concerted discursive production by participants. It occurs as a feature of how they (including the counselor) come to construct descriptively, and thus make recognizable and accountable, the nature of their relationship, its troubles, and a first step toward a solution. That solution involves, in a counselor's turn not examined here, having to "break out of the prejudices" and "start over" as if from a time, back at the start of their relationship, before these scripted reaction patterns got established.

In Extract 11, the counselor provides a yet more abstract, general purpose script formulation of couple troubles, cast now in terms of an emblematic reciprocal bind, using a general-purpose, could-be-anybody actors, the nursery rhyme characters Jack and Jill.

Extract 11 (DE-JF:C1:S1:13)

- | | | |
|---|------------|---|
| 1 | Counselor: | It's it's what I call the <u>Jack</u> and <u>Ji:ll</u> |
| 2 | | situation, that (.) <u>Jack</u> will say I go to the |
| 3 | | <u>pu:b</u> (.) because <u>Ji:ll</u> nags. (0.6) <u>Ji:ll</u> will say: |
| 4 | | <u>no:</u> , (1.8) I only <u>na:g</u> because he goes to the |
| 5 | | <u>pu:b</u> . (0.5) And he'll say <u>no:</u> I go to the pub |
| 6 | | because you <u>nag</u> (0.2) so it's this sort of (.) |
| 7 | | up and <u>dow:n</u> situation, |
| 8 | Mary: | <u>l°Mm</u> (.) that's (the way it is isn't it'°) |

Extract 11 formulates a kind of superordinate script into which Jeff's and Mary's pattern of conflict can be fitted, one applicable to any number of actual relationship problems, though cast in terms of a for-example, emblematic instance: going to the pub versus nagging about it. More relevantly, it is a pattern of Jack and Jill *saying* that the other nags or goes out (lines 2, 3, 5). This is formulated as a "situation" (lines 2, 7) that couples may find themselves in, rather than just a series of actions; situational descriptions typically provide for less blaming, externally caused rather than agentive kinds of actions (Edwards &

Potter, 1993). The scripting is done via the emblematic, all-purpose characters themselves (Jack and Jill), by the deployment of an iterative future tense ("Jack will say. . . ,", "Jill will say . . ."), and by the notion of an evidently cyclical and repetitive "sort of (.) up and down situation." The reciprocity is done by the exact symmetry of complaints; the nagging causes the going out, and vice versa—like two people tangoing. So the reciprocating recriminations of relationship troubles talk are transformed into a recognizable-as-standard, and potentially tractable-by-counseling, "situation."

An important thing to note is that Extract 11 occurs on page 13 of the full transcript of this session, sequentially *before* the others we have examined, and a few lines prior to Mary's initial story in Extract 8. So the "Jack and Jill" story represents not just the culmination of all this reciprocal story telling, but a kind of frame or template for it that was formulated in advance. The counselor and the clients eventually produce their accounts in a way that *displays how they can be fitted* to the Jack and Jill script. Although such formulations would not always have to be done in that order, this is the kind of status that plans and scripts seem to have in ordinary discourse. Rather than providing analysts with explanations of people's actions (Schank & Abelson, 1977), they feature as participants' ways of constructing the sense and accountability of their actions in flexible, rhetorically oriented ways (Edwards, 1994; cf. Suchman, 1987).

CONCLUSIONS

Emma's expression "two to tango" provided a starting point for exploring a range of relationship-formulating talk. This entailed the pursuit of a range of "script formulations" for couples troubles, the "dispositional" work that such formulations perform, the fine-grained rhetorical and reciprocating nature of talk *between* couples, and the take-up of those reciprocity formulations in solution-oriented discourse. Rather than treating participants' notions of dispositions and scripted actions as psychological—and producing their talk—or as inherent in persons and events, scripts and dispositions have been analyzed as discursively produced and interaction-oriented categories, designed for and in the telling, and as accomplishing actions in the telling.

I make no attempt to provide a definitive list of scripting devices.

Such a list might become indefinitely long, and specific devices may not always do scripting (e.g., *if-then* structures are also used for logical connections) and not in any automatic way. Their identification, as doing script-and-disposition work, has been a matter of seeing how they do that in specific stretches of discourse. Nevertheless, and with those caveats, it is possible to list a set of devices that may prove to be regularly used and that are in any case used in the materials analyzed here. These include: using verbs with iterative aspect, as in “he *gets* so made at me” (Extract 2) and “we *get* into a pattern of behaving” (Extract 10); using modals for iteration, such as *would* and *will*, as in “she *would* not reverse its position” (Smith, 1978, p. 46) and “Jack *will* say . . .” (Extract 11); *if-then* structures (Extract 6, “*if* somebody came up . . .”; Extract 10, “*if* I tell him . . .”); event pluralization (Extract 3, “we had *arguments* . . .”); citing dispositions (Extract 6, “I’m not the *type* . . .”; Buttny, 1993: “she *likes* to talk about it”); various temporal adverbs and adverbial phrases (*always*, *sometimes*, *usually*, *often*, *all the time*: e.g., “*all along*” in Extract 3, and “*every single week*” in Extract 3a); manner expressions such as “*the way* he goes on” (Extract 4a); explicit instancing of events as pattern exemplars (Extract 6, “I’ll tell you just a quick *instance* now . . .”); and of course, formulae and idioms that summarize regular action patterns, such as “two to tango” and the emblematic “Jack and Jill situation.”

These materials and analyses can be compared to other studies of relationship and couples therapy talk. Three in particular are of direct interest, in that they also deal with what have been called “blame-accounts sequences” (Buttny, 1990, 1993) and couples therapy (Gale, 1991), and with participants’ topics of jealousy and communicative openness (Stenner, 1993). Buttny (1990, 1993) analyzed reciprocating patterns of blame-blame and blame-defense in couples counseling. Features of the present analyses can also be found in Buttny’s materials. For example, “Jenny” script-formulates how “if things happened to Larry he couldn’t talk about them” as a warrant for a dispositional attribution: “>he’s< very introverted and and very ah: private, very private person” (Buttny, 1963, p. 68). “Larry” responds to this potentially blaming characterization (given a communicativeness norm for relationships and counseling) by providing a counterscript and disposition for Jenny: she is overtalkative, “she has a problem she likes to talk (0.5) about it or reiterate on it (0.4) a num:ber of times a large number of times (.) in my view” (ibid.).

Buttny noted that reciprocating patterns of this sort are commonly observed in studies of relationship discourse. Citing Cronen, Pearce, and Snavely (1979) as a source, he remarked that, "These patterns are not desired, but interactants may feel enmeshed within the pattern and unable to change" (Buttny, 1993, p. 67). One of the features of the present analysis has been to explore how such sequences (1) display a fine-grained sensitivity to the other person's contrasting accounts that belies any straightforward notion that the speakers do not understand each other, and (2) how "enmeshed pattern" formulations of such troubles may themselves, along with everything else the couple says, perform constructive work as participants' categories.

Stenner (1993) analyzed a pair of audio-recorded interviews between "Jim" and "May," who were shortly to be married, focusing on May's supposed jealousy and Jim's supposed lack of it. Stenner puzzled at the differences between May's and Jim's accounts: "How is it that people can *unknowingly* entertain such contrasting constructions of themselves and their relationships?" (Stenner, 1993, p. 127, emphasis added). I have tried to undermine the assumption that (other) couples are actually "unknowing" of each other, and to reassign such notions to the status of participants' categories; that is, participants may methodically work up such notions in their discourse, as a way of accomplishing various kinds of interactional business.

Stenner's puzzlement may be due to having conducted *separate interviews* with each partner. He wrote that, "despite the importance for May of open communication, Jim does not tend to talk about his feelings and desires" (1993, p. 127). This is based directly on a quotation from May: "I try to talk to him about everything . . . he's not a great talker . . . it's a bit one-sided that way . . . it's like trying to get blood from a stone" (*ibid.*). But taking May's version at face value, as a factual description of herself and her partner, ignores its possibly contentious, blaming content. Earlier in his analysis, Stenner cited a claim by Jim of being prevented from talking freely out of consideration for May's feelings: "So you try and express what you really think and say, and you get, and then her lower lip starts to go and then I shut up" (Stenner, 1993, p. 118). So there is at least some evidence of rhetorical symmetry here. Rather than unknowing of each other, May and Jim are possibly attuned to each other in a rather precise, if somewhat oppositional, way.

Gale (1991) analyzed a session between a married couple and their therapist, William O'Hanlon, a leading proponent of "brief," often

single-session "solution-oriented" therapy (de Shazer, 1985; O'Hanlon & Weiner-Davis, 1989). Gale's work employs conversation analysis mainly as a "methodology," while retaining a strong orientation to therapists' own theories and descriptions of how therapy works. This means that much of the analysis is concerned with how O'Hanlon's therapeutic procedures, in the terms in which O'Hanlon himself described them, can be identified at work in the recorded session. The wife identifies the husband's lack of communicativeness about his feelings as a significant element in their current troubles. If I may use the analytic terms developed in the present study, she does this via an identifiable series of script formulations ("he wasn't telling me how he feel:s") and narrated instances ("like last weekend was very stressful we moved into our apartment . . ."; Gale, 1991, p. 125). These build the husband as a dispositional nontalker who, in this instance, "just kinda phased out on me and he was just like (.hhh) kinda not: ther:e" (ibid.). The therapist suggests the need for the couple to "hear it both ways and not take it personally, not react" (ibid.), displaying affiliation with both husband and wife, within a generalized "two to tango" kind of orientation; the cooperative problem-solving ethos of fixing relationships, doing counseling, and being counseled.

Analyses of descriptions and accounts in these sorts of settings contradict some prevalent "social cognition" assumptions concerning relationships, relationship troubles, and couples therapy (e.g., Bubenzer & West, 1993; Duck, 1993). Social cognition theories, currently the dominant paradigm in social psychology (Eiser, 1986; Fiske & Taylor, 1984), assume that people act generally, and in relationships, on the basis of their perceptions and understandings, including such mental constructs as scripts and plans (Berger, 1993; Schank & Abelson, 1977). Although notions such as scripts, plans, goals, understandings, and so on are clearly relevant for the analysis of discourse, their status has to be somewhat different from that in social cognition theory. That is because they arise discursively as participants' topics and concerns. Participants descriptively work up or counter the scriptedness of events, the status of instances, and the planfulness of their conduct, together with the specific nature of events and of their participation in them. The goal of analyzing all this discursively is not to opt for which of a set of actual or possible scripted versions is correct, but to examine how and when such versions are produced (Edwards, 1994). The notion that a particular version of events is simply the way somebody sees them, or

else just the way things are, is precisely the sort of constructions that participants may work to establish, undermine, or set in opposition.

NOTES

- 1 This information, for each data extract, denotes its source and position in a larger corpus. The final number is a page number in a full transcript, which shows roughly where each extract occurs with regard to others taken from the same conversation. All data are transcribed using Gail Jefferson's conventions. Extract 1 is from Jefferson's own data but slightly simplified. Asterisks denote a "squeaky" vocal delivery.
- 2 In closely adjacent text, not included in Extract 1, Barbara does indeed formulate a reluctance to "get involved" in what may be "a mess."
- 3 Other expressions that Emma uses include "you know I'm no bottle o' milk" and "so (.) let's face it what you say in a:ngl*er" and "you know how you talk." Again, these are unspecific, idiomatic kinds of blame-sharing applicable to anybody anywhere.
- 4 The difference between a normalizing and a pathologizing script formulation seems in this case to inhere in the specific details and discursive context of each description. The possibility of a systematic pattern in such differences must await further study.
- 5 As Buttny (1993, p. 94) noted, "affect avowals" in discourse can serve as "shorthand formulations" to invoke a variety of culturally understood grounds for emotional reactions.
- 6 Indeed, the analytic position adopted here is that it is precisely because such discursive moves are analyzable as performing systematic interactional business that we cannot take them as straightforward realizations of speakers' mental or intentional states (cf. Coulter, 1990; Edwards, 1994; Edwards & Potter, 1992; Schegloff, 1988).

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