

The use of relational terms to accomplish interactional
business: Three examples from a rhetorical discursive action
approach

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Walter John Carl

**University of Iowa
Department of Communication Studies
105 BCSB
University of Iowa
Iowa City, IA 52242-1498**

walter-carl@uiowa.edu

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Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to investigate how people use relational terms to accomplish interactional business, make relevant relational obligations, and imply requirements of performance about interpersonal relationships. "Relational terms" refers to labels, categories, or phrases -- such as "friend," "my family," "just friends," etc. -- that are associated with a particular kind of interpersonal relationship (Sahlstein, 1999). Rather than thinking about how these terms may be used in a hypothetical, contrived, or an idealized sense, three empirical examples of naturalistic interaction are analyzed from a rhetorical discursive action perspective (Edwards & Potter, 1992), which is especially attentive to the rhetorical and performative features of discourse and how matters of stake, fact, interest, and accountability are constructed and managed discursively. The first example illustrated how 'the sometimes disappearing friend' is used by a participant as a social category to account for her absence. The second example showed how 'just friends' versus 'I'm just his (.) friend' is used to negotiate intimacy and distance between people and the building up and undermining of versions of a particular relationship. The third excerpt highlighted how matters of stake and motivation are worked up and managed in talk, and the practice of linking up activities and inferences to a relational term or category. The paper concludes with implications for future study of the rhetorical use of relational terms, in particular, and relationship processes, more generally.

Introduction

In the fields of interpersonal communication and personal relationships, numerous researchers have argued for the centrality of talk to relationship processes (Hopper & Drummond, 1990; Shotter, 1993; Duck, 1994; Spencer, 1994; Baxter & Montgomery, 1996; Fitch, 1998). Rather than viewing talk as a neutral tool for describing reality, these authors emphasize how talk is an ongoing, unfinished rhetorical and performative activity. By rhetorical, Duck (1994) suggests that talk presents a particular view of the world, "which others can accept, challenge, reject, or assimilate" (p. 12). By performative, it is suggested that talk performs certain jobs, such as managing identity, proposing certain positions and denying counter positions, or indicating affection.

Due to the efforts of researchers cited above, the rhetorical and performative features of talk have increased in theoretical discussions and empirical studies. However, this increased currency has not always led researchers to analyze actual empirical stretches of interaction for the rhetorical and performative implications (though see Hopper & Drummond, 1990; Spencer, 1994; Fitch, 1998 for notable exceptions). The purposes of this essay, then, are to offer an analytic approach that attends to the rhetorical and performative features of relational talk in actual, transcribed relational interactions, as well as to follow an emerging topic of study, the use of "relational terms," and how they may be used to accomplish interactional business (Sahlstein, 1999), make relevant relational obligations, and imply requirements of performance about interpersonal relationships (see also Duck, 1998, where this claim may be traced).

In the first section of this essay, the rhetorical discursive action analytic approach will be introduced. Next, the study of personal address terms (e.g., Fitch, 1991), person reference terms (e.g., Sacks & Schegloff, 1979; Moerman, 1988), and rhetorical relational terms (Sahlstein, 1999) will be briefly reviewed in relation to one another. Following this, three

empirical examples of social interaction will be analyzed for how relational terms accomplish a range of interactional business. In closing, three implications of this study will be discussed and suggestions made for ways research can productively move forward in terms of a rhetorical discursive approach to relating. Additionally, the claim will be made that this approach offers a new way to understand the use of relational terms and how their use implies norms about the performance of interpersonal relationships.

A rhetorical discursive approach to relating

The analytic approach offered in this essay is called a rhetorical discursive action approach which highlights the rhetorical features (Billig, 1987; Duck, 1994) of a discursive action approach¹ (Potter & Wetherell, 1987; Potter & Edwards, 1992; Potter, 1996; Edwards, 1997). In this section, I will discuss the following claims of a discursive action approach: talk is a) situated, b) action-oriented, c) constructed, d) pervasively rhetorical, and e) a site to manage issues of accountability and identity (Edwards & Potter, forthcoming).

Discourse² is situated, action-oriented, and constructed

First, talk is situated within sequences of interaction. Note the following example:

Extract 1³

- | | |
|---|---------------------------------|
| 1 | Rick: Hey are you busy tonight? |
| 2 | Barb: Don't have any plans yet |
| 3 | Rick: 'wanna go to a party? |
| 4 | Barb: Sure |

1 The "discursive action" approach (Edwards & Potter, 1992) has also been labeled "discursive psychology" and addresses the rhetorical and dilemmatic features of everyday life (Billig, 1988). The label "rhetorical discursive action" used in this paper highlights the specifically rhetorical features of this approach, especially given that rhetoric, broadly conceived, has been a foundation for the discipline of communication studies (Tracy, in press).

2 The term "discourse" is used to refer to the talk and text as the performance of social actions. In this paper, the data is exclusively conversation, so the term "talk" is used interchangeably with "discourse," though it could equally be argued that the data is exclusively "textual" since transcripts of the conversations are being analyzed (see Derrida, 1988; Potter, 1996, p. 85).

3 Extracts 1 and 2 are "made up" examples with no technical transcription notations. They are used here to introduce some basic points in a "reader-friendly" fashion and to contrast with subsequent extracts taken from "naturally occurring" talk (Potter & Wetherell, 1995) with technical notations (except for those without notations in original transcript, such as Extracts 4, 5 and 7). See Appendix 1 for transcription conventions.

Each line in the above transcript represents a "turn" of talk (Sacks, Schegloff, & Jefferson, 1978). One turn of talk is followed by a subsequent turn, and so on. In this excerpt, Rick asks Barb if she is busy tonight (line 1). Barb replies that she does not have plans (line 2), suggesting that her schedule is available. At the next turn (line 3), Rick invites Barb to a party, which Barb accepts in line 4. Lines 1 and 2 make up what conversation analysts call a question-answer "adjacency pair," while lines 3 and 4 comprise an invitation-acceptance adjacency pair. While this may be an obvious point, note how the invitation-acceptance pairing comes sequentially after the question-answer pairing. Conversation analysts have identified lines 1-2 as a "pre-sequence" (Hutchby, 1998), or an orderly sequence of turns that precede and "make relevant" a subsequent sequence. That is, after it becomes apparent that Barb's schedule is open, Rick invites her to the party. If Barb was not available, then perhaps Rick might not have made the invitation.

The use of the phrase "makes relevant" suggests that a turn of talk is "oriented to," but not determined by, its position in an interactive sequence (Schegloff, 1989). For example, in line 2, by providing an answer, Barb treats "Hey are you busy tonight?" as a question. In line 4, however, Barb treats, or "orients to," Rick's "'wanna go to a party?" as an invitation, and one that she accepts. However, one turn at talk does not determine another term, but creates the possibility for a particular response, thus "making relevant" particular subsequent turns. In this example, then, an invitation makes relevant an acceptance or rejection (often with an account for why one is rejecting the invitation⁴), but does not make either of these inevitable. The acceptance or rejection may be postponed until later or be absent completely (Heritage, 1994). To further demonstrate that one turn does not determine another turn, and to show how an acceptance or rejection is deferred, consider the following excerpt:

4. The nature of accounts and social accountability will be discussed below.

Extract 2

- 1 Rick: Hey are you busy tonight?
 2 Barb: Why do you ask?
 3 Rick: Well I was wondering if you wanted to go to a party?
 4 Barb: Oh, yeah I'm free.

In this excerpt, Rick asks the same question, but Barb does not answer it, at least not right away. Instead, she asks, or "inserts," a question of her own (the first part of what is called an "insertion sequence"; Hutchby, 1998). In this case, Barb does not ignore Rick's question, but defers it until more relevant information is obtained. Barb treats Rick's reply in line 3 as providing sufficient information, and completes the second part of the question-answer adjacency pair that started in line 1. The point of using terms like "adjacency pairings," "relevance," and "orientation" is because they allow a "way in" to understanding *how social actions are performed* in an interaction and "oriented to by the participants themselves" (Hutchby, 1998, pp. 14-15).

A second claim of a discursive action approach, then, is that *discourse is action-oriented*. This claim suggests that discourse performs various actions such as blaming, justifying, complimenting, teasing, building up one's own argument and/or undermining another's, and so on. Relatedly, a third feature is that *discourse is constructed, or worked up, to perform these actions* by drawing on words, descriptions, accounts, common topics, and rhetorical devices. In order to see these three issues at work, it is important to use detailed transcripts of actual, sequential interaction (Edwards, 1997).

To illustrate the situated, action-oriented, and constructed features of discourse, consider the following example (from Potter, 1996, pp. 108-109) where students are discussing a noise that they hear outside of their apartment or flat.

Extract 3 (DSS-K:94:1)⁵

Becky: oi (.) sh shh (.) it could have been that
 Neil: NO that's not making a noise
 []
 Alan: no (.) something outside (0.4) it was
 definitely outside
 Diane: Neil you've got shoes on

Note Diane's turn in this sequence (the arrowed line) to make a few points about talk's action-orientation. First, as competent conversationalists and as members of a culture where, to be able to go outside of the house, shoes must be or are often worn, Diane's turn can be heard as a "request" for Neil to go outside and investigate the noise. Thus, Diane's talk here is not simply making an observation about the world (though more on this below), nor "constructing" the world in an abstract sense. Instead, she is working up a description of the situation in order to do something, in this case, to request that Neil investigates the noise. Importantly though, it is not just discourse analysts of this talk who can hear this as a request, but the participants orient to it in this way. That is, in the next few lines (not shown here), the students talk about the risks associated with going outside to investigate the noise, specifically about the possibility that there may be a burglar outside who is carrying a weapon.

Second, notice how Diane's "request" is not direct (such as, "Neil, would you go outside and check out that noise?"), but is accomplished by offering a description. That is, the request is inferred, rather than directly stated. One inference, then, is that because Neil has his shoes on, he is in a position to go investigate the noise. Third, the action that is done by Diane's description suggests some sensitivity or delicacy to the situation and that this sensitivity is being managed here. That is, the request for Neil to go outside to investigate involves some effort, or perhaps danger. Relatedly, this sensitivity also points to identity

5 Refer to Appendix 1 for transcription conventions used in this paper, which were developed by Gail

issues that may be implicated, or at stake, in this interaction. That is, Diane could be perceived as lazy (not wanting to make the effort to go outside) or afraid (of confronting the possible danger), for example. Both the sensitive nature of the request and the identity issues are simultaneously constituted and managed by Diane's description.

Third, Diane's description "Neil you've got shoes on" could also be heard as "just stating the facts" or "making an observation." This points to another important analytic focus of a discursive action approach: *fact construction*. "Fact construction" refers to how versions of the world are assembled together and stabilized as factual and independent of the discourse producer, and often to manage issues of "stake" (Potter, 1996). The term "stake" does not refer to one's inner, psychological motivations that get expressed through talk, as if these concerns exist extrinsic to discourse and that a function of talk was to serve as a conduit for them (Hopper, 1992). Rather, matters of interest and stake are salient issues that people build up, undermine, and attend to in their talk as part of doing particular relational business (Edwards & Potter, 1992). Descriptions are especially useful for managing stake because a speaker does not have to say "I want you to go outside and check out those noises." Rather, this same action can be accomplished less directly with Diane's "Neil you've got shoes on." Potter notes how descriptions are employed to carry off an evaluation or other social action, especially since they can be defended as uninterested and unmotivated reports about the world. Of course, though, even ostensibly neutral descriptions or reports involve rhetorical choices, which is consistent with the work of Burke (1966) on how every symbolic selection necessarily entails deflections of alternative formulations, and Duck's (1994) argument that "The choice of terms to emphasize is not determined or dictated by the behavior being explained but is chosen by the observer/explainer..." (p. 79). This analytic

emphasis on how reports, descriptions and versions are constructed to perform social actions leads to the pervasively rhetorical features of discourse.

Discourse is pervasively rhetorical

Another way that discourse is constructed and action-oriented is that versions of the world, people, events, mental life, etc. are constructed in talk and texts in order to do things. Descriptions and versions of the world are not offered free-standing, but often in a context where they counter alternative versions in such a way as to resist being written off as partial, interested, or just plain false (Edwards & Potter, 1992). Further, communicators may build up their own versions while simultaneously taking down a rival version, thus displaying a defensive and an offensive rhetoric (Potter, 1996a).

To illustrate this analytic interest in rhetoric and antagonistic versions, consider the following excerpts from Drew's (1990) research on courtroom interaction (as discussed in Edwards & Potter, 1992, pp. 50-51). Below, C refers to the defense counsel who is cross-examining a witness (W) for the prosecution, who is the victim of an alleged rape.

Extract 4

C: [referring to a club where the defendant and the victim met] it's where girls and fellas meet isn't it?

W: People go there.

C: And during the evening, didn't Mr O [the defendant] come over to sit with you?

W: Sat at our table.

In both of these examples, the defense counsel and the witness offer alternative versions or descriptions of events. Each version makes relevant certain inferences and does different business in the interaction. For example, when the defense counsel characterizes the club as a place where 'girls and fellas meet', his version makes two issues salient – gender and certain types of relationship activity (in this case, 'meet[ing]') – that could be consequential to the offense under dispute (i.e., rape). Notice how the witness's version

succinctly neutralizes a) the gender issue by substituting the generic reference term ‘people’ and b) the relational activity implications by characterizing the club as just a place where people go. The second example follows a similar pattern. The defense counsel’s version makes the inference available (to the “overhearing jury”) that the defendant came over to sit with the witness (again, a relevant issue for this trial), while the witness’s version counters this implication by removing the specific person reference and substituting it with ‘our table’.

As these examples illustrate, communicators deploy versions of events to do things in interaction (in this case, make inferences available for the jury) and these versions are countered or undermined in the service of other actions. Thus, in this context, the study of rhetoric as the building up and undermining of alternative, often rival, versions of events is important to understanding some of the business that gets done by participants through communication.

Discourse as a site to manage issues of accountability and identity

Another related point about the action-oriented nature of communication is the issue of accountability. As Buttny (1993) argues, communication and accountability mutually implicate one another because humans are treated as responsible to others when they make accounts about their own and others’ actions. That is, communication accounts are offered to hold someone or oneself responsible for actions or to absolve someone or oneself of this responsibility. The issue of accountability is dealt with in terms of participants’ ways of talking and their own orientation (Antaki, 1994). That is, agency is not dealt with in terms of a philosophical argument about the extent to which people are “really” agentic or can be held responsible for their actions. Rather, communicators in an interaction treat, or orient to, each other as agentic and responsible (but not everyone, for example, children, animals, people who are judged to be mentally unstable, etc.), thus making accountability practices available

for analysis. Further, a focus in this paper is to analyze how accounts are constructed, or worked up, to manage and attend to issues of agency and responsibility.

Related to the notion of accountability is a concern for normativity. Following from Garfinkel's (1967) ethnomethodological view that rather than analyzing how norms become internalized and then reproduced or deviated from, the focus should shift to study the methods people use (thus ethno-method-ology) invoke, challenge, and transform norms in the process of accounting for their own and others actions. Conversation analysis picks up this ethnomethodological tradition in order to look at how norms are *performed* as part of accountability practices on a turn-by-turn basis. Consider the following example from Sacks (1987):

Extract 5

- 1 A: You coming down early?
 2 B: Well, I got a lot of things to do before getting cleared
 3 up tomorrow. I w- probably won't be too early.

Sacks noted that the phrasing of A's question in the "positive" sense ("You coming down early?" rather than the "negative" form, "You're not coming down early are you?") makes relevant, or sets up the normative conditions for, a "Yes" answer. B however, marks that a non-normative response will be provided by the "Well" and then provides an account about how he has a long of things he has to do (not that he does not want to come; note how issues of stake and interest are being managed here), and then, after the account, B states that he won't be too early (but in a weak version; note the use of "probably" and "won't be too early"; see Sacks, 1987 for more details). By talking in this way, both A and B *perform* what is considered normative and routine for their joint interaction.

A second issue managed discursively is identity (Antaki & Widdicombe, 1998). Tracy & Naughton (1994) have highlighted the importance of identity to communicative interaction in their analysis of "intellectual discussions." Specifically, they claim that

identity is “implicated” in communication through various practices of asking questions during discussion, meaning that identity is an issue at stake for participants, and that a concern for identity is displayed and oriented to in participants’ talk (see Extract 3 and Diane's "Neil you've got shoes on"). In addition to analyzing how communication displays a concern for participant identities, identity is also a categorical resource that is drawn upon and made relevant by participants to do various actions (Antaki & Widdicombe, 1998). That is, identity can be seen as a social category that people use in their talk, on particular occasions, to do some interactional business. In particular, Sacks (1974) discussed how a person can construct a sufficient, reasonable account for an action by linking up certain activities that are conventionally associated with a certain identity category. For example, consider the defense counsel and witness in Extract 4 (above); the paired categories "girls and fellas" make issues of gender and sexual activity relevant while the category "people" provides an account of activity where these implications are neutralized.

The use of personal address, person reference, and rhetorical relational terms

The analytic orientation described above will be used in this paper to analyze how relational terms or categories are used in interaction to perform various business. Existing research has examined the use of "personal address terms" (Philipsen & Huspek, 1985; Fitch, 1991), "person reference terms" (e.g., Sacks & Schegloff, 1979, Moerman, 1988), as well as "rhetorical relational terms" (Sahlstein, 1999). While personal address, reference, and relational terms are not synonymous, it is worth briefly reviewing the three concepts in relation to one another.

Personal address terms (e.g., "yes sir," "thanks mom," "hello stranger," etc.) have been extensively studied in the fields of sociolinguistics and communication studies as a communicative activity in which speakers address or refer to each other. While some studies (e.g., Ervin-Tripp, 1972) have investigated personal address terms in the context of how certain variables (e.g., age, sex, status, etc.) determine what term will be used in a particular

situation, Fitch (1991) and others (e.g., Takao, 1976) have adopted a cultural approach which seeks to discover the meanings of address terms shared by a particular group of people. Fitch (1991) argued that personal address terms serve a referential "pointing" function (i.e., terms are used to "point to" one person or another) while also performing social functions (i.e., by addressing another person, speakers invoke personal identities and establish a definition for the relationship between speaker and addressee). In her study of the situated meanings of Colombian *madre* terms, Fitch showed how certain permutations on *madre* invoked particular norms (e.g., to show affection and respect) and also indexed particular Colombian cultural premises about persons and interpersonal relationships (e.g., "all women are mothers, primarily and always mothers" and "mothers are 'good' women, faithful to the father of their children, and must therefore be honored with deepest respect and protection"; p. 263).

While personal address terms are terms that are used to address others who are co-present in an interaction, person reference terms may be used to refer to a person or group of people who may or may not be co-present (e.g., "they," "Mother Theresa," or a person's name or title). Sacks and Schegloff (1979) investigated the conversational organization of how persons refer to others (often not-present in the interaction) in U.S. conversation. They claimed that there are two general principles that organize how persons are referred to in conversation: "the preference for minimization" and the "preference for recipient design." By "minimization," Sacks and Schegloff suggest that persons use a single reference form (e.g., such as a first name) to refer to others. By recipient design, the authors argue that referrer (the speaker making the reference to another person) takes into account the recipients when using certain reference forms, and specifically in terms of person reference terms, speakers will use reference forms that their recipient will recognize (e.g., a specific name or a title) rather than "non-recognitional" forms such as "somebody," "some guy," etc. The combination of these two principles often results in the use of a "recognitional label," and the typical recognitional label in U.S. conversation is a personal name. When a recipient does not recognize the referent based on a recognitional label, then the referrer provides further reference forms (such as a title or epithet) until the recipient acknowledges recognition or the attempt is abandoned.

Moerman (1988) picks up Sacks and Schegloff's focus on the sequencing and structure of conversational occasions where persons refer to others, but focuses on Thai conversation rather than U.S. conversation. In his Thai data, Moerman argues that the usual recognitional label for an absent person is a title or title plus a name, or by sometimes adding a second name, such as a spouse's or a parent's. Further, Moerman argues that differences between Thai and U.S. conversation have implications for differences between Thai and U.S. notions of personhood, despite there being striking similarities in terms of the ways initial references to non-present persons are sequentially organized.

Working out of a different tradition than address and person reference terms, Sahlstein (1999) coined the phrase "rhetorical relational terms" (RRTs; or perhaps, the rhetorical *use* of relational terms) to explore how people use relational terms -- such as "friend," "my family," "just friends," etc. -- in persuasive ways or in compliance-gaining situations. Following Duck (1998), Sahlstein argued that all communication is persuasive and that people can be persuaded to do things because of the particular relationship two people share (e.g., sibling, romantic partner, or neighbor). The two research questions posed in her study were: 1) in what ways the relationship between two parties could be seen in talk as doing persuasive work?, and 2) if, and how, relationship terms are used in persuasive attempts? Sahlstein concluded that while rhetorical relational terms were not always used explicitly (e.g., as in "I thought you were my friend"), they did surface in compliance-gaining attempts. Further, in situations where a relational term was not used explicitly, there were implicit indications (e.g., displays of shared relationship knowledge and relationship continuity) that the relationship of the communicators was salient in the persuasive attempts.

To illustrate, Sahlstein (1999) argued that a relational term is used persuasively in the following two compliance-gaining attempts:

Extract 6

Gloria: You want me to frost it for you=
 Pam: =uhh huh huh huh hhh=
 Gloria: =Oka:y Pam leave the keys under the mat I'll be: over
 Gloria: there in five minutes okay?
 []
 Pam: Thanks you are a true friend.

Extract 7

Sally: Oh Felicity. Come on.
 Felicity: I have so much to do.
 Sally: Oh I know but Kelly and I are like your best friends you have to.
 Felicity: What time are you going to go?

In Extract 6, Sahlstein noted that the relational term 'true friend' (at the arrowed turn) occurs *after* compliance has been gained, while in Extract 7, the relational term 'best friends' occurs as *part of* the compliance gaining attempt. The phrase "true friend" (Extract 6), Sahlstein argued, seemed to reinforce that Pam is the type of friend who acts consistently with the expectations and obligations of being a friend, while the use of 'best friends' (Extract 7) seemed to make relevant certain obligations of what a friend does. In both extracts, there was evidence that the relationship parties are actually *performing* their relationship through their talk. Specifically, Gloria and Pam actually enacted the behaviors that constitute being a true friend (i.e., coming over in five minutes to frost a cake) while Sally and Felicity displayed that going out to a party is one (perhaps of many) expectations for action that go along with being 'like...best friends.'

Studies of address terms (i.e., Fitch, 1991), reference terms (i.e., Moerman, 1988), and rhetorical relational terms (e.g., Sahlstein, 1999) share some important similarities. First, all three studies acknowledge that these terms can function as "pointing to" or referring to an addressee/relational partner or the speaker. Second, the use of such terms constitute personal identities (e.g., the type of person someone is) and define the relationship (e.g., as friends, mother-daughter, etc.) through talk. Third, the use of these terms invoke norms, expectations, and premises about what is appropriate for a particular relationship (e.g., about what a true friend is, how to show affection or respect, etc).

However, these three studies differ in their attention to conversational details of actual sequential interaction and their emphasis on talk's rhetorical and action-oriented features. For example, Fitch (1991) analyzed ethnographic field notes and focus group discussion to determine the cultural meanings of Colombian *madre* terms⁶, while Sahlstein did not discuss many of the interactional details in her conversational excerpts since her initial project was to establish whether or not relationship terms were present in compliance-gaining attempts. Moerman's (1988) conversation analytic and ethnographic study, in contrast, made use of extensive interactional details to ground his claims about Thai versus U.S. data. The degree to which details of conversational episodes are analyzed raises at least two issues for this paper: the first issue concerns greater attention to the interactional details surrounding the use of relational terms, and a broader second issue concerns the choice of which details to focus on and which details to exclude in a rhetorical discursive analysis.

Issue 1: Greater attention to interactional details

As relational terms are studied for their rhetorical and performative features, it is important to attend to more of the interactional details than, for example, whether or not relational terms are present or not. Sahlstein (1999) observed that the relational terms (e.g., 'best friends' and 'true friends') were positioned differentially in relation to the compliance gaining attempt, implicitly suggesting that the placement of relational terms is somehow consequential to how they function. One implication of this, then, is that rather than focus on relational terms per se, analytic attention should focus on *how relational terms are positioned sequentially (i.e., turn by turn)* as part of accountability practices between relationship parties.

It is also important to study the turns surrounding the use of the relational terms. For example, in Extract 7 (above), Sally uses Felicity's name to get her to come to the party and then issues the directive 'Come on.' This example suggests how analytic attention might

⁶ Subsequent studies (e.g., Fitch, 1998) have increasingly incorporated sequential interaction in addition to ethnographic field notes

focus on the circumstances in which relationship parties address or refer to each other by their name, and whether or not a person's full name is used (e.g., "Felicity JoAnn Smith may function differently than just 'Felicity') (Sacks & Schegloff, 1979; Fitch, 1998). Next, note how Felicity responds with an account for why she *cannot* go rather than why she *will not* go (Drew, 1984; Potter, 1996). By responding that she has 'so much to do,' Felicity presents herself as a person who would go under other circumstances, but is constrained by factors external to the relationship that prevent her from doing so. Additionally, Sally offers a token acknowledgement that she heard all that Felicity has to do ('Oh I know') and then invokes a third party, Kelly (who is not physically co-present in this interaction), as part of another bid to get Felicity to go to the party. By invoking Kelly, Sally suggests that it is not just she, the current speaker⁷, who wants Felicity to go, but it is also Kelly too (oh, and by the way, both of us are 'like your best friends!').

Issue 2: Which interactional details are included/excluded and why

One claim of this paper is that a rhetorical discursive action perspective offers an analytic approach that permits greater attention to the interactional details concerning the use of relational terms than demonstrated in previous analyses thus far (i.e., than in Sahlstein, 1999). But are all details in an interaction equally important, thus requiring equal analytic attention? If not, how does an analyst justify which interactional details to include or exclude in an analysis? These questions also raise the issue of transcription practices because the level of detail at which interaction is transcribed limits/allows the level at which analysis can take place (Tracy, 1995). Tracy (in press) offers a way in to these issues by arguing that discourse analysis⁸ is a method of inquiry into the "study of talk (or text) in context, where research reports use excerpts and their analysis as the central means to make a scholarly

⁷ This is an example where the issue of "stake" (Edwards & Potter, 1992), discussed in more detail in the third empirical example, is constructed in the interaction.

argument" (p. 4). Further, she argues that the choice concerning the level of transcription detail relates to the types of scholarly questions posed and arguments being made (Tracy, 1995). Thus, one way of approaching the issue about what interactional details to pursue depends on the scholarly arguments made.

Since the focus of this paper is on how relational terms are used in interaction to accomplish various social actions and how their use implies norms about the performance of interpersonal relationships, then the level of detail at which to transcribe and analyze must attend to the normative and action-orientation features of discourse. The rhetorical discursive action approach offered in this paper adopts the transcription conventions of a conversation analytic approach (see Appendix 1) which was specifically designed to attend to issues of social accountability and how talk is action-oriented (Sacks & Schegloff, 1979; Buttny, 1993; Edwards, 1997).

But even with a highly detailed transcript, are all the details included on this transcript equally consequential to the analysis? Must an analyst attend to every elongation, pause, emphasis, turn, etc. on the transcript? Tracy's point about the importance of the scholarly argument being made is instructive here too. Again, since the focus here is on how relational terms are used and their use implies norms about the performance of interpersonal relationships, then all interactional details *consequential to these issues* should be analyzed. A key strength of providing detailed transcripts is that readers of the analysis have the same access to, though arguably less familiarity with, the data as the analyst (Hutchby & Woofitt, 1988). Thus, readers can contribute to the analysis by arguing that another interactional detail is also, or more, consequential to the analysis than what has been discussed so far. Following Hopper (1992, p. 20), the analytic approach used in this paper does not claim that everything consequential to a particular research question is always displayed by participants

in their talk, nor that every empirical detail in a transcript is important to the particular research focus of a project. Rather, a rhetorical discursive approach proposes that the best way to proceed in making scholarly arguments about social interaction is to make claims based on what participants interactively display to each other and can be made publicly accessible in terms of an audio and/or video recording and transcript so that readers can legitimately contest particular arguments (Potter, 1998).

In summary, Sahlstein's (1999) initial study on relational terms did not attend to the sequential placement of the terms and other conversational details that highlight the rhetorical and performative features of how these terms are used. To extend work on the use of these terms, a rhetorical discursive approach is offered, along with the claim that this analytic approach is geared to a range of interactional details that may be consequential to how relational terms are used and how their use implies norms about the performance of interpersonal relationships.

In the rest of this paper three examples will be analyzed to illustrate the strengths of a rhetorical discursive approach and to explore the diverse range of ways that relational terms can be used. As a preview, the first two examples are from a phone conversation -- found in the UTCL data set (A21ME.1) -- between Pam and Gloria⁹. The first of these examples will illustrate how 'the sometimes disappearing friend' is used as an identity category to manage a bit of accountability and illustrates how norms and expectations about doing, or performing, interpersonal relationships are displayed in talk. The second example shows how 'just friends' versus 'I'm just his (.) friend' is used to negotiate intimacy and distance between people, the practice of building up and undermining versions of a relationship, and performs relational norms about what is appropriate and acceptable. The third excerpt is from a therapy-oriented context (appearing in Edwards, 1998) where matters of stake and motivation

covers a range of language and social interaction approaches including conversation and discourse analytic

are salient. This example documents how relational terms are used to manage these issues by playing off of relevant inferences associated with the terms and to construct "reasonable" versions of relationship behavior.

Analysis of empirical excerpts

'The sometimes disappearing friend'

The first example occurs towards the beginning of a phone conversation between Pam and Gloria (see Excerpt 7 below). In the turns that precede this excerpt¹⁰, a reason or topic for this call has yet to be identified (Sacks, 1992, LC2; Silverman, 1998, pp. 112-113). At line 13, a candidate reason for this call is offered by Pam in the form of a formulation ('So') and solicitation for news ('what are you doin'). The rest of the excerpt will be examined turn-by-turn to establish the interactional context for Pam's use of 'the sometimes disappearing friend'.

Extract 8 UTCL:A21ME.1

13 P: So what are you doin
 14 G: U:m. .hhhh nothin I was just- >I been tryin to call
 15 you< for about the last five thousand da:ys what happened
 16 (0.2)
 17 P: I fell off the ear:th
 18 G: That's what I figured
 19 (0.7)
 20 P: I'm the sometimes disappearing friend who obs- (0.3)
 21 unfortunately has to work for a living

At line 14, Gloria is placed in a position to judge what is newsworthy in terms of her conversational partner, in this case Pam, as indicated by the 'U:m' and in-breath ('.hhh...'). After a self-repair ('I was just-') that seems to minimize the significance of what comes next, Gloria states that she had been 'tryin to call' Pam. To analyze what issues may be at stake here, we can formulate alternative possibilities that are not present in order to understand

approaches.

9 This extract was also included in Sahlstein's (1999) data set.

10 For the lines surrounding this excerpt (1-12 and 22-24), please see Appendix 2.

what is present (Potter & Wetherell, 1987). Instead of saying 'I been tryin to call you,' Gloria could have said something like "You haven't been returning my calls," which might be heard as more direct and perhaps even accusative. Thus, along with the minimizing self-repair 'I was just-', 'I been tryin to call you' seems to be a way of managing what could be heard as a complaint by Pam. The use of the extreme case formulation ('for about the last five thousand da:ys'; Pomerantz, 1986) raises the intensity, perhaps concern, about not being able to contact Pam. Gloria's turn comes to an end with a question ('what happened') that requires an account for Gloria's inability to call Pam.

The 0.2 second pause (line 16) is somewhat ambiguous but may mark some trouble in the interaction. Gloria's 'what happened' is clearly heard as a relevant transition place, and as a question that nominates Pam to speak. At this point, Pam has an obligation to respond, or Gloria can continue talking (Sacks, Schegloff & Jefferson, 1978). Pam employs an artful account -- 'I fell off the earth' -- as the second pair part of Gloria's question (line 17), thus offering her own extreme case formulation that matches the extremity of Gloria's 'five thousand days' while attending to the relevancy of the question posed to her.

But Gloria's response in line 18 suggests that Pam's account is not sufficient. By saying 'That's what I figured' Gloria's comment can be heard along the lines of "I knew that before, and it still does not explain anything." Thus, the onus is back on Pam to provide a more satisfactory account, which is hearable by a 0.7 second pause (line 19). And it is here where we (and Pam and Gloria) get to the use of 'the sometimes disappearing friend' that we are primarily interested in. To sum up, then, the first 19 lines of this conversation, Pam and Gloria go "back-and-forth" between who is going to explain the rationale for the purpose of this call. One candidate reason is offered in line 13 where Pam asks Gloria what she is doing, and a second candidate occurs when Gloria asks Pam to explain why she has not been able to call her. Pam's first go at an account -- ('I fell off the ear:th'; line 17) -- was not seen as sufficient by Gloria (as evidenced in lines 18-19; see Extract 9 below), and now the ball is back in Pam's court. So what does Pam come up with now?

Extract 9 UTCL:A21ME.1

17 P: I fell off the ear:th
 18 G: That's what I figured
 19 (0.7)
 20 P: I'm the sometimes disappearing friend who obs- (0.3)
 21 unfortunately has to work for a living
 22 G: .hhh Yes but I mean like- (0.2) >everybody was tryin
 23 to get a hold of you the other< night and they
 24 couldn't do it
 25 P: I know i- okay one ni:ght. I g(h)o by myself to the mall
 26 and the whole world falls apa(h)rt

In line 20, Pam ascribes to herself an identity category ('the sometimes disappearing friend') which, interestingly, is not as common in North American talk as "best friend" or "true friend" (see Extracts 6 and 7 above), suggesting its deployment in this interaction is for a very local, particular effect. But what specifically is this effect? At this point in the conversation, Pam is obliged to give a satisfactory, recipient-designed account to Gloria to explain what has happened to her. Specifically, Pam has to provide some type of new information that Gloria does not already know (see line 18, 'That's what I figured'). By ascribing herself ('I'm') this category ('the sometimes disappearing friend') she can reap the benefits of the activities associated with that category (Sacks, 1974). That is, someone who is a 'sometimes disappearing friend' sometimes disappears -- that's just the type of person they are.

But Pam did not say that she was the "sometimes disappearing person" and so maybe there is something more going on with the use of friend here. Pam's use of 'friend' may suggest that, despite being out of contact for a while (the precise length of time is not stated by either), Pam can still be considered a 'friend'. Further, the use of friend here invokes their relationship as a relevant issue, and may also be a subtle reminder that, given that they are "friend(s)," Gloria should know that Pam sometimes disappears. Thus, the invocation of the category 'the sometimes disappearing friend' seems to be a way to signal that "there's no news here" and therefore nothing further Pam needs to account for. Indeed, the idiomatic aspect of 'has to work for a living' (line 21) can be heard as a way to terminate a topic and

move on to something else (Drew & Holt, 1988), while the 'unfortunately' seems to minimize Pam's choice in the matter, implying that her having to work is beyond her control.

It seems that Pam's attempt to end the topic was unsuccessful since Gloria upgrades her position by stating that 'everybody' was trying to contact Pam the other night, but was unable to do so (line 22). This turn is reminiscent of Extract 7 above in that, after an unsuccessful attempt to get Felicity to go to the party, Sally upgraded her position by invoking another friend, Kelly. In a similar way, Pam appeals to an even more extreme case (i.e., 'everybody') as a way of soliciting further details from Pam. This upgraded appeal seems to do the trick as Pam starts to "come clean" by saying 'I know i- okay one night...' (line 25) and then explains what happened. For purposes of how a relational term was used, it is enough to end the analysis here and note how Pam used the category 'the sometimes disappearing friend' to account for her behavior in response to a hearable complaint by her "friend" Gloria. Specifically, Pam did this by linking up her actions (not being able to be contacted by Gloria) with a category that is appropriate for this action ('the sometimes disappearing friend'). The term 'everybody' was also used to invoke relationships, perhaps of others in their Pam and Gloria's network, as a way of upgrading an appeal for further information.

Further, this excerpt illustrates how norms and expectations about doing, or performing, interpersonal relationships are displayed in talk. That is, by virtue of the fact that Gloria holds Pam accountable for her absence, and that Pam ultimately provides an account, they jointly enact what types of behavior are considered normative for their relationship. Additionally, Pam and Gloria perform their relationship in the process of displaying mutual knowledge (i.e., when terms like 'everybody' can be used without having to ask to whom this refers; Planalp & Garvin-Doxas, 1994).

We're 'just friends' versus 'I'm just his (.) friend'

In a second example, which occurs towards the end of Pam and Gloria's phone conversation, Pam has invited Gloria to happy hour at Rumor's (presumably the name of a

drinking establishment). In lines 810 (see Extract 10), Gloria is in the process of declining Pam's invitation. The appearance of the relational terms occurs in lines 828 and 830.

Extract 10 UTCL:A21ME.1

810 G: .hhh Well listen thanks for: invite me and everything but
 811 I really do need to um (1.0) pt I need to go over and-
 812 I need to finish typing this and I need to go over and
 813 give Bab's car back
 814 P: No problem
 815 If you feel like doing su-in tomorrow or tomorrow night
 816 call me
 817 G: .hhhh I prob'ly ih- oh wuh well um C T and I were thinking
 818 about going out tomorrow night somewhere hh
 819 P: Where at,
 820 G: I don't know we hadn't really decided
 821 [yet]
 822 P: [Well] I don't want to be three's company
 823 [you know]
 824 G: [Oh] you- come on with C T:
 825 P: Come and knock on my door ((singing))
 826 G: pt O:h come o:n
 827 P: <Eh huh [huh]>=
 828 G: [You kno:w me and C T are <just frie:nds>
 829 P: Bull honkeej:::
 830 G: [hh Well <I'm just his (.) friend, oka:y?>
 831 P: °Mm mm:::°
 832 G: Pa:m.
 833 P: °Oka:y.°
 834 G: .hhh I'[m not gonna date] guys for
 835 P: [(What ever) you sa-]
 836 G: another seven years I told you
 837 [huh huh huh]
 838 P: [Yeah but] I still think you guys are gonna get married

In lines 810-813, Gloria declines Pam's invitation for happy hour by offering a justification. Pam seems to accept this justification as legitimate and then suggests they get together at another time. Their relationship as friends is already relevant given their interaction shown in previous extracts (i.e., the disappearing friend; Extract 9 above). There is further evidence of their friendship by the display of mutual knowledge in lines 812-813 (that is, Pam displays knowledge of what "finish typing this" refers to and who "Bab" is by not stating something like "typing what?" or "Bab who?"; Planch & Garvin-Doyas 1994)

After Pam's suggestion that she and Gloria get together another time, Gloria takes a long in-breath, initiates a self-repair (line 817) that could be heard as a display of hesitation, and then says that 'CT and I were thinking about going out tomorrow night somewhere hh'. Of all the other aspects of Gloria's turn Pam could orient to (i.e., "CT who?", "why are you just 'thinking' about it, you haven't decided yet?", "going out, right, you two are dating!", why are you going 'tomorrow night' and not some other night?", etc.), Pam takes up the vagueness of the term 'somewhere' (line 818) by asking for more specific information about where Gloria and CT are going. Gloria responds that they haven't decided yet. Pam's use of 'Well' (line 822) seems to highlight that what Pam follows with will address the preceding turns, and then offers that she does not want to be 'three's company.'

The use of 'three's company' seems a bit strange here. On a first reading, perhaps Pam was getting at something like "two's company, three's a crowd," which would imply that Pam is "doing politeness" and does not want to intrude on Gloria and CT. There are valid reasons for Pam to feel like she would be intruding. For example, Pam may have picked up on Gloria's use of 'we' in her response, 'I don't know we hadn't really decided yet' [my emphasis], and what may have been a hesitation display in line 817. But why three's company? For one possibility, note what Gloria orients to in her next turn (line 824).

The 'Oh you-' by Gloria, followed up with what seems to be the start of an invitation ('come on with C T:'), suggests that Gloria did hear 'three's company' as "three's a crowd," or perhaps less speculatively, that Gloria is orienting to the issue of possible intrusion. Thus, Gloria seems to be saying "Don't be silly, Pam, come along with us." But in line 825, Pam starts to sing words that happen to be the opening verse to the U.S. television sit-com "Three's Company." Members of the U.S. television-viewing audience in the late 1970s and early 1980s will know about this connection (though perhaps they should not admit having watched this particular show!), and Gloria doesn't seem to display any difficulty recognizing this as well. However, possessing this level of cultural knowledge as an analyst may be good for a knowing laugh, but I am not sure it gives us any special insight to the interactional

dynamics that are being managed by the participants¹¹. What is important for analytical purposes is how Gloria orients to this singing display in her next turn.

Extract 11 UTCL:A21ME.1

822 P: [Well] I don't want to be three's company
 823 [you know]
 824 G: [Oh] you- come on with C T:
 825 P: Come and knock on my door ((singing))
 826 G: pt O:h come o:n
 827 P: <Eh huh [huh]>=
 828 G: [You kno:w me and C T are <just frie:nds>
 829 P: Bull honkee|:::
 830 G: [.hh Well <I'm just his (.) friend, oka:y?>
 831 P: °Mm mm:::°

In line 826, then, Gloria seems to take Pam's singing as an instance of "doing teasing" and Pam's laugh (line 827) displays that Gloria received it as such. Gloria, perhaps displaying some defensive rhetoric, then comes back with the first use of a relational term when she says 'You kno:w me and CT are just frie:nds.' The use of 'just frie:nds' may be doing a number of things here. First, it is offered as part of an account about her relationship with CT that is made in response to the teasing display. Second, a common usage of 'just frie:nds' is as a contrast category to a more intimate, often dating or romantic situation (Rubin, 1985; Werking, 1997; see also Tracy & Anderson, 1999, for their discussion of a similar point on pp. 211-212). Thus, part of the account being offered here suggests that Pam's 'Come and knock on my door' might have been heard by Gloria as carrying some sexual, romantic, or more intimate connotations than Gloria would like to imply about her relationship with CT. The use of 'You kno:w' hints that the topic of Gloria's relationship to CT has been alive for them before this interaction. There is also a third candidate for the use of 'just frie:nds.' Given that the issue of Pam intruding on Gloria and CT 'going out' may still

¹¹ Antaki (1998) argues that analysts do not need access to participants' private meanings ("psychological speculation") or "culture" ("cultural exegesis") as a way to understand the turn-by-turn dynamics of an interaction. Whether or not this argument applies here is beyond the scope of this paper. Although cultural knowledge can be used, indeed inevitably is used, when making the type of analysis here, it is important to

be live, the use of 'just frie:nds' here could be to signal Pam that 'going out' is not exclusive, as in a date, but they are just two friends who had made plans that could include another person.

Again, the next turn offers insight to what may be going on in a previous turn, allowing analysts insights into which of these candidate issues Pam orients to. In a rather direct manner (i.e., 'Bull honkee::::'), Pam displays suspicion or questioning, thus undermining Gloria's account of her relationship with CT, and suggesting that there is more to it than what Gloria purports. In line 830, Gloria's in-breath and 'Well' seem to display "giving in," which is followed by a reformulation of her relationship to CT. Specifically, Gloria positions herself as 'his (.) friend'. Note the intricacy involved here. The hearable pause between 'I'm just his' and 'friend' makes the category of 'friend' stand independent from any modifiers, such as 'just' (also note the slower rate of speech for the whole part after the 'Well'). One effect of this may be to take away any possible romantic or intimate connections associated with the use of 'just friends'¹². The 'oka:y?' tagged on to the end displays Gloria's wonder at whether or not Pam will accept this new version.

If possible alternatives to 'I'm just his (.) friend' are considered, the analysis can be extended. For example, Gloria could have said, 1) "He [or CT] is just my (.) friend", or 2) "We're just (.) friends". If Gloria had said the first alternative -- "He is just my (.) friend" -- there is a subtle inference that can be drawn from this, which may speak to the level of investment she has in her relationship with CT. That is, Gloria could be heard as implying "I'm not so much CT's friend, but he's more my friend." But given Pam's actual, displayed suspicion to Gloria's first formulation -- 'just friends' -- Gloria may have needed to convey some degree of investment to her relationship with CT or risk receiving a second, equally incredulous reaction from Pam. A second option for Gloria would be to say "We're just (.) friends," such that Pam would hear "friends" on its own and not with the "just" modifier,

¹² Though beyond the scope of this paper, it is interesting to return to the issue of cultural knowledge here and Antaki's (1998) argument. The romantic connotations and associations carried by the phrase "just friends" become alive for the participants, as evidenced by Gloria's reformulation in line 830. It seems that knowledge of the common cultural usage of "just friends" to build up or undermine intimate associations facilitates the analysis here. In support of Antaki's position, however, an analyst could still make claims about the interactional dimension displayed without this knowledge.

deflecting any romantic overtones. It seems then, that Gloria's actual 'I'm just his (.) friend' steers well clear of any further romantic overtones than even "We're just (.) friends" would carry, while displaying just enough investment in relation to CT so that she can address Pam's 'Bull honkee::::'. Note that Pam displays a recognition of the subtle differences between Gloria's two versions as she downgrades the 'Bull honkee::::' to a slightly less skeptical, '°Mm mm:::°'.

Since the focus of this paper concerns the use of relational terms, it is sufficient to end the analysis here, though lines 831-838 show the continued negotiation of whose version of the Gloria-CT relationship will stand, with both Gloria and Pam trying to get the last word in. One claim for this excerpt, then, is that relational terms and phrases can be used to negotiate intimacy and distance between people (see also Tracy & Anderson, 1999, for their discussion of "relational positioning" activities). Second, the rhetorical-orientation of relationship talk is evidenced here as Pam and Gloria each build up and undermine versions of Gloria's relationship with CT. Third, in these excerpts Pam and Gloria again enact norms for the performance of their relationship. That is, they are displaying to each other that this type of negotiation about relational definitions with third parties (i.e., C T) and relational intrusion (i.e., not wanting to be "three's company") is acceptable and normative for them on this particular occasion.

'Going out with my friends'

This last excerpt is taken from Edward's (1998) and is used to illustrate the use of relational terms when constructing a version of one's interests, or stake, as reasonable. Again, the term "stake" does not refer to one's inner, psychological motivations that get expressed through talk, as if these concerns exist extrinsic to discourse and that a function of talk was to serve as a conduit for them (Hopper, 1992). Rather, matters of interest and stake are salient issues that people build up, undermine, and attend to in their talk as part of doing particular relational business (Edwards & Potter, 1992).

The data here is from a couples therapy meeting, featuring Connie and Jimmy.

Connie has made a complaint about Jimmy's attitude to her having nights out with her female friends. Specifically, her complaint is that Jimmy's disapproval is unreasonable, that he gets extremely and irrationally jealous, and that this jealousy restricts her freedom to go out.

Jimmy defends his suspicions, especially about what she might be up to with other men, as rational and based on his knowledge of what she is like after a few drinks (Edwards, 1998, see especially p. 27). At this point in their session, the counselor has just invited Connie to explain 'quietly to Jimmy' her desire for more 'freedom of choice' in what she does. Connie replies:

Extract 12 (DE-JF:C2:S2:p. 22)

Connie: >What I would like to be able to do is,< when my friend
 1376 rings me up, (0.5) every six weeks, or: when they're
 1377 having a girls' night out, >to be able to say,< (.)
 1378 "yeh I'd love to go." (0.7) Without (0.2) THAT meaning.
 1379 (.) going out with my frie:nds (.) doesn't have anything
 1380 to do: (0.2) with not wanting to sit in with you.
 1381 (0.8)
 1382 That's what I mean.
 1383 (.)
 1384 I just (.) want (0.8) you know how o:ften it happens,
 1385 (.) an' I just like to go out with you, (0.8) sitting
 1386 there saying, (.) "th*a- y*eh th*at's f*ine," (0.8)
 1387 no:t (.) with sitting there with a fa:ce that's (.)
 1388 I kn0:w I've (.) touched on a sore spot.
 1389 (1.0)
 1390 I just- that's what I would like. (.) And (.) as I said,
 1391 (.) you know (.) how often that that happens.
 1392 (0.6)
 1393 When my frie:nd rings me up (.) "I have a problem,"
 1394 (1.3)
 1395 y'know: "d'y'fɑ:ncy comin out, an hav'n a chat?" (.)
 1396 "Ye:h I'd love to go:, no: problem, (.) I'll see you
 1397 such and such a time,"= but I don't feel that I have
 1398 to (0.3) say, (.) "would you mi:nd Jimmy? (0.9) if I
 1399 go out," (0.7) or::, (0.9) whatever.

There is a lot of elegant interactional work done here, and not space enough to attend to it all (see Edwards, 1998, pp. 27-28 for a lengthier treatment of this extract). For the

purposes of this paper, two related points will be made. First, it is important to understand how the general rhetorical nature is being worked up in this extract by Connie¹³. The term "rhetorical" refers to how versions of the world are built up or undermined, and especially in relation to possible, alternative versions (Billig, 1988; Potter, 1996). Remember that Connie's words here are in response to the counselor's invitation to explain her desire for more freedom in her choice of activities. She constructs her version of a set of events -- the possibility that her friends might call her up or want to go out together -- as reasonable, and in contrast to a possible, rival version that Jimmy might offer: going out with a bunch of women to drink and look for guys, perhaps. How does she do this? Note how it is her friend that calls her up (lines 1375-6, 1393) and not Connie initiating the call. Further, her friends are not calling every night, but just 'every six weeks' or so. Look at how Connie says she would not be going out with just any one for any reason, but it is a 'girls' night out' (line 1377). Also, see how she presents these nights out as wanting to spend time with her friends, and not as a way to avoid spending time at home with Jimmy (lines 1379-80). In these and other ways, then, Connie is building up what is at "stake" for her. She is building up this position as "reasonable," a version that counters any possibility that she is motivated to avoid Jimmy or wants to go out in order to have a few drinks and look at other guys.

The second point concerns how the relational terms are specifically used to construct this "reasonable" version. Specifically, notice the types of activities Connie says she would do with her friends, especially towards the end of the excerpt. These activities include talking to her friend about a problem (line 1393), 'comin out', and 'hav'n a chat' (line 1395). These are all activities that friends do. Importantly, they are activities associated with the category of people called friends. How is this achieved? As in the first excerpt of the 'disappearing friend', Connie links up particular activities (talking to her friend about a problem, 'comin out', and 'hav'n a chat') to the categories they belong to (what 'my friend[s]' would do). By articulating activities to an appropriate category, she has done what is

¹³ This should not be taken to imply that the previous two examples were not also equally "rhetorical." The use of the term "rhetorical" here is to explicitly draw attention to these features here to set the stage for how the relational terms in this extract are being used.

necessary to construct a sufficient, reasonable account (Sacks, 1974). Given these articulations (Connie can be heard as saying), it is simply not the case that a person with friends who wants to chat, talk about their problems, and have the occasional girls night out is the type of person who gets a few drinks in her, chats up other men, all while her husband is sitting home alone. In this excerpt then, the terms 'friends' and 'my friends' are used to play off the activities and inferences associated with those terms. This is done as part of constructing a reasonable version where matters of stake, motivation, and particular norms about what is expected in the performance of Connie and Jimmy's relationship are being negotiated in and through talk (i.e., what Connie may be "up to" with other men).

Implications for future research

This paper began with a promise to offer an analytic approach that emphasized the rhetorical and performative features of relational talk. Specifically, a rhetorical discursive approach was used to analyze three examples of actual, transcribed interaction for how relational terms were used and how their use implied norms about the performance of interpersonal relationships. With the first example, 'the sometimes disappearing friend' was used as an identity category to account for her absence in response to a complaint made by her relational partner. The second example was used to argue how 'just friends' versus 'I'm just his (.) friend' is used to negotiate intimacy and distance between people, the rhetorical building up and undermining versions of a particular relationship with a third party, and to highlight how relationship parties enact norms for the performance of their relationship. The third excerpt showed how matters of stake and motivation are worked up and managed in talk by reference to activities and performative inferences associated with a relational term or category.

There are at least three related implications that this study raises in terms of how relationship processes are studied: 1) the claim that relationships are persuasive needs to be

supplemented with more detailed explication of how persuasion is accomplished interactionally with various conversational devices; 2) whether or not relationships should be treated as participants' or analysts' resource, and 3) the use of actual, transcribed interaction provides an empirically grounded way to make claims about relational talk.

The interactional accomplishment of relationships as persuasion

Sahlstein's (1999) initial study of the function of relational terms in persuasion was guided by Duck's (1998) argument that relationships serve as a background for persuasion. Specifically, Duck contended that different types of relationships (i.e., strangers, acquaintances, and friends) carry different relational obligations, and people are more or less obliged to do things for each other depending on their relationship. A straight-forward example is that a friend is obliged to help another friend move because their friendship carries this expectation. Sahlstein's purpose was to supplement Duck's relationships-as-background-for-persuasion argument by looking at actual interactions to show how the relationship itself can be used as a persuasive resource in conversations, especially via the use of relational terms. While neither Duck nor Sahlstein would argue that one type of relationship is persuasive in the same way across all circumstances, there may be a tendency for the relationship to become an "omni-present variable" lurking beyond or behind interaction and influencing people to do things for one another. To explicate this point, consider Extract 7 again (discussed in Sahlstein, 1999, and above) where Sally is attempting to get Felicity to go to a party with a third friend, Felicity:

| | |
|-----------|---|
| Sally: | Oh Felicity. Come on. |
| Felicity: | I have so much to do. |
| Sally: | Oh I know but Kelly and I are like your best friends you have to. |
| Felicity: | What time are you going to go? |

Because Felicity agrees to go to the party (albeit reluctantly) after their relationship status was explicitly invoked, there may be evidence to suggest that their relationship is persuasive. However, what if Felicity decided not to go to the party despite the invocation of relationship status? Would the relationship still be considered persuasive? Further, how does an analyst account for prior attempts (i.e., 'Oh Felicity. Come on.') to get Felicity to come to the party, especially considering that the relationship would presumably still be in the background? The claim that relationships are a background for persuasion becomes much more complex when actual conversation is analyzed. What is needed, then, is a way to investigate the interactional circumstances under which a relationship is or is not persuasive and how the relationship is made relevant sequentially (whether it be explicitly with the use of a relational term or implicitly by displays of mutual knowledge or intimacy, etc.). Thus, it may be more accurate to argue that *jointly making the relationship relevant in a particular sequential location* is persuasive rather than claiming that the relationship itself is persuasive.

Relationships as a participant versus analyst resource

One issue that makes the claim "relationships are a background for persuasion" complex when looking at actual interaction is that the category "relationship" is being used (exclusively) as an analyst's resource rather than as a participant's resource. Widdicombe (1998) made a compelling case to distinguish identity as a participant's versus an analyst's resource. Widdicombe argued that rather than an analyst characterizing people as having a particular type of identity (analyst-oriented view), an alternative, participant-oriented approach is to focus on "*whether, when and how* identities are used" interactionally (p. 195). By focusing on identity as a participant's resource, the analytic concern is "with the occasioned relevance of identities here and now, and how they are consequential for this particular interaction and the local projects of speakers" (p. 195).

Further, Widdicombe argued that a participant-oriented approach is less concerned with what criteria define certain categories since particular identities are "conventionally associated with attributes, activities, rights and obligations" and is more focused on how "speakers appeal implicitly or explicitly to this normative knowledge in constructing identities" (p. 195). She went on to argue that a participant-oriented focus "takes the view that normative knowledge has to be invoked and can be challenged and transformed, and this suggests that we [as analysts] cannot delineate category attributes or specify in advance which features of a category will be brought to bear on the business of identity on any particular occasion" (p. 195).

Widdicombe's position on identity as a social category is directly relevant to relationships as a social category. Thus, instead of adopting an analyst-oriented perspective and emphasizing that being friends, strangers, or acquaintances carry particular obligations and that these obligations are a background for persuasion, the analytic emphasis shifts to a participant-oriented perspective and investigates whether, when, and how these norms about the performance of relationships are invoked, challenged, and transformed on a particular occasion as participants performatively construct their relationship.

Of course, it would be fair to argue that the phrase "relational terms" (or "adjacency pair," "orient to," and "pre-sequences") is an analyst resource since most participants do not go around using this language (Billig, 1999). Additionally, "analyst" language such as "face," "repression," and "culture" are commonly used by "participants," which is one reason it is impossible to draw a hard and fast distinction (Edwards & Potter, 1992). However, the blurring of the distinction between analyst and participant is not the point. Instead, the claim here concerns not using the categories of relationships as an analyst resource to argue that each type of relationship persuades according to their varied social obligations and expectations. Instead, the analytic perspective offered in this paper makes the topic of study

whether, when and how participants invoke and enact expectations and obligations in the performance of their relationship. This shift from "relationships as an analyst resource" to "whether, when, and how participants make relationships relevant in talk" allows for the analysis of the rhetorical and performative features of relational talk.

The (continued) use of actual, transcribed interaction to study relationships

As discussed in the Introduction, numerous researchers have argued for the centrality of talk to relationship processes but fewer have analyzed actual empirical stretches of interaction. As this paper demonstrates, to adequately address the rhetorical and performative features of talk, the use of actual, sequential interaction is essential. Hopper (1990), for example, persuasively demonstrated how the study of relational turning points was usefully informed and transformed when actual interaction was analyzed. The same holds true for the study of how relationships are persuasive and for how relational terms are used interactively.

Though specific relational terms were analyzed in actual, sequential interaction to see what practices were accomplished, one could have equally started by looking for various practices in order to see how and what terms or conversational devices may be used to accomplish them. For example, one practice is how people negotiate distance and intimacy conversationally (also identified by Tracy & Anderson, 1999). This can be done with the use of relational terms (e.g., 'we're just (.) friends' versus 'we're just friends') or without (e.g., use of a generic reference term, such as 'he' or 'a person'; see examples of this in Tracy & Anderson, 1999, pp. 207-210). A third approach is to look at various "sites" of interaction, or how practices intersect with one another. For example, one could look at introductions as a "site" since when someone introduces someone else to another, the speaker places him or

herself in relation to the one being introduced. Thus, the practice of introducing someone may also involve the practice of "relational positioning" (Tracy & Anderson, 1999).

In conclusion, based on the three implications above, a useful direction to move in for future research is not to study relational terms per se, but rather the focus should be on: 1) the sequential positioning of relational terms as part of accomplishing a range of social actions (e.g., rhetorical undermining and building up of versions of relationships, negotiating intimacy-distance, compliance-gaining, etc.), 2) how the relationship is made relevant in talk with or without the use of relational terms (for example, by displays of mutual knowledge; see for example Planalp & Garvin-Doxas, 1994 and Sahlstein, 1999), and 3) how norms for the performance for relationships are invoked, challenged and transformed in actual, sequential interaction.

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Appendix 1 -- Transcription Conventions (adapted from Atkinson & Heritage, 1984)

| | |
|-------------------|---|
| (.) | The shortest hearable pause, less than about (.2) of a second |
| (0.3) (1.0) | Exactly timed pauses, in this case 3/10 of a second and 1 second |
| .hhh, hhh | Speaker's in-breath, and out-breath respectively |
| huh huh | Laughter syllables |
| A(h)re | (h) denotes 'laughter' within words |
| cu- | A dash designates a sharp cut-off of a prior word or sound |
| So::: | Colons show that the speaker is extending a word or sound, with more colons representing longer sounds |
| (syll syll) | Material in single brackets represents unclear speech rendered in the approximate number of syllables |
| () | Unclear speech or noise where no approximation is made |
| run= =on | 'Equals' signs link material that runs on |
| my door | Arrows indicate rising or falling intonational shifts |
| ? | Indicates a rising tone |
| . | Indicates a 'natural' ending |
| <u>Without</u> | Underlining indicates emphasis |
| THAT | Capital letters indicate speech noticeable louder than that surrounding it |
| °soft° | Degree signs indicate speech spoken noticeably more quietly than the surrounding talk |
| >fast< | 'Greater than' and 'less than' signs indicate the talk they encompass <slow> was produced noticeably quicker or slower than surround talk |
| over[lap [over | Square brackets between adjacent lines of concurrent speech denote the start and ending points of overlapping talk |
| | Side arrow indicates a point of special interest addressed in the text |
| * | Asterisks indicate a high-pitched "squeaky voice" |
| [...] | Indicates that material has been left out of the extract |
| [material] | Material in square brackets indicates transcriber's commentary |

Appendix 2 -- Opening lines of Gloria and Pam's phone call

UTCL (A21ME.1)

1 GLORIA: Hello,
 2 (.)
 3 PAM: Gloria?
 4 G: Yeah.
 5 P: Hi: it's me
 6 G: Hi hhuh Okay I figured it wa:s.
 7 P: [hihih
 8 P: huh [huh huh]
 9 G: [.hhhh] a(h)nywa(h)(h)y hih
 10 P: You're answering the pho:ne all chipper:
 11 [Hello:]
 12 G: [OI-] Oh I'm sorry?
 13 P: So what are you doin
 14 G: U:m. .hhhh nothin I was just- >I been tryin to call
 15 you< for about the last five thousand da:ys what happened
 16 (0.2)
 17 P: I fell off the ear:th
 18 G: That's what I figured
 19 (0.7)
 20 P: I'm the sometimes disappearing friend who obs- (0.3)
 21 unfortunately has to work for a living
 22 G: .hhh Yes but I mean like- (0.2) >everybody was tryin
 23 to get a hold of you the other< night and they
 24 couldn't do it
 25 P: I know i- okay one ni:ght. I g(h)o by myself to the mall
 26 and the whole world falls apa(h)rt
 27 G: A(h)re you serious it was so: funny
 28 G: .hhh let me tell you cause like- I talked to Marie and
 29 I tried to call you and then I talked to Marie and she- i-
 30 she goes .hhh well you call hu- back over there
 31 cause Steve was .hhhh you know
 32 P: Nyeah
 33 G: You know he was- (0.2)
 34 gettin all worried and everything