

## **The balancing act: Framing gendered parental identities at dinnertime**

SHARI KENDALL

*Department of English  
Texas A&M University  
227 Blocker Building, TAMU 4227  
College Station, TX 77843-4227  
skendall@tamu.edu*

### ABSTRACT

A framing analysis of family interaction during dinnertime demonstrates that the mother and father linguistically create gendered identities through the number and types of discursive positions they take up within the frames they create and maintain. The mother accomplishes numerous tasks and activities by taking up multiple discursive positions within several interactional frames, whereas the father takes up fewer positions within fewer frames. Furthermore, the positions they take up are gendered, reflecting a sex-based division of labor, even though both parents work full-time outside the home. Through these gendered patterns of participation, the parents create gendered parental identities and negotiate their parental authority with their daughter and with each other. The attention to speech acts, footings, positioning, and framing reveals the intricate and dynamic details of interaction. Furthermore, this discourse model captures and explicates the process through which individuals create gendered identities as they enact and constitute other social identities. (Gender, family, framing, positioning, interactional sociolinguistics, discourse analysis)

### INTRODUCTION

Discourse analysts have shown that individuals constitute their various social roles – such as mother or daughter – through talk.<sup>1</sup> These roles are not static and immutable but may be realized in multiple ways. A social role is the sum total of numerous concrete interactions in which an individual constructs a particular identity within situations that realize that role. Mothers and fathers interacting with a child at dinnertime create parental identities through the language they use with the child. For example, the language actions they perform, and the manner in which they perform them, may be more or less authoritative or controlling. They may also choose particular types of utterances to create a personal connection with the child, such as asking personal questions about the child's day and/or by engaging the child in humorous banter. Questions and humor both create intimacy, but in different ways. Through these choices, women and men

constitute their roles as parents and claim particular attributes as belonging to these roles. In addition, as individuals create identities, they simultaneously constitute other social parameters such as gender, ethnicity, and class (Bucholtz 1999; Cameron 1997; Eckert & McConnell-Ginet 1992, 1999). Thus, women and men create not only a parental identity but a gendered one as well: “mother” and “father.” Individuals create gendered identities by drawing upon linguistic options that are socioculturally associated with gender as they perform the pragmatic and interactional functions of language through which they constitute a social role and, thus, constitute roles in a gendered way (Ochs 1992; Tannen 1996). It is the manner in which people constitute their identities when acting within a social role that is linked with gender – that is, being a “good mother,” being a “good manager” (Kendall 2003).

I use a framing approach in the research tradition of interactional sociolinguistics to explicate how the parents in one family create gendered parental identities as they interact with their ten-year-old daughter during four dinners the family recorded at home. My approach builds on framing as pioneered by Goffman 1974, 1981 and developed and advanced in discourse analysis by Tannen 1993, 1996. In addition, it draws on discursive positioning as developed by Davies & Harré 1990 and Langenhove & Harré 1999. I demonstrate that one way women and men constitute gendered identities in naturally occurring interaction is through the number and types of discursive positions they take up within the frames they create and maintain as they constitute other social identities, in this case, mother and father. In these dinners, the mother accomplishes numerous tasks and activities by taking up multiple discursive positions within several interactional frames, and she creates and maintains many of these frames simultaneously, whereas the father takes up fewer positions, and he creates and maintains the frames in which they occur one frame at a time. The types of positions the parents take up are gendered as well, reflecting a sex-based division of labor, even though both parents work full-time outside the home. Through these gendered patterns of participation, the parents create connection with their daughter and negotiate their parental authority with their daughter and with each other.

After presenting previous research on family discourse, I explain the theoretical background that unites framing and positioning. I then introduce the family that participated in the study and briefly present quantitative results showing how frequently the mother and father take up the positions and frames that constitute the dinnertime encounters. I then turn to the discourse analysis of the dinnertime interactions, presenting the positions the mother takes up most often and then describing the father’s participation. Finally, I explore how the parents create gendered parental identities through these positions and frames and consider the significance of these identities in terms of the challenges faced by dual-income couples at home. Thus, through a framing analysis, I identify some of the discursive positions that are available at dinnertime, and demonstrate how the distribution of these positions is socially significant to the enactment and

perpetuation of gendered social identities in the family, and the responsibilities and expectations these identities entail.

## GENDER IN FAMILY DISCOURSE AT DINNERTIME

Dinnertime has served as a lucrative site for the study of family discourse, in terms of both the functions parents perform and the interactional workings of power (e.g., Abu-Akel 2002; Blum-Kulka 1997; Kendall 2006; Ochs & Taylor 1992, 1995; Paugh 2005; Taylor 1995). This is not surprising since dinner is one of the few activities that brings many families together on a daily basis and, as such, serves as an important site for the constitution and maintenance of the family and familial roles. Feiring & Lewis (1987:379) observe that “[i]n the dinner setting the child is exposed to eating etiquette, manners, procedures as well as interaction between family members, all of which convey roles, rules and values of the family and culture.” Dinnertime is not restricted to eating dinner but is viewed by parents as an opportunity for family members to interact socially and for parents to teach children appropriate behavior.

In a cross-cultural study of families at dinnertime, Blum-Kulka (1997:9) identifies three layers of talk resulting from the nature of the dinnertime activity: “the instrumental business talk of having dinner”; “sociability” or “talking as an end in itself” (Simmel 1961:161); and “intentional socialization functions, ranging from table manners to socialization of family values.” Because dinnertime is a socializing event, family interaction varies based on class, cultural background, and other social parameters; for example, “[f]amilies may vary individually, by class or by culture,” in how they balance “dinner as an activity and dinner as a social, conversational event” (35). However, despite such variations, those studies comparing the verbal functions performed by mothers and fathers at dinnertime find that mothers tend to fulfill more dinner-related, sociable, and socialization functions. Mothers in American families serve as “the primary director of the mealtime activities in terms of the providing-food function” (Feiring & Lewis 1987:382). They perform more actions within the “social function” as well (Lewis & Feiring 1982): They talk more, are addressed more, and maintain “a connection between the father and children by talking about and eliciting information exchange on the activities of family members” (Feiring & Lewis 1987:382). Also in American families, mothers respond to children more frequently than fathers do, which results in a pattern in which mothers talk significantly more (Perlmann 1984). In Swedish, Finnish, and Finnish-Swedish families, mothers are “most active in controlling topic development” (Tryggvason 2004:225). A study of narratives and explanatory sequences in American families shows that mothers contribute the majority of talk, and fathers are “relatively infrequent speakers” (Beals & Snow 1994:335). Regarding the socialization function, Brumark 2004 finds that mothers in Swedish families produce more “meta-pragmatic comments,” defined by

Blum-Kulka (1990:278) as comments made “to sanction a perceived lack of politeness, to encourage ‘proper’ behavior and to prompt the use of politeness formulae.” Also in Swedish families, mothers provided more than 50% of comments on “ethical and moral matters” compared to fathers and children (De Geer 2004:1708).

Like these earlier studies, I find that the mother participates more and performs more dinner-related, sociable, and socialization functions at dinnertime. However, the framing analysis reveals more precisely and more fully what mothers’ participation really consists of, and how deeply labor-intensive it is. I identify other functions of talk, including those occurring within caregiving and managerial frames, and I demonstrate that the mother performs multiple functions simultaneously by maintaining multiple frames. In addition, I consider these functions within a model of discourse that elucidates how the performance of these functions contributes to the discursive creation of parental and gendered identities.

Dinnertime has also provided a venue for exploring gendered power dynamics within the family (Blum-Kulka 1997; Ervin-Tripp, O’Connor & Rosenberg 1984; Ochs & Taylor 1992, 1995; Varenne 1992; Watts 1991). In their study of narrative roles in American families, Ochs & Taylor 1995 find that mothers tend to take up the powerful role of narrative “introducer” who either initiates a narrative herself or elicits a narrative from another family member. Fathers tend to take up and/or be positioned as the more powerful “problematizer,” the person who “renders an action, condition, thought, or feeling of a protagonist” (in the past), or someone’s comments as a co-narrator (in the present), as “problematic, or possibly so” (107). They conclude that the narrative practices of all the family members set the father up to judge the actions of others, contributing to a “‘Father knows best’ dynamic” that is often thought to be obsolete in contemporary families (101).

Ochs & Taylor’s analysis of narrative roles at dinnertime is particularly illuminating in terms of power in the family. However, the analysis focuses on only one type of talk (narrative) that occurs during dinnertime, raising the question of whether there are other roles that family members assume and other ways in which parents linguistically take up powerful roles at dinnertime. In my analysis, I address both of these questions and consider the interplay of power (as control or hierarchy) and solidarity (as connection or intimacy) as well. Tannen (2003:50) argues that the focus on power in research on family discourse comes at the expense of the equally influential dimension of connection, even though family relationships are both “intensely hierarchical and intensely connected.” Verbal actions function as both “power maneuvers” and “connection maneuvers” simultaneously (51). In my analysis, I distinguish the positions the parents take up vis-à-vis their child based on the relative balance of connection and control that the parent establishes by taking up that position. The mother takes up positions that reflect and realize the intimacy and hierar-

chy of the parent/child relationship in relatively equal measure. She also takes up those positions most heavily weighted on the control dimension. These powerful positions are not uncontested by the father, however. He takes up a position in which he simultaneously creates connection with their daughter but undercuts the mother's parental authority. Through the positions they take up (and do not take up), the parents negotiate authority and connection and create gendered parental identities as well.

## DISCOURSE MODEL FOR CREATING GENDERED IDENTITIES

Women and men create gendered identities by using discursive strategies that index sociocultural expectations associated with gender as they accomplish other tasks (e.g., Ochs 1992; Tannen 1996). Eckert & McConnell-Ginet (1992:93) observe that "[g]ender can be thought of as a sex-based way of experiencing other social attributes like class, ethnicity, or age." Cameron (1997:33) explains that "[b]eing a woman or a man . . . is about living one's other social identities (such as racial, ethnic, regional, subcultural) in a particular and gendered way." Consequently, gender must be examined in conjunction with some other social identity – such as "parent." Furthermore, the focus must be on the language the individual uses to perform relevant actions and activities. Tannen (1996:201) borrows Bateson's 1979 concept of "the corner of the eye" to explain that gender is best understood when "some other aspect of the world is the object of direct focus." A framing analysis accomplishes this theoretical and methodological mandate by focusing on the manner in which participants use language to accomplish various goals as they act in socially definable capacities, such as mother or father. After identifying how the participants are framing the interaction, it is then possible to consider the "difference gender makes" (Cameron 1992:13).

A framing approach focuses on how participants' frames – their understandings of "what it is that is going on" (Goffman 1974:10) – emerge and are constituted by verbal and nonverbal interaction. These understandings or interpretations entail expectations about how each individual will participate in the interaction, what types of linguistic register each will use, and what tends to happen in these types of interactions (Drew & Heritage 1992). Goffman 1981 introduced "footing" to explain how participants negotiate interpersonal relationships, or alignments, as they dynamically frame an interaction. Footings are "the alignment we take up to ourselves and the others present as expressed in the way we manage the production or reception of an utterance" (128). He suggests that a shift in footing involves "an alteration in the social capacities in which the persons present claim to be active," "a change of tone" constituted by linguistic features such as "pitch, volume, rhythm, stress, tonal quality," and, often, a change in "participation status," such as "addressed recipient" and "unaddressed recipient," distinguished by whom the current speaker singles out as the target of an utterance in multiparty talk (137).

Footings may be held across several turns at talk, or one footing may be embedded in another when an individual shifts temporarily “with the understanding that it will almost immediately be reengaged” (155). In multiparty talk, there may be a “dominant state of talk” or an individual may shift among footings and frames to speak with different classes of participants (156). To illustrate the latter, Goffman cites Tannen & Wallat’s (1982, then forthcoming) study of a pediatrician examining a cerebral palsied child in the mother’s presence in an examination/interview conducted at a Child Development Center. Tannen & Wallat 1993 explain how the pediatrician shifts among three frames to interact with four parties. Each frame consists of functions of talk (e.g., entertaining, explaining), linguistic register, and the footings the pediatrician takes up with respect to the four other parties (she addresses, ignores, or puts “on hold” the child, the mother, the video crew, and the medical residents who will view the recording at a later date) (65). The three frames are as follows. In a social encounter frame, the pediatrician ignores the video crew, establishes rapport with the mother in a conversational register, and entertains the child in “motherese.” In an examination frame, the pediatrician ignores the mother, examines the child, makes sure the video crew is ready, and explains what she is doing for the residents, speaking in a “reporting register” characterized by flat intonation and a clipped style. Finally, in a consultation frame, the pediatrician answers the mother’s questions in a conversational register, keeps the child “on hold,” and ignores the video crew and the residents.

Goffman (1981:156), commenting on the pediatrician in Tannen & Wallat’s study, notes “the capacity of a dexterous speaker to jump back and forth, keeping different circles in play.” However, Tannen & Wallat 1993 suggest that in the examination/interview, the pediatrician is burdened by the need to balance multiple, and oftentimes conflicting, frames; for example, answering the mother’s questions in the consultation frame interrupts the examination sequence, and reporting medical information to the video audience “may upset the mother, necessitating more explanation in the consultation frame” (67). They note that the pediatrician was aware of the difficulty she had in examining the child in the mother’s presence and, upon hearing their analysis, “was pleased to see a theoretical basis for what she had instinctively sensed” (71). Similarly, a framing analysis of dinnertime interaction reveals that the mother in the current study bears a heavy interactional load through the number of frames she creates and sustains, and the need to juggle several frames simultaneously, providing one reason why many women feel that home is sometimes more exhausting than work (Hochschild 1997).

Positioning has been recognized as being central to the creation of identities. In their “framework for the analysis of identity as produced in linguistic interaction,” Bucholtz & Hall (2005:586) define identity as “the social positioning of self and other.” I use the concept of positioning to account for the “social capacities” that individuals take up within frames as part of the process through which

individuals discursively create identities. Davies & Harré (1990:47) introduce positioning as the interactional process through which individuals discursively produce “a diversity of selves.” At each moment in an encounter, participants take up, resist, and assign positions by locating self and other in relation to values, qualities, and social categories, as these social constructs are simultaneously constituted by interaction. To characterize social capacities, I focus on one of the ways participants position self and other: by speaking and/or conducting themselves in a manner associated with one of the roles that are “recognisably allocated to people” within social structures without necessarily taking up that role (Davies & Harré 1990:52). In other words, one can speak in a way that evokes how a teacher might speak, thus positioning the self as Teacher and the other as Student without actually being a teacher or student. These positions reflect, index, and constitute “social category formations” (e.g., “father/daughter,” “player/referee/spectator”), and occur through “typification extension,” wherein “we think, metaphorically of a person scanning their past experience for a concrete occasion on which to build an interpretation of the position they have been assigned . . . until they encounter the record of a typified occasion such as “nurse/patient” (52).

In my model, positions are mutually constitutive components of frames. Participants create frames by taking up and making certain positions available to others; and, conversely, participants make certain positions available through the frames they create and maintain. In this framing/positioning model, one might say that the pediatrician in Tannen & Wallat’s (1993) study takes up the following hypothetical positions within the frames: She shifts between two positions, Socializer and Consultant, with the mother; she assumes two positions simultaneously, Examiner/Entertainer, with the child; and she takes up one position with each of the remaining two parties – Technical Manager with the video crew and Reporter for the medical residents. The labels for these hypothetical positions, and for the positions in the current study, attempt to represent the social capacity in which the speaker is acting by selecting a social category formation that best typifies how participants speak when taking up that position.

#### PARTICIPANTS AND METHOD

The analysis presented in this article is part of a larger research study that explores the relations among work, family, gender and talk by examining the linguistic interaction of a woman at work and at home. The mother in this family, Elaine, volunteered to participate in the study in response to a request for volunteers that I sent via e-mail at her workplace, a large government institution in the Washington, DC area. Elaine and her husband, Mark, both in their forties, are white, heterosexual, and middle-class. Their daughter, Beth, was ten years old. Both parents work full-time outside the home. For the study, Elaine carried a tape recorder with her for a week at work. During this same work week, she

tape-recorded her family at home during dinnertime each week night, yielding four dinnertime encounters that serve as the basis for this analysis.

The case study method does not provide a statistical basis for generalizing. To understand the strengths of the case study, it is necessary to consider the “potential for learning” instead of, or in addition to, the “criterion of ‘representativeness’” (Stake 1994:243). Like some anthropological inquiries, the goal of discourse analysis is to “understand the data, rather than to prove or disprove preformulated hypotheses or to create general predictive models” (Johnstone 1996:24). Nevertheless, as Varenne (1992:127) observes, by examining local patterns in one family, the analyst can “discern echoes of patterns that are far from local.” Each case study occurs at the intersection of social and historical processes which make that case possible in a particular time and place.

Initially, I was interested in comparing how the woman in this family constitutes her parental authority at home and her managerial authority at work (Kendall 2003). Therefore, I first identified the mother’s (and later the father’s) verbal “control acts” based on Ervin-Tripp, Guo, & Lampert’s (1990:308) definition as “attempts to produce change in the actions of others,” which encompasses prohibitions, invitations, offers, and directives (orders, suggestions, requests, requests for information). In order to account for the linguistic form of each act, it was necessary to identify its function. However, I found that the function alone was not sufficient; therefore, I performed a framing and positioning analysis to more fully describe the context of each act, and found that this elaborated understanding of context accounted for the form of each act (Kendall 2003). Moreover, for the dinnertime encounters, it revealed much more about the discursive creation of gendered parental identities, as I demonstrate in this article.

The following section describes the discursive structure of the dinnertime encounter, including the frames and positions that occur during these dinners. All but one position is a “controlling position” that is constituted in whole or in part by control acts. These positions account for all the parent–child verbal interaction in the four dinners, with the exception of the conversational frame. In the interest of space, I have restricted the number of positions in the conversational frame to the controlling positions plus one non-controlling position, the Comedian, which is necessary to account for the father’s participation at dinnertime.

#### DISCURSIVE STRUCTURE OF THE DINNERTIME ENCOUNTER

From beginning to end, dinnertime encounters are complex interactions. In these dinner encounters, there are three structural elements that together account for “what is going on” at dinnertime, providing the interactional contexts in which participants’ utterances are produced and interpreted. The first, and highest, level is the dinnertime encounter, which, in these dinners, begins with food preparation and ends when family members leave the table and begin non-dinner-related activities. The second level is the sequence of events, or phases:



DINNER FRAME	CAREGIVING FRAME	SOCIALIZATION FRAME	MANAGERIAL FRAME	CONVERSATIONAL FRAME
Head Chef	Assistant	Etiquette Monitor	Planner	Journalist
Host	Teacher	Behavior Monitor	Social Secretary	Moral Guardian
Director of Cleanup	Caretaker	Language Monitor		Facilitator Comedian

FIGURE 1: Frames and positions at dinnertime.

a preparing phase in which family members prepare dinner and dish up their food, an eating phase in which family members eat and chat at the dinner table, and a post-eating phase in which family members chat, clean up, and begin other activities. The third level is interactional framing: what is taking place discursively at a given moment. One or both parents linguistically create and maintain five interactional frames during these dinners, accounting for all the parent–child interaction: dinner, caregiving, socialization, conversational, and managerial.<sup>2</sup>

Each frame is constituted by, and makes available, one or more discursive positions. In the DINNER FRAME, parents discursively take up the positions of Head Chef (directing the preparation and service of food), Host (offering food to other family members as they eat), and Director of Cleanup<sup>3</sup> (directing cleanup). In the CAREGIVING FRAME, parents attend to children’s needs at dinnertime by taking up the positions of Assistant (assisting children with dinner), Teacher (teaching children dinnertime skills), and Caretaker (attending to children’s other needs). In the SOCIALIZATION FRAME, parents produce explicit injunctions to behave and speak in appropriate ways by taking up the positions of Etiquette Monitor<sup>4</sup> (enforcing dinnertime rituals), Behavior Monitor (monitoring nonverbal behavior), and Language Monitor<sup>5</sup> (monitoring language). In the MANAGERIAL FRAME, parents manage children’s social activities by taking up the positions of Social Secretary (managing children’s schedules) and Planner (managing children’s social lives). Finally, in the CONVERSATIONAL FRAME, parents take up the positions of Journalist (requesting the daily news), Moral Guardian (assessing children’s past actions), Facilitator (introducing conversational topics), and one position that does not include control acts: the Comedian (engaging in humor). The five frames and fifteen positions are presented in Figure 1.

Positions are characterized by, first, the functions of talk the speaker performs when taking up that position, delineated as speech acts (Austin 1962) and further classified based on Searle’s (1979) categorization into five classes. Directives are attempts “by the speaker to get the hearer to do something” (e.g., order, request, suggest, instruct, question) (Searle 1979:13); representatives (or

assertives [viii, n. 1]) commit the speaker to “something’s being the case, to the truth of the expressed proposition” (e.g., explain, conclude, assert) (12); commissives commit the speaker to do “some future course of action” for the hearer (e.g., offer, promise, threaten) (14); expressives express a “psychological state” (e.g., praise, thank, deplore) (15); and declarations bring about the propositional content “solely in virtue of the fact that the declaration has been successfully performed” (e.g., appoint, fire) (16).

Second, positions are characterized by linguistic registers based in part on the types of speech acts and the manner in which these acts are linguistically realized. For example, some positions are constituted by relatively short imperatives whereas others consist primarily of more conversational contributions. Third, positions are differentiated by footings in terms of (i) the participant structure (addressed and unaddressed recipients), (ii) the social capacities in which the speaker is currently acting, and (iii) the alignment a participant creates between self and other, as characterized by the power dimension, which ranges along a continuum from hierarchy to equality and is negotiated through control, and the solidarity dimension, ranging from intimacy to distance. Finally, positions vary based on their relation to surrounding talk. Some are realized by footings, or rekeyings, that are held across several turns of talk, some are embedded within others as momentary shifts, and others occur as both. Humor is conveyed by “rekeying” a frame (Goffman 1974) through linguistic and paralinguistic features such as “laughter particles,” which “index that a text is to be interpreted as humorous” (Kotthoff 2006:7).

After briefly presenting the quantitative distribution of the positions and frames, I turn to a discourse analysis describing the fourteen controlling positions Elaine takes up, and then consider Mark’s participation. I demonstrate that Elaine and Mark create gendered parental identities through the positions they repeatedly take up within the five frames based on the number and types of positions they take up, and whether they take up multiple positions. In addition, I demonstrate that Elaine and Mark create connection with their daughter and negotiate their own and the other parent’s authority through these positions as well.

#### DISTRIBUTION OF POSITIONS AND FRAMES

In the four dinnertime encounters, Elaine takes up eight of the fifteen positions exclusively: the Head Chef; Caretaker; Etiquette, Language, and Behavior Monitors; Social Secretary; Facilitator; and Moral Guardian. In addition, she takes up six positions a greater percentage of time than Mark does: Director of Cleanup (75%), Host (93%), Assistant (91%), Teacher (92%), Planner (88%), and Journalist (75%). Mark takes up one position almost exclusively: Comedian (91%). The percentage of times a position is taken up by the mother is represented by shading in Figure 2.

THE BALANCING ACT

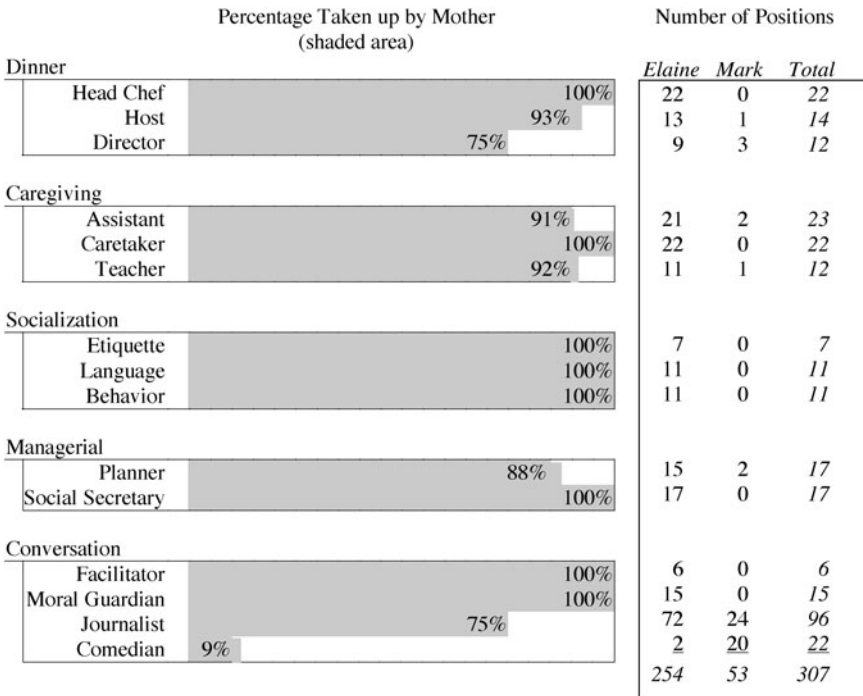


FIGURE 2: Distribution of positions.

Based on the distribution of positions presented in Figure 2, it is clear that Elaine takes up more positions than Mark; Elaine takes up all fifteen positions, and Mark takes up seven of these positions, four of these only minimally: Host (7%), Assistant (9%), Teacher (8%), and Planner (12%). The positions he takes up a noteworthy number of times are the Director of Cleanup (25%), Journalist (25%), and Comedian (91%). Figure 2 also shows that Elaine participates more in all the frames, revealing that she is the person primarily responsible for dinner, conversation, and appropriate behavior – and for their daughter Beth as well (caretaking and managerial frames).

MOTHER AT DINNERTIME: THE BALANCING ACT

*Dinner frame*

In the preparing phase of the dinnertime encounter, Elaine takes up the position of Head Chef in the dinner frame by directing Beth’s (and Mark’s) actions as she prepares dinner and gets the food to the table. One evening, Elaine was preparing dinner while Mark picked Beth up from her horseback-riding lesson. Ex-

cerpt (1) occurs shortly after they returned. Elaine directs Beth to help her move food to the table (dinner frame) as Mark and Beth tell her about Beth's lesson (conversational frame). The turns in which Elaine takes up the position of Head Chef are indicated by arrows.<sup>6</sup>

## (1) HEAD CHEF

- 1 Beth: Mom you know what John said?  
 2 He said even if you're on the correct ( ) you're on the wrong diagonal.  
 3 You can change it.  
 4 Mark: Oh yeah he says – he said to change 'em when you think you're on the wrong one.  
 5 Elaine: → Beth help me carry this over.  
 6 Mark: And that he you know without him asking and telling him all this that he wants you to –  
 7 Elaine: → And then you can bring the plate over to Daddy.  
 8 Mark: uh keep yourself on the right diagonal by changing when you need to.  
 9 Beth: Hopefully tomorrow I'll get it right.

Although Mark and Beth are interacting within the conversational frame, Elaine verbally maintains the position of Head Chef by telling Beth how to assist her (lines 5, 7). The Head Chef is constituted by orders, requests, and instructions (directives). By taking up this position, Elaine claims the authority to decide what needs to be done and to tell the others what to do. However, this authority is gained through the responsibility for preparing dinner; that is, whoever is cooking would likely take up this position. This responsibility falls to Elaine exclusively during these four dinners, which, she reported later, is generally the case.

As the family eats dinner, their conversation is punctuated by Elaine's offerings of food, which are neatly inserted into (apparent) topic closings. In excerpt (2), the family members are chatting about one of Elaine's coworkers and, when there is a pause in the conversation, Elaine offers Beth and Mark more spaghetti, taking up the position of Host:

## (2) Host

- 1 Elaine: Richard? . I think he's your age.  
 2 Mark: Hm. My age?  
 3 Elaine: Mhm.  
 4 Mark: Oh. Shee, I thought he was younger.  
 5 Elaine: Uh uh.  
 6 Mark: Hm.  
 7 . . . .  
 8 Elaine: → More spaghetti?  
 9 ..  
 10 Mark: No wonder he's taking Motrin. (chuckles)

Elaine's offer occurs in the dinner frame and, as in excerpt (1) above, the surrounding talk occurs in the conversational frame. Although this position is

constituted by offers, a commissive speech act that Ervin-Tripp et al. 1990 classify as a controlling act, it does not claim parental authority because the Host does not direct the actions of others. However, by taking up this position, Elaine claims responsibility for dinner as a whole and for the welfare of the others, as one would expect of a host at a dinner party.

When the family has finished eating, they remain at the dinner table and chat and then begin to clean up (post-eating phase). The parent responsible for cleaning up takes up the position of Director of Cleanup by telling the others what to do and/or by acting as the source of authority. Excerpt (3) occurs one evening after Beth offered to do the dishes while Elaine and Mark remained at the dinner table. This example illustrates how Elaine takes up the position of Director of Cleanup and how she shifts between two positions and frames (indicated by subheadings).

(3) DIRECTOR OF CLEANUP

DIRECTOR (DINNER FRAME)

- 1 Beth: Um, do you want me to, like, to just wash that off?
- 2 I can do [ ( ).
- 3 Elaine: → [ Sure if you want to . . .
- 4 Stack it over there for the dishwasher. . . . .

CONVERSATIONAL FRAME

- 5 Mark: Tell you what the name of that movie is . *Vision Quest*.
- 6 I was telling you about ( ).
- 7 Elaine: Are you sure that's the name of the movie?
- 8 Mark: Matthew Mo- Modine I think.
- 9 I don't remember who the girl was. .
- 10 You don't remember that movie?
- 11 Elaine: Uh uh.
- 12 Mark: About the . . wrestler . kid.
- 13 Elaine: No, we're gonna have to go into um
- 14 Mark: In high school?
- 15 Elaine: We're near a Blockbuster.

DIRECTOR (DINNER FRAME)

- 16 Beth: I know it was just used but . does that look clean?
- 17 Elaine: → Well then run it through the dishwasher but-
- 18 Yeah it looks clean but-
- 19 Beth: Where should I put it?
- 20 Elaine: → Just leave- leave it over there.
- 21 You can put it in- in the dishwasher.
- 22 If you . . . want. . . . .
- 23 Thanks.
- 24 Beth: In there or (in the washer)?
- 25 Elaine: → No. . . . .

CONVERSATIONAL FRAME

- 26 Mark: You remember in that movie they were- the kid was trying to get down to the weight . so that he could wrestle that guy.
- 27 ((Mark's description of the movie omitted.))
- 28 Elaine: Mm mm. ((negative))
- 29 Mark: You don't remember that?
- 30 Elaine: No.

Elaine takes up the position of Director of Cleanup to answer Beth's questions (lines 1–4, 16–25), and she participates in the conversational frame by responding to Mark as he talks about a movie (lines 5–15, 26–30). Thus, she balances the dinner and sociability functions of dinnertime as she shifts between addressed recipients, "keeping different circles in play" (Goffman 1981:156). The co-occurrence of both interactions requires Elaine to shift between frames, and, more importantly, she must attend to both frames simultaneously even when one is active and the other is "on hold." Although this type of shifting is not uncommon in multiparty talk, only Elaine engages in this type of balancing act during these dinners.

Parents taking up the position of Director of Cleanup, which is constituted by directives, claim the authority to tell others what to do and/or how a task should be accomplished. Although Mark takes up this position one evening when he is responsible for cleaning up (25%), Elaine takes up this position in all remaining instances, including those in which Beth has assumed responsibility.

### *Caregiving frame*

When dinner is nearly ready, Elaine continues to prepare dinner and act as Head Chef in the dinner frame by directing Mark and Beth in preparing and serving the food. She then begins to help Beth prepare her plate by taking up the position of Assistant in the caregiving frame. In (4), she assists Beth in preparing a taco.

#### (4) ASSISTANT

- |   |         |  |
|---|---------|--|
| 1 | Elaine: | Okay, here's the spoon for your –                    |
| 2 |         | Here's your beans, go ahead and scoop that in.       |
| 3 |         | You want me to put the rice and corn on . . . first? |
| 4 |         | Or after you put your beans.                         |

Elaine takes up and maintains the Assistant position by giving Beth instructions for preparing her food (lines 1–2) and by requesting information to determine Beth's preferences (lines 3–4). While Elaine assists Beth, Mark prepares his own plate; not surprisingly, then, Elaine takes up the Assistant position most frequently (91%). This position occurs as an extended activity at the end of the preparing phase and recurs periodically as a momentary shift in footing during the eating phase (see excerpts 7 and 16 below). It reflects and constitutes both the hierarchy and intimacy of the parent–child relationship because, by taking up this position, parents claim the authority to direct the child's actions but render assistance and care as well.

During the eating phase, Elaine takes up the position of Teacher in a caregiving frame when she instructs Beth how to do a task rather than assisting her directly. As the Assistant in excerpt (4) above, Elaine assists Beth in making a soft taco; in 5, which occurs later on the same evening, Elaine takes up the position of Teacher by teaching Beth how to assemble a second soft taco herself:

(5) TEACHER

- 1 Elaine: Okay, just kind of flip it over.
- 2           Keep it compact...
- 3           That's it. [Roll, roll.]
- 4 Beth:           [(Shoot.)
- 5 Elaine: Okay, tuck that under.
- 6           <increasing emphasis> You got it. You've got it. You've got it!
- 7           You did it yourself!
- 8           Great!

Instead of making the soft taco for Beth, Elaine instructs her how to do it step by step, using directives (lines 1–3, 5) and then praising her enthusiastically (lines 6–8). By taking up this position (92%), Elaine assumes the authority to tell the child how to accomplish a task, reflecting the parent–child hierarchy; but its focus on self-accomplishment, as evidenced by praise (expressives), makes this position function as a connection maneuver as well.

In addition to assisting Beth with her food and teaching her dinnertime skills, Elaine takes up a more general parental position in the caregiving frame throughout all phases of dinnertime: the Caretaker, when she tells Beth to do something that is for Beth's own good. For example, when Elaine is preparing dinner, she makes sure that Beth is ready:

(6) CARETAKER

- 1 Elaine: Wash your hands.

During these dinners, Elaine takes up the Caretaker position exclusively. Like the other positions in the caregiving frame, this position entails both intimacy and hierarchy, but it is more heavily weighted on the dimension of control because the parent does not offer aid. This distinction is reflected in language structure because it is realized primarily by orders, whereas the Assistant and Teacher are also realized by instructions and praise.

*Socialization frame*

During the dinner encounters, parents not only attend to dinner (dinner frame) and their children's needs (caregiving frame), but also explicitly monitor children's behavior and enforce dinnertime etiquette and rituals. These verbal acts occur within the third frame at dinnertime: the socialization frame. Elaine takes up the first position in this frame, the Etiquette Monitor, when she asks Beth to say the religious blessing:

(7) ETIQUETTE MONITOR

- 1 Elaine: → Do you want to say the blessing real quick?
- 2 Beth:           Okay.
- 3 ...
- 4 Elaine:           After you finish chewing that carrot? (chuckles)
- 5 .....
- 6           Do you want me to butter that for you? ((ASSISTANT POSITION))
- 7 Beth:           <chanting> God is great, God is good, and I thank him for our food.

- 8 By his hands, we are all fed.  
9 Thank the Lord for our daily bread. A:men.)

Through this position, Elaine both shapes Beth's expected behavior and structures the dinnertime encounters by formally initiating the eating phase and, later, formally closing the dinnertime encounter by reminding Beth, *Ask to be excused*. Since Elaine takes this position up exclusively, she assumes the authority to determine which rituals will be enforced.

Elaine takes up the second position, the Behavior Monitor, throughout all phases of dinnertime as she monitors and corrects Beth's nonverbal behavior. In (8), Elaine and Mark are engaged in a disagreement about the owner of the horseback riding establishment when Elaine notices that Beth is rummaging through a drawer in the dining room.

(8) BEHAVIOR MONITOR

- 1 Elaine: She's the MANager.  
2 Mark: Well I SAID that –  
3 I said I think [it's either a woman who owns it –  
4 Elaine: [(to Beth)) Whatcha trying to get?  
5 Beth: A brush. They're not in here.  
6 Elaine: → Well please don't dig around there without asking.  
7 Beth: Sorry. Oh here it is.

Elaine asks Beth what she is looking for and, following Beth's response, takes up the position of Behavior Monitor by reprimanding her for going through the drawer *without asking* (line 6). Elaine constitutes the Behavior Monitor, a controlling position that emphasizes the parent-child hierarchy, through directives in the form of reprimands for past behavior, commands and requests for present behavior, and injunctions on future behavior. By exclusively taking up this position, Elaine claims the authority to monitor Beth's behavior and decide which actions are and are not appropriate.

Once the family has settled in at the dinner table to eat and talk conversationally, Elaine begins to monitor Beth's language as well, taking up the position of Language Monitor throughout the eating and post-eating phases. In (9), the family is talking about the tomatoes that Mark and Beth picked from the garden:

(9) LANGUAGE MONITOR

- 1 Elaine: These are very tasty tomatoes.  
2 Mark: Mhm.  
3 Beth: It's only because deer licked all over them.  
4 Elaine: Deer licked all over them?  
5 Mark, you wanna –  
6 Beth: Yeah we've got deer poop out –  
7 [These are –  
8 Elaine: → [Hey! Excuse me, let's not use that language!  
9 Beth: Sorry.  
10 Elaine: → It would be droppings, thank you.  
11 Beth: Deer droppings.



Elaine objects to Beth's phrase *deer poop* when discussing the tomatoes from the garden, taking up the position of Language Monitor, before Beth can finish what she is saying, and then by identifying the acceptable choice (lines 8, 10). The Language Monitor is a controlling position constituted by directives in the form of reprimands and injunctions. By exclusively taking up this position, Elaine claims the authority to determine how language is used at the dinner table.

### *Conversational frame*

To many families, conversational interaction is as important a function at dinnertime as eating dinner itself. Elaine ushers in the conversational frame at the beginning of the eating phase by taking up the position of Facilitator. In (10), which occurs immediately after the blessing on the first evening, Elaine introduces two significant things that happened to her that day but concern the other family members as well.

(10) FACILITATOR

- 1 Elaine: → We got a um . . . .  
 2 Beth: → E-mail?  
 3 Elaine: → e-mail from Melanie and I sent her a little one,  
 4 it's very very short .  
 5 if anybody wants to . . . read it?  
 6 Beth: → I'll read your short one.  
 7 Elaine: → And I heard all about Richard's trip and it sounds good!

The two topics Elaine introduces structure the bulk of the talk on this evening: They received an e-mail from a friend (lines 1, 3), and Elaine's coworker told her about his backpacking trip through Yosemite National Park (line 7). Since the family members were in the process of planning a vacation, they were all interested in hearing about the experience. Throughout this evening, Elaine introduced a new topic whenever the conversation lagged. The maintenance of social interaction at dinnertime may reflect the finding that women are expected to "provide emotional sustenance as well as nutritional sustenance at family meals" (Lorber 1994:182). It also reflects the early finding in gender and language research that women tend to provide more overt conversational support than men in mixed-sex interactions (DeFrancisco 1991; Fishman 1983; Tannen 1990; Zimmerman & West 1975). Like the Host, the individual taking up this position claims responsibility for family members' welfare but does not exert parental control.

As they interact socially at dinnertime, both Elaine and Mark take up the position of Journalist by asking questions about Beth's day. Although Mark also takes up this position (25%), there are some crucial differences. Elaine initiates 20 stretches of news-telling whereas Mark initiates only one; in other words, Elaine almost exclusively takes up the narrative role of "introducer" (Ochs & Taylor 1992, 1995). In addition, Elaine typically asks Beth several questions about a topic, and then Mark contributes one or two questions, indicating that

she is steering these discussions. In many stretches of news-telling, Mark does not verbally participate. In (11), initiated by Beth, Elaine asks several questions and then Mark contributes a question.

## (11) JOURNALIST

- 1 Beth: I was playing poker with Janet last night.  
 2 Elaine: → Does Janet know how to play?  
 3 Beth: Mhm, her brother taught her.  
 4 Elaine: → Is it just she and her brother?  
 5 Beth: Uh huh.  
 6 Elaine: → Is he older?  
 7 Beth: Mhm.  
 8 Elaine: → She goes away to some camp in New York . . . And that's where she jumps?  
 9 Beth: (giggles)  
 10 Elaine: She's at that place where she took lessons over . . . by her house with Ann.  
 11 Mark: → What was the name of it?

Both parents create connection with Beth by asking her questions, conveying a metamessage of care by showing interest in the details of her life (Tannen 1990). However, by almost exclusively initiating these question–answer sequences, Elaine facilitates this exchange of information and, thus, contributes more heavily to maintaining a connection between Elaine and Beth, and between Mark and Beth as well. Thus, like the mothers observed in previous studies (Beals & Snow 1994; Lewis & Feiring 1982), the mother facilitates a connection between father and child. The Journalist also stems from and re-creates parental authority because parents determine what aspects of children's lives will be held up for parental scrutiny (Ochs & Taylor 1995). When children's past actions come into question, parents take up the next position: the Moral Guardian.

Parents take up the position of Moral Guardian when they explicitly judge the appropriateness of a child's behavior in the past. Elaine takes up this position exclusively. An extended instance occurs one evening because another parent had told Elaine that Beth threw water on a girl. The dialogue that ensues is what Beck & Wood (1993:341) describe as a "situation of accountability," in which parents act as "moral guardians" to deal with situations "involving any departure 'from what we consider ordinary expectable or approvable behavior.'" Elaine begins the discussion by asking Beth what occurred:

## (12) MORAL GUARDIAN

- 1 Elaine: → Now what happened with Samantha, and where were you, what else was going on while this happened?  
 ( ) you guys or what.  
 2 Somewhere where you were drinking water.  
 3 Beth: The cafeteria.  
 4 Elaine: At lunch time or,  
 5 Beth: ( ).  
 6 Elaine: Okay.

- 7                   And Samantha was standing near you or something, or the kids started off saying 'water', or what happened.
- 8 Beth:           It – She was sitting down.
- 9 Elaine:         Mhm.
- 10 Beth:          When she came in she sat down, and we were playing cats cradle, right? And then she stole my water cap when I went to go and get a drink of water.
- 11 Elaine:         Oh as a jokey thing.
- 12 Beth:          No. She wouldn't give it back.

After Beth explains, Elaine introduces what Beck & Wood (1993:353) describe as a “definitive interpretation” of the story, assuming the role of judge when she interprets the frame of the activity as play: *Oh as a jokey thing* (line 11). Beth disagrees with Elaine’s interpretation (line 12), but they soon drop the topic when Elaine is satisfied that Beth didn’t do anything to provoke the other girl. The Moral Guardian is a hybrid position that combines the information-seeking questions of the Journalist and the evaluative judgments of the socialization frame. Like the Journalist, it is both a controlling and connecting maneuver; however, like the Behavior and Language Monitors, the evaluative component emphasizes the parent–child hierarchy. Later in the same conversation, it is this evaluative component of these questions that Beth responds to and Elaine denies:

## (13) MORAL GUARDIAN

- 1 Beth:       Stop giving me grief about it.
- 2 Elaine:      I'm not giving you grief.
- 3 Beth:       Yeah you are.

In these dinners, Elaine exclusively takes up this position, claiming the authority to evaluate Beth’s actions.

*Managerial frame*

During these dinners, Elaine handles other responsibilities in addition to dinner-related tasks (dinner frame), talking socially (conversational frame), assisting and teaching Beth (caregiving frame), and monitoring Beth’s behavior (socialization frame). Some of these tasks occur in a managerial frame that co-occurs with the post-eating phase. Elaine takes up the first position in this frame, the Planner, when she helps Beth organize and plan her social life. For example, one evening Beth had already agreed to spend the following Saturday night at one friend’s house when she received a phone call inviting her to sleep over at another friend’s house on the same night. Beth tells the second friend that she will call her back. In (14), Elaine makes suggestions about what Beth should say to the friend whose invitation she must turn down:

## (14) PLANNER

- 1 Elaine:      Just tell her you just already accepted an invitation, on Saturday morning, to a friend’s house to spend the whole day and the night there.
- 2               Ask her if you can have a rain check...
- 3               mm I don't know.

Because Beth is concerned about hurting her friend's feelings, Elaine gives her advice on how to handle the situation. By doing so, she does more than arrange a sleepover; she instructs Beth in the social nuances required for dealing with people sensitively. This position is characterized by a conversational register in addition to directives (suggestions) and expressives (praise). It is balanced in favor of the connection dimension through its emphasis on helping Beth but evinces parental authority as well based on the capacity for influencing the actions of the child.

The second position is the Social Secretary, managing Beth's schedule. One evening, Beth was scheduled to attend her horseback-riding lesson after dinner, so she had to get ready soon after eating. In (15), Elaine, Mark and Beth are talking about the distance to another city (conversational frame) when Elaine cuts the topic short by telling Beth what she needs to do to get ready to go (managerial frame):

(15) SOCIAL SECRETARY

- 1 Elaine: It couldn't be any further than when we drove to Michigan.  
 2 Mark: No, about six hours.  
 3 Beth: < *jokingly* Excuse me! >  
 4 Elaine: → < *faster* Okay, go ahead and get your vitamin, and go up and brush your teeth 'cause you're gonna probably have to leave about . quarter after or so. >  
 5 Beth: The only weird thing is, remember when I rode O'Malley?

When Elaine takes up the position of Social Secretary (line 4), she shifts from a conversational register to a controlling register characterized by strings of imperatives delivered at a faster rate. Nevertheless, Beth does not get ready immediately; instead, she raises a topic about what happened when she rode a particular horse (line 5). Then, after several minutes, Elaine again tells Beth to get ready. This position occurs as an extended activity during which Elaine shifts between this position with Beth and the conversational frame with Mark, who does not take up this position. Hochschild (1989:10) finds that the need to balance work and family quickens the pace at home. She describes how mothers become the "time and motion experts" of family life, ensuring that the children adhere to this schedule; and thus, she notes, the mothers become "the 'villains' in a process of which they are also the primary victims." Elaine assumes this responsibility as well; thus, getting Beth ready on time adds to Elaine's interactional load.

*Summary: Mother at dinnertime*

During these four dinners, Elaine carries a heavy interactional load based on the numbers of positions and frames she creates and maintains. Furthermore, it is clear that she is engaged in an interactional balancing act based on those stretches of talk in which she shifts between positions and frames (as in excerpt 3), and also based on the many positions and frames she maintains during each phase at

dinnertime: During the preparing phase, Elaine takes up the position of the Chef (dinner frame) and Assistant (caregiving frame). To a lesser extent, she takes up the positions of Teacher and Caretaker (caregiving frame), and Behavior Monitor (socialization frame). Elaine initiates the eating phase by taking up the position of Etiquette Monitor (socialization frame) to ask Beth to say the blessing, and she initiates the conversational frame by taking up the position of Facilitator. During the eating phase, she begins to take up the positions of the Host (dinner frame), Journalist and Moral Guardian (conversational frame), and Language Monitor (socialization frame). She continues to take up the position of the Behavior Monitor (socialization frame), and the Assistant, Caretaker, and Teacher (caregiving frame). In the post-eating phase, the family continues to talk and begins to clean up. Elaine begins to take up the positions of Planner and Social Secretary (managerial frame) and Director of Cleanup (dinner frame). She continues to take up the positions of Caretaker (caregiving frame); Language and Behavior Monitors (socialization frame); and Facilitator, Moral Guardian, and Journalist (conversational frame). Through her disciplinarian behavior, her expressed interest in Beth's life, and her active caregiving, Elaine creates the parental identity of a "nurturing disciplinarian."

While the mother in this family is engaging in this interactional balancing act, what is the father doing at dinnertime? How does he create parental authority and connection, and what parental identity does he create?

#### FATHER AT DINNER TIME: THE COMEDIAN

Unlike Elaine, Mark does not engage in an interactional balancing act; nor does he create parental authority or connection in the same way. He avoids taking up the most controlling positions and does not create a connection with Beth through controlling positions, with the exception of the Journalist. Instead, he connects with Beth – and negotiates parental authority with Elaine – in the conversational frame by making humorous remarks and/or rekeying a serious topic as humorous. In the caregiving frame, he minimally takes up the positions of Teacher and Assistant but does not take up the more controlling position of Caretaker. In the socialization frame, he does not enforce dinnertime rituals (Etiquette Monitor) or take up the strongly controlling positions of Language and Behavior Monitors. In the managerial frame, he does take up, albeit infrequently, the position of Planner, a conversation-like position, but not the more controlling Social Secretary. In the dinner frame, he takes up the position of Director of Cleanup one evening when he is responsible for this task, and he minimally takes up the Host, but not the Head Chef. However, Mark is an active participant in the conversational frame (as shown in excerpts 1–3, 8, 9, 11, and 15 above). Like Elaine, Mark connects with Beth by asking questions that express an interest in her life (Journalist), but he does not claim parental authority by introducing topics about Beth's life. Furthermore, he does not take up the evaluative position of Moral

Guardian, a position that establishes a more asymmetrical alignment between parent and child than does the Journalist. The position that most characterizes Mark's verbal interaction is the Comedian in the conversational frame, a non-controlling position that he takes up more frequently than Elaine (91%). What is primarily of interest is the parental identity that Mark creates through humor, and the effects these contributions have on the negotiation of parental authority and connection.

Mark takes up the position of Comedian when he makes humorous remarks throughout all phases of dinnertime. At times, both Elaine and Beth enjoy his humor; however, in some instances, Mark sustains Beth's humorous key, whereas Elaine does not. In (16), Beth draws attention to the similarity between the last name of a mutual acquaintance, *Horst*, and *horse*:

## (16) COMEDIAN

- 1 Beth: I used to say that to Mr. Horst.  
 2 Elaine: It's kind of a weird name to be called that ( ).  
 3 Mark: ( ).  
 4 Beth: It's like 'Hi [Mr. . . Horse].'  
 5 Mark: [Beth likes it because it's a horse.  
 6 Elaine: Horst.  
 7 Beth: (giggles) I know it's Horst but when I was little  
 8 [ I would like- like when we first moved in? I'm like 'Hi Mr. Horse!'  
 9 Mark: → [(singsong voice) A horse is a horse of course.]  
 10 Beth: It was like ( ) (laughs)  
 11 Elaine: What kind of salsa would you like sweetheart? ((ASSISTANT))

Beth reframes a serious topic by rekeying it as humorous (line 4); however, Elaine remains in a serious key by stating the correct pronunciation (line 6). Mark's response in line 5 sustains the non-serious key of Beth's utterance and he further contributes to the humor by singing, *A horse is a horse of course*, mimicking the theme song of the 1960s sitcom *Mister Ed* (line 9). In this way, Mark creates a connection with Beth by picking up on her humor and engaging in banter. Although Elaine creates a connection with Beth through many of the controlling positions in the other frames, such as the Assistant in this excerpt (line 11), these caregiving positions foster a different type of relationship, more "parent" than "friend."

Mark connects with Beth through humor and he also negotiates parental authority with Beth and with Elaine through humor as well. In some cases, Mark's humor defuses Elaine's parental authority by rekeying a serious discussion as humorous. Excerpt (17) occurs during the stretch of talk about the water incident discussed earlier (excerpts 12 and 13), in which Elaine takes up the controlling, evaluative position of Moral Guardian:

## (17) COMEDIAN

- 1 Elaine: What did she say? ((MORAL GUARDIAN))  
 2 Beth: She said, 'Now you owe me a drink of water!' and I go, 'What for!'  
 And she goes, 'Because you spilled on my one thousand dollar chaps'.  
 3 Elaine: (laughs)

- 4 ((some unintelligible text omitted))  
 5 Elaine: They don't cost a thousand dollars.  
 6 Mark: → Maybe hers had rhinestones!  
 7 Elaine: ⟨laughs⟩ No.

Although Elaine laughs at the girl's claim that her chaps cost a thousand dollars (line 3), she sustains the serious key of the Moral Guardian by stating that chaps don't cost that much. Mark, however, does not take up the position of Moral Guardian. Instead, he takes up the position of Comedian by making a joke (line 6), thus defusing the seriousness of the discussion by shifting from a serious to a humorous key. By adding a humorous element, Mark lightens the judgmental stance of the Moral Guardian.

In some cases, Mark's humor undercuts Elaine's parental authority. A situation in which this occurs begins when Mark offers Beth some food and Elaine chastises Beth for her response:

## (18) COMEDIAN

- 1 Mark: You want another bowl? ((HOST))  
 2 Beth: Ew.  
 3 Mark: Hm?  
 4 Beth: No! They're disgusting.  
 5 Elaine: Excuse me. ((LANGUAGE MONITOR))  
 6 Beth: Sorry!  
 7 Elaine: Just say 'no thanks'.  
 8 Beth: No thanks!  
 9 ((6 seconds))  
 10 Mark: → ⟨chuckling, whispered⟩ Disgusting.)  
 11 Beth: ⟨scoffs⟩  
 12 Elaine: Go take your vitamin. ((CARETAKER))

After Beth's response to Mark's offer (lines 2, 4), Elaine takes up the position of Language Monitor to let Beth know that her comment and nonverbal expression of disgust were inappropriate and to tell her what she should have said (lines 5, 7). And Beth does. Case closed. But 6 seconds later, Mark makes light of the situation by echoing the very expression for which Elaine castigated Beth. He repeats Beth's term *disgusting* under his breath, in a humorous way, like a conspiring sibling whispering behind his mother's back (line 10). Beth responds in kind by giggling in a breathy voice, indicating appreciation of Mark's remark while scoffing at Elaine's (line 11). By aligning himself symmetrically with Beth through his joking behavior, Mark connects with Beth but undercuts Elaine's authority with Beth as well.

Finally, in several instances of humor, Mark violates Elaine's norms of appropriate dinnertime language. In each case, Elaine responds by taking up the position of Language Monitor vis-à-vis Mark. One evening, Beth is singing to herself and Mark joins in, singing in falsetto. Mark's utterance is not audible on the audio recording, but, based on both Elaine's and Beth's responses, he apparently sings something they consider inappropriate:

## (19) COMEDIAN

- 1 MARK: → *<singing in falsetto>* ( ).  
 2 Elaine: Mark, please.  
 3 Mark: *<laughs>*  
 4 Beth: Dad, that went on tape.

Elaine admonishes him, and Beth reminds him that they are being tape-recorded. This episode is similar to an exchange at dinnertime discussed by Taylor 1995. During a parental argument, the oldest child whispered from behind his father's chair, *Daddy, we're being filmed* (1995:293). Taylor observes that the boy thus "voices concern for the representation of the family as a whole . . . for their image, their public face." When Elaine takes up the position of Language Monitor with Mark, she is enacting her authority as a parent by monitoring what Beth hears and attempting to protect the family face as well. Mark, on the other hand, constructs his parental identity through humor and, as in this case, his humor opposes traditionally appropriate language at dinnertime. Thus, he creates the identity of a "rebellious Comedian."

## DISCUSSION: FRAMES FOR DINNER

The analysis of the discursive positions that family members take up within frames provides a way to examine the discursive creation of identity and to explain the interactional dynamics of families. Parents are imbued with the authority to make decisions for their children and to direct their children's behavior. However, parents choose which decisions they will make and what actions they will direct. Furthermore, when two parents of different sexes are present, the distribution of these decisions and actions between the two parents may be socially significant in terms of gender, contributing to the parents' construction of the identities, "mother" and "father." The interactional dynamics of this family reveal another possible configuration of authority in the family, contrasting with the "Father knows best" configuration identified by Ochs & Taylor 1992, 1995. In this family, the mother seems to "know best." She takes up more of the authoritative positions than the father, both with the daughter and with the father. The father supports the mother's authority by not taking up these positions himself; however, he does take up the position of Comedian in which he counters the mother's authority. Therefore, the mother's authority – like the father's authority in Ochs & Taylor – is both supported and contested by her spouse.

Throughout these dinners, Elaine takes up powerful positions, but each varies based on the sources of power and the significance in terms of connection. The three positions in the socialization frame and the Moral Guardian in the conversational frame are powerful positions based on their evaluative component: the power to decide what is appropriate and to direct the child to act on it. The positions in the conversational frame are powerful in the sense that the person asking the questions and raising the topics determines who and what get talked about. The Journalist and Moral Guardian in this frame simultaneously



create connection with the child by conveying that the parent cares about the details of the child's life – although the Moral Guardian tempers this message, since the goal is to determine whether the child behaved appropriately, thus making it a more powerful position. The positions in the dinner, managerial, and caregiving frames gain their power through responsibility for a particular task or activity: The Head Chef is responsible for preparing dinner, the Director of Cleanup for cleaning the kitchen and dining room, the Social Secretary for getting Beth ready for her next activity, and the caregiving positions from having ultimate responsibility for taking care of the child. The latter are weighted more equally in terms of power and connection because they reflect the hierarchy and dependency of the parent–child relationship (power) as well as the nurturing component (connection). Through her disciplinarian behavior, her expressed interest in Beth's life, and her active caregiving, Elaine assumes an identity of a “nurturing disciplinarian.”

In contrast, Mark approaches dinnertime primarily as an opportunity for pleasurable conversation, particularly through humor (Comedian). He also shows interest in Beth's life by asking her questions (Journalist) – although not to the extent that Elaine does. Mark's humor sometimes balances out the disciplinarian aspect of Elaine's behavior but sometimes undercuts her authority as well. In this way, he creates a more covert authority and, thus, assumes the identity of a “rebellious comedian.” Thus, through their positionings, Elaine creates an overtly authoritative parental identity and assumes responsibility for the family face. Mark creates a more symmetrical alignment between himself and Beth than Elaine does; and he contests the authority Elaine creates, but without assuming the responsibilities that underlie this authority. The extent of these responsibilities is revealed by the distribution of positions and frames during these dinners.

The distribution of positions by frame reveals that Elaine takes up more positions, and thus performs more functions, at dinnertime, in addition to and including the dinner, socialization, and conversational functions identified in previous studies of family discourse at dinnertime. The pattern that emerges based on the positions that Elaine takes up almost exclusively during these four dinners are encapsulated in Varenne's (1992:40, 48) observation, based on his study of talk in one family, that the mother “is involved, either as initiator, addressee, or interpreter, in almost every activity which emerges in the talk,” which suggests “the presence of a powerful pattern”: “Metaphorically, at least, [the mother] is ‘at the center of’ the family, and this is worth noticing.” Elaine bears a heavy interactional load during the time in which she prepares dinner, the family eats, and they begin to clean up: She oversees the preparation of food (Head Chef), serves food (Host), oversees cleanup (Director of Cleanup), assists Beth (Assistant), meets Beth's other needs (Caretaker), teaches Beth dinnertime skills (Teacher), enforces dinnertime rituals (Etiquette Monitor), monitors Beth's dinnertime behavior and language (Behavior Monitor and Language Monitor), maintains conversational interaction (Facilitator), requests infor-

mation about Beth's life (Journalist), evaluates Beth's past actions (Moral Guardian), manages Beth's social life (Planner), and maintains Beth's schedule (Social Secretary). Meanwhile, Mark takes up some of these positions minimally, but he primarily participates in the conversational frame, requesting information about Beth's life (Journalist) and making humorous remarks (Comedian).

Through these patterns of participation, Elaine and Mark create gendered parental identities. As previous studies of talk at dinnertime have shown, mothers tend to perform more of these functions. Furthermore, the greater number and types of positions that Elaine and Mark take up reflect gendered patterns within the domestic division of labor, as identified by sociological time-use studies that compare women's and men's work at home. First, just as Elaine takes up more positions at dinnertime, research continues to show that women still do at least twice as much housework and child care as their partners, even when both parents work full-time (Bianchi, Milkie, Sayer & Robinson 2000; Buunk, Kluwer, Schuurman & Siero 2000; Coltrane 2000; Lee & Waite 2005). Second, just as Elaine tends to maintain two positions and frames simultaneously, women, but not men, tend to do more than one task at a time, such as folding laundry and keeping an eye on a three-year-old (Hochschild 1989). Third, the pattern in which Elaine takes up caretaking positions and Mark takes up the more playful position of Comedian mirrors the finding that women spend more time on caretaking tasks, such as feeding and bathing children, whereas men spend more time doing enjoyable things with them, such as going to the park or the movies (Coltrane 2000; Hochschild 1989). Fourth, a robust finding in time-use studies is that women are more likely to do tasks similar to those captured by what I have called the managerial and caregiving frames: making sure that children's needs are met and keeping track of and maintaining their schedules and social lives. As one woman stated in Morin & Rosenfeld (1998:A17), "I feel I'm always on duty. When we're at home, I'm the one who always has an eye out for our son, making sure he's eating on time, things like that." The similarities between these patterns and the positions that Elaine and Mark take up suggest that the interactional patterns in Elaine's family at dinnertime are a component of the sex-based division of labor at home. Although we do not have evidence beyond these four dinners that the mother and father in this family always interact in these ways, the mother later reported that these patterns of participation are typical for this family and, like the pediatrician in Tannen & Wallat 1993, she was pleased to see that her feelings of sometimes being overwhelmed at dinnertime were warranted.

The rise of the dual-income family has been called the "most dramatic, far-reaching change affecting women, men, and families" in the latter half of the 20th century (Waite & Nielsen 2001:35). This change in the structuring of families raises the question of whether and how this shift influences families' daily lives and the gendered identities that parents create both at home and in the workplace. The number and, particularly, the types of tasks that Elaine and Mark perform provide evidence that a gender ideology of "domesticity," or the belief

in the superiority or ideal of a breadwinning father and caretaking mother (Williams 2000), endures regardless of the fact that both parents work outside the home. The component of this belief that most influences the division of domestic labor – both linguistic and nonlinguistic – is the deep-seated, and perhaps unconscious, belief that a mother is ultimately responsible for the children. The analysis of family interaction suggests that language, gender, and parental identities are intertwined in ways that both reflect and reproduce gender as a social construct and encourage a traditional sex-based division of labor despite (or because of) the mass movement of women with young children into the workforce. Thus, gender at a societal level is (re-)created at the interactional level through the positions the parents take up within the frames they create and maintain as they interact with their daughter at dinnertime.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> I am grateful to Deborah Tannen for her helpful comments on several versions of this analysis and for her unwavering support. I am also grateful to the family who took part in this study. Any errors or omissions are my own.

<sup>2</sup> Dinnertime as a whole is a socializing event for children; however, my “socialization” frame is restricted to those utterances that explicitly foreground this function of talk in the form of injunctions on behavior and the maintenance of social rituals and etiquette.

<sup>3</sup> The position of Director of Cleanup does not appear in Kendall 2003. It was added to distinguish between preparation (Head Chef) and cleanup.

<sup>4</sup> The Etiquette Monitor combines the Ritual Enforcer and Appearance Monitor in Kendall 2003 because they share the property of maintaining dinnertime etiquette.

<sup>5</sup> In Kendall 2003, the Language Monitor is called the Etiquette Enforcer. The name was changed to more accurately reflect the verbal versus nonverbal distinction between this position and the Behavior Monitor.

<sup>6</sup> Transcription conventions are as follows:

((comment))	Transcriber’s comments.
(text)	Uncertain transcription.
( )	Unintelligible talk.
<vocal noise>	Vocal noises.
<manner> text )	The manner in which an utterance is spoken.
TEXT	Emphatic stress.
[text	Onset of simultaneous talk.
text . text	A perceptible pause of approximately one-tenth of a second per dot.
‘text’	Direct quotes.
text –	An abandoned or incomplete utterance.
text-	A truncated word or adjustment within an intonation unit, e.g., repeated word, false start.
.	Falling final intonation.
,	Phrase-final intonation.
?	Rising intonation.
!	Animated tone.
:	Elongated sounds.

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