

A(p)parent play: Blending frames and reframing in family talk

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ABSTRACT

This study extends Goffman's idea that frames are laminated in various ways in interaction by demonstrating how work and play frames are inter-related in two distinct ways in naturally occurring family conversations. An analysis of excerpts from everyday interactions between parents and young children in three families illustrates how frames of play and parenting are laminated (i) by using language to sequentially transform interaction from a literal frame to a play frame (reframing), and (ii) by creating two definitions of the social situation simultaneously through language and sometimes through physical actions as well (blending frames). It identifies linguistic and paralinguistic features by which these laminations are accomplished and shows how the parents in each family use the two different types. Finally, the analysis demonstrates in what ways play constitutes "work" for parents, contributing to our understanding of play as both ambiguous and "paradoxical." (Discourse analysis, framing, play, parent-child discourse, family interaction, parenting)*

INTRODUCTION

Framing, which has become a key theory in discourse analysis and linguistic anthropology, has been linked to the notion of "play" since its inception. Bateson 1972 introduced his understanding of FRAME and the related concept of META-MESSAGE, stemming from his observation of monkeys play-fighting at a zoo. He remarked that something in the monkeys' behavior established a play frame by sending the metamessage "this is play." Goffman (1974:186), drawing on Bateson's concept of frame in his study of how people make sense of everyday activities, notes that in contexts that are in some sense "unreal," such as drama and other instances of make-believe, framing is not only of great importance but can also be particularly intricate, entailing multiple LAYERS OF LAMINATIONS. Play is thus a potentially fruitful context in which to examine how framing – or the creation and negotiation of "definitions of a situation" (Goffman 1974:11) – is discursively accomplished. Indeed, prior research considering children's role-play (Hoyle 1993), parent-child role-play (Gordon 2002), teasing conversations

among adults (Straehle 1993), and play and performance in cyberspace communication between adults (Danet, Ruedenberg-Wright, & Rosenbaum-Tamari 1997, Campbell 2003) has demonstrated how participants collaboratively create and layer frames through uses of particular linguistic and paralinguistic features.

In this article, I investigate Goffman's (1974, 1981) idea that in defining social situations interlocutors use language to LAMINATE frames, which I understand as creating and maintaining multiple frames simultaneously or transforming frames in quick succession. In particular, I explore the interrelationships between two frames that recur in the context of everyday family discourse: frames of play (e.g., singing, games, teasing, and role-play) and frames of parenting "work," specifically situations in which parents attempt to control their children's behaviors. Although prior research suggests that work and play are inextricably intertwined in everyday family life (e.g., Göncü et al. 1999, Sirota 2002, Goodwin 2007), the various ways in which work and play frames can be laminated or interwoven has been only minimally explored. To consider this, I examine excerpts of conversation drawn from the self-recorded audiotaped interactions of three dual-income American families. Each family consists of two parents and one young child (ages 2 years 1 month, 2 years 11 months, and 4 years 10 months); the parents tape-recorded over a relatively lengthy period of time (7–14 days). Extending previous research illustrating how frames are discursively manipulated (e.g., Goodwin 1996; Gordon 2002, 2003; Kendall 1999, 2003, 2006; Tannen 2006; Tannen & Wallat 1993), I identify two distinct ways of laminating frames of work and play: through sequential transformation (REFRAMING) and through simultaneous creation (BLENDING).

By "reframing," I refer to situations in which parents transform into play literal-frame interactions in which they attempt to control their children's behaviors. In other words, they change the definition of the social situation as they use utterances to signal play. Reframing, I illustrate, occurs in two different ways: (i) A parent uses language to send the metamessage "this is play," typically to reframe a conflict-ridden exchange (e.g., a yes/no conflict is linguistically transformed into a spelling game); and (ii) a parent uses language to explicitly reclassify a non-play physical activity as play (e.g., leaving the playground to go home for dinner is explicitly referred to using the term "race"). By "blending," I refer to cases in which there are two simultaneous definitions of what is taking place. Blending too occurs in two forms. (i) A parent uses language and physical movements to create two different frames at once, one defined through a verbal metamessage and the other through physical action; this means that the parent uses linguistic and/or paralinguistic features to send a playful metamessage while simultaneously accomplishing a literal-frame task (e.g., playfully singing while putting a child's coat on her). (ii) A parent accomplishes work and play concurrently through a single utterance by speaking as a pretend role-play character and issuing a task-oriented directive (e.g., a mother and child pretend to be "fairy godmothers" and the mother encourages the child to finish her lunch by speak-

ing as a fairy godmother and telling her, “Fairy Godmother, I think you better sit down and eat your yogurt, because it’s almost nap time”).

The analysis illustrates how parents in the three families discursively manipulate and laminate frames of work and play, thus contributing to the relatively few linguistic explorations of Goffman’s (1974:157) intriguing idea that “Every possible kind of layering [of frames] must be expected” in everyday life. In so doing, it also demonstrates how play and work are interwoven in the family context, helping us better understand layering frames as an everyday, jointly constructed discursive phenomenon. It shows how the parents use play to accomplish parenting tasks (or attempt to do so), while also revealing in what ways play is (or can be) itself a form a parenting work. My analysis thus builds on prior research finding that for some parents (especially mothers), participating in play with children is motivated by the belief that it is developmentally stimulating (Haight, Parke, & Black 1997), and on studies suggesting that maintaining linguistic attention to multiple frames simultaneously or in rapid succession is part of the “work” parents (especially mothers) do in interacting with children (Kendall 1999, 2003). It also contributes to our understanding of play as a “paradoxical” framing (Bateson 1972).

The organization of the article is as follows. I first review the theoretical foundations of frames theory, the paradoxical and ambiguous nature of play, how prior research has explored play as a resource for accomplishing parenting work, and the idea that play is itself parenting work. Second, I introduce the data set considered in this study in more detail. Third, I examine examples of reframing, illustrating the range of linguistic and paralinguistic features that are used in reframing literal-frame tasks or actions as play: repetition; laughter; manipulation of pitch, intonation, volume, voice quality, and melody; and “naming the game” (e.g., “peek-a-boo”). I then demonstrate how frames of work and play are blended together through a similar set of features – melody, volume, repetition, and laughter – as well as through features that work toward creating pretend role-play identities: address terms, voice quality (especially pitch), and speech registers. I also discuss how the parents in the different families rely on manipulating frames in these ways to various degrees to accomplish a variety of tasks, and give evidence that for the two mothers who use these strategies frequently, play becomes a kind of parenting work. Finally, I describe implications of this analysis for our understanding of framing as well as for conceptualizations of the interrelatedness of work and play in the family context.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Framing and reframing

The notion of FRAME as introduced by Bateson 1972 and developed by Goffman 1974 has played an important role in discourse analytic studies that explore the complex unfolding of talk-in-interaction. For instance, Tannen & Wallat 1993

use the concept in their analysis of a videotaped pediatric examination involving a physician, a mother, and an eight-year-old child. They define “frame” or “interactive frame” as “a definition of what is going on in interaction, without which no utterance (or movement or gesture) could be interpreted” (Tannen & Wallat 1993:59). Building on Goffman’s (1981:128) notion of FOOTING, which Goffman defines as 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,” as well as his idea that shifting footings and frames is the ability of a “dexterous speaker,” Tannen & Wallat explore the pediatric exam in terms of shifting frames. They find that the pediatrician uses a range of linguistic and paralinguistic features to skillfully manipulate a number of frames in this interaction: the social encounter frame (in which the pediatrician interacts with the mother and child), the examination frame (in which she examines the child and verbalizes her findings for the benefit of pediatric residents who will later view the video), and the consultation frame (in which she talks with the mother). Features the pediatrician uses to signal these different frames include pitch, lexical items, repetition, pacing, pausing, and tone of voice. These features are what Gumperz 1982, 1992 calls CONTEXTUALIZATION CUES. These can be understood as linguistic and paralinguistic features that “when processed in co-occurrence with other cues and grammatical and lexical signs, construct the contextual ground for situated interpretation and thereby affect how particular messages are understood” (Gumperz 2001:220); in other words, contextualization cues are used to signal and interpret frames of interaction.

One way of conceiving of what the pediatrician does in the interaction is as REFRAMING: She uses language (and paralinguistic and gesture) to continually transform the definition of the interaction from a consultation to an examination to a social encounter and so on. Occasionally, the pediatrician has trouble managing these multiple frames and one frame “leaks” into another. For instance, the social encounter frame involves the pediatrician’s using a teasing register while talking to the child, saying, for example, while examining the child’s stomach, *No peanut butter and jelly in there?*; when moving to the examination frame the pediatrician uses medical terminology and a flat “reporting” tone of voice. The examination frame leaks into the social encounter frame when the pediatrician asks the child in a teasing voice, *Is your spleen palpable over there?*

Tannen (2006:601) uses the term “reframing” to refer to “a change in what the discussion is about” in her linguistic analysis of one family conflict as it is played out in various forms over the course of one day. Thus a conflict between a husband and wife (Neil and Clara, whose discourse is also analyzed in this article) about who will take a package to the post office is reframed as a discussion about whether the husband can be relied on for support in other areas of life, beyond everyday chores. Building on Goffman’s 1974 work on key, REKEYING manifests as “a change in the tone or tenor of an interaction” (Tannen

2006:601). Thus, when the wife's request for a favor is "recycled with overtones of anger," rekeying occurs; likewise, rekeying takes place when the topic is later treated with laughter (Tannen 2006:601). This can also be understood as a change in footing: What was a serious alignment or footing between interlocutors eventually became playful.

The phenomena of reframing and rekeying are also explored by Goodwin 1996 in her analysis of how interlocutors "recast" the talk of a prior speaker as a means of "shifting frame." Examining excerpts of conversation from a range of contexts, including a storytelling situation during a family dinner that was videotaped, Goodwin emphasizes the step-by-step process by which interlocutors transform interaction and identifies a range of strategies used to shift frame, including repetition and intertextuality, changes in pronunciation and volume, and uses of gesture, gaze, and posture. She thus demonstrates how both verbal and nonverbal channels provide resources for shifting frames of interaction.¹

Goffman proposes that in most interactions participants do not simply change frames and footings, but actually embed one within another, or "lamine" experience. He suggests that "within one alignment, another can be fully enclosed. In truth, in talk it seems routine that, while firmly standing on two feet, we jump up and down on another" (1981:155). This idea has been explored in face-to-face interaction (Gordon 2002, 2003; Hoyle 1993) as well as in online communication (Campbell 2003, Danet et al. 1997); interestingly, these studies all involve a frame of "play." Collectively, they have identified a range of contextualization cues used to signal frames; they have also identified resources by which interlocutors layer, "nest," or "embed" frames. For instance, in Gordon 2002, I illustrate how in mother-child pretend play, frames are embedded within one another through uses of pitch, in-character terms of address, and particular speech styles, as well as through the repetition of shared "prior text" (A. L. Becker 1995). Through drawing on these features, the mother and child (Janet and Natalie, whose discourse is also considered in this analysis) overlay multiple frames in a single moment in time; each frame's metamessage is more specific than the one that contains it, refining the nature of the play. For instance, the frame "this is play" contains a "smaller" role-reversal pretend-play frame; this frame is created in part through Natalie calling her mother "Natalie," and Janet referring to Natalie as "Mommy."

In Gordon 2002, I also note that the mother uses play to accomplish parenting "work": She uses pretend-play roles to encourage Natalie to choose books to read prior to nap time, for instance. Although it is not the focus of that analysis, I suggested that this phenomenon is an example of frames blending – a perspective I pursue in depth in this article. Blending is similar to Tannen & Wallat's 1993 "leaky frames" in that two definitions of interaction are being signaled at once. However, in contrast to leaking, blending seems to be an intentional discourse strategy; parents use it to make work seem like play to children.

The paradoxical and ambiguous nature of play

In introducing the idea of PLAY FRAME, Bateson (1972:180) observes that play is intrinsically paradoxical: Playful actions denote non-play actions, but “they do not denote what those actions FOR WHICH THEY STAND would denote” (emphasis in the original). Thus, when two monkeys play-fight, “The playful nip denotes the bite, but it does not denote what would be denoted by the bite” (Bateson 1972:180). The bite is “not real,” but is also NOT “not real” (Bateson 1972; see also Shore 1996). The parents whose discourse I examine take the paradox of play one step further: They “play” with play frames to accomplish literal-frame parenting work. However, because play is “labile” (Bateson 1972:182), or unstable, play can quickly transform into a serious interaction and vice versa. This is true in play situations involving monkeys and other animals; it is true in human interaction as well.

Shore 1996 fleshes out the idea that play is both paradoxical and unstable in his examination of the complexity of levels of organization of sporting events:

Competitive sports are at once violent martial encounters and harmless play. But to be effective, play must never be simply make-believe. The spectator needs to feel that if the match is not really war, it nevertheless comes very close to war. As Bateson would put it, sporting competition is not war but it is also NOT not war. It hangs at the very edge of its performance frame. (Shore 1996:111)

Shore’s analysis focuses on the margins of play, or what he terms “marginal play.” These are cases in which play spills over its boundaries; in this “liminal world,” we are “unsure of our footing, unclear as to whether we are located within a game world or in the ‘real’ world beyond the play” (Shore 1996:107). The examples I consider in this article are part of this “liminal” world: The footings of the participants may be uncertain. Indeed, ambiguity is inherent in play, an idea Bateson 1972 explores in a “metalogue” entitled “About games and being serious.” In this metalogue, Father and Daughter discuss the complexity of determining whether or not they share a definition of their conversations either as “play” or as serious interactions, and what such a determination might mean. Similarly, in the examples of play I examine, ambiguity is present, certainly for the analyst, and likely for the participants as well. It is not clear whether the parents are “actually” entering into the play frame; that is, it is unclear, for instance, if a parent views singing with a child while getting her dressed as “play,” or if the singing is simply part of parenting work. It is also not obvious if the children see instances of play in which parents try to use play to direct their behaviors as “real” play. Based on my analysis of linguistic features, it is evident that parents do (linguistically) enter into play; however, I cannot be certain that they are cognitively “engrossed” (Goffman 1974:346). Considering the children’s verbal participation, I suspect that the children at times are engrossed in the play

frame, as when the play frame is jointly constructed and seamlessly unfolds. At other times, the children seem to be aware that play is being used to accomplish a parenting task; for instance, in some cases the children redirect the play frame away from the task.

Play and directing children's behaviors

Although there is a great deal of research examining how parents socialize their children through discourse (e.g., Blum-Kulka 1997, Ochs & Schieffelin 1984, Ochs, Smith, & Taylor 1996, Ochs, Taylor, Rudolph, & Smith 1992, Pontecorvo & Fasulo 1997, Taylor 1994, Tulviste, Mizera, De Geer, & Tryggvason 2002) and how parents attempt to direct or regulate their children's behavior (e.g., J. Becker 1994; Blum-Kulka 1990, 1997; Gleason 1987; Gleason, Ely, Perlmann, & Narasimhan 1996; Goodwin 2006; Tulviste et al. 2002), relatively few studies have focused on play as a resource parents draw on to accomplish caregiving or parenting tasks, such as directing their children about what to do or what not to do. In this section, I give a brief overview of studies that have considered play between parents and children, in particular pretend play, as an opportunity for parents to accomplish everyday task-oriented activities.

Haight & Miller (1993:72) find that pretend play – or make-believe in which aspects of the here and now are treated in nonliteral ways (following Garvey 1977) – is used by both American mothers and children participating in videotaped play sessions “to express and regulate feelings, support an argument, enliven daily routines, teach, and influence each other's behavior.” For instance, they observed one mother using pretend play to deny her daughter a pacifier; specifically, the mother animates a puppet-like mitten using a high-pitched voice to do so. Haight & Miller note that another mother regularly used play to enliven daily routines; she managed to entertain her child by engaging in pretending while preparing meals, running errands, and cleaning house.

In later studies, Haight and her colleagues (Haight 1999, Haight, Masiello, Dickson, Huckleby, & Black 1994, Haight, Wang, Fung, Williams, & Mintz 1999) examine American and Chinese caregiver–child pretend play to explore pretend play as a socializing practice that is culturally situated in middle-class Chinese, European American, and African American families. The authors find that although caregivers in all three groups participate extensively in play with their children, there are variations in play. For example, Haight et al. 1994 observe that the European American parents tended to introduce pretend play to encourage the child to try something new or do something frequently resisted, like wearing a bicycle helmet, or to redirect the child from forbidden or irritating behaviors, like having a tantrum. In contrast, the Chinese caregivers more frequently than the American caregivers initiated pretend play in the context of teaching proper conduct (Haight et al. 1999).

Examples of play being used as a resource for doing parenting work appear in other studies as well. For instance, Göncü et al. 1999 give the example of a

mother pretending that a spoonful of food is an airplane arriving at the hangar (the child's mouth) in order to encourage the child to eat, a use of play they witnessed in both urban middle-class American and Turkish families. Goodwin's (2006:538–39) analysis of directive/response sequences in family interaction includes an example of a mother who tries to get her son to go into the bathroom to brush his teeth by playfully suggesting he “samba to the bathroom.” In a study drawing on the notion of framing, Sirota 2002 explores how frames of play and work at times “interdigitate” and influence one another in the everyday communicative interactions of two middle-class American families. Considering naturally occurring videotaped conversations of these families, Sirota (2002:1) demonstrates how play and housework “shade almost imperceptibly into one another,” how both parents and children are involved, and how play activities are used by participants to accomplish consequential action with moral meanings. Specifically, she focuses on two extended sequences, showing how in both cases, interlocutors weave play into task activities through use of pitch, gesture, laughter, and intertextual repetition. Building especially on Sirota's study, my analysis delves into the particular ways in which work and play can be inter-related – reframing and blending frames – and how these are linguistically accomplished.

Play as parenting work

Play, especially pretend play, is not just a resource drawn on by parents to issue task-related directives to their children; it has also been viewed as part of the “work” of being a parent. For instance, Haight et al. 1997 examine videotaped parent–child interactions and post-play interviews with parents to address the motivations of middle-class European American parents for participating in pretend play with their children. They find the extent to which mothers view pretend play as important to children's development is significantly related to the frequency and mean duration of mother–child pretend play. Likewise, mothers', but not fathers', beliefs about the importance of their own participation are significantly correlated to proportion of play time spent pretending. In contrast, the extent to which fathers viewed the activity as enjoyable relates to their frequency of play. Haight et al. 1997 link this finding to Parke's (1996) observation that maternal roles in European American middle-class communities tend to be more culturally mandated while paternal roles are more discretionary. They thus surmise, “Perhaps, mothers who viewed pretend play as important to their children's development also felt relatively more responsible than fathers to ensure, personally, that their children participated in this developmentally stimulating activity” (Haight et al. 1997: 287). One way of understanding these findings is that, for mothers in particular, engaging in pretend play with one's child might be viewed as an obligation, or as part of parenting “work” that helps ensure the child's healthy social, cognitive, and linguistic development. Too, this fits in with a broader pattern identified by Ochs & Schi-

effelin 1984 among middle-class white American caregivers of taking the perspective of, and accommodating to, the child.

THE STUDY

This study builds on previous scholarship that has identified play as both a resource for accomplishing parenting tasks and as parenting work in itself, while also highlighting the paradoxical and ambiguous nature of play in the family context. It also develops our understanding of framing in discourse by demonstrating how reframing and frame blending are linguistically accomplished. To do this, I analyze extracts of audiotape-recorded and transcribed conversations involving members of three families consisting of two parents and one young child: Kathy, Sam, and their daughter Kira (age 2 years 1 month); Janet, Steve, and their daughter Natalie (age 2 years 11 months); and Clara, Neil, and their son Jason (age 4 years 10 months). These extracts are drawn from a larger study of family talk designed to explore how women and men use language to create professional and parental identities.² As part of their participation in this study, each parent carried a digital audiotape recorder for approximately one week, recording as many interactions as possible throughout the day.³ This resulted in continuous or near-continuous recording of naturally occurring family talk; in addition, no researchers were present during recording. Although the families were not videotaped, it is often clear from the audio track what actions are taking place, based on verbal cues from the participants (e.g., a father says to his daughter, *I'm gonna chase you*) and sounds captured by the recorders (e.g., the sound of footfalls).⁴ In addition, after tape-recording was complete, each parent was "shadowed" by a research team member at work and at home for at least one day, giving us the opportunity to see their homes and observe them engaging in various everyday activities. (I shadowed Janet and Clara.) All participating families live in the greater Washington, DC area and are dual-income, white, and broadly middle-class.

The design of the larger study allowed me to examine play interactions across a relatively long period of time: Janet and Steve and Clara and Neil taped for 7 days (totaling 165 and 89 hours respectively); Kathy and Sam taped for 14 days (for a total of 134 hours).⁵ In addition, several interactions in which parents talk about parent-child play were captured and are included in the analysis that follows.

REFRAMING: SEQUENTIAL TRANSFORMATION

In this section, drawing on but slightly modifying Tannen's (2006:601) definition of reframing as changing "what the discussion is about," and following Goodwin's (1996) work on shifting the frame of interaction, I examine how parents attempt to transform one (non-play) activity into another (play). This entails rekeying; the tone of the interaction is altered to become non-serious and "fun."

Reframing occurs in two different ways: (i) A parent uses language to indirectly reframe ongoing talk (the verbal interaction itself is reframed; the definition of the nature of the talk changes); and (ii) a parent uses language to explicitly introduce a new understanding or reconceptualization of a physical activity (a task or action is reframed, not talk itself).

Using language to reframe a conflict-ridden interaction into play

Parents in all three families use language to reframe conflict-ridden interactions into play; as Goodwin 1996 points out, argument is a speech activity in which participants frequently change footings and frames. I focus on how the definition of interaction transforms from “verbal conflict” into “play.” In this section, I give one example involving Janet and Natalie, and one involving Clara and Jason.

In the first excerpt, Janet – with significant input from her daughter, Natalie – reframes a conflict with Natalie as a play “spelling test.” It is Saturday evening at home, and Natalie is helping Janet prepare for a dinner party Janet will be holding later that evening. Although Natalie is not quite three years old, she is extremely verbal, as will become apparent; in addition, she also frequently resists her parents’ wishes and regularly throws screaming temper tantrums. Here Natalie is “painting” olive oil on bread when Janet points out that she is using too much oil. This causes an altercation in which Natalie and Janet respond to each other repeatedly with *no* and *yes*, respectively. Janet, with Natalie’s extensive input and cooperation, successfully transforms the interaction into a play “spelling test” as a way of diverting a possible full-on tantrum (lines 13, 18, and following).

(1)⁶

- | | | |
|----|------------|---|
| 1 | Natalie: | I'm painting this bread. |
| 2 | Janet: | Why yes you <i><chuckling></i> are.) |
| 3 | | Okay wait a minute Baby, |
| 4 | | let me help you. |
| 5 | | [Because] there's too- there's too much on there, |
| 6 | Natalie: | [No.] |
| 7 | | No. |
| 8 | Janet: | Yes. |
| 9 | Natalie: | No. |
| 10 | Janet: | Yes. |
| 11 | Natalie: | No. |
| 12 | | <i>((short pause))</i> |
| 13 | → Janet: | Y E . <i><whispering></i> S! |
| 14 | | <i>((short pause))</i> |
| 15 | → Natalie: | N O, |
| 16 | → | no! |
| 17 | Janet: | <i><laughs></i> |
| 18 | → | What's N O spell. |
| 19 | → Natalie: | No. |
| 20 | Janet: | What's Y E S spell. |
| 21 | Natalie: | Yes. |

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22 Janet: What does . B O O spell.
 23 Natalie: Boo!
 24 Janet: <laughs>
 25 <laughing> Very good!
 26 What does . P A T spell.
 27 Natalie: Pat!
 28 Janet: <gasps> <high-pitched> VERY SMART!
 29 What about . M O M M Y!
 30 Natalie: Mommy!
 31 Janet: <gasps> <laughing, high-pitched> Oh my goodness,
 32 [you're so smart!]
 33 Natalie: [<laughs>]
 34 Janet: How about . D A D D Y.
 35 Natalie: Daddy!
 36 [<laughs>]
 37 Janet: [<gasps>] <high-pitched> You know so many words!
 38 Natalie: <laughs>
 39 Janet: Do you remember d- what G O spells.
 40 Natalie: Cat!
 41 Janet: <laughing> No:.)
 42 That would be C A T,
 43 CAT.
 44 G O spells GO.
 45 Natalie: G O,
 46 go!
 47 Janet: Right!
 48 Very good!
 49 Natalie: I want to do (it some now).
 50 Janet: Okay,
 51 we're all done,
 52 but there's- there's more for us to do,
 53 don't worry.
 54 There's PLENTY more work!

Excerpt 1 shows Janet skillfully diverting a potential oncoming tantrum by reframing a yes/no conflict into play, specifically into a play game of spelling. She introduces this reframing through spelling the word *yes* in line 13. Specifically, she says the letters *Y* and *E* (with intonation inviting Natalie to supply the *S*), and, after a short pause, Janet whispers the letter. Natalie, though she did not supply the missing letter, contributes considerably to this reframing by responding *N O, no!* in lines 15–16, which is followed by Janet laughing, further framing this activity as playful (and probably serving to positively evaluate Natalie's precociousness). As the interaction continues, with Janet rhythmically spelling words and Natalie identifying them, Janet gasps in an exaggerated way (lines 28, 31, 37) to display appreciation for as well as excessive surprise at Natalie's ability to identify words. In addition, she continues to laugh with appreciation (e.g. lines 24, 25, 31) and uses a relatively high-pitched voice when praising Natalie (e.g. line 28, *VERY SMART!*). Through these contextualization cues, too, Janet frames the spelling activity as play, and Natalie contributes to this framing through laughter of her own (lines 33, 36, 38), likely responding to Janet's use of pitch and her exaggerated gasps. In the

excerpt, the conflict is successfully diverted through a reframing that also rekeys the interaction.

The second excerpt shows Clara, mother of Jason (an older child, at age 4 years 10 months) reframing a conflictual interaction into play, although it is a play frame of a different kind: teasing. Teasing is a strategy that can build solidarity between interlocutors and that may involve manipulating features such as prosody, laughter, and use of formulae and pronouns (Straehle 1993). Immediately prior to the excerpt, Clara and Neil had been trying to convince Jason to accompany them to a coffee shop (Starbucks) so they could hear a guitarist who was playing there, and Jason instead insisted they go buy him a toy (Silly String). Clara and Neil had refused; Jason subsequently continues whining about wanting Silly String. (Note that his desire to have Silly String and his parents' refusal to buy it for him – due to bad behavior he manifested during the family's taping week – were continual sources of conflict, in particular between Jason and Clara.) In lines 6 and following of the excerpt, Clara reframes the interaction.

(2)

- 1 Jason: <whimpers>
 2 <whiney> I want it.)
 3 ((short pause))
 4 <whiney> I wanna get (the) Silly String.)
 5 Neil: [(You won't ??)]
 6 → Clara: [(high-pitched) Lemme see] if I get this straight.
 7 YOU,
 8 want ME,
 9 to jump outta my chair.)
 10 Jason: <laughs>
 11 Clara: <high-pitched> go all the way to the mall,
 12 Jason: <laughs>
 13 Clara: just for the simple purpose,
 14 of getting Silly String for you.)
 15 Jason: <laughs>
 16 <laughing> Yeah.)
 17 Clara: <high-pitched> And then come ALL THE WAY BACK.
 18 Just with this little bottle of Silly String.)
 19 Jason: <laughing> Yea:h.)
 20 Clara: [(high-pitched) It sounds a little] silly to me!)
 21 Neil: [I told him that—]
 22 I told him we should bring a uh→
 23 his coloring book and crayons,
 24 to the Starbucks,

Clara uses high pitch and also exaggerated, swooping intonation contours to entertain Jason by teasing him about the ridiculousness of his request that she make a trip to the shopping mall with the sole purpose of buying him Silly String. Jason picks up on Clara's reframing, and laughs at what she says. Clara thus deftly transforms a disagreement over purchasing a toy into playful teasing, circumventing further parent-child conflict. In fact, Clara frequently reframes conflict-ridden interactions with Jason as playful teasing (Neil at times does this

as well); in addition, Clara often uses high pitch as a means of signaling this frame. This fits into a broader pattern of Clara using pitch manipulation as a resource in mitigating conflicts. Tannen 2003, 2004, drawing on the same larger data set as this study, observed that Clara uses high pitch while animating or “ventriloquizing” the family’s two dogs as a way of communicating with her husband and son – at times critically – while introducing a note of humor.

Reframing a physical activity as play

Physical activities, like verbal exchanges, are also reframed in these families. Parents in all of the families use language to attempt to transform physical activities into play; they do this by explicitly naming the play frame. This means that they invite the child to reconceptualize a literal-frame (nonverbal) activity as play. I give one example from the tapes of each of the families that do this frequently: one excerpt involving Sam and Kira in which Sam tries to get Kira to put on her shirt, and one involving Janet and Natalie in which Janet tries to get Natalie to cooperatively leave the playground where they had been playing. I also show an example involving Neil and Jason in which Neil encourages Jason to leave a playground, to show the different (non-play-oriented) parenting strategy typically used in this family.

Excerpt (3) shows Sam trying to transform one physical activity, putting Kira’s shirt on in the morning, into another, a game of “peek-a-boo.” In doing this, Sam also tries to rekey an interaction marked by conflict (Kira whines and fusses as Sam tries to put her shirt on) into a harmonious, fun interaction (thus he also tries to accomplish reframing of the first type – he tries to reframe the talk itself). Kira here is referred to as “Ki-Ki,” as is typical in this family. Note that Kira, at age 2 years 1 month, is not only younger but also far less verbal than Natalie; however, she still manages to resist her father’s attempts at reframing.

(3)

- 1 Sam: (Who gets) a shirt Ki-Ki.
 2 ((short pause))
 3 Got your shirts!
 4 Kira: Feet.
 5 Sam: No,
 6 no this goes over your HEAD.
 7 Those go up- on your feet, okay?
 8 This goes over your head,
 9 Kira: ⟨whines⟩
 10 Sam: can you put this over your head?
 11 Kira: ⟨fusses⟩
 12 [(cries)]
 13 Sam: [Oh Ki-Ki, this goes over your head.]
 14 I- I- it doesn’t go on your feet!
 15 Kira: ⟨fusses⟩
 16 ((short pause))
 17 ⟨fusses⟩
 18 Sam: It’s gonna go on your head, okay?

- 19 → PEEK-A-BOO!
 20 Kira: ⟨*fusses*⟩
 21 → Sam: ⟨*high-pitched*⟩ Peek-a-boo!
 22 Kira: ⟨*fusses*⟩
 23 Sam: All right,
 24 we'll do your feet first.
 25 Do your feet first.
 26 ((*short pause*))

In line 19, Sam tries to reframe his struggle to put Kira's shirt on her as a game of peek-a-boo. He does this by actually "doing" peek-a-boo, which entails saying the game's name (lines 19, 21) (and likely covering Kira's face or eyes with the shirt – or possibly his own face or eyes). The playful reframing is also marked through high pitch in the segment (line 21). However, Kira seems to resist the reframing, as Sam decides instead to start getting Kira dressed feet first (line 25). Elsewhere, Sam uses peek-a-boo when Kira begins fussing while he is folding laundry, and there he is met with greater success. Kathy uses similar reframings in her interactions with Kira, for instance trying to reframe medicine-taking as pretend Mommy–baby play.

Janet and Steve reframe physical activities into fun activities in interaction with their daughter as well. In the following excerpt, Janet and Natalie had been playing at a playground near their home and it was time to leave. Janet had repeatedly been trying to impress this on Natalie, and Natalie repeatedly resisted. After Janet pretends to have a picnic with Natalie, she brings up the topic of leaving the playground again, and says that they need to leave so they can go home and prepare pizza for dinner. Janet keys "going home to make pizza" as something fun first by using an Italian accent (lines 4–5), and then by singing "the pizza song" (lines 6–7) and by telling her they could sing the pizza song together (lines 8–9). Natalie nonetheless resists Janet's request. Janet subsequently attempts to reframe "going home" as something playful: a race.

(4)

- 1 Janet: Oh you know what?
 2 It's time for us to go back home!
 3 Natalie: Why.
 4 Janet: ⟨*Italian accent*⟩ Because we've got to →
 5 make the pizza pie!
 6 ⟨*singing*⟩ Yoo do do do do do do,
 7 do do do do do do do do do.)
 8 Come on,
 9 [we'll go sing] the pizza song.
 10 Natalie: [(???)]
 11 ((*short pause*))
 12 Janet: Do you know how it goes.
 13 Natalie: No.
 14 Janet: You don't?!
 15 Oh I'll have to sing it by myself?
 16 Natalie: Yes.
 17 Janet: Oh dear.
 18 → Come on,

19 → I'll race you.
 20 → One,
 21 → two,
 22 → three,
 23 → GO!
 24 Natalie: (I don't want to.)
 25 Janet: Oh.
 26 Want to hold hands?
 27 Natalie: No.
 28 Janet: Come on.
 29 Natalie: I don't want to hold hands.
 30 Janet: All right,
 31 come on.

In line 18, Janet directs Natalie *Come on*. She uses the term *race* to try to trigger a new frame with a “fun” key (line 19); she continues the reframing by counting off as if at the start of a race (*One, two, three, GO!*, lines 20–23). Natalie resists this reframing, uttering in line 24 *I don't want to*. Thus, although her mother has tried to reframe the action of going home as something enjoyable, Natalie resists her mother's wishes. (Janet eventually uses another strategy, blending walking home with a frame of pretend play, to get Natalie to walk home cooperatively.)

When the parents in the third family want Jason to perform a particular action, they typically do not reframe it into play in the ways parents in the other families do; indeed, this occurred very rarely. Instead, they offer him explanations about why he should be cooperative. For instance, in the following excerpt, Neil tells Jason it is time to leave the playground and go home. His strategy for doing so is quite different from the reframing we saw Janet using in excerpt (4).

(5)

1 Neil: Hey, what are you doing?
 2 Sit down, on there.
 3 Jason: Ah, oh, I, uh.
 4 → Neil: You ready to go home, Jason?
 5 Jason: No.
 6 I want to (?)
 7 → Neil: Jason, why don't we go home now, okay?
 8 Jason: No.
 9 → Neil: Yeah, 'cause we got to get ready to go to Kathryn's party.
 10 Jason: Now?
 11 → Neil: Well, in about—
 12 → I'm not sure what time it is,
 13 → but I think in about a half an hour →
 14 → we're going to have to leave,
 15 → I have to take a shower.
 16 Jason: *(softly)* No.)
 17 Neil: Okay?
 18 Jason: [Okay.]
 19 Neil: [So] let's go.
 20 Jason: (? party? ??)
 21 *((sound of walking))*

Although Janet and Neil both follow directives they issue to their children to leave the playground with explanations about why leaving is necessary (to make pizza for dinner and to make sure they have time to get ready to go to a party they will be attending later in the day, respectively), Janet rekeys leaving as play, first through using a pretend accent and singing, then through reframing going home itself as play (as a race). Although both Neil and Clara do play games with their son, including games that are similar to those played in the other families (e.g., Neil and Jason race to see who can slide down the slide at the playground first), they rarely use these games as a resource for securing Jason's cooperation, instead choosing to elaborate on reasons why a particular behavior is important (and expected). Thus, in the different families parents rely on play as a parenting resource to different extents.

BLENDING FRAMES: SIMULTANEOUS CREATION

Like reframing, blending frames rekeys interaction. Whereas in reframing a child is invited to participate in a playful interaction rather than a conflictual one, or to reconceptualize a literal-frame physical activity as play, blended frames characterize situations in which there are two simultaneous definitions of the interaction. Like reframing, this occurs in two different ways: (i) A parent physically accomplishes a parenting task (signaling "this is work" or "this is a task-related activity") while linguistically and paralinguistically signaling play; and (ii) a parent blends work and play in a single utterance by enacting a pretend-play character issuing a task-oriented directive.

Blending a physical "work" frame and a verbal "play" frame

Parents in two families (Janet and Steve; Kathy and Sam) regularly physically undertake a parenting task while verbally signaling play (in the tapes of the third family, this occurred only once during the taping period). The interlocutors blending frames in this way can be viewed as doing something (physical) in a literal or non-play frame and at the same time doing something (verbal) in a play frame.

Excerpt (6) shows Janet attempting to blend frames in this manner by singing to Natalie as she puts tights on her. Prior to the excerpt, Natalie had been resisting putting her tights on, whining and crying; in the excerpt, once Janet gets the tights on Natalie, it is discovered that that they are too small. Thus the process must begin again; Janet blends frames as a way of distracting Natalie and securing her cooperation. Unlike cases of reframing, Janet does not use language to explicitly transform the physical action into something fun (e.g., she does not say "let's put the feet-snakes into their sleeping bags" or something of that nature); instead she uses the verbal channel to introduce a play frame while continuing the process of getting Natalie dressed (a frame of parenting work).

(6)

- 1 Janet: I hope these tights aren't going to be too SMALL,
 2 let's see what's going on here.
 3 Natalie: Uh.
 4 Janet: Oh my goodness,
 5 these are too- these are too SMALL!
 6 Those are tiny.
 7 Okay,
 8 back to the drawing board.
 9 → *(singing)* Sitting on your bottom,
 10 → sitting on your bottom,
 11 → sitting on your tiny tiny bottom.)
 12 Right?
 13 Natalie: Right.
 14 Janet: *(whispers)* Right.)
 15 Natalie: *(whispers)* Right.)
 16 Janet: Okay—
 17 Oh oh oh,
 18 over here.
 19 → *(singing)* Sitting on your .)
 20 → Natalie: *(singing)* Bottom.)
 21 → Janet: *(singing)* Sitting on your .)
 22 → Natalie: *(singing)* your BOTto:m.)
 23 → Janet: *(singing)* Sitting on your bottom bottom bottom.)
 24 Oh [what is going on here.]
 25 Natalie: [Ba ba bum bum bum bum] bottom bottom bottom →
 26 [[bottom bottom.]]
 27 Janet: [[Ugh we did]] this the wrong way.
 28 Okay this is NOT working very well.
 29 Natalie: *(laughing)* No:!)
 30 Janet: Hold *(laughing)* on.)
 31 Natalie: *(laughing)* No:.)
 32 Janet: *(laughing)* We've got to try again.)
 33 Natalie: *(laughs)*
 34 Janet: That was a fiasco,
 35 all right.

((Janet and Natalie continue laughing and talking about the "tights fiasco" as Janet puts a different pair of tights on Natalie))

Janet's singing about *sitting on your bottom* amuses Natalie as Janet continues to try to get her tights on. (*Sitting on your bottom* also seems to be part of the process; in this way the singing itself could be an example of the kind of verbal frame blending I consider in more detail in the next section.) Janet invites Natalie to join in the playful activity: After singing about *sitting on your bottom* (lines 9–11), Janet verifies with Natalie: *Right?* (line 12). Natalie repeats her mother's words (line 13), and again when the word is whispered (lines 14–15). When Natalie apparently moves away from Janet, Janet directs her to come back in a non-play frame (*Oh oh oh, over here*, lines 17–18), and then resumes singing (line 19). This time, Janet pauses after singing *Sitting on your*, using intonation to "invite" Natalie to supply the missing word (*bottom*), which Natalie does in song (line 20) (we saw this strategy in excerpt 1 as well). This is followed by Natalie repeating variations of the word *bottom* to herself (lines 25–26), and

Janet and Natalie laughing together as Janet realizes she is putting Natalie's tights on the wrong way. This laughter continues as Janet and Natalie discuss the *fi-asco* of putting tights on. Thus, through blending "putting on tights" with the activity of singing, the interaction is rekeyed from one of whining and resistance to one of shared humor and cooperation. In performing two tasks at once, one verbal (singing) and one action-oriented, Janet is simultaneously working and playing. This is similar to the mother Haight & Miller 1993 observed who engaged in pretending while also doing other activities, such as preparing meals. Janet in particular frequently accomplishes this kind of blending in everyday talk by engaging in pretend role-play with Natalie while doing other tasks, like eating her lunch.

In a similar way, excerpt (7) shows Sam using singing one morning to encourage Kira to get her coat on so Sam can take her to daycare (referred to as *school* in the excerpt). It seems Kira is resisting, and Sam tries to bring some fun into the interaction by singing.

(7)

- 1 Sam: Put on your coat.
 2 Let's go bye bye.
 3 Let's go bye bye.
 4 Coat!
 5 <whistles>
 6 Kay, I'll see you.
 7 Kira: <wails in protest>
 8 Sam: Okay, put on your coat!
 9 → <laughs> Ki-Ki.)
 10 → <singing> We're going to go to school today,
 11 → we're going to go to school!)
 12 ((pause))
 13 Okay, I'll chase you around.
 14 I'm gonna chase you.
 15 I'm gonna chase you.
 ((sounds of running and chasing follow))

Sam encourages Kira to get her coat on first through issuing directives (lines 1–4, *Put on your coat./Let's go bye bye./Let's go bye bye./Coat!*), then through whistling at Kira (line 5) and pretending that he will leave without her (line 6). When she responds to this by wailing (line 7), Sam directs Kira one more time to put on her coat (line 8, *Okay, put on your coat!*), and then introduces a play frame by laughing (line 9) and singing (lines 10–11, *We're going to go to school today, we're going to go to school!*). The tune to which Sam sings is one he repeatedly uses across the taping period, sometimes with different words, as he tries to get Kira excited about going to daycare.⁷ Sam's singing attempts to blend frames: to create a verbal frame of play while he simultaneously gets his daughter ready to go. Although this does not result in cooperation from Kira, Kira seems to pick up on the rekeying the singing entails: During a break in talk (line 12), she apparently (nonverbally) invites her father to chase her, in other words,

to play. Sam agrees (line 14, *Okay, I'll chase you around*), and the frame is shifted from conflict to play. However, leaving the house is further delayed; play is not successfully blended together with the activity of getting Kira's coat on.

Verbally blending work and play

The second kind of frame blending I identified involves a parent blending frames of work and play by speaking in the voice of a pretend role-play character while simultaneously issuing a task-related directive. These are perhaps among the most interesting examples; they are also the most linguistically complex. Parents in one of the three families blend frames in this way: Janet and Steve both do this, although Janet does so much more frequently. (Note that Janet also spends a greater amount of time caring for her child than the other parents: She worked part time outside the home, about 8 hours per week. In contrast, Kathy worked 30 hours per week, and all the other parents worked full time.) Janet and Steve were also the only parents to engage repeatedly in pretend role-play with their child during their taping period; role-play was a kind of play Natalie particularly enjoyed. Although there were several instances of pretend-play interaction involving Kira and her parents, the play was often short-lived and did not involve much "in role" verbal exchange, as Kira was not yet very verbal. In addition, both Janet and Steve were trained as actors and acted in children's theater on weekends; this may have influenced the amount of role-play that occurs in the discourse of this family. Instances captured on tape include play involving the enactment of family roles (e.g., Janet plays the role of "Natalie" and Natalie pretends to be "Mommy;" see Gordon 2002, 2003), play in which characters from books, television programs, or movies are enacted (e.g., from the children's television program *Sesame Street* and the film *The Wizard of Oz*), and play involving socioculturally common scripts such as going to see the doctor. I illustrate how through their participation in such role-play, the parents (most often Janet) blend frames of pretend with frames of "work," or task-based frames. In doing this, these parents accomplish a range of everyday parenting tasks: They tell Natalie what to do, encourage her to speak and act in conventionally polite ways, and prepare her for frequently problematic transitions in the day, like the transition from lunchtime to naptime.

Excerpt (8) shows Steve using a pretend role-play frame to issue a simple directive: to encourage Natalie to drink her juice at breakfast time. It is early in the morning at home. Natalie and Steve had been engaging in play in which Natalie pretended her "daughter" (her doll, Lucy) was sick, and Steve enacted Lucy, making her cough and describe her symptoms in a high-pitched voice while he simultaneously prepared breakfast (note that this creates blended frames in the first sense, but only from Steve's perspective, as Natalie does not participate in preparing breakfast). Then Natalie threw a short-lived temper tantrum because she was unhappy with the breakfast spoon Steve gave her; it is also possible this tantrum was an attempt to delay her father's departure for work. After a

pause of approximately one minute, Natalie introduces play that Steve subsequently uses to encourage Natalie to drink her juice. This play follows a “doctor” script. In this play, the characters are Natalie (who plays “the mommy”), Steve (who plays “the doctor”), and Lucy, Natalie’s doll (who is Natalie’s “daughter” and “the patient”). Note that Steve performs his own role of “doctor” (e.g. line 5) and also enacts Lucy (line 14).

(8)

- 1 Natalie: You be the daughter and I'll be the mommy okay?
 2 Steve: Okay.
 3 Natalie: Hi this is my daughter Lucy,
 4 she's not feeling well.
 5 Steve: <deep voice> She's not eh?)
 6 Natalie: No.
 7 Steve: <deep voice> What are her symptoms.)
 8 Natalie: Could you check her out please?
 9 Steve: <deep voice> Sure.
 10 → Here while I check her out,
 11 → you drink this apple juice.
 12 Let's see Lucy?
 13 Cough.)
 14 <coughs> ((enacting Natalie's doll))
 15 <deep voice> Say ah:..
 16 Mmm. Mm hmm.
 17 ((short pause))
 18 I think she's got a little bit of a cold.
 19 She needs to rest and keep warm.
 20 Let's cover her up.
 21 And she needs constant care and attention.)
 22 ((short pause))
 23 That's it.

This excerpt shows Steve cooperatively participating in Natalie’s play. Steve enacts the role of a doctor using a low-pitched voice, which signals that he is not speaking as himself, thus sending the metamessage “this is play.” Steve pretends to examine Natalie’s “daughter” and uses the medical term *symptoms* (line 7), he interacts with the doll by giving her instructions (line 13, *Cough*, line 15, *Say ah:*), and he gives his diagnosis (line 18, *I think she's got a little bit of a cold*) and recommendations (line 19, *She needs to rest and keep warm*; line 21, *And she needs constant care and attention*). These forms of participation all signal that Steve is enacting the doctor role. However, in lines 10–11, he uses the role to accomplish a parenting task – to encourage Natalie to drink her juice (*Here, while I check her [Lucy] out, you drink this apple juice*). In this way, he blends frames of work and play.

Janet blends frames in similar ways, although she does it much more frequently and often over more extended periods (she also engages in role-play with Natalie for longer periods in general). One day at lunchtime at home, Natalie introduced play in which she pretended to be “Blue Fairy” and Janet played the role of “Natalie.” Janet agreed to participate in this play, despite the fact that

she was not finished eating her lunch (Natalie had finished hers). In excerpt (9), we see Natalie, using the play frame by speaking in the role of “Blue Fairy,” asking to have some of her mother’s yogurt; thus Natalie uses the play frame to do her own “work” as a child – trying to get what she wants. Reciprocally, Janet negatively sanctions Natalie’s behavior from inside the play frame; she equates Natalie’s grabbing of the yogurt with lack of manners. Note that this excerpt is preceded by several minutes of play where Natalie, as “Blue Fairy,” greets Janet, who is playing the role of “Natalie,” and that Janet has already shared some of her yogurt with Natalie. Janet’s use of high pitch in the excerpt signals that she is playing the role of “Natalie”; elsewhere in the tapes this use of high pitch is referred to as using “the little voice.”

(9)

- 1 Natalie: Hi Miss Natalie.
 2 May I have some of y- that yogurt.
 3 I guess I’ll get some.
 4 → Janet: ⟨*high-pitched*⟩ Blue Fairy why are you trying →
 5 → to eat my yogurt.
 6 → Why are you trying to eat my yogurt Blue Fairy.)
 7 Mnm mnm. ((*negative*))
 8 [Do- do not grab,]
 9 Natalie: [(I want ??)]
 10 → Janet: Blue Fairy should know better manners than to grab.
 11 Natalie: Blue Fairy can I grab.
 12 → Janet: ⟨*high-pitched*⟩ Blue Fairy don’t you have →
 13 → some good manners.)
 14 Natalie: Please?
 15 → Janet: ⟨*high-pitched*⟩ Didn’t they teach you manners →
 16 → at fairy school?).
 17 Natalie: They didn’t teach me manners at fairy school.
 18 Janet: ⟨*high-pitched*⟩ You’re kidding!)

Although Natalie asks politely for the yogurt (line 2, *May I have some of y- that yogurt*), it seems she helps herself to Janet’s yogurt without waiting for Janet’s response (line 3, *I guess I’ll get some*). Janet subsequently indirectly comments on Natalie’s table manners using a high-pitched voice and addressing Natalie using the play address term “Blue Fairy” (lines 4–6, *Blue Fairy why are you trying to eat my yogurt. Why are you trying to eat my yogurt Blue Fairy*). This blends play and non-play frames, as Janet is speaking as “Natalie” but also parenting her: She chastises Natalie for trying to eat someone else’s food without permission. (Note that Janet also may be using the play frame specifically to protect her yogurt.) Then, when Natalie apparently grabs for Janet’s yogurt, Janet utters *Mnm mnm* (line 7, meaning ‘no no’) and *Do- do not grab* (line 8), utterances that are in her own voice and outside the play frame. However, she then repositions her request that Natalie not grab as part of the pretend frame, using the term “Blue Fairy” (line 10, *Blue Fairy should know better manners than to grab*). After Natalie addresses Janet as “Blue Fairy” in line 11, Janet reassumes “the little voice” and continues to comment on Natalie’s manners

(lines 12–13, *Blue Fairy don't you have some good manners*; lines 15–16, *Didn't they teach you manners at fairy school?*). These strategies encourage Natalie to “use her manners”: She says *please* in line 14. Thus, it seems that Janet’s blending of the task-based frame of directing Natalie’s interactional behavior and the pretend frame of role-play can be viewed as “successful.” (A few moments following this excerpt, Natalie repeats her request for yogurt, and Janet, in her own voice, agrees that she can have a little bit, even though Janet had offered her yogurt for lunch in the first place and Natalie said she didn’t want it.)

PLAY AS WORK IN THE CONTEXT OF FAMILY

This analysis has thus far demonstrated how work and play are interconnected in everyday parent–child conversation through reframing interaction and blending frames. Given this interconnectedness, it is perhaps not surprising that some parents come to view play as a kind of work. In fact, in these data, there is evidence that for two of the parents, Janet and Kathy, engaging in play with their daughters constitutes parenting work. Play might be viewed as work by these mothers because both regularly use it to accomplish parenting tasks. It could also be that they view play – and their participation in parent–child play – as developmentally important, and therefore an obligation (if they fit into the pattern of other middle-class European American mothers such as those interviewed in Haight et al. 1997). In addition, play may feel like work because it hinges crucially on manipulating frames.

Prior research on naturally occurring family discourse suggests that managing frames is in itself part of parenting work. For instance, Kendall’s (1999, 2003) frame analysis of one family’s dinnertime conversations finds that the mother’s interactional workload is much heavier than the father’s, as the mother enacts a number of different positions vis-à-vis the couple’s daughter (Teacher, Chef, Behavior Monitor, etc.) in various frames, whereas the father only enacts one, which Kendall calls “Playmate,” in a play frame. Kendall’s (2006) study of one kind of transition encounter, the homecoming encounter, in two families that participated in the same larger study providing the data I examine (Kathy, Sam and Kira; Janet, Steve and Natalie) suggests that in order to avoid a parent–child altercation, parents must attend to (at least) two frames: a social encounter frame, and a transaction frame. For instance, Kendall examines an excerpt of a transition encounter involving Kathy, Sam, and Kira in which Sam attends to only one frame, resulting in parent–child conflict. In that instance, Kira attempts to climb into her father’s lap after he arrives home from work, but he is hungry and, focused on eating a snack, snaps at her. Sam’s focusing on one frame (eating) to the exclusion of another (greeting and paying positive attention to Kira) caused an altercation. Thus, “attending to multiple frames” can be thought of in itself as parenting work; this may be in particular the case for mothers, as was the case for the mother whose discourse is considered in Kendall 1999, 2003.

In the following conversational excerpt occurring one evening at home, Kathy describes to Sam her struggles to get Kira buckled into her car seat, and discusses not only how she uses play as a resource, but also how this play “obligates” her to perform certain actions. In the excerpt the word *buck* is sometimes used for *buckle*. Kira is present in this interaction as well.

(10)

- 1 Sam: ((to Kira)) How'd you like school.
 2 ((to Kathy)) How'd she like school.
 3 Kathy: She—well, she—I had to wake her up to get her out early.
 4 Sam: O:::h.
 5 Kathy: She fussed in the car,
 6 she wouldn't let me buckle her,
 7 and she's so strong,
 8 I couldn't- I couldn't FIGHT her, Sam,
 9 she was like THIS→
 10 Sam: ⟨laughs⟩
 11 Kathy: and I could not get her in the seat.
 12 Sam: O:::h, there's a trick.
 13 Kathy: What, tickle her?
 14 Didn't work.
 15 Sam: No, what'd I do last time.
 16 I had something last time.
 17 → I just tried—I changed the subject.
 18 ⟨laughs⟩
 19 Kathy: So now when I buck,
 20 say “Mommy has to buck,
 21 [and kitty cat—”]
 22 Sam: [(laughs) All you gotta do—]
 23 → All you have to do is say “fries.”
 24 → Kathy: Have to say “kitty cat.”
 25 Sam: ((to Kira)) And you'll sit down, won't you.
 26 Kitty has got to buck?
 27 → Kathy: Well, she has a little kitty cat that my mom gave her,
 28 and I said, “Everybody has to buck, even the kitty cat.”
 29 But she didn't want the kitty cat to buck with her,
 30 she wanted him to buck with Mommy,
 31 → so Mommy has to put kitty cat under here,
 32 Sam: ⟨laughs⟩
 33 Kathy: 'cause kitty cat has to buck!
 34 ((to Kira)) And everybody has to buckle for safety →
 35 when we're in the car, right?
 36 Ye::s.
 37 Everybody has to be safe.
 38 Sam: You didn't WANNA go in the car, did you.
 39 Kira: Mama.
 40 Kathy: Then we went on and had some fun, didn't we.

Here Kathy and Sam discuss the difficult process of getting Kira to sit down and get buckled into her car seat. Sam notes a couple of strategies that have worked for him: changing the subject (line 17) and mentioning *fries* (line 23; Kira loves to go to McDonald's for French fries). Kathy however talks about another strategy she has used to get Kira buckled up: She tells Kira that her toy *kitty cat*

needs to be buckled in as well (note that the interaction Kathy describes was not actually captured on tape). However, this obligates Kathy to buckle the toy cat into her own seatbelt; she states that she HAS TO buckle the cat in with her (lines 29–31, 33). Although this strategy is reportedly successful for Kathy in reframing conflicts about getting Kira to cooperate into play where they buckle up Kira’s toy cat, it is somewhat of an inconvenience for Kathy; the play becomes an obligation and results in Kathy buckling a child’s toy into her own seat belt.

There are indications that for Janet too play is a type of parenting work. For instance, excerpt (11) provides evidence that it may take Janet added effort to engage in pretend play with Natalie because of the attention to framing it entails: In addition to enacting the everyday role or identity of “parent” (or “Janet”) she simultaneously enacts another role (here, Janet pretends to be Natalie’s preschool teacher, “Miss Mandy”). Remembering to enact a pretend play role while being a parent (and a person) can lead to speech errors that point to the cognitive work the play requires. Excerpt (11) shows Janet briefly forgetting to speak in the role of “Miss Mandy.” She had been enacting the “Miss Mandy” role (at Natalie’s insistence) as she prepared Natalie for nap time, thereby blending frames; for instance, in the excerpt Janet uses the role to direct Natalie to select a book to read (lines 1–2). Then, still speaking in the tone of voice used to play the role of “Miss Mandy” (a high-pitched, airy voice), Janet explains to Natalie that she (Janet) would like to use the bathroom before they take a nap.

(11)

- | | | |
|---|----------|---|
| 1 | Janet: | <i>⟨Miss Mandy voice⟩</i> Can you pick → |
| 2 | | our first book please?) |
| 3 | Natalie: | This one! |
| 4 | | <i>⟨(short pause, soft music comes on)⟩</i> |
| 5 | Janet: | <i>⟨Miss Mandy voice⟩</i> Okay, |
| 6 | → | Mommy has to use the bathroom— |
| 7 | → | I mean Miss Mandy has to use the bathroom.) |

In lines 1–2, Janet blends a task-based frame with a play frame. But then, she makes a “performance error,” using “Miss Mandy’s” voice to speak about herself (“Mommy”). This error points to the added work pretend play might cognitively create for a parent. It is similar to the phenomenon of “leaking” between frames identified by Tannen & Wallat 1993.

There is also more explicit evidence that playing with Natalie constitutes work for Janet. Excerpt (12), drawn from an interaction Janet had with three of her friends one evening during a dinner party (see Gordon 2006), shows Janet talking about engaging in pretend play as part of doing the work of being a parent. She describes to her friends, all of whom are women who work full time and do not have children, what it is like to spend the day at home with Natalie. (Recall that Janet works part time, approximately 8 hours per week.) In line 2, Janet is speaking as “Natalie.”

(12)

- 1 Janet: So we're driving in the car,
 2 "You be- you be Natalie,"
 3 → so I'll try to talk,
 4 → she'll- "no no no,
 5 → the LITTLE voice."
 6 → So I have to go,
 7 → *<high-pitched>* "Mommy!"
 8 Vicki: *<laughs>*
 9 → Janet: You know,
 10 → and have this little voice.
 11 → "No no no the LITTLE voice."
 12 → So some days I'm just like,
 13 → "okay Mommy would just like to be Mommy right now."
 14 Vicki: [*laughs*]
 15 Becky: [*laughs*]
 16 Pam: [*laughs*]
 17 → Janet: "I don't want to have the little voice,
 18 → [I don't want] to be Wallace." . . .
 19 Pam: [(Oh dear.)]
 20 Becky: Oh boy.

In this excerpt, Janet describes pretend play as if it is work. She notes that she HAS TO use the high-pitched "little voice" while enacting the role of Natalie (lines 6–7). She implies that "being Mommy" is enough work that she does not need the added task of "being" someone else, such as Wallace (a children's film character sometimes enacted by Janet in role-play with Natalie). Janet laments, *So some days I'm just like, "okay Mommy would just like to be Mommy right now"* (lines 12–13). This phrase perhaps most of all captures the fact that engaging in role-play with Natalie, though at times it is enjoyable and humorous, is on some level parenting work. In other words, play is not just a means of accomplishing parenting work through creating blended frames or through reframing interaction; all pretend play is in itself a form of parenting work.

DISCUSSION

The excerpts of family interaction I have considered in this analysis illustrate that play is a fruitful site for examining how framing works in everyday talk. My analysis builds on Goffman's (1974, 1981) idea that frames are laminated in discourse by illustrating first of all how frames can be interrelated or layered in two distinct ways: through reframing and through blending frames. I examined how these are similar to one another – both use language and paralinguistic features to rekey interaction – but also showed how they are systematically different: Reframing is a sequential transformation of what is going on in an interaction, whereas blending sends metamessages of play and work simultaneously. This extends Goffman's idea that framing is often a complex, multi-layered activity in day-to-day life by illustrating how multiple frames can be interrelated. It also adds to prior research that has focused on how frames can

be discursively interrelated – either NESTED (Campbell 2003, Danet et al. 1997) or EMBEDDED (Gordon 2002), OVERLAPPED (Gordon 2003), or SHIFTED (Goodwin 1996) or REFRAMED (Tannen 2006) – by identifying what I call BLENDED FRAMES and by demonstrating how blending and reframing are related, but distinguishable, strategies used to interconnect work and play frames. In addition, I illustrated how various linguistic and paralinguistic features are utilized to manipulate frames into these configurations moment by moment: repetition; laughter; manipulation of pitch, intonation, volume, voice quality, and melody; “naming the game”; and through features that create pretend identities, including address terms, voice quality, and speech registers. This adds to prior research identifying contextualization cues that signal various kinds of play, such as that of Straehle 1993, Hoyle 1993, and Sirota 2002.

In identifying two ways of laminating frames of work and play – sequential transformation (reframing) and simultaneous creation (blending) – I found that parents relied on manipulating frames in these ways to various degrees. The parents in one family frequently laminate frames in both ways (Janet and Steve); in a second family the parents typically use reframing (Kathy and Sam); and in the third family parents rarely reframe or blend work and play (Clara and Neil). What might explain these patterns is beyond the scope of this study; however, there are several reasonable hypotheses. One possibility is that the parents have different child-rearing ideologies which may or may not be related to their prior experiences, the differing ages of their children, as well as their own ages (Clara and Neil are in their forties; the other parents are in their thirties). Another is that the parents only use the most effective strategies in parenting: Blending frames through role-play, for instance, seems to be a relatively successful way of dealing with Natalie’s resistance, and role-play is a kind of play Natalie greatly enjoys. In contrast, the verbal competence of Kira, a younger child, may not yet permit her to participate fully in such play, so the strategy may not be successful; as Garvey (1977:79) notes, pretend role-play is “perhaps one of the most complex kinds of play conducted in childhood.” It is possible that role-play is not at all an effective strategy for interacting with Jason (although we do not know this, since there are no instances of role-play in the tapes of this family). Too, the presence or absence of play in everyday interactions in which parenting work is accomplished may point to the larger context of each family’s distinctive culture. For instance, Janet, Steve, and Natalie use language in patterned ways to construct a family culture based largely around verbal play and performance (see Gordon 2003); these parents’ uses of play to do parenting fit into this broader pattern. (Goodwin 2007 also identifies playfulness as a central component of a family’s culture.)

Blending frames of work and play and trying to reframe work as play may also serve as attempts to bridge two dimensions that Tannen 2001, 2003, 2007 has suggested are constantly being negotiated in family interaction: connection

and control. The strategies used to laminate play and non-play frames that I have outlined in this article can be viewed as simultaneously serving the needs for connection and control in the family context.⁸ The examples I have examined show parents trying to exert control over their children while rekeying interaction as play, a more solidarity-based type of interaction. This may explain why the strategy appeals to some parents: Beyond being functional in influencing children's behaviors, it serves these dual human needs at once. In other words, laminating task-based frames and play frames can be viewed as fitting into a larger set of strategies families use to create their own "politeness systems" (Blum-Kulka 1990). Through strategies such as using nicknames and manipulating tone of voice in issuing parental control acts (Blum-Kulka 1997), parents attempt manage the simultaneous asymmetry, intimacy, and informality of parent-child relationships as well as individual family members' needs for involvement and independence.

In creating exchanges in which "play" and "work" are both present, either weaving in and out of each other moment by moment as interaction unfolds, or being enacted simultaneously, the parents create situations in which work apparently becomes play. But a parent's play may also be conceptualized as work – because he or she uses it to accomplish parenting tasks, feels obligated to participate, and has to deal with the extra cognitive and linguistic attention monitoring multiple frames at once or in quick succession might entail. Thus, this study illustrates the ambiguous nature of play, in particular instances of play that may be conceived as somewhat "marginal." The data I have analyzed also take Bateson's (1972) conceptualization of play as "paradoxical" one step further: Parents "play with" play to accomplish literal-frame tasks and activities. As the playful nip denotes the bite, but not "what would be denoted by the bite" (Bateson 1972:180), actions in parent-child play denote literal-frame actions but not what would be denoted by those actions. However, in the instances of parent-child interaction analyzed here, play is used to accomplish "real" literal-frame actions. The definition of the situation is "not real" but NOT "not real"; however, in a sense it is additionally "real."

Parenting often involves multitasking in daily life – playing with a child while also getting her dressed, trying to diffuse a tantrum and getting oneself ready in the morning, reading to a child while preparing him lunch. Frame analysis provides a useful way of trying to understand the layered nature of such everyday parenting activities. In addition, delving into the notion of laminated frames helps us better recognize the linguistic dexterity that parents manifest in interactions with their children, as well as the ambiguous and paradoxical nature of what we often understand simply as "play." In offering insights into excerpts of "a(p)parent play," this study also sheds light on the complex nature of everyday interaction more generally and the linguistic means by which this complexity is created and negotiated.

NOTES

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¹ Although my analysis focuses primarily on the verbal channel, I also build on Goodwin’s insights into nonverbal frame shifting by discussing physical actions to the extent that it is possible, given sounds and noises captured by the audiotape recorder.

² This study was funded by the Alfred P. Sloan Foundation (grant #99-10-7 to Deborah Tannen and Shari Kendall and grant #B2004-40 to Tannen, Kendall, and me).

³ Families were recruited for participation through announcements of the project that Tannen made following lectures she gave in the Washington, DC area and through flyers posted at various locations. To be eligible to participate, families had to have at least one child and both parents had to work outside the home. In addition, both parents had to be willing and able to tape-record at home and at work. Because this is ethnographic research that uses a case study method, we accepted the first four families who met our requirements and agreed to participate. Interestingly, although it was not too difficult to find couples willing to tape at home, it turned out to be very challenging to find those willing to tape at work.

⁴ The high quality of the digital tape recorders used (Sony TCD-D100s) was extremely helpful in this regard.

⁵ Family members were instructed to audiotape for one week; however, Kathy and Sam experienced some difficulties with their tape recorders early on and ended up taping two weeks on their own accord (mostly Sam’s) to ensure that they successfully recorded enough talk.

⁶ The transcription conventions used in this article were developed by Deborah Tannen and Shari Kendall for use in the research study “Mothers and fathers at work and at home: Creating parental identities through talk.”

((words))	Double parentheses with italics enclose transcriber’s comments
(words)	Single parentheses enclose uncertain transcription
carriage return	Each new line represents an intonation unit
→	An arrow at the end of a line indicates that→ the intonation unit continues onto the next line
—	A dash indicates a truncated intonation unit
-	A hyphen indicates a truncated word
?	A question mark indicates a relatively strong rising intonation
.	A period indicates a falling, final intonation
,	A comma indicates a continuing intonation
..	One or two dots indicate silence
:	A colon indicates an elongated vowel
CAPS	Capitals indicate emphatic stress
{laughs}	Angle brackets enclose descriptions of vocal noises, e.g. laughs, coughs
{manner} words)	Angle brackets enclose descriptions of the manner in which an utterance is spoken, e.g. high-pitched, laughing, incredulous
words [words]	
[words]	Square brackets—single and double—enclose simultaneous talk

⁷Note that the tune comes from a children’s video about “going to the zoo” that Kira often watched during the taping week. See Tovares 2005, 2007 for a discussion of how bits of public texts – such as what one sees on television – are utilized in private interactions involving members of the families who participated in this study.

⁸ See Tannen 1994 for a discussion of the interconnectedness of power and solidarity in interaction.

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