

# Foreword

Over the course of two centuries of racialized slavery in the US and another 160 plus years of racial segregation (both *de facto* and *de jure*), inequalities of Race<sup>1</sup> became deeply embedded in our daily life interactions and were then exported around the world. Other inequalities are similarly embedded in structures of interactional expectation such that in ordinary interaction people are often producing inequality unintentionally. Nevertheless, we tend to treat inequality as if it were a matter of institutional rules and individual attitudes, and thus attempts at reform tend to focus on either changing rules and laws or on sensitizing individuals to personal bias. To the extent that the pervasive forms of exclusion that produce inequality do their work through social interaction, in focusing on individuals and explicit organized forms of exclusion, the actual processes through which we continue to produce Race and other forms of inequality together in daily social interaction tend to be overlooked. Because such instances of exclusion are ‘social facts’, produced like other social facts through the tacit taken-for-granted practices of ordinary social interaction, they cannot be explained in terms of individual attitudes and formal institutions. Nor can such inequalities be eradicated by convincing people to become anti-racist, or anti-sexist, or anti-ableist – although that is certainly necessary. Even people who are thoroughly committed to achieving equality will continue producing social facts in ways that exclude if they continue to participate in unexamined social practices in which inequality has become embedded. The dynamics of the tacit social practices through which we create inequality together every day must be understood, and ordinary people must develop an awareness of these tacit taken-for-granted social processes before change is possible (Rawls & Duck, 2020).

In this timely book on *Critical Conversation Analysis*, Hansun Zhang Waring and Nadja Tadic have brought together conversation analytic (CA) research that takes a critical stance toward revealing the tacit taken-for-granted underpinnings of racism and other inequalities in conversational interaction so that we can understand how these processes of

Othering work. They present this research under the umbrella of what they call 'Critical CA' in 10 illuminating chapters that analyze interaction across ordered sequences of talk to reveal contemporary inequalities of Race, Gender, Power and Politics at work in social interaction (discussed in more detail below). There is a false belief among many social scientists that to illuminate *big* issues like racism and exclusion we need to start with *big* conceptual ideas. The research in this book challenges that premise, each contribution in its own way showing how the analysis of interaction in sequential details reveals processes of Race and inequality at work line-by-line, sometimes explicitly, sometimes tacitly. When the so-called big ideas ignore how things actually work, they need to take a back seat to a detailed analysis of social interaction.

In their opening discussion, Tadic and Waring context their critical CA approach in what they refer to as the 'oft-cited debate on the relationship between critical analysis and CA' (p. 4), which comprised a series of articles by Emanuel Schegloff, Margaret Wetherell and Michael Billig, featured in *Discourse & Society* between 1997 and 1999. The point at issue was the claim – consistent with the 'big ideas' position – that empirical research on the details of language use cannot lead to better theory or social change. In refuting this charge, Schegloff emphasized a crucial difference between CA and conventional research: political and social categories are typically the starting point of analysis – chosen *a priori* – for researchers not using CA, which makes critique based on them circular. Whereas for CA researchers, categories and their relevance are an emergent property that can be tracked empirically by sequential analysis. This 'emergent' quality makes the difference (Rawls, 1987, 1990).

Racism and other inequalities require being enacted, one might say 'performed', in situated social contexts to be experienced. However, because the social processes through which racism and inequality are enacted/achieved as social facts are largely tacit and interactional, even when backed by racist beliefs or formal legal mandates, they are difficult to pin down: obvious to those excluded by them – but not to those doing the excluding. Thus, those who do not experience racism and exclusion tend to know little about it, while those who do experience racism are rarely listened to. For Harold Garfinkel and Harvey Sacks, the founders of ethnomethodology (EM) and conversation analysis (CA), Jewish scholars in a US social science founded largely by the White male sons of Protestant ministers, the relationship between marginality and trouble in interaction was clear. Working together in the early 1960's, their heightened awareness of interaction as a setting for the 'doing' of marginality, coupled as it was to their own marginality and alignment with other

marginalized categories of person, set them against the mainstream (Duck & Rawls, 2023) or what they might have called the ‘normals’ (Rawls, 2023) who then further marginalized their message.<sup>2</sup>

To do a better job of understanding racism it is necessary to determine how – just how – interactional practices are being used to enact expectations and presuppositions about Race, Gender and Other marginalized categories. Lacking such an understanding we have failed over and over again to address problems of racialization and marginalization, often mistakenly believing that they have been overcome. This particular failure to identify racism in action has made the US vulnerable to racialized appeals that are being used to amplify divisions between citizens and threaten the US democratic experiment. EM and CA have essential roles to play in generating the understanding we need to meet the moment – a bit like the role of Newton and Galileo in grounding the natural sciences in empirical demonstrations of things like gravity, the fragmentation of light, and inertia: findings to which we now give big names like ‘laws’ but were originally small demonstrations of matter in action.

Critical CA is an appropriate name for this important research. It is important to note, however, that even when EM and CA focus on establishing how ordinary social facts are made when there is no trouble or inequality, they are still involved in *an inherently critical enterprise* that promises to rewrite the foundations of many disciplines. Garfinkel and Sacks were both explicit about this in collaborating to launch their joint challenge to Sociology and Linguistics through a series of five meetings at UCLA in 1962 and 1963 funded by Garfinkel’s AAF grants.<sup>3</sup>

On top of this intrinsic challenge of EM/CA to mainstream disciplines, when their focus is on what interactional troubles reveal about how social inequalities are being produced, as in this book, the research also has a direct relevance to practical political and moral issues. In his first published article in 1940, Garfinkel reported on an ethnographic observation of racism he made as a 22-year-old graduate student traveling on a segregated bus in the US South. The article documented how tacit presuppositions were used to maintain segregation on the bus and how things fell apart when those tacit presuppositions were questioned.<sup>4</sup> Garfinkel realized from the beginning that *making what is tacit explicit is a critical enterprise* that can reveal how inequalities are created and maintained, and he based EM on that premise (Rawls, 2022a, 2022b). Sacks, working with Garfinkel in the early 1960’s, realized that making what was tacit about the achievement of conversational meaning explicit would reveal the social interaction – the sociology – that is hiding at the heart of linguistics (as Durkheim’s exposure of the

Individual as a social fact had revealed the sociology hiding at the center of philosophy and psychology). Garfinkel and Sacks launched EM and CA together in the early 1960's with the idea of doing this critical work of revealing what is ordinarily taken for granted and changing the way we approach both social and technical research (see Eisenmann *et al.*, 2023).

Unfortunately, for most of the past century a prejudice against social interactionism has worked against the reception of such studies (Rawls, 2018) and their critical potential has not been recognized. Tadic and Waring touch on this problem. EM/CA researchers who make critical contributions to understanding racism and injustice endure unfounded criticisms by those who attack their methods as 'unscientific', while those same critics blithely adhere to positions that hide and even reinforce the social inequalities they claim to be addressing.

When Lewis Coser, for instance, in his 1974 Presidential Address, referred dismissively to EM as a 'Method in Search of a Substance' – implying that EM/CA were engaged in observing trivia to no purpose – he aligned himself with theoretical and conceptual models and against the possibility of progress through detailed research that is not grounded in such models. For Coser, concepts and models come first and define the substantive problems a researcher then tries to 'measure'.<sup>5</sup> Coser (following Whitehead, 1927) called attempts to prioritize empirical data over conceptual models a 'fallacy of misplaced precision'. By contrast, this prioritizing of concepts and models by Coser and most mainstream thinkers is in my view a 'Fallacy of Misplaced Abstraction' (Rawls, 2004).

The assumption that concepts take precedence over and precede empirical observations is precisely what EM and CA challenge. How can concepts come first if, as social facts, they are an interactional achievement (an argument Durkheim (1912) intended as the grounding for sociology as a discipline: practices he argued create concepts (Rawls, 2009)). There is certainly no lack of substance; EM and CA have been clear from the beginning about the problem – or substance – they targeted. That target is the theoretical models that those like Coser insist must be *allowed to stand in for the world as it is*: models, which can only be as good as the assumptions they rest on, are supposed to take precedence over the way society is actually organized move-by-move, turn-by-turn. That those models hide how social processes actually work (what Garfinkel and Sacks called 'glossing' the actual practices) – that they hide how people cooperate to use practices to make social facts – did not interest Coser and those he aligned with. They considered the 'real world' too messy to deal with and treated empirical contingencies as an irrelevant part of that

mess, which should be reduced – or cleaned up – through conceptual generalization/glossing.

While others imagined that such ‘clean’ conceptual representations are needed to do real ‘scientific’ research, Garfinkel’s experience with the deficiency of models during WWII told him otherwise. Working for the Army Air Force (AAF), Garfinkel prepared a report on how the AAF went about training airplane mechanics (Garfinkel, [1943] 2019). At the beginning of the war, everything was in short supply. There were no planes or engines for the mechanics to train on. Even simple tools were hard to come by. The AAF generals nevertheless insisted that those doing the training throw out the books (conceptual models), and crude physical models were built to support the training.

In commenting on the difference between airplane mechanics and sociologists in 1963, Garfinkel told a story about an airplane mechanic who finally climbed into a real airplane for the first time and found that the plane was very different from the model. Garfinkel’s point was that the mechanic did not fault the plane for not meeting the criteria of the model. The mechanic saw that the fault was with the model. The sociologist, however, as Garfinkel told it, would complain about the world that it did not meet the criteria of the model (Garfinkel, 1988; Rawls & Lynch, [1943] 2019).

By contrast with a mainstream sociology that faulted the social world for being less orderly than their conceptual models, Garfinkel and Sacks intended EM/CA to reveal what those models were hiding, arguing that what the models were treating as irrelevant contingencies are actually the key to how things work. Imagine if natural scientists had kept approaching the details of elements, atoms and electrons as irrelevant contingencies, as they had in the age of Copernicus. Research that begins with conceptual models of society is similarly problematic, reflecting the beliefs and biases of those who constructed the model, while saying nothing about the order properties of the actual social world – the target of the research.

The 10 chapters in this book investigate issues that are central to creating a diverse, equitable and inclusive democratic society, and they do so using CA analysis of how the design and placement of turns in talk implicate conversational moves that either indicate that participants are already orienting to such issues as a problem in the interaction, or make such issues a problem through the placement of those turns in the talk. Finding inequality embedded in social practices across a wide range of interactions, each chapter in different detailed ways specifies how unequal power relations are produced, reproduced, resisted and problematized by ordinary people doing what we all take for granted in our daily lives.

## How this Book Delivers on the Promise of Critical Conversation Analysis

In giving their Chapter 10 the title “‘Just a Method in Search of a Problem?’ The Power of Conversation Analysis’, Elizabeth Stokoe and Saul Albert allude to and challenge the Coser critique – pushing back against the insinuation that EM/CA has no substance, with a powerful demonstration that CA has indeed *found its problem* in studies of embedded power and preference. After first showing what more can be learned from doing CA analysis of two public controversies for which audio was available (one involving Race, the other Gender), Stokoe and Albert discuss a range of problems that CA analysis has located within policing and health care organizations. Focusing on a gap between guidance and practice in police training and evaluation and in health diagnosis and evaluation, they explain how CA analysis reveals that in actual interrogations and diagnostic interviews practitioners deviate from the protocols in ways that matter, both for the services clients receive and for their own careers, arguing that: ‘CA has the power to reveal the inadequacy of standardization and written guidance’ (p. 208). Their analysis shows how performance assessments based on role-playing and other conceptual ‘tools’ differ from what actually happens in ways that make assessments based on such tools deeply flawed, and demonstrates that CA has the ‘power’ to reveal that such misunderstandings about the way interaction works have become embedded in social institutions and their methods of evaluation in ways that add to the burden of disadvantage.

It should be added that EM/CA is/are not a method, as Coser assumed, but many methods driven by a theoretical insight, the whole of which had its problem clearly in view from the beginning. That problem was always at one level focused on social inequality and the particular racial inequalities and heightened awareness of them that were experienced by its first Jewish authors (Duck & Rawls, 2023). Garfinkel’s early realization that the way inequality is reproduced in social interaction was being hidden by conventional approaches fueled a broad challenge – to rewrite social science and sociology in particular – such that the processes of social fact making that are hidden by conventional methods and theories can be brought out into the light of day – inspected – and understood. Sacks extended the challenge to rewriting linguistics as an enterprise reliant on interaction and hence also inherently sociological.

This book delivers on the promise of critical CA to demonstrate how inequalities are embedded in talk and interaction, in many different ways. Chapter 8, *I’m Just Saying: Being Explicit in a Mixed-Race Conversation*

about Racism', by Sarah Chepkirui Creider, takes a close look at conversations about racism that took place in 2020 as people all over the world inspired by BlackLivesMatter protests tried to come to terms with the murder of George Floyd and other Black men and women by the police in the US. We learn that a CA analysis of the turns of Black speakers in such conversations indicates that they orient to the reality that the White participants they are talking to do not share their experience of the world. When they talk about their experiences of Race with White people, this awareness is marked through the placement of accounts and formulations that would be unnecessary between participants who can assume they share the same social experiences. Creider formulates this as a visible marker that participants are not able to achieve what Garfinkel called 'Trust Conditions', leading to troubles in the talk.

That aspects of turn-taking can be analyzed to reveal difficulties in talk about racism, because accounts and formulations only appear when speakers orient the proximity of trouble, or a lack of shared understanding, is important. For White speakers who are not sure when they are being naïve about Race, being on the lookout for such occurrences and *taking them seriously as evidence of a problem* would be one quick and easy way of being less naïve and incompetent and more successfully anti-racist in such encounters.

From Chapter 9, 'Using Racial Incompetence as a Comedic Device and Tacit Method of Anti-Racist Education', by Lillian Cheeks and Kevin Whitehead, we learn that sitcoms can be a useful tool for teaching anti-racism. The authors demonstrate how comedy sketches can accomplish this through the enactment of sequences of talk in which actors perform White incompetence. Audiences learn to recognize this interactional incompetence through its humorous juxtaposition with the responses of Black performers. Again, the analysis makes use of CA detail to illuminate what is going on in these episodes and show how they illustrate the racism embedded in ordinary everyday sequences as performed by White actors.

We also learn in Chapter 2, 'Investigating Raciolinguistic Ideologies in Interaction', by Nadja Tadic, Hansun Zhang Waring and Elizabeth Reddington, about ways in which raciolinguistic ideologies work to position non-White speakers as inferior/not-American – and as inferior speakers of English. CA analysis reveals that second language learners have different experiences in the US depending on whether they are White or non-White, because Americans take for granted that White people are American (speakers of English), and that non-White people are

not-American (and therefore not speakers of English). This creates many absurdities that second language teachers must explain to their students, involving them in awkward explanations, e.g. of why, because Americans will assume that White Europeans *can* speak English, they will need to explain that they do *not* speak English or Americans will assume they do. Whereas non-White speakers will find that no matter how proficient in English they become, Americans will likely treat them as if they cannot speak English – often even speaking to them loudly and slowly as if they could not hear. This of course involves the teacher in giving explanations like ‘[you are White] you look American’, which replicate US racism in an effort to help students manage it.

A detailed analysis of how ‘mocking repeats’ and nonsense syllables are being used in aggressive racial confrontations in ways that make use of the sequential obligations relevant to ‘repair’ appears in Chapter 3, ‘Racist Renditions: Mock Language in Interaction’, by Elliott Hoey and Chase Raymond. The details of ‘mock language’ are treated by Hoey and Raymond ‘*as an interactional practice* – that is, as produced and understood in the service of action’ (p. 51). Using data from a corpus of racist/racialized altercations on video that are circulating on social media, the authors use CA, as they put it, ‘to uncover how mock-language practices can emerge within, and be fitted to, the particulars of their interactional environments...within the immediacy of heated exchanges...to maintain “White public space”’ (p. 51). Preserving White public spaces is a White supremacist objective that the CA analysis in this chapter shows can be achieved by mocking repeats.

How does this work? There is, the authors note, a ‘family resemblance with the sequential organization of repair’ (p. 66) that enables the aggression. Repair is, they point out, considered a ‘priority activity’ (Schegloff *et al.*, 1977: 720) in that ‘[i]ts actions can supersede other actions, in the sense that they can replace or defer whatever else was due next ... It is the only action type that we know of now which has this property’ (Schegloff, 2000: 208). Repair can be inserted anywhere. ‘Whatever is said’, they argue, ‘a next speaker can always say “Pardon?”’, for example, thereby initiating repair and halting – albeit momentarily – the trajectory of action in progress’ (p. 66). A mocking repeat, which takes the form of other-initiated repair is thus a powerful interactional move *that obligates those being mocked to respond*. According to Hoey and Raymond, these ‘racist renditions ... resemble other-initiated repair in both its action context non-specificity, as well as in the sequence-/action-halting power it wields’ (p. 66). In other words, mocking renditions can be used almost anywhere to trap persons of color in sequences of interaction in which they are ‘visibly constrained by rigid norms of linguistic purity, but white linguistic



disorder goes unchallenged' (Zentella, 2003: 53, as cited in Hoey & Raymond, this volume, p. 66).

While the authors argue that the practice is 'usable "anywhere"', 'part of its power as a tool of domination is that it is not usable by "anyone" (cf. "true" other-initiated repair). Rather, it is asymmetrically available to members of the relational pair dominant language speaker–subordinate(d) language speaker' to create White linguistic disorder (p. 66). In the data they analyzed, the device is 'used by speakers of "standard" US English against those who are raciolinguistically categorized as e.g. Spanish(-speaking) and Chinese(-speaking) – members who are unable to deploy the same devices in return' (pp. 66). In other words, it is a device for use by White speakers of standard English against non-White non-standard English speakers (who are often assumed not to be speaking standard English even when they are). The authors argue that this use 'recalls Sacks' (1992: 394) description of certain membership categories as "protected against induction", such that evidence to the contrary (i.e. Target's use of "standard" English) does not foreclose the usability of a (raciolinguistic) category' (p. 66). The analysis demonstrates how conversational preference orders, which are ordinarily used to structure talk to create shared meaning, can be misused by people to marginalize Others – trapping them into preferred responses that further enable their own marginalization. It would certainly be helpful to be able to recognize such aggressive strategies and develop ways of responding or not responding (Rawls & Duck, 2017) that could neutralize the aggression.

CA analysis of how news reports can present the use of non-standard English speech (in this case Hawaiian speech) as deficient, presented by Scott Saft in Chapter 4, 'Talk in Local News Broadcasts: Reinforcing Negative Views towards the Hawaiian Language', shows how the sequential organization of news presentations, combined with the choice of descriptors, and formulations of Hawaiian speech, are used to construct the use of Hawaiian speech in public as rebellious and bad – instead of recognizing that such speech exercises a right to use one of the two official languages of the state of Hawaii. According to Saft, news reports are candidates for such CA analysis because, 'Although the news reports considered in this chapter do not center on exchanges of interaction, there is a parallel with talk radio in that the sequential organization of the reports derives directly from the fact that representatives of the institution, anchors, reporters, producers, etc. possess the institutional power to control how the reports are organized' (p. 88).

It is this ability to organize information sequentially, Saft argues, 'including the strategic insertion of voice-overs with practices such as

categories, formulations and reported speech that construct content that reinforces power asymmetries in society' (pp. 88–89) which creates the appearance that speaking Hawaiian in public is 'controversial' and 'rebellious' – thus devaluing the speech of legislators and other public figures when they do speak Hawaiian in public. Without appearing to take a side on the political issues, such practices of news presentation, according to Saft, 'make it possible to portray attempts to speak Hawaiian as problematic and to avoid devoting significant time and space to consideration of rights', while at the same time allowing news organizations to claim that they are not taking sides: 'These practices, in sum, help to reinforce the current asymmetrical relationship between Hawaiian and English' (p. 89).

Chapter 5, 'Inequality in Action: Granting Emergency Service Requests in a Highly Resource-Constrained Context', by Catherine Tam, Kevin Whitehead and Geoffrey Raymond, looks closely at the role of turn-taking in managing trust in the context of emergency and service calls, finding that (1) a 'caller's willingness to end the call and await the arrival of the service reflects their trust that institutional actors will fulfill the obligations entailed by the call-taker's granting of the service' (pp. 91–92). This is consistent with previous research that shows (2) callers 'displaying "trust" that the emergency service institution will function as expected as a background condition for the accomplishment of the actions of requesting and providing services (cf. Garcia & Parmer, 1999; Heritage, 1984; Watson, 2009)' (p. 91). By contrast, where callers may not trust the service providing institution – which is common for those who experience marginalization – and where they 'may have grounds to anticipate that the fulfillment of this "social contract" may be so substantially delayed as to call into question its status as an *emergency* service' (p. 92), calls are marked with 'indications of contingency', 'tag questions' and other practices *to manage this lack of trust*. In other words, callers who lack trust in the service provider mark that lack of trust with indications of their reluctance to end the call.

Tam, Whitehead and Raymond maintain that the solution to the problem of trust in service calls is not for call-takers to speak differently to callers, but rather, to *deal with the underlying inequalities* in the society that lead to this lack of trust in the first place. The point of the CA analysis of the calls is to establish that such lack of trust *does interfere* with business as usual – and that when the business as usual is emergency services *the consequences can be dire*.<sup>6</sup>

Chapter 6, 'Delegitimizing the "Other" at US Congressional Town Hall Meetings', by Di Yu, demonstrates that a prevalent strategy used in such political meetings is very much at odds with the stated democratic purposes

of those meetings. The strategy is to delegitimize the opponent – often a marginalized Other – and if they are not already marginalized, to marginalize them through the talk – which can be done to almost anyone.

Yu observed in these meetings ‘instances of citizens delegitimizing the “other” who come from different backgrounds or hold opposing views by portraying them as threats’ (p. 127). Apparently, such ‘citizens are often joined by the MOC [Member of Congress] or other attendees to collaboratively delegitimize the “other”’ (p. 127). In doing this work of Othering, Yu found that ‘citizens use categorical shorthands (e.g. gender movement, AOC, Muslim interest, Pelosi) to encode the “other” as threatening, dangerous, uninformed, biased or potentially harmful’, and that ‘such portrayals of the “other” can also be used as bases for requesting political action against them’ (p. 127).

Many emphasize the role of such meetings in making politics democratic, arguing according to Yu that ‘inclusivity of diverse perspectives in deliberation and policy making can facilitate the achievement of more equitable outcomes’, which leads to the perception that they are ‘a required component of public deliberation forums such as congressional town halls’ (pp. 127–128). However, Yu notes that what often occurs in such meetings has the opposite effect, concluding that: ‘practices exemplifying deeply rooted differences among citizens abound, and those who have access to the town hall floor have the potential opportunity to assert power over the “other” and even enact political actions against them’ (p. 128), thus nullifying the potential benefits of a town meeting forum.<sup>7</sup>

Finally, Chapter 7, ‘Negotiating Power Inequalities in Joint Decision-Making in a Faculty Meeting’, by Innhwa Park and Santoi Wagner, uses a CA analysis to demonstrate how power differentials conferred by privilege can be neutralized through turn-taking in a meeting between high school teachers and administrators. Park and Wagner note that meetings are essential to the work of many organizations, but that they often involve power relations that can make participation difficult. They explain that with regard to faculty meetings (at a high school not a university, which would be quite different): ‘In particular, faculty meetings, the context of this study, constitute a large amount of work time for many teachers and are a significant channel of organizational communication. Effective faculty meetings play a central role in improving professional competence, fostering communication and building community’ (p. 133).

As Park and Wagner note, teachers know the most about the classroom but have the least power to make decisions in such meetings: ‘Thus, decision-making at faculty meetings can involve an ongoing power struggle ... among participants with varying levels of institutional authority

and domain-specific knowledge' (p. 134). The authors do a turn-by-turn analysis of how such power relations are managed in an actual meeting during which decisions about teaching are made, through the lens of what they call 'deontic authority' (Stevanovic, 2018; Stevanovic & Peräkylä, 2012). In so doing, they demonstrate ways that a teacher with less institutional power than others in the meeting can design and position her turns sequentially to 'balance compliance and resistance' to the authority displayed by higher ranking participants and 'move her proposal forward'. This balance is accomplished through small details of turn construction that would be missed by a non-CA analysis. The authors note that the teacher in their data 'shows compliance by acknowledging the broader issues raised by the assistant superintendent and/or the department head and affiliating with their stance towards these issues', while also conveying 'resistance by challenging the relevance of the broader issues to her specific proposal and moving to close the sequences concerning them' (p. 151). Indications of compliance are followed by returns to her proposal.

Overall, Park and Wagner argue that the sequential design of these turns is critical to their success, noting that 'the teacher orients to her display of resistance as delicate: she delivers disagreements in a dispreferred manner with mitigations and self-repairs (Pomerantz, 1984) and/or rejects problematizations by aligning with the more powerful institutional voice (Ford, 2008: 53–91)' (p. 151). This 'balancing act' helps get the other participants refocused on her own proposal. The placement of the hesitations, mitigations and self-repair in her turns is critical to her success but would either be 'cleaned up' (not transcribed) and thus not appear at all, or be considered irrelevant, in most non-CA analysis of these meetings.

## **The Theoretical/Political Relevance of Interactional/Sequential Detail**

When ethnomethodology and conversation analysis began making their mark – and were so roundly attacked in the late 1960's and early 1970's – the US was at an inflection point. The Civil Rights Act had passed in 1965, Title IX became law in 1972, and Vietnam veterans spurred on the passage of two Disabilities Acts in 1973 and 1974. In addition to Race and Gender, these new laws guaranteed equal rights to many categories of marginalized and disabled people. In formal law, the US made a great leap forward. But progress foundered in the face of a concerted and organized White conservative effort to evade and undermine equal rights in combination with deeply embedded differences in how people in different categories experience social interaction. The possibilities for a new era of

equality were endless. Making that a reality, however, would have required a broad and meaningful acknowledgment that US society is shot through and through with social practices and expectations that embed racism, power and inequality. That did not happen.

A book that showcases the relevance of CA to issues of Race, Power and Marginality more generally, as this one does, is very timely: we are at another inflection point with regard to racism and civil rights – this time worldwide. Whether we go forward or back depends a great deal on whether we have learned anything about how Race and inequality work through social interaction in the meanwhile and whether we are ready to listen to marginalized voices with awareness of those processes (Rawls, 2000). There is the social will in this moment (again) to do something about racism and inequality. But, without coming to terms with the tacit racism being taken for granted in interaction every day, we will keep repeating the cycles of denial and repression we have been through so many times.

First and foremost, the confrontation with racism we so desperately need to have requires recognizing that and how racism is embedded in ordinary interaction. Unless we accept that every one of us in ‘doing being ordinary’, as Sacks put it, engages in tacit embedded practices that marginalize and racialize – unless we stop searching for individual racists and take a good look at ourselves and our own daily social practices – the future will not only be like the past, but active attempts to suppress change will continue to grow. Nostalgia for the days when Black people ‘knew their place’, Women ‘stayed at home’ and the Disabled were ‘neither seen nor heard’, now animates enough US citizens to threaten the stability of the nation.

For those who are aware of the role Race and inequality have played in US history and scholarship, this will not be altogether surprising. The White predominantly male sons of Protestant ministers, members of a society that worships Individualism, took a Social Contract Theory of society from Durkheim (a marginalized Jewish man), which established sociology as the study of social facts created by the collective efforts of members bound by an implicit social contract, and reduced it to an approach in which the individual and individual agency are said to face off in a perennial struggle against social structure: as if the social Self and social Institutions were not both the result of cooperative social interaction. That the prominent students of these early sociologists led an effort during WWII (that carried over into the post-war and beyond) to strip social science of any interest in social interaction and social fact making processes (Rawls, 2018), literally stripping it of ‘the social’, is also not surprising.

That those invested in defending the conceptual models laid down by this tradition made a point of criticizing EM/CA was predictable. The CA studies represented in this book challenge the most basic assumptions of their critics. EM/CA follow Durkheim (1893) in arguing that the Individual and Individual Reason are social achievements – social facts – and therefore cannot be the starting points for argument (as they are in many disciplines) (Rawls, 2022b).

Although the CA argument that meaning making can be documented in the relationship between turns in sequences of interaction is entirely new, the argument that meaning making can be studied empirically has a venerable history. Durkheim used detailed empirical descriptions to argue that the concepts that comprise human reason (cause, force, etc.) are created in interaction through the use of what he called ‘constitutive practices’ (Durkheim, 1912; Rawls, 1996, 2009). It was also Durkheim’s (1893) position that processes of social fact making leave empirical evidence of their requirements. What he called ‘self-regulating constitutive practices’ would self-sanction when their implicit social requirements are not met, leaving sanctions as empirical markers. His most important argument, however, was that sets of self-regulating constitutive practices would develop in diverse modern societies around occupations and sciences as a new way of making social facts and organizing society – and that sociology should study them (Rawls, 2021).

EM/CA has led the way in following up on what Garfinkel (2002) called ‘Durkheim’s Aphorism’: that the processes of making social facts is sociology’s fundamental subject. Self-regulating practices have prerequisites – implicit conditions of contract – that include the need for reciprocity. Durkheim spoke of equality and justice. And when those prerequisites are not met, the practices self-sanction, marking them visibly as troubled in ways that can be empirically documented. Accounts, formulations, justifications and other evidence of trouble mark such failures. As Creider shows in Chapter 8, when prerequisites cannot be met between Black and White speakers because they don’t experience the same social world, and therefore cannot be talking about the same thing, troubles are obvious and evident in their talk and marked by Black speakers as such with accounts and formulations. Because they don’t share the same expectations, trust conditions cannot be met.

It is important to underscore Stokoe and Albert’s point that rather than accepting that CA should be held accountable to the rhetoric of ‘big questions’, those who pose those so-called big questions should be held accountable to the findings of EM/CA – to what we have discovered about how things actually work – and to an informed understanding of just how much tacit inequality framed those ‘big questions’ that we need to escape from (p. 218).

The conventional argument seems to be that reasoning on the basis of general ideas is valid – but that it is not valid to find out how things actually work and then demonstrate how inequalities can get in the way and create trouble. The latter addresses a huge question. Why the fact that it does so on the basis of empirical description, and/or what people like to call ‘micro’ data, should be a problem is strange. The size of the data has never been an issue in the natural sciences. No one dismisses research on molecules because they are small.

EM/CA launched a stiff challenge to most existing disciplines – including sociology and linguistics – and they did so on the basis of a heightened awareness of interaction that was not familiar to the majority. A lot was and still is at stake, so it is not too surprising that the challenge was resisted. At this point, however, it is past time to recognize the power of EM/CA. As Sacks argued in 1967–68 (unpublished manuscript, Garfinkel Archive), if a response by a second person to something said by a first person achieves its sense only as a display of understanding of the first utterance and not from grammar or syntax, and if such displays are expected and even preferred, then something is going on in conversation that cannot be explained by linguistics. The upshot, according to Sacks, is that talk is fundamentally interactional. What words mean and sentences/utterances signify is a situated interactional achievement – and therefore conversation and talk are a proper subject of sociology – which the chapters in this book demonstrate, in addition to showing the utility of CA for addressing questions of Race and inequality.

The chapters in this book show that CA and the detailed analysis it delivers can reveal how Race and racism are produced in social interaction. They also reveal the subtleties of Power and how it can be neutralized in talk. They reveal ways in which asymmetries in society can make trouble in talk and how the use of models/generalizations can amplify disadvantage. Social meaning is created through the use of practices bound by tacit Social Contract. Living in the world unequally makes sharing the Trust Conditions of that tacit agreement all but impossible to achieve. Words and sequences literally mean different things for people with contrasting racialized experiences and differential social access, and that this is the case is marked in the talk and can be empirically documented. How this order has been overlooked for so long is something of a puzzle, but the refusal to look at what people are doing in conversation and interaction, criticizing those who do look, and insisting that concepts and ideas should stand in as models of reality, certainly has a lot to do with it.

*Anne Rawls*



## Notes

- (1) I have adopted the practice of capitalizing terms for key social facts such as Race, Self and Other marginalized categories in all my publications to indicate the socially made, contingent, social fact status of those categories.
- (2) There is something important to be said here about Goffman's argument in *Stigma* about passing and marginality – basically that everyone is passing and consequently anyone can be marginalized. Most people don't know that Goffman was working with Garfinkel on this question, and while many know he was working with Sacks, they don't typically make much of it. But Goffman and Garfinkel were working together in 1963 to make an important argument 'on passing' that is relevant to the argument of this chapter (Rawls, 2023). Goffman argued that because social identities need to be performed to social criteria – and no one perfectly fits the criteria – we are all to some degree passing to achieve identity. In other words, because we are all orienting to categories that are somewhat idealized in order to achieve social identities (or roles) that no one really ever exactly fits, we are all engaged in passing. The difference is that some of us succeed in 'passing' and avoid the stigma, while those who cannot pass become stigmatized, and are therefore more aware of what they do. This makes research on the marginalized (or deviant) central to key sociological questions about the rest of us whom Goffman and Garfinkel called 'normals'. Garfinkel called those with heightened awareness 'perspicuous settings' for learning about what is normally taken for granted. Furthermore, because we all pass to some extent, and are subject to the same contradictions in trying to distinguish ourselves from others to emphasize our better fit to the norm, seeing past what we take for granted is not only necessary in order to stop Othering people – it is necessary to stop living in a state of self-contradiction.
- (3) Materials from these meetings are in the Garfinkel Archive.
- (4) Often mistakenly called a short story, this early article by Garfinkel was an ethnography of an incident he had observed (see Rawls, 2022a).
- (5) Of course, when Coser refers to the quantitative measurement of 'variables' that are defined *a priori*, then he is correct that theory must come first, and that letting such methods drive theory has been a highly problematic and circular process. However, his identification of EM/CA as a method is incorrect, and his claim that it lacks theory is also wrong. EM/CA is an inherently theoretical approach that generated many different methods and findings. The big problem for Coser and many others is that the theoretical premise of EM/CA, that meaningful social facts are the end product of ordering practices used in social interaction (that are self-sanctioning in Durkheim's sense), conflicts with their own mainstream theory that social action is inherently disorderly in its own right – and only rendered orderly through the application of social theory and its derivative methods (by the practices of professional sociologists), which Garfinkel (1988) referred to as the 'Parsons' Plenum' approach.
- (6) Prior research has also documented that dispatchers tend not to trust minority callers, and that this lack of trust often results in lack of service in response to those calls (Manning, 2000).
- (7) Yu recommends a solution: 'To move citizens out of the extreme divisiveness, those hosting such events can consider instituting deliberative structures to facilitate citizens' participation toward productive, inclusive outcomes and creating opportunities for further civic education for citizens (Knobloch & Gastil, 2015)' (p. 128). The problem with this hope is that it is a current GOP strategy to maximize divisiveness because it gets them votes. The findings of the chapter, in other words, are not



evidence of a failure – but are in fact a successful outcome of political strategy to divide the American population by Race and marginalized categories. There is a history that explains this. It is called *The Southern Strategy*.

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