Family narrative as political activity

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ABSTRACT. This study suggests that political order within families is manifested in and constructed through family narrative activity. The study is based on a corpus of 100 family dinner narratives of two-parent American families. Our findings show that narrative roles (introducer, protagonist, primary recipient, problematizer of protagonists or other co-narrators, problematizee) differ in the control they exert and in their distribution across family members. Parents, especially mothers, tended to introduce narratives, thereby controlling narrative topic and timing. Children were the most frequent protagonists yet they rarely introduced narratives about themselves and were rarely ratified as preferred recipients of others' narratives. Fathers tended to be primary recipients, often orchestrated through mothers' introductions. Not coincidentally, fathers were also the dominant problematizers of family-member protagonists/co-narrators, assuming a panopticon-like role. Children sometimes resisted family narrative activity, suggesting a certain awareness of the politics of narrative and its potential to expose them as objects of scrutiny.

KEY WORDS: family discourse, narrative activity, panopticon, participant roles, political order, problematizing, resistance

1 RESEARCH GOALS

This work examines how the family is constituted as a political institution through conversational interaction. While politics tends to be associated with the public domain, it is also an on-going part of—and perhaps socialized in—the relatively private world of family life. Families are political bodies in that certain members review, judge, formulate codes of conduct, make decisions and impose sanctions that evaluate and impact the actions, conditions, thoughts and feelings of other members. Such administration of power is characteristic of families everywhere and may occur whenever family members interact.

Our focus is on the political constitution of middle-class, white, two-parent, English-speaking American families in and through their everyday

narrative activity. We examine such activity at dinnertime as a particularly intense moment for (re)instantiation of their family politics. For the families in this study, dinner is often the first time in the day when family members interact as a whole for a sustained period of time. For many, it is the first time in the day that stories and reports about that day's activities and experiences are aired in front of the family. These stories and reports of personal experience draw in the participation of the entire family as 'co-narrators' (i.e. those who jointly narrate). Even though a particular set of events being narrated may involve only one or two members of the family as event protagonists, other family members sitting around the table often contribute significantly to the narrative at hand, eliciting and supplying important—sometimes even critical—narrative components such as settings, actions, consequences and psychological responses (Ochs and Taylor, 1992; Ochs, Taylor et al., 1992).

Our concern in the present study is how family political order is constituted through such reporting and story-telling. These two narrative activities concern the telling of temporally ordered past events (cf. Labov and Waletzky, 1968; Polanyi, 1989; Ricoeur, 1988). In this study, stories are distinguished from reports in that a story revolves around a central problematic past event and responses—including both psychological and physical action responses—to that event (Bruner, 1990; Stein and Glenn, 1979). A report, on the other hand, is defined here as simply entailing two or more temporally ordered past events (Ochs, Taylor et al., 1992). Both stories and reports may also refer to present and future events relevant to narrated past events (Ochs, forthcoming).

We argue here that, while reporting and story-telling are potentially rich co-cognition experiences for family members (Ochs, Taylor et al., 1992), they are far from 'benign' verbal activities. To the contrary, these verbal activities may provide family members with the opportunity to expose, pass judgment on and, where problematic, sanction some particular family member's actions, thoughts or feelings. We further argue that co-narrator role distribution (e.g. on the one hand, whose actions tend to be exposed and explored; on the other hand, who tends to pass judgment on and/or problematize others' actions, conditions, thoughts and feelings as protagonists or narrators) is not random among family members but rather (re)instantiates a political structuring of family roles and privileges. These findings derive from an analysis of our dinner corpus with regard to the following questions:

1. Which family members tend to be *protagonists* of stories and reports?
2. Which family members tend to *introduce* stories and reports involving family members? To what extent do family members introduce such narratives about other family members as opposed to about themselves?
3. Which family members tend to be the *primary recipients (addressees)* of stories and reports?
4. Which family members tend to *problematize* other family members' (or their own) actions, conditions, thoughts and feelings—as protagonists and as co-narrators?
5. Which family members' actions, conditions, thoughts and feelings (as protagonists or as co-narrators) tend to be *identified as problematic*?

Our analysis indicates that fathers, mothers and children[2] may systematically assume particular roles with respect to the footings (Goffman, 1981) of narrative protagonist, narrative introducer (one who elicits or initiates the narrative), primary narrative recipient (one to whom the narrative is primarily addressed or oriented), problematizer of a protagonist's or narrator's actions, and problematizee (one who is targeted by problematizer). In our corpus, stories and reports at dinner tended to focus on children as protagonists, yet children exerted little control in some critical aspects of the telling of these narratives: they tended not to introduce (either elicit or initiate) narratives, even when about themselves; they were rarely primary recipients of others' narrating; and they rarely problematized the actions, thoughts, etc., of other family members as protagonists and narrators. Such narrative roles as introducer, primary recipient and problematizer lay for the most part in the domain of parents, regardless of who the narrative protagonists were: parents, especially mothers, tended to assume the role of report/story introducer, thus administering power by deciding whose actions are to be verbally revealed to the family and when; parents, especially fathers, tended to be these dinner narratives' primary recipients; and fathers were, overwhelmingly, the chief narrative problematizers, exercising power principally by evaluating others' actions, conditions, thoughts and feelings—as either praiseworthy or problematic.

We suggest that these observations provide insights into a micro-level working of family politics and an underlying pattern of narrative role preferences that is not reciprocal but largely hierarchical and which impacts *who* contributes *what* to family dinnertime narrative activity. We do *not* propose that family members necessarily consciously seek the narrative roles we have evidenced but rather that their assumption of these roles—and the domains and degrees of control they entail—is often an outcome of coordinated narrative moves involving more than one family member. Such coordinated narrative moves not only manifest but also establish hierarchies of control among family members. As we shall see in the following discussion, a narrative move by one family member (such as eliciting a narrative) may set up certain family members to be protagonists and others to render judgment on narrative events involving family members.

2 DATABASE

2.1 The family corpus

The present study examines family communication in the course of dinner preparation, eating and clean-up in seven two-parent middle-class families earning over $40,000 a year. These seven are drawn from a larger corpus of

20 native English-speaking, Caucasian-American families with a five-year-old (actual age range, 4;11 to 6;1) and at least one older child. Over a two-year period from 1987 to 1989, all families were recorded in their homes from late afternoon until the time the five-year-old was in bed.[3]

Recordings were made on four evenings. Two of the evenings were video- and audiotaped by the researchers. During the dinner meal, the researchers left the family alone in the dining area, recording the interactions with a video camera on a tripod. Two other, intervening evenings were audiotaped by the families themselves. The recorded material used for this analysis includes all the videotaped dinnertimes (preparation, eating and clean-up) of the seven families when both parents were present for the entire meal (a total of 13 dinners).[4]

2.2 The narrative corpus

Our analysis focuses on the social organization of two types of narratives: stories and reports of personal experience. Exactly 100 of these narratives—27 stories and 73 reports—were told during the 13 dinners and comprise the narrative database for this study.

'Stories' of personal experience were isolated according to the following criteria:

1. the narrative contains at least two temporally ordered clauses referring to at least two past-time events (Labov and Waletzky, 1968); and
2. the narrative centers around a past event—often referred to as the 'inciting event' (Sharff, 1982) or 'initiating event' (Stein and Glenn, 1979)—that is presented as inciting an internal/psychological or external/physical response or condition.[5]

Inciting/Initiating Events are not limited to distressful events but rather more broadly include events that create a disequilibrium in life's course, including any—positively or negatively viewed—unusual, surprising, odd or unexpected events that engender a response by a protagonist. This component of stories is at the core of Labov and Waletzky's (1968) notion of 'reportability' and Burke's (1945) notion of 'trouble'.

In this framework, stories typically include Settings, one or more Inciting/Initiating Event(s) (the IE), Internal (psychological) Responses to the IE, actional Attempts to respond to the IE, Consequences of these attempts, and psychological/emotional Reactions to the Attempts and/or Consequences (cf. Stein and Policastro, 1984; Ochs et al., 1989). As noted earlier, stories must necessarily center around past-time events but can refer as well to present and future events (Goodwin, 1990; Ochs, forthcoming).

Example 1 illustrates a story of personal experience. This story segment was produced during the closing moments of a dinner meal after the children have already left the table to play outside and after Dan, the husband, has elicited more news from his wife Patricia about the day's activities:

(1) **Patricia's dress story (excerpt)[6]**
   m = mother (Patricia); f = father (Dan)

Round 1
m: ... and then we went to this other um – this dress store? – and (my Mom) bought me a dress for the wedding – (for   's wedding) (3.8) ((*kids outside talking; Dan looks at Patricia, then starts to eat, then looks back at Patricia*))
f: (You're kidding)
m: hun uh ((*shaking head no*))
f: (I thought you had a dress)
m: (My) mother didn't like it
     [
     ((*phone rings; Patricia gets up*))
f: (   )
m: (It's your mother)
     ((*phone rings again; Patricia's voice on answering machine begins; Patricia picks up kitchen phone; it is his mother*))

Round 2 ((*begins shortly after Patricia hangs up and sits at table*))
f: So as you were saying?
m: (What was I/As I was) saying ((*turning abruptly to face Dan*)) What was I telling you
f: I?don't? know
m: oh about the ?dress?
f: (the) <u>dress</u> (1.2) ((*Patricia is drinking water; Dan looks to her, back to his plate, back to her*))
f: You <u>had</u> a dress right?
m: ((*slightly nodding yes once*)) Your <u>mother</u> (bought me it/wanted me to) – (My mother didn't like it) (0.4) ((*facing Dan, Patricia tilts head slightly, as if to say 'What could I do?'*))
f: ((*shaking head no once*)) You're kidding
m: no
f: You gonna return it?
m: No you can't return it – it wasn't too expensive – it was from Loehmann's (0.8)
m: so what I'll probably do? – is wear it to the dinner the night before – when we go to the (Marriott)? (1.8) ((*Dan turns head away from Patricia with a grimace, as if he is debating whether he is being conned, then turns back and looks off*))
f: (Doesn't that sound) like a – helluva/total) – w:aste?
m: <u>no?:</u>
f: no
m: ((*with hands out, shaking head no*)) It wasn't even that expensive (1.2)
m: ((*shaking head no, facing Dan*)) even if it were a com<u>plete</u> waste (0.4) ((*Dan looks down at plate, bobs head to right and to left as if weighing logic, not convinced*))
m: but it's not. ((*looking away from Dan*)) (0.6) ((*Patricia looks outside, then back to Dan*))
m: (but the one) my Mom got me is <u>grea:t</u>
     [
     ((*Dan picks food off Oren's plate next to him*))

m: It's (attractive-looking/a practical dress)
f: *((gesturing with palm up, quizzical))* (Well why did) you have – Why did you let my Mom get you something (that you –) .
m: Your mo:ther bought it – I hh –
f: Oh she just got it for you?
m: *((nodding yes))* (yeah)
f: You weren't there?
m: I was there (and your mother said 'No no It's great Let me buy it for you') – I didn't ask her to buy it for me?
(5.0) *((kids outside talking; Dan is eating more food off Oren's plate))*
f: So they're fighting over who gets you things?
m: *((nods yes slightly))* – *((smiling to Dan))* tch – (cuz I'm/sounds) so wonderful
(9.0) *((Patricia turns to look outside and blows her nose))*

In this story, Dan problematizes Patricia's mother's buying her a dress for a wedding—on the grounds that Patricia already had a dress ('You're kidding' ... 'I thought you had a dress' ... 'You had a dress right?'), indeed a dress purchased for this very occasion by *Dan's* mother. In response to Dan's problematizing of the dress purchase, Patricia turns to the event that led to the new purchase. She frames *his* mother's earlier purchase of a different dress for Patricia to wear to the wedding as an Initiating Event—for *her* mother. In Patricia's version of the story, this event incited an Internal Response from her mother ('My mother didn't like it') and an external action as an Attempt to resolve the problem posed by the first dress, namely her mother's buying another dress for Patricia to wear at the wedding. She further defends the new dress purchase by revealing her solution to the two-dress 'excess', namely her decision to wear the dress *his* mother purchased to the dress rehearsal, thus another Attempt to deal with the problematic Initiating Event. Dan in turn provides his own psychological reactions to his wife's and her mother's actions, responsibilizing Patricia for creating this problem ('. . . you let my Mom get you something [that you didn't like]') and criticizing her conspicuous consumption ('Doesn't that sound like a – (helluva/total) – waste?').

This story also clearly illustrates how the narratives we have isolated, while grounded in past-event reference, can also contain references to present and future events and reactions which are relevant to past events. In many cases, the stories and reports in our corpus refer to present and future events and reactions as possible outcomes or consequences of past events.

In contrast to the problem-focused nature of stories, *'reports' of personal experience* were isolated according to the following criteria:

1. the narrative contains at least two temporally ordered clauses referring to at least two past-time events, but
2. the narrative does *not* center around a past-time event (an IE) that is presented as inciting a problematic psychological or physical response or condition.

In addition to clauses depicting Past Actions, reports typically include Settings and Reactions to those actions. In reporting, a narrator may frame an event as problematic; however, the narrator does not also present other actions or psychological states as *results* of the problematic event. That is, reports do not treat problematic events as causal events that incite or initiate subsequent events. Like stories, while reports must refer to past-time events, they can also include reference to present and future events as well. Example 2 illustrates a report narrative:

(2) **Chuck's gym class report (excerpt)**
    m = mother; f = father; c = Chuck (6;1)

m: m – Chuck went to gymnastics today?
f: hm – good=
m: *((to Chuck))* =(n he swam a lot?) – Tell Dad what (you thought) about gymnastics and what you did? – *((nods head and laughs))* (hm compared to what you do on /usually do)
        [
c: okay:: – it was okay – (it was not real cinchy)
f: mhm:? – What sort of things did you do?
c: uh:::: – pullovers?
f: mhm:?
        [
c: those were (the) – that was the only hard part (one)
    (1.2)
c: (side) rolls?·
m: mhm?
    (1.0)
c: (with) (closed/both) legs?
m: mhm?
    (0.6)
m: no bar work today right?
c: right
    (1.8)
f: so was that –
c: twenty-five sit ups?
f: mhm? – was – Was that like uh – your last gym class? or different
c: different – much different
f: kay
c: (We) did the part with – fi::ve – fifteen – (swi:ngs) – or we could have done five and we took five and then we both (did/get) it
m: mhm? – Was it a good class
    (0.6)
c: (okay)
m: Did you like the kids in it?
c: mhm? – only two k – kids there that I liked=
    =*((Dad clears throat))*
m: *((nods yes slightly))*
c: I mean one (in fact) *((shaking head no))* none I mean
m: There was nobody you knew yet?
c: m?m
    (0.6)
m: but – you like to go to this big class though?
c: uh huh
    (0.4)

m: *((mouth full))* (it? looked good to me.)

In our framework, this narrative exemplifies a report as opposed to a story in that the co-narrators here primarily elicit[7] and supply a list of actions that Chuck carried out in the class that day. The narrative does not center around a problematic event; that is, Chuck's elicited actions and reactions are not characterized and focused on as provoking subsequent attempts to deal with them or psychological responses.

3 NARRATIVE POLITICS AT DINNER

3.1 *The multiple outcomes of dinnertime talk*

Dinner can be a wonderful moment of the day for families. Indeed our earlier work (Ochs et al., 1989; Ochs, Taylor et al., 1992; Ochs and Taylor, 1992) has laid out some of the positive outcomes of family interaction at dinnertime: for many families, dinner is the time for sharing information and helping one another with problematic events in their individual or collective lives, typically via narrative. We have found that in the course of dinnertime families tell narratives extensively and do so collaboratively. At one time or another, each family member in our study above age three participates in narratives that have been introduced by some other family member. Other co-narrators do not merely ask questions; they also supply information critical to understanding and interpreting the significance of the narrated events under consideration. We have shown the impressive interactional complexity of such narratives wherein other, non-protagonist family members fill in relevant bits of background information (Settings), offer characterizations of how the protagonists felt (psychological/ emotional Internal Responses to the Initiating Event, the IE) and evaluate how protagonists responded to the IE (i.e. provide Reactions to Attempts to deal with the IE and to its Consequences). What we see in these dinner co-narrations is the familial institution at work in the activity of jointly telling and interpreting events that concern at least one of the family members present. All 20 families in our corpus engaged in this complex social, linguistic and cognitive activity, albeit some more than others.

We have demonstrated in our earlier work how dinnertime operates as a potential opportunity space for children to be socialized into joint construction of narratives and collective problem-solving in which alternative perspectives on events are weighed and family members rework several oral drafts of a narrative, sometimes laying out first what did happen and then what should or could have happened if the protagonist(s) had shared the world-view of the co-present family. In many cases, dinner narratives center around a complaint against a non-present non-family member, and, in these cases, the family's redraftings of narrative events often support the perspective of the family member who initiated the narrative. For example, when the older daughter in one family complains that the principal of her school gave too light a punishment (namely one day's detention)

to a girl who pulled up another girl's dress in front of the boys, her mother rushes in with the supporting remark 'I mean you really would have liked to kill the – the girl – huh?' and her younger brother chimes in with 'I think? she should – be: in there [detention] for a h-whole MONTH? or so ... each day she('d) hafta go there – each day each day each day even if? ....' Such narrative contributions give families their own distinct moral character and can (re)institute family values and create family solidarity.

We have also observed a divisive side to family dinner co-narration: as we shall further examine in this paper, narratives about co-present family members can turn into judgmental reckonings of their actions and stances. Such narratives create a discursive world in which family-member protagonists are vulnerable to the points of view and reactions of those sitting around the table. We might say that, at least for the families in our study, narratives are initiated with the understanding that they are 'on the table' for others to consider. Part of what it means to be a member of these families is the expectation that family members will insert themselves into narratives regardless of who initiates them. In these families, membership entitles them to these narrative privileges.

While all members of these middle-class families display rights to enter narratives already 'on the table' and while any family member may be a narrative protagonist, there are nonetheless issues of parity concerning the extent to which mothers, fathers and children actually do assume these narrative roles: for example, the extent to which each of them puts stories and reports on the table or has their narrative actions put on the table by others; the extent to which their actions, conditions, thoughts and feelings are problematized; and the extent to which they problematize their own and others' actions, etc. It is to the distribution of these roles within and across families that we now turn.

3.2 *Participant roles in narrative activity*

Like all social activities, narrative activity involves a number of different participant roles. Protagonist, elicitor, initial teller, primary recipient/ addressee, problematizer and problematizee are some of the roles that persons may assume in telling a story, reporting an event or engaging in other forms of narrative activity. For the purposes of this study, these roles are defined as follows:

Protagonist: a leading or principal character in a narrative. We are especially interested here in co-present, family-member protagonists. In Example 1 above, that protagonist is Patricia; in Example 2, it is Chuck.

Elicitor: co-narrator who asks for a narrative to be told. (This is an optional role; a narrative may be initiated directly without elicitation.) In Example 1, the first round was elicited initially by Dan's asking 'Is that what happened today?' (prior to the actual beginning of 'Patricia's Dress Story'); after the phone-call interruption, Dan re-elicits and Patricia self-elicits the narrative that she had begun before the interruption (Dan: 'So as you were saying?'; Patricia: '... What was I telling you'). In Example 2,

Chuck's mother elicits the narrative from him: 'Tell Dad what (you thought) about gymnastics and what you did?' Examples 3 through 5 provide further illustrations of narrative elicitation (in the lines indicated by arrows):

(3) Jodie's day camp report (excerpt)
f = father (Dan); o = Oren (7;5); j = Jodie (5;0)

→ f: ((looking at Jodie)) I need to know what happened at school
    o: (She) didn't go:: to school
        [
    j: I didn't go to school I went to camp=
                       [
                       ((Dad begins pointing
                       to Jodie))
→ f: =camp (today) – sorry camp – Tell me what happened in Sarah's class
    j: I didn't go: to Sarah's class
        (0.4)

(4) Josh's school trip report (excerpt)
f = father (Patrick); j = Josh (7;10)

→ f: How wa- Josh? How was your trip? today:
        (0.4) ((Josh was beginning to drink from his mug, pauses to answer))
    j: good
        (0.2)
→ f: whadya – wha- Tell me about it
    j: ((pausing again from drinking)) good
        (0.6)

(5) Chuck's karate report (excerpt)
m = mother; c = Chuck (6;1)

→ m: Chuck did you tell Daddy – u:m what happened at karate ((speaking
        extremely fast)) when you came (in in your new) uniform? What did
        (Daisy) do for you?

    c: ((to Dad, smiling)) um – she (got my belt) an DE:?:N she gave me
        (back/that) new one
        (0.6)

Initial teller: co-narrator who expresses the first declarative proposition about a narrative *event*, i.e. not merely supplying the setting, as the mother does in Example 5. In Examples 1 and 2, the initial teller is the mother of the family. In Examples 3 through 5, the initial tellers are the children in the respective families, although it is clear, as seen in Example 5, that initial tellings (the natures of their propositions to be developed) are sometimes embedded in an elicitation and/or rather precisely constrained or manipulated by an elicitor. In some cases, the proposition is even more directly *asserted* by the elicitor who thereby becomes initial teller as well. (For example, a father to daughter: '(your) mother said you were thinking of uh: – getting on the swim team?') In other cases, such as Example 2 above, an initial teller (Mother: 'Chuck went to gymnastics today?') may then elicit its further telling from the protagonist or other co-narrator.

Primary recipient: co-narrator to whom a narrative is predominantly oriented. While narratives are collaboratively told and while all family

members are *implicitly* ratified as audience, individual narratives tend to be oriented more to certain family members than to others. Sometimes a family member is selected in the elicitation. For instance, in Examples 1, 3 and 4 above, the elicitor (in each case, the father) implicitly selects himself as the primary recipient. In Examples 2 and 5, the elicitor (in both cases, the mother) explicitly selects another family member (in both cases, the father) as primary recipient of the narrative (e.g. '... tell Daddy ...'). In other cases, e.g. in unelicited tellings, selection of primary recipient may be done implicitly by the initial teller, as in Example 6:

(6) 'Godspell' report (excerpt)
m = mother; f = father; l = Lucy (9;7)

→ m: ((from kitchen, behind Dad)) The kids got to see 'God?spell' today
    f: ((as he looks down at his plate)) hm.
        (0.4)
    f: ((looking back up – to Lucy?)) (goo:d?/they did?/you did?)=
    m: =(we)=
    f: =Did you like the movie?
    l: ((nods yes, has hand in mouth)) – ?uhm?

In this example, there are four family members: mother, father and their two children, Lucy and Chuck. The initial teller (the mother) implicitly selects the father as primary recipient not only through reference to '*the kids*'[8]—and thus to a perspective shared only by the mother and father— but also through the informational context in that the father is the only one of the four people at the table who does not know that 'the kids got to see "Godspell" today'—and thus the only potential 'audience' for this news. The father then ratifies himself as primary recipient for the proposed narrative by directly eliciting his children's experience. A similar implicit selection of primary recipient is seen in Example 2 (from the same family) in the mother's narrative-initiating proposition 'Chuck went to gymnastics today?'

Problematizer: co-narrator who renders an action, condition, thought or feeling of a protagonist or a co-narrator problematic, or a possible problem.

Problematizee: co-narrator whose action, condition, thought or feeling is rendered problematic, or a possible problem.

On the one hand, a problematizer may *other*-problematize, i.e. render problematic some action, condition, thought or feeling of a protagonist or co-narrator other than oneself. For instance, in Example 1, Dan other-problematizes his wife Patricia's actions numerous times (e.g. 'You're kidding'; 'You had a dress right?'; 'You weren't there?', etc.) and Patricia in turn problematizes his perspectives as well (e.g. 'no?:'; 'Your mo:ther bought it', etc.). On the other hand, a co-narrator may *self*-problematize, i.e. the problematizer is also the problematizee, raising problems with her/ his own actions, feelings, etc. In Example 7, a segment from an extended narrative, the 'Bev Story', illustrates self-problematizing. Prior to this segment, Marie, who runs a day-care center in their home, has recounted to her husband Jon how one of her day-care children's mothers, Bev, had

given her more money than she owed for day-care services and how Marie had not accepted the extra money. Subsequently, Marie has also recounted how Bev had not given a required two weeks' notice for withdrawing her daughter from day care, whereupon Jon has reanalyzed and problematized Marie's non-acceptance of the money. The following segment illustrates self-problematizing (albeit prompted by Jon's prior other-problematizing) as Marie seems to have begun to accept Jon's interpretation and questions her own actions (in the line indicated by an arrow):

(7) Bev story (excerpt)
    m = mother (Marie); f = father (Jon)

   m: *((head on hand, elbow on table))* You know – Jon I verbally did tell
→   Bev two weeks' notice Do you think I shouldov stuck to that? or (to
    have/just) done what I did.
    (0.8)
   f: When I say something I stick to it. unless she: – s-brings it up. If I set a
    policy – (you know/and I) – and – they accept that policy – unless they
    have reason to change it and and say something? I do not change
    it . . .

This narrative displays how self-problematizing by one family member can license and lead to (further) other-problematizing by the self-problematizer's primary recipient. In Example 7, having already other-problematized and having seen his perspective acknowledged in Marie's questioning of her own actions, Jon moves on to amplify his other-problematizing, licensed by Marie's explicit invitation for his further judgment.

Co-narrators who take up the role of problematizer (of others or of self) may problematize an action, condition, thought or feeling on a number of different grounds, including (but not limited to) the following:

(a) *The action/condition/thought/feeling is considered untrue, incredulous or doubtful.* Problematizing utterances can call into question or even deny the truth of a proposition, as in Example 8:

(8) Earthquake report (excerpt)
    f = father; j = Josh (7;10)

   f: And I commanded the earthquake to stop – and it did
               |
→ j: *((making a face))*   Hah *((laughs))*
→   Liar liar pants on fire
            |
   f: I said 'Earthquake you stop at once You are
    fri:ghtening my children and we will not tolerate this'
→ j: No you *((laughing))* di?dn't
   f: No?
→ j: No
   f: Wel- I was thinking that
→ j: hun uh:?:
    (2.2)

In some narratives, the problematizer does not render a claim untrue but rather treats it with skepticism, as the mother does in Example 9:

(9) Josh's homework report
    m = mother; f = father; j = Josh (7;10)

Mother is at the sink doing the dishes. Father has just finished eating and gets up with his plate. Josh is seated at the dining table, in full view of kitchen area, doing homework.

   j: I'm done
    (0.4) *((Josh rises from his chair, begins capping his pen))*
→ m: *((disbelieving tone))* Already Josh. Read me what you wrote.
   j: *((standing, reading from his paper))* We went to a museum. – It was fun. – We learned about gold and other gems and minerals – When we – went to the (vault) we saw pretty things like crowns – We saw animals. – Some were bison raccoon walrus and many more – I liked it *((looking up proudly as he finishes))*
    (0.4)
   m: (o)kay. *((unenthused))*
   j: See? See how much I wrote? *((holds up paper to mother and father in kitchen))*
    (0.8)
   f: (almost/it's about) – a third of a page.
    (1.0) *((clatter of dishes; Josh looks back at page and puts it on the table))*
   f: Is that okay Mom?
   m: (it's) okay.
    (14.0) *((Josh leaves – for living room?))*

In some narratives, the problematizer displays a range of belief stances. In Example 1, for instance, we find a set of problematizing comments from husband to wife ranging along a continuum of disbelief. Dan's first reaction to his wife's reporting of 'a:nd (my Mom) bought me a dress for the wedding' is to respond with 'You're kidding'. When Dan says this, he is not necessarily wanting to know whether or not Patricia is kidding. Rather, he appears to be using 'You're kidding' to imply that the proposition is hard to believe. There may be a number of reasons why the proposition is hard to believe. In this case, the proposition may be hard to believe in light of his knowledge that Patricia already has a dress for the same event. Later on in the same narrative, Dan treats Patricia's account of her non-liability as highly dubious through the utterances 'Oh she just got it for you?' and 'You weren't there?' In Example 10 as well, the problematizer (again Dan, this time targeting his son Oren) displays a range of stances from disbelief to incredulity:

(10) Oren's day camp report (excerpt)
    m = mother (Patricia); f = father (Dan); o = Oren (7;5); j = Jodie (5;0)

   f: Well – listen Just tell me. – I just need to know – What else you do – how – How many kids in your group? *((with hand out, facing Oren, as if in mild desperation))*
   o: forty-three?
→ f: hh *((turns head away))*
    (0.6)
→ f: He's not telling the *((whiny, facing Oren))* tru::th=
   m: =That is the truth
→ f: *((turning sharply to Mom))* what?

m: mm ((nodding yes)) - (I spoke to a counselor)

→ f: ((incensed, cutting food as he speaks)) FORty THREE: ((turning to Oren)) How could there be forty three?

o: Ours is the biggest group?=

j?: =(nn)

j: (look at his fa(.hhh)ce)=
    [
    ((Dad looks to Jodie, then quickly to Oren))

→ f: ((very rapid, mouth full)) =(how do I know   face) – you telling the truth?

o: (mm) ((starting to nod yes))
    [
f: ((sergeant-like)) How many in your group.

o: ((said as if on verge of crying?)) forty three?
    (0.6)

→ f: He's lying
    [
j: hehe ((giggling, looking to Dad, then Mom))

m: (no they   ) ((shaking head yes))
    [
o: NO I'M NO:h:T ((bangs back against chair and turns toward living room)) – I'm NO:?:t. ((in screeching/laughing protest))
    (0.8)

Here, we see an example of the extremes to which narrative other-problematizing can go, wherein a father repeatedly accuses his son of lying. This category of problematizing—on the grounds of dishonesty or skepticism—occurred in our corpus only in cases of *other*-problematizing.

(b) The action/condition/thought/feeling is considered a sign of incompetence. Problematizing utterances can describe a narrative action, condition, thought or feeling as lacking competence. In some cases, a family member is identified as irresponsible or not showing mature judgment. For instance, in Example 11, problematizer Jon accuses his wife Marie of showing poor judgment earlier in the day in sending their young daughter Janie (age 5;11) to relay an apparently ambiguous or misconstruable message to Jon. The message involved Janie asking her father where certain photo negatives were kept so that her mother could give them to a friend who wanted them. Jon has already alleged, prior to the excerpt in Example 11, that the message came out instead as a request for him to find the negatives himself, a request he was too busy to oblige.

(11) **Photo negatives story (excerpt)**
    m = mother (Marie); f = father (Jon)

f: ('f) Janie had come out and said to me – 'Dad will you tell M:ommy where the films– are from the pic?tures,' I would have said 'Yes? Janie'

m: Well when she's about eight or nine I bet she'll be able to do that
    [
f: Janie came out

→ f: YOU: are over eight or nine are you not?

m: Ye:s – and that's exactly what I told her to say?

Indictments for showing poor judgment (such as this implicit indictment of Marie for expecting too much of her daughter) may extend to accusations of not being adequately conscientious. In 'Chili Peppers' (Example 12), both the mother and her son Oren problematize the mother's actions, accusing her of failing to keep the son out of harm's way while eating in a restaurant when he was a toddler. Specifically, the mother is blamed for failing to recognize that hot chili peppers were on the table and failing to stop her son from eating one and burning his mouth. After a lengthy remembering of this incident, here Oren other-problematizes his mother's behavior, she concurs (thereby self-problematizing), and then Oren turns on his mother, physically as well as verbally, to indict and punish her for her 'incompetence':

(12) **Chili peppers story (excerpt)**
    m = mother; f = father; o = Oren (7;5); j = Jodie (5;0)

→ o: YOUR FAULT – YOUR FAULT= ((pointing at Mom and reaching over till he's touching her cheek with his index finger))

→ m: ((nodding yes)) =It was my fault

j: hhh ((soft laugh – at Oren's reaction to Mom?))

m: I thought it was a um – green pep?per – .HHHHH
    [
    ((Oren is now pinching Mom's cheeks as she talks))

m: ((pulling Oren's hands away)) OW that really hurts honey?

→ o: your fault – I get to do whatever I want to do once

Complaints about a family member being overweight also fall into this category of problematizing, implicitly or explicitly indicting a lack of control as a sign of incompetence. In Example 13, Patrick responds to his wife's statement that she sat down on a broken chair and it split apart by (somewhat teasingly?) suggesting that she has a weight problem:

(13) **Broken chair story**
    m = mother (Molly); f = father (Patrick);
    j = Josh (7;10); r = Ronnie (4;11)

    During dinner preparation, Molly brings Ronnie a spoon to open a can of Nestlé Quik with; she touches the back of Ronnie's chair and scoots him in to the table

m: (Oh) this chair? broke – today
    [
    ((microwave? buzzer goes off))

f: I? know

    ((Molly heads back toward kitchen, stops by Josh's chair; Josh begins looking at Ronnie's chair and under table))

m: No:: I mean it rea:?lly broke today
    [
f: I? know

f: I know?

→ m: Oh you knew that it was split?

f: yeah?,

m: The whole wood('s) split?

f: yeah,

→ m: Oh did you do it?

(0.4)

f: I don't know if I did? it but I saw that it wa:?s=

            [

m: (oh)

((Josh goes under table to inspect chairs))

r?: ( )

   =[

m: yeah I sat down? in it and the whole thing split so I – *((bending over as if to indicate where on chair))* I tie:d

                         [

→ f: *((somewhat bratty intonation))*   That's (a) rea:l s:ign? that you need to go on a di:?et.

r?: *((going under table too))* (where)

m: hh *((grinning as she rises from stooped position next to Josh's chair on side facing Patrick))*

r?: (where where where)=

j: =Mi:ne? broke?

m: I fixed it – (I tied)

          [

r?:   (mi:ne?)=

j?: =(I'm not gonna sit on that chair)

((Josh pushes his chair away and pulls his Mom's chair over to his seat; she then pushes Josh's chair over to her seat))

This is an example of how husband and wife often jockey around each other, mutually problematizing in a tit-for-tat type of exchange, each trying to assign/avoid blame for breaking the chair. Molly constructs her utterances using the passive voice ('Oh this chair? broke – today?'; 'No:: I mean it rea:?lly broke today'; 'I sat down? in it and the whole thing split ...') which avoids assigning herself as the agent responsible for the condition of the chair. Try as she might, however, Molly does not get her husband to admit responsibility for the chair nor does she stave off his blaming her for breaking the chair and his nudging her about going on a diet.

In some narratives, the problematizer complains about a lack of competence by characterizing a *product* of one of the family members as substandard. Such problematizing is exemplified in Example 14, when the father (Patrick) describes the white meat of the turkey as 'a little dried out':

(14) Turkey white meat report

   m = mother (Molly); f = father (Patrick); r = Ronnie (4;11)

   Molly seems to be washing dishes, with Dad standing near her?, fixing his dessert? – both off camera; the boys are at the dinner table

→ f: I thought the turkey was a li::ttle– the white meat was a little dried out=

r: *((as he tears open a snack package))* =(aHA:/a LO::t)=

m: =(I had the white meat I thought it was a little)

                           [

r?:   (milk will)

→ f: bu:t I think? – that – if we had eaten it right away? instead of=

     [

r: ( )

---

f: =(putting/placing) it in the oven (you know?)

           [

r: (milk)

   (0.2)

f: (time)? – (I think it woulda been fantastic)

r: *((off camera))* (I ee Daddy::)

→ f: (yeah/you know) I thought it needed the gravy

r: ( )

   (0.6)

→ f: But I thought it was good with the gravy – although I don't think it was my greatest batch of gravy ever

   (0.6)

Here, while father Patrick appears to have been responsible for cooking the turkey, his problematizing of the white meat as too dry—which, in Patrick's first turn, is ambiguously targeted (as to whether it is self- or other-directed)—becomes more clearly *other*-problematizing in his next turn ('if we had eaten it right away?'): the blame is laid not on the cooking time, but rather on the fact that the turkey had to sit in the warm oven until other parts of the meal were ready—which seems to be a way in which Molly, the mother, is implicated as 'incompetent'. As these examples have illustrated, problematization for incompetence can be self- or other-targeted; in our corpus, mothers—like Marie in Example 7 and Patricia in Example 12—were the ones most prone to *self*-problematize on grounds of incompetence.

(c) The action/condition/thought/feeling is considered out of bounds (unfair, rude or excessive). One may also problematize the actions of a protagonist or the attitudes of a co-narrator because they violate one's sense of what is just, virtuous, proper behavior, or otherwise 'morally' correct. This type of problematization is illustrated in Example 1 above when Dan calls into question the value judgment of his wife Patricia in buying a second dress. Through such comments as 'You had a dress right?' and '(Doesn't that sound) like a – (helluva/total) – w:aste?', Dan portrays Patricia's and her mother's actions as unnecessary, wasteful consumerism. Furthermore, he implies in these and other comments (e.g. 'Why did you let my Mom get you something that you –') that Patricia acted improperly in leading his mother to believe that Patricia would wear the dress that his mother had purchased.

In some narratives, a family member problematizes a behavior or attitude manifest at the time of the telling rather than at the time of the past narrated events. For instance, in Example 15, the father becomes irritated with his son Adam when the latter inadequately responds to the father's narrative elicitations:

(15) Adam's swimming report (excerpt no. 1)

   f = father (Skip); m = mother (Debbie);

   a = Adam (9;0); s = Sally (5;5)

f: *((to Adam))* so (whadda) – what strokes did you work on in swimming=

a: =toda:y? the. – stro:ke? *((serving himself food))*

(0.8) ((*Mom begins to cut cornbread for Sally*))
→ f: ((*a little annoyed, looking squarely at Adam, nodding head yes*))
        I'm <u>ask?</u>ing you a question.
   a: (ca:<u>ncer?</u>)= ((*making pun on 'stroke' as medical term?*))
        ((*dog barking*))
        =[
→ f: (whaddaya mean?)
        =[
   s: chicken head ((*as she pounds both hands on table, facing Adam*))
        ((*Adam is slowly dishing up peaches to himself*))
→ f: (whaddayou mean?)
        [
   m: (food)
        (1.0) ((*Sally 'rocks' in her seat, then makes circular motion with finger to her head as if to say Adam is crazy; Mom puts slice of cornbread on Sally's plate*))
   m?: ((*to Sally?*)) (You must eat this. there)
   a?: ((*to Mom?*)) (thanks)
   s: ((*to Dad*)) (Do–?)
        [
→ f: ((*to Adam, nodding yes slightly*)) Well why don't you tell me what
        strokes (you've learned – you've learned, in swimming)

Here, in stating 'I'm asking you a question', the father steps out of his own narrative pursuit in order to problematize Adam's non-responsiveness as rude and impertinent; as such, the problematizing becomes another way of eliciting—or attempting to elicit—the report the father seeks.

(d) The action/condition/thought/feeling has or had negative ramifications. In some narratives, a co-narrator points out some past action, condition, thought or feeling that could possibly present a problem for the problematizer or for some other person in the future or did create a problem for someone in the past and thus was careless. For instance, in the 'Broken Chair Story' (Example 13), when Molly asks 'Oh you knew that it was split?' and then 'Oh did <u>you</u> do it?', she is trying to find out if her husband knew about how badly split the chair was at a time prior to her sitting down in it. Even though she is unsuccessful in assigning agency to her husband for physically breaking the chair, she does suggest culpability in that he failed to notify her of the condition of the chair, his inaction (and the implied thoughtlessness which she attempts to problematize) thereby allowing for the possibility of her sitting down in the chair and its splitting apart.

These and other concerns addressed in the act of problematizing serve to reinstantiate through everyday narrative activity not only the value systems of families (e.g. the priority given to honesty, competence, restraint, respect, foresight, thoughtfulness, etc.) but also, as we shall demonstrate below, the sociopolitical hierarchies governing the distribution of rights and responsibilities among the various family members to define, monitor for and enforce these systems (e.g. to problematize their violations). As such, narrative activity powerfully indexes and (re)allocates the political organization of the family.

3.3 Narrative organization of the family

Our findings indicate that the narrative roles of protagonist, elicitor, initial teller, primary recipient, problematizer and problematizee are distributed discriminately and systematically among family members. While mothers, fathers and children assume all these roles at one time or another, in the dinners we have observed they each orient more to certain roles than others. As such, the narrative roles that they take on help to define their particular family identities. Being a mother/wife or a father/husband or a child/sibling is defined in part by the actions which are routinely performed in the presence of one another and/or for the benefit of one another. Some of these actions are verbal actions, including narrative actions, that thus impact individual family members' roles. We now consider each of the narrative roles (e.g. protagonist) which we described and exemplified above in terms of the extent to which fathers, mothers and children assume them.

3.3.1 Protagonists. In the 100 stories and reports in this narrative corpus, there were a total of 124 family-member protagonists (7 of the narratives had no family-member protagonists, i.e. they concerned third parties; 70 focused on one family member as protagonist; 15 had two family-member protagonists; 8 had three family-member protagonists). The overall distributional pattern among family members is shown in Table 1.

TABLE 1. Family-member protagonists
Of the 124 family-member protagonists
who were the preferred protagonists?

Target (5-year-old) child	33
Older sibling(s)	31
Mother	28
Father	24
Younger sibling(s)	8
	124

Grouping these findings, we see that *children were the preferred protagonists* in the family dinner narratives in our corpus:

Protagonists: CHILDREN (72) >   PARENTS (52)
                                 MOTHERS (28) > FATHERS (24)

In light of the families' knowledge that our study required a five-year-old and older sibling, there is the possibility that parents focused on the doings of the children and particularly the five-year-old more than they otherwise would have. This seems an unavoidable potential confound; however, if anything, it would suggest a corpus 'stacked in favor' of children as active participants in family dinner co-narration, which was not necessarily the case (see below and Taylor, 1991b).

3.3.2 Introducers (elicitors and initial tellers). Given that the stories and

reports in our corpus were predominantly about the children in the family, it is important to an appreciation of the political implications to find out how these narratives came about, i.e. whether by the protagonist-narrators' own unelicited initiation or by others' elicitation or initiation. Table 2 displays how the 100 past-time narratives in our corpus were introduced and then Table 3 will connect these findings to those of Table 1.

TABLE 2. Narrative introducers
Which family members introduced (either by elicitation or direct initiation) stories and reports involving family member protagonists?

	Total narrative introductions	By elicitation	By initiation
Mother	39	14	25
Father	32	15	17
Older sibling(s)	18	5	13
Target child	9	7	2
Younger sibling(s)	2	0	2
	100	41	59

First, note that the majority of past-time narratives in our corpus were introduced by direct initiation (59) rather than elicitation (41). Mothers and older siblings markedly preferred direct initiation over elicitation. Fathers showed roughly equal preference for elicitation and direct initiation. Only target children preferred elicitation over direct initiation, whereas younger siblings did no eliciting and little initiating of past-time narratives at the dinner table.

The most important point we draw from Table 2 is that, while the bulk (72 percent) of narrative protagonists were children (as seen in Table 1), children did relatively little introducing of narratives: in direct contrast, 71 percent of all stories and reports were 'put on the table' by parents—and not just as elicitors but, even more, as initiators of the narrative, a role taken up especially by mothers (in 25 cases). *In sum, parents were vastly more 'preferred' as introducers than were children*:

Narrative introducers: PARENTS (71)   >   CHILDREN (29)

In these findings, we see how, from the very outset of co-narration, being a narrative protagonist does not necessarily entail the role of narrative introducer. Control over the decision to introduce a narrative is not necessarily linked with—much less inherent in—the role of protagonist. This independent relation between protagonist and introducer is an important discursive insight into how certain family members' power is instantiated through narrative activity.

To specify the protagonist–introducer relationship, we examine in Table 3 which protagonists were introduced by which other family members, as opposed to self-introduced.

TABLE 3. Who introduces whom?
To what extent did family members introduce stories and reports about themselves as opposed to having 'their' narratives introduced by others?

Protagonist (no. narrs)	Who introduces (elicits or initiates)		
	Self (%)	Other (%)	Which other (%)
Father (24)	54.2	45.8	M = 33.3 Ch = 12.5
Mother (28)	53.6	46.4	F = 35.7 Ch = 10.7
Children (72)	33.3	66.7	M = 34.7 F = 19.4 Sib = 12.5
> 6 yrs old (31)	45.2	54.8	M = 25.8 F = 22.6 Sib = 6.5
~ 5 yrs old (33)	24.2	75.8	M = 42.4 F = 18.2 Sib = 15.2
< 4 yrs old (8)	25.0	75.0	M = 37.5 F = 12.5 Sib = 25.0

Table 3 reveals that fathers and mothers were the only family members whose own narratives (i.e. narratives in which they are protagonists) were introduced more often by themselves than by others (albeit marginally). With regard to the other-initiation of narratives about parents that *did* occur, there appears to be relative parity—across spouses, that is: mothers were as responsible for introducing narratives about fathers (33.3 percent of them) as fathers were for introducing narratives about mothers (35.7 percent). *But children rarely introduced, even elicited, parents' narratives.* However, to the degree that children did introduce narratives about parents, they did so equitably (12.5 percent of narratives about mothers and 10.7 percent of narratives about fathers).

In narratives where the children are protagonists, however, a very different picture emerges—one characterized by very little self-introduction and considerable other-introduction. *As a group, children introduced only one-third of all the narratives 'put on the table' about themselves; two-thirds were introduced by others, chiefly by the mother (34.7 percent).* Looking at this phenomenon by age of child, we see that, among children, older siblings (a total of 8 older siblings across the 7 families, aged 6;6 to 9;7) displayed the greatest tendency for self-introduction of their own narratives (approximating the preference pattern of parents): older siblings' percentages for self- (45.2 percent) vs other- (54.8 percent) introduction are roughly equal. Also, mothers and fathers introduced narratives about older siblings almost equally (25.8 percent and 22.6 percent, respectively).

Such indexes of relative balance for older siblings (in both self- vs other-

introduction and in other-introduction by mothers vs by fathers) did not obtain for five-year-old and younger children. *Three-fourths* of all narratives about the five-year-olds were introduced by others, principally (42.4 percent of the time) by mothers. This pattern differed very little for younger siblings (a total of 5 younger siblings in the 7 families, aged 0;9 to 3;8). Yet developmental research indicates that five-year-olds and even younger children are competent narrators and do widely introduce narratives about themselves and others (cf. Bruner, 1990; Feldman, 1989; Heath, 1983; Miller, 1982; Miller and Sperry, 1988; Preece, 1985; Weir, 1962). That the five-year-old and younger children in this study tended not to introduce narratives about themselves is, in our view, a manifestation of family political order at the dinner table. While five-year-old (and younger) children know *how* to tell their stories, they may have considerably less control than parents over whether or not a story about themselves is to be told or when it is to be told. In our corpus, every family member was at times in the position of having others introduce their narrative, but children were the most subject to this, and as such it may represent a form of asymmetric narrative control. In light of Preece's (1985) study of children's story-telling during car-pool trips (where three children were driven by one of their parents), it may be that children find compensation in their peer environments; that is, outside the family—perhaps especially outside the dynamics of family dinnertime—children may be better able to determine if and when narratives about themselves are to be aired.

One further observation on the findings in Table 3 concerns the role of siblings in introducing narratives about each other. Not surprisingly, the youngest siblings were the most exposed to narrative introduction by other children (25.0 percent of the time); five-year-olds' own narratives were introduced by siblings 15.2 percent of the time—always by older siblings. Only 6.5 percent (i.e. only two cases) of older siblings' own narratives were introduced by younger (namely 'target') children. The relation of older to younger siblings thus paralleled that between parents and children: like parents, older children displayed relatively more control over the reins of narrative topic and self-introduction. These findings suggest that not only parents but (older) siblings as well are important agents in socializing the politics of narrative introduction.

3.3.3 Primary recipients. For the 100 stories and reports in this narrative corpus, there were a total of 116 primary recipients, i.e. implicitly or explicitly singled-out or self-selected primary addressees. (In fifteen narratives, two family members were selected or self-selected as primary recipients; in one case, three members were so selected; in the remaining narratives, there was one such primary recipient.) Table 4 displays which family members were the primary recipients of these dinner narratives.

TABLE 4. Narrative recipients
Which family members were most often selected (by self or other co-narrator) to be the primary recipients of these 100 stories and reports?

Fathers	55
Mothers	40
Target child	10
Older sibling(s)	9
Younger sibling(s)	2
	116

While mothers were seen in Table 2 to be preferred introducers, fathers are seen here to have been preferred recipients. Moreover, combined, fathers and mothers overwhelmingly dominated the role of ratified recipient:

Recipients: PARENTS (95)   >   CHILDREN (21)
FATHERS (55) > MOTHERS (40)

In addition to these already lopsided findings, we note that in 8 of the 21 instances where children were primary recipients, they were not *singled out* but rather shared this explicit ratification with a parent. Thus, here, even more dramatically than in the findings regarding introducers, we see a privileging of parents, in this case for the role of explicitly ratified or primary audience for family narratives.

How fathers and mothers were so selected as primary recipients is displayed in Table 5, which indicates for narrative *initiators* (rather than elicitors) who their preferred primary recipient was, recognizing that this choice may have been previously manipulated in an elicitation (e.g. mother to child: 'Tell Dad about ...').

TABLE 5. Who addresses whom?
For each family member, who was the primary recipient of the narratives they *initiated*?

Initiator	Primary recipient[b]		
Mother (39)	→ Father (33)	> Children (10)	> Self[c] (2)
Children (36)	→ Mother (22)	≥ Father (19)	> Sibling (3)
Father (25)	→ Mother (16)	> Children (6)	> Self (3)

[a] For mothers and children—but not for fathers, the total number of recipients exceeds the number of narratives they initiated because they sometimes explicitly addressed multiple recipients, as noted above, or because another member self-selected as an additional primary recipient/addressee.

[b] When primary addressee is 'Self', it is because the initiator initiated someone else's narrative for them in the process of requesting to be 'audience' to the elicited narrative, as illustrated in the following: Father to daughter: '(your) mother said you were thinking of uh: – getting on the swim team?'

The *key finding* of Table 5 is that children were *nobody's* preferred primary recipients. Mothers generally oriented narratives they initiated towards fathers, fathers generally oriented narratives they initiated towards mothers, and children overwhelmingly oriented the narratives they

initiated towards both mother and father. (Within this orientation toward parents, mothers initiated toward fathers twice as often as fathers toward mothers.) Combined with the observation of Tables 1, 2 and 3, we can see that, overall, children tended to be talked *about* and introduced *by* others, but rarely addressed, i.e. talked *to*.

As suggested by this corpus, in some families, a classic family narrative pattern thus consists of the following: (1) mothers elicit or initiate narratives abers about co-present children; and (2) fathers are selected by mothers as primary recipients. This pattern is illustrated in Examples 2, 5 and 6 above and in the following additional narrative excerpts:

(16) Mother: Oh:: you know what? you wanna tell Daddy what happened to you today?=
     Father: Tell me everything that happened from the moment you went in – until:

(17) Mother: Jodie tell Daddy then what happened

In this classic scenario, mothers, for their part, exert control at the dinner table not only by introducing narratives about children but also by deciding *to whom* such narratives are to be directed. Mothers' control in these cases extends to both children and fathers in that children are obliged to be protagonists and sometimes narrators while fathers are obliged to be recipients—and, implicitly, judges. Fathers also put themselves in that position, in particular through independent elicitation of children's (and mothers') narratives.

One reason why fathers were frequently 'preferred' recipients of narratives about children (whether introduced by mothers or elicited by fathers) is that they were often the only one present who did not already know the events described in such narratives—the 'unknowing recipients' (cf. Mandelbaum, 1987; Taylor, 1991a). Fathers in this study generally arrived home after mother and children had been together for some time. In some cases, mother and children had spent the day together. In other cases, mothers had access to children as they arrived home from school or camp or in the course of driving car-pools. Even the mothers in this study who worked full-time generally arrived home earlier than fathers. Mothers thus frequently came to the table knowing the contents of many of the narratives about their children (which then privileged mothers as elicitors or initiators) whereas fathers typically did not.

Nevertheless, mothers *were* the second most preferred recipients (in 40 of the 100 narratives). While in some of these cases, mothers *had* prior knowledge of the narrative in question (as in the case of collective remembering of past events, e.g. child to mother: 'Mom, remember when . . .'), in other cases mothers did not (e.g. child to mother: 'Mom, but you know what? . . .'). In particular, mothers were generally 'unknowing recipients' of narratives about father. (With respect to narratives about each other's day, spouses tend to be reciprocally uninformed, as dinner becomes the first opportunity for airing such events.) Furthermore, even in the case of narratives about children where mothers have prior knowledge of events,

they may not know specific additional details or children's feelings about those events. This latter circumstance may account in part for the result captured in Table 5, namely the strong showing for mothers as primary recipients of narratives introduced by children, even with all the instances of mothers' setting the stage for fathers to take that role.

3.3.4 Problematizers and problematizees. In the 100 stories and reports in this corpus, there were 229 problematizings of co-present family members' actions, thoughts or feelings, either by oneself or by a fellow co-narrator. Table 6 indicates the number of times each family member assumed the role of problematiz*er* (i.e. identifier of problems) vs problematiz*ee* (i.e. 'targeted' as problematic or implicated in problematic actions).

TABLE 6. Problematizer vs problematizee

Which family members tended to be problematizers and which tended to be problematizees?

	As problematizers		As problematizees
Fathers	116	>	67
Mothers	80	=	84
Children	33	<	78
	229		229
	F > M > Ch		M > Ch > F

First, as summarized across the bottom of Table 6, note that the *fathers* in the corpus dominated as problematiz*ers*, while they were least often problematiz*ees*. *Second*, while there was relatively little difference in who tended to be a problematiz*ee*, i.e. *target* of problematization (as seen in the column on the right), there was a very marked difference with regard to who served as problematiz*er* (as seen on the left above): *fathers were problematizers nearly 50 percent more often than were mothers and 3.5 times more often than were children; mothers problematized 2.4 times more often than children.* The arrow directions (>, <, =) suggest the relative importance of 'problematizer' and 'problematizee' roles in defining the family roles of father/husband, mother/wife and child/sibling: While fathers were much more often problematiz*ers* than they were problematiz*ees*, mothers were almost equally constituted by the two roles, but children were much more often problematiz*ees* than problematiz*ers*.

Given these preferences, Table 7 examines who was the target of each family member's problematizing. Here, we see once again a rough parity between fathers and mothers in the sense that *fathers chose mothers as their targets (57.8 percent of their problematizing) roughly proportional to mothers' choosing fathers as their targets (52.5 percent).* It should be kept in mind, however, that these are percentages of unequal frequencies; thus, fathers problematized mothers more often than mothers problematized fathers. A qualitative analysis reveals *three* further important distinctions in the nature of mothers' and fathers' mutual targeting. First, mothers' problematizing of fathers was most often a problematizing (or rather

TABLE 7. Who problematizes whom?
For each family member – as problematizer – who was
their preferred target?

Problematizer	Problematizee (%)	
Father	M	= 57.8
(116)	Child	= 33.6
	Self	= 8.6
Mother	F	= 52.5
(80)	Child	= 35.0
	Self	= 12.5
Children	F	= 45.5
(33)	Sib	= 27.3
	M	= 21.2
	Self	= 6.1

counter-problematizing) of fathers' prior problematizings of themselves, i.e. of mothers' narrated actions, conditions, thoughts and feelings; there was very little evidence in our corpus of mothers' problematizing of fathers' actions, feelings, etc. This type of counter-problematizing is elaborately illustrated in Example 1, 'Patricia's Dress Story', where Patricia's problematization takes the form of a defensive refutation of her husband's problematization of Patricia's behavior. Second, fathers tended to problematize over a much wider range of topics concerning the mother's day than did mothers about the father's. Thus, fathers problematized about mothers' actions in her workplace, at home or during recreational activities, whereas fathers' actions in the workplace were typically not even narrated by the father much less problematized by the mother. In contrast to mothers' work experiences, fathers' work experiences were typically 'off-limits' as an object of familial problematizing. Third, mothers did not further problematize fathers after fathers problematized themselves in the narrative, whereas fathers sometimes 'dumped on' (i.e. further problematized) mothers after mothers problematized themselves (as seen in Example 7 between Jon and Marie).

In the generalized findings of Table 7, we also see that *mothers and fathers problematized their children in roughly equal proportion (each directing roughly a third of their problematizings at their children—fathers, 33.6 percent and mothers, 35 percent)*. However, once again, given that these are percentages of unequal frequencies of problematizing (i.e. as seen above, fathers problematized 50 percent more than mothers), it would be understandable that children as well as mothers might perceive that it was the fathers who were their principal problematizers. *The preference by children for targeting their father (45.5 percent) may represent, then, a retaliatory or 'tit-for-tat' response*. This phenomenon was illustrated in the 'Earthquake Report' (Example 8), where Josh (jokingly?) accused his father of lying. In second order of preference, children targeted their siblings (27.3 percent). Our analysis shows that, *while it was rare for*

siblings to introduce narratives about older siblings (as noted in Table 3), *it was not rare for them, within narratives, to problematize older siblings* (in fact, they did so *more often* than older siblings targeted younger). Meanwhile, *mothers were relatively privileged or off-limits (21.2 percent) as targets of children's problematizings*. (However, Example 12, 'Chili Peppers', does illustrate this relatively exceptional occurrence.)

While these quantitative generalizations suggest potential widespread 'norms' for family-member role relations in narrative activity, it must be noted that, in contrast to the relative lack of variation across families in our global analysis of protagonists (where children were preferred in all 7 families), introducers (where mothers were preferred in 5 of the 7) and recipients (where fathers were preferred in 5 of the 7), there is considerable family variation in patterns of other-problematizing, especially in mother vis-a-vis father problematizing. Over half of all instances of father-targeting-of-mother in narrative came from one family (Jon—from Example 7—as problematizer); in addition—and largely in response to Jon's problematizing, the mother in this family (Marie) problematized the father in narrative more times than any other mother, accounting for 40 percent of all instances of mother-targeting-father. Coupled with the observation that Marie was problematized by Jon twice as often as Jon was problematized by Marie, this pattern suggests a family 'portrait' of asymmetrically heightened readiness for spouses to problematize each other. In this same family, the children almost never problematized. Meanwhile, Patricia and Dan (of 'Patricia's Dress Story') were the second most frequent cross-spouse problematizers but did so in nearly equal numbers, i.e. more reciprocally than did Jon and Marie. Their children were the most frequent problematizers among children in the corpus, contributing nearly half of all instances (recall, for example, 'Chili Peppers'); they targeted their mother and father almost equally but rarely targeted each other (i.e. their sibling). In a third family, the father (Patrick) problematized his wife (Molly), but Molly almost never problematized Patrick, although the children did. In another family, father and mother never problematized each other—all instances of problematizing in that family were targeted toward and/or by the children (i.e. the family had the highest frequency of cross-sibling problematizing). In yet another family, one where there were fewer narratives to begin with, the very limited number of narrative problematizings were all by mother or father directed at one particular child. In short, while we have begun our analysis with the above quantitative overview of general problematizing trajectories, it is extremely important to recognize that, within individual families, family members may be constituting very disparate 'norms' for readiness to problematize others—and for role expectations regarding who is 'licensed' to problematize whom.

With regard to self-problematizing, Table 7 shows that among family members *mothers in our corpus directed relatively more of their problematizing toward themselves* (12.5 percent of all their problematizing, versus 8.6 percent for fathers and 6.1 percent for children). Instances of mothers' self-problematizing were found to occur across all the families in the study,

as illustrated in the 'Bev Story' (Example 7) and in 'Chili Peppers' (Example 12). Among fathers, a family-by-family comparison reveals that self-problematization varied considerably. Some fathers (e.g. Dan, the father in 'Oren's Day Camp Report' and in 'Patricia's Dress Story') never self-problematized, while others did so occasionally but not necessarily as explicitly or unambiguously as mothers did (e.g. Patrick in the 'Turkey White Meat Report'). As noted earlier—in the case of Marie's self-problematization in Example 7 and Patricia's in Example 12—self-problematizing often triggered other-problematizing. As also noted, this was more often the case when mothers self-problematized (especially on grounds of incompetence) than when fathers did.

Next, we turn to the reverse perspective of that just examined. In Table 8, we identify—for each family member—which family member tended to be her or his chief problematizer(s).

TABLE 8. Who is problematized by whom?
From the perspective of each family member, who was most often the problematizer of their actions, conditions, thoughts and feelings?

Problematizee (no.)	Problematizer (%)	
Mother (84)	F	= 79.8
	Self	= 11.9
	Child	= 8.3
Children (78)	F	= 50.0
	M	= 35.9
	Sib	= 11.5
	Self	= 2.6
Father (67)	M	= 62.7
	Child	= 22.4
	Self	= 14.9

Here, we see that fathers were responsible for nearly 80 percent of all the times mothers were targeted, further indexing how mothers might perceive fathers—their husbands—to be their problematizers more than fathers experienced mothers—their wives—in that role (62.7 percent). This pattern is represented especially vividly, as we have seen above, in 'Patricia's Dress Story' (Example 1), in the 'Bev Story' (Example 7), in the 'Photo Negatives Story' (Example 11) and in the 'Broken Chair Story' (Example 13). In this last example, we also saw an illustration of how the father–mother dynamic can play itself out as a sort of tit-for-tat, one manifestation of the reciprocal (levels of) problematizing between parents captured in the findings of Table 8.

Table 8 also shows that children were problematized especially by their fathers (50 percent of the time), an extreme example of which was illustrated in 'Oren's Day Camp Report' (Example 10), where the father went so far as to repeatedly accuse his son of lying, often very explicitly. Meanwhile, children being problematized by mothers (35.9 percent of the time)

was illustrated in 'Josh's Homework Report' (Example 9). Finally, as already noted above, problematization by siblings (11.5 percent of all targeting of children) tended to come from younger children aimed at their older brothers and sisters.

In sum, the most salient result of our analysis of problematization (Tables 6, 7 and 8) is that the fathers in our corpus were the predominant problematizers of *other* family members' actions, conditions, thoughts and feelings when stories and reports were aired during family dinnertime. Although they did also problematize themselves, fathers primarily problematized—and were *the* primary problematizers of—not only mothers but children as well. Thus, while family members look similarly 'vulnerable' to being problematized (as seen in Tables 6 and 8), fathers were least vulnerable—and mothers and children were most vulnerable—to being problematized by *others*.

This orientation in dinnertime co-narration has political consequences in that the lives of family members are disproportionately under the all-seeing, all-scrutinizing and problematizing gaze of fathers. Such an orientation, it is important to stress, was, on the one hand, partly an outcome of fathers' typically being the most uninformed party regarding family events and thus more often selected as primary recipients. As such, 'father as problematizer' was facilitated in our corpus by the active role of mothers who sometimes (perhaps inadvertently) set fathers up as potential problematizers—by introducing the stories and reports of children and mothers in the first place and orienting them towards fathers as primary recipients. As such, father and mother can be seen to co-operate in a narrative power-sharing arrangement that allows each (parental) party complementary modes of control, i.e. mothers' control over topic content, timing and recipientship, and fathers' control over assessment.

On the other hand, fathers' role as problematizer cannot be explained solely by their status as unknowing parties and mothers' establishing them as primary recipients. As noted, mothers were the preferred recipients of the narratives introduced by both fathers and children. In these cases, mothers usually had an unknowing or partially unknowing status, yet they did not evidence the same propensity for problematizing as did fathers. Further, Table 2 indicates that fathers elicited narratives as often as mothers did. Unlike mothers' elicitations, however, the elicitations by fathers tended to select themselves as preferred recipients. Thus, while there *was* familial collusion in establishing fathers as problematizers, fathers also assumed this role independently.

3.4 The parental panopticon

Foucault's application of the 'panopticon' notion, i.e. the all-seeing eye of power (cf. Bentham, 1791; Foucault, 1979, 1980), to modern social institutions seems to us to have a certain analogical relevance to what we see happening at dinnertime around the family table. The panopticon refers to a type of institutional architecture—as exemplified in prison architecture—

in which spaces are partitioned in such a way as to both confine inhabitants and expose them to surveillance from a central watch tower. Stories and reports can be seen as *discursive* structures in which the lives of protagonists are verbally laid out for the inspection of interlocutors.

Thus, we suggest that in a panopticon-like manner, stories and reports discursively arrange protagonists and interlocutors in relationships of power. When mothers direct children to tell fathers about some incident in their day or when mothers take upon themselves to initiate narratives about their children or when fathers elicit such narratives, they nominate children as protagonists whose actions are accessible to other interlocutors, particularly fathers, to review and/or sanction. When mothers and fathers take on these narrative roles, they implicitly establish fathers in the position of the panopticon (i.e. as central watch towers) and their children as monitored subjects. In this way, narrative activity can be a mechanism for parents to verbally penetrate and regulate 'even the smallest of details of everyday life' (Foucault, 1979)—of their children as well as of one another.

There is distinct variation in our data in the degrees and manner of fathers' uptake of this potential panopticon role, even across two families which both evidenced the 'classic' scenario whereby the mother additionally 'sets up' the father: Chuck's father (in Examples 2, 5 and 6) displayed minimal 'exploitation' of this role, while Dan, the father who accused Oren of lying in Example 10—and also strongly indicted the mother, Patricia, for her 'excesses' in Example 1—seemed prone to readily and regularly problematize, taking the monitor-and-regulate functions of the panopticon to their more extreme incarnations. The potential socialization ramifications of such orientations is suggested by Dan's son Oren's readiness to 'monitor', problematize and indict his mother, as in 'Chili Peppers' (Example 12).

The spirit of the panopticon is evidenced in the course of family co-narration not only in acts of problematizing. Acts of *praising* are also forms of monitoring, which, like problematizings, may be accompanied by interrogations and other controlling acts. The following story (Example 18), which centers on the issue of how long a roast should be properly cooked, illustrates a narrative 'pat on the back' to mother for listening to the advice of father and thereby cooking the roast to near perfection ('See Mol: – (if you–) – you listen(ed) to o:l: Pat (and) it turns out (good)'). In so doing, father pats himself on the back as well for advising mother on the cooking time:

(18) Potatoes & roast story

    m = mother (Molly, or Mol); f = father (Patrick, or Pat);
    j = Josh (7;10); r = Ronnie (4;11)

Molly stands between her place and Patrick's, serving vegetable from saucepan to her own plate and then turning to serve Patrick

f: *((opening foil on his potato))* (Did you bake it?) – You baked it in the oven huh

m: *((serving vegetable to Patrick))* Yea:h – as long as I had the meat? goin

    (1.0)

m: Ronnie sit dow?n
    (0.6) *((Molly heads back to kitchen with empty saucepan))*

→ f: See Mol: – (if you–) – *((turning to face her))* you listen(ed) to o:l: Pat (and) it turns out (good)=

m: =Ronnie

r: (yeah?)

f: How long did it cook (for)
             [

r: (ah uh uh uh) *((jumping sounds as he heads for his seat))*
    ((Molly comes back and sits))

m: I put it in a:t – about fi:ve to four
              [
              ((Ronnie loudly sighs as he sits))

f: uh huh=

r: =(can I   go   dinner toy)
           [

m: and then at quarter till I turned it off – quarter to six
                             [

f: Oh (I
    said) an hour and forty minutes?
    (0.6) *((no visible response from Molly — she's mashing her potato; Josh is blowing his food, seems to be listening to Dad & Mom and looks occasionally off to kitchen wall — to clock?))*

→ f: So you cooked it about the length that I said
        [
        ((Ronnie humming))

m: Yeah a little bit longer (maybe/I think)

→ f: So you cooked it about the length but not to the degree on the thermometer – which – perhaps indicates that the thermometer=
                                          [

m: *((pointing to meat on her plate))*   This is
    per?fect

f: =that the thermom?eter is off
    (0.2)

m: maybe?
    (0.4)

m: It might have been (in a   ) close to a bo:ne or something like that? (cuz) this is perfect

f: because – when I said (I know/on how) long to cook it I was going by – by the pound?age of the meat?
    ((sound of Molly shaking salt from metal shaker))
    (1.0)
    ((Molly gets up to get herself a can of Coke))
    (0.8)

f: I'm tired.
    (2.6) *((Molly returns with Coke can))*

The tone that is established from the outset of this narrative is paternalistic. Father establishes that *he* is the judge (of the roast's—and therefore the mother's—success); he is the authority; he portrays himself as even more reliable than a thermometer in gauging the doneness of meat. Even in the kitchen, in this family at least, it seems 'Father Knows Best'. In this

narrative, father exerts considerable monitoring through numerous interrogations, which mother seems to resist in her response 'Yeah a little bit longer' and again in her assertions, twice, that 'This is perfect'.

While fathers thus frequently appear to be relatively powerful occupants of 'control tower' positions, they—like others in such surveillance positions—are *sometimes* carrying out role expectations, in this case, family members' expectations surrounding the role of father. Indeed, as suggested above, in some families, fathers *can be* set up for the panopticon role when mothers establish them as primary recipients of narratives. In these and other ways, fathers are as much bound to a political order within the family as are those they survey. Our findings do not lead us to indict fathers (or mothers) but rather to examine and expose the panopticon role in narrative, regardless of who occupies it. In addition, we do not wish to suggest that the spirit of the panopticon is by any means the only—or necessarily even the dominant—one in family co-narration, but rather that it seems to capture an underlying dynamic that co-exists with a more supportive spirit in an on-going tension. Which 'spirit' prevails is variable across situations and across families but is probably always present, palpably so, to children as well as to parents.

We also note that there is, to some degree, an almost inherent double bind for parents that can lead them to turn the dinner hour into a nightly 'inquisition'. Parents *do* want—and sometimes feel they need, for good reasons—to know about their children's lives, both general and specific information about their activities, and they do become frustrated if and when their children become reticent. Finding the balance in how to obtain that information and show interest in their children's lives without being overbearing or 'interrogating' is admittedly problematic—more so in some family dynamics than in others. In some families, children are more resistant to sharing and parents may feel the children and their narratives have to be 'pulled' out. In some families, parents go further in the direction of taking on a 'panopticon' role, perhaps as a function of these 'catch-22' considerations.[9] This caveat, offered in the interest of being 'fair' to parents and their own dilemmas, nevertheless leaves an unreconciled imbalance unaccounted for—namely the 'recipiency' imbalance: in our corpus, children are not explicitly ratified addressees of their parents' narratives in the same way that children are often obliged to explicitly address their parents. And there is the rub: *our findings suggest that there is not an equal balance wherein parents address their lives—their narratives—to their children as much as they expect their children to address their lives to them.*

3.5 Children's resistance

The classic scenario we have extracted from our quantitative findings in Section 3.3 highlighting mothers' role in setting up narrative tales for fathers to judge and fathers' role as problematizer par excellence suggests a complicity among parents (which may not be conscious) to penetrate and

direct the lives of their children via (dinnertime) narrative activity. Such a complicity is part of the educative and formative role expectations associated with childrearing in all societies in the sense that childrearers everywhere coordinate to incorporate children into society, i.e. to socialize them. These coordinated actions are hegemonic (Gramsci, 1971) with respect to children in the sense that the actions both maintain parental dominance and also attempt to assimilate children into parental worldviews through the process of scrutinizing narratives in which children figure as protagonists. As noted earlier, in our corpus, narrative practices were also found to submit mothers' lives as protagonists to the scrutiny of fathers (e.g. 'Patricia's Dress Story', Example 1), whereas the reverse—fathers' actions, etc., as protagonists being subject to mothers' scrutiny—was virtually non-existent. Thus, within parental dominance, paternal hegemonic patterns were also in evidence, which 'subjugated' mothers along with children.

There is, however, always the *possibility* of resistance by the subjugated (see Marx and Engels, 1848/1978; Gramsci, 1971; Giroux, 1983). Resistance is discussed in political philosophy on the level of large social groups such as regional states, social classes and ethnicities, but political philosophy recognizes that both hegemony and resistance are quintessentially familial processes. Gramsci (1971: 266), for example, notes that:

> A father will be legislator for his children but the paternal authority will be more or less conscious, more or less obeyed.

In family co-narration, the panopticon spirit is sometimes resisted by other family members—by mothers (as evidenced in the mother's resistance to the father's scrutiny in the 'Potatoes & Roast Story', Example 18 above) but also, and sometimes persistently and effectively, by children. We see evidence of such resistance both in children's *reluctances to comply* with parental elicitations of their narrative accounts and in their sometimes *ironic stances* vis-a-vis parents' narrative expectations.

For instance, following the extract cited in Example 15 above ('Adam's Swimming Report'), the father persists in seeking a report from Adam (overlapping compliance-gaining food distribution talk for a couple of minutes), but Adam ignores his father or gives little more than 'I don't know' or other entirely unsatisfactory (from father's perspective) responses until, in frustration, Adam's father finally turns to his wife to get the information he seeks:

(19) **Adam's swimming report (excerpt no. 2)**
  f = father (Skip); m = mother (Debbie); a = Adam (9;0); s = Sally (5;5)

  f: *((to Adam, nodding yes slightly))* Well why don't you tell me what
     strokes (you've learned – you've learned, in swimming)
                        [
  m: (You want some) cornbread Skip?
  f: (yeah thank you)
     (0.6) *((Dad holds out his plate toward Mom for cornbread))*

s: *((to Dad))* (Do) you (share) your eggs?
a: *((finishing serving self peaches))* (thought we weren't havin') any
   nut?meg
f: what strokes. what s–
   [
a: *((softer, turning to face camera))* thought we weren't havin'
   ((mouthing toward camera)) (any nutme–)=
m: *((quite annoyed))* =Adam?
   ((Adam sits))
m: There are other people at this table. now you put back two of those
   peaches
   (0.6)
a: okay? (okay)
   (0.2) *((Adam stands again and puts one peach half back as he
   speaks))*
a: Each? – people get, two except for (me) – that's fair, *((using spatula to
   point to Dad and then back to serving dish))* two for you *((to Dad))* t–
                                               [
m: *((firmly))*   Put? two back
a: then, Da?ddy gets three
   (0.4) *((Adam scoops back another peach onto serving dish))*
m: *((sharply, nodding yes once))* we'll see
a: *((mutters under his breath))* (   )
f: *((to Adam))* so what happened – what happened today in swimming
                 [
s: Daddy didn't take, too much food
→ a: *((under his breath))* (oh well I don't know) – (dive)
s: *((demanding tone, to Mom))* Can you get something diff'rent=
                                      [
a: *((still speaking very softly))*   (we   for a while)
s: =than this chai::r
   (0.4)
f: *((to Adam))* How are ya doing in (your) diving?
→ a: *((to Dad))* (in what)?
f: How are you doing in diving?
             [
s: *((to Mom))*   Get a diff'rent chair=
                      [
→ a: *((to Dad))*   I don't know
   ((Mom gets up to help Sally with chair))
m: =*((to Sally))* (Could you ask) ni:cely?=
s: *((to Mom))* =plea:::se=
→ f: =*((to Mom))* How's he doing in diving
m: *((to Dad, as she stands next to him, shaking head no))* (Well they
   don't really   ) . . .

We suggest that Adam here uses narrative resistance to avoid compliance
with a narrative process which inherently entails exposing the protagonist,
i.e. himself, to evaluation and critique. At the same time that he and his
mother become adversaries over food allocation rights, Adam engages in a
political struggle with his father over narrative rights, namely who is to
control the direction of the narrative about Adam's swimming lesson.

Adam is able to stall the unfolding of the narrative but not to subvert it
completely, as evidenced by his father's ultimately turning to his mother to
facilitate the continuation of the narrative process.

In Example 20, 'Jodie's Shots Report', we see a different kind of resis-
tance illustrated in Jodie's brother Oren's 'wise guy' retort to his mother's
eliciting of his narrative participation:

(20) Jodie's shots report (excerpt)
   m = mother (Patricia); f = father (Dan); o = Oren (7;5); j = Jodie (5;0)

   m: You know what Jodie said that was really – I thought really smart? –
      and really good?
   o: what
   m: She said. – she couldn't stand to wait for the shot (ta–) the last thing
   j: *((turning and speaking straight at Oren, proudly, wide-eyed))* so I –
      got it first
      (0.8)
   m: so she asked for her shot first
   j: *((turns to Oren and nods yes twice, proudly))*=
   m: =and that way she didn't have to wait
   j: *((turns and nods yes once again to Oren))*
      (0.2)
   m: and then?
      (0.8)
   m: I thought that was really. – a terrific thing for her to do
                                                        [
   f: *((nodding yes))* I agree
   m: *((to Oren))* (What do you think?)
   o: *((nods yes))*
      (0.4)
→ o: If you let me go out then I think it's great
   f: (no)
   m: *((smiling))* And if we don't you think it's really dumb huh?
   o: mhm?
   m: (unhun) That's interesting

On the surface, Oren is being asked here to take on a panopticon (father-
like) role as evaluator (of Jodie's actions), but Oren's response suggests that
he may well perceive it to be a manipulated role, a summons to do evaluat-
ing which has been set up to rubber-stamp his mother's evaluation. In his
ironic bribing ('If you let me go out then I think it's great'), Oren may be
manifesting a kid's way of 'casing the system' and then counter-manipulat-
ing it.

We further suggest that children's flights (or attempted flights) from the
dinner table may in part manifest sensitivity to—and desire to escape
from—certain injustices and disempowerments in family co-narration.
While the restlessness of many children to leave the dinner table might be
readily written off by some as reflecting simply children's drive to play, to be
more active, etc., it can also represent a political counter-offensive—a
resistance to a discursively manifest hierarchy that manipulates children.

4. CONCLUSIONS

Gramsci (1971) has suggested that all domains of society can be examined for their political character. In this essay, we have considered ways in which the family is a political institution through an analysis of family co-narration as a political activity. The family dinnertime stories and reports which we have recorded are political activities in the sense that they involve an exposure and scrutiny of family members' actions, conditions, thoughts and feelings. These narrative moves entail narrative roles such as protagonist, introducer (elicitor and/or initiator), ratified recipient, problematizer (problem-identifier) and problematizee (target), each of which is differentially empowering for the family member who enacts it.

In our data, the roles of narrative introducer, ratified recipient and problematizer—the roles which seem to be the most empowering—tend to be in the hands of parents. Introducers of dinnertime narratives tended to be mothers, especially as initiators, and also fathers, relatively more as elicitors. On the one hand, introducing someone else's narrative may, in principle and within a given narrative, empower the narrative protagonist as having an important life worthy of narrative attention, especially when such introducing is limited to elicitation (see Taylor, 1991b, regarding roles and outcomes for children *within* narratives). On the other hand, we suggest that when there is a *pattern* such as we have seen here, where one familiar interlocutor regularly introduces fellow co-narrators' stories and reports in a non-reciprocal way, then the role of introducing can be seen to be an agenda-setting, empowering role for the introducer which concurrently disempowers the role of narrative protagonist as a non-self-determining one.

Second, the role of recipient, when overtly ratified, is also a role which is more powerful than might be recognized at first glance as it empowers that participant as an asserted and valued addressee, one whose judgments matter. As we have seen, fathers tended to be nominated for this explicitly acknowledged position, either by mothers or by fathers themselves in their elicitations. Third, problematizing, which is a judiciary action of great import, was also exercised primarily by fathers, not coincidentally: explicit addressees are implicitly called upon to attend to a protagonist's (and co-narrator's) experience and perspective and to react. Such reaction may be supportive or it may be critical or variations of both. What we have seen in our corpus is that those who tended to be critical, via problematizing, were fathers. They used their ratified recipientship to weigh in most strongly among family members as voices of probing, critique and judgment of the narrated events and the responses of mothers and children.

Meanwhile, two other roles seem less empowering—those of protagonist and problematizee. Only in the role of problematizee, which is a relatively passive or defensive position (unless responded to by counter-problematizing), was the distribution of family members roughly symmetrical. On the surface, every family member was more or less equally vulnerable to being a target of someone's problematizing; however, we have seen that mothers and children were more often subject to *others'* problematizing.

In our data, the role of protagonist, ironically, also tended to be a relatively passive co-narrator role for those who most often assumed the protagonist role, namely the children—passive in that they did not usually introduce their own stories and, as such, their protagonist role was not one that was voluntarily assumed. Indeed, we have seen that mothers in particular tended to place children in this role. Family co-narration, as practiced in this way, thus tends to ratify children as topical *objects* of narration but not as *active agents* of narrative activity (Taylor, 1991b), measured here in terms of the influential roles of introducer, primary recipient and problematizer. The process of narration itself seems to set them and their lives up for examination under the watchful eye of a familial panopticon, typically the father.

We have also observed, however, that children are not resourceless participants in these political interactions. They can display considerable capacity to resist elicited narrative displays and scrutinizings. Like Adam in 'Adam's Swimming Report' (Example 19), they are often quite adept at evading even the most persistent narrative interrogations. And like Oren in 'Jodie's Shots Report' (Example 20), they may cleverly play the 'wise guy' (or, sometimes, the 'con artist') to seek escape from the dinner table as a final resourceful alternative to continued (narrative) surveillance. On balance, we suggest that, both in its ordering and evaluating of daily lives and in these resistances and other reactions to it, family co-narration can be seen to be a powerful medium for enactment and socialization of another drama outside and underlying that of the narrative events—namely the ongoing (re)instantiation of the political structure of the family.

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NOTES

1. This paper is the result of the equal work of both authors.
2. For convenience and consistency in our tables and discussion, we use the terms

'father' and 'mother' throughout this article to refer to the men and women in these nuclear families, although several narratives (e.g. Examples 1, 11, 13, 14 and 18) engage men and women in their roles as spouses rather than as parents.

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4. Family Database: 7 Caucasian-American, two-parent families

Children in family—with age and gender of each

Family pseudonym	TC − 2	TC − 1	Target child	TC + 1	TC + 2
Cook			4;11 (m)	7;10 (m)	
Crosby		1;5 (f)	4;11 (f)	6;6 (f)	
Hope*	1;5 (m)	3;7 (m)	5;11 (f)	8;7 (m)	
Locke	0;9 (m)	3;8 (m)	5;8 (f)	7;6 (f)	9;8 (f)
Popper			5;0 (f)	7;5 (m)	
Saxe			5;5 (f)	9;0 (m)	
Schultz			6;1 (m)	9;7 (f)	

Key: TC − 1 and TC − 2 = younger siblings of 'target child' in descending order;
TC + 1 and TC + 2 = older siblings of 'target child' in ascending order;
f = female child; m = male child.

* The mother did not eat dinner with the family during one of the videotaped evenings in the Hope family, hence the 13-dinner total since we only included two-parent dinners.

5. The Initiating or Inciting Event roughly corresponds to the 'complicating action' of a narrative of personal experience described by Labov and Waletzky (1968).

6. All family member names used in the transcript excerpts and throughout this paper are pseudonyms. Transcription conventions are those of conversation analysis (see, for example, Schenkein, 1978) with some modifications, notably the use of double question marks as in Example 1, Round 2, the father's 'I ?don't? know', to show rising plus stressed intonation on the word(s) bounded by the question marks.

7. Polanyi (1989) suggests that reports vis-a-vis stories are characterized by elicitations. Thus, in Polanyi's framework, reports are distinguished from stories in that recipients of reports have displayed interest in the narrative prior to its telling whereas recipients of stories typically have not. In our corpus and in our definition of story vis-a-vis report, such elicitation is not a categorical feature distinguishing the two narrative types. For instance, 'Patricia's Dress Story' (Example 1) is elicited previously by her husband's asking 'Is that what happened today?'.

8. Typically the use of the term 'the kids' to refer to children of the family is a referential practice of one parent addressing another. A parent addressing his or her children might use 'you kids' but not 'the kids'.

9. We are grateful to Alessandro Duranti for calling our attention to this important and complex caveat to our assessment of 'panopticon' effects.

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