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How proposing an activity to a person with an intellectual disability can imply a limited identity

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Abstract

In residential homes for people with learning or intellectual disabilities (or mental retardation, in North American usage), a routine way for staff members to structure residents' time is to propose outside activities (for example, shopping trips to town, attendance at a concert and so on). We identify one common way of proposing such activities which reveals a subtle but significant aspect of the staff's understanding of the residents' identities. Staff often introduce an activity not by mentioning its actual qualities (e.g. 'do you want to go and see a church concert with lots of singing?') but by associating it with a given individual (for example 'do you want to go to a concert with Bill?'). This practice favours the social aspect of the residents' choices over any other, and encourages the residents' conceptions of themselves as people with feelings who care about others, and who are, in turn, cared about. We discuss the implications of such an apparently positive identity ascription.

Introduction

The issue of the identities available to people with learning or intellectual disabilities (and those terms, of course, though ostensibly merely technical, each imply inference-rich identities in their own right¹) is fraught with social, cultural and political difficulty. One particular scene of concern is in the very mundane decisions of such people's lives. The question of the daily choices available to, or imposed on, persons with intellectual difficulties is of much concern in the clinical and professional literature (e.g. Beamer & Brookes, 2001; Dowson, 1997; Edge, 2001; Guess, Benson & Siegel-Causey, 1985; Harris, 2003; Jenkinson, 1993; Jenkinson et al, 1992; Kinsella, 2000; Kishi et al, 1988; Stalker & Harris, 1998). In Britain, as in other countries, questions of choice have attracted Government-level intervention. In the UK, one of the four central aims of the recent influential White Paper on services for people with intellectual disabilities (Department of Health, 2001) was that they should have more choice and control over their own lives. In order to achieve this, services are meant to adopt 'person-centred' approaches in the support they offer. Broadly, this involves putting in place formal systems in which a person determines the type of support, accommodation and activities they want themselves. All this requires staff respect of service users' autonomy and partnership: two crucial issues of personhood and identity.

In practice, this is no easy matter. Staff members have to negotiate identities which often have contradictory goals. In particular, their role as representative of the organization (with its responsibilities for service targets, health and safety, professional expertise, and the promotion of independence) often conflicts with their role in person-centred approaches of facilitator, advocate and supporter (Beamer & Brooks, 2001; Jenkinson et al, 1992; Swift, 2005). In practice, this often involves rapid fluctuations in the identities offered and claimed within single interactions. In addition, people with intellectual disabilities have to negotiate the contradictory identities assigned them within these different discourses of care. Central to a person-centred approach is a change of identity for people with intellectual disabilities, from that of relatively passive recipient of

¹ The term 'learning disabilities/difficulties' is a diagnostic label currently used in the UK, replacing 'mental handicap'. In other countries the term used is 'mental retardation'. There is a growing use of what is seen as the less negative term 'intellectual disabilities', which we follow here.

services, advice and education, to that of an empowered and rational consumer of services (e.g. Social Exclusion Unit, 2005). In that context, the issue of how the learning-disabled member of a residential home structures her or his time, or has it structured for them by staff, become a site of some significance. How do staff manage the task of offering choices and issuing proposals to the residents? What does this tell us about the identities the staff recognise in, or impose on, the residents?

Analysis of interaction

Evaluating the actual delivery of person-centred services is notoriously difficult. Retrospective interviews and ethnographic reporting have their place (e.g. Jenkinson et al, 1992; Kishi et al, 1988; Stancliffe et al, 2000), but the method we favour is one that pays very close attention to the details of interaction as they appear in audio and video recordings. Conversation Analysis, the method we report here, is a well-established approach to the study of talk in interaction (for an account of the history of Conversation Analysis (henceforth, CA), see Heritage 1984; for a recent overview of its methods and style, see Hutchby and Wooffitt, 1998, and ten Have, 1999; for the difference between CA and discourse analysis more generally, see Wooffitt, 2005). CA inspects recorded data to see how the participants in a scene display their own understandings of what they are doing and saying, as evidenced in the detailed organisation of their talk.

Within the field of research on intellectual disability, CA has already been used to study the communicative strategies of people with an intellectual disability (e.g. Wootton, (1989), the practices of their assessment (e.g. Antaki, 1999), the interactional production of ‘acquiescence’ and ‘incompetence’ (Rapley, 2004) and the manner in which people manage their identities in interviews (e.g. Rapley, Kiernan and Antaki, 1998). More pertinently for the study we report here, CA has also successfully been used to uncover the working practices of staff dealing with people with intellectual disabilities in routine service-user interviews [Authors reference] as well as in self-advocacy group meetings [Authors reference].

In this article we shall use the insights of CA to explore just how it is that staff members offer residents choices of activities, and what the exact wording of those proposals imply for the residents' identities. The issue of choice and identity has not, so far as we know, been addressed at the level of the actual exchanges between service-user and staff member, yet it is here that the great macro-level issues must play out in practice. We should note at the outset that what the reader will see is a qualitative study of routine events, in their interactional detail. We shall not offer a survey of how often the kind of events we record here happen. Our aim is to show how small details of interactional practice on the part of staff members can unwittingly produce and sustain restricted identities for people with intellectual disabilities (for further examples see Rapley, 2004).

Data

Our data are part of a larger corpus of interactions which were recorded on video in one NHS residential home in the South East of England (coded CHW-VD03 and CHW-VD04 on the extracts below), and on audio in one other residential home (coded 'House 4') and one day centre (coded 'DC'), also in the South East of England. The particular extracts we have used come from 4 service-users' meetings across the separate residential homes. All homes were for adults labelled as having 'learning disabilities', and all meetings were chaired by a staff member and attended by a number of house residents or day centre users. Advance permission to record, and informed consent for anonymised data to be used in scholarly publications, was granted by all parties at the outset of the research project. Permission to record was, for confirmation, also solicited on each occasion on which recording took place.

Selection of examples.

We chose occasions on which the staff member was informing the service-users about, or asking them if they wanted to attend, some activity outside the normal run of routine, and that required the resident to accept, decline or confirm their understanding. The kind of event that we noted included such activities as *going to a concert*, *going cycling*, and *going to [a named] club*. Ethnographic work in the services confirms that these are

entirely typical of the kinds of out-of-house/day service activities attended by the service-users.

In all the data extracts we show below, names and identifying details have been changed. The notation we provide on the transcripts is an aid to seeing how the words were actually spoken, following the established Conversation Analysis principle that the delivery of words, the pauses between them, their volume, clarity and overlap are all matters which affect their meaning. The notation we use here is comparatively light, noting only those aspects of delivery which are crucial for the particular analytic points we make in this article. The explanation of the symbols is given in the Appendix.

Analysis

Before we get to our main analyses, we shall give examples of two mundane practices available to staff members when proposing activities to individuals, namely describing the proposed activity quite minimally (by a simple reference to the name/place of the activity, assumed to be familiar to the resident), or by addition of some characteristic intrinsic to the activity. Then we shall spend the bulk of the analysis on departures from these two formats, in which the staff describe an activity by reference to some person associated with it.

(a) The minimal case: here the staff member's proposal refers to the activity and place minimally, with no associated detail, qualities, named people, or anything else. The presumption would be that the event/activity/location is sufficiently intelligible or familiar to the resident that nothing further is required, and their response, unless it showed incomprehension, is taken to be well-founded.

Extract 1. House 4 transcript 2 line 38 "Christmas Lunch"

- 1 Mel [()
- 2 Ann [(A::my), [(.) would you like to go ou:t, (.3) for Christmas
- 3 ? [(>yeah<
- 4 Ann lnch, to Forest Lodge.

5 (1.0)
6 Amy °no::°,
7 Ann you wouldn't?
8 Amy °no°
9 Ann where would you like to go:,
10 Tim (oh lordy)
11 Ann you don't want to go:, [we'll have to find something else
12 Tim [(oh lordy)
13 Ann for you then won't we.

In extract 1 above, the staff member (Ann) describes the proposed activity minimally (*go out for Christmas lunch to Forest Lodge*) - that is, with no reference to such qualities of the occasion as, for example: comparison with other venues, memories of previous occasions, what the food is like, who else might be going, who might the resident might meet there and so on. The only details provided are the event-type (a "Christmas lunch") and location. This is treated as self-explanatory. That this description is taken to be sufficient is seen in the sense that the resident's rejection (*No*) is taken to be well-enough informed and grounded for the proposal to be abandoned after one confirmation check. Rather minimal description of proposed activities, then, is sometimes sufficient.

(b) *The descriptive case.* Staff members could, and did on occasion, propose to residents activities which they described in terms of some intrinsic quality of what was to come. In the extract below the staff member Kay first refers to the event as 'the' Craft fair, then adds explanatory detail, for the benefit of other residents who have not yet responded.

Extract 2. DC transcript 3 first half line 222 "Craft Fair" [Note; the transcription of this extract only minimally reproduces the heard features of the talk]

1 Kay right the craft fair,
2 Joe (that's true)
3 Kay are any of you coming to the craft fair?
4 George yes, I'm coming

5 Kay you're coming, Philip you're coming, you're coming, (.)
6 anybody else coming to the (fair.)
7 Joe (I'm working) Saturday, at the [(club)
8 Kay [(Nat) you're coming. Pat
9 and Ted have kindly offered to help (.) at the craft fair so if any
10 of you others want to help at the craft fair, just give your
11 names to Tracey (.) and she'll give you a job to do.
12 (.)
13 Kay That'll be lovely, yeah?
14 George yeah,
15 Kay yeah, you could help behind the stall, or you could help in
16 the kitchen.

Although George and Joe have responded to staff-member Kay's proposal after the minimal description, several residents do not respond immediately. The elaboration Kay begins on line 8 encourages a positive response by pointing out what might be enjoyable about the activity. Her elaboration includes both extra details (the names of other group members who have agreed to go and examples of the types of jobs available) and an evaluation ('lovely'). Below, in another example of elaboration, the staff-member ('Dave') explicates what the activity (*Tuesday club*) involves by a piece of mime:

Extract 3. CHW-VD03 "Dee-jaying"

1 Dave *((looking at Dominic))* (tues-) Tuesday club.
2 (.5)
3→ Dave *((makes horizontal spinning motion with fingers))* deejaying
4 *((gives thumbs up to Dominic))*
5 Henry deejaying.
6 Dominic *((nods to Dave))*

The staff member is doing the rounds of a group of residents at a meeting. At this point he is explaining to each resident in turn that the next meeting of the "Tuesday Club" is in

two weeks, and checking in a minimal fashion that they have understood the message. When he gets to Dominic, he enhances the description of this event by indicating (in mime) that it will involve the opportunity to take control of the decks and act as a deejay. This occurs in a gap in which Dominic could, but does not, confirm his receipt of the subject of the message. The gesture is picked up and articulated by one resident (Henry) for the benefit of Dominic, who then signals assent.

Main analysis: Activities proposed with a reference to some associated person.

Now let us see what it means for a staff member to offer an activity which does not mention any intrinsic qualities of the activity, yet is enhanced by the mention of a named individual. We see this in three environments: as a reissue of a proposal which has apparently not been understood or registered; as a reissue of a proposal that has been rejected; and on the very first utterance of a proposal.

1. Naming a person as a reissue of a proposal that the resident has not understood or confirmed.

The first environment in which we see the use of a name as an adjunct to the activity is where the resident has responded to the proposal in a way which the staff member treats as a non-acceptance but (unlike the case in example 1), pursues the proposal. The resident may have withheld agreement, displayed incomprehension, or appeared not to have registered the proposal. The staff member redoes the proposal, now including the name of someone associated with the activity.

The following extract shows an example. Dave (a staff member) is going round explaining that 'Tuesday Club' is in two weeks. He gets only minimal confirmation that each resident has heard this information (as in extract 3 above). We would say that these minimal confirmations stand in opposition to the kind of explicitly "full" confirmation which showed that the person understood the subject (what "Tuesday Club" actually is) and the timing information (two weeks time). This seems to be a member's as well as an

analysts' observation, because we see, in extracts 3 and 4, that Dave pursues confirmation of at least the former aspect. At line 9 he gets to resident Alec, who has been engaging in a conversation with Chris (the researcher) on and off throughout the meeting.

Extract 4. CHW-VD03-230206. 07.25 "What's her name?"

- 1 Dave Tuesday clubs starts in two weeks' time. (.) two
2 weeks' time Tuesday club,
 [7 lines removed in which others respond]
9 →a Dave *((to Alec))* Tuesday club?
10 Alec *((looks away from Dave to Chris))* (Bill does it) erm
11 [yeah,] Dave, (.3) Chris
12 *[((momentarily turns to Dave))] ((looks back at Chris))*
13 →b Dave *((to Alec))* [(yer d- do-) cards.
14 Alec [(° °)]
15 Chris *((giggles softly))*
16 →c Dave *((to Alec))* listen. (.5) cards. (.5) two weeks time. What's
17 →c her name?
18 Alec yeah. (Sharon).
19 Dave Sharon. *((puts up finger in "that's right" gesture, turns*
20 *away))*. Two weeks time.
21 Alec *((to Chris))* Do you know Sharon.

Dave's first proposal to Alec (line 9) is apparently not registered, as Alec is talking across the table to Chris. Dave repeats the proposal when he has Alec's attention (line 13) by specifying one aspect of the proposed activity: *you do cards*. Alec is back looking at Chris, and doesn't answer. Dave redoes the question again, this time explicitly getting Alec's attention first (*Listen*), then naming the activity (*cards*), then putting a question to focus Alec's attention on a person (*What's her name?*).

What interests us is the test-question about Sharon (a test question is one to which the answer is already known by the questioner; it is a format common to didactic encounters

such as those in classrooms - see, for example, Edwards and Mercer 1987). Sharon has never been mentioned before in this session, and her association with the proposed activity remains unarticulated (though presumably clear to the parties concerned). Nevertheless Dave thinks it worthwhile to ask Alec to pronounce her name as an enhancement of what *going to Tuesday Club* means, or entails, in order finally to obtain a confirmation that Alec knows what activity Dave is talking about. Note, of course, that although Alec satisfactorily provides Sharon's name, he does not actually confirm he understands the crucial detail that Dave is attempting to impart – that the club begins in two weeks time. Instead, Dave treats confirmation that Alec has understood the activity (by naming a person) as sufficient.

That the resident has recognised a certain person as being associated with the activity has been enough. 'Sharon' has stood as a proxy for, or a good-enough description of, the event. There are obviously deep waters of implication here, as the staff member mobilises some inference-rich feature of the description, just as one would predict from Sacks' observation that descriptions are prime sites for constructing interactionally-consequential versions of reality (Sacks, 1992, in, for example, Vol 1, pp 236 ff). We shall return to just what these implications are later, once we have established the activity-plus-name practice more securely.

In the example below, again showing Dave and Alec, Dave uses a test-question in a similar way to his use in Extract 4:

Extract 5. *CHW-VD03-230206. 10.35 Who drives the bus?*

01	Dave	you still happy going to Pardew's?
02	Alec	er- <u>yeah</u> ,
03→	Dave	wi::th, (.3) who drives the bus?
04	Alec	Steve.
05		(.5)
06	Dave	Is he good, or bad.
07	Alec	Ba:d ma:n.

11 Ann [yuh (.)]y'know putting the numbers on the [card.
 12 Jay [ZACK?] [d'y
 13 know HOW to play bingo ZACK?
 14 (2.5)
 15 Lynn °°I don't°°=
 16 Ann =Yes you do:, you used to do it.
 17 Jay How about Zack:=
 18 → Ann =When Pearl:I was here,
 19 Lynn (arrrrhh [yeah)with ()
 20 Ann [do you remember, we used to turn it round
 21 (on the), we used to sit at the table.

Ann's pursuit of a response mutates into an enquiry as to whether Lynn knows what bingo is, and what we find significant is how Ann attempts to jog Lynn's memory. First she describes the mechanics of the game (line 11 – *you know, putting the numbers on the card*). Lynn's 'I don't' at line 15 might be treated as a response to any of the three previous turns – it might be a response to Jay's question to Zak at line 14 (i.e. 'I don't know how to play'), it might be a response to the main question at issue which Jay asks at lines 1 and 4 (i.e. 'I don't want to play bingo') or it might be a reply to Ann's phrasing at lines 7 and 11 in which she says '*you know ...*' (i.e. 'I don't know what bingo is'). Ann treats it as the latter, and this is when she adds a further detail, the name of a person associated with it (*when Pearl was here*). It is only when this seems to fail (note the next detail is added in overlap with Lynn's possible 'yeah') that Ann turns to the physical arrangements (*we used to turn it round* etc). What we see here, then, is that a person's name is used as a prompt after the name of the activity and a simple description of how it is played appears to fail.

In extracts 4 and 5 the staff member is meeting residents' non-answers by reissuing questions that pick out for emphasis not the location, experience, physical attraction or other intrinsic qualities of the activities proposed, but their explicitly social promises and obligations. In extract 6, the staff member provides a simple description of the activity,

and when this fails she names the person involved. This illustrates that person naming is a flexible strategy that can be used when confirmation of understanding is being sought by a staff member. It can be used as a first attempt at reissuing a proposal after an activity has been named but not receipted adequately, or during subsequent attempts at the proposal after other details have failed to elicit confirmation.

2. Naming a person after a proposal that the resident has actively declined.

In the next, a less common, set of cases, we see the staff member introduce a named person associated with the activity even after the resident has overtly declined the proposal.

Extract 7. CHW-VD03-230206. 11.44 "With Lenny"

((n.b. Dave is holding his fists out towards Henry on the table))

- 01 Dave ((to Henry)) which is better,
 02 [Stern Grange, (.3) Li:fe Care Change Network meeting,]
 03 [((points to each fist alternately))]
 04 Alec ((glasses off, rubbing his eyes))(°o:hm°)
 05 Henry (oh. (.) [this)
 06 [((points to appropriate hand))]
 07 (.5)
 08 Dave Stern [Grange.
 09 Henry [Stern Grange with Oliver ((pointing to Oliver))
 10 Dave [Do you'n want to go to your meetings any more] on a
 11 Alec [(((still rubbing eyes)) ()]
 12 Dave Friday?
 13 (1.0)
 14 Henry no [more ner.
 15 Alec [(((still rubbing eyes)) ((turns to Dominic)) (eyes)
 16→ Dave with Lenny. =

We can see from the internal evidence in line 1 that this is the very start of the staff-member's go-round of the residents on this topic. He introduces the concert with no further elaboration than the name of some person (Bill) not previously mentioned in the talk. This extract is particularly striking because we would expect a concert to be elaborated by details such as the type of music or the identity of the performers in order for the person to decide if they wanted to go. Instead, the information that they would be going ‘*with Bill*’ is treated as sufficient.

In the following extract, we see a variation of naming on first reference. In this case, the activity is already in the air, and the staff-member is once again soliciting views around the table. However, when he gets to one resident, Dominic, the reference to the activity undergoes a profound change:

Extract 9. CHW-VD03-230206 05:54 See Reena?

01	Dave	((<i>consulting notes</i>)) Alec, Victor and Dominic said
02		they would like to go cycling <u>e</u> very week, (.)
03		((<i>looks at Victor & nodding</i>)) still happy to go
04		[c <u>y</u> cling every week?
05	Victor	[((<i>nods</i> ,[<i>looking at Dave</i>))
06	Dave	[((<i>looking at Victor & nodding</i>
07	Dave	((<i>gaze arrives at Alec</i>)) still want to go cycling e[v'r'y week?
08	Alec	[eh= <u>y</u> eah::,
09		[(.5)]
10 →	Dave	[((<i>looking at Dom, chin up</i>))] still want to go and see
11 →		Reena ((<i>brings head down level</i>)) every week?
12		(.3)
13	Dom	((<i>points across the table in the direction of Brenda</i>))

In lines 10 and 11, Dave turns to resident Dominic and puts him the question that has been doing the rounds: whether he wants to go cycling every week. However, it mutates into the question *still want to see Reena every week?* There has been no hint that Dominic

has not followed the references to cycling, which have been discussed for some dozens of turns as each resident in turn was surveyed. Even had there been an indication that the activity would be under-specified for Dominic by the term 'cycling', one might imagine other aspects of the scene which ought to bring it to mind - its location, the scenery involved, the characteristics of the bikes and so on. Nevertheless, the staff member's first recourse is to naming a given person, presumably associated with the activity in some way. At this point we can usefully turn to a discussion of what the implications are of this practice.

What are the implications of associating the proposed activity with a person?

The proposed activity could have been described in myriad ways (see the ethnomethodological discussion of choice of description in Garfinkel, 1967, and in Sacks, 1992). Why describe it by nominating a given person? There are a number of reasons possible for this choice. Offering the resident a familiar name (Bill, Reena) might make the task of understanding the activity's description (like going to a concert, going cycling) cognitively easier. Making choices intelligible is a perennial concern for care staff and practitioners in general (see, for example, the concerns expressed in Cameron and Murphy, 2002), and it is often recommended (e.g. by Prosser and Bromley, 1998) that questions are made as concrete as possible for people with intellectual disabilities. Certainly, staff members' attempts to make things simple, and to describe things concretely, is a pervasive features of the talk we recorded in these residential settings, and in some of the extracts here we do see person naming used when first and second attempts at describing activities are not met with clear receipts or confirmations of understandings. However, as an explanation of putting a name to a proposed activity, the desire to make things simple is not the whole story, since the activities that were being proposed were all everyday events, simply described. Staff members could and did on many occasions elicit responses from residents on the basis of such plainly described activities, without recourse to mention of other persons' names.

The alternative that we would favour, based on what we see in the data, and at which we have already hinted as went through the examples, is that the staff's use of a named

person emphasises some essentially social aspect of the activity. It is to be done with someone, or to see someone, or to be with someone. This mobilises, we argue, the resident's social obligations, their sense of community, and the feelings that go along with it. It reinforces their identities as people for whom relationships are important, and it reiterates their involvement in social networks outside the services in which the meetings are taking place (note that in extracts 4-11 the named person is someone who is not a user of the service).

Consider this - very revealing - extract, which comes immediately after Extract 8 above. Henry has declined the proposal of going to the Lifecare Change Meeting. Dave pursues Henry's reasons, thus:

Extract 10. CHW-VD03-230206. 12.00 "They'll miss you" (n.b. we reproduce four lines from the end of extract 8)

- 14 Henry no [more ner.
 15 Alec *(((still rubbing eyes))) ((turns to Dominic)) (eyes)*
 16 Dave with Lenny.=
 17 Alec =(eyes yer).
 18 Dave why not, zit- (.) jus boring?
 19 (.5)
 20 Henry boring.
 28 Dave don't like it? *(((shakes head)))*
 29 Henry no, ([).
 30 → Dave [>wha' about the other people there that< like you.
 31 (3.0)
 32 → Dave all the other people like you: there, (.5) they'll miss you.
 33 (.)
 34 Henry (uh-er uh like me).
 35 Dave is that, (.) [duzzat make you happy or sa:d.]
 36 Alec [()]
 37 Henry (ve'y sad). *(((signs tears)))*

- 38 Dave [so do you want to see 'im], yes or no.
 39 Alec [()]
 40 Henry no:;
 41 Dave okay, fair °enough°.

Back in Extract 7 we had already seen that Henry's initial rejection of carrying on going to the meeting was met by staff-member Dave referring to *Lenny* (line 16), presumably as a counter argument; if Henry does not go to the meeting, he misses the chance of going with Lenny. Henry maintains his opposition. Before accepting Henry's refusal, Dave then elaborates both the possible reasons for it ('zit just boring?') as well as the social consequences Henry might not have considered. This beats out into the open a very significant display of what Dave considers to be the salient aspect of the outing: *what about the other people there that like you*, he asks; *they'll miss you*. This seems to us an exceptionally clear crystallisation of the motivation for the practice as we have seen it throughout the article. Naming others highlights the residents' social life, their social obligations and their social relationships, above all other considerations. This is brought into relief if we consider what other disadvantages might have been mentioned, such as missing the opportunity to speak in public, discuss certain topics, plan events, participate in its collective goals, or to develop personal skills, all of which are the type of goals stressed in institutional policy .

In extract 11 below we see how this aspect might be crucially a matter for talk *with the* residents, rather than with non-resident co-conversationalists. This is a serendipitous outcome of having the researcher present at the interactions, and thus there for the staff to address, and to give (as in this case) a different account of what is happening. The extract comes from a meal at which the staff member Dave again mentions the future 'Tuesday Club ' (a perennial topic of discussion and planning in this residential home).

Extract 11. CHW-VD04 11.11 "Snap"

- 1 → Dave ((to Alec)) Tuesday club starts next week, (.) a'you
 2 going to see Vivian Burns next week.

3 Alec (whuh-?)
 4 (.8)
 5 Dave Tuesday club.
 6 (1.0)
 7 Alec ((to Chris))(), Chris?
 8 (.3)
 9 Alec come tomorr' night, () clu:b.
 10 Dave next Tuesday, not [tomorrow, next Tuesday.
 11 Chris [°()°
 12 Alec ((to Chris))().
 13 Chris I can't cos I've got ([).
 14 Alec [who (doos) it? Hazel does it, Hazel.
 15 (.5)
 16 Chris [°Hazel°
 17 → Dave [((to Alec))() play cards with Hazel, with Oliver?
 18 (1.0)
 19 Dave (going to play) snap with- Oliver.
 20 (.3)
 21 Dave (j'ever) play cards with Hazel,
 22 (.5)
 23 Dave ((turns away from Alec & raises glass to lips)) no, doesn't
 24 want to, no.
 25 Chris °heh heh°
 26 ((silence for 4 secs while Dave drinks))
 27 →Dave Cuz-, ((turns to Chris)) cos (iss) been (cut) for a while,
 28 → Oliver's probly forgotten >that he-< (.) he actually enjoys,
 29 → (.3) they do er:m (.3) sort of like snap type things all- a
 30 → whole load of 'em sort of er.

Notice the now-familiar practices of naming the activity by reference to a person - see *Vivian Burns* as an equivalent to going the Tuesday club next week, and *going to play*

cards with Hazel as an attraction of the trip (although in this case Alec himself has raised Hazel's name as relevant). What is striking is that when the staff member turns to the researcher Chris with a comment about Oliver's disinclination to go, the reference to the other people involved which was a feature of his discussion with Alec, disappears. Instead, the staff member mentions that Oliver (like the others who go) *actually enjoys like snap-type things*. This is not just because Chris does not know the people at the club – Dave could have said that Oliver (like the others) enjoys seeing friends, and explained who they are. In other words, when talking to the residents what is emphasised are the social relations involved, but when talking to the researcher it is the intrinsic qualities of the activities which are made salient.

Discussion

People with a intellectual disability, who live under the supervision of welfare authorities, are meant to be able to freely express choices in their daily lives. That is a policy recommendation which forms part of the larger strategy of according people with intellectual disabilities 'normal' rights (Department of Health, 2001). We set out to investigate what happened when, in a residential home setting, staff members proposed activities to residents. Staff could and did introduce such activities minimally, or by mentioning their intrinsic attractions. However, we were concerned with the case of staff describing an activity not by mentioning its qualities but by associating it with a given individual (for example 'do you want to go to a concert with Bill?'). This could be occasioned by residents' non-uptake, or rejection, of a first proposal, but also happened at the staff's first mention of the activity, when no 'reissue' needed to be done.

Descriptions of activities are, of course, not neutral reports, and are to be studied for their use (- as has become common ground in empirical discourse studies at least since Garfinkel's early ethnomethodology; see, for one ambitious programme in the vein of discursive psychology, Potter, 1996). We argued that the practice of finding a named person as an adjunct to the proposed activity was not merely a matter of making the

activity easier for the resident to understand. Rather, we argued that naming a given person mobilises the social side of the residents' choices. Identifying someone with whom the resident might share the experience of the activity, or who might feel let down if the resident didn't attend, emphasises the resident's place in a social network. This became patently clear when we inspected extract 10. We saw that the staff member probed at a resident's rejection of a certain activity specifically by appealing to his social obligations to the people concerned, who liked him and who would miss him. Moreover, we saw in extract 11, that the distinction between intrinsic qualities of the activity, and its social aspects, is not simply an analysts' fiction: it is what ethnomethodologists call a "members' category" (Garfinkel, 1967) which is live for the participants (at least, it is live for the staff). The staff member we were recording described an activity to a resident one way, and to the researcher in another way. When talking to the researcher, the staff member deleted reference to the social aspect of an activity, and referred to its intrinsic qualities. Clearly, the social aspect is something brought out specifically for these residents.

What can we make of this practice? It is arguable that repeated emphasis on the social and emotional aspect of future activities (including obligations to others) is positive. It underlines the resident's place in a social network of people who care about her or him, who might 'miss him', which might cause the to 'feel sad' (these quotes are taken from Extract 11). In that sense, stressing the social side of activities affirms a positive identity and fits with government and service philosophies promoting community inclusion (as promoted, for example by the UK Department of Health, 2001). It is also a useful shorthand which undoubtedly helps to identify activities and places for people whose communication or comprehension might be in question. There is another aspect that no doubt also contributes to this practice. The service-users in these settings rely on outings organised and supported by staff for their social life, and rarely have the opportunity to contact and meet individual friends outside such organised activities. For this reason, such activities may very well be important locations for the maintenance of friendships

On the other hand - and this is the dilemma facing the member of staff - repeated appeal to the social aspect of activities might have the unwelcome effect of negating the

residents' abilities to choose activities on other grounds. It disqualifies them from choosing on such rational criteria of the activities such as their location, ease or difficulty, familiarity or unfamiliarity, intellectual challenge, aesthetic appeal, and so on. This is highlighted when we consider what we might expect to be said in some of these extracts. In the example of the concert (extract 8) the type of music or performers are not mentioned as relevant to the decision until later in the meeting; in the example of the upcoming meeting (extract 10), the activities that go on in the meeting, the topics discussed, or the possible functions the meeting serves for the resident (e.g. learning to speak up, self-confidence) are not mentioned as important benefits of the meeting.

There are several more practical issues that these extracts reveal. In a number of instances understanding was checked in a minimal way by simply obtaining confirmation that the activity in question was recognized. What was not checked was the crucial secondary aspect – in the case of extracts 3 and 4 the timing information (the club was starting in two weeks time), in the case of extract 5 the person's desire to go to "Pardew's". In contrast, in extract 8 and 11 the staff member puts in much more work to check just what it is the resident wants. This illustrates that such an apparently simple process such as checking understanding has several aspects which can be undercut in busy forums such as service-user meetings. The second issue illustrated here is that when activities are described predominantly in terms of the persons involved, then an extra element to person choice is added. If a service-user wanted to stop going to an activity, characterizing the activity by the people involved to an extent makes it harder to refuse, since this entails an implicit rejection of the people involved (we see this played out explicitly in extract 10). In short, intentionally or not, it is a practice which exerts a subtle pressure on people to agree to participate, and as such we might expect it to be used more often when activities favoured for institutional reasons are being discussed.

The larger issue to which this study speaks is the familiar (if controversial) one of the relation between the macro and the micro. In this case, we have looked to the actual details of talk to find identity-rich forms of interaction. This is still a comparatively unusual approach in the study of the lived experience of people with intellectual

disabilities, and the staff with whom they live, but one that promises to reveal significant micro-social practices which embody abstract macro processes. What it has shown here, we argue, are mundane institutional practices which orient to the recipients' difficulties in comprehension and communication, but which also produce particular types of identities in interaction: namely people whose orientation and value is primarily social, and whose appreciation of other aspects of life is limited.

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Transcription Symbols

(.)	Just noticeable pause
(. 3) , (2 . 6)	Examples of timed pauses, in seconds
word [word] [word]	Square brackets aligned across adjacent lines denote the start and end of overlapping material.
wor-	A dash shows a sharp cut-off
wo:rd	Colons show that the speaker has stretched the preceding sound.
(words)	A guess at what might have been said
()	Talk too unclear to merit even a guess.
word= =word	The equals sign shows that there is no discernible pause between two speakers' turns or, if put between two sounds within a single speaker's turn, shows that they run together
w <u>or</u> d, WORD	Underlined sounds are louder, capitals louder still
°word°	Material between "degree signs" is quiet
>word word<	Inwards arrows show faster speech
wo(h)rd	(h) shows that the word has "laughter" bubbling within it
((<i>smile voice</i>))	Attempt at representing something hard, or impossible, to write phonetically
→	Analyst's signal of a significant line