Managing Counterinformings: An Interactional Practice for Soliciting Information that Facilitates Reconciliation of Speakers’ Incompatible Positions

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This article is a conversation-analytic examination of situations where one speaker responds to another in a way that publicly exposes that the two speakers hold an incompatible position on a same matter, and in a way that claims that the respondent holds epistemic authority over the matter. These types of responsive actions (i.e., counterinformings) solicit accepting or rejecting responses, and normally include information (e.g., an explanation) that facilitates the other speaker’s ability to reconcile the speakers’ positional incompatibility. Withholding such information from a counterinforming can be an interactional control tactic. This article focuses on these types of withholding counterinformings and their management by the other speaker. Specifically, this article describes an interactional practice used to solicit reconciliatory information.

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A variety of theories across a variety of disciplines predict that an incompatibility between two speakers’ “positions” (e.g., knowledge or beliefs) on a same matter motivates information seeking toward the goal of reconciling such incompatibility; this is evident in Berlyne’s (1965) theory of epistemic curiosity, Pollner’s (1987) theory of mundane reason, Harmon-Jones’s (1999) action-based model of cognitive dissonance, and Afifi and Weiner’s (2004) theory of motivated information management. This article extends this research into naturally occurring, mundane conversation by exploring an understudied form of positional incompatibility—that is, public and social versus cognitive and subjective (Bradac, 2001)—as well as an understudied method of information seeking to reconcile positional incompatibility, that is, interactional (Berger & Kellerman, 1994; Pomerantz, 1980, 1988). A conversation-analytic approach (Heritage, 1984b) allows this article to begin to remediate Afifi and Weiner’s (2004) critique that research tends to ignore “the dyadic fashion in which the information-management process in interpersonal exchanges

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is negotiated” (Afifi & Weiner, 2004, p. 169), and to implement Berger’s (2002) recommendation that information-seeking research move beyond verbal reports to analyze actual information acquired.

This article examines situations where one speaker responds to another in a way that publicly exposes that the two speakers hold an incompatible position (e.g., knowledge or belief) on a same matter, and in a way that claims that the respondent holds epistemic authority over (e.g., knows more about) the matter. Conversation analysis has termed these types of responses counterinformings (Heritage, 1984a). Counterinformings solicit (or, in the terms of conversation analysis, sequentially implicate) accepting or rejecting responses, and normally include information that facilitates the other’s ability to reconcile speakers’ positional incompatibility, such as explanations. This article focuses on counterinformings that withhold such information, and describes an interactional practice used by the other speaker to solicit it. Before generally characterizing the focal practice, it pays to see a concrete example, which can be found in Extract 1. In context, Rich has been doing research in preparation for delivering a persuasive speech (for a college course assignment) on “how to stay trim and fit.” Immediately prior to this extract, Rich has been detailing the contents of his speech to his college friend Carla, including his advice to “stay away from milk” (lines 1 and 21–22). The withholding counterinforming is produced by Rich at line 30, “Wro::ng.”, and the focal practice is produced by Carla at line 32, “Wro::ng?” (Hereafter, counterinforming turns are designated in the left margins of transcripts with a “b-> ”, and the focal practice with a “===>”).

**Extract 1: BONES [UTCL.D08]**

01 RIC: And to stay=away from junk foo:d .h mi:l:k .h (. ) uhm...
  (19 lines omitted; Rich continues to describe speech))

21 RIC: ...Liquid flesh (. ) or-or thee equivalent
22 of milk. *h=h=h* ((laugh))
23 (1.0)
24 CAR: Milk. I though milk was good for you.
25 RIC: No.
26 (0.2)
27 CAR: Fer- (0.2) for old people,
28 (.)
29 a-> CAR: I[t make]s your bones stro:n[g.]
30 b-> RIC: [No. ] [Wr]o::ng.
31 (.)
32 ===> CAR: Wro::ng?
33 RIC: Wrong. only when you’re young, and that’s thuh
34 m-=milk from your mother’s (. ) b[G]som.
35 CAR: Oh: really?
36 RIC: Yes.

At line 24, Carla challenges Rich’s advice to *stay away from milk* by providing an opposing belief for confirmation, “I thought milk was good for you.”, which Rich disconfirms with “No.” (line 25). At line 27, Carla extends, and thus pursues, her challenge with an increment, “Fer- (0.2) for old people,” (line 27; re. increments,
see Schegloff, 1996b), which Rich again disconfirms with “No.” (line 30). At line 29, Carla continues to pursue her challenge; here, she provides evidentiary support for her challenge by making an assertion about the nutritious qualities of milk: “It makes your bones strong.” Carla’s assertion publicizes her belief (i.e., position) about milk. At line 30, Rich responds by emphatically rejecting Carla’s belief: “Wrong.” (line 30). On the one hand, Rich’s rejection exposes that he and Carla hold incompatible (indeed, conflicting) beliefs about the nutritious qualities of milk. Furthermore, Rich’s rejection is designed to unmitigatedly claim his epistemic authority over the matter. On the other hand, Rich’s rejection does not provide information that facilitates Carla’s ability to reconcile their incompatible positions, such as an explanation. Furthermore, Rich designs “Wrong.” to be a possibly complete response (Sacks, Schegloff, & Jefferson, 1974) by vocally stretching it (symbolized in the transcript by the colons) and producing it with final-falling intonation (Local, 2007). Thus, although Rich’s response exposes his positional incompatibility with Carla, it does not include—in fact, it is designed to withhold—information that facilitates Carla’s ability to reconcile their incompatible positions. The focal interactional practice occurs at line 32, where Carla repeats “Wrong?” (line 32), and ends the repeat with rising intonation (symbolized in the transcript by the question mark). With this, Carla solicits reconciliatory information, and Rich complies by providing an explanation: “only when you’re young, and that’s thuh milk from your mother’s [.] bosom.” (lines 33–34).

This article extends research on interactional forms of control, their relational consequences, and their management (Millar & Rogers, 1976). From a relational perspective, “control is the constellation of constraints people place on one another by the manipulation of both interactional structure and content, which limit the options appropriately available subsequently to each relational partner” (Wiemann, 1985, p. 86). Wiemann further observed that “turn-taking strategies [are] among the fundamental resources available to interactants to establish a definition of their relationships, especially in terms of control distribution” (p. 85). From this perspective, responses like Rich’s “Wrong.” (line 30)—which expose that two speakers hold incompatible positions, which claim epistemic authority over the matter (Drew, 1991; Linell & Luckmann, 1991), yet which withhold information that facilitates the other’s ability to reconcile speakers’ positional incompatibility—can be “one-up” (Courtright, Millar, & Rogers-Millar, 1979; Fisher & Dreksel, 1983) conversational control tactics (Bradac, Wiemann, & Schaefer, 1994; Ng & Bradac, 1993). This article examines the functions of such a control tactic, and an interactional practice for managing it (i.e., Carla’s repeat: “Wrong?” [line 32]). The remainder of this introduction describes the context in which the focal interactional practice occurs, and then describes the general nature of this practice.
The interactional and social-epistemological context for the focal practice

The focal practice is positioned after a particular type of sequence of interaction (Schegloff, 2007) that makes relevant a particular action-context and social-epistemological context. (This “sequence” is not necessarily an adjacency-pair sequence.) The first part of this sequence involves an action in which one speaker publicizes a position. My use of the term “position” is intentionally vague, and refers at least to knowledge and beliefs. To say that this position is “publicized” is to say that it is made public or relevant in interaction (rerelevance, see Schegloff, 1992), for example through direct assertion, linguistic presupposition (Leech & Thomas, 1990), or grammar-based preference organization (Sacks, 1987; Schegloff, 1988). For example, in Extract 1, Carla publicizes her belief about milk by asserting: “It makes your bones strong.” (line 29). Although not definitional, this position is usually not epistemically mitigated, and thus is produced in a way that claims the speaker’s right to know about the position in question. For instance, Carla does not say I think milk makes your bones strong (resocial epistemics, see Heritage & Raymond, 2005).

The second part of the sequence has three recurrent features. First, it involves a responsive action that publicizes that its speaker holds an incompatible position relative to that publicized by the other speaker. (An “incompatible” position is often, but not always, a conflicting one.) For example, in Extract 1, Rich’s “Wrong.” (line 30) rejects Carla’s position. Although not definitional, this responsive position, like the initial one, is usually not epistemically mitigated. For example, Rich does not say I’m not sure if that’s right. As such, the responsive action is usually designed to strongly contest the initial speaker’s claimed epistemic rights over the matter. Thus, the focal practice to be examined tends to occur in the context of a sequence of talk that publicly exposes two speakers as being roughly equally epistemically committed to incompatible positions on a same matter. Second, as a result of its first feature, the responsive action is a type of counterinforming (Heritage, 1984a) that solicits an accepting or rejecting response (see also Coulter, 1990; Jefferson, 1987, 2007; Jefferson & Schenkein, 1978).

Importantly, and as will be demonstrated in the analysis, counterinforming actions normally include information (e.g., corrections and explanations) that facilitates the other’s ability to reconcile speakers’ positional incompatibility; such information facilitates the other’s ability to accept or reject the counterinforming. This pattern is empirically evident in published data dealing with correction and argument (Antaki, 1994; Goodwin, 1983; Knoblauch, 1991; Maynard, 1985; Sacks, 1964b; Schegloff, Jefferson, & Sacks, 1977; Vuchinich, 1990), and is consistent with prior work on the social organization of denying, disagreeing, and rejecting (i.e., disaligning) responses, which are frequently accompanied, in the same turn, by additional talk that attempts to preserve social solidarity (Clayman, 2002; Ford, 2001; Ford, Fox, & Hellerman, 2004; Heritage, 1984b; Schegloff, 2007). The focal practice to be examined is positioned after counterinformings that have a third feature, which is that they “withhold” information that would adequately facilitate the other speaker’s ability to reconcile the positional incompatibility, and thus violate the aforementioned
interactional norm. For example, Rich’s “Wro::ng.” (line 30) merely rejects Carla’s position and withholds an explanation (which he eventually supplies at lines 33–34). In sum, the focal practice is situated within a particular context of sequence, action, and social-epistemic interpersonal relationship, and this context is co-constructed by participants.

**The focal practice: A practice of other initiation of repair**

The focal practice is produced by the speaker of the initial position that is contested. For example, in Extract 1, Carla produces the initial position about milk at line 29, and then produces the focal practice at line 32. The focal practice is one of initiating repair on another speaker’s talk (i.e., *other-initiated repair*; Schegloff et al., 1977), and was identified by Jefferson (1972) as a type of “questioning repeat.” The focal practice involves virtually identically repeating a portion (or all) of the counterinforming, and ending the repeat with rising, interrogative intonation (Quirk, Greenbaum, Leech, & Svartvik, 1985). For example, Carla’s “Wr_o::ng?” (line 32) repeats Rich’s “Wro::ng.” (line 30).

Counterinformings solicit accepting or rejecting responses (Heritage, 1984a). The focal practice occurs in the wake of counterinformings that violate an interactional norm by withholding information that “adequately” facilitates the other’s ability to reconcile speakers’ positional incompatibility. (“Adequacy” is defined by speakers according to the principle of recipient design; Sacks & Schegloff, 1979.) As detailed by Schegloff et al. (1977): “Other-initiations of repair undertake to have . . . ‘obstacles’ removed in the service of the production of a sequentially implicated next” (p. 380). The focal, repair-initiatory practice identifies the withholding counterinforming as an obstacle to either accepting or rejecting it as a counterinforming. The normal organization of interaction provides for the sense of this obstacle, which is the lack of sufficient reconciliatory information. Thus, the focal repair-initiatory practice is understood as soliciting such information. According to the Miriam-Webster dictionary, the term “reconcile” has two primary definitions: (a) “to make consistent or congruous”; and (b) “to restore to friendship or harmony” (http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/reconcile). The focal practice, as one of other-initiated repair, solicits reconciliatory information in order to promote the possibility of producing a socially harmonious, accepting response (Clayman, 2002).

**Method and data**

Methodologically, conversation analysis inductively examines data from naturally occurring interaction and represents an emic (vs. etic) approach that prioritizes interpretations that are displayed, and oriented to, by participants themselves (for review, see Heritage, 1984b; LeBaron, Mandelbaum, & Glenn, 2003). This article is part of a larger project dealing with actions that get implemented through turns involving repetitions of others’ talk. The larger data set is drawn from approximately 130 hours of naturally occurring, mundane conversation (including 275 telephone
calls and 8 videotapes). The focal practice emerged inductively as part of an examination of a subcollection of 176 cases of virtually identical, final-rising-intoned repeats that implement other-initiated repair. The focal practice was found in 16 cases. Although the practice is rare, as Jacobs (1986) noted: “What people do a lot may be less important than what people can do, but don’t do very often” (p. 152; see also Jefferson, 1981). There are two major reasons for the rarity of the focal practice. First, counterinformings (especially ones that are epistemically unmitigated) are themselves rare because they frequently involve the initiation or enactment of correcting other speakers, which is interactionally dispreferred (Schegloff et al., 1977). Second, counterinformings normally include information that facilitates the other’s ability to reconcile speakers’ positional incompatibility, which obviates the “need” for the focal practice. All cases were transcribed by the author using Jefferson’s notation system (in Atkinson & Heritage, 1984) and retranscribed by a second trained conversation analyst to ensure the reliability of the transcripts (Roberts & Robinson, 2004). The cases analyzed herein are particularly clear examples of the phenomenon, but are also representative of the cases in the larger collection; negative cases are included to avoid anecdotalism and ensure validity (for review, see Jacobs, 1990; Silverman, 2001).

Analysis

This section begins by examining the normal social organization of epistemically unmitigated counterinformings. Following this, the existence and operation of the focal practice are documented with three types of evidence, including two more cases of the focal practice (in addition to Extract 1), one boundary case (Schegloff, 1997), and two negative cases (Silverman, 2001). Finally, the function of the focal practice is clarified by comparing it to others for managing counterinformings, such as accepting and rejecting them, “fishing” for reconciliatory information with what Pomerantz (1980) called “my-side tellings,” and directly asking for such information (e.g., How is that possible?).

The normal social organization of counterinformings

This section supports two claims. First, it demonstrates that (at least epistemically unmitigated) counterinforming actions normally involve providing the other speaker with information that facilitates his or her ability to reconcile the positional incompatibility. Second, it demonstrates Heritage’s (1984a) observation that counterinformings solicit either acceptance or rejection of the counterposition. First, counterinforming actions normally involve providing the other speaker with information that adequately facilitates the other speaker’s ability to reconcile the positional incompatibility. The primary form of evidence for this claim is that counterinforming actions routinely include the provision of corrections (e.g., replacement terms) and/or explanations. For example, see Extract 2, in which Ken, Roger, and Al are talking about cars. At lines 2–3, Ken’s use of the term “motor”
publicizes his position that it is a “correct” term. (Note that the cases in this section do not contain the focal practice.)

Extract 2: THUNDERBIRD [GTS:II:2:8T]

01 a-> KEN: And they told me how I could stick a th-uh:: Thunderbird
02 a-> motor? (.5) in my Jeep? And I bought a fifty five
03 [Thunderbird motor.]
04 b-> ROG: [Not motor, engine.] you speak of [electric motor and
05 KEN: [Okay
06 b-> ROG: a gasoline engine.
07 KEN: Engine. [Okay-
08 AL: [Internal comb:si:ion.
09 KEN: Alright, so lookit...

Roger’s counterinforming turn at lines 4–6 contains three elements. First, similar to Rich in Extract 1, Roger rejects a term used by Ken: “Not motor,” (line 4). Roger’s rejection-element exposes, but does not provide Ken with information that would facilitate his ability to reconcile, their positional incompatibility. In the terms of conversation analysis, rejection elements, such as Rich’s “Wro::ng.” (Extract 1, line 30) and Roger’s “Not motor,” initiate correction, but do not enact correction (Schegloff, 1992). Note, however, that unlike Rich in Extract 1, Roger continues speaking, in the same turn, to produce a second element in which he replaces the term motor with “engine.” (line 4). Here, Roger corrects Ken, and thus enacts the “repair proper” (a term used by Schegloff, 1992), which potentially resolves the trouble and thus facilitates Ken’s ability to reconcile the positional incompatibility. Roger continues speaking to produce a third element in which he explains his correction: “you speak of electric motor and a gasoline engine.” (lines 4–6).

For a second example, see Extract 3, which is drawn from a conversation between Dee, Mark, Fanny, and Ann. At line 1, Dee asserts, and thus publicizes, her position that Rice University is located in Louisiana:

Extract 3: RICE [Post Party:II:14]

01 a-> DEE: Ri:ce, is in Louisiana.
02 (.)
03 b-> MAR: No[:: ]
04 FAN: [Tex[as. ]
05 b-> MAR: [Tex[as.]
06 DEE: [Te:x]as. ⁰<Rice.⁰ (#tha:t’s# right).'
07 ANN: Heeyoosta:n. ((a pronunciation of ‘Houston’))

Similar to Roger in Extract 2, Marty’s counterinforming turn contains two elements. Like both Rich in Extract 1 and Roger in Extract 2, Marty initially “merely” rejects Dee’s assertion: “No:” (line 3). However, unlike Rich in Extract 1, but like Roger in Extract 2, Marty continues speaking, in the same turn, and replaces (i.e., corrects or repairs) Louisiana with “Texas.” (line 5), which facilitates Dee’s ability to reconcile the positional incompatibility. (The separation of Marty’s talk on lines 3 and 5 is an artificial product of the transcription system, which recognizes Fanny’s
entry at line 4.) There is further evidence that Marty orients to his accountability for continuing to produce reconciliatory information; specifically, he continues to produce “Texas.” (at line 5) despite the fact that Fanny is currently speaking (at line 4), and despite the fact that Fanny is recognizably (Jefferson, 1984) producing the same correction: “Tex[as].” (line 4; in the transcript, the left bracket symbolizes the onset of Marty’s continuation). Fanny produces her own correction immediately after Marty’s disagreement token (i.e., after “No” of “No[:’’), and thus displays her independent orientation to the relevance of facilitating Dee’s ability to reconcile her positional incompatibility with Marty.

“Mere” exposition of speakers’ positional incompatibility can be accomplished directly, as it was through Rich’s (Extract 1), Roger’s (Extract 2), and Marty’s (Extract 3) repair-initiatory rejections (i.e., Wrong, Not motor, and No, respectively), or indirectly as a byproduct of other actions, such as disconfirmations. For example, see Extract 4, which is drawn from a nonbusiness-related conversation between a pediatrician and a father at the end of a medical visit. At line 1, the physician produces an assertion to be (dis)confirmed, and thus publicizes his position that the dad works at NASA’s Jet Propulsion Laboratory: “You’re at > J. P. L. < right?”

Extract 4: B I O L O G I S T [TMS:12:03:12]
01 a-> DOC: You’re at > J. P. L. < right?
02 (0.2)
03 b-> DAD: No. I’m at uh:: Cal Tech.
04 DOC: Cal Tech.
05 DAD: Biologist. yeah.

The dad’s counterinforming turn at line 3 contains two elements. First, he disconfirms the physician’s assertion: “No.” As a byproduct of his disconfirmation, the dad “merely” exposes that he and the physician hold incompatible positions. Unlike Rich in Extract 1, but like Roger and Marty in Extracts 2–3 (respectively), the dad continues speaking, in the same turn, to produce a second element in which he corrects the physician, “I’m at uh:: Cal Tech.” (referring to the California Institute of Technology), which facilitates the physician’s ability to reconcile the positional incompatibility.

Insofar as the corrections engine, Texas, and Cal Tech (in Extracts 2–4, respectively) are specific alternatives to motor, Louisiana, and J.P.L. (respectively), they are “rich” in terms of their capacity to facilitate the other’s ability to reconcile the positional incompatibility. Explanations, such as “You speak of electric motor and a gasoline engine.” (Extract 2, lines 4–6), are especially “rich” in this regard. However, units of talk that accomplish counterinformings sometimes consist of resources (e.g., corrections and explanations) that are relatively “poor” or “inadequate” in terms of facilitating reconciliation of positional incompatibility. Important for the present argument, speakers of such units routinely continue speaking, in the same turn, to provide further units that more adequately facilitate reconciliation. For example, see Extract 5. Shirley had previously tried to call her girlfriend Geri but, as Shirley
complains earlier in the call: “thuh line was busy for like ho:urs.” (data not shown). At line 1, Shirley asks, “Wh_ were you talkling to.”, which linguistically presupposes (Leech & Thomas, 1990), and thus publicizes, her position that Geri was talking on the phone.

**Extract 5: PHONE OFF HOOK [Geri & Shirley]**

| 01 | a-> SHI: Who were you ta:ilking to. |
| 02 | (0.5) |
| 03 | GER: Jus’ no.w? |
| 04 | b-> SHI: .hhh No. I called be-=like between elev[en an’] |
| 05 | [ I] wasn’ talkling |
| 06 | b-> SHI: tuh a:nybody. <bgth> Marla=an’ I slept until about ngo:n- |
| 07 | [h:]h An’ when I woke up... |
| 08 | ((Explanation deleted)) |
| 09 | SHI: Marla left thuh phone off thuh (hook)) |
| 10 | GER: [Right.] |
| 11 | GER: ‘Cause Marla likes tuh sleep #late.# |

Geri ultimately responds to Shirley’s question at lines 5–6, and her turn contains two units. First, Geri rejects Shirley’s presupposition in an epistemically unmitigated fashion: “I: wasn’ talkling tuh a:nybody.” (lines 5–6). Geri’s rejection is a counterinforming: It effectively corrects Shirley’s presupposition (i.e., from “someone” to “no one”) and exposes their positional incompatibility. Although Geri’s counterinforming, as a correction, provides some information that might assist Shirley in reconciling the positional incompatibility, it is arguably “poor” in this regard (e.g., although Geri’s rejection element rules out that the busy signal was caused by her talking to someone else, it does not account for the busy signal itself). Note, then, that unlike Rich in Extract 1, but like Roger, Marty, and the dad in Extracts 2–4 (respectively), Geri continues speaking, in the same turn, and provides an alternative explanation for the busy signal that potentially reconciles the positional incompatibility; in this case, Geri begins to tell a story about how one of her housemates, Marla, left their phone off of the hook (lines 6–8), an account that Shirley anticipatorily guesses: “Marla left thuh phone off thuh (hook)” (line 9).

To summarize the first point of this section, Extracts 2–5 support the argument that counterinforming actions normally include information that adequately facilitates the other speaker’s ability to reconcile positional incompatibility, such as “rich” corrections or explanations (see also Pomerantz, 1988; Sacks, 1964b/1992; Schegloff, 1992; Schegloff et al., 1977). What counts as “adequate” information is likely guided by the principle of recipient design and thus relative to specific speakers (Sacks & Schegloff, 1979). For example, in Extracts 2 and 5, that Roger and Geri provide explanations in addition to corrections is some evidence that they orient to the corrections as being possibly inadequate in terms of facilitating Ken’s and Shirley’s (respectively) ability to sufficiently reconcile the positional incompatibility. As suggested by Extract 4, the factor that promotes turn expansion
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is not limited to the action of initiating correction (e.g., Not motor, No, etc.), but involves any counterinforming unit that simultaneously exposes speakers’ positional incompatibility yet withholds information that facilitates the other’s ability to reconcile such incompatibility. Withholding counterinformings, such as Rich’s “Wrong.” in Extract 1, arguably violate an interactional norm.

Second, this section demonstrates that counterinforming actions solicit accepting or rejecting responses (Heritage, 1984a; see also Coulter, 1990). For example, in Extract 2, Roger produces a counterinforming at lines 4–6. In overlap with Roger’s explanation, Ken accepts Roger’s correction with “Okay” (line 5). Furthermore, after Roger’s explanation, Ken displays registration of the correction by repeating it, “Engine.” (line 7; Schegloff, 1996a), and then accepts it again: “Okay-” (line 7). In Extract 3, Mark produces a counterinforming at lines 3–5. By repeating “Texas.° < Rice.>°” (line 6), Dee “produces a display of consulting her own knowledge of the location” (Heritage, 1984a, p. 314), and then accepts Mark’s counterinforming with: “(#that’s# right)” (line 6). In Extract 4, the dad produces a counterinforming at line 3. The physician then displays his registration of, and accepts, the dad’s correction by repeating it: “Cal tech.” (line 4). Finally, in Extract 5, Geri produces a counterinforming at lines 5–6. Shirley responds by producing “Oh.” (line 7), which claims a change in her state from uninformed to informed and projects acceptance of Geri’s position (Heritage, 1984a).

The observation that counterinforming actions solicit accepting or rejecting responses is important for the upcoming argument. The focal practice, as a practice of other initiation of repair, tacitly claims that its speaker’s ability to accept or reject the other’s counterinforming is hampered because it does not provide adequate resources with which to reconcile the positional incompatibility. In this way, the focal practice is understood to solicit such reconciliatory information in order to be able to accept or reject the counterinforming. For example, in Extract 1, Rich’s “Wrong” (line 30) is a counterinforming. Carla’s production of the focal practice, “Wrong?” (line 32), delays her acceptance or rejection of Rich’s counterinforming in order to solicit additional reconciliatory information, which Rich provides with his explanation at lines 33–34. Note, then, that Carla produces the newsmark, “Oh: really?” (line 35), which claims to register, and be informed by, Rich’s explanation (Heritage, 1984a). The phrase Oh really? is a type of newsmark that tends to pursue minimal expansion (e.g., Rich’s “Yes.” at line 36) and leads to sequence closure (Heritage, 1984a), and thus is a way of projecting ‘acceptance’ of Rich’s counterinforming.

The focal practice
This section provides two more examples of the focal practice (in addition to Extract 1, above). First, see Extract 6. At line 1, Ida’s question refers to contacting a Catholic missionary (Sister Maryanna) who is currently working in a remote part of the world.
Ida’s question, “how could we: reach (.) Sister Maryanna.” (line 1), linguistically presupposes, and thus interactionally claims a position, that Sister Maryanna can be contacted. After a bit of intervening talk (at lines 3–7, which is analyzed in a later section), Abby responds with an epistemically unmitigated (i.e., extreme-case formulated; Pomerantz, 1986) counterinforming: “That’s impossible.” (line 8). Abby’s counterinforming rejects Ida’s presupposition about Sister Maryanna, exposes their positional incompatibility, and arguably withholds information that would facilitate Ida’s ability to reconcile such incompatibility. Abby designs “That’s impossible.” to be a possibly complete response by stretching it and producing it with final-falling intonation (Local, 2007). Thus, Abby’s counterinforming arguably violates an interactional norm. Along these lines, the micropause at line 9 can be explained in terms of Ida waiting for Abby to produce additional reconciliatory talk in compliance with this norm (Note: There is a similarly positioned pause in Extract 1, at line 31, which can be explained in terms of Carla waiting for Mark to produce additional reconciliatory information.)

When Abby does not continue speaking (at line 9), Ida produces the focal practice: “That’s impossible?” Abby’s response to the focal practice contains two units. First, Abby confirms with “Right.” (line 11). Compared to other response tokens (e.g., Yeah, Mm hm), Right claims knowledge-based authority (Gardner, 2007), and is evidence that Abby orients to the focal practice as challenging the veracity of her counterinforming. Note that, in Extract 1, Rich similarly orients to Carla’s focal practice (“Wrong?”; line 32) as a challenge; that is, Rich responds to it by confirming it by repeating it (“Wrong.”; line 33), which Jefferson (1972) described as a practice for confirming-while-challenging the challenging implications of questioning repeats (see also Schegloff, 1996a).

Second, Abby continues speaking, in the same turn, to support her counterinforming (at line 8) by explaining it, “they have no phone:” (line 11), which facilitates Ida’s ability to reconcile the positional incompatibility. At line 13, Ida’s “They have no phone” claims to register Abby’s explanation (Schegloff,
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Ida produces this unit with final-level intonation, which projects more talk (for review, see Ford & Thompson, 1996), and continues to ask: “does she ever come (.) to you?” By pursuing an alternative method for contacting the Sister (i.e., indirectly through Abby), Ida treats Abby’s explanation (at line 11) as being sufficient. Thus, at line 13, Ida tacitly claims acceptance of Abby’s counterinforming and concedes its facticity.

For another example, see Extract 7. Eva (who lives in the United States) is speaking with her friend Mia, who is visiting the United States from Israel. Eva recently bought a compact disk of a music album, to which she refers at line 1.

Extract 7: TAPE [CH:4315.5]

01 a-> EVA: Should I try an’ make you a new copy[y]? 02 b-> MIA: [I] ↑have o:ne:.↓ 03 EVA: =Oh you have on[e]? 04 MIA: [Ygr]: ah it’s home somewhere in- in in
05 EVA: [Oh. ]
06 MIA: Israel. [but uh:. ]
07 EVA: [Oh yeah. that’s] right.

When Eva offers “Should I try an’ make you a new copy?” (line 1), she presupposes, and thus interactionally claims a position, that Mia no longer has a (new) copy of the album. Mia’s counterinforming, “I ↑have o:ne:.↓” (line 2), effectively rejects Eva’s offer by correcting her presupposition (i.e., if Mia already has a copy, then Eva’s offer is not relevant), which exposes their positional incompatibility. Similar to Rich in Extract 1 and Abby in Extract 6, Mia produces “I ↑have o:ne:.↓” to be possibly complete by stretching “o:ne:.” and ending it with final-falling intonation (Local, 2007).

Compared to Rich’s “Wro::ng.” (Extract 1, line 30) and Abby’s “That’s impossible.” (Extract 6, line 8), it can be argued that Mia’s counterinforming “I ↑have o:ne:.↓” (line 2) has a greater capacity to facilitate Eva’s ability to reconcile the positional incompatibility because the counterinforming consists of an account for rejecting Eva’s offer. However, Eva nonetheless produces an Oh-prefaced version of the focal practice, “Oh you have one?” (line 3; Heritage, 1984a), which solicits additional reconciliatory information. (The Oh-preface is analyzed in a later section.) This demonstrates that the focal practice is a social one for claiming one’s need for more, or more “adequate,” reconciliatory information, regardless of whether or not the counterinforming is “objectively” adequate in this regard.

Mia’s response to the focal practice contains two units. First, Mia confirms with “Ye:ah” (line 4), which is produced with final-level intonation that projects further talk (for review, see Ford & Thompson, 1996). Second, Mia produces an explanation that possibly accounts for the positional incompatibility created by her rejection: “it’s home somewhere in- in- in- in Israel.” (lines 4–6). Eva subsequently claims to have been informed by, and accepts, Mia’s account with “Oh yeah.” (line 7; Heritage, 1984a). Eva follows this with “th’s right.” (line 7), which, according to Heritage,
“accepts the prior account by treating its informing as a ‘just-now-recollected-as-relevant’ remembering of a previously and independently known information” (p. 338).

In sum, in Extracts 1 and 6–7, Rich’s, Abby’s, and Mia’s counterinformings (at lines 30, 8, and 2, respectively) possibly violate an interactional norm by withholding information that adequately facilitates the other speaker’s ability to reconcile the positional incompatibility, which hampers that speaker’s ability to accept or reject the counterinforming. (In Extract 7, it may be more accurate to say that Eva’s use of the focal practice treat’s Mia’s counterinformation as violating this norm.) In each case, the focal practice is understood as soliciting (additional) reconciliatory information. After such information is provided, the speaker of the focal practice indirectly or directly accepts the other’s counterinforming, which concedes its facticity.

Extracts 1 and 6–7 raise the question of what respondents (i.e., Rich, Abby, & Mia) might be doing (or accomplishing) by refusing to cooperate with an interactional norm by producing a withholding counterinforming. It was noted in the introduction that withholding counterinformings can be “one-up” conversational control tactics. That is, withholding “adequate” reconciliatory information forces initial speakers—i.e., producers of the claimedly incorrect position—into a position where they must deal with the positional incompatibility on their own, and from their (claimedly) epistemically disadvantaged position. Stated differently, withholding “adequate” reconciliatory information can be a practice for holding initial speakers accountable for “knowing better” or “figuring it out on their own.” For a small bit of evidence, in Extract 7, Eva’s “that’s right.” (line 7) orients to having ought to have known Mia’s reconciliatory explanation, and thus to being responsible for presupposing an incorrect position (at line 1).

As seen in work on interruption behavior (e.g., Schegloff, 2002; Zimmerman & West, 1975), conversational control tactics can function to either endorse other speakers’ perspectives, and thus promote solidary relations (conversation analysis refers to this as affiliation), or disapprove of, or disagree with, such perspectives, and thus promote discordant relations (conversation analysis refers to this as disaffiliation) (Clayman, 2002; Stivers, 2008). As such, we can expect that withholding counterinformings can be mobilized toward a range of either solidary or discordant relational ends. That said, at least in Extracts 1 and 6, it appears that discordance is at issue. In both extracts, the withholding counterinforming occurs in a context of ongoing discord regarding the matter at hand. For instance, in Extract 1, Rich’s counterinforming, “Wro::ng.” (line 30), comes immediately after his rejection, “No.” (line 30), of Carla’s challenge (at lines 24–29) to Rich’s advice to stay away from milk (at lines 1 & 21–22). In Extract 6, Abby’s counterinforming “That’s impossible.” (line 8) comes immediately after a sequence of other-initiated repair at lines 4–5. That is, before answering Ida’s question, “h:ow could we: r:each (.) Sister Maryanna.” (line 1), Abby initiates repair with “You have tuh r:each Sister Maryanna.”, which (via turn design and final-falling intonation) is a practice for projecting disagreement with Ida’s attempt to contact the Sister (Schegloff et al., 1977). Abby’s initiation of
repair provides Ida with an opportunity to modify her question (e.g., back down from its presuppositions), yet Ida holds her ground by providing a mere confirmation: “Yeah” (line 5). In the context of prior and ongoing discord, the withholding counterinformings in Extracts 1 and 6 antagonistically perpetuate the speakers’ incompatibility. Relatedly, they highlight the other speaker’s ignorance, in part by interactionally pressuring that speaker into an epistemically subordinate position of having to either seek reconciliatory information (e.g., ask for an explanation), or resolve the positional incompatibility on their own.

One way of managing withholding counterinformings, and thus managing a practice of interactional control, is through the use of the focal practice. The focal practice is “challenging” in at least three ways. First, as a practice of repair initiation (Schegloff et al., 1977), the focal practice tacitly claims that the counterinforming violates an interactional norm (Maynard, 1985), and thus that the other speaker is responsible for “repair-related trouble” (Robinson, 2006). Second, at least compared to turn-designs that are composed of interrogative syntax (e.g., Where are you looking? or How is that possible?), which strongly “invokes a claim that the questioner lacks certain information . . . and that the addressee has this information” (Heritage, 2008, p. 2), the focal practice is “merely” composed of a repeat. At least syntactically, then, the focal practice does not make concessions to the facticity of the other speaker’s position or related epistemic authority. Along these lines, the focal practice can be described as a practice for “holding one’s own position” in the face of it being challenged (by the counterinforming), while giving the counterinformer an opportunity to revise or defend his or her position. (Admittedly, the focal practice does prosodically concede some ground to the other speaker’s position and epistemic authority because it involves interrogative, or final-rising, intonation.) Third, as a mere, virtually identical repeat, the focal practice problematizes the counterinforming while providing no “concessionary” indication of what the counterinformer should do (i.e., how they should “repair” the problem).

A boundary case: Evidence from same-speaker continuation

In the previous section, the evidence for the function of the focal practice was found in recipients’ responses to it. This section provides evidence that producers of the focal practice orient to its function in the same turn. The focal practice normatively requires a response. (In terms of conversation analysis, it is the first part of an adjacency-pair sequence; Schegloff & Sacks, 1973.) According to the rules for turn taking (Sacks et al., 1974), upon the completion of the focal practice, its speaker should stop speaking and the selected speaker should produce a relevant response. In some cases, though, the speaker of the focal practice does not stop speaking, but rather continues to advance their turn by producing another, different action that itself normatively requires a response. Doing so is commonly a practice for narrowing or specifying the original action (Lerner, 2002). Such modifications provide evidence for the nature of the action that speakers designed their original unit to accomplish.
This section provides one example when the focal practice is immediately followed by another initiating action. Extract 8 is drawn from a telephone call between three college students, Tom and Steve (who are roommates about to graduate), and Steve’s girlfriend Dee. Speaking primarily to Dee, Tom has been praising a business-consulting company (see lines 1 and 3), and at line 3 asserts that it is his first career choice.

**Extract 8: AIRLINES [CP:6065]**

```
01 TOM: ...but it says a lot (.). (ey)=about them an’n’=uh:=
02 DEE: =I guess so.
03 TOM: That’s where I wanna go. ((referring to a consulting company))
04 (0.2)
05 DEE: Ah: [:]
06 STE: [.h]hh [So: ] [Are you looking at that Steve?]
07 (.)
08 DEE: hh
09 a-> STE: No [you’re looking] at Amer- American Airlines. right?
11 STE: [Uh:-]
12 b-> STE: h No:.
13 --> DEE: No? Where’re you looking.
14 STE: [ Uh:] if I do an’ Airline I wanna do
15 (.)
16 STE: United.
17 DEE: Ah: .:
```

At line 7, Dee asks Steve if he is considering, as a job prospect, the same company as Tom. However, before Steve answers— which he begins to do at line 9 with an inbreath, and at line 11 with “Uh:”—Dee produces a disconfirming response to her own question, “No” (line 10), and replaces it with an assertion to be confirmed: “you’re looking at Amer- American Airlines. right?” (line 10). Dee’s assertion (at line 10) interactionally claims a position that Steve is seeking employment with American Airlines. Steve’s disconfirmation, “No:” (line 12), is a counterinforming that “merely” exposes his positional incompatibility with Dee. As in Extracts 1, 6, and 7, Steve designs his disconfirmation to be possibly complete by stretching it and producing it with final-falling intonation.

At line 13, Dee produces the focal practice: “No:?” Rather than stopping talking to allow for a response (as speakers did in Extracts 1, 6, and 7), Dee continues speaking and replaces the focal practice with a question: “Where’re you looking.” (line 13). With this question, Dee explicitly solicits information that would facilitate her ability to reconcile the positional incompatibility. Dee’s question is evidence that the focal practice was designed to pursue reconciliatory information, and that Dee orients to Steve’s counterinforming, “No:” (line 12), as withholding such information. Steve responds to Dee’s Where-question with an account for his counterinforming: “if I do an’ Airline I wanna do United.” (lines 14–15). Similar to previous extracts, Dee then claims to be informed by Steve’s response, “Ah:..” (line 17; Heritage, 1984a), which projects her acceptance of Steve’s counterinforming.
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J. D. Robinson

Negative cases: Evidence from nonoccurrence

It is possible to find negative cases (Silverman, 2001) where the focal practice does not elicit (additional) reconciliatory information. However, when such information is not provided, it is immediately repursued by the initiators of the focal practice, thereby supporting the argument that it is designed to pursue such information. For the first of two negative cases, see Extract 9. Prior to this extract, Ann has informed Maureen and Terry that her (i.e., Ann’s) father is going to Norway to visit his mother. Based on this, Maureen assumes—understandably, albeit incorrectly—that Ann’s family, and thus Ann, is Norwegian. (Hereafter, pursuits are indicated by “∗−” in the left margins of transcripts.)

Extract 9: NORVEGIAN GIRL [Game Night]

01 a> MAU: So you’re a No- Norveegian girl[.]  
02 b1> ANN: [No.  
03 0.8]  
04 MAU: [No-  
05 b2> ANN: [No absolutely not a drop.  
06 ==> MAU: No?  
07 0.4]  
08 ANN: Nope.  
09 0.4]  
10 >> MAU: How’s that possible. He’s not your father  
11 ANN: He is my father.  
12 0.7]  
13 ANN: But they’re not Norwegian.  
14 0.7]  
15 TER: They just live-  
16 ANN: They just live ([in Oslo).  
17 MAU: [Coocohh.  
18 TER> Isn’t that different.

Based on her (legitimately incorrect) assumption, Maureen produces an assertion for (dis)confirmation, “So you’re a No- Norwegian girl.” (line 1), which interactionally claims an (incorrect) position that Ann is Norwegian. Similar to Steve in Extract 8, Ann responds with a disconfirmation, “No.” (line 2), which is a counterinforming that “merely” exposes her positional incompatibility with Maureen. Ann designs her counterinforming to be possibly complete by producing it with final-falling intonation. The 0.8-second silence at line 3 can be explained in terms of Maureen waiting for Ann to continue speaking and produce additional reconciliatory information. When this does not happen, Maureen begins to produce the focal practice, “No-” (line 4). However, Maureen cuts herself off (symbolized in the transcript by the hyphen) in the face of Ann simultaneously starting to talk (at line 5). At line 5, Ann responds with an upgraded (i.e., extreme-case formulated; Pomerantz, 1986) disconfirmation, which again constitutes a withholding counterinforming: “No absolutely not a drop.” (line 5). Maureen reissues the focal practice at line 6: “No?” Extract 9 is a negative case because Ann responds to the focal practice by providing “mere” confirmation, “Nope.” (line 8), and thus continues to withhold reconciliatory information.

The micropause at line 9 can again be explained in terms of Maureen waiting for Ann to continue speaking and produce additional reconciliatory information. When this does not happen, Maureen repursues such information by directly soliciting an
explanation: “How’s that possible.” (line 10). As evidence that Maureen is, indeed, soliciting an explanation, note that she goes on to provide a candidate explanation (for (dis)confirmation): “He’s not your father,” (line 10; Pomerantz, 1988). That Maureen pursues reconciliatory information is evidence that the focal practice (at line 6) was designed to solicit such information, and that Ann’s mere confirmation (at line 8) was an insufficient response to the focal practice. Ann ultimately responds, at lines 11–16, with an explanation, and Maureen subsequently produces “Oooohh.” (i.e., a version of Oh; line 17), which claims to have been informed by Ann’s explanation and projects Maureen’s acceptance of Ann’s counterinforming.

For a second example, see Extract 10, which is drawn from a call between two Jewish women. At line 2, Tamara’s reference to Purim is to a Jewish religious holiday for which students would normally be let out of school. Although Beverly’s son, “Ben Yamin” (line 3), attends a Jewish school, he is not a “normal” student because he is “considered in base midrish.” (line 12), which means that he is in an advanced class of religious learning (“base midrish” refers to Beit Midrash). Contrary to the norm, students who are “considered in base midrish” typically celebrate and study Purim while at school.

Extract 10: PURIM [CP:6852.1]

01 (2,5)
02 a-> TAM: When do they get off for Purim.
03 b-> BEV: .hhhhhh Uh: m Ben Yamin doesn’t.
04 (0,2)
05 ==> TAM: [Dd-doesn’t.]
06 BEV: (Yinhh)
07 BEV: N:O.
08 (.).
09 ==> TAM: Wh:yy:
10 BEV: [.hhhhhh=
11 TAM: -I mean obviously his grade doesn’t get off.
12 BEV: =.much he’s considered in base midrish[h.]
13 TAM: [Wio:.w.

Tamara’s question, “When do they get off for Purim.” (line 2), presupposes, and thus interactationally claims a position, that both of Beverly’s children are let out of school during Purim. Beverly’s counterinforming, “Ben Yamin doesn’t.” (line 3), rejects Tamara’s presupposition and “merely” exposes their positional incompatibility. Beverly produces her counterinforming to be possibly complete by producing “doesn’t” with final-falling intonation. The silence at line 4 can be understood in terms of Tamara waiting for Beverly to continue speaking and produce additional reconciliatory information. When this does not happen, Tamara produces the focal practice, “Doesn’t,” (line 5). As in Extract 9, this is a negative case because Beverly responds to the focal practice by providing “mere” confirmation, “N:O.” (line 7), and thus continues to withhold reconciliatory information.

Similar to Extract 9, the micropause at line 8 can again be explained in terms of Tamara waiting for Beverly to continue speaking and provide additional reconciliatory information, and when this does not happen, Tamara repursues it by directly soliciting an explanation: “Wh:yy.” (line 9; Bolden & Robinson, in press). Tamara’s pursuit
is evidence that the focal practice (line 5) was designed to solicit reconciliatory information, and that Beverly’s mere confirmation (line 7) was an insufficient response to the focal practice. In response to Tamara’s Why-question, Beverly ultimately produces an explanation: “He’s considered in base midrish.” (line 12). Subsequently, Tamara produces the assessment, “Wo::w.” (line 13), which registers, and projects acceptance of, Beverly’s explanation (Schegloff, 2007).

This article argues that the focal practice is one for soliciting additional information that facilitates one’s ability to reconcile the positional incompatibility exposed by a counterinforming in order to facilitate one’s ability to produce an accepting or rejecting response to the counterinforming. This argument is further supported by Extracts 9–10, which represent negative cases in which the focal practice is responded to with “mere” confirmation (i.e., not with reconciliatory information). In these cases, “mere” confirmation is oriented to as an insufficient response. Specifically, speakers who produced the focal practice repursue reconciliatory information by directly soliciting it (e.g., How’s that possible? and Why?). As such, Extracts 9–10 further support the argument that responsive, counterinforming actions normally include information that adequately facilitates the other speaker’s ability to reconcile the positional incompatibility.

It has been argued that the focal practice is “challenging” in that it is a repair-initiatory practice for “holding one’s own ground (or position)” while giving the counterinformer an opportunity to revise or defend his or her position. Responding to the focal practice with “mere” confirmation (as did Ann and Beverly in Extracts 9 and 10, respectively) is a practice for competing with the focal practice; mere confirmation is also a way of “holding one’s own ground (or position).” In both Extracts 9 and 10, relative to their production of the focal practice, when Maureen and Ann (respectively) continue to directly solicit reconciliatory information (at lines 10 and 9, respectively), they can be said to “back down” from their position. That is, relative to the syntactic design of the focal practice, the interrogative syntax of How’s that possible? and Why? makes a concession to the facticity of the other speaker’s position and related epistemic authority (Heritage, 2008); as Heritage put it, the interrogative syntax embodies a steeper “epistemic gradient” between speakers.

Earlier, it was argued that withholding counterinformings can be control strategies for holding initial speakers accountable for “knowing better” or “figuring it out on their own.” We saw that, in contexts of prior and ongoing discordance regarding a matter, withholding counterinformings can antagonistically perpetuate a conflict. In contrast, Ann’s and Beverly’s withholding counterinformings (in Extracts 9 and 10, at lines 2 and 3, respectively) occur outside of contexts of ongoing discordance. Furthermore, the initial positions taken by Maureen and Tamara (at lines 1 and 2, respectively) are especially warranted given prior talk and social norms (e.g., in Extract 9, insofar as Ann has revealed that her father is going to Norway to visit his mother, it is warranted to assume that Ann’s family, and thus Ann, is Norwegian). In such nondiscordant contexts, withholding counterinformings can be mobilized toward more benign relational ends. Specifically, they can be a practice for “generating
a puzzle,” thereby building the projected reconciliatory information up as being particularly newsworthy. For example, in Extract 9, Maureen ultimately produces a “guess,” “He’s not your father,” (line 10), which is some evidence that she orients to Ann’s withholding as a practice for “generating a puzzle.” Furthermore, Maureen’s “Oooohh” (line 17) treats Ann’s reconciliatory explanation (at lines 11–16) not as mere information (cf. the change-of-state marker *Oh*; Heritage, 1984a), but as surprising information (Wilkinson & Kitzinger, 2006), which is oriented to by Terry’s subsequent comment: “Isn’t that different.” (line 18). Similarly, in Extract 10, Tamara’s “Wo::w.” (line 13) treats Beverly’s reconciliatory explanation as being not merely informative, but surprisingly so.

**Alternative moves after counterinformings**

In the wake of counterinformings, the focal practice is only one of many conversational moves that speakers can make. Insofar as members understand the action accomplished by a practice of interaction by reference to relevantly alternative practices (Gardner, 2001; Schegloff, 1996a), an examination of such alternatives provides additional insight into the nature of the focal practice. Each of the alternatives to be examined has different implications for participants’ alignment, affiliation, and social-epistemic identity regarding the matter in question.

As demonstrated earlier, counterinformings solicit accepting or rejecting responses (Heritage, 1984a). We have already seen that, compared to the focal practice, one alternative move is to accept a counterinforming (e.g., Okay). Accepting a counterinforming relinquishes one’s position, tacitly accepts having produced an error, and ratifies the other speaker’s epistemic authority over the matter.

At the other end of the spectrum, another alternative move is to reject a counterinforming. For example, see Extract 11, where two girlfriends, June and Irene, are discussing a third party, Janie. (This extract is also analyzed in Heritage, 1984b, Extract 29, p. 313.)

**Extract 11: GONE [Rahman 12]**

01 JUN: >Have you seen her.  
02 a-> IRE: >(Yeh-) <=.h well she’s gone to ehm ehm: eh: Chester:  
03 (0.9)  
04 IRE: J[nie,]  
05 JUN: [JANIE] has.  
06 IRE: By?  
07 b-> JUN: No she hasn’t,  
08 (0.8)  
09 >>> IRE: Ye:s. she’s gone,  
10 (0.7)  
11 IRE: She went just before dinner.  
12 (.)  
13 JUN: ↑Oh:↓

At line 2, Irene informs June, and thus publicizes her position, that a third party has left town: “she’s gone to em ehm ehm: Chester.” Similar to Abby in Extract 6 (at line 4), June initiates repair on Irene’s informing, “JANIE has.” (line 5), which projects her disagreement with it, and thus establishes a context of discord for
the focal practice. As projected, June rejects Irene’s informing, “No she hasn’t,” (line 7), which is a counterinforming that “merely” exposes the speakers’ positional incompatibility. The 0.8-second silence at line 8 can be explained in terms of Irene waiting for June to continue speaking and provide additional reconciliatory information. When this does not happen, Irene rejects June’s counterinforming, “Yes.” (line 9), and then reasserts her (i.e., Irene’s) original position: “she’s gone,” (line 9). Rejecting a counterinforming tacitly asserts the correctness of one’s position, rejects the counterinforming’s implication that an error was made, and reasserts one’s own epistemic authority on the matter (while challenging the other’s claim to it).

As a rejection of June’s counterinforming, Irene’s “Yes. she’s gone,” (line 9) is itself a type of counterinforming (i.e., a counter-counterinforming). The 0.7-second silence at line 10 is an interactional space in which it is relevant for either Irene to accept or reject June’s position (initially taken at line 2), or Irene to somehow “support” her own position. Eventually, Irene enacts the latter, providing evidential grounds for her position: “She went just before dinner.” (line 11). June responds by producing “↑Oh↓” (line 13), which claims her change of state from unknowing to knowing (Heritage, 1984a) and projects her acceptance of Irene’s position.

There are alternative moves that lie “in between” the two poles of accepting and rejecting counterinformings, and these alternatives tend to be mobilized toward managing withholding counterinformings. One such alternative is Pomerantz’s (1980) practice of “telling my side.” For an example, see Extract 12.

**Extract 12: SPORT CENTER [Rahman:001]**

01 a -> VER: Where did yuh get to las' ni:ght,
02 (1.0)
03 b -> JEN: Last- >I dit-< (. ) I din't go any↑where?↓
04 (0.4)
05 >>> VER: Well Matthew rang to see if you were here.
06 (0.5)
07 JEN: .hh Oh:=h- well- was it ↑la:st↓ night.
08 (.)
09 JEN: Yes it wuh- that’s right, i’ was las’ ny- .hh no I taken
10 Iven:=ehm (. ) .mtch=.hhh to thee=eh (0.2) sport center in:
11 [Saltbern.]
12 VER: [ Oh:::];

Vera’s question, “Where did yuh get to las’ night,” (line 1), publicizes her position that Jenny was not home for at least a portion of the previous evening. Jenny responds with a counterinforming that rejects, and tacitly corrects, Vera’s position: “I din’t go any↑where?↓” (line 3). (Note that, unlike all previous counterinformings, this one is epistemically mitigated with final-rising intonation.) The silence at line 4 can be explained in terms of Vera waiting for Jenny to continue speaking and provide additional reconciliatory information. In a context where the focal practice might otherwise be utilized, Vera pursues such information with: “Well Matthew rang to see if you were here.” (line 5). Here, Vera asserts a limited form of access.
to Jenny’s life, which is the basis of her original position (i.e., Vera knows that Matthew called and that no one answered). According to Pomerantz (1980), Vera’s pursuit (at line 5) is designed to “fish” for an account (in this case, one that provides reconciliatory information). Perhaps stronger than the focal practice, Vera’s fishing device is a challenging practice for “holding her own position.” That is, Vera’s fishing device consists of evidence that possibly supports her own initial position and contests Jenny’s counterinforming position, and is syntactically and interrogatively a declarative (vs. interrogative). Jenny responds to Vera’s fishing device by providing an explanation (lines 9–11) that reverses her own, and tacitly accepts Jenny’s, position.

As seen in Extract 9, another alternative to the “plain” focal practice is to preface it with the particle “Oh.” Heritage (1984a) argued that, as a free-standing token, “Oh” projects, and thus tacitly and weakly claims, acceptance of a position. An “Oh”-preface tends to laminate this stance of tentative acceptance onto the focal practice, and can begin to transform it into more of a “newsmark” (Heritage, 1984, pp. 343–344).

Another alternative to the focal practice is to directly solicit reconciliatory information. Extract 10 provides evidence that participants orient to the distinction between the focal practice and direct solicitations. There, in the same turn of talk, Dee abandons the focal practice, “No?” (line 13), for the interrogative: “where’re you looking.” (line 13); the interrogative syntax acknowledges Steve’s epistemic authority over the matter, and thus tacitly accepts Steve’s counterinforming (Heritage, 2008). Dee’s replacement of the focal practice with this interrogative is an effort to offset the former’s challenging stance.

Discussion

This article is a conversation-analytic examination of an interactional practice for managing a particular type of counterinforming (Heritage, 1984a). Counterinformings occur when one speaker responds to another in a way that publicly exposes that the two speakers hold an incompatible position (e.g., knowledge or belief) on a same matter, and in a way that claims that the respondent holds epistemic authority over (e.g., knows more about) the matter. In line with existing theory (Afifi & Weiner, 2004; Berlyne, 1965; Harmon-Jones, 1999; Pollner, 1987), this article demonstrated that counterinformings normally include information that adequately facilitates the other speaker’s ability to reconcile the positional incompatibility, such as explanations. This article examines an interactional practice for managing counterinformings that withhold such reconciliatory information, and thus that violate an interactional norm.

A withholding counterinforming can be a practice of interactional control (Bradac et al., 1994; Ng & Bradac, 1993; Wiemann, 1985) for holding initial speakers accountable for “knowing better” or “figuring it out on their own.” Withholding counterinformings can be used to accomplish actions that have varying relational consequences (Millar & Rogers, 1976). For example, when used in environments...
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of prior and ongoing discord about a matter, withholding counterinformings can antagonistically perpetuate and/or escalate a conflict. On the other hand, when used outside of environments of discord, withholding counterinformings can be used to frame the withheld information as being especially newsworthy, or a puzzle to be solved, and thus can have more benign relational consequences.

This article redemonstrated Heritage’s (1984a) observation that counterinformings solicit accepting or rejecting responses. When a counterinforming withholds information necessary to allow its recipient to reconcile speakers’ incompatible positions, it hampers the recipient’s ability to accept or reject the counterinforming. This article examined an interactional practice for managing withholding counterinformings; specifically, this practice is one of initiating repair on another speaker’s talk (Schegloff et al., 1977), and was identified by Jefferson (1972) as a type of “questioning repeat.” The focal practice involves virtually identically repeating a portion (or all) of the counterinforming (typically, this is the component of the counterinforming that rejects the initial position), and ending the repeat with rising intonation. The focal practice solicits information that facilitates its speaker’s ability to reconcile the positional incompatibility exposed by the counterinforming, such as an explanation, in order to promote the possibility of its speaker producing a socially harmonious, accepting response.

Speakers have at their disposal a range of alternative conversational strategies for managing counterinformings, each of which have different implications for participants’ alignment, affiliation, and social-epistemic identity regarding the matter in question. For example, accepting a counterinforming (e.g., Okay or That’s right) is a complimentary and submitting “one-down” move (Fisher & Drecks, 1983) that relinquishes one’s position, tacitly accepts having produced an error, and ratifies the other speaker’s epistemic authority over the matter. Insofar as “opposition [e.g., a counterinforming] itself does not necessarily occasion a dispute” (Maynard, 1985, p. 23), accepting a counterinforming can be a way to unmitigatedly avoid a dispute. Alternatively, rejecting a counterinforming is a symmetrical and domineering “one-up” move (Fisher & Drecks, 1983) that tacitly asserts the correctness of one’s position, rejects the counterinforming’s implication that an error was made, reasserts one’s own epistemic authority on the matter (while challenging the other’s claim to it), and enacts a form of argument or dispute (for review, see Antaki, 1994; Maynard, 1985).

The focal practice is yet another practice for managing counterinformings, and appears to be tailored to withholding counterinformings. The focal practice is “challenging” in at least three ways. First, as a practice of repair initiation (Schegloff et al., 1977), the focal practice tacitly claims that the counterinforming violates an interactional norm (Maynard, 1985), and thus that the other speaker is responsible for “repair-related trouble” (Robinson, 2006). Second, at least in terms of its syntactic design, the focal practice does not make concessions to the facticity of the other speaker’s position or related epistemic authority (Heritage, 2008). Along these lines, the focal practice can be described as a practice for “holding
one’s own position” in the face of it being challenged (by the counterinforming), while giving the counterinformer an opportunity to revise or defend his or her position. Third, as a mere, virtually identical repeat, the focal practice problematizes the counterinforming while providing no “concessionary” indication of what the counterinformer should do (i.e., how they should “repair” the problem). As Schegloff (2007) noted, every practice of interaction has its “counter,” and apparently withholding counterinformings are no exception, as they can be countered or challenged by the focal practice. At least when withholding counterinformings are produced in the context of prior and ongoing discord, the focal practice is a relatively minor effort to forestall a larger-scale argument or dispute (Maynard, 1985).

One caution needs to be addressed. Outside particular contexts of interaction, there is not a one-to-one correspondence between turn design and action (Schegloff, 1997). The turn design of the focal practice—that is, a virtually identical repeat of another’s talk that ends with rising intonation—does not always accomplish other-initiated repair (Heritage, 1984a), and even when it does, it can be used to implement a variety of different repair-related actions (Jefferson, 1972; Kim, 2003; Koshik, 2005; Sorjonen, 1996; Wu, 2006). The action implemented by the focal practice is constituted not only (or even primarily) by its turn design, but also by its situation within a particular context of sequence, action, and social-epistemic interpersonal relationship.

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References


掌控反告知行为：
不可调和状态下产生调和信息的交互实践

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摘要

本文用话语分析法考查了如下的会话情景：会话一方对另一方的回应表明二者对同一事件的立场不兼容，或其中一方对事件的看法处于认识上的权威地位。这些类型的回应行为（即反告知）要么被对方接受，要么被对方拒绝。反告知行为中通常包含一些能够促进另一方调和二者不相容状态的信息（比如解释），保留或隐瞒这样的信息可成为控制交互的技巧。本文集中于抑制反告知行为和另一方会话者对反告知行为的掌控。具体而言，本文描述了一种可用产生调和性信息的交互实践。
La gestion des contre-informations : une pratique interactionnelle de sollicitation d’information facilitant la conciliation des positions incompatibles des interlocuteurs

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Résumé

S’appuyant sur l’analyse de conversation, cet article examine des situations au cours desquelles une personne réagit à une autre d’une manière qui (a) exhibe publiquement l’incompatibilité des positions des deux parties à propos du même enjeu et qui (b) soutient que la personne qui réagit détient une autorité épistémique à propos de l’enjeu. Ces types d’actions (les contre-informations ou counterinformings) sollicitent des réactions d’acceptation ou de rejet. Elles incluent généralement des informations (p. ex. une explication) qui aident l’autre personne à concilier leurs positions respectives. Restreindre ces informations peut être une tactique de contrôle de l’interaction. Cet article se penche sur ces types de contre-informations restreintes et sur la gestion qu’en fait l’autre locuteur. En particulier, cet article décrit l’une des pratiques interactionnelles utilisées afin de solliciter de l’information permettant une conciliation des positions.
Managing Counterinformings: An Interactional Practice for Soliciting Information that Facilitates Reconciliation of Speakers’ Incompatible Positions

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Mit gegenteiligen Informationen umgehen: Zum interaktionistischen Umgang mit der Informationssuche, um nicht-vereinbare Positionen verschiedener Sprecher abzugleichen

Managing Counterinformings: An Interactional Practice for Soliciting Information that Facilitates Reconciliation of Speakers’ Incompatible Positions

반대정보의 관리: 연설자의 양립적 입장의 화해를 촉진시키는 정보를 선택하게 하기 위한 상호행위적 실행

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요약
본 연구는 두 연설자가 같은 문제에 대해 공공연하게 다른 입장을 보이거나, 반응자가 이 문제에 대해 우월한 권위를 주장하는 것으로서, 한 연설자가 다른 연설자에게 반응하는 상황의 대화 분석 연구이다. 이러한 형태의 반응적 행위들은 반응들을 수용하거나 거부하거나를 선택하게 되며, 일반적으로 다른 연설자가 기존 연설자의 입장적 불일치에 대응하는 능력을 촉진시키는 정보를 포함하게 된다. 반대정보로부터 이러한 정보를 유지하는 것은 반응적인 통제 전략이다. 본 논문은 이러한 종류의 유지 반대 정보와 다른 연설자에 의한 그들의 관리에 촉점을 두고 있다. 특히, 본 논문은 화해적인 정보를 선택하는데 사용되어 지는 상호반응적 실행을 기술하고 있다.
Manejando Contra-informaciones: Una Práctica de Interacción para la Solicitación de Información que Facilita la Reconciliación de los Oradores con Posiciones Incompatibles

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Resumen

Este artículo es una exanimación de conversación analítica de situaciones donde un orador responde a otro en una forma que expone públicamente a los oradores sosteniendo posiciones incompatibles sobre un asunto similar, y en una forma que reclama que el demandado sostenga autoridad epistémica sobre el asunto. Estos tipos de acciones de respuesta (a saber, contra-información) solicita la aceptación o rechazo de las respuestas, y normalmente incluye información (a saber, una explicación) que facilita la habilidad del otro orador para reconciliar las posiciones incompatibles de los oradores. Reteniendo esa información de una contra-información puede ser una táctica de control de la interacción. Este ensayo se focaliza en esos tipos de retenciones de la contra información y su manejo por parte del otro orador. Este artículo, específicamente, describe una práctica de interacción usada para solicitar información reconciliadora.