The Practical Accomplishment of Everyday Activities Without Sight

Edited by Brian L. Due

1   The practical accomplishment of living with visual impairment

An EM/CA approach

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The minute particularities of living with visual impairment

> *"In order to understand blindness one must study the minute particular. It is in the observation of tiny detail that I have come to understand the nature of blindness".*
>
> *(Hull, 1997, p. xiii)*

> *"Blind people also lose communication through general body language, since although they can speak using gestures, they cannot receive the body language of other people. Most of the little moments of play are lost, winking, sticking out your tongue, exchanging mocking glances, raising the eyebrows and so on. Everything must be channelled through words or through touch".*
>
> *(Hull, 1997, p. 12)*

> *"You only notice the windscreen when a crack develops in it, and the taken-for-granted nature of everyday life late in the twentieth century is only challenged by some profound disaster".*
>
> *(Hull, 1997, p. 232)*

In his seminal books, the visually impaired professor of religious education John M. Hull (1935–2015) describes his own process of losing his sight as an adult. The previous quotes stress some important aspects that will run throughout this book: (1) the importance of studying the actual, everyday, ordinary details of the lived lives of visually impaired persons (VIPs)[1]; (2) the importance of establishing knowledge of the multisensorial and practical implications of the impaired sense in communication; and (3) what we can learn more generally about human sociality and taken-for-granted knowledge, culture, practices, etc. by studying VIP in practical action and interaction.

Whereas the dominant research traditions – as I will discuss in detail next – study visual impairment from a medical, cognitive, and psychological perspective, this book provides insights into just how VIP accomplish ordinary activities in orderly, organized ways. All the chapters in this book are based on a video-ethnographic methodology and ethnomethodological conversation analysis (EM/CA). VIP have been recorded while engaged in ordinary activities like shopping, visiting friends,

going to work, spending time in their own home, trying to use new assistive technologies, etc. While most books on VIP describe in detail cognitive and biological issues, this book is about the actual daily lives and the practical issues that arise when people are not able to see the world around them. Thus, the objective of this book is to provide detailed knowledge of key issues in the daily lives of VIP.

The book contributes insights into the practices of VIP – and on that basis, it also provides perspectives for rethinking some of the most basic aspects of human sociality (e.g. perception, interaction, multisensoriality, and ocularcentrism). As such, the book provides innovative findings in the field of EM/CA. It aims to contribute to the broad field of social research into VIP's lives, and more specifically, to establish new directions in ethnomethodology and conversation analysis by unpacking the details of VIP's everyday activities.

The book's main themes are (1) practices for navigating in urban environments; (2) practices for achieving inclusion in social situations; (3) practices of getting to know objects and technologies through touch; and (4) how these themes may contribute to EM/CA research focusing on "atypicality" and multisensoriality. Navigation, social inclusion, and the world of touch constitute key phenomena that are affected by visual impairment. There is an interesting relationship between these themes, as sighted people ordinarily use their sight for navigating, for figuring out the location of co-participants and the embodied cues they produce, and for achieving understanding of objects in the world. VIP, on the contrary, cannot rely on vision for navigating, for interpreting embodied cues, or for identifying or recognizing objects. As such, other sensory resources and other practices are employed to accomplish these basic human actions. The chapters will present examples and findings relevant to these issues.

The book includes unique contributions from scholars across the world. Each chapter contributes both to the general understanding of VIP's lives and to the theoretical development within the chapter's own domain. The book has two main audiences: (1) people conducting research related to disability and impairment, especially visual impairment; and (2) people conducting research into interactional phenomena, especially within the EM/CA community in general.

The book assumes basic prior knowledge about social science and ethnography in the tradition of ethnomethodology and conversation analysis. The following sections in this introductory chapter discuss how EM/CA provides opportunities for new understandings and respecifications of basic human issues of sociality related to visual impairment. David Goode, a disability researcher who studied deafblind children, says this about the study of impaired bodies: "There is no other version of sociology that incorporates the lived body as strongly as ethnomethodology" (Goode, 2003).

Disability is a topic for research not only in its own right, and with respect to people with impairments, but also because such studies may, from an ethnomethodological standpoint, reveal basic, taken-for-granted knowledge about human action, practices, norms, and sociality. A case of particular relevance to this book's interest in impaired vision is one of Harold Garfinkel's breaching experiments, in which he asked his students to wear inverting glasses. As Garfinkel learned

from Maurice Merleau-Ponty, many everyday tasks are bodily accomplishments. Garfinkel would then conduct experiments to show *just how* this is the case. One such case is the "inverting lenses" experiment. These lenses turn everything upside down and reverse right and left, thus impairing the wearer's vision. Albert B. Robillard, one of his students, describes the experience:

> Garfinkel had us try to write our names on a blackboard while looking at it. We found we could not. Our handwriting broke down at every turn. The inverting lenses did not permit a routine access to knowing where your hand was, nor did they allow the visual monitoring and direction of where your hand was moving. If we closed our eyes, we were able to write our names legibly. But if we used our sight, the handwriting became confused, often provoking a momentary paralysis of the hand and arm. The objective of the exercise was to demonstrate that such mundane tasks as writing were founded on the habit of "normal" eyesight.
>
> (Robillard, 1999, p. 155)

"Normal eyesight" (20/20 vision) is the default for living in the social world. Our world is predominantly organized by and for sighted people – in other words, it is *ocularcentric* (from late Latin: *ocularis*, "of the eyes"). The study of VIP not only provides insights into a minority's daily mundane lives and troubles – of special interest is Garfinkel's (2002 pp. 212–213) own studies of his blind student Helen and the orderly ways she organized her kitchen – but also how such perspicuous settings reveals a plethora of taken-for-granted knowledge and practices that otherwise gets routinely accomplished (cf. Garfinkel, 1963) in an ocularcentric world (see the paragraph titled "The ocularcentric design of the spatial world" in this chapter).

Visual impairment: facts and positions

Some people are born with blindness or low vision, but most people develop vision loss later in life. Globally, the World Health Organization (WHO) states that 2.2 billion people have a visual impairment (WHO, 2019). Research (e.g. Varma et al., 2016) suggests that the percentage of people with visual impairment will rise rapidly up to 2050 as the population ages. For most VIP, not being able to see the world causes problems. The everyday consequences can be significant: less than 30% of working age VIP adults are employed (Slade et al., 2017). Simple day-to-day activities can be cause for significant concern, and VIP leave their homes much less often than sighted people. This reduced activity level is in itself detrimental to health and can lead to isolation and social exclusion (Brunes et al., 2019).

Studies of VIP have typically been conducted using questionnaires and experimental or autoethnographic methods. Everyday life as it naturally emerges in and through embodied actions and social interactions with other people and objects remains poorly understood. In this book – instead of presupposing what may be counted as activity, action, mobility, interaction, and social inclusion/exclusion per

se – we depart from a video-ethnographic methodology and instead adopt the ethnomethodological analytic mentality, that is paying attention to what the participants themselves actually accomplish in situ through situated actions. As such, this book provides new, empirically based knowledge of key issues in the lives of VIP when they, for example use assistive technologies, interact with guide dogs, train to navigate urban environments, interact with others at work or in school, and achieve embodied insights about objects and obstacles in the world.

The landscape of research on visual impairment can be divided into eight different perspectives: *The biological perspective* deals with how visual impairment develops and affects the person's body, focusing on bodily sensation and motor functions (e.g. Bailey et al., 1990). *The cognitive perspective* deals with cognitive aspects of visual impairment and how the brain works together with the senses (e.g. Cattaneo & Vecchi, 2011). *The technological perspective* deals with different types of assistive aids, typically with a focus on technologies and ergonomics (e.g. Hersh & Johnson, 2010). *The sociological perspective* deals with aspects of stigmatization, and culture and social inclusion/exclusion (e.g. Milian & Erin, 2001). *The disability perspective* focuses on discussions of what counts as ability and what counts as "normal" (e.g. Davis, 2016; Shakespeare, 2017). *The communicative perspective* deals with troubles related to communication, social skills, competences, and, typically, cognition and learning (e.g. Roe & Webster, 2002). *The ethnographic perspective* deals with how ordinary activities are accomplished in situ, typically focusing on geographic or spatial issues related to human geography (e.g. Macpherson, 2017). Finally, *the autoethnographic perspective* focuses on how visually impaired people themselves describe, based on their own experience, aspects of everyday practices (e.g. Saerberg, 2015).

Obviously, all of these different research perspectives, with their different focuses and methodologies, offer important knowledge about the complexities of being visually impaired. Along with these eight perspectives, this book offers a ninth: *the EM/CA perspective on visual impairment*. This perspective does not dismiss findings from the other perspectives but unpacks phenomena from video materials to respecify some of the taken-for-granted knowledge that goes into key topics such as mobility and navigation, achieving inclusion, and using objects and technologies. As such, the book is a unique contribution to studies of visual impairment, as all the chapters (except Chapter 11) are based on original empirical work, in the form of video ethnography, and ethnomethodology and conversation analysis (EM/CA).

The eight different perspectives are typically divided into two main paradigms: the *medical paradigm*, focusing on the biology of the impaired sense; and the *social model paradigm*, focusing on social aspects of inclusion in or exclusion from society and sociality. The social model is typically related to the broad and interdisciplinary field labelled *disability studies*. Whereas the study of impairment in the medical paradigm is concerned with cognitive and bodily (motor function) aspects, the study of disability focuses mostly on the social construction and social consequences of having an impairment (Bickenbach et al., 1999). This book is in dialogue with the social model paradigm, which regards disability as a political "construct" (Shakespeare, 2014, 2016, 2017).

Disability studies is largely concerned with unpacking injustice, one way or another, and in performing critical examinations of stigmatization and discrimination in society and institutions to enable and suggest inclusion based on the redesign of societies' structures (Oliver, 1990; Linton, 2005), for example focusing on the right to equal access to education (de Beco, 2018). Typically, however, disability studies has taken a postmodern/post-structuralistic approach, focusing on how power and structures predetermine and affect identity construction (Corker & Shakespeare, 2002; Dirth & Branscombe, 2018). This is particularly the case in research based in gender and queer theory, which discusses issues of identity construction, biological markers and structural oppression, building on, among others, Foucault's studies of the structural normalization of, for example sexuality (Foucault, 1979), Goffman's studies of stigmatization (Goffman, 1963b), queer theory (Butler, 1988), and related concepts about the discursive production of identity through performative acts.

The majority of critical disability studies focus on the production of norms and normality (the "normal" abled/non-disabled/disabled body) as something that researchers in general (in the medical paradigm) take for granted, but which should be subjected to scrutiny. However, while an EM/CA position agrees that dichotomies like normal/abnormal, typical/atypical, competent/incompetent, etc. are analytically problematic, it diverges from disability studies by *not* having a predefined focus on the "construction" or importance of disability at all. It is important not to presume that disability or the impairment of vision is relevant for the accomplishment of situated activities. While it is a medical fact that VIP do have an impaired sense, our approach is that there *might* be all sorts of asymmetries in interaction regarding not only sensory capacities, but also access to sensory resources, cognitive abilities, levels and types of knowledge, etc., and that the relevance of these features cannot be determined from the outside. One way to describe the difference between seeing/visually impaired people is, as Abrahamson et al. (2019, p. 297) suggest: "[those] participants with heterogenous access to communication resources [and those without]". But this is just one way of understanding impaired persons, who also are describable from an endless list of features such as age, race, gender, occupation, nationality, income, height, weight, hair colour, etc. Just as these features might or might not be relevant in situated encounters, visual impairment might or might not show up as relevant. In addition, it should be noted that there is no such thing as a sensorily perfect human being which can, in radical terms, be anticipated. This leads to the fact, that each and every situation is "only actually found out" (Garfinkel, 2002, p. 96) as endogenously produced by just those present persons having just this or that sensory impairment – or any other ascribable characteristics.

Contrary to approaches in disability studies that presume disability to be a prevalent "socially constructed" problem, and contrary to medical approaches that presume that the impaired sense *a priori* has consequences for everyday life, we adopt a radical ethnomethodological perspective of *indifference* (Garfinkel & Sacks, 1970; Garfinkel, 1991; Pollner, 2012). Instead of trying to solve "problems" by anticipating their existence, we should treat actions and practices as phenomena to

be investigated in quotidian circumstances. According to Garfinkel and Sacks, eth-nomethodological studies should "describe members' accounts of formal structures wherever and by whomever they are done, while abstaining from all judgements of their adequacy, value, importance, necessity, practicality, success, or consequenti-ality" (Garfinkel & Sacks, 1970, p. 346).

People with impairments can be studied in practical and interactional contexts without *a priori* focusing on the identity of being/not being disabled, competent, or experiencing social problems and social exclusion. Following Maynard (2005), the marking of problems (of any kind in practice and interaction) is, in any case, a member's designation, not an analytic one: "ethnomethodological and conversation analysis asks about what exactly and precisely goes on in interaction whether or not participants perceive or sense deviance and disability then and there" (Maynard, 2005, p. 520). This requires that it is shown precisely how – if at all, and *for all practical purposes* (Garfinkel, 1967; Psathas, 1980) – disability and impairment are made relevant within unfolding situations. This means that contrary to most of the research within disability studies, which is concerned with criticism and political programmes, an EM/CA approach seeks, as its primary aim, not to solve anything, but to treat each and any instance as a phenomenon to be investigated in detail. This should enable an analytical precision from within, which does not presuppose any form of either identity, biological marker, competence, (dis)abilities, or other forms of membership categories to be of relevance *a priori* (Sacks, 1989; Schegloff, 1997).

EM/CA studies of disability and impairment

Studies of disability from an ethnomethodological and/or conversation-analytical perspective are not new. Not only did early ethnomethodologists study people with impairment, but impaired persons themselves also conducted autoethnographic, ethnomethodological self-studies. For instance, Albert Robillard, who suffered from paralysis, studied what he termed the *Meaning of a Disability* (Robillard, 1999). When he began to suffer the symptoms of motor-neuron disease, he realized he was a living laboratory for revealing the taken-for-granted methods people use to accomplish activities. With his communication restricted by loss of speech and paralysis, Robillard experienced frustration in attempting to make himself under-stood by others. He showed how the "fabric of self" is achieved through "real time" communication (Robillard, 1994). Another early account of impairment and real-time communication is Goode's (1994) study of children born deaf and blind, with no formal language capacities. Among other things, Goode showed the production of these children as impaired within institutional settings, in and through unfold-ing practices. Other recent EM/CA studies of deafblind people in particular, using tactile communication resources, are Iwasaki et al. (2019) and Willoughby et al. (2019). (See the section titled "EM/CA research on visual impairment as a practi-cal and interactional accomplishment" for more state-of-the-art description of EM/CA studies of VIP.) In these ethnomethodological studies, disability is seen as an emerging social-cultural production, and as such it may work as an ascribed mem-bership category for people. EM/CA treats the member "as [like] any other feature

of a setting – i.e., as an indigenously produced, accountable feature of the event" (Goode, 2007, p. 13). Therefore, membership categories or identity categories (e.g. as being "disabled" or "abled", competent/incompetent etc.) are produced in and through culturally embedded practices and interactional contexts (Antaki & Widdicombe, 1998; Zimmerman, 1998). It is in and through culturally recognizable practices that disability is constructed *as* disability. Membership categorization analysis (MCA) is a specific branch of ethnomethodology that deals with culture in action (Hester & Eglin, 1997). This methodology focuses on identities in interaction and on the different membership categorization devices (MCDs) that members use to ascribe membership of recognizable cultural categories to themselves and others (Stokoe, 2012).

When a disability such as visual impairment is made into its own topic and focus, MCA becomes highly relevant. However, MCA has rarely focused on disability, and when it has done so, it has been primarily in relation to intellectual (Frankena et al., 2019) or cognitive issues such as attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) (Schubert et al., 2009; Evaldsson, 2014), or with a specific focus on children (Hester, 1998) or relatives' accounts of children with disability (Austin & Fitzgerald, 2007). MCA has been used to study "atypical interactions" related to communication problems acquired through aphasia (for an overview see, e.g. Rasmussen (2013)), but to my knowledge, no prior research has focused on visual impairment from an MCA perspective (Chapter 6 of this book being an exception).

As briefly mentioned earlier, the majority of EM/CA research on disability has focused on issues with communication, specifically related to impairments that affect the ability to talk and interact, and as such has foregrounded language *competence* as a key feature (Rasmussen et al., 2012). This field has specifically developed into what has become known as "atypical interaction" (for overviews, see Antaki & Wilkinson, 2013; Wilkinson et al., 2020), with a focus on language and communication disorders. "Disability identities" have been studied specifically with regard to autism (Maynard, 2005; Renshaw et al., 2014), intellectual impairment (Antaki et al., 2007, 2015; Antaki, 2013), aphasia (Beeke et al., 2014; Goodwin, 1995, 2006; Wilkinson, 2014), and dementia (Kristiansen et al., 2019). Although these different populations have a range of impairments and consequently experience all sorts of social problems, the field of "atypical interaction" focuses on people for whom frustrations in communication are experienced as a permanent fixture of daily life. Visually impaired people, on the other hand, do not have problems with language-understanding or language-production in general. Being blind does not produce "atypical" verbal interactions, in the sense of trouble with lexical constructions. Although there might be more repairs (as in "atypical interaction" in general (Antaki & Wilkinson, 2013, p. 535)), these are not related to language competence as such, but to aspects of *seeing*.

Hence, the study of VIP does not really belong to the field of "atypical interaction" as it is classically understood. That said, there are still many overlaps with the broad focus on disability – in particular, the seminal work of Charles Goodwin, who studied his father Chil, who suffered from aphasia (Goodwin, 1995, 2003). One key finding in his work was the notion of collaboration and building on resources

provided by co-participants, which he later came to term "co-operative action" (Goodwin, 2017). The concept of co-operative action applies to many contexts, but it is particularly useful for describing people with an impairment who build on visual resources provided by other participants in interaction for accomplishing perception – as shown, for example by Due (2021a).

EM/CA research on visual impairment as a practical and interactional accomplishment

Garfinkel called marginal cases involving VIP "natural experiments" (Rawls et al., 2020, p. 8ff). He writes: "EM's 'Heideggerian' uses of incongruities of bodily impairments and brain injuries and illnesses are perspicuous in revealing the ('hidden') transparent work of achieved coherence" (Garfinkel, 1996, p. 17). The idea of settings, persons, situations, and troublemakers as "incongruities" that reveal morality, order and tacit, taken-for-granted practices was already part of Garfinkel's famous analysis of the "atypical" person, Agnes – the "intersexed person" (Garfinkel, 1967, p. 118ff). Similarly, understanding VIP's social practices may reveal not only what constitutes ordinary activities when being visually impaired, but also aspects of what we all occasionally do to achieve the taken-for-granted (cf. Nishizaka, 2020). Garfinkel also has these wonderful sections in the book *Ethnomethodology's Program* (2002) about "sight impairment as a perspicuous setting" (pp. 212ff). From studying specific cases of Helen and Sherry in the kitchen, while having guests over and collectively going to the coffee urn at the university, we learn specific details of settings that otherwise go unnoticed. With regard to queueing, Garfinkel for instance concludes: "Helen taught us to see and examine the organizational contrast between the local interactional crush as a serving procedure and the work of a formatted queue" (p. 215). Perspicuous settings may reveal orderly features in their concrete details. It is in and through the practicality of living with the impaired sense – the natural breaching of moral orders for example queuing, cooking, or having guests over – that ordinary aspects of society may become "*observably visibly, witnessably*" (p. 215) accountable.

   For example, walking and navigating from A to B while sighted can be difficult if you are in a new location and you need to read and understand a map, whereas the practice of walking a straight route and turning around corners in hallways is an uncomplicated and unnoticeable accomplishment for a sighted person with no other impairments. They are just walking. However, even the simplest walking activity requires a complex coordination of the body relative to the changing environment and the actions of other participants. Studying such practices may also reveal the ordinarily taken-for-granted phenomenal details that go into doing such a walk. This has been known since the early days of ethnomethodology, as exemplified by George Psathas's studies of practical reasoning in mobile situations. He was particularly interested in one of the most obvious issues related to loss of vision – namely, how to find your way in the world. In several studies (e.g. Psathas, 1976, 1992), he investigated navigation, mobility, orientation, wayfinding, and walking as practical accomplishments. Several studies by Marc

Relieu also focused on walking and talking and the spatial embeddedness of talk (Morel & Relieu, 2011; Quéré & Relieu, 2001; Relieu, 1994). Most research on visual impairment from a video-ethnographic EM/CA perspective has been concerned with mobility and navigation. Brian Due and Simon Lange studied the use of the white cane (Due & Lange, 2018b), the guide dog (Due, 2021b; Due & Lange, 2018a), and obstacle detection (Due & Lange, 2018c). Due also studied navigation with robotic technologies, using the four-legged robot named Spot as a "guide dog" (Due, 2023a, 2023b). In addition, Chloé Mondémé has provided studies of navigation with the guide dog (Mondémé, 2011, 2013, 2017, 2020). What these studies reveal, in general, is that for visually impaired people, collaboration and coordination are much more complex and orderly accomplishments than described in mainstream approaches.

A few other studies have examined aspects other than navigation. vom Lehn studied the practice of exploring objects within a museum (Lehn, 2010), as did Kreplak and Mondémé, focusing on descriptions by sighted guides (Kreplak & Mondémé, 2014). Avital and Streeck (2011) studied social interaction among blind children, while Hirvonen and Schmitt (2018) studied collaboration between a sighted and a visually impaired person working together on a train station. Abrahamson et al. (2019) studied how blind and visually impaired mathematics students must rely on accessible materials such as tactile diagrams to learn mathematics. Simone and Galatolo (2020, 2021) have studied how VIP accomplish indoor climbing through instructed body movements provided by guides. The use of assistive technologies has also been studied (Due et al., 2017) – in particular, computer vision and natural language processing (like Google Home systems) are promising for VIP (Due & Lüchow, 2023, forthcoming; Reyes Cruz, 2021; Reyes-Cruz et al., 2020, 2022). However, few researchers approach visual impairment from an EM/CA perspective, and many of the previously mentioned researchers contribute chapters in this book.

Phenomenal fields and respecifications in the wake of studying visually impaired people

From an EM/CA perspective, studying blind and visually impaired people engaged in everyday activities involves a focus on these activities' circumstantial details and how actions and practices are made recognizable. We therefore study settings that Garfinkel, in his "misreading" of Merleau-Ponty, called *phenomenal fields*, in which the emphasis is on how members – not analysts – define the space in and through which they are accomplishing actions (Garfinkel, 2002). In this book, the use of the term *phenomenal field* is more specifically tied to the gestalt-contexture of activities and the spaces within which activities occur. Any phenomenal field is constituted not from the outside, through theoretically imposing concepts, but by examining the "locally produced, endogenously achieved, naturally accountable coherent haecceities that constitute as coherent instructed actions the phenomenal fields of ordinary human 'jobs'" (Garfinkel, 1996, p. 20).

Garfinkel also performed a "misreading" of Gurwitsch's understanding of gestalt contextures (Eisenmann & Lynch, 2021; Lynch & Eisenmann, 2022; Meyer,

2022). This is highly relevant for studying visually impaired people, because Garfinkel established the grounds for understanding perception and the organization of orderly details as a praxeological, social, and bodily achievement. In any given case, the phenomenal field and the perception within it are achieved through embodied work. Society and human sociality cannot be imagined *for real*; they are only discoverable. In contrast to mainstream "constructive analysis" (Button et al., 2022), the chapters in this book thus demonstrate "locally produced, naturally accountable phenomena of order" (Garfinkel, 1991).

Not only do the chapters provide novel findings about phenomena of order within commonplace situations, they also provide grounds for several forms of respecification. Studies of visually impaired people in social interactions constitute perspicuous settings for performing respecifications with, as Garfinkel writes:

> "Heideggerian uses" of handicaps, illnesses, disability, and their affiliated equipmental "aids to independent living," as well as with inverting lenses and other bodily, characterological, organizational, and procedural "troublemakers." With these "troublemakers", work's incarnate social organizational details are revealed by overcoming their transparency in their topically ordinary concerted recurrencies of ongoingly developing phenomenal fields of ordered details of generality, uniformity, interchangeable populations, and the rest – i.e., in ordered details of structure.
>
> (Garfinkel, 1996, p. 12)

The precise details of phenomenal fields are, from a formal analytical perspective, easily missed, because they are seen but unnoticed, taken for granted and seemingly unproblematic. Studying VIP leads one to also often study troublesome cases that make ordinary phenomena and their settings available ("perspicuous") for detailed observation (cf. Lynch & Eisenmann, 2022).

According to Garfinkel, respecifications are concerned with establishing new understandings of phenomena of order in detail and with a concreteness that would otherwise go unnoticed by scholars and research programmes. Some of the more substantial respecifications that emerge from studying VIP are (1) *distributed perception*; (2) the visual organization of the spatial world (*ocularcentrism*); (3) the *identity fallacy*; and (4) *the visibility paradox* of conducting visual, video-based analysis of VIP. The following sections briefly describe these themes.

The distribution of perception – *multisensoriality and co-operative action*

The senses and perception are relevant topics when studying VIP because one central sense is impaired. Cognitive studies describe how this can lead to sensory substitution, in which the parts of the brain used to process visual information receive input from other sensory systems (Bach-y-Rita, 2002; Proulx et al., 2014). However, similar kinds of transformations occur in social practice. Studying VIP naturally leads to questions about sensations, sensory experiences (e.g. Fele & Liberman, 2020) and multisensoriality (Mondada, 2019). The function of

the visually impaired person's cane, for instance, has been understood as a sensory extension, for example metaphorically as "the blind man's eye" (Descartes, 1988, p. 58). Although the white cane extends "the scope and active radius of touch", as Merleau-Ponty puts it (2002, p. 165), it nevertheless possesses specific affordances for what it can detect and what it cannot. Although it is not really an extended "eye", but more akin to an extended, tactile, feeling and exploring "finger" (Due & Lange, 2018a; Kleege, 2016), the key point is that being visually impaired forces us to investigate sensations in new ways. A focus on the senses naturally leads to a focus on perception. Studying VIP engaged in everyday activities from an EM/CA perspective can therefore lead to a respecification of otherwise typically cognitively understood phenomena as also being observable, accountable practices.

The cognitive and medical description of perception states that signals from the sensory system (physical or chemical stimulation) go through the nervous system to the brain, and this is how the senses produce perception of the world. However, seeing or feeling something does not just consist of stimuli-response mechanics, but of human experience embedded in concrete environments (Gibson, 1979; Coulter & Parsons, 1990). Being visually impaired means relying more on talk and bodily sensations in and through touch, haptics, and the vestibular sense, which involves movement and balance (sensing our body in space), and the proprioceptic sense, which we use to understand where our body parts are in relation to each other. People who became visually impaired later in life, for example Hull (1997), report that not only are other senses enhanced when vision is impaired, but that they also experience a stronger whole-body sensation (Hull, 1997, p. 204).

Collaboration, coordination, and social construction of action, or (as Goodwin termed it) co-operative action, are pervasive phenomena. Generally speaking, people tend to build action in concert (Goodwin, 2007). A particularly interesting phenomenon emerging from the study of VIP is how perception also may be a distributed, co-operative phenomenon (for a detailed outline of the concept, see Due, 2021a). As such, studying VIP may lead to interesting respecifications of sensation, perception, and co-operative action and in that respect may also respecify concepts such as joint attention (Kidwell & Zimmerman, 2007) as being more than just a shared visual practice (cf. Chapter 5 of this book).

The ocularcentric design *of the spatial world*

Georgina Kleege, professor in art and disability, and herself visually impaired, presents this anecdote:

> Some weeks after September 11, 2001, the blind musician Ray Charles was interviewed about his rendition of "America the Beautiful," which received a good deal of airtime during the period of heightened patriotism that followed that event. The interviewer, Jim Gray, commented that Charles should consider himself lucky that his blindness prevented him from viewing the images of the World Trade Center's collapse, and the Pentagon in flames: "Was this maybe one time in your life where not having the ability to see was

a relief?" Like Diderot, the interviewer assumed that true horror can only be evinced through the eyes. Many eyewitness accounts of the event however, were strikingly nonvisual.

(Kleege, 2016, p. 450)

Studying VIP and learning from their multisensorial engagement with a visually designed world prompts a respecification of both the historically and culturally constructed primacy of vision, and the role and meaning of a spatial, material, and cultural world that mostly is designed by and for sighted people. In the West, sight has typically been described as the most essential of the senses (Jay, 1994; Classen, 2020). This has produced bias, not only in the research, but also in the whole design and architecture of our societies. Almost every philosophical and psychological treatment of perception and sensation, from Aristotle (1987) to Descartes (2001) to Berkeley (2008) and up to the present, has treated issues of perception as synonymous with issues of vision. Consequently, the world can be said to be designed, constructed, and organized by and for sighted people, that is it is *ocularcentric* (Brook, 2002; Due & Lange, 2018c; Hull, 1997; Macpherson, 2006). Physical public space is essentially designed by and for people who have the ability to see it. The same goes for other types of disabilities – urban environments are essentially designed by and for able-bodied people in general (Gleeson, 2002; Titchkosky, 2011; Soldatic et al., 2014). However, for visually impaired people, space must be established through multimodal and multisensory practices (Psathas, 1992; Hull, 1997), for example tactile sensations or using hearing to determine the distance to an object (echo location) (Due & Lange, 2018a). The study of VIP not only prompts a critical respecification of the visual organization of the world, but also provides opportunities for a critical examination of the kind of work in which the other senses are engaged in sense-making processes (Due, forthcoming; Due & Toft, forthcoming).

The identity fallacy – *presuming membership categorial relevance*

Although visually impaired people are arguably a marginalized group (Boys, 2017), we should not proceed on the basis of normative or critical perspectives *per se*. The reason for not proceeding in this fashion is that while problems can arise from the ocularcentric design of our world and its cultural production of "disability identities", this might not be something to which the members themselves are oriented. In the medical model, the presumption is that a visually impaired person is affected by their impairment at all times. However, in the social model, the person is presumed to be unfairly constrained by society, culture, work, institutions, and so on. In both cases, the identity (regardless of whether it is regarded as biological in nature or as a "social construct") is presumed to be omnirelevant. This might be called *the identity fallacy*. The study of VIP from an EM/CA perspective enables a respecification of this dichotomic model within disability studies by focusing on the practices and resources that "underpin the possibility of description employed by members, discoverable, and only discoverable, in the lived detail of ordinary actions" (Smith et al., 2020, p. 2).

The visibility bias – *looking at visually impaired people*

One principle in EM/CA is to study *witnessable*, *observable*, *exhibited*, and *display-able* phenomena as they are, that is as they occur as practical action in everyday detail (Garfinkel & Sacks, 1970). From the very beginning, there has been an interest in studying the "immediately witnessable details of immortal ordinary society" (Garfinkel, 1996, p. 8). What is striking about this is that the interest in people's practices is intertwined with a visually biased terminology. According to the Cambridge Dictionary,[2] what can be *witnessed* relates ordinarily to what a person *sees* as happening (e.g. a crime or an accident); what is *observed* relates to *watching* the way something happens, or the way someone does something (e.g. to learn more about it); what is *exhibited* relates to something that is *shown* publicly; and what is *displayed* is normally related to the arrangement of something that can be *seen*. It is striking how these central terms in ethnomethodology are visual categories.

Consequently, one might argue, visual bias is embedded in both the approach to everyday life and in EM/CA research. This is partly to do with the ocularcentrism of our society more generally, but methodologically speaking, it may also relate to ethnomethodology's original observations about the *visibility* (etc.) of action. Early conversation analysis emphasized talk and telephone conversations (Schegloff, 1968; Sacks et al., 1974), and as such was highly oriented to that which is *hearable* in interaction. However, since the beginning of the 1980s, EM/CA has developed in a multimodal direction (Goodwin, 1979, 1981; Heath, 1982, 1986). The multimodal, visual, and embodied turn (Nevile, 2015), as facilitated by the easier use of smaller video cameras (Erickson, 2011), caused a boom in the study of the visually available and tangible world. This is also evident in visual anthropology, sociology, and ethnography (Ingold, 2000; Pauwels, 2011; Pink, 2013) in general, which favour studies of the visual aspects of everyday lives. As Lisa van den Scott notes, in a review of the state of the art, researchers "prioritize sight and the meaning making of imagery" (van den Scott, 2018, p. 721).

This has surely also been the case in EM/CA, in which sight has often been assumed to be a member's resource within action production and interaction. Gaze has been a topic in itself ever since the "beginning" of interactional studies (e.g. Goffman, 1963a; Kendon, 1967; Goodwin, 1980; Heath, 1984). This sensory bias continues within CA to this day (e.g. Sidnell, 2006; Rossano et al., 2009; Kendrick & Holler, 2017; Licoppe & Figeac, 2018; Mondada, 2018, 2019). Seeing has (tacitly) been taken to be the principal mode of perception (Vannini et al., 2011). Vision is surely an important resource for achieving intersubjectivity through gaze and body movements, and in the use of objects by all of those with "normal sight" (i.e. 20/20 vision, cf. note 1). However, since bodies and their behaviours are available to others through acts of seeing (Gibson & vom Lehn, 2019), VIP also regularly adjust to the ocularcentrism of the social world by, for example smiling at other people (Hull, 1997) or otherwise bodily orienting to their perception (see Chapter 5 in this book).

What I describe as the *visibility bias* relates to the fact that EM/CA has been (perhaps excessively) focused on visual resources and actions. Even in the growing

literature on multisensoriality, visual sensation is central (e.g. Edmonds & Greiff-enhagen, 2020; Pillet-Shore, 2020) – the exceptions being tasting (Fele & Liber-man, 2020; Wiggins & Keevallik, 2020) and smelling (Mondada, 2018). Studies of VIP could lead to a respecification of sociality as being more than "just" visually organized. The visibility bias therefore also requires a respecification of the catego-ries we use to describe practices. I can talk about seeing something without using words like "see", and vice versa – I can talk about seeing something without being able to see (Ryle, 1949; Wittgenstein, 1953; Coulter & Parsons, 1990; Sharrock & Coulter, 1998; Due, 2016; Nishizaka, 2003, 2018). This is why it makes sense for VIP to use visual metaphors. The respecification required in studies of VIP there-fore entails the proposal that visual categories like *witness, observe, exhibit*, and *display* may be used – as is perhaps already the case – in more abstract ways to describe practices that are produced to be publicly recognizable and available for other sensations.

Finally, one could argue that learning about VIP's life worlds would require methods other than a visual methodology like video recordings. For that reason, most of the projects referenced in this book are combined with ethnography during the collection of empirical material. However, only the transcribed video material is reported and used as data for the analysis. The world is *de facto* ocularcentrically designed and organized, and therefore VIP adjust and orient to these circumstances by producing actions to be witnessable for others. In addition, VIP cannot report about what they do not see (or otherwise notice), but which is still relevant for the shared accomplishment of current activities (e.g. when a guide dog tacitly and unnoticeably leads them around an obstacle (Due & Lange, 2018a)). The poten-tial bias and problems associated with these studies are because the seeing, video recording researcher is analyzing a world that is unfamiliar to them, and therefore they are unable to truly take a member's perspective. What Garfinkel and Wieder (1992, p. 182) called the "unique adequacy requirement of methods" refers to how the researcher must be "vulgarly competent in the local production and reflexively natural accountability of the phenomenon of order he is 'studying'". On this basis, ethnomethodologists have explored in depth, and from the inside, phenomena such as learning to play the piano (Sudnow, 1978), doing advanced mathematics (Liv-ingston, 1986), understanding laboratory science (Lynch & Woolgar, 1988), living with impairment (Robillard, 1999) or going shopping (Hester & Francis, 2003). However, a member's perspective is not sufficient for, nor a guarantee of, a more truthful analysis. The idea that researchers must try to have – and exhibit in their analysis – a vulgar competence in "the local production of the phenomenon of order" (Garfinkel and Wieder, 1992), is not the same as maintaining any such local member's perspective throughout the analytical work.

Structure of the book

The chapters in this book provide analysis and findings from everyday activities in which VIP are engaged in managing obstacles and achieving locally important goals. However, this is not a handbook thematically organized around, for example

vision illness; education; sport and physical exercise; assistive technology; understanding cultural aesthetics; socio-emotional and sexual aspects of visual impairment; orientation, mobility, habitation, and rehabilitation; and sensory substitution or life phases (e.g. Ravenscroft, 2019). Although some of these ordinary topics will be touched upon, the book is organized around the kinds of topics that are most prevalent within the (small) community of EM/CA researchers working with VIP.

The first part consists of chapters dealing with practices for navigating in urban environments. Marc Relieu describes the production and reception of help proposals offered by pedestrians to visually impaired persons during a course in locomotion and orientation. Chloé Mondémé focuses on the resources for shared intelligibility in interaction between visually impaired persons and guide dogs in navigational tasks.

The second part of the book presents studies that deal with "inclusion/exclusion" from society. In her study of the roles and tasks of visually impaired team members in collaborative audio-description, Maija Hirvonen describes how blindness can be a form of expertise. Louise Lüchow describes how VIP recipient-design actions to be relevant for seeing colleagues in a workplace setting. These studies thus reveal how inclusion/exclusion are vague, even useless categories when conducting more dynamic and interactional work. Rikke Nielsen explores issues that arise when visually impaired persons use new technologies and encounter problems. It shows how VIP who otherwise seem to produce actions that display competence and skills in using technologies deal with being unable to solve technical issues. Jürgen Streeck and Rachel Chen describe "blindisms" in a study of visually impaired children interacting in school. They show how at a first glance a blind child appears to be ensconced in a cocoon spun by her own movements but that her behaviours are responsive to the social environment, and other interactional participants attune their own speech and movements to her rhythm. Rather than focusing on the individual child and assuming that her behaviour is socially disruptive, this chapter shows the importance of investigating how the interacting system accommodates and uses this rhythmic behaviour. This chapter differs a bit from the other chapters in this volume as it utilizes some semiotic terminology as part of the explanation model, which is more aligned with Goodwin's semiotics than ethnomethodology.

The third part zooms in on sensorial practices for touching objects and technologies. Brian L. Due, Rui Sakaida, Hiro Yuki Nisisawa, and Yasusuke Minami describe embodied explorations, with a focus on the multisensorial work of VIP aimed at recognizing object features in social interaction. Dirk vom Lehn focuses on practices of experiencing art via the hands and eyes of others, that is interaction between VIP and sighted guides in art museums.

The final part of the book consists of commentaries on the fundamental methodological consequences of the study of VIP for EM/CA. Lorenza Mondada describes how this book relates to studies of the senses and multisensoriality. She shows how vision is not always the most privileged and first-recognized sense for apprehending the world even for sighted persons and on the other hand, that the access to the world in general is most often not reduced to one sense but is built on multiple senses – or multisensoriality. While this book highlights the importance of considering

blind and visually impaired people when developing a critical understanding of a society that is *de facto* built on the primacy of vision, Mondada's chapter considers situations in which sighted people cannot rely on vision or encounter the limits of their vision. In the last chapter, Gitte Rasmussen focuses on how researching visually impaired people can contribute to a renewed and expanded multimodal understanding of the field characterized as "atypical interaction". The approach taken in this book is that visual impairment is an ongoing practical "accomplishment" that shows up as being relevant or irrelevant within unfolding situations in very different ways, which cannot be predefined as "atypical". The final discussion chapter by Rasmussen seeks to connect the study of visual impairment to the field or "program" of "atypical interaction" while at the same time using the findings from this book's chapters as a lever to move the programme of "atypical interaction". Whether the EM/CA approach to studying visual impairment should be related to the "program" of "atypical interaction" is an ongoing discussion, and Chapter 11 contains positions with which not all ethnomethodologists or conversation analysts would agree. This book thus also demonstrates that there are divergences not only within the wider literature but also within EM/CA itself. The EM/CA approach is not reducible to a unitary perspective.

Acknowledgements

Notes

1   The term visually impaired persons (in its short form, VIPs) is used throughout the book to describe people with blindness and low visual acuity (VA). This refers to the clarity of vision. VA is a person's ability to recognize small details with precision at a distance. Normal sight is termed *20/20 vision*. This means, that at 6 meters (or 20 feet), the eye is able to separate contours that are approximately 1.75 mm apart. Vision of 6/12 (or 20/40) corresponds to lower performance, while vision of 6/3 (20/10) corresponds to better performance. Vision impairment is legally defined as either severe impairment (6/60, 20/200) (1% or less than normal sight) or blindness (worse than 3/60) (WHO, 2017). An individual is considered legally blind if their central visual acuity is 20/200 or lower.

2   These entries are from the 2022 version: https://dictionary.cambridge.org.

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