

New Perspectives on Goffman in Language and Interaction

Body, Participation and the Self

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8 Embodied scepticism

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relevance

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8 Embodied scepticism

Facial expression and response relevance

Rebecca Clift

1. Introduction

‘The natural home of speech is one in which speech is not always present.’
Erving Goffman, *The Neglected Situation*
(1964, p. 135)

Erving Goffman’s assertion that ‘the proper study of interaction is not the individual and [their] psychology, but rather the syntactical relations among the acts of different persons mutually present to one another . . . Not, then, men and their moments, but moments and their men’ (1967, pp. 2–3) is rightly seen as the starting point for contemporary work on interaction. As Schegloff (1988, p. 90) points out, it not so much rehabilitated a domain as actually habilitated one:¹ the recognisability of the moments captured in his descriptions of social life opened up the possibility of a whole domain of inquiry. But of course, however richly suggestive and recognitional these vignettes, Goffman never committed, at least in print² to working with the sort of – in Harvey Sacks’s famous words – ‘repeatably inspectable’ data that makes possible both transcription and the collection of ostensibly similar ‘moments’ (see Clift & Mandelbaum, 2024) that is the foundation of analysis. In the half-century since Goffman’s discovery of the domain, it now flourishes most clearly in the field of multimodal conversation analysis, originating in the work of Goodwin (1979, 1981); for an overview, see Mondada (2016). It is the recording, transcription and CA collections-based method that opens up the possibility of identifying the whole arc of how a particular interactional ‘moment’ came to be: analysing the moment-by-moment intricacies of co-present participant involvement that constitute the syntax of action. In this chapter, I pick up and extend some of the threads originally spun by Goffman in his separate observations on embodiment and responses in interaction, and apply the methods of sequential analysis in order to study one particular interactional moment in interaction. In examining this moment across a number

of instantiations, we shall appreciate the nuances of how participants to interaction position themselves with respect to each other and to what they do: an appreciation that we originally owe to Goffman.

Goffman's insistence, in *The Neglected Situation*, that the behaviour of those speaking and those co-present but not engaged in talk could not be analytically separated (1964, p. 134) was embodied in all of his writing, but was most sharply present in his descriptions of particular interactional practices. In *Response Cries* (1978), he discusses a class of vocalisations, among them mutterings and imprecations, that may be designed to be heard, but are not necessarily designed to be responded to:

Frustrated by someone's authority, we can mutter words of complaint under our breath as the target turns away, out of apparent conversational earshot. (Here is a structural equivalent of what children do when they stick out their tongues, or put their thumbs to their noses, just as their admonisher turns away.) These sub-vocalizations reside in the very interstice between a state of talk and mere co-presence – more specifically, in the transition from the first to the second. Here function seems plain: in muttering, we convey that although we are now going along with the line established by the speaker (and authority), our spirit has not been won over, and compliance is not to be counted on.

(1978, p. 797)

In what follows, I examine a practice in English interaction that in some respects resembles this class of 'sub-vocalisations' in that it, too, lies in 'the very interstice between a state of talk and mere co-presence'. However, in other respects it is distinct; most obviously in that it is an embodied practice rather than a vocal one, but also in what it responds to. This practice is a facial expression, produced in response to a particular type of claim made by a co-participant. Selected instances of this facial expression, taken out of their sequential contexts, are captured in the screengrabs below:



Figure 8.1 Participant on right



Figure 8.2 Participant on left



Figure 8.3

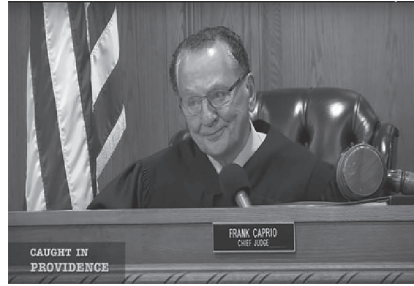


Figure 8.4

As Figures 8.3 and 8.4 make clear, the facial expressions are characterised in each case by a raising of the eyebrows – which has the effect of furrowing the brow – in conjunction with a pursing of the lips. In the first two cases – Figure 8.1 and Figure 8.2 – the producer of the facial expression has a gaze averted from the co-participant to whom they are responding; in the two others, they are gazing directly at their co-participant. They are clearly displays of stance – and, as suggested by the gaze aversion in Figure 8.1 and Figure 8.2, and the pursing of the lips in all cases – disaffiliative ones at that. The similarities, in the visual domain, with Goffman's response cries, would appear evident. If response cries, in the auditory domain, are produced 'as the target turns away, out of *apparent* conversational earshot' (my italics), which of course does not preclude the possibility that they are very much heard³ – they raise the question of response relevance, even in the case that they are heard: while Goffman describes them as not themselves designed for response, he does not elaborate on the possible mechanisms of their design. So an important focus in examining instances of this facial expression in their sequential contexts is the means by which they are designed with respect to response relevance. In this respect, by bringing the methods of sequential analysis to a class of embodied actions, I aim to extend Goffman's observations on response cries. First, however, I briefly situate the investigation by reference to a domain of work made relevant by this particular practice: research on facial expression, before proceeding to discuss the data.

2. Facial expressions in response: previous work

The investigation of 'syntactical relations' between the actions of co-present participants that Goffman insisted were the 'proper study of interaction' is nowhere exemplified better than in multimodal conversation-analytic

research from Goodwin (1979, 1981) onwards. This has variously shown the extent to which the production of any action in interaction may be contingent on visual feedback from co-present participants in the course of its production. So one primary means by which participants can indicate their stance toward an action produced by a co-participant is, of course, facial expressions (see, e.g., Mondada, 2018). As Peräkylä and Ruusuvuori (2006, 2012) have shown, facial expressions can affiliate or disaffiliate with stances displayed by a co-participant. Furthermore, work by Kaukomaa et al. (2015) shows how such expressions in response to a turn can work to shift talk to a more light-hearted footing. With respect to displays of negative stance, Kaukomaa et al. (2014) show how eyebrow furrows in pre-beginnings can anticipate a negative or disaffiliative stance; and Crespo Sendra et al., examining facial expressions in the context of Catalan and Dutch interaction, albeit under experimental conditions, suggest that what they call the ‘incredulity question’ is ‘characterized by some degree of eyebrow furrowing and eyelid closure’ (2013, p. 4). Facial expressions by a recipient thus do not just mirror a speaker’s stance, but work to perform operations on the talk (Kaukomaa et al., 2015, p. 319).

In all of this research on facial expressions, the exchanges examined are dyadic, with participants seated in full view of each other and brought together to interact for the purposes of recording. The facial expressions examined are thus salient to co-participants. However, when examined across a variety of settings, not all displays of stance may be made salient or available to co-participants; so, for example, Clift (2021), investigating the eye-roll as an interactional resource, shows how an eye-roll may be produced so as *not* to be visible to the co-participant to whose turn it is a response, and so clearly not designed for uptake from them. In this respect, the eye-roll resembles Goffman’s description of children sticking out their tongues or thumbing their noses as the target turns away (1978, p. 797), so clearly not designed for response relevance. How an action – in this case, a particular facial expression – may be designed to project or suppress the relevance of a response is the focus of the investigation that follows.

3. The data

The data used for this study were recorded in two domestic and one institutional context, all for public broadcast. Excerpts 1–3 were taken from the multipart documentary ‘fly-on-the-wall’ series “The Family”, broadcast 2008–2010 on Channel 4 TV in the UK. The broadcast programs were edited footage taken from a corpus of approximately 1,500 tapes of two British families (one seen in Figure 8.1 and the other seen in Figures 8.2 and 8.3) filmed continuously in their homes across four months by

20 wall-mounted cameras. The dataset for this study includes data from both this broadcast footage and from a week's worth of unedited footage made available by the producers.⁴ Excerpt 4, from which Figure 8.4 was taken, is also taken from a broadcast context, 'Caught in Providence', the filmed proceedings of the Municipal Court in Providence, Rhode Island, presided over by Chief Judge Frank Caprio.

The broadcast nature of the data has its strengths in terms of quality and volume, the former making it possible to provide high quality images, and the latter, to identify a collection of instances. However, by the same token, broadcast data can constrain the possibilities of examining the full participation framework, with edited footage focusing primarily on the producer of an utterance as opposed to its recipient. It also introduces one significant element that was not originally present, and which needs to be accounted for in any analysis: the presence of the broadcast audience. In addition, to the extent that the 'Observer's Paradox' (Labov, 1972) affects all filmed multimodal data, this corpus is no different, with the participants necessarily being aware that they are being filmed. However, the extended nature of the filming, carried out continuously over many months in the case of 1–3 and non-continuously, but over years, in the case of 4, with the exemplars discussed involving a range of participants, mitigates this paradox as much as possible. The analysis that follows thus focuses on the interactional sequence leading up to the target phenomenon and the facial expression itself; I hope it will be apparent that, as far as can be established, none of the excerpts presented has been analytically compromised with respect to the production of the facial expression itself. The collection was small – a total of ten cases – of which the ones presented here were the most representative.

4. The facial expression in sequential context

The sequential context for the instance captured in Figure 8.1 is as follows. It is produced, in multiparty interaction, in response to a claim that a belt found in the speaker's car belongs to 'a friend's girlfriend'. The speaker, Tindy, is the twenty-three-year-old younger brother of Sunny. Prior to Tindy's arrival at the breakfast table, and unbeknownst to him, Sunny and his wife, Shay, have found a woman's belt in Tindy's car, which has led to light-hearted speculation between them and the men's mother, Polly, about whether he has a secret girlfriend. The seating arrangement around the breakfast table is represented schematically below.

In the excerpt below, Tindy has arrived for breakfast, to be greeted teasingly by his mother, Polly, with 'How is your girlfriend?' He denies that he has a girlfriend, only for Polly to reject the denial; in the subsequent talk, in l.1 in excerpt 1 below, she ventures that she has proof that he is dissembling:



Figure 8.5 Positions around the breakfast table in excerpt 1

Excerpt 1 (Clift, F2:1:14)

POL=Polly, mother of Sunny and Tindy (embodiments \perp and gaze \downarrow);
 SUN=Sunny (embodiments $+$ and gaze \blacklozenge); SHA=Shay=Sunny's wife
 (embodiments $*$ and gaze \bullet); TIN=Tindy (embodiments Δ and gaze λ)

01 POL: Do you wanna proo:f.
 02 (0.4)
 03 TIN: fGo on. What, you're gonna show me a belt. f
 04 POL: fWho told himf. Heh.]
]gaze to S-----]
 05 POL: fDid you::.f
 sun: fgazing down at mobile phone, smiling
 06 +* (1) *
 sun: +furrows brow-->1.8
 sha: *reaches for food scrap with LH*
 sha: •looks at P, slight headshake•
 07 SHA: Bidi! ((calling dog))
 08 SUN: fNoz f+
 f gazing at phone
 ->+
 09 POL: lWhose [belt is it, l
 tin: lgazing at POL----l
 10 SHA: [Bidi! ((calling dog))
 11 l (0.4) l
 tin: lgazes downwards, then down to R l
 12 TIN: #Some girl's.°
 fig: #8.6
 (1.2)
 14 POL: Girl,
 15 TIN: l'S my Friend.'s girlfriend.l
 l looking down and to the L--l
 16 * # (0.2) # *
 sha: *moves from #bending to L# to upright position*
 fig: #8.7 #8.8
 17 *# (0.2) *
 sha: *hands come up towards cutlery*
 fig: #fig 8.9
 18 *# (0.2) *
 19 sha: *raises eyebrows, purses lips*
 fig: #8.10
 20 (0.2)
 21 POL: Friend's girlfriend

Polly's challenge (line 1) is met by Tindy's anticipation of what she will produce as 'proof' (line 3), revealing that he knows that they have discovered the belt. Both Shay and Sunny deny having told Tindy about it – the former with a slight headshake (line 6), the latter verbally (line 8) – upon Polly's question (line 5). In response to this question about whose belt it is (line 9), Tindy looks down and to his right (Figure 8.3(a)) and then provides a designedly vague formulation, 'Some girl's' (line 12). Polly initiates repair at line 14 – 'girl' – and Tindy substitutes with the more specific 's'my friend's girlfriend' – what Schegloff (1989, pp. 146–147) calls a 'Sacks substitution' in response to repair initiation.

It is at this point that Shay, who is seated diagonally to Tindy's right, produces the expression of raised eyebrows and pursed lips as seen initially in Figure 8.1, now reproduced as 8.10. She has just been bending to her left to feed a scrap to the family dog. Tindy produces his claim as she moves to the upright position to pick up her cutlery. Figure 8.8 is taken just before, and Figure 8.9 and Figure 8.10 in the course of, Shay's response.

We can see that it constitutes a display of disbelief at the claim that has been made – a display of scepticism wholly warranted by Tindy's claim. In this case, the evidence of the belt in his car, plus his designedly unspecific formulation 'some girl's' provide grounds for receipting his assertion with a degree of scepticism. The facial expression produced by Shay registers her stance toward Tindy's claim, but – like, in the auditory domain, one of Goffman's response cries – it is designed in its composition not to get uptake. Shay keeps her head in pretty much the same position as before (see Figure 8.9), not turning to Tindy and keeping her gaze ahead into the middle-distance (Figure 8.10) as she raises her eyebrows and purses her lips (l.19). That the expression is not designed to pursue uptake befits its character as a display of negative stance, in that it does not serve further to provoke but is available to those who may see it (in this case, the viewers of the video) as a collusive object. In this respect the functional resemblance of this sceptical expression to the eye-roll (Clift, *op.cit.*: 266) is unmistakable. It also has some of the visceral, reactive quality of the eye-roll, even though both practices may occur at some distance from that to which they are responding. It is clear that Shay waits until she is sitting fully upright after feeding the dog before she produces the sceptical expression (Figure 8.9 captures her beginning to raise her eyebrows). She could, after all, have made the same face while gazing down at the dog.⁵ So while her middle-distance gaze during her sceptical expression does not seek eye-contact, it makes the expression potentially available for others to see, relative to gazing down.



Figure 8.6



Figure 8.7



Figure 8.8

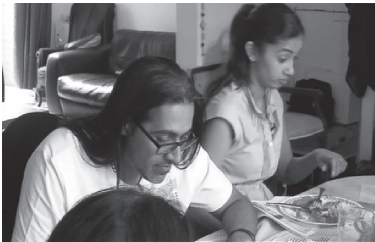


Figure 8.9

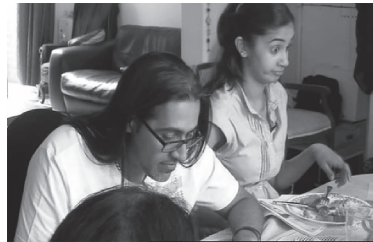


Figure 8.10

Shay's expression does not impede the progressivity of the talk (Schegloff, 1979; Stivers & Robinson, 2006). Of course, the main line of talk has been between Polly and Tindy, from Polly's question in line 9 to Tindy about the ownership of the belt and his responses, to line 15; they are also sitting opposite each other and so in each other's direct field of vision.⁶ Although not involved in this question-answer sequence, Shay, like Sunny, sitting to one side of them, has been an active participant in the wider sequence, having responded at line 6 with a headshake to Polly's question about whether they had told Tindy about the belt. Notwithstanding this

contribution, neither Sunny nor Shay have been wholly engaged as participants in the sequence, their eye-gaze directed to other activities; Sunny has stayed with his gaze fixed on his phone, even in responding 'no' to Polly's question, and as Figures 8.7–10 show, in the wake of Tindy's claim; Shay has been engaged in eating and summoning the dog. C. Goodwin's (2007) observation that gaze implicates visible attention suggests that in this case, Sunny and Shay are in a somewhat ambivalent position with respect to the talk: what M.H. Goodwin calls 'potential ratified participants' (1997, p. 78) who, through gaze direction and bodily orientation position themselves at this moment as engaged principally in other activities than the main line of talk. But unlike Sunny, Shay's embodied sceptical response does engage with – but does not seek further engagement with – the ongoing interaction. In contrast, just after Shay produces her embodied response, Polly verbalises, in the form of an other-initiated repair, a scepticism that has just been displayed by Shay: 'friend's girlfriend' (line 21)⁷ which standardly adumbrates disagreement (Schegloff, 2007). Shay and Polly thus elect to display a sceptical stance toward the same claim but using different resources, with different implications for the ongoing progressivity of the interaction.

Shay, in the course of producing her display of scepticism, is not in the direct line of sight of the co-participant to which her expression is a response, and furthermore does not seek him out. In this respect, her sceptical face might be considered an embodied analogue of one of Goffman's response cries: a registering of stance, which is not necessarily designed to be responded to. It is tempting to attribute the lack of response relevance to the compositional characteristics of the embodiment, that is, as somewhat occluded from direct view.⁸ However, before coming to this conclusion, it is necessary to establish across a number of instances whether response relevance is indeed tied to the potential visibility of the facial expression.

The following excerpt, in contrast, shows a party in full view of the co-participant to whom she is responding, and actively turning away in the course of her response in a very visible display of disaffiliation and negative stance. Prior to Excerpt 2 below, Jane and Simon had upbraided their nineteen-year-old daughter Emily for taking time off work, claiming to have had 'gastroenteritis', when she has evidently had no such thing. Jane has now summoned her children to the dining room, where she is sitting with a diary, to discuss 'what's going on Saturday night'. In Excerpt 2, Emily stands at the door of the dining room, facing Jane; the positions of the various family members are represented in Figure 8.11 below:

Emily (standing)



Figure 8.11

In Excerpt 2 below, Emily is just arriving at the door of the dining room as she produces line 1.

Excerpt 2 (Clift, F1:1, 34–36)

JAN=Jane (embodiments * and eye-gaze ●), SIM=Simon (embodiments +), EMI=Emily (embodiments ⊥), 19 year old daughter, TOM=Tom, 14 year old son; CHA=Charlotte, 16 year old daughter (embodiments % and eye-gaze Δ)

```

01 EMI:   Why, what's going on Saturday nig:ht
02 SIM:   (Has[ 'e?])
03 JAN:   [it's my birth- my fortieth bir[thday
04 TOM:   [No:
05        (0.6)
06 EMI:   Working.
07        (1)
08 JAN:   Right.
09        (1.2)
10 JAN:   An'- (.) An' the other thing, what's happening
11         on Sunday, SimonΔ
12        (0.2)
13 EMI:   I'm working.
14        ●*(0.4)*+●
        jan:   ●to E-----●
        jan:   *RH drops down to table in visible deflation*
        sim:   +turns back to look over R shoulder at E+
15 SIM:   %heh HEH heh heh heh heh +heh heh.hhh+
        +raises arms in the+
        +air in 'surrender' gesture+
        cha:   %starts tearing paper---> 1.20
16 JAN:   *It's my fortieth birthday [and #mother's day+
17 EMI:   [I tried to get it
        jan:   *hands outstretched in hold--->
        fig:   #8.12
18        ↑off
19        (0.3)*
        jan:   -->*
20 EMI:   I: ●*tri:ed*●
        jan:   *#raises eyebrows, purses lips
        jan:   ●shifts gaze away from E●
        jan:   *moves hand off table while sitting back*
        fig:   #8.13
21 CHA:   %ΔAre you act[ually jokingΔΔ %
        Δlooks at E-----Δ
        %suspends partially torn paper%

```

22 EMI: [I asked her weeks ago:
 23 *↓ (2.4) ↓ *

emi: ↓chin forward, head in hold↓
 jan: *brings both hands up to cover face*

24 SIM: You a:re a case, Emily honestly.
 25 (0.2)

26 SIM: ↓You're gonna miss your Mum's birthday (.)↓
 emi: ↓puts hands towards face; turns to walk out↓

27 SIM: ↓and Mother's day↓
 emi: ↓hands up-----↓

Emily's 'What's going on Saturday night' (line 1), is a first indication of trouble (see Schegloff, 2007, p. 151ff. for such next-turn repair initiators (NTRIs) as adumbrating problems) and misalignment, even before Jane's response, with its insertion repair (Wilkinson & Weatherall, 2011) raises the stakes, at line 3. In registering nothing of the momentousness of 'Saturday', Emily's defiantly terse response ('Working', line 6) to the implied query about Saturday (we remember she has just been reproached for *not* working) amounts to an egregious affront.⁹ Upon Jane's subsequent inquiry to Simon about Sunday, Emily's 'I'm working' (line 13) chooses a similar turn format to her prior line 6, only now including the agent of the verb, and so holds fast to that previously expressed commitment and all that it had entailed. Jane's response is embodied (line 14): in a display of exasperation, her right hand drops at the wrist to the table in a visible deflation (Clift, 2014) and, at the same time, she moves to cradle her chin with her hand. At the same time, Simon produces a theatrical burst of laughter to cast Emily's response as, literally, risible (Clift, 2016), accompanied by a 'surrender' gesture with his arms. After Simon's burst of laughter, Jane's assertion 'It's my fortieth birthday and mother's day' (line 16), now produced in a context where it is clearly not an informing, is hearable as a complaint. As she produces this turn, Jane opens out her hands with fingers spread (see Figure 8.12) and keeps them in a hold (Sikveland & Ogden, 2012; Floyd et al., 2016), which indicates that the issue is yet to be resolved. At the point at which Jane has reiterated 'It's my fortieth birthday', Emily launches a defence at lines 17–18, 'I tried to get it off' – that is, the day off work. There is a brief pause at line 19 – a so-called 'post-overlap resolution hitch' (Schegloff, 2000, p. 34) as the speakers emerge from overlap, whereupon Emily launches an insistent 'I tried'; just after the launch of the turn, Jane's left arm comes down and she shifts her gaze away from Emily and down to her left, producing as she does so the raised eyebrows and pursed lips recognisable as the sceptical expression (line 20) (Figure 8.13).

There is ample evidence in the prior sequence to suggest that Jane might display a sceptical stance towards Emily's defensive claim that she has tried to get the day off work. Emily's line 1, where she shows ignorance of what



Figure 8.12 (l.16 before)



Figure 8.13 (l.20 during)

is happening on Saturday, and her assertion *after* she has been informed – and indeed subsequent re-assertion – that she is working that day, all provide warrants for Jane to take a sceptical stance toward her claim. Indeed, just as in excerpt 1, where Polly subsequently verbalises a scepticism that Shay displays, here Charlotte, Emily’s sister, similarly subsequently verbalises a scepticism that Jane displays (line 21): ‘Are you actually joking?’ However, unlike the instance in 1, where a display of scepticism is done in such a way as not necessarily to be visible to the party to whom it responds, Jane’s is produced as Emily faces her, with a very visible shift of posture away from Emily and aversion of eye gaze (see Figure 8.13). It is thus designed, as the previous instance had not, for visibility to its target¹⁰ – and in a context, unlike the previous instance, where the producer of the sceptical look is engaged in ongoing talk with the target. At the same time, as in 1, it does not seek mutual eye-gaze; Jane turns her head and body slightly away from Emily, although she is still facing towards her. As Kendon has suggested, gaze aversion has been demonstrated to be relevant for non-affiliation (1967) and, as Kidwell notes, can also be an act of resistance and control (2005, 2006) and particularly important in disaffiliative

stance-taking (Haddington, 2006). So the postural shift in the turn away from Emily as Jane produces her sceptical expression clearly indexes Jane's resistance to Emily's response through a momentary disengagement. However, at the same time, Jane's position facing Emily as she produces the expression means that her sceptical stance is, in principle, highly visible to Emily. However, it is not clear that Emily's next turn is straightforwardly a response to the facial expression as such. In the first place, as we have seen, Jane's sceptical expression is accompanied by a complex of other indications of disaffiliation, so it is not possible to single out the facial expression itself as prompting a response from Emily. And, although Emily's response is produced in its wake, the position of that response – produced just after Charlotte launches the turn that displays her own incredulity (line 21) – suggests it serves also to rebut Charlotte's scepticism, although it does not respond to her question. In addition, Emily's turn is grammatically built to buttress her earlier claim 'I tried to get it off . . . I tried' (lines 17–19) and so incrementally extend the defence she had launched at line 17. It takes the form of a claim that she sought permission from her boss some time before; a chronological rank-pulling designed to evidence her just-prior assertions: 'I asked her weeks ago' (line 22) (see Clift, 2007 on reported speech as a claim to epistemic priority). This turn, then, is plainly produced in the context of, and designed to counter, the general displays of resistance by both Jane and Charlotte to Emily's defensive claim that she sought time off, rather than being a response to Jane's sceptical expression as such.¹¹

So, in contrast to the display of scepticism in Excerpt 1, which is produced with no mutual gaze, where there is no direct relevance of a stance display from the producer of the sceptical expression, and no relevance of a response from its target, in this particular case there is a withdrawal of gaze at the moment where the sceptical expression is produced. The displays of stance by both Jane and Charlotte – of which Jane's sceptical expression is but one element – are unequivocal. Emily's response is ambiguous with respect to the facial expression while clearly registering the general resistance to her defensive claim.

We have thus seen two instances of a sceptical facial expression with no mutual gaze between a producer and its target. In Excerpt 1, the facial expression is seemingly designed to be not necessarily visible to its target, and does not prompt a response. In Excerpt 2, the facial expression is apparently designed to be visible to its target (although there is a withdrawal of eye-gaze) and further talk from the target is forthcoming – but it is not possible to establish the status of this talk as a response to the expression. So a possible connection between the visibility of a facial expression and response relevance remains to be established. In contrast, the next two excerpts show instances of someone producing a sceptical face while

gazing at the party to whom they are responding. In Excerpt 3, Jane and Simon have just seen Emily leave the house to go to a nightclub late at night; Emily has departed in the face of resistance from her parents and amidst some acrimony. In the wake of her departure, Jane seeks to reassure Simon that he is not the target of her earlier, forcefully expressed, views:

Excerpt 3 (Clift, F1:1:26)

JAN=Jane (embodiments * and gaze •); SIM=Simon (embodiments + and gaze ♦)

```

01 JAN:  I'm ↑not having a go at you love,
02      I'm ju[s' (sayin')
03 SIM:  [W'L THEN J'S DIRECT YOUR ATTENTION
04      AT HER, NOT A' ME.
05 JAN:  *I'm just tryin' t'stop you fr'm s- =
          *moves towards sofa-->1.11
06 JAN:  =(.) blowing a ↑gasket.
07      (0.4)
08 JAN:  That's a::11.
09 SIM:  W'l don't!
10 SIM:  •Don't worry, I #•c'n control my=
          jan:  •looks at S-----•
          fig:  #8.14
11 SIM:  =♦#*gas*ket,#* .hhh♦
          ♦looking at J-----♦
          jan:  -->*
          jan:  *raises eyebrows, purses lips*
          fig:  #8.15 #8.16
12 SIM:  *♦+you #sat on the settee w/s shouting+♦*
          +Left hand point and hold -----+
          ♦nod on 'you' at sofa-----♦
          jan:  *moves to pick up cushion-----♦
          fig:  #8.17

```

Jane seeks to defend herself against the impression that she is 'having a go' at Simon by launching a reformulation of what she is doing (1.1) which he intercepts before its conclusion with a loud directive rebuttal (lines 3–4). However, Jane's subsequent attempt to reassure – a claim that that she was trying to stop him from 'blowing a gasket' – an idiomatic phrase for losing his temper – is taken by Simon as embodying a complaint, which he defends with the sharp directive retort, 'Well don't!' (line 9) and then a defensive claim, 'I can control my gasket' (lines 10–11). In this respect, the sequence resembles that in Excerpt 2 – a complaint, followed by a defence, which itself prompts a sceptical expression. Simon's defensive claim – produced in the wake of his vehement retort to Jane, and his earlier refusal to accept Jane's reformulation of what she was doing with his loud, intercepting directive 'W'L THEN JUST DIRECT YOUR ATTENTION AT HER, NOT A'ME' – is clearly belied by his current conduct. At the very point at which the end of Simon's TCU is projectible, Jane responds with the expression of raised eyebrows and pursed

lips that is recognisable as a sceptical expression. As Simon says ‘I can control my’, Jane is shown in Figure 8.14; and as he produces the word ‘gasket’, she raises her eyebrows, producing a noticeably furrowed brow, and purses her lips in Figure 8.15 (during the expression), where her eye-gaze turns to Simon:



Figure 8.14 ‘can control my’ (before raising eyebrows)

As Jane produces this expression, she is moving towards the sofa where Simon is seated; Figure 8.16 shows Simon producing the word ‘gasket’:



Figure 8.15 ‘gasket’ (during eyebrow raise)



Figure 8.16 ‘gasket’



Figure 8.17 'sat'

Jane's expression (line 11) is produced as she walks towards the sofa where Simon is sitting. It is done fleetingly, *en passant*, as she moves toward the sofa, and the fact that it is produced in the course of Simon's turn gives it, like the previous instances, the visceral, reactive quality of the eye-roll (Clift, op.cit.). As Figures 8.14 and 8.15 show, there is a minimal tilt of the chin downwards as Jane produces her expression, but no major re-orientation of her head; indeed, as Figure 8.15 shows, Jane turns her eye-gaze sideways toward Simon as she produces the expression without turning her head towards him – a head-turn that would implicate searching for mutual gaze. The progressivity of the talk is unimpeded as Simon's verbal response does not register the sceptical expression, although Figure 8.16 shows his head turned towards Jane as he produces the word 'gasket' (at which his eyes are closed in a momentary blink) and, at Figure 8.17, the word 'sat' at line 12; he continues his turn by calling out Jane for exactly the same transgression – losing her temper – of which she accuses him: 'you sat on the settee was shouting' (line 12).

As noted earlier, the display of scepticism in Excerpt 3 is distinct from Excerpts 1 and 2 in being produced by a speaker engaged in mutual gaze with the recipient. Excerpt 4 below shows a case similar in this respect to 3, although in this particular case, both speaker and recipient are directly facing each other, with full mutual postural orientation. The context is a filmed courtroom in Providence, Rhode Island, where Judge Frank Caprio is overseeing a traffic violation case. He invites the defendant, Ms. Quentin, who is charged with going through a red light at an intersection, to look at the video which clearly shows her car failing to stop at the red light before she takes a right turn:

Excerpt 4 (Caught in Providence www.youtube.com/watch?v=hJl-kdKV4DQ, 2:36)

Judge Frank Caprio= JFC (embodiments* gaze ●); Ms. Quentin=MSQ (embodiments + gaze ◆)

01 JFC: ↑Okay, what d'you wanna tell me about this.
 02 MSQ: I thought th't I had stopped long enough
 03 before I took the right.
 04 JFC: Before you came to court +(.)+ you thought you
 msq: +nods, nods+
 05 JFC: stopped long enough before you took the right.
 06 MSQ: Correct.+
 +nods+
 07 JFC: >Right< so y- you and I are gonna watch the
 08 video again,
 09 MSQ: I kno:w.
 10 JFC: and let me know if you stopped long enough.
 11 (0.8)
 12 JFC: Can you see this?
 13 (1.0)
 14 JFC: I know you're stopped now because the video is
 15 stopped, but let's t(h)ake a l(h)ook at i(h)t
 16 (0.2)
 17 JFC: ((while video of car is playing)) Here's yer
 18 vehicle here's yer vehicle here's yer vehicle
 19 here's yer vehicle here's- uh, oh-oh-oh-oh-oh.
 20 *(0.8)*
 jfc: *turns back from video to MQ*
 21 JFC: D'you still think you stopped long #enough?
 fig: #8.18
 22 +(0.2)+
 msq: +turns from video to FC+
 23 MSQ: Yes.
 24 (1.0)
 JFC: #●Raises eyebrows, purses lips for 2.2 seconds●
 ●-----gazing at MQ-----●
 fig: #8.19
 25 JFC: *mp.*
 separates lips
 26 (0.6)
 27 JFC: We're gonna ●look at it once more●
 ●-----gaze to MSQ-----●
 28 (0.4)
 29 JFC: We're gonna look at it once more.



Figure 8.18 (l.21 before)

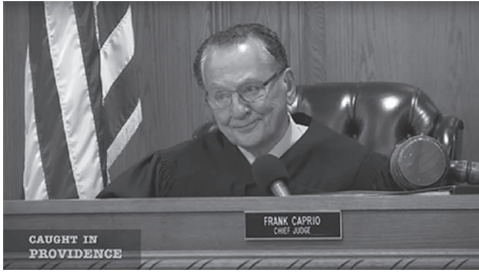


Figure 8.19 (l.24 during)

Ms. Quentin sets out her defence at lines 2–3: an assessment that she thought she had ‘stopped long enough’ to constitute having stopped at the red light. Having provided a commentary on second run-through of the video footage of Ms. Quentin going through a red light (lines 17–19), which clearly shows her car failing to stop (his commentary cutting off at the point at which the car continues through the light: ‘here’s- uh, oh-oh-oh-oh-oh’, line 19), Judge Caprio, using Ms. Quentin’s own words in her earlier assessment, asks her at line 21 whether she maintains the same position: ‘D’you still think you stopped long enough?’. The judge’s expression at the end of this question is shown at Figure 8.18. At this, Ms. Quentin, gazing at the judge, says simply ‘Yes’. In response to the moral certainty conveyed by this unadorned response, the judge inclines his head slightly to the right and produces what is now recognizably a display of scepticism as conveyed by raised eyebrows and pursed lips, seen in Figure 8.19.

As in the instances 1–3, we see a sceptical expression produced in response to a turn making a claim which is not supported by evidence – here, compellingly so, as demonstrated on the video. As a first response to this claim, Judge Caprio’s expression displays his scepticism (line 24). As such, the sequential organisation of the prior turns resembles that in excerpt 1: a question, followed by an answer, which itself receives a sceptical look – here, unlike in 1, from the producer of the question. But unlike all the previous instances, here the producer of the sceptical expression is facing the recipient and looking directly at its target. And, as Figures 8.1–8.4 show, this instance is the only one where the producer of the sceptical expression is inclining their head toward the target at the same time, in this case simultaneously with a tight smile, with a hold of the expression as he gazes at the recipient for 2.2 seconds: a hold that implicates, unlike the previous instances that we have seen, that its producer is seeking mutual eye gaze so that his sceptical expression is fully visible and registered by its target. In this respect, it is wholly contrastive with that in excerpt 1, which

is compositionally designed not to be fully visible to its target. That in this context the producer of the sceptical expression visibly seeks mutual eye-gaze with the target here may be seen to be shaped by the institutional context. Judge Caprio is trying to establish Ms. Quentin's stance on the traffic offence she has committed; as he addresses her from l.1 onwards he maintains eye-gaze toward her as he pursues a response that can be reconciled with what is evident from the video clip. Maintaining eye-gaze with the defendant is thus one resource in ensuring that she has registered his stance and indeed that onlookers (both co-present and as the broadcast audience) have also done so. Yet, for all the visibility of the judge's expression, it does not get a response from the recipient, and the judge's subsequent assertion, at line 27 that 'we're gonna look at it once more' and its repetition on line 29 constitutes an insistence that examining the video again will prompt the defendant to revise her response.

The display of scepticism in excerpt 4, while being produced in a similar sequential position to those in 1–3, is thus distinct in that a participant, by holding their expression as he looks at the recipient, with full postural orientation toward her, explicitly seeks mutual eye-gaze, and in doing so, pursues visibility. It thus appears comprehensively to undermine what might have been suggested by excerpt 1: an apparent association between the lack of visibility of a facial expression to, and subsequent lack of response from, its target. Here, there is full visibility and yet no response. Thus whether or not the embodiment is visible to its target appears not to be decisive for response relevance. Here, then we arrive at a puzzle: that, despite full mutual gaze, the sceptical facial expression does not prompt a response.

5. The sceptical expression and response relevance: position and composition

If the visibility of the sceptical expression appears not necessarily to be decisive in response relevance, it is important to remember that one compositional feature is surely criterial: that is, its status as an embodiment. While plainly features of turn design, such as features of articulation, can enhance or suppress the relevance of a response – such as lowered volume in muttering – verbal action in general clearly has the potential to project response relevance in a way that embodiment does not (but for an exception, see Clift, 2021, pp. 269–270). It is thus likely that the Judge's sceptical expression in excerpt 4 has suppressed response relevance relative to a verbal display of scepticism. But since '*both position and composition* are ordinarily constitutive of the sense and import of an element of conduct that embodies some phenomenon or practice' (Schegloff, 1993, p. 121, emphasis in original), it is necessary to examine, alongside elements of composition, the sequential position of this practice.

In the courtroom context of excerpt 4, the constraints of the turn-taking system expose particularly clearly how the contributions of the participants are shaped around a basic question-answer sequence (Atkinson & Drew, 1979), with the judge initiating questions and the defendant responding to them. This instance makes plain that, in sequential terms, as in excerpt 1, a sceptical expression is produced after the responsive turn in a question-answer adjacency pair: that is, in the position of what Schegloff calls a sequence-closing third, that is a turn ‘designed not to project any further within-sequence talk beyond itself’ (2007, p. 118). A prominent form of sequence-closing third identified by Schegloff is the assessment, which ‘articulates a stance taken up – ordinarily by the first pair part speaker – toward what the second pair part speaker has said or done in the prior turn’ (ibid., 124). As a ‘stance taken up’ in embodied, rather than verbal, form, the sceptical expression investigated here constitutes an assessment – and, as we have seen, a negative one, albeit here with the hint of a smile from the judge indicating a kind of indulgent bemusement. It is evident that, in sequential terms, the sceptical expression thus projects sequence closure rather than expansion; in this respect, while registering a very clear stance, it does not pursue a response.¹² Across all the cases we have seen, the sequential context for the sceptical expression may be represented in the following manner, whereby an initiating action – in 1 and 4 the first part of a question-answer adjacency pair, and in 2 and 3 the first part of a complaint-defence adjacency pair – gets a resistant response. It is in response to this resistance in each case – position 3 – that a participant produces the sceptical expression. As we have seen in 1, but not the other instances, the producer of the sceptical expression is not necessarily the initiator of the sequence (table 1):

Table 8.1 Prior sequential context for the sceptical expression

<i>Position 1: Initiation</i>	<i>Position 2: Resistance</i>
(1) Whose belt is it	Some girl’s . . . My friend’s girlfriend
(2) It’s my fortieth birthday and mother’s day	I tried to get it off . . . I tried
(3) I’m jus’ tryin’ a stop you from blowing a gasket	W’l don’t! I c’n control my gasket
(4) D’you still think you stopped long enough	Yes

This sequential pattern makes very clear that a third position response does not itself project an expansion of the sequence; in one case, 2, there is indeed further sequence-expanding talk, but, as we have seen, this is built as a continuation of the speaker’s second position resistance so its status as response to the third position display of scepticism is indeterminate.

Thus, examining not simply the compositional features of the sceptical expression – its status as an embodiment, and the ways it is, or is not, designed to be potentially visible – but also the sequential environment in which the expression is produced has enabled us to identify the means by which sequentially it suppresses response relevance.

6. Conclusion

In his rich vignettes of social life Goffman captured highly recognisable but impressionistic interactional ‘moments’. This chapter has aimed to explore some of the observations he made by examining, in the detail of naturally occurring data, one such actual moment. In doing so, it has brought the methods of CA, with its systematic attention to collections of instances and focus on sequentiality, to some of Goffman’s concerns. In particular, it has sought to extend Goffman’s observations on a class of action he called ‘response cries’ into the domain of the multimodal by examining an embodied practice: a sceptical facial expression.

The claims to which the sceptical expressions are an initial response appear in the excerpts examined as follows (table 2):

Table 8.2

<i>Excerpt</i>	<i>Claim</i>
(1)	Some girl’s . . . My friend’s girlfriend
(2)	I tried to get it off . . . I tried
(3)	I c’n control my gasket
(4)	Yes (i.e. I still think I stopped long enough)

In each of these four cases, there is evidence in the prior sequential context to cast doubt on the credibility of the claim being made – and the claim may be duly contested by the co-participant(s) by means of the sceptical expression. In excerpt 1, Tindy’s initial resistance to being explicit about the ownership of the belt casts doubt on his claim that it belongs to his friend’s girlfriend; in excerpt 2, Emily’s initial response to Jane about her plans for the upcoming Saturday undermine her claim that she tried to get that day off; in excerpt 3, Simon’s initial response to Jane’s attempts to reassure him suggests that he cannot control his temper; and in excerpt 4, Miss Quentin’s flat ‘yes’ in response to the question as to whether she thinks she stopped long enough at a red light flies in the face of video evidence that she did not. In response to each of these claims, a co-participant produces what is recognisable as a sceptical expression by raising their eyebrows and pursing their lips. Only one of these – excerpt 2 – gets a

response, and, as we have seen, it is equivocal as to whether it responds to the facial expression as such.

The reasons for the suppression of response relevance have been shown to lie in elements of both composition and sequential position. In the first instance, it is clear that the relevance of a response to embodied action is suppressed, relative to that for verbal action. But it is also the case that the sequential position of the sceptical expression has shown to be critical for response relevance: in this particular case, its production in the position of a sequence-closing third action also suppresses the relevance of a response. Thus response relevance is suppressed by both compositional and positional means.

Having explored some of Goffman's observations, it is striking to see how much his vivid sketches capture the basic elements of particular practices. With response cries, the depiction of mutterings 'as the target turns away' of course combine both features of turn design, in the form of articulation – lowered volume – and embodiment. And the observation that muttering occupies 'the very interstice between a state of talk and mere co-presence' when examined on the naturally occurring data is revealed to lie, not solely in audibility, but also with the sequential position of the action being implemented. Mutterings are, after all, at least in Goffman's vignettes, negative assessments ('words of complaint') – and as we have seen, these can occupy sequential positions where response relevance is suppressed. Without the data of actual interaction, of course, we can only speculate; it is, after all, only on such data that we can achieve traction by analytic consideration of 'position' and 'composition'. But by examining such data here, it is hoped that this study has demonstrated something of how Goffman's observations can be explored in the detail of actual interaction, while standing testament to the ongoing significance of his work for us today.

Notes

- 1 Although Schegloff (1988) argues that Goffman was demonstrably less committed in his own published work to 'moments' rather than 'men'.
- 2 Schegloff (2003, p. 34) reports being told by Goffman's students that Goffman used video materials in his teaching.
- 3 And even on occasion, responded to. For example, mutterings under one's breath – Goffman's example of a response cry – may be audible and salient enough for the target to initiate repair on.
- 4 My thanks to Dragonfly productions for consent to use both the broadcast material and some of their raw unedited footage.
- 5 However, a referee comments that this is counterintuitive, on grounds of economy of attention, with feeding the dog one attentional track and responding to Tindy another. It would thus require more cognitive and interactional work to do them simultaneously.

- 6 This is not, of course, to discount the existence of peripheral vision, which spans 120°.
- 7 The falling prosodic contour on this turn is consistent with Couper-Kuhlen's (2020) finding for other-initiated repair for British English.
- 8 This does not, of course, discount the possibility that it is visible in peripheral vision.
- 9 Furthermore, Emily subsequently turns her gaze away from Jane off to the right. In the light of Goodwin's (2007) observation that gaze implicates visible attention and moreover a co-operative stance, this implies a very visible shift away from both attention and cooperation.
- 10 As Figure 8.13 shows, neither Simon nor Charlotte are gazing at Jane as she produces the sceptical look.
- 11 It is an assertion that fails to get interactional traction, however: Jane responds by covering her face with her hands, and Simon sequentially deletes Emily's turn by producing an assessment and the grounds for it (lls. 26–7): 'You are a case Emily honestly . . . you're gonna miss your Mum's birthday and Mother's Day'.
- 12 Of course, in 1, there *is* sequence expansion after position 2, in the form of Polly's other-initiated repair, 'friend's girlfriend' in l.21. Other-initiated repair is an ever-present possibility and, as such, is an exception to the projection of sequence closure in third position.

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