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Kevin Whitehead; G RAYMOND; Brett Bowman

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Cross-Cutting Preferences in Interactional Trajectories Toward Violence[1]

Kevin A. Whitehead and Geoffrey Raymond
University of California, Santa Barbara

Brett Bowman
University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg

Contemporary scholarship on violence has offered contradictory accounts for its situated production in interaction, with some proposing that it is difficult to carry out and others contending that most violence is motivated by ostensibly pro-social moral imperatives. We address this puzzle using video recordings of mundane and institutional occasions of violence to document two normative preferences that have "cross-cutting" implications for possible trajectories toward violence once its use has been projected. First, participants orient to a preference for producing violent actions that are, or claim to be, responsive to another's violent action and thus defensive. Second, participants orient to a cross-cutting preference that privileges progress toward the realization of physical violence once it has been projected. Our analysis of participants' management of these preferences both elucidates some systematic features of the social organization of (potentially) violent conflicts and extends conversation analytic findings regarding preference organization.

INTRODUCTION

Despite the long-term trend toward pacification and away from violence in managing social relations (Elias 1994; Pinker 2012), recent social commentary (see, e.g., Osnos 2020; Homans 2021; Palmer and Zick 2021; Sargent

[1] Kevin A. Whitehead is also a Visiting Associate Professor at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. The research reported in this article was supported in part by

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2022) has documented the increasing prominence of threats and uses of violence across a range of political, institutional, and other social conflicts. Scholarship on violent conduct has thus taken on a renewed urgency. Contemporary research in this area has been advanced by carefully examining the features of violent situations. As Collins (2008, pp. 1–2; cf. Goffman 1967) notes, this involves analyzing "not violent individuals, but violent situations. . . . We seek the contours of situations, which shape the emotions and acts of the individuals who step inside them. It is a false lead to look for types of violent individuals, constant across situations. A huge amount of research has not yielded very strong results here." In attempting to better understand the mechanisms shaping the course of violent situations, much research has offered one of two seemingly opposing accounts for the situated production of violent conduct. The first of these emphasizes that violence is difficult to carry out, describing situational barriers or constraints against its production, while the second emphasizes how situational factors may promote, justify, or even require violent conduct. In what follows, we review the most influential scholarship advancing each of these contrasting explanatory frameworks, before presenting a social-interactional framework for the analysis of violent situations and conduct that encompasses and advances them. Crucially, the framework we advance can incorporate the various cognitive, emotional, motivational, and relational factors emphasized in the substantial corpus of prior scholarship. It does so by specifying an

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interactional-moral framework administered by participants in occasions where violence is threatened or used, thereby systematically treating violence as an exceptional resource that can nonetheless be accountably deployed by reference to situated circumstances.

BARRIERS VERSUS INDUCEMENTS TO VIOLENCE

Early research on the situational dimensions of violence (e.g., Luckenbill 1977; Felson and Steadman 1983; Dobash and Dobash 1984; Katz 1988; Felson and Tedeschi 1993) demonstrated the value of applying interaction-sensitive analysis to interviews, criminal case files, and court transcripts to identify underlying orders of violent social action. Using increasingly available video and photographic data, along with various forms of ethnographic materials, Collins (2008, 2009, 2012, 2013, 2019, 2022) emphasizes the situated, microinteractional foundations of violence. A central implication of Collins's influential theory is that violence is difficult to accomplish. Specifically, Collins (2008, p. 19) argues that an "emotional field of tension and fear"—which he calls *confrontational tension/fear* (*ct/f*)—arises when actors are faced with the possibility of engaging in violent conduct, as a consequence of humans being "hard-wired for interactional entrainment and solidarity" (Collins 2008, p. 27). He thereby proposes an evolved physiological factor, manifesting as *ct/f*, which "inhibit[s] most violence from happening" and renders most violence that does occur "incompetent at hitting its desired targets" (Collins 2009, p. 567). The centrality of *ct/f* in Collins's theorizing and analysis can be appreciated in his attendant focus on violence as "a set of pathways around confrontational tension and fear" (Collins 2008, p. 8). These pathways include "(1) finding a weak victim, especially a victim who is emotionally dominated; (2) orienting to an audience that encourages a small number of performers of violence; (3) remaining at a distance to launch weapons without having to confront the enemy face-to-face; (4) a clandestine approach which pretends there is no conflict until the very last instant" (Collins 2013, p. 136).

Collins's central analytic framework thereby emphasizes the import of *ct/f* as a barrier to the production of violence across a range of occasions, from ones in which violence is "ugly and morally despicable" to others where "the violence is honorable, happy, ebullient, or at least in an in-between zone where it is socially excused and covertly encouraged" (Collins 2008, p. 33). Thus, although Collins acknowledges these variations in the moral status of violence, his primary analytic focus is on situated emotional factors as constraints on its production. Collins's theory has guided a substantial number of subsequent studies across a range of settings and types of violence (e.g., Klusemann 2012; Weenink 2014, 2015; McCleery 2016; Bramsen 2018; Mosselman, Weenink, and Lindegaard 2018; Nassauer 2018, 2019),

reflecting its prominence as a framework for social scientific studies of violence.

In contrast to Collins's foregrounding of the social-psychological barriers to the production of violent actions, Fiske and Rai (2015) argue that most violence can be accounted for by moral injunctions that propel participants *toward* acting violently. Drawing on an approach rooted in moral psychology, coupled with examination of a range of different types and sites of violence, both historical and contemporary, they argue that violence is "morally motivated to regulate social relationships" (Fiske and Rai 2015, p. 301)—and thus, "people often judge—and feel—that it is good to do violence to others" (Fiske and Rai 2015, p. 191). In this view, rather than needing to overcome the types of emotional and moral constraints Collins identifies in order to act violently, "when people hurt or kill someone, they usually do so because they feel they ought to: they feel that it is morally right or even obligatory to be violent" (Fiske and Rai 2015, p. xxii). Thus, while Collins's account focuses on how violence is difficult to accomplish, Fiske and Rai's account suggests that in certain circumstances it may be difficult *not* to act violently (also see, e.g., Luckenbill 1977; Katz 1988; Anderson 1999; Jones 2004;Wikström and Treiber 2009; Jackson-Jacobs 2013; Labov 2013; Mann 2019).

A key feature shared by both Collins's and Fiske and Rai's frameworks is that they disattend the situated reasoning and actions through which participants, on a moment-by-moment basis, manage and contest the moral evaluations and other situational features of violent conduct foregrounded by their respective frameworks (cf. Martin 2011). That is, both frameworks start from the assumption that analysts can readily identify such features in relation to particular violent occasions under examination and that they remain stable throughout a situation's unfolding. They thereby treat the situation as a "static field" (Goodwin and Heritage 1990, p. 289) by reference to which psychological (emotional, motivational, cognitive, etc.) factors find their expression in social conduct (also see Heritage 1984; Maynard and Heritage 2023). Consequently, these scholars treat the antagonistic actions that are recurrently associated with conflictual encounters as largely uninformative for their theorizing of violence. For example, Collins (2008, p. 24) characterizes such actions as formulaic and distinct from violence itself (cf. Lloyd 2017), claiming that they constitute "ritual patterns of bluster and bluff . . . [that] provide an ideology that covers up the real nature of violence." Fiske and Rai (2015, p. 24), on the other hand, recognize the occurrence of practices like "insults, taunting and cursing" that may precede violence, but they treat these practices as simply a product of the same motivational processes that produce violence, and they bracket it out of further examination on that basis.

In contrast, we contend that these types of ostensibly ritualized patterns of antagonistic conduct are part of the warp and weft of violent occasions

and thus warrant close analysis if we are to explicate the social dynamics of such occasions. This enables us to focus on how participants contend in situ with the moral status of their actions over the course of an encounter, how this moral status can shift as a consequence of their conduct, and how participants' definitions of the situation can thus change from one moment to the next. In this way, the practices of "bluster and bluff" can be appreciated as interventions in the situation that participants can use to renew or transform the moral status of (de-)escalation in relation to possible violence—and yet nevertheless are treated by participants as distinct from physical violence itself. Thus, rather than treating the situation or context of violence as distinct from the violent actions contingently produced "within" them, our approach treats the relationship between context and action as reflexively and dynamically constituted (cf. Heritage 1984; Goodwin and Heritage 1990; Maynard and Heritage 2023). In this way, our approach takes seriously Fiske and Rai's (2015) demonstration that every culture provides for the occasioned, moral use of violence. However, rather than examining cultural or motivational variations in such matters, we take up a more fundamental matter: the situational parameters participants must take into account in proposing that violence may be a morally relevant form of conduct and/or in managing their conduct once another participant has done so—and thereby how participants evaluate the alignment between situated conduct and what their culture or institution may treat as morally prescribed or warranted uses of violence. The social-interactional framework we thereby advance reveals that participants cannot avoid contending with competing social demands that simultaneously morally prohibit and morally compel violent conduct. These dynamics, and the shifting moralities they entail, may in turn be consequential for how antagonists come to be viewed as perpetrators, victims, aggressors, cowards, bullies, and the like—both by participants and scholars.

A SOCIAL-INTERACTIONAL FRAMEWORK

The framework we introduce here takes into account a number of readily observable features of (potentially) violent encounters, which we then examine in further detail in relation to our data in the analysis that follows. First, while some social scientists treat incidents of violence as a form of social chaos or "disorder" (e.g., Sampson and Raudenbush 1999), a number of previous ethnomethodological and conversation analytic studies of the interactional organization of violent encounters (e.g., Lloyd 2017; Elsey, Mair, and Kolanoski 2018; Whitehead, Bowman, and Raymond 2018; Lloyd and Mlynář 2021; Weenink, Tuma, and van Bruchem 2022; Raymond, Chen, and Whitehead 2023) demonstrate that they are orderly at a fine-grained level of detail. This is evident in our data in the ways that

participants systematically work to establish the moral legitimacy and meaning of their violence by positioning it as a *responsive* action—and thereby produced as purposeful and socially organized, if not always competent, conduct.

Second, as Goffman (1964) observed, although talk (including conflicts conducted through talk) and violence may co-occur in the same encounter, they are *alternative* means for conducting social action. These alternatives are not equal, however. Talk is the basic vehicle for social action in interaction (Schegloff 2006) and a primary means by which humans pursue projects, invoke identities, manage social relations, produce, manage, and alter institutional realities, and so on (cf. Schegloff 2006; Heritage and Clayman 2010). Violence is an *alternative* to talk and is often surrounded by it and/or used simultaneously with it. The use of violence, however, entails an escalation that implies talk has failed, or is insufficient on its own, and thus that the antagonist using violence contends some more extreme resource than talk is required. In contrast, in mundane (i.e., ordinary, noninstitutional) settings where one or more parties use violence *without talk*, this fact may be a defining feature of it. This distinction between pursuing conflict through threats and/or uses of violence versus through other forms of talk or conduct is consistent with the treatment of violence by legal frameworks, scholars across a wide range of disciplines, and (as we show in the analysis that follows) everyday actors as a domain of conduct that is distinct from other methods for pursuing conflicts—but one whose use is nevertheless sometimes morally warranted.

Third, like talk and other forms of embodied conduct, violence takes a fundamentally *indexical* form (Garfinkel 1967; Heritage 1984). That is, no matter how conventional or apparently scripted it may appear to be, violence does not have stable, trans-situational meanings. Nevertheless, how violence is placed by reference to the talk and other conduct that accompanies it, along with the practices and methods used to compose and direct it, may claim bases for its use, meaning, and moral status *as* social action—although others may dispute these claims. As with other forms of social action, the problems of producing an adequate analysis of violence can be addressed by reference to the interpretive question it poses for participants in light of the relevance of formulating an appropriately fitted next action: "Why that now?" (see, e.g., Schegloff and Sacks 1973; Schegloff 2007).

Fourth, violence and the threats that project its imminent use transform and dominate the occasions in which they occur. That is, violence and threats of violence become not only a defining feature of the interactions in which they occur, but their use places those involved in such encounters in a situation of choice: Virtually anything they do—including doing nothing at all—will be understood by reference to it. More generally, once one or more participants projects the use of violence, an orientation to this

becomes the predominant preoccupation of the participants until the use or threats of violence dissipate and participants resolve its import—a process that may endure beyond the boundaries of the specific occasion on which it occurs.

We propose that the orderly nature of occasions in which one or more participants projects or uses violence emerges, in part, from the participants' use of a set of interdependent forms of social organization to compose and make sense of conduct within those encounters (for an overview, see Schegloff [2006]). In particular, our analysis demonstrates the heightened salience of two "preferences"—forms of social organization that promote one outcome over others—relating to threats and/or uses of violence. On such occasions, participants systematically orient to these preferences as having "cross-cutting" (Schegloff 2007, p. 76) import in shaping the subsequent trajectory of the encounter, including whether, when, and how violence comes to be used. As we illustrate below, these basic forms of social organization, and the contingencies to which they are addressed, can be used as resources in developing an analytic framework for studying the real-time unfolding of (potentially) violent encounters. We turn first, however, to a brief overview of their constituent elements and features.

(CROSS-CUTTING) PREFERENCE STRUCTURES IN SEQUENCES OF ACTION

Conduct within interaction is composed through sequences of actions, which consist largely of initiating and responsive actions (Schegloff 2007). As Schegloff (2007) and other conversation analysts (e.g., Pomerantz 1978; Sacks and Schegloff 1979; Heritage 1984; Pomerantz 1984) have demonstrated, such sequences are pervasively shaped by a range of "preferences" that promote one possible outcome over others. For example, in responding to invitations, acceptance is preferred over declination; in responding to requests, granting is preferred over denial; in responding to commands, compliance is preferred over resistance, and so on. In such cases, the possible alternatives are systematically treated by participants as asymmetrical, with responses that align or affiliate with the course of action set in motion by an initiating action treated as "preferred" and those that depart from it treated as "dispreferred."

It is important to note that the conversation analytic use of these terms is not designed to imply that preferred actions are those that participants *psychologically* desire—nor that dispreferred actions are those that participants necessarily dislike. Instead, they refer to a *structural* relationship between first and second pair parts of action sequences—and the socially constituted expectations embodied therein—which participants reveal they are oriented to through the differential practices they use in producing aligning

versus disaligning actions. That is, aligning actions are produced as structurally preferred through participants systematically delivering them immediately and in simple or unelaborated forms, while disaligning actions are systematically delayed, mitigated, and elaborated by accounts and thereby produced by participants as structurally dispreferred (Heritage 1984; Schegloff 2007).

A further feature of preference structures is that for some sequential contexts and/or action types participants may have to contend with multiple preferences, which may be cross-cutting, meaning that the multiple preferences set in motion by an initiating action cannot be simultaneously satisfied in a responsive action—such that a response that is preferred in relation to one set of preferences will unavoidably be dispreferred in relation to another (Schegloff 2007). For example, Pomerantz's (1978) classic study of responses to compliments demonstrates how participants treat compliments as a type of assessment, with agreement being a preferred response, as well as orienting to a constraint against self-praise that renders agreement with a compliment a dispreferred response. Since these competing constraints cannot be simultaneously satisfied by either agreement or disagreement, participants routinely struggle to respond to compliments and deploy a range of practices in doing so (including praise downgrades, reassignments of praise, and return compliments) that serve to manage, and in the process display, their orientations to the cross-cutting preferences at play (Pomerantz 1978; also see Raymond 2003; Schegloff 2007).

Building on these findings, we examine in the analysis that follows how participants in our data manage, and thereby display their orientations to, what they treat as normative (i.e., morally enforced) expectations for how conflicts should unfold once one or both parties has projected the use of physical violence. Our analysis demonstrates that participants systematically orient to a constraint against initiating the use of violence—that is, they orient to a preference for using violence only as a responsive action. This is consistent with Fiske and Rai's (2015) theory of virtuous violence, with participants maintaining a distinction between violence that defends a moral order against extreme threats and violence used aggressively without just cause. This is also consistent with well-known legal allowances for the use of force when acting in self-defense as well as with commonsense moral understandings in relation to blame associated with both perpetrators of aggressive violence and parties seen as responsible for the initiation of nonviolent conflicts or arguments—as shown by admonishments such as "You started it!" and "Don't start with me!" Moreover, it is consistent with research that examines the moral and interactional organization of the initiation of both violent and nonviolent conflicts (e.g., Maynard 1985; Goodwin and Goodwin 1990; Dersley and Wootton 2000; Reynolds 2011; Lloyd 2017; Whitehead et al. 2018; Maynard 2019; Afshari Saleh 2020; Clift and

Pino 2020; Joyce 2022; Weenink et al. 2022; Raymond et al. 2023) and research that has demonstrated the distinctions participants systematically make between producing initiating versus responsive actions across a range of action types (e.g., Heritage and Raymond 2005; Schegloff 2007). Nevertheless, as we show, participants have to manage in real time how their conduct may come to be viewed as initiating or responsive—defensive or aggressive—and the practices they can deploy in order to manage its sequential positioning.

In addition, however, we find that participants systematically orient to a second, cross-cutting preference that poses countervailing pressures *toward* the realization of physical violence once it has been projected. That is, once at least one party has threatened or invited it—whether explicitly or through conduct that tacitly projects its production—progress toward violence is treated as expected and movement away from it is treated as an accountable alternative on two contrasting bases.[2] First, threatening to use violence where it is not deemed to be morally provided for can be cast as abusive or bullying. Second, failing to use violence where it is morally expected can occasion charges of cowardice. Importantly, both of these bases serve to retain violence as a form of social conduct reserved for exceptional circumstances and thereby constrain its use. That is, parties who seek to avoid being seen as abusive, bullying, or cowards by reference to this preference will threaten or otherwise project violence only if they deem its use to be morally warranted or even required. This preference is also consistent with—and provides a granular specification of—observations regarding the progressive realization of many other courses of action conducted via talk and other body behavior, where abandoning a course of action may be treated as accountable and associated with negative inferences, commentary, sanctioning, and the like in relation to the character, beliefs, or other qualities of one or more of the parties involved (see, e.g., Schegloff 1979; Heritage 1984; Schegloff 2006; Stivers and Robinson 2006; Heritage 2007; Schegloff 2007; Raymond and Lerner 2014; Lerner and Raymond 2021). In keeping with this line of research, we will refer to this as a preference for progressivity.

As our analysis shows, much of what previous scholars have observed about violent encounters can be understood in terms of participants' simultaneous management of these cross-cutting structural preferences for responsive violence and progressivity and the practices they deploy in the course of struggling to do so. Specifically, we demonstrate that participants systematically orient to these preferences across a number of distinct,

[2] In describing conduct as "accountable," we mean that parties systematically treat the conduct as intelligible and as either requiring explanation or, in the absence of such, as informative about the moral character of the actor (also see Heritage 1984).

endogenously organized interactional trajectories that (potentially) violent encounters may follow. In this way, our analysis both elucidates some systematic structural features of the interactional and moral organization of such occasions and, by explicating previously undocumented features of the preference for progressivity, extends the foundational conversation analytic findings on preference organization described in the foregoing discussion.

DATA AND METHOD

The data on which our analysis is based are drawn from a larger dataset consisting of over 450 "opportunistic third party videos" (Jones and Raymond 2012)—that is, video recordings that were not produced by researchers or for research purposes but that have been made publicly accessible via social media platforms such as YouTube, Twitter, and Reddit. The videos were located using a purposive sampling procedure (see, e.g., Silverman and Marvasti 2008) implemented by entering search terms such as "fight," "conflict," "argument," and "violence."

In developing the analysis reported in this article, we screened the dataset and selected a subset of recordings that excludes those showing scripted interactions (e.g., from films or TV shows), those in which the recording of the encounter started too late or ended too soon to permit examination of the moments at which violence is first projected and the subsequent interactional trajectories on which the present analysis focuses, and those in which the quality of the video and/or audio was insufficient for the purpose of the type of detailed analysis we conducted. While this screening eliminated a substantial proportion of the larger collection of videos, it nonetheless afforded us a usable set of over 150 recordings, encompassing a range of everyday settings, including streets, parks, beaches, stores, restaurants, bars, school and university campuses and classrooms, buses, and trains. This set of recordings includes cases of conflicts in which violence is neither projected nor used, cases in which violence is in some way projected by one or more antagonists but ultimately no violent action is produced, and cases in which one or more parties uses physical violence. Moreover, the subset of cases where violence is used include those in which this is preceded by verbal conflict as well as those in which violence is used abruptly and without any apparent immediately prior conflict or other conduct that projects or anticipates it. The recordings thereby allow for the examination of both interactional trajectories in which violence emerges as well as mechanisms through which violence could be averted or forestalled despite having been treated by at least one participant as a potential outcome.

The recordings appear in virtually all cases to have been produced using cell phone video cameras, with the participants (in addition to the person filming the exchange) ranging from only two antagonists to different combinations

of numbers of individuals making up each conflicting party, rising as high as hundreds of individuals in some cases, such as in the context of large-scale political or sporting events. In some cases, the participants appear to have been completely unknown to each other, while in others there is evidence of varying degrees of familiarity ranging from acquaintance (e.g., among school or university classmates) to close friendship, family, and/or romantic relationships.

Based on these variations within the dataset, the "types" of violence that are either projected or produced in the recordings, in terms of the typologies developed by violence scholars (e.g., Galtung 1969; Krug et al. 2002; Hamby and Grych 2013), include both interpersonal (e.g., family, intimate partner, and community violence) and collective (e.g., police and other types of state violence), as well as both instrumental (e.g., robbery) and expressive (e.g., affect-based) violence. Despite the ways scholars differentiate and contest these types of violence, we have focused on commonalities across them in order to describe a basic, but modifiable, moral and inferential framework that participants use to make sense of violent conduct.

Notwithstanding this range of variations across our dataset, the data are neither designed nor claimed to be statistically representative of (potentially) violent occasions as a whole or of particular types of such occasions, and our analysis makes no claim regarding the distribution or relative frequencies of these practices across specific settings, populations, or categories (including demographic) of participants. This does not preclude the possibility of quantification for the purpose of distributional or other statistical analyses in future studies, but a precondition for doing so is, as Schegloff (1993) notes, the development of detailed (qualitative) analyses that will enable the meaningful subsequent coding and counting of the phenomena at hand. We thus focus in the present report on providing analyses of the produced orderliness that underpins the exchanges we examine and thereby on the ways that action and context are reflexively and dynamically constituted. This involves initially examining cases of conflicts in mundane copresent interactional occasions in order to describe a locally organized, party-administered framework that participants use in producing and making sense of violence (or threats thereof) and that they hold others morally accountable for similarly using (also see, e.g., Garfinkel 1967; Heritage 1984)—including by demonstrating that in "deviant cases" participants treat the absence of conduct and/or orientations associated with this framework as accountable (also see, e.g., Heritage 1984; Schegloff 1996). In focusing initially on mundane occasions of interaction, we adopt a well-established comparative method grounded in the specification of a basic and foundational form of interaction—glossed by conversation analysts as "ordinary conversation"—that is produced through a set of basic and interdependent forms of social organization, including action formation, turn taking, sequence organization, and

repair (Schegloff 2006, 2007). Such occasions constitute a primary, and primordial, site of both human sociality in general (Schegloff 2006) and violent conduct more specifically. This makes them a key site for establishing the basic contours of the inferential and moral framework for violence (or threats thereof) on which we focus.

Such occasions can also be compared with "institutional" interactions, which are "talked into being" (Heritage and Clayman 2010, p. 3) through systematic modifications (e.g., reduction and specialization) of the practices and orientations of participations that emerge from their adaptation to the exigencies of institutional occasions and expectations (also see Raymond's [2003] use of this approach in analyzing yes/no interrogatives). We illustrate this contrast by comparing the use or threats of violence in mundane interactional occasions with their use in police encounters with members of the public (cf. Drew and Heritage 1992), drawing on video data from a large database of dashboard and body camera recordings, which is described in greater detail in Raymond et al. (2022), Jones et al. (2023), and Raymond et al. (2023).

Our analysis was conducted through detailed conversation analytic examinations of the interactional unfolding of the recordings, aided by transcripts produced using the system developed by Gail Jefferson (2004).[3] This approach is based on inductive examination of the moment-by-moment unfolding of recorded interactions, focusing on the structures and practices used by participants and grounding analytic claims in the observable orientations revealed in participants' production of successive actions (see, e.g., Schegloff 2007). Following the procedure described in Schegloff (1996), we built collections of instances of the distinct interactional trajectories evident across our dataset (also see Clift and Raymond 2018; Whitehead 2020). We then systematically analyzed these collections, identifying in the process the participants' evident orientations to the cross-cutting preferences described above and iteratively developing and refining our analyses by testing them against additional cases in the dataset. The specific cases we present in the following sections were selected to provide the clearest possible illustrations of the findings generated from the entire set of recordings, while also demonstrating some of the range and types of variations evident between cases within the dataset. The video recordings of the cases we analyze below are available through a cloud storage drive,[4] and readers are encouraged to examine them alongside our analyses in order to independently verify the validity of our claims. We have also included arrays of screenshots showing the unfolding of key parts of the exchanges to provide readers who prefer

[3] We have used pseudonyms for all participants whose talk is included in the transcripts and/or who are referred to in the accompanying analyses.

[4] https://doi.org/10.7910/DVN/M0DU6X.

not to watch the recordings with a measure of visual access to the features of embodied conduct we describe in our analyses.

In keeping with the principles of our conversation analytic approach, we have not routinely categorized the participants in our data as members of the various social categories commonly used in sociological analyses unless we could warrantably ground such categorizations in the conduct and orientations of the participants themselves—whether explicitly or implicitly (see, e.g., Schegloff 1997*b*; Whitehead 2020). However, in cases where such categories were evidently consequential for the conduct of the participants in relation to our analyses of the interactional trajectories we identified, we have identified them as such prior to the corresponding data extracts in order to aid readers in anticipating and following the subsequent analyses.

ANALYSIS

We begin by considering the range of practices through which participants engaged in a conflict can project the imminent use of violence and how their use can transform and dominate the occasion, and conflict, in which they are produced. Participants treat an initial use of these practices by one or more antagonists as implicating a marked shift in the tenor of the occasion and what range of actions could be expected from those involved and/or in close enough proximity to become involved. In addition, participants treat subsequent uses of these practices as maintaining or reinstating progressivity toward the use of violence. They include (1) repeated and/or escalating threats of violence, challenges and invitations to another party to act violently, and other violence-promoting verbal actions; (2) movement into close(r) physical proximity; and (3) other embodied displays of readiness to fight. While these practices rarely, in our data, occasion immediate moves to violent conduct, their use transforms the antagonists' and other participants' circumstances insofar as they now treat movement either toward or away from violence as morally accountable matters. It is in this way that such moves dominate, for the participants, the occasions in which they are deployed, insofar as they become the primary context to which subsequent actions are oriented. This can be appreciated in the range of trajectories that emerge from their use, which we analyze in terms of participants' orientations to the cross-cutting preferences that—as we have noted above—are introduced by the projected use of violence. These trajectories include the emergence of "sequential standoffs" (also see Raymond et al. 2023); one or both parties withdrawing from the conflict (in some cases followed by their return and reengagement); and the use of violent actions by one or both parties (cf. the trajectories for closings of verbal family conflicts described by Vuchinich [1990]).

We contrast this predominant set of trajectories with a minority of cases in which one party produces a violent action without projecting or revealing in some way that they are about to do so. These instances of "unprojected" violence constitute "deviant cases" by virtue of the party who produces the violent action apparently disregarding the cross-cutting preferences that participants in cases of the other trajectories treat as constraining their conduct. However, *other* participants in the scenes in these cases systematically treat these violent actions as violating the normative constraints associated with these preferences, thereby reproducing them as the prevailing moral framework for the interpretation of violent actions even when an antagonist has chosen to depart from them.

Throughout our analyses of these trajectories, we also consider the actions and orientations of third parties, which may significantly contribute to whether and how participants move toward or away from violence following its projected use. While there is a substantial existing literature addressing the impact of third-party interventions on the situated unfolding of violent conflicts (e.g., Levine, Taylor, and Best 2011; Parks et al. 2013; Philpot et al. 2020), our present concern with these interventions is focused on the further evidence they provide for participants' systematic orientations to the cross-cutting preferences we have described.

Sequential Standoffs

In our data, the projected use of violence by one or more of the antagonists recurrently emerges in, and as the basis for, sequential standoffs (also see Wagner-Pacifici 2000; Raymond et al. 2023). As Wagner-Pacifici (2000, p. i) notes, participants in standoffs organized by reference to the possible use of violence find themselves in a state of interaction that is "both frozen and continuing." Although Wagner-Pacifici analyzes occasions involving state and other institutional actors engaged in conflicts across a spatial divide, in the analysis that follows, we show how a similar state of frozen and continuing interaction can be observed in ordinary occasions of face-to-face conflict. We contend that in these occasions of close-quarter conflict—and potentially in conflicts more generally—the projected use of violence may not give rise to its immediate realization, in part because antagonists may struggle to manage the countervailing interpretive constraints on their conduct introduced above in our discussion of cross-cutting preferences. In contrast to sequential standoffs that may emerge in other (including cooperative) contexts, which are typically resolved within a few turns (Schegloff 2007; Raymond et al. 2023), the standoffs that emerge in conflicts where violence is threatened can be extended across many sequences of turns. The expansion of these standoffs emerges when parties to the conflict find themselves unable to advance a conflict to the point of violence or accountably

withdraw from its use. In lieu of either of these alternatives, one or more parties may seek to induce the other to engage in conduct that violates these constraints, including by using renewed threats of violence to intimidate the other into backing down or inviting them to be the first to produce violence. In this way, antagonists work to avoid any appearance that they may be withdrawing or backing down from the conflict, while also enabling them to position their own uses of physical violence as *responsive* actions.

Extract 1*a* below illustrates these features of sequential standoffs, as well as some of the other basic features of (potentially) violent occasions we have described above. Specifically, it demonstrates how participants in the scene register the projected use of violence, how this transforms and dominates the occasion, and how participants' orientations to the cross-cutting preferences associated with its use shape its possible emergence and meaning once it has been projected. This extract shows part of an evidently racialized conflict between residential neighbors, with the video starting at a point where the (white) party who lives upstairs (Alan, designated as "ALA" in the transcript below) comes down to confront the other (Black) party (Ben)—which Alan claims Ben has invited him to do (see line 12). Three other parties present in the scene—Corey (COR), Dwayne (DWA), and Elijah (ELI)—are not directly involved in the conflict but appear to be consociates of Ben. Alan's conduct—particularly his approach and the challenge and complaint (lines 1–4) he directs to Ben as he approaches—ratifies the escalation of the conflict that Alan claims Ben has invited. His arrival produces a sociophysical configuration that multiple participants observably treat as transforming the context by projecting the possible imminent use of violence. From this point forward, a standoff emerges in which each and every action produced by both the antagonists and others in the scene is observably oriented to this possibility of violence.

(1a) [427]

1 ALA: (W') ya gotta talk all that sh- ((A approaching B))
2 fuckin' shit f('r)?
3 (1.8)
4 ALA: Nobody likes listening to it.
5 (0.8)
6 COR: (what this?)
7 ALA: I a[in't fuckin' kidding around. ((A slows, stops in front of B))
8 BEN: [(Don') walk up on me (man,) don' walk up on me man.
9 (0.8)
10 BEN: Don't walk up on me man.
11 (0.5)
12 ALA: You're the one who invited me down h[ere.

13 DWA: [pt °°Go back in here.°°
14 BEN: ( )
15 DWA: °°Go°° back [in there.
16 COR: [He's fighting [da:d!
17 ELI: [Ay! Ay!
18 ALA: [How about you
19 ELI: [Ay! AY! (Hey!)
20 ALA: [fucking cool it?
21 ?: (He knows.)
22 (0.5)
23 BEN: Or what?
24 ALA: Or what? How about just fuckin' cool it on thi[s?)
25 BEN: [Or what?
26 (1.2)

The participants' orientations to the imminent use of violence can be observed most prominently in the conduct of the antagonists, whose actions systematically renew the relevance of a choice between escalation to the use of violence and withdrawing or backing down. Alan's use of the threat "I ain't fucking kidding" (line 7) as he moves into close physical proximity of Ben (see fig. 1) does this by displaying his preparedness to engage in violence if Ben does not back down. Ben's warnings as Alan steps toward him ("don't walk up on me"; lines 8 and 10) treat Alan's approach as a possible threat that could warrant the use of defensive violence by Ben. Alan's other-oriented directive to "fucking cool it" (lines 18–20 and 24) as he stands face-to-face with Ben and a few inches away from him (fig. 2) renews his proposal that Ben should back down and tacitly conveys his preparedness to act violently should Ben continue to fail to do so. Ben's counters to these admonitions ("or what"—lines 23 and 25), as he maintains his body position in the face of Alan's proximity (fig. 3), challenge Alan to choose between making explicit his thus far implicit threat or possible use of violence and backing down. Across these exchanges, the antagonists' actions are fundamentally preoccupied with the projected possible use of violence and its implications.

Others in the scene also clearly orient to the potential for imminent violence, treating it as a notable development: Dwayne, who is filming the exchange (an act that itself treats the occasion as noteworthy), anticipates that subsequent events may be dangerous or inappropriate for children, twice telling a toddler in the scene (Corey, who appears to be around two to three years old) to "go back in there" (lines 13 and 15). In seeking to intervene in the conflict, Elijah's "multiple sayings" (see Stivers 2004) treat the participants' movements as reflecting a further escalation. Even Corey orients to the imminent possibility of violence, exclaiming, "He's fighting dad!"



FIG. 1.—Alan moves into close physical proximity of Ben

(line 16). In this way, each of the participants treats the projected imminent use of violence as having transformed the occasion and thus what they are accountable for doing in light of it. In doing so, these parties also evidently track moment-by-moment shifts in the potential threat of violence. For example, Elijah's repeated interjections (lines 17 and 19) are timed to register Ben's shift to a "bladed" stance and unfolding of his arms (thereby adopting



FIG. 2.—Alan stands face-to-face with Ben

a ready-to-fight position—compare fig. 2 to fig. 1),[5] and Alan's responsive movement is designed to reestablish his proximity to Ben.

Despite this range of ways in which the participants repeatedly project or anticipate violence, and the antagonists move incrementally toward it,

[5] This is a stance in which one foot is placed in front of the other with the body at an angle minimizing exposure to a (potential) fighting opponent.



FIG. 3.—Ben maintains his body position in the face of Alan's proximity

an incipient standoff begins to emerge. This can be appreciated in further features of the antagonists' conduct described above: These actions are primarily produced as "counters" (Schegloff 2007, pp. 16–17)—that is, they avoid engaging with the choice posed by the other party (i.e., to further escalate the conflict versus to back down) by redirecting a related choice to them. For example, Ben counters Alan's admonitions (lines 1 and 4) with a warning

(line 8); Alan counters Ben's warnings (lines 8 and 10) with an accusation (line 12); and Ben counters Alan's directives (lines 18, 20, and 24) with challenges (lines 23 and 25). Each party's repeated verbatim and/or modified use of directives, threats, and challenges in pursuit of a response thereby reflects their difficulty in either advancing or resolving the conflict. While these actions involve incremental adjustments to their design and type, a sequential standoff emerges in which each party produces successive actions that maintain the conflict in a "frozen but continuing" state without either backing down or escalating it to the use of violence.

The emergence of this standoff arises from the antagonists' evident efforts to manage the cross-cutting constraints posed by the preferences for progressivity and responsive violence. On the one hand, they deploy practices that display an ongoing commitment to participating in the conflict, including by producing the violence that has been projected, while also making withdrawal by the other party accountable. On the other hand, each casts the other as the aggressor in the conflict, in part by inviting the other to be the first to produce violent conduct—the realization of which would warrant their own production of responsive violence. The cross-cutting nature of these preferences poses a bind for the antagonists that can be appreciated in their recurrent use of counters in lieu of responsive actions. The sequence-initiating actions each produces pose untenable choices for their recipients insofar as they make relevant responses (either producing a first violent action or backing down) that would necessarily violate one or the other set of preferences and would hence be morally sanctionable. The standoff thereby emerges and continues as each antagonist uses counters to redirect this fraught choice to the other.

Once a standoff has emerged, the practices antagonists deploy in managing the preferences for responsive violence and progressivity may prolong the standoff for an extended period of time. This can be observed in the continuing unfolding of the above encounter, shown in extract 1*b* below. Here both parties continue to produce situationally sensitive actions that cast the other as the aggressor, while also avoiding any implication that they may back down or withdraw from the conflict. This can be appreciated in an asymmetry between the antagonists that was apparent in extract 1*a* but that is further heightened in the part of the encounter shown in extract 1*b*: Ben recurrently challenges Alan to initiate the violence projected by having come down to confront Ben, and Alan repeatedly declines to either take up Ben's challenges or back down in the face of them, while positioning Ben as the conflict's provocateur.

(1b) [427]

24 ALA: Or what? How about just fuckin' cool it on thi[s?)

25 BEN: [Or what?

26 (1.2)

27 ALA: Like [I need to fuckin sock you up?
28 BEN: [°Or what?°
29 BEN: Do it!
30 (0.6)
31 ALA: I don't [ha:ve to.
32 BEN: [I dare you.
33 (0.3)
34 ALA: I don't ha:ve [to.
35 BEN: [I dare you.
36 (0.6)
37 BEN: Make your move!
38 (0.5)
39 BEN: Make your move, devil!
40 (.)
41 BEN: Make your move!
42 ALA: [I'm the devil [([ )
43 COR: [Yeah! [Do i[t!
44 BEN: [Make your move.
45 ALA: You're the one talking all the hate, and
46 I['m the devil?
47 BEN: [Make your move, bitch.
48 (0.5)
49 BEN: °Make it.°
50 (0.5)
51 BEN: °Make it.°
52 (2.5)

As in extract 1*a*, Ben's challenge (line 25) makes relevant Alan choosing between following through on the threat of violence posed by his approach or abandoning the project that it would pursue. In responding (line 27), Alan declines to do either while only explicitly disclaiming the necessity to produce violence and thereby disattending the possibility of backing down. Having established these contrasting, reciprocal positions, each antagonist continues to pursue the project of inducing the other's production of a first violent action: Ben continues to produce repeated challenges, including "Or what?" (line 28), "Do it!" (line 29), "I dare you" (lines 32 and 35), and "Make your move" (lines 37, 39, 41, 44, and 47), along with further pursuits of this ("Make it") in lines 49 and 51. In two cases (lines 39 and 47) these challenges are upgraded through Ben's use of race- ("devil")[6] and

[6] This term appears to be a contraction of "white devil," a way of referring to racist white people commonly attributed to civil rights icon Malcolm X (see, e.g., Segrest 2001; Butts 2024).

gender-based ("bitch") insults designed to position Alan as the aggressor (in the case of the former) or as having compromised his masculinity by failing to follow through on his earlier threats (also see Whitehead et al. 2018). In contrast, Alan rejects the premise of Ben's challenge (line 27), before responding to Ben's pursuits with a further account that asserts his autonomy to resist its implications (line 31, and again in line 34). Alan then counters Ben's implication that Alan is the aggressor by casting Ben as such (lines 42 and 45–46). We can also note that substantial periods of silence recurrently develop in places where responses by Alan are due (lines 26, 30, 33, 36, 38, 40, 48, 50, and 52). Such delays in responding further reflect Alan's difficulty in finding adequate ways of addressing Ben's challenges (cf. Drew 2005) and thus underscore his struggle to manage the cross-cutting preferences for progressivity and responsive violence (for further accounts of the association between delay and dispreference, see, e.g., Pomerantz 1978; Heritage 1984; Pomerantz 1984; Sacks 1987; Schegloff 2007).

Extracts 1*a* and 1*b* illustrate how the projected imminent use of violence transforms occasions by committing the party or parties who have done so to a choice between advancing to its use or being seen to have either failed to use it when it was warranted or resorted to threats of its use without adequate warrant—a pattern evident across cases in our data. Even where one or more antagonists have committed to using violence as a means of resolving a conflict, they must still manage its local accountable production in light of the cross-cutting preferences associated with its projected use. The practices we have observed in extracts 1*a* and 1*b* in the antagonists' production of threats, directives, warnings, challenges, invitations, and the like—while recurrently doing so in form of counters and pursuits—serve as systematic resources for shaping and reshaping the situated context of their moves to promote or avoid violence in ways that index these preferences. Thus, rather than constituting mere "bluster and bluff," or conduct separate and separable from the use of violence, the conduct of the antagonists in these cases—and the silences that punctuate it—reflects their efforts to manage the very conditions relevant for the accountable production of violence or for warranting withdrawal from the conflict in which it has been threatened.

Despite the possibility for standoffs to be maintained for extended periods, the conflicts during which they emerge must ultimately progress through one of the other trajectories we describe in the following sections. As we shall see, these alternative trajectories also exhibit participants' orientations to these cross-cutting preferences.

Withdrawals

In the previous section our analysis considered the constraints against both producing violence and withdrawing once it has been projected,

while focusing primarily on the practices designed to manage the former. An orientation toward the progressive realization of violence once it has been threatened can also be observed in conflicts where antagonists attempting to avoid the choice between escalation and standoff do so by seeking to withdraw. In such cases the remaining antagonist(s) and/or others in the scene may treat an apparent decision to unilaterally withdraw, thus avoiding violence, as an accountable matter. For example, participants may sanction or mock antagonists who physically withdraw, casting such action pejoratively as "backing down" (cf. Collins's [2008, p. 10] observations on "humiliating ways of backing down" as alternatives to the use of violence).

In many cases, the antagonist who has withdrawn exits the scene despite this sanctioning, thereby ending the interaction and thus the conflict without the use of violence that had been projected. Alternatively, in some cases, antagonists making an initial move toward withdrawal display a reluctance to follow through with this action by engaging in recurrent moves to resume the conflict, thereby rendering an apparent withdrawal merely temporary. The empirical details of withdrawals that are sustained and thereby end the conflict are, however, similar to those that are followed by reengagement. In this respect, we observe that withdrawals constitute *possible* completions of units of interaction—in this case conflicts—via exiting the encounters in which they have been pursued. Thus, like other units of interaction—for example, turns (Sacks, Schegloff, and Jefferson 1974), sequences (Schegloff 2007), and conversations (Schegloff and Sacks 1973)—their realization as *actual* completions or, alternatively, their resumption is contingent on the conduct and choices of the participants involved (also see, e.g., Whalen, Zimmerman, and Whalen 1988).

In order to illustrate features of withdrawals and how they may nonetheless be followed by reengagement and uses of violence, we examine a case, the first part of which is shown in extract 2*a*, in which both can be observed in a single encounter. In this case, a dispute on a bus has escalated to an exchange of threats, occasioning another passenger to begin recording it. The recording begins with a (white) antagonist, Brad, removing his jacket while in a bladed stance, in apparent preparation for escalation to the use of violence, while a (Black) antagonist, Alvin, stands in close proximity, facing him (line 1; fig. 4). In the immediately following moments, Alvin begins to initiate a withdrawal, turning away and reaching toward a nearby seat to gather his belongings, formulating this conduct in nonthreatening terms as he does so (line 4; fig. 5). In the unfolding of the exchange during and after Alvin's withdrawal, both parties orient to his conduct as specifically meaningful and sanctionable by reference to the ongoing expectation of violence—thus further demonstrating our observation that threats of violence transform and dominate the scenes in which they are produced.

(2a) [234]

((B removing jacket; A begins turning away))
ALV: (Forget you.)
BRA: Spare me. Spare me[:.]
ALV: [(I]mma) get my shit and get [outta here.]
BRA: [Spare me- G]et
your shit. Get your shit. Get your shit. >Get your shit<
[and g]et outta h[ere.]
ALV: [(Hey-)] [(I cou]ld you man.)
BRA: Get outta here.
(0.8)
BRA: (What,) / (>C'mon,<) Do it! >°Do it!°< Hit me, hit me, hit me
(do it, hit me, hit me.)<
(0.3)
BRA: >Hit me.<
ALV: Psh ((turns and begins to walk away))
BRA: [↑Come on!]
CAS: [This sh]it real!
BRA: Bitch!
(1.2)
BRA: (Get your) fuckin' ass off the bus.
(.)
BRA: ( ) punk!
(2.0)
BRA: You ain't sh[it.]
(ALV): [( )]
BRA: [(C'z) you're a chump, cuz you're a]
(ALV): [( )]
BRA: [chu]mp.
?: [( )]
(0.4)
ALV: (talk shi[t)]
BRA: [YOU WON'T DO] NOTHIN', DUDE, I WAS TAKIN'
MY COAT OFF AN' YOU (GONNA TRY FLEX YOUR MUSCLES) YOU'RE
NOTH[IN', >YOU'RE A LITTLE PUNK!<]
ALV: [↑ M A N , ↑ IF I'D H]IT YA I'DA KNOCKED
YA ASS OU:T!

As Alvin begins to step away, Brad issues a series of directives (lines 5–7) that repeat part of Alvin's formulation, using these repeats to characterize Alvin's withdrawal as having been directed by him, and therefore as a backdown by Alvin reflecting an accountable failure on his part to produce the threatened violence. This move by Brad occasions a return to a standoff:



FIG. 4.—Brad stands in a bladed stance and removes his jacket while Alvin stands in close proximity.

Alvin turns back toward Brad (figs. 6 and 7) and appears to formulate this move as a resumption of the conflict (line 8); Brad, who has stepped back, treats Alvin's action as reprojecting violence as he invites Alvin to follow through on what he has apparently threatened (lines 11–12, and 14). In this way, the earlier projected use of violence is retained by both parties as the



FIG. 5.—Alvin begins to initiate a withdrawal

primary framework for making sense of moves to both withdraw from and return to the conflict in which it occurred.

This iteration of the standoff ends when, following Alvin's audible dismissal of Brad's invitations (line 15), he again begins to move away from Brad (fig. 8). Notably, however, Alvin does not simply turn and walk away. Rather, his departure is characterized by "stutter steps" that embody an



FIG. 6.—Alvin returns to a standoff with Brad

alternating commitment to staying versus withdrawing as contrasting courses of action (see Raymond and Lerner 2014, pp. 238–42). His apparent struggle to advance either of these alternatives visibly embodies his inability to simultaneously satisfy the cross-cutting preferences with which he is contending. As Alvin eventually opts to resolve this dilemma by withdrawing, Brad resumes taunting him using various directives, epithets, and insults



FIG. 7.—Alvin and Brad continue a standoff

(lines 16, 18, 20, 22, 24, 26, 28, and 32–34) that further characterize his withdrawal as directed by Brad as evidence of Alvin's cowardice—that is, by proposing that Alvin has threatened violence that he is unwilling to actually produce. In particular, note Brad's insults that assert the type of category-based explanations for conduct in relation to violence examined by Whitehead et al. (2018) and also seen in extract 1*a* and 1*b*. These include one based



FIG. 8.—Alvin begins to move away from Brad

on gender (line 18) as well as "punk" (lines 22 and 34), which evidently derides Alvin as a coward and may also serve to mobilize race-, gender-, sexual orientation–, and/or age-based insults against him.[7] This constitutes a

[7] The word "punk" can be used in American slang to characterize someone as a child, a young and/or weak man, or an aggressive young criminal (see, e.g., Dalzell and Victor

further way in which, once it has been projected, the production of violence and its alternatives are treated as accountable—here by reference to participants' membership in one or more categories commonsensically presumed to be its motivational bases.

Alvin also accounts for his decision to withdraw (lines 35–36), claiming it to have been an act of mercy rather than cowardice. Although not explicitly mentioned by Alvin, the specific grounds he provides for walking away—that he would otherwise have knocked Brad out—may reflect his orientation to the relevance of race. That is, this account may be sensitive to his understanding of his "provisional status" as a Black person in a "white space" (see Anderson 2015, pp. 13–14) and how that might be consequential for him should he engage in a violent conflict that left Brad injured. This orientation, which becomes explicit later in the encounter (see extract 2*b* below), demonstrates a further way in which treating context as dynamically constituted can reveal how ostensibly situation-extrinsic contexts—in this case structural racism—can become relevant to participants as consequential local exigencies with which they must contend at particular moments in unfolding situations (also see Whitehead et al. 2018; Whitehead 2020).

In sum, both participants treat Alvin's withdrawal, and his attendant failure to produce the violence projected by his earlier conduct, as both morally fraught and accountable. Withdrawing parties can, and in many cases do, maintain their withdrawal despite the sanctioning they receive for doing so. However, in this and some other cases of withdrawals in our data, the apparently withdrawing party does not (and sometimes, as in this case, cannot) leave the scene altogether, which provides conditions that enable continued pursuit of the conflict, including moving back into a physical configuration in which violence can be used. This provides for the recurrent possibility that withdrawals, like standoffs, may ultimately be followed by uses of violence.

Uses of Violence

We now turn to cases in which one or both parties use violence, considering how such moves are sensitive to the cross-cutting preferences for responsive violence and progressivity. Specifically, we consider two predominant ways in which participants in our data warrant moves to the use of violence, each of which is accountable by reference to one of the two preferences and thereby constitutes further evidence for their import even in cases where

2013; Marti Solano 2013) and can thereby serve as a derogatory allusion to race and/or age. It is also used in African American slang more specifically as a derogatory reference for a gay or effeminate man or as a claim of cowardice (see, e.g., Bucholtz 1999; Nyong'o 2005).

violence is produced. Our analysis shows how antagonists can find ways out of the binds associated with these cross-cutting preferences and the standoffs they can give rise to.

First, participants can manage the preference for responsive violence by managing the sequential positioning of their violent conduct. As demonstrated by the cases we have examined already, participants can move closer to one another without actually making physical contact and then seek to draw the other into being the first to make contact using taunts and insults. However, their proximity and movement can also occasion apparently inadvertent or minimal forms of contact that may be treated by one party as a violent action by the other and thus as a warrant for a violent response (also see Katz 1988; Jackson-Jacobs 2013). An instance of this, shown in extract 1*c*, can be seen in the continuation of the conflict we examined in extract 1*a* and 1*b*. We resume immediately after the standoff we described in extract 1*b*, with Alan shifting his body position to step outside of Ben's stance and moving closer to Ben (fig. 9; cf. fig. 3). As Alan plants his left foot in making this move, Ben lifts and swings his right hand to deliver an open-handed slap to the side of Alan's head (line 56; figs. 10 and 11).

(1c) [427]

52 (2.5)
53 DWA: Go back in there [( )°
54 BEN: [(Touch/punch) me, devil.
55 ALA: ( )
56 (1.5) ((B slaps A))
57 BEN: Fuck that, you stepped on my ↑foot!
58 (1.0) ((A stepping back toward B))
59 BEN: Come on, get you so:me!

Following this slap, Ben produces an account (line 57) that positions it as having been responsive to physical contact initiated by Alan. This account formulates a breach by Alan of the taken-for-granted body boundary (also see, e.g., Cekaite and Mondada 2020) that Ben thereby treats as having a special relevance and import in conflicts such as this one, where the projected possible use of violence shifts the framework of accountability relative to the ways incidental contact in nonconflictual encounters may be readily excused with a minor apology, such as "excuse me" (see Heritage, Raymond, and Drew 2019). In this way, Ben accounts for his escalation to the use of violence by positioning it as defensive rather than aggressive. In delivering only one blow before resuming inviting Alan to produce violence (line 59), Ben calibrates his use of violence to the ostensible offense to which he produces it as responsive. Moreover, Ben treats the continued use of violence in



FIG. 9.—Alan shifts his body position to step outside of Ben's stance and moves closer to Ben

managing this conflict as an accountable matter, proposing that any additional uses of violence on his part would be similarly defensive in nature. In our data, accounts that position violence as responsive and thus defensive may be disputed by its recipients and others in the scene. In this respect, the validity of such accounts in any particular case is a concern for



FIG. 10.—Ben begins to slap Alan

participants, and their management thereof displays their orientation to the preference for responsive violence.

The second predominant way in which participants in our data warrant moves to the use of violence is by positioning it as arising from threats to

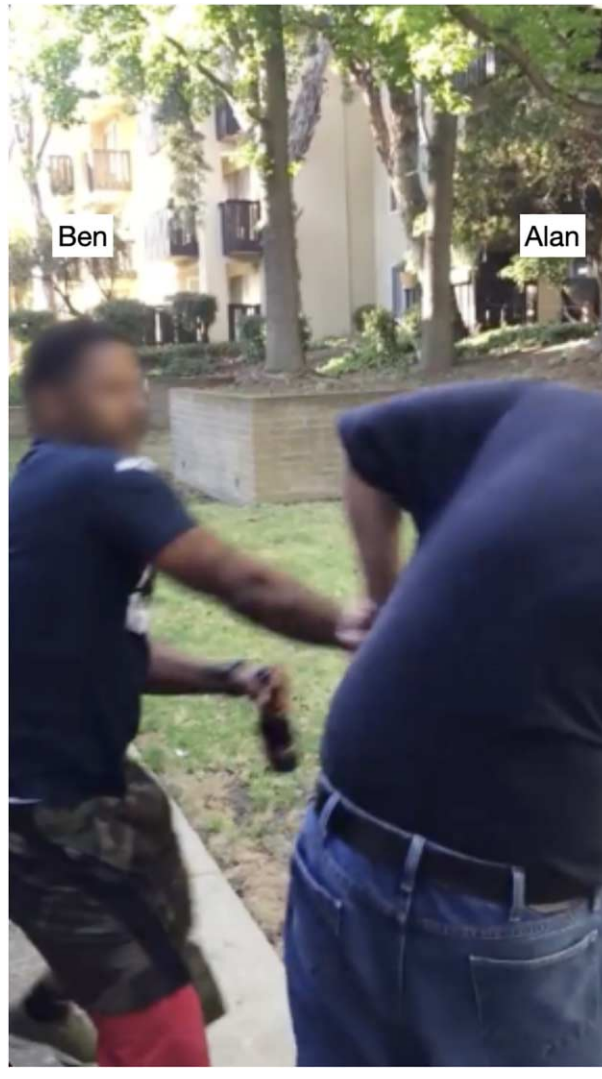


FIG. 11.—Ben completes the slap of Alan

moral order (cf. Fiske and Rai 2015) that mandate escalation to a first use of violence. For example, participants may deem sustained provocations, and particularly those using race, gender, sexual orientation, and other social categories (as shown in extracts 1 and 2) as requiring violent conduct, with the target thereby positioned as a member of a morally degraded category (cf. Garfinkel 1956; Goffman 1963) deserving of such treatment. An instance

of this is shown in extract 2*b*, which begins approximately 40 seconds after the end of extract 2*a*. During this time, Brad has continued to taunt and insult Alvin, and similarly continues to do so in the initial moments of extract 2*b*. Specifically, in line 93, Brad pursues his efforts to entice Alvin into a physical conflict off the bus, and when Alvin declines to align with this project, Brad resumes his category-based insults. Alvin has (as described previously) withdrawn from the conflict, and in the intervening period has declined to take up multiple prior taunts and insults by Brad designed to draw him back into a fight-ready physical configuration. However, in this part of the exchange he treats Brad's persistent provocations as crossing a line, and thus requiring a violent response.

(2b) [234]

93 BRA: WHERE YOU GETTIN' OFF AT?
94 (1.2)
95 BRA: BITCH!
96 (0.8)
97 ALV: (You better)
98 BRA: COWARD=ASS FUCKIN:' LITTLE ↑PUNK, THAT'S WHAT [YOU] ARE,
99 ALV: [YEAH?]
100 (0.5)
101 BRA: YEAH, TH[AT'S] >WH'T YOU ARE.<
102 ALV: [YEAH?] ((A begins to stand up))
103 (0.4) ((A standing up))
104 ALV: What's up. ((A running toward B))
105 (0.2) ((A running toward B))
106 BRA: (Bitch!)
107 ALV: What's up, huh? ((A approaching B))
108 (.) ((A stops in front of B))
109 ALV: (Come on!) ((A starts punching B; continues 10s/up to line 125))
110 (1.5)
111 ALV: FUCK YOU (WANT NOW,)
112 (0.2)
113 ALV: FUCKIN' ASS CRACKER!
114 (.)
115 ALV: (Mother)fucker I'll KI:LL YOU, CRACKER!
116 (0.2)
117 ALV: (What the) FUCK YOU MEAN?
118 (.)
119 ALV: HUH?
120 (0.5)
121 ALV: >FUCK [(YOU MEAN?)<]
122 BRA: [AY ( ] [AY! HEY H]EY!)

123 ALV: [(SPARED YOUR FUCK A)]
124 (0.2)
125 ALV: FUCK YOU MEAN, CRACKER?
126 BRA: YUH=HH
127 ALV: HI (SP[IT YO' SPEED)]
128 CAS: [T h a t ' s] real now, [hah?]
129 BRA: [CALL] THE POL[ICE!]
130 ALV: [FUCK](YOU MEAN?)
131 (0.8) ((passenger clapping; A walking toward front of bus))
132 BRA: CALL >THE POLICE!<
133 (1.8)
134 ALV: FUCK YOU MEAN?
135 CAS: GET OUT ('N') GET MISSIN', BRUH!

Alvin's first response appears in line 97, with what appears to be a warning ("You better . . ."), which follows a silence (line 96) after Brad's repeated gender-based insult (line 95). Brad does not take up this response by Alvin, instead following up this insult by recycling in line 98 other insults against Alvin ("coward" and "little punk") that he had previously used (see extract 2*a*). Alvin responds more forcefully to this, using the repair-like challenge (Schegloff 1997*a*), "Yeah?" (line 99), which gives Brad the opportunity to back down. When Brad instead affirms this insult (line 101), Alvin repeats his challenge (line 102) and begins to stand up and move toward Brad (figs. 12 and 13). Given his distance from Brad at this point, Alvin cannot respond with violence without first moving back into close proximity to him. By swiftly and concertedly moving down the aisle of the bus, while repeating formulaic announcements of his projected imminent use of violence, "What's up" (lines 104 and 107) and "Come on" (line 109), Alvin seeks to "freeze" or maintain Brad's prior taunt as the proximate context for his imminent use of violence. In this way, Alvin treats the production of a first violent action as warranted by and directly responsive to Brad's repeated category-based insults. As Alvin approaches, Brad raises his arm in a defensive posture that anticipates Alvin's imminent use of violence (fig. 14) and thereby treats Alvin's conduct as readily projectable and intelligible in light of his own provocations (also see Lerner and Raymond 2021).

As Alvin proceeds to use violence, striking Brad repeatedly for around 10 seconds (lines 109–125; fig. 15), he more explicitly formulates his conduct as responsive to Brad's taunts (also see Whitehead et al. 2018): By repeatedly calling him a "cracker" (lines 113, 115, and 125), Alvin treats Brad's prior conduct as racist[8] and thus treats his ongoing violent conduct as a

[8] When used by Black American speakers, "cracker" is commonly an epithet meaning "white racist" (see, e.g., Otto, 1987; Dalzell and Victor 2013).

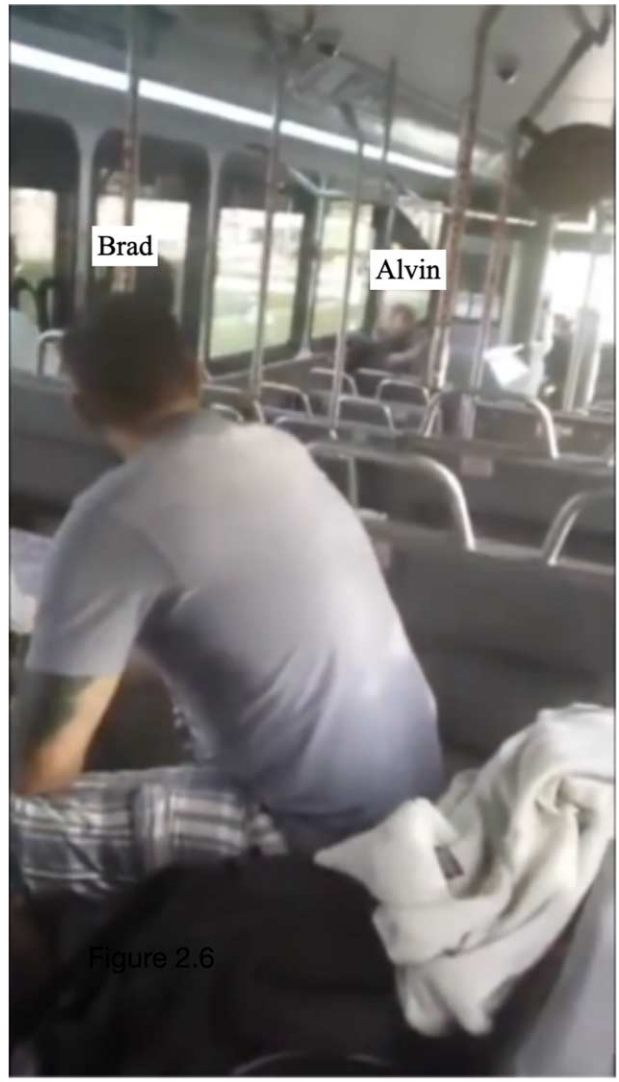


FIG. 12.—Alvin begins to stand up

justified, or even required, response calibrated to the offense it targets (cf. Fiske and Rai 2015). This is further underscored by his repeated use of challenges formulated as questions both while beating Brad (lines 111, 117, 119, 121, and 125) and after he stops doing so (lines 130 and 134). Conversely, when Alvin actually produces the violence Brad has been inviting, Brad twice appeals to others to "call the police" (lines 129 and 132). In this way



FIG. 13.—Alvin moves toward Brad

Brad seeks to challenge Alvin's positioning of his use of violence as warranted by Brad's insults, instead proposing it to be an unjustified and unlawful assault.

In appealing for assistance from other passengers, Brad makes relevant their assessments of the moral status of Alvin's violent conduct. In light of this, it is noteworthy that nobody observably takes up his requests for assistance

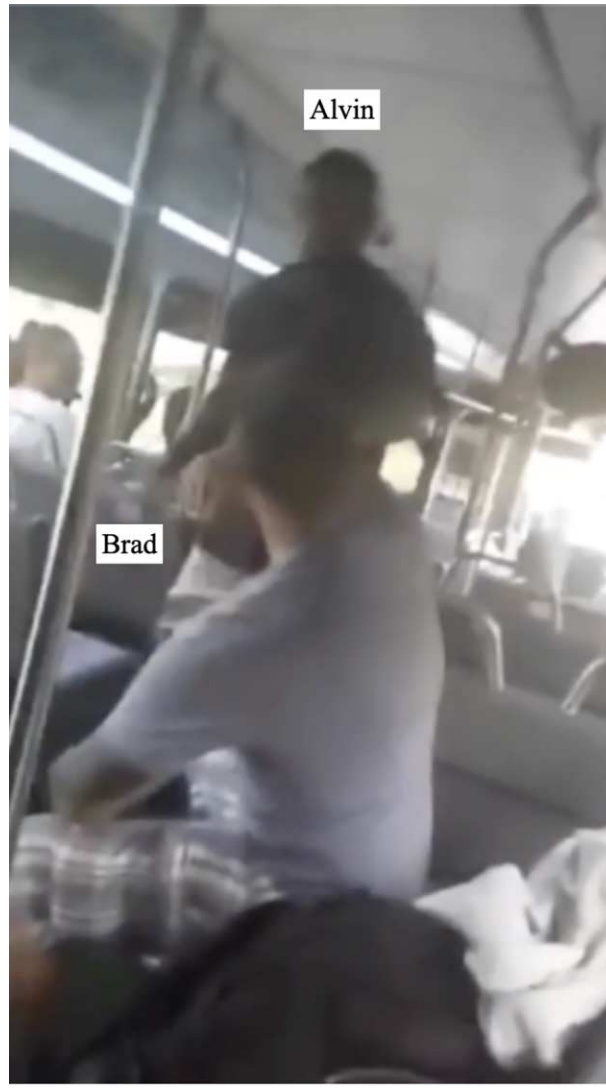


FIG. 14.—Brad raises his arm in a defensive gesture as Alvin approaches

or aligns with his claims. On the contrary, at least one passenger can be heard clapping in the immediate of Alvin's use of violence (line 131). Also significant in this regard is the conduct of Cassie (CAS), a Black woman who has been recording the conflict. After registering what has happened by turning the camera toward herself and remarking, "That's real now" (line 128), she turns the camera back toward the departing Alvin and advises him to



FIG. 15.—Alvin repeatedly strikes Brad

avoid contact with the police by proposing that he should "get out 'n' get missin'," using the affiliative address term "bruh" as she does so (line 135).[9]

[9] This address term can also index a speaker and/or recipient's blackness (see, e.g., Duck 2017; Calhoun 2019) and thereby provides further retrospective evidence for Cassie's orientation to this conflict as tacitly racialized.

As the recording ends, Alvin can be seen leaving the bus (fig. 16). The other passengers who respond thus converge with Alvin in treating the conflict as one grounded in Brad's racist actions and interpret Alvin's use of violence as "virtuous"—responsive to, and warranted by, the nature of Brad's insults. Furthermore, both Alvin and Cassie orient to Alvin's special vulnerability to blame for the conflict and/or arrest by virtue of his status as a Black man.



Fig. 16.—Alvin leaves the bus

As this case suggests, even where one or more parties warrant the use of violence as justified by reference to a person's membership in a morally compromised category (in this case, "racist"), they must still manage the local relevance and procedural consequentiality of the category in question (also see Schegloff 1991). This includes managing alternative ways in which the use of violence might otherwise be morally evaluated. Moreover, across cases in our data in which violence is used during the course of a developing conflict, participants' publicly observable conduct displays a systematic concern with managing the moral constraints associated with the cross-cutting preferences for defensive violence and progressivity, independently of potential psychological motives or states that might be attributed to them.

Deviant Cases: Unprojected Uses of Violence

Having examined participants' orientations to relevance of cross-cutting preferences in shaping and making sense of occasions where violence is projected, we now turn to a different type of evidence indicating their systematic relevance or import. In this section, we consider a set of deviant cases that appear in our data, involving one party's production of a violent action without any prior conduct projecting its use. Such "unprojected" violence is routinely positioned as a violation of the normative constraint against aggressive violence. Indeed, it is commonly described using pejorative terms such as "sucker punch" and "dog shot," and persons using these unprojected attacks may be characterized in similarly pejorative terms, including as "bullies," "hotheads," or "cowards."

An instance of unprojected violence can be seen in extract 3, which shows a dispute filmed outside of a bar. It is clear at the outset of the recording that the parties have positioned themselves in a state of incipient conflict, with the exchange being constituted as a "postmortem" of a dispute that evidently took place inside the bar. One party in particular (Billy) is apparently oriented to this as a precursor to resolving and exiting the conflict rather than resuming it or anticipating escalation to violence. However, the other party (Aaron) responds to an utterance by Billy with an unprojected punch rather than with a responsive utterance.

(3) [441]

1 AAR: (I) told you, I'm gonna go ↑over with my chick,
2 BIL: Okay,
3 (1.0)
4 AAR: Keep it movin',
5 (.)
6 BIL: Okay.
7 AAR: Watch it!

8 BIL: What=did I say back to that?
9 (.)
10 AAR: You didn't say sh↑it!
11 BIL: Well then what's the deal?
12 (0.8)
13 AAR: There was ↑no fuckin' ↓deal!
14 BIL: Then why are we $doin' this right now?$
15 AAR: I don't know, you walked up to me, all buff=like.
16 BIL: W- ↑I did?
17 AAR: Yeah, you d[id.
18 BIL: [$↑FUCK ↓OFF!$
19 (0.4)
20 AAR: FUCK OFF? ((elbow-punches B))
21 CRA: DUDE!
22 (1.5)
23 AAR: Fuck off?
24 (.)
25 CRA: Chill out, dude. ((escorting A away from B))
26 (0.8)
27 DOU: Huh=h ((chuckle))
28 (1.8)
29 DOU: hh huh huh huh .hh hh hh ((chuckles))
30 (1.0)
31 ERI: ( ) he told him to fuck off.
32 (1.0)
33 AAR: He told me to fuck off.
34 (.)
35 AAR: D'you not ↑see ↓that?

Over a series of exchanges, the parties in this case show divergent orientations to the encounter, but neither threatens or otherwise observably projects the imminent use of violence before the moment Aaron elbow punches Billy (line 20), an action for which Billy was evidently entirely unprepared. Prior to this moment, Billy, standing with his hands behind his back throughout (figs. 17 and 18), treats both their encounter in the bar and the current one as being products of a (possibly blameless) misunderstanding. In doing so, he treats the conflict as nonserious and headed toward resolution, using practices of repair (see, e.g., Schegloff, Jefferson, and Sacks 1977; Schegloff 1992) to offer multiple opportunities for both parties to accountably withdraw without either being seen as having backed down. Aaron's unprojected use of violence emerges in the midst of an apparent repair sequence. In the moments preceding this, Billy's queries in lines 11 and 14 claim that he doesn't understand the basis for Aaron's orientation to the situation as



FIG. 17.—Billy stands with his hands behind his back while Aaron maintains a side-on position.

one of conflict, thereby offering an opportunity for accountable mutual withdrawal from the current exchange. In response to the second of these queries (line 14), which proposes that there is not, or need not be, a conflict, Aaron disclaims an understanding of its basis and blames Billy for having initiated it (line 15). Aaron thereby claims a defensive orientation, while claiming that Billy has acted, and/or is currently acting, in an aggressive



FIG. 18.—Billy continues to stand with his hands behind his back as Aaron strikes him.

manner. Billy responds to this accusation (line 16) with a repair-like challenge (Schegloff 1997*a*) that renews his treatment of the conflict as an absurd consequence of Aaron's overreaction to an innocuous encounter. Following Aaron's reassertion of his accusation (line 17), Billy's emphatic but smiling

dismissal, "FUCK OFF!" treats Aaron as absurdly insistent on maintaining his (mis)understanding of the prior exchange (line 18) and thus positions him as the aggressor.

Instead of continuing the dispute using talk, Aaron treats Billy's use of profanity as a warrant for using violence. Specifically, he repeats what he treats as Billy's (most proximate) offensive action (line 20), thereby maintaining the position for his response as pending (cf. extract 2*b*), and then immediately elbow punches Billy (fig. 18). Up to this point, Aaron has maintained a side-on body position (fig. 17), enabling him to escalate to the use of violence with reduced projectability, thereby delaying Billy's possible recognition of this move and the reciprocally organized defense such recognition might occasion (also see Lerner and Raymond 2021). Further, by striking Billy with his elbow rather than his fist, Aaron reduces the preparation phase for producing the blow, since it can be initiated without needing to first draw his arm backward. Moreover, the only other change in his body position he produces concurrently with the blow is quickly shifting his left foot from the inside to the outside of Billy's right foot (compare fig. 17 to fig. 18), enabling him to throw the punch while nevertheless maintaining his balance. Consistent with the unprojected character of the violence, Billy is caught completely off guard, with the punch landing squarely on the side of his face and knocking him to the ground and incapacitating him.

Unprojected uses of violence such as this in our data are systematically responded to with sanctioning, including displays of shock and censure. In this case, Craig (CRA, who has been standing near Aaron and Billy observing the exchange) immediately produces an exclamation (line 21) that treats Aaron's conduct as unequivocally morally problematic and begins to physically guide him away from the scene (fig. 19), before directing him to "chill out" (line 25). Aaron responds to this admonishment by attempting to justify his conduct, first by again repeating the profanity that he treated as warranting his use of violence (line 23) and then by producing a direct account (line 33) and questioning whether Craig failed to register Billy's ostensible offense (line 35). Other parties in the scene similarly register Aaron's use of violence as an accountable transgression: Doug (DOU) registers disbelief at Aaron's violent conduct with shocked laughter at lines 27 and 29, and Eric (ERI) offers an account (line 31) and thereby treats an explanation as relevant.

As such, across our data, such uses of unprojected violence—including, in some cases, violence produced without any immediately preceding talk at all—are treated by participants as "special" cases that occasion reputational (and potential legal) consequences for the party who deploys them. This can be seen in a case of violence produced without immediately preceding talk, shown in extract 4, which is taken from a video recorded outside a stadium following a British football game. As supporters of one of the teams (Watford)

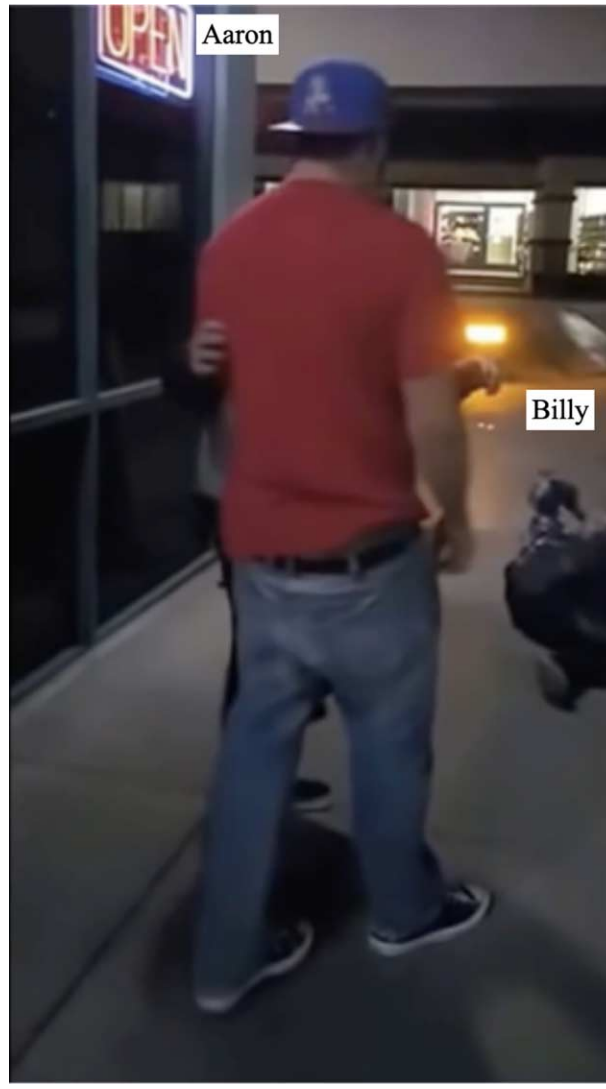


FIG. 19.—Craig guides Aaron away from the scene

exit the stadium, a supporter (Gavin) of the opposing team (Wolverhampton Wanderers, or Wolves) moves in the opposite direction, which the parties (Adam and Bob) viewing him from a vantage point above the scene treat as portending trouble, and thus as a basis for recording his conduct. The transcript below shows the commentary concurrently produced by Adam and Bob and by other onlookers nearby (Chris, Dan, and Edward) as Gavin

moves toward (figs. 20 and 21) and then, without warning, forcefully shoves a Watford supporter (Harry) in his face and neck area (figs. 22 and 23).

(4) [494]

ADA: There ya go,
(0.8)
BOB: (Cos he is, he's) tryin' tuh go into the Wol- Watfords.
CHR: Oh[:! ((Gavin approaches Harry))
ADA: [There we go! ((Gavin shoves Harry's face and neck))
BOB: OH: WENT FER FUCKING KIDS::! ((Gavin throws punches at other Watford supporters; continues for 7 seconds/until line 13))
DAN: OH NO!
(0.2)
BOB: Jus' swung at kids::!
DAN: NO::!
(0.2)
BOB: Fookin' little dickhead:(s)!
ADA: AH, he's gettin' leathered! ((Gavin punched and kicked by Watford supporters; continues for 13 seconds/until line 26))
CHR: See ya later, mate!
BOB: He ↑swung at fuckin' fif- a: fifteen year old(s), didnee?
EDW: (An' they) stamped on 'is 'ead.=
BOB: =Yeah.
(0.5)
BOB: Deserv[es it.
DAN: [°Oh my go:::d,° [he's absolutely lamped him.
BOB: [Fookin' deserves it.
(0.5)
DAN: No, sto:p (we need to he's [ )
BOB: [NO, he ↑deserves it, he (went) for himself.
DAN: O:h:: ye(r) absolute nutt(h)er!

Shortly after the beginning of the recording, we hear Bob attributing a motive for Gavin's movement, as he formulates an account of his conduct as seeking a confrontation with Watford supporters (line 3). Although the observers producing this commentary thereby show they have recognized Gavin's possible project, the specific Watford supporter he targets, Harry, evidently does not anticipate any confrontation, as he smiles and looks to his right while Gavin approaches from directly in front of him (figs. 20 and 21). Only at the moment that Gavin launches his shove (fig. 22) do the commentators and Harry himself recognize his incipient use of violence. This is registered by Chris's use of the news marker "Oh" (line 4) and Harry's shocked

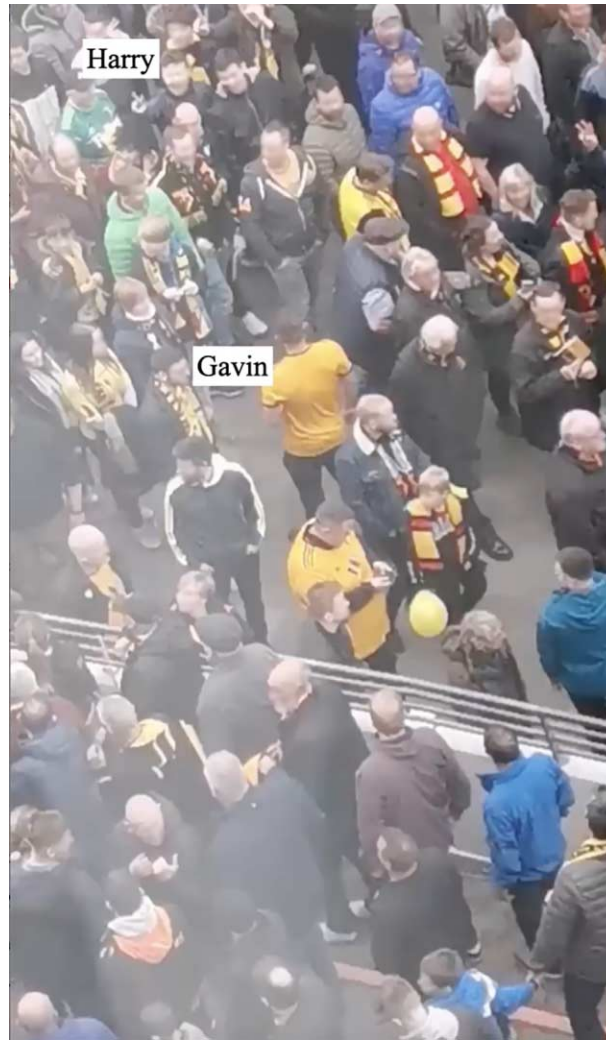


FIG. 20.—Gavin approaches Harry

facial expression as he stumbles backward due to the force of the shove (fig. 23). By contrast, Adam's exclamatory "There we go!" (line 5) registers Gavin's use of violence as a realization of the kind of trouble he (Adam) and Bob had sought to formulate in their prior commentary at lines 1 and 3.[10]

[10] Although the raised vantage point of these commentators offers them a perspective on the unfolding events that is unavailable to the supporters they observe below, they also evidently were not able to project with precision the exact type and target of the trouble



FIG. 21.—Gavin continues to approach Harry

This unprojected use of violence by Gavin is immediately treated by those observing it as shocking, unexpected, and morally offensive. For example, Bob initially expresses shock before emphatically negatively sanctioning Gavin's conduct specifically on the basis of the (vulnerable) category of

they inferred Gavin was seeking to initiate. In this respect, although this commentary claims recognition of an anticipated form of conduct, it is only in retrospect—as Gavin observably begins his unprojected attack on Harry—that they can do so.



FIG. 22.—Gavin launches his shove of Harry

persons he has targeted (lines 6, 10, and 17), while Dan's generalized expression of dismay at the unfolding events (lines 8 and 11) implicitly condemns Gavin's conduct. Moreover, as Gavin extends his unprovoked attack by targeting Watford supporters in the vicinity, a number of both those he has targeted and others nearby respond with retributive violence, which is praised and/or celebrated by multiple observers (lines 14, 16, 18, 21, and 23). Although a disagreement emerges regarding just how much retributive violence Gavin deserves (lines 22–27), this only happens after he has been physically



FIG. 23.—Harry stumbles backward following Gavin's shove

overwhelmed, neutralized, and to some degree punished by numerous Watford supporters. The disagreement therefore hinges on how much retribution is warranted rather than whether it is warranted at all. Furthermore, multiple observers also produce negative moral evaluations of Gavin *as a person*, with Bob producing a gendered insult of him (line 13) and Dan using an extreme case formulation (Pomerantz 1986) in characterizing him as an "absolute nutter" (line 28). Thus, at every point in this encounter, participants in the scene and those observing it from above treat Gavin's unprojected use of

violence as morally despicable and use it as the basis for forming more global judgments of his character.

The systematic treatment of unprojected violence as immoral is also reflected in some scholars' characterization of it as "gratuitous violence" (e.g., Wieviorka 2003; Bruce 2010; Foreman-Peck and Moore 2010), a term that marks its production in circumstances where the violence used is not recognizable as a germane or relevant next possible action—and thus not in any way defensive. There are, however, some exceptions to this: Extending our prior observations on uses of violence as a response to category-based provocations, in some cases in our data participants seek to warrant the unprojected use of violence on the basis of its target(s) or recipient(s) being members of stigmatized categories. While in extract *2b* the relevance of such categories is introduced by participants during the course of the conflict (also see Whitehead et al. 2018), a similar set of categories can also be used by aggressors as bases for initiating conflict and/or violence—including unprojected violence, as we see in extract 4 with Gavin's apparent targeting of Harry by reference to his membership in the "Watford supporter" category and possibly (as Bob infers) his age. More generally, and consistent with Fiske and Rai (2015), aggressors may seek to justify unprojected violence on the basis of their target's membership in stigmatized (e.g., racial, ethnic, gender, sexual orientation, religious, age, political, etc.) categories and by reference to ostensible moral distinctions between members of these respective sets of categories. The adoption of special legal protections for members of many stigmatized categories from what are classified as "hate crimes" is a response to such uses of these categories as bases for producing unprojected violence. Instances of unprojected violence thus constitute a set of deviant cases that reveal the ways that participants use aspects of a normative framework—most particularly in this case the preference for defensive violence—to make sense of violent conduct even in cases where one party appears to disregard the constraints associated with the framework (cf. Wieder 1974; Heritage 1984).

INSTITUTIONAL OCCASIONS FOR VIOLENCE

Having examined participants' systematic orientations to cross-cutting preferences in relation to uses of violence in mundane occasions of interaction, we turn now to consideration of their modification in institutional interactions, focusing specifically on police encounters with members of the public. These occasions are particularly informative for our analysis by virtue of the special status that violence has in police work. As Bittner (1970, p. 40) observes, when police are called to address a problem, their intervention means "above all else" the legal capacity to use their coercive authority, including force or violence, "to overcome resistance to their solutions in the native habitat of the

problem." In granting the police this legal authority, governments empower police officers to *initiate* the use of violence as a means of overcoming some forms of civilian resistance. This has two key consequences for the participants in police encounters. First, for police officers, it expands the range of circumstances in which violence can be used and reduces the constraint associated with the preference for defensive violence described above. As a legal matter, the initiation of the use of violence by police officers must nonetheless be justified by reference to prevailing use-of-force policies that prescribe when, how, and in what forms coercive violence can be used. However, the degree to which these legal constraints are oriented to by particular officers or enforced by police organizations may vary considerably (see, e.g., Friedrich 1980; Fyfe 1988; Skolnick and Fyfe 1993; Terrill 2005), and over time such policies have come to expand the scope of circumstances under which police officers are entitled to use force defensively (Sierra-Arévalo 2021). Second, for civilian recipients of police violence, it adds a legal constraint against the use of responsive violence. As a practical matter, however, civilians' awareness and acceptance of this legal reality may vary considerably. Moreover, they may retain elements of a mundane orientation to interaction with the expectation that officers' departures from its constituent expectations can only be warranted by reference to the severity of the reason for the encounter or events that occur during its course (cf. Meehan 2018; Rawls, Duck, and Turowetz 2018).

This specialized institutional framework for violence primarily emerges by reference to projects initiated by police officers and organized through sequences of action in interaction (also see Raymond et al. 2023), as illustrated by extract 5. In this encounter, two (white) backup police officers (PO1 and PO2) have arrived to assist a first (white) responding officer (PO3) at a scene in which the manager of a sandwich store has accused a (Black) teenage customer, Brian (BRI), of illegally refilling a soda cup belonging to his friend. On arriving, PO1 and PO2 encounter Brian standing in front of the store holding a drink (fig. 24). At the direction of PO3, PO2 and PO1 collaboratively instruct Brian to sit (lines 20 and 21). A sequential standoff stalls the project initiated by PO2's directive, as Brian, PO2, and PO1 struggle over the terms under which Brian will comply with the directive, with PO2 threatening and then using violence as a means of unilaterally resolving the standoff—albeit thereby sustaining the conflict and attracting the participation of other parties therein.

(5a) [SPD_024860_5192@20090716221303]

((15 seconds/19 lines omitted))

20 PO2: SIT!

21 PO1: >Sit=down<

22 (0.8) ((PO3 begins to move to hold CM2's arm))

23 PO1: (Sit) on the ground.= ((PO2 and PO3 holding CM2's arm))
24 BRI: =( ).
25 PO2: Sit on the gr[ound.
26 PO1: [Sit=d[own.
27 BRI: [I'll sit on the gr[ound,
28 PO2: [SIT,
29 (0.4)
30 PO2: DO:WN!
31 (.)
32 BRI: I'll sit on the grou[nd, <jus' [(let go my hand.)
33 PO2: [Do it- [Do it or get
34 knocked down.
35 (.)
36 PO2: That's your choice.
37 (1.2)
38 BRI: Can I [(sit?)
39 PO2: [Do it or get [knocked down.
40 (???): [Can I (sit on this?)
41 (.)
42 BRI: Can I >si' down?< ((PO2 begins to knee B's leg))
43 (1.0) ((baton strike to B's knee by PO2 at end of silence))
44 BRI: aahHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHH!! ((B collapsing to the ground))
((48 seconds/10 lines omitted))
55 ALO: Over a cup of ↑pop? (↑no way,) ↑are you ↑serious?
56 PO1: Leave the premises [please.
57 ALO: [(Over) a cup of pop? ↑How do you feel?
58 ↑Jesus Christ! ↑Are you serious?
59 (0.2)
60 ALO: (Over) [a cup of pop?
61 PO1: [(Leave the premises.)

Following PO2 and PO1's initial directives, a conflict emerges as to whether Brian is complying or will comply. This begins with the brief silence at line 22, during which Brian continues to stand. The officers treat his inaction as resistance by each moving to take hold of one of his arms (fig. 25), timing the onset of their contact with the first of a series of pursuits of his compliance with their directive (lines 23, 25, 26, 28, and 30). During the course of these pursuits, Brian claims a willingness to comply, while seeking to identify an impediment to doing so (lines 27 and 32). The standoff emerges as PO2 treats Brian's utterances as indicative of continued noncompliance by timing a series of escalating pursuits to intersect and thus interrupt Brian's turn beginnings. These pursuits initially use increased volume and hyperarticulation (lines 28 and 30) and then threaten coercive force



FIG. 24.—PO1 and PO2 arrive at the scene and encounter Brian

(lines 33–34, 36, and 39) by posing a "choice" (line 36) between Brian complying with the directive and being "knocked down" (lines 34 and 39). In the context of these threats, Brian orients to PO2's imminent use of violence by shifting from *offers* of prospective compliance to *pleas* for the opportunity to comply (lines 38 and 42). During Brian's production of the second of these pleas, PO2 begins to use coercive force, first kneeing Brian's leg in an apparent effort to bring him to the ground (line 42; fig. 26) before escalating to the use of a baton strike to his knee (line 43; fig. 27), which prompts Brian to cry out in pain as he collapses to the ground (line 44; fig. 28)—a position in which he remains for the duration of the encounter.

The terms of the standoff in this case are constituted differently from those we considered in mundane conflicts (as shown in extracts 1 and 2 above), which emerge through participants' management of the cross-cutting preferences arising from the projected use of violence. By contrast, in this case (and other cases of standoffs in police encounters with the public in our data), officers may organize and deploy violence to overcome civilians' purported resistance, even in the absence of any projection or use of violence by civilians. That is, in police encounters in our data, standoffs emerge in the course of



FIG. 25.—PO1 and PO2 take hold of Brian's arms

struggles over whether and how a project initiated by the police will be conducted, with violence being projected (and in some cases ultimately used) by police officers as a way of compelling compliance with the officers' proposed resolution of their project (also see Bittner 1970). This can also be appreciated in the body behavior of the participants in the course of the standoff. For example, in taking hold of Brian's arms, the officers assert an entitlement to touch that, because it was done without prior consent, may be treated as transgressing the taken-for-granted body boundary oriented to in extract 1*c* and other mundane conflicts. Moreover, in contrast to the embodied preparation for violence seen in extracts 1–3 (e.g., participants' adoption of bladed stances, management of bodily proximity, etc.), in extract 5 the officers reduce opportunities for Brian's use of unprojected violence by positioning themselves on either side of him while holding his arms. In addition, following PO2's use of violence, Brian shows no orientation to an entitlement to respond in kind. Both parties thus orient to the institutional asymmetries with respect to the right to use violence described above. In these ways, the officers treat



FIG. 26.—PO2 knees Brian's leg

violence as a routine resource available for carrying out their work (cf. Elsey et al. 2018).

In contrast, other parties in the scene retain elements of the mundane orientation to the use of violence as constrained by cross-cutting preferences. In the aftermath of PO2's baton strike, Alonzo (ALO) loudly expresses disbelief (lines 55, 57–58, and 60), and thereby sanctions PO2's use of violence as extreme or unwarranted in light of the reason for the encounter. Moreover, as shown in extract 5*b* (which begins around one minute and ten seconds after the end of extract 5*a* and shows the continuing conflict in the aftermath of the baton strike), Calvin (CAL) repeats (line 113) a pointed query by Brian regarding the absence of a Black officer (line 112).

(5b) [SPD_024860_5192@20090716221303]

111 (0.9)

112 BRI: Where's the black cop?

113 CLA: Yeah yeah ( ) black cop.
114 BRI: Wher- where's our black cop?
115 PO3: Now [it's a black thing.
116 PO2: [Okay.
117 PO2: Yeah.
118 CAL: [It is.
119 BRI: [( ) ↑always been a black thing.

Calvin thereby affiliates with Brian's treatment of their and the officers' respective race categories as relevant to and consequential for the encounter. While PO3's rejection of these queries (line 115) treats them as having newly introduced race as retrospective accounts for these events, Calvin rejects this claim (line 118), and Brian in turn amplifies this rejection (line 119) by proposing that race had been relevant from the outset of the encounter—and beyond it. In these ways, Calvin, in collaboration with Brian, proposes that the officers have used Brian's incumbency in a stigmatized racial



FIG. 27.—PO2 strikes Brian's knee with a baton



FIG. 28.—Brian collapses to the ground

category as a basis for their unjust treatment of him, culminating in PO2's use of violence.

Thus, in contrast to participants' orientations in mundane cases of conflict such as those examined above, here—and recurrently in other cases where police officers use coercive violence—we find a sharp divergence between the sense that civilians and officers make of whether the violence was warranted and what motivated it. As this divergence suggests, although the police are legally empowered to use violence under certain specified conditions, their talk is designed to display that they have nevertheless managed its use moment by moment in light of the unfolding details of encounters. This may involve contending with civilians' displayed understandings of the distance between what officers are doing and what the situation apparently demands of them—which recurrently includes civilians treating officers' uses of violence as departing from the constraints associated with the cross-cutting preferences that have been the focus of our analysis.

IMPLICATIONS AND CONCLUDING REMARKS

In this study, we have taken up an apparent puzzle posed by theorizing and findings proposing that violence is either predominantly difficult to

accomplish (cf. Collins 2008, 2009, 2012, 2013, 2019) or difficult to avoid (cf. Fiske and Rai 2015). Our analysis addresses this puzzle by showing how participants systematically orient to the social and moral organization of violent occasions that are constituted by cross-cutting preferences for defensive violence and progressivity toward violence. In particular, we have considered how a range of trajectories involving the possible use of violence, in light of these cross-cutting preferences, are made relevant by the projected use of violence during the course of an ongoing conflict. In doing so, we have demonstrated that participants treat violence as *both* an exceptional form of conduct *and* nonetheless justified and possibly even required in some circumstances.

This analysis contributes both to conversation analytic research regarding preference organization and to understandings of the interactional and moral organization of violence. Regarding the former, preference organization has predominantly been described in the context of cooperative occasions, examining how it contributes to preserving social solidarity. For example, Atkinson and Heritage (1984, p. 55) note that "the institutionalized design features of preferred/dispreferred actions are both inherently structured and actively used so as to maximize cooperation and affiliation and to minimize conflict in conversational activities." Our present findings extend this analysis to occasions of conflict by showing that and how participants' orientations to the systematic relevance of the cross-cutting preferences we have described serve to retain violence as a resource to be used only in special circumstances. Moreover, our analysis of the preference for progressivity demonstrates how this preference encompasses a broader range of phenomena than previous analyses (e.g., Stivers and Robinson 2006; Heritage 2007; Lerner and Raymond 2021) of the accountability of the progressive realization of structurally projected conduct have described. Beyond the relevance of bringing to its possible completion an action or sequence that is already in progress, we have shown how an orientation to this preference can also shape occasions for producing an action in the first place. That is, we have shown how threatening the imminent use of violence involves claiming that its projected use is currently relevant, such that subsequently withdrawing from the progressive realization of its use is accountable (i.e., vulnerable to being seen as bullying, weakness, cowardice, etc.). Conversely, participants who produce unprojected violence may be held accountable for having acted precipitously, without an occasion for their conduct having been established.

With regard to understandings of the interactional and moral organization of violence, our analysis of how participants manage cross-cutting preferences in warranting the use of violence across a range of sequential environments reveals that such occasions have an endogenously produced overall structural organization (Schegloff and Sacks 1973; Schegloff 2007) that participants treat as relevant over its course. This can be observed

across four distinct constituent elements produced in and through talk and other conduct that participants treat as integral to occasions of (potential) violence: (1) projection of the imminent use of violence; (2) (de)escalations that precede and frame its use or abandonment; (3) the onset, composition, and termination of violence; and (4) retrospective treatments of violence and/or its abandonment in its aftermath. The integral relationship between these elements suggests that, far from being reducible to mere "bluster and bluff" or epiphenomenal to violence itself, the talk and other conduct in episodes in which violence is projected figure centrally in establishing the conditions for its warrantable use and its interactional import. This continues through the production of violence and in its aftermath, providing additional windows into its contested meanings and thus how violence comes to dominate the occasions on which it is threatened and/or used. By examining these features of the social organization of violence primarily in relation to mundane interactional occasions, we have established how they are systematically produced in situ as a normative framework for "ordinary violence," before then considering how they can be modified by reference to institutional tasks and goals, using the case of police violence as a site for examining this. Future research could examine whether and how this normative framework is contended with by participants in a range of other institutional occasions and settings in which violence is recurrently used and by reference to the categories of persons that populate them. These include, for example, combat in war, political mobilizations and movements, and other forms of state violence that depend on institutional practices for identifying (categories of) people who can be treated as warrantable targets for violence and the particular times, circumstances, and places at which they can be targeted (cf. Elsey et al. 2018).

Our analysis further shows that the contingent nature of violent outcomes, which Collins (2008, 2009, 2012, 2013 ,2019) attributes to the difficulties involved in overcoming the obdurate social-psychological barrier of *ct/f*, may be better understood as arising from the social and moral complexities that participants observably contend with in managing these cross-cutting preferences. It is, of course, possible that participants in occasions of potential violence may be privately preoccupied with the emotional dynamics described by Collins and others. However, as a public matter their conduct reflects a systematic orientation to the normative, as opposed to psychological, conditions for the warrantable production of violence. Furthermore, participants do not, as Fiske and Rai (2015) assert, appear to align to any overdetermining moral structure that evokes the virtuosity of action when enacting violence even as they do provide situated accounts that justify its use. As our analysis demonstrates, these situated justifications can nevertheless link to category-related and other projects that analysts have conventionally treated as elements of "macro" social structure

(also see, e.g., Whitehead et al. 2018). In explicating the dynamically shifting moral frameworks participants use to account for progressing toward, stalling the production of, or retreating from violence in unfolding sequences of interaction during the course of conflicts, our analysis reveals how historically variable features of social structure come to feature in these occasions as participants' resources (cf. Zimmerman and Boden 1991) for warranting situated violent actions. Across these occasions, violence is produced in the midst of talk and other conduct that is designed by participants to convey its sense and import as a social phenomenon and thus may be inadequately understood when extracted from the unfolding details used by participants to contextualize and contest its production—whether they treat it as difficult to accomplish or morally compelled or both.

DATA AVAILABILITY

Data supporting this article can be found in Whitehead, Raymond, and Bowman (2024), in the Harvard Dataverse, https://doi.org/10.7910/DVN/M0DU6X.

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