The Effect of Joint Interviewing on the Performance of Gender

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The authors report a series of controlled comparisons of fifty-eight one-to-one qualitative interviews and thirty-seven mixed-sex joint interviews on the same health-related topics. Their analysis identifies comparative keyword frequencies and is supported by qualitative investigations of keywords in context, drawing on existing relevant knowledge of common gender differences in language choice. Gender differences are reduced and women's perspectives are more prominent in joint interviews, so researchers wanting to find out about men's experiences concerning health-related topics such as those associated with fatherhood may find out more in one-to-one interviews with men. The greater readiness of men to engage in gender-stereotyped behavior in sole interviews, most of which involved a female interviewer, suggests that an interviewer's gender identity is perceived as somewhat neutral by comparison with the considerable salience of the gender of a joint respondent. This finding potentially contributes to knowledge of the qualitative interview as a special form of institutional talk.

Keywords: *joint interviewing; gender difference; experience of illness; comparative keyword analysis*

INTRODUCTION

The dynamics of one-to-one qualitative interviews (Gubrium and Holstein 2002) and of focus groups (Kitzinger 1994; Barbour and Kitzinger 1999) have been the subject of much methodological comment and study, but the

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joint interview is less well understood. Rather than simply being halfway between sole interviews and focus groups, joint interviews (i.e., one interviewer and two respondents) may generate interactions that are qualitatively different from either. We report a study of joint interviews with mixed-sex pairs of respondents, comparing these with one-to-one interviews on the same topics. We place this in a social research methodological context but draw also on sociolinguistic literature on the performance of gender in mixed- and single-sex settings.

METHODOLOGICAL LITERATURE

It is important at the outset to be clear about definitions and philosophical perspectives. We distinguish joint interviews from situations where a one-to-one interview happened to include a third party, as was the case in the study reported by Boeije (2004), who found that spouses sometimes wanted to overhear or be present during all or part of an interview with a person experiencing multiple sclerosis. We, on the other hand, have studied situations where pairs of people, usually spouses, were at times intentionally interviewed to gather a joint perspective. Boeije (2004) takes the realist view that copresence of third parties can "undermine the validity" (p. 3) of data that he would prefer generated in sole interview settings. Boejie finds that the presence of a spouse can make respondents avoid criticizing the spouse or be reluctant to reveal personally discrediting information. We take a more agnostic view of validity, which depends on the use to which an account is put by the researcher rather than being inherent in the account itself. We explore the effect of differential context (joint versus sole) on the type of account produced without claiming or assuming that one is, in absolute terms, more valid than another.

Arksey (1996), in her review of the social research literature on joint interviewing, indicates that these are "qualitatively different" (p. 1) from sole interviews, echoing Allan's (1980) view that they may "lead to data being generated that could not be obtained from interviews with individuals" (p. 205), such as a fuller or more comprehensive account or allowing for direct observation of interactions between spouses to indicate, for example, how they negotiate decisions. Seymour, Dix, and Eardley (1995) suggest that joint interviews can reveal the different kinds of knowledge held by each person and that gaps and memory lapses may be remedied by the interventions of a second person. Additionally, they say that a caregiver can be a helpful prompt for a person with disabilities. In general, these

authors claim that a more holistic view of a relationship between a pair can be gained. Morris (2001) argues that the rhetorical production of "jointness" by a marital couple can be observed in joint interviews and recommends close attention to passages in which speakers refer to *we* or *us*.

There are different views about the effect of the joint interview on disclosure of personal, private, or sensitive issues. Seymour, Dix, and Eardley (1995) take the view that sole interviews facilitate the discussion of sensitive issues; Morris (2001), in her comparative study of joint and sole interviews with people with cancer and their caregivers, found no difference in this respect. Radley and Billig (1996) suggest that joint interviews may be occasions for accounts that place particular emphasis on public justifications. But Morris (2001) found that sole interviews could equally be occasions for the display of public accounts, with couples interviewed separately often using identical phrases, suggesting a degree of preinterview rehearsal for public consumption.

Gender is clearly an independent influence on whether an interview generates accounts involving self-disclosure ("I/me" talk), because a range of sociolinguistic studies (summarized in Coates 2004) show that women are more likely than men to produce such accounts across a variety of settings. Seymour, Dix, and Eardley (1995) suggest that joint interviews may be helpful in encouraging personal disclosure from men who are otherwise uncomfortable about doing this with a stranger in a sole interview. The effect of joint interviewing on women, though, is considered to be less facilitative: Arksey's (1996) review cites a number of authors claiming that women may be inhibited in such settings if they involve a mixed-sex pair, as they may be interrupted by overbearing male informants who see themselves as speaking on behalf of the couple. As will be seen, our analysis does not support this view.

Systematic comparison of sole and joint interviews is rare in this methodological literature, which also tends to substitute personal reflections on interviewing experiences for a more data-driven analysis. Morris (2001) is an exception, reporting a study of people with cancer and their caregivers, some of whom were interviewed singly, others jointly. Morris found equal amounts of talk by both parties in joint interviews, after an initial phase in which the patient (of either sex) had told his or her story. Women tended to report on emotional issues more than men. However, a significant proportion of the joint accounts were devoted to the presentation of a jointly shared version of events, with "we" talk and mutual "echoing" and completion of each other's phrases (or "duetting" [Coates 2005:92]) being particularly evident.

SOCIOLINGUISTICS OF MIXED-SEX TALK

Joint interviews can, of course, be done with same-sex pairs. The present study, though, is of mixed-sex interviews, so findings from the general sociolinguistics literature concerning gender are highly relevant. Any analysis of the sociolinguistics of mixed-sex talk must start from an appreciation of widespread findings about gender differences in language use, summarized in Coates (2004). In general, mixed-sex settings can often be seen to reduce these differences, with the exception of some differences (e.g., male quantitative dominance of talk) that are only evident in a mixed setting.

Since the publication of Butler's *Gender Trouble* (1990) that portrayed gendered identity as a potentially mutable and adaptable performance, it has become commonplace among sociolinguists interested in gender to question the "gender differences" tradition that Coates represents (e.g., Cameron 2003). Many studies now demonstrate the presence of subcultures that break with the norms of conventional heterosexual gendered expression or that achieve gendered identification via unexpected means (e.g., through male gossip). Although these demonstrate the increased opportunities that exist nowadays for variably performed gender identities, a host of empirical studies show that the linguistic markers summarized below remain the methods by which the majority of speakers in modern (English-speaking) populations perform gender across many different contexts.

Rayson, Leech, and Hodges (1997) have reported quantitative gender differences in vocabulary use in the spoken element of the British National Corpus (BNC), a representative collection of some 4.5 million words (Crowdy 1995). Their findings for particular words will be given as our own findings are reported, as this study establishes a baseline against which gender differences in more specialized corpora can be judged. For the moment, we rely largely on Coates's (2004) comprehensive review of the gender differences sociolinguistic literature.

Coates (2004) notes that studies show women disclose more personal information, talk more about feelings and other people, tell stories that express embarrassment or fear, and use more questions encouraging interaction rather than ones that consider their interlocutor as an expert. They use more minimal response tokens such as *yeah*, *right*, and *mhm*, and these are usually positioned to show support and encourage interaction. When men use these tokens, they are more likely to be used in a disruptive way, announcing an interruption or delivered after a long pause to indicate lack of interest.

Men, on the other hand, swear and use taboo language more than women, reducing this in mixed-sex settings. They prefer to talk about

impersonal topics such as "current affairs, modern technology, cars or sport" (Coates 2004:133), discuss their achievements or drinking habits, and engage in "expertism." Unlike women talking in single-sex groups, who include a wide range of characters of both sexes in their stories, men generally do not tell stories that involve women as major characters, and they are less likely to demonstrate cooperative language patterns (such as an encouraging use of minimal response tokens).

In mixed-sex settings, men talk more than women and hold the floor for longer periods but are also more likely in such settings to mitigate their performances of masculinity. They have, for example, been found to tell stories that involve female characters, focusing on personal disasters, fears, and caring. They may also conarrate stories with spouses. This involves, for example, latching (following from previous speaker with no interval), repetition, and utterance completion of the other's speech, suggesting raised attentiveness to the needs of interlocutors. Thus, "in mixed contexts, it seems that men have more latitude to explore a wider range of masculinities and to display more feminine aspects of themselves" (Coates 2005:101). These findings also suggest a process of communication accommodation in mixed-sex settings (Street and Giles 1982), whereby speakers adapt their own language to more closely mirror those of the people they are with.

A further area in which gender differences have been found is in communication preferences. Coates (2002) has found that men's storytelling often involves portraying the speaker as an expert. Jackson et al. (2001) show that men are more likely than women to use the Internet to get information. Kiss and Meryn (2001), reviewing the literature on gender and cancer, conclude that men prefer information exchange to attending support groups or sharing feelings. When men do organize support groups, they use them to discuss medical information and hear the views of invited expert speakers, whereas women prefer small meetings with opportunities for intimacy with other women (Gray et al. 1996). Klemm et al. (1999) and Seale, Charteris-Black, and Ziebland (2006), in studies comparing men and women's postings to online illness forums, indicate that men are more likely to exchange information, whereas women are more likely to be mutually supportive and share personal experiences.

The broad hypothesis that drives the present methodological study is that a joint interviewing context is likely to result in accounts that demonstrate greater convergence between men and women in both linguistic style and topic content than in similar one-to-one interviews. A further question concerns the potential for mixed-sex joint interviewing to result in accounts that favor the perspective of one gender.

METHODS AND MATERIALS

In a corpus of 1,035 transcribed qualitative interviews collected originally for use on the DIPEx Web site (www.dipex.org), we identified thirty-seven joint interviews; these were semistructured interviews where respondents were encouraged to talk at length about their experiences. Respondents were identified by a variety of sampling methods, including volunteering and snowball sampling. They were asked to participate in an interview to talk about their experiences, and in some cases, the negotiations to set up the interview resulted in identifying a spouse or other person who had also been closely involved with the experience, sometimes as a caregiver and sometimes as an equal party to decision making. This could then lead to a decision by all parties to carry out an interview involving both individuals.

Topics concerned the experience of illness, pregnancy, or parenting (Table 1). In all but one matched triplet of interviews, the interviewer was female. Each of the joint interviews was matched with a one-to-one ("sole") interview with a man and a woman on the same topic, collected for the same purpose, and normally involving the same interviewer. When possible, the age of the respondent and his or her socioeconomic classification (Rose and Pevalin 2005) were matched. In one case (prostate cancer), a female sole match could not be found. In fifteen cases, a male match could not be found; most of these involved parenting or pregnancy experiences, as few sole interviews with men on these topics were available in the overall corpus.

Both quantitative and qualitative techniques were used, supported by computer software. Interviewer speech and male and female respondent speech were separated into different files for quantitative comparisons of word usage. The numbers and lengths of utterances by the various speakers were calculated for each interview and entered into SPSS for statistical comparative analyses. WordSmith Tools (Scott 2005) was used for comparative keyword analysis (Seale, Charteris-Black, and Ziebland 2006) to identify key quantitative differences in vocabulary choice. WMatrix (www.comp.lancs.ac.uk/ucrel/wmatrix) supplemented this by applying dictionary-based semantic tagging that helped identify meaningful word and short phrase clusters on which there were significant differences between texts. The "keyword-in-context" displays of these software packages and our inspection of original transcripts generated a more contextual understanding of the function of particular words. This means that we present a context-sensitive, systematic comparative analysis of joint and sole interview texts that is both replicable and objective, informed by our knowledge of methodological and sociolinguistic literature.

TABLE 1
Topics Covered in Joint Interviews and Their Matched Sole Interviews

	Joint	*Sole Female Matches*	*Sole Male Matches*
Experience of own illness/health issue			
Colorectal cancer	1	1	1
Prostate cancer	1	0	1
Young people with cancer	2	2	2
Living with dying	2	2	2
Hypertension	1	1	1
Experience of intensive care	7	7	7
Young adult sexual health	1	1	1
Pregnancy-related experiences			
Antenatal screening	6	6	1
Ending a pregnancy	3	3	3
Parents'/caregivers' experiences			
Parents deciding about immunization	2	2	2
Parents of children with congenital heart disease	10	10	0
Caring for someone with dementia	1	1	1
Total	37	36	22

Comparisons of interviews proceeded through the following four steps:

1. A comparison to establish baseline differences between men and women in sole interviews,
2. A comparison between joint and sole interviews for men to answer the question, What is the effect of joint interviewing on men?
3. The same comparison as 2 for women, and
4. A comparison to establish differences between men and women in joint interviews. Differences identified here could be compared with differences found in step 1 to see if they had lessened or otherwise changed.

For making direct comparisons between groups of interviews, transcripts were selected or matched so that like was always compared with like. First, a "strict-matched" subsample of twenty-four interviews was selected. This comprised eight pairs of male and female sole interviews matched for topic, age, and socioeconomic status for which there were eight matched joint interviews. This selection of interviews largely involved parents talking about ending a pregnancy (three pairs), immunization (two pairs), or antenatal care (one pair). One pair involved caring for someone with dementia; another pair involved young adults talking about sexual

health. All four of the steps described above could be done on this subsample, preserving the principle of comparing like with like.

Although this subsample forms the core of the analysis reported here, it is restricted to just twenty-four of the ninety-five available interviews listed in Table 1 because of the need to discard those without valid matches. Therefore, this analysis is supplemented by other "loose-matched" subsamples described below:

1. The sole loose-matched sample consisted of twenty-one pairs of matched men and women who gave sole interviews. This was used solely for step 1.
2. The male loose-matched subsample consisted of twenty pairs of matched joint and sole interviews with men. This was used for step 2.
3. The female loose-matched subsample consisted of twenty-six pairs of matched joint and sole interviews with women. This was used for step 3.
4. The joint loose-matched sample consisted of twenty-four joint interviews, in which both speakers were either parents, caregivers of people with illness experiences, or people reporting on their own illness experience. Because male and female respondents' speech was separated into different files, a comparison of male and female speech in joint interviews (step 4) was therefore possible with this subsample.

The logic of this analytic sequence, which has been applied to all of the findings sections below (except the first), can be illustrated by considering a simple investigation of the distribution of swearwords using the loose-matched samples only. We included searches for the words *bastard*, *bloody*, *bugger*, *damn*, *fuck*, and *shit* (as well as variations such as *fucking* and *fucker*). All instances were inspected in context to exclude instances in which these were used but were not swearwords.

Step 1: Comparison of male and female sole interviews revealed twenty-one such words in men's speech, compared with three in women's, confirming the general findings of the sociolinguistics literature (Rayson, Leech, and Hodges 1997; Coates 2004).

Step 2: Comparison of joint and sole interviews with men revealed fewer such words in joint interviews (five as opposed to nineteen), suggesting that the effect of joint interviewing is to reduce men's tendency to swear.

Step 3: With four swearwords occurring in female sole interviews and one in their joint interviews, we conclude no particularly strong reduction is caused by joint interviewing in women's already-low propensity to swear.

Step 4: Two swearwords by men and none by women in joint interviews suggests that this is a setting where the usual gender difference in swearing is absent because the "mixed company" of the joint interview setting has reduced men's tendency to swear. Thus, men have accommodated, on this measure,

TABLE 2
Gender Differences in Sole and Joint Interviews: Turns at Talk and Words

	Men	*Women*	*p* =
Strict-matched sole			
Mean no. of turns	77	94	.560
Mean total words	9,876	11,366	.518
Strict-matched joint			
Mean no. of turns	143	181	.008
Mean total words	3489	8815	.008

to women's linguistic style. Interestingly, the presence of a female interviewer in most of the sole interviews (step 1) does not seem to have inhibited men from swearing. We return to the possible perception of research interviewers as gender neutral in the discussion section of this article.

FINDINGS

Quantitative Dominance

Table 2 shows that, for the strict-matched samples, there is no significant difference in the amount that either gender speaks or the number of turns they take in sole interviews. In joint interviews, women speak significantly more and more often than men. Additionally, it is clear that when women take the floor in joint interviews, they use it to speak twice as many words as do men because men's turns are used to utter, on average, twenty-four words (3,489/143), whereas women's are used to utter, on average, forty-nine words (8,815/181).

This contrasts with the research literature summarized in Coates (2004) to the effect that although "there is a widespread belief in our society that women talk more than men . . . research findings consistently contradict this" (p. 117). Coates cites numerous studies that have demonstrated significant quantitative dominance of talk and turns at talk by men in a variety of mixed-sex settings.

Our findings, by contrast, agree with those of Rayson, Leech, and Hodges (1997), who found in their study of the BNC that women talked more and took more turns than men (although it is not clear that contributors to this corpus were talking in mixed sex settings). Our previous research (Seale, Charteris-Black, and Ziebland 2006) suggested that that the topics of health and illness may be regarded by both men and women as ones where women's concerns and experiences ought to predominate.

Given the topic of many of these interviews (child health and pregnancy), this seems a likely explanation of the overall quantitative parity or predominance of speech from women.

Speaking for *Us* Rather than *Me*

These interviews often involved inquiry into an experience (e.g., termination of pregnancy) or a decision (whether to vaccinate a child) in which both interviewees (often parents or partners) were involved. As we have seen, sociolinguistic studies show women to be more comfortable than men in speaking about their own personal experiences, and such talk is realized by using first-person singular pronouns (*I*, *me*, and *mine*), rather than the third-person or plural pronouns. In fact, talking about *our* experience was quite common in these interviews, and analysis of sole interviews (step 1) showed that men were more likely than women to use plural pronouns that referred to both themselves and their partner, reflected in a considerably higher usage of *we*, *our*, *we've*, *we're*, and *us*. Two examples from male sole interviews are,

> Well, at seven weeks, we had the scan. . . . We didn't, er, get told the OK until about twelve weeks, but so, but it felt like we'd been going for months because we'd had so many scans.

> So I think even at that stage if we'd known, you know, the chromosomal disorder was easy. That was, for us, was a very easy choice.

Women, on the other hand, were more likely to understand the sole interview as an opportunity to speak about their own personal experience, reflected in their higher usage of *I*, *my*, and *me*. Table 3 gives detailed statistics on this. Such tabulations underlie the quantitative claims that follow as well as those reported in other sections below, but not all are shown because of space limitations.

This pronoun usage changes markedly when men and women are interviewed in joint settings. The analysis for each gender, comparing how word usage changed between sole and joint interviewing settings (steps 2 and 3), showed both genders to be more likely to use *you* in joint interviews, largely because they were addressing each other during the joint interview. But *we* usage became considerably more frequent for women, with *our* and *we* figuring among the significant keywords for jointly interviewed women, both in the strict-matched and loose-matched comparisons with sole interviews, and *we've* and *we're* figuring in the strict-matched comparison. No such change occurred for men. Examples of women's *we* usage in joint interviews are as follows:

TABLE 3
"I/We" Pronouns: Rate per 1,000 Words in Sole Interviews

	Strict Match		*Loose Match*	
	Women	*Men*	*Women*	*Men*
Men more				
We	10.1	15.8	5.6	9.1
Our	0.8	2.2	0.4	1.2
We've	0.2	0.7	0.2	0.6
We're	0.2	0.7	0.3	0.5
Us	2.3	3.4	1.1	1.8
Women more				
I	43.6	31.9	51.6	41.1
My	8.1	5.7	9.5	7.5
Me	4.0	2.6	8.0	5.6
Total no. of words	94,923	85,314	216,996	175,949

NOTE: All gender differences are significant below $p = .0001$ (log likelihood test).

> Our, our consultant explained to us that it's a national average.
>
> So we had no question in our minds at all, and we took our oldest son to be vaccinated, without any worries, whatsoever.

Comparison of men and women in joint interviews (step 4) showed no significant gender difference in the rate of *we* references, with only *me* figuring as a keyword referencing the self for women. This suggests that joint interviews reduce this gender difference. Men are relatively hesitant to regard their own experience as the topic of inquiry in either joint or sole interviews. When interviewed alone, women regard their own personal experience as the topic of inquiry, modifying this in the joint setting to include their partners. The implications of this for researchers trying to find out about men's personal experiences are discussed later.

Other People

Women generally include references to wider informal social networks in their stories than do men (Coates 1996; Rayson, Leech, and Hodges 1997; Seale, Charteris-Black, and Ziebland 2006). Comparison of men and women in strict-matched sole interviews (step 1) confirmed this, with *mother*, *husband*, *somebody*, *sister*, *person*, *neighbors*, and *boyfriend* figuring in women's keywords, but only *wife*, *wife's*, and *boy* in men's. The loose-matched comparison

added *mum*, *ladies*, *person*, and *mum's* to this tally for women, and *fetus*, *child*, and *girlfriend* to men's tally. Men in sole interviews thus tend to focus on their partners or use rather impersonal terms to refer to children, whereas women discuss a wider range of people, including those outside the immediate household or family. An example from a woman in a sole interview is,

> I've had my *mum* and my *sister* and my *friends*. One of my *colleagues*, well one of my *friends* from work, every time I was moved to a new ward or to another hospital, he made sure he was there for each move and to greet me and make sure I was all right and settled. And you know *people* visiting and what have you has really, I couldn't have asked for more really. You know, you really know who your *friends* are when you get stuck like that. But I've always had good *neighbors*, so I shall miss them when they move next week.

An example from a man is,

> I do believe the decision was made [with regard to] the effect it would have had on the *child*. But I guess . . . from my *wife's* point of view that she would have had the greater burden.

There were mild indicators that joint interviewing increased men's propensity to talk about a wider range of other people (step 2) and other indicators that they decreased women's (step 3). Thus, *person* appeared as a men's joint interview (strict-matched) keyword and *mates* in the equivalent loose-matched comparison (as in "all my mates were really good"). For women, *mother*, *sister*, and *neighbors* ceased to be significant keywords, being replaced by the impersonal *child* or *baby* in joint interviews.

These shifts suggest a degree of gender convergence in joint interviews. A direct comparison of the speech of men and women interviewed in joint settings (step 4) confirms this. There were several "other people" keywords in men's speech in the strict-matched comparison (*wife*, *guys*, and *man*), and *wife*, *guys*, *people*, and *partner* appeared in the loose-matched comparison. An example, containing many "people" words and also demonstrating a man and his wife orienting to this "performance" of gender as somewhat unusual, is given below:

> Because, you know, it's not just you as a couple. You know, there's, er, you know, there's *family* involved in, in the process and, um, and particularly the *grandparents*. I mean my *parents* don't have any *grandchildren* yet, um. . . . This was their first *grandchild*, you know. . . . So they, you know, they were, they were proudly starting to tell *friends* and so on and, and it was taken away from them. So it's been hard for them as well. And probably also for, um, for *dads*, because, you know, they don't go through the, er, the physical side of it, but they go through the emotional side of it. And, er, you know, *men* deal

> with grief in a totally different way from *women* and don't like to talk about it. I've not, er, really talked about it to many *people*. I've talked to close *family* [wife laughs, saying, "You're doing very well tonight"] and . . . one or two *friends*, but it's not something that you just, you know, pitch up at the pub with your *mates* . . . and over a pint of beer start talking over, because *guys* don't do that. So, um, and maybe that's one element of, of all of the support network that's out there, that doesn't probably really explain to *guys* how they're supposed to, to deal with, er, emotions and grief and crying and all that sort of thing. (Man in joint interview)

No keywords appeared for jointly interviewed women in the strict-matched comparison with sole interviews; "*husband*" and *baby* appeared in the loose-matched comparison. Thus, the effect of joint interviewing is to reduce or perhaps even reverse this commonly found gender difference.

Feelings

Talk about a wide range of feelings is very commonly found to be characteristic of women rather than men (Coates 2004) and in illness narratives particularly (Kiss and Meryn 2001; Seale, Charteris-Black, and Ziebland 2006). Comparison of strict-matched pairs of sole interviews (step 1) established this difference quite clearly. There were no feelings keywords for men, but *felt*, *nervous*, *feel*, and *silly* characterized women's speech. With the exception of *nervous*, these also all appeared as women's sole interview keywords in the loose-matched comparison, which also identified *coped*, *accept*, *horrendous*, *hated*, *frightened*, and *confused*. *Felt* is not an unequivocal "feelings" word, as it can also be used to refer to beliefs and physical sensations, but inspection of context showed it to be almost exclusively used to refer to feelings (e.g., "I just felt unhappy." "We felt really judged."). A fuller example is,

> I *felt* a lot of comfort and joy for other people who were having a successful pregnancy. You know I *felt* I love to see it working well. . . . And um I was quite taken aback and quite shocked by that so you know there, people have some very extreme feelings around this subject.

Comparison of each gender across sole and joint interview settings (steps 2 and 3) revealed no significant keywords relating to this dimension, with the exception of women in joint interviews, who were less likely to talk about how they had *coped* or might *cope* with their situations, suggesting a mild reduction in women's references to emotions in joint interviews.

Comparison of men and women in joint interviews (step 4) showed that only the keyword *felt* was more common in women's speech in the strict-matched

comparison and only *confident* in the loose match. *Panicking* now appears as a keyword for men in joint interviews. Thus, joint interviewing appears to have reduced women's propensity to discuss feelings and slightly increased men's.

Attentiveness and Support

Words such as *hmm*, *mm*, and *yeah* are often used to indicate attentiveness and support, as shown in this extract from a joint interview where a woman intersperses her partner's story with *hmm*:

> Man: Yeah, I guess, um, I haven't had a great deal of one-night stands, and they're not terribly fulfilling.
> Woman: *Hmm*.
> Man: And there's always that worry about what, what, where has she been and . . .
> Woman: *Hmm*.
> Man: Who's she's been with and . . .
> Woman: *Hmm*.
> Man: So there's, there's anxiety on that front. It's better, better to be with someone I think.

Coates (2004) reviewing the literature on such "minimal responses" or "back channels" suggests that it is

> unanimous in showing that women use them more than men, and at appropriate moments, that is, at points in conversation which indicate the listener's support for the current speaker. . . . Holmes (1995:55) asks rhetorically whether minimal responses are "a female speciality." (Coates 2004:87)

However, Rayson, Leech, and Hodges (1997) report *yeah* and *hmm* to be more common in men's speech and *mm* to be more common in women's speech, though these authors do not report the context of these interjections.

Our findings indicate the opposite to Coates's conclusion, being more in line with Rayson, Leech, and Hodges (1997). Men were more likely than women to use *yeah*, *hmm*, and *OK* in both strict and loose comparisons of sole interviews (step 1). Both genders became more likely to use *mm*, *mmm*, and *yeah* in joint interviews, presumably because there were two people to attend to rather than just one (steps 2 and 3). When men and women were compared in joint interviews, men remained more likely to use such markers, these now including *mm*, *mmm*, *yeah*, and *hmm*.

But context is important when assessing the function of these words. Coates (2004) suggests that "when men *do* use minimal responses, these

are often delayed, a tactic which undermines the current speaker and reinforces male dominance" (p. 88). To investigate this proposition, a stratified random sample of one hundred uses of such words was selected (twenty-five from each type of interview). Blinded to the gender of the speaker and whether the interview was sole or joint, one of us (a linguistics specialist: JC-B) categorized each usage according to whether it was a minimal response token and then according to whether it was associated with an interruption or other kind of assertion of dominance, such as a lack of interest in what the other speaker was saying.

Twenty-nine of the one hundred examples were categorized as not being minimal responses, and this appeared randomly distributed (fourteen women and fifteen men; sixteen sole and thirteen joint). Such usages were, for example, where a speaker reported another person's speech. No examples were judged to have involved interruption, an attempt to undermine the other speaker, or to have resulted in dominance of the interaction. The other seventy-one instances were judged to involve the use of these words to indicate attentiveness and support for the other speaker, for example,

> Interviewer: Basically, what, um, what I do is I do interview today.
> Male respondent: *Hmm*.
> Interviewer: We cover issues like, um, relationship history, your knowledge about contraceptives.

> Woman: I mean he was one of these doctors that just tells you the facts.
> Man: *Hmm*.
> Woman: He told us that there was a risk of death, but it was a very small risk, and, um, it was very, really it was a very simple operation where it was a . . .

We therefore conclude that the greater use of markers of attentiveness and support by men is maintained across both sole and joint interview settings. It seems likely that in the case of joint interviews, this is because women are more likely to hold the floor, with men in a listening role much of the time.

COMMUNICATION PREFERENCES

To explore the effect of joint interviewing on the well-established gender differences in communication preferences reviewed earlier, we examined word clusters relating to the use of information technology and to use of the telephone, on which marked gender differences were initially highly evident. For this, we drew on an analysis of semantically tagged word clusters, using WMatrix software.

Gender and Information Technology

Men in sole interviews were significantly more likely to use "information technology and computing" words, in both strict- and loose-matched comparisons (step 1: $p < .001$ for both comparisons). Words contributing most to this category were *screen*, *Internet*, *Web site*, *computer*, and *IT*. Examples from sole-interviewed men include,

> It made it more real for us to see it [the fetus] on *screen* I think.
>
> I've looked on the *Internet* at certain sites but not really very much. There was a help line when I was ill, but I wasn't, at that point, I didn't really want to, didn't really want to phone up and speak to someone about it.
>
> I think that, the official sites I think are, um, you know, um, contain good-quality information. You can look on the, um, you know, the national immunization *Web site*, the "MMR: the facts" *Web site* I think provide very reliable information.

The joint interview setting had no significant effect on men's propensity to use these words (step 2). But for women in the strict-matched sample, joint interviewing produced a highly significant ($p < .0001$) shift toward greater usage of these words (step 3), although no significant difference occurred for women in the same comparison for the loose-matched sample. Some examples from joint-interviewed women include,

> It was just amazing seeing him on *screen*, like that. Or "it" on *screen*, as we used to say, because we didn't know the sex.
>
> You have to take everything on the *Internet* with a grain of salt.
>
> If you certainly look on any autism *Web site*, a lot of them will now tell you the marker illnesses to look out for.

There was no significant gender difference for this category in the joint interview setting (step 4). This suggests that the joint interview setting reduces gender differences for these topics, possibly because women increasingly discuss them in joint interviews.

Gender and Phoning

Women in sole interviews were significantly more likely than men (step 1) to use "telecommunications" words ($p < .0001$, strict; $p < .001$, loose). Words contributing most to this category were *phone*, *phoned*, *telephone*, *phone up*, *phone call*, *phoned up*, and *phone number.* Examples of women using these words in sole interviews include,

> I was at home, um, just myself, and one of my, one of my sons and the, on the *phone* call, um, he said, "I've got bad news and good news for you. The bad news is that you have a Down's syndrome child; the good news is that you're booked in to have an abortion first thing tomorrow."
>
> So I spent the whole morning on the *phone* from here, *phoning up* various charities . . .
>
> Once I had to trawl through *directory enquiries* and try and find this woman.

Joint interviewing when compared with sole interviewing was associated with a significant reduction ($p < .01$) in men's use of telecommunications words (step 2). Significant reductions also applied to women in both strict ($p < .0001$) and loose ($p < .05$) comparisons (step 3).

The gender difference in favor of women using telecommunications words remained when men and women in joint interviews in the strict-matched sample were compared ($p < .001$), but there was no significant difference in the loose-matched comparison. Gender differences for this topic, therefore, remain in the joint setting, though are possibly somewhat weakened.

ORIENTING TO GENDER

In an earlier study of men posting on an Internet-based breast cancer message forum (Seale 2006), we found that men who deviate from traditional masculine language choices (e.g., talking about their feelings or their children, expressing care and concern) often tended to comment on this behavior either in themselves or others. One might therefore expect such explicit orientation to gendered norms to be more common in joint than in sole interviews. To establish whether there were quantitative or qualitative differences between joint and sole interviews, we examined all instances of the word *men* in loose-matched sole interviews (twenty-one instances) and loose-matched joint interviews (thirteen instances) that involved men.

In male sole interviews, four of the twenty-one involved an explicit orientation to male gendered norms. An example is,

> There's about one e-mail every two months or something [in the men's group] (laughs) because *men*, we can't put, write down emotional stuff like that very well, you don't get a lot of response.

In men's talk in joint interviews, nine in thirteen instances involved an orientation to such norms. One took the form of a man suggesting that although this was "old-fashioned," he felt men had to be "strong" and take

"more responsibilities for everyday decisions" when their partners had a problem like that of his wife. Two involved reflections on difficulties they believed men had in expressing emotions. Two involved a man talking about how he had read his sister's magazines to find out about health issues, as magazines for men did not contain such material. Two were incorporated in a complaint about double standards in judging sexual behavior:

> I don't know whether it's just *men* and women or just society, but I've always, it's always seemed to me that a man who's with a lot of women, uh is a, he's a stud or you know he's, he's, um, it's, it's something to be proud of. But a woman [is] considered a slut, you know, if she's with a lot of *men*.

Two more involved a man who complained of being excluded during a health care procedure that was focused on his wife:

> There was nowhere for me to be close to her while she was having the, the detailed scan. And I th-, I, I think there is generally an expectation that *men* are not going to take as much of an interest in these things as women do, um, so I guess a lot of the time women get talked to and *men* just sit there and listen.

There is, therefore, only a small quantitative difference, albeit in the direction that supports the hypothesis that joint interviews are more likely to prompt thoughts about masculinity as a topic. More cautiously, we may conclude that being interviewed about personal illness experiences prompts such reflections in some men, whether in sole or joint settings.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Many of these interviews involved couples talking about pregnancy and childbirth, in which all concerned are likely to have seen the woman's experiences as the firsthand ones. Additionally, in the majority of cases, the interviewer was a woman. These facts, added to the fact that interest in health issues is in general often associated with women, may explain some of our findings. Thus, contrary to concerns that the joint interview setting might result in dominance by men (Arksey 1996), our results show that women in the joint interviews that we have studied are more likely to achieve quantitative dominance, perhaps because women were acknowledged by their partners (and by the interviewer) to be the most appropriate reporters of this type of experience. This explanation may also be applied to the finding that men in sole interviews were more likely than women to speak about joint experience (reflected in greater use of *we*, *us*, etc.). Women in sole interviews clearly interpreted the inquiry as being about their own personal experience (reflected

in their greater use of I/me words), their reference to joint experience increasing when they were interviewed in joint settings. Clearly, men's readiness to talk about themselves separately from their joint identity within a couple was less than that of women, and this may be particularly because of the topics covered in these interviews as well as cues conveyed by the interviewers. If researchers want to find out about men's personal experiences of illness and fatherhood, it may be better to interview them on their own and to ask questions that maintain a focus on men's rather than a couple's experiences.

The absence of male dominance is also indicated by the findings about markers of attentiveness, agreement, and support for the other speaker. Men are particularly likely to produce these markers, and this is not because they are using them as part of a strategy to disrupt or dominate interaction, either in joint or sole settings. Although it seems likely that this is related to the listening role of men in joint interviews where women do most of the talking, it is also possible that men, when questioned (largely by female interviewers) about personal experience, are particularly concerned to support the interaction. Perhaps they would be different if asked to demonstrate expertise in another kind of topic, and it is possible that the studies reviewed by Coates (2004), showing men to be prone to interrupting others or ignoring them, came from such fields.

Our analysis supports the view that joint interviewing reduces certain "traditional" gender differences that are otherwise evident in one-to-one interviews. The literature shows it to be well established that when discussing illness experience as well as a variety of other topics, women tend to speak about a wider range of other people than men and discuss feelings more. The effect of joint interviewing on these differences is to reduce them, with our evidence suggesting that men and women move toward each others' topic preferences. The same can be said of discussions of gender and information technology, in which men in sole interviews exhibit a well-documented tendency to express more interest in this than women (Locock and Alexander 2006) but where joint interviewing reduces the difference, partly because women start to talk about this topic more. The findings for telecommunications talk are only somewhat supportive of the general picture of gender accommodation in joint interviews.

Although it might be concluded from this that the joint setting is experienced by men as one in which unfamiliar gendered norms are experienced, the findings on expressions of unfamiliarity only provide weak support for this view. Rather, they suggest that men in both sole and joint interview settings (and remember that the interviewer in all but one pair of interviews was a woman, so the sole settings themselves were not single sex environments) had some awareness that the topic of personal health and illness experience was leading them into areas where gendered expectations are commonly contested.

From the viewpoint of a sociolinguist interested in the effect of mixed settings on language choices, we must note that we have not compared mixed settings with pure single-sex settings. In all cases but one, the interviewer was female, so most of the sole interviewed men were, technically speaking, in a mixed setting. This possibly explains why *we* usage was common in the male sole interviews or why men appear particularly concerned to use markers of attentiveness and support. In other respects, though (e.g., swearing, fewer references to feelings or to other people), men in sole interviews conformed to what one might expect of a man in a single-sex setting. We suggest, therefore, that qualitative research interviews are a particular form of "institutional talk" (Heritage 2004), in which the gendered identity of an interviewer, following norms of professional behavior that largely involve elicitation and acceptance of the other, is experienced by respondents as somewhat less salient than that of a marital partner, Our sole interviews with male respondents are therefore likely to have been experienced as gender-neutral environments by men, contrasting with interviews in which their female partners were also involved, which will have been experienced as true mixed-gender settings.

Our analytic method means that we have focused largely on differences in vocabulary and topic content rather than on interactions and conversational sequences. The findings, too, may be limited in their relevance for interviewing outside the health field or where joint interviewing does not also involve the mixing of genders. Nevertheless, we hope that our comparative analytic approach may prove useful in future studies of other kinds of joint interviews. Within the limitations described above, it is clear that our method delivers a systematic comparison of different interview settings, shedding some light on the responses of men and women to mixed-sex joint interviewing about health-related experiences. This, we hope, will be of interest both to sociolinguists interested in the general effects of mixed-sex settings on the performance of gender and to qualitative social researchers planning studies that involve interviews.

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