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## **Crossing with care: Bogs, streams and assistive mobilities as family praxis in the countryside**

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### *German abstract*

In unserem Artikel, dessen Analyse auf der Ethnomethodologie, der ethnomethodologischen Kategorisierungsanalyse (Membership Categorisation Analysis), und der Konversationsanalyse (EMCA) basiert, untersuchen wir das Überwinden von Hindernissen in Außenumgebungen als reflexiv konstitutiv für die Herstellung, den Widerstand und die Anpassung von Familienbeziehungen. Dabei erforschen wir, wie die Kategorisierungen von Beziehungen, die Teilnehmer vornehmen, als eine Ressource für die Organisation interkorporaler, mobiler Handlungen herangezogen werden können. Wenn Mitglieder einer Gruppe auf Hindernisse treffen, bringen sie veränderte Körperbewegungen in Bezug auf die Hindernisse hervor, um Hilfe anzubieten, Hilfe anzuwerben, Hilfe anzufragen und Hilfe abzulehnen. Die angebotene Hilfe wird dann buchstäblich durch das Reichen einer Hand konstituiert, wobei die Formen des Kontaktes und der Unterstützung sehr genau koordiniert und abgestimmt werden. Wir lokalisieren die Bedeutung der unterstützenden Praktiken, die durch diese Beziehungen (z. B. Erwachsener-Kind) relevant gemacht werden und zeigen, wie solche Praktiken mit der Wahrnehmung der lokalen Umgebung (z. B. Flüsse, das Gelände unter den Füßen) verflochten werden. Die Daten für unsere Analyse sind Videoaufnahmen von Familien, die durch die Landschaft wandern und einander dabei helfen, Hindernisse zu überwinden. Unsere Beobachtungen der Organisation und Zurechenbarkeit des Überwindens von Hindernissen durch Körperberührungen, Gesten und Gespräche trägt zu den Analysen von Praktiken in Familien, der Mobilität und der Interkorporalität bei.

*Schlüsselwörter:* unterstützte Mobilität, Unterstützung, Gehen, Land, familiäre Beziehungen, Interkorporalität, Ethnomethodologie, Analyse der Kategorisierung der Mitglieder, Konversationsanalyse.

### *English abstract*

In this paper, we use ethnomethodology, membership categorisation analysis, and conversation analysis (EMCA) to investigate traversing obstacles in outdoor environments as reflexively constitutive of producing, resisting and adjusting family relationships. We look at how relationship membership categorisations are a resource to be drawn upon in organising intercorporeal mobile actions. When faced with obstacles, group members offer, recruit, request or reject assistance, through altered bodily movements, in relation to obstacles. The assistance offered

is then constituted through, literally, lending a hand in finely coordinated and adjusted forms of contact and support. We locate the significance of assisting practices that are made relevant by these relationships (e.g. adult-child) and how such practices are intertwined with perceiving the local environment (e.g. rivers, the terrain underfoot). The data is video recordings of families walking through the countryside and assisting one another in crossing obstacles. Our findings on the organisation and accountability of traversing, through touch, gesture and talk, contribute to studies of family practices, mobility, and inter-corporeality.

*Keywords:* assisted mobility, assisting, walking, countryside, family relationships, inter-corporeality, ethnomethodology, membership categorisation analysis, conversation analysis.

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## **1. Introduction: Obstacles and the accountabilities of assisting one another**

What are families doing when they choose to walk together across streams, through forests, and up hills? Is a walk just another occasion for parents to build their children's confidence and know-how in moving across rough ground? Or is the walking itself an occasion for families to maintain and adjust their relationships? In a simple sense, a walk in the country, away from traffic-filled roads, in forests, fields, or moorland, offers family members space to be close or distant, to exercise, tackle obstacles or simply roam freely. Exploring how family members assist one another, while on a walk will reveal elements of both how families look out for and look after another and how assisting itself is collectively accomplished.

Following the recent studies of Keisanen et al. (2017) we have headed outdoors to attend to family practices in the countryside. Our interest is in occasions in country walks wherein families meet obstacles that blocks their paths, such as fences or thickets, or, in this paper, bogs and streams. These landscape features make the differentiated and incumbent expertise, capacities, and duties of family members relevant. They are organized through the family as a member's categorizing device (see also Smith, this volume). Each parent (and child), drawing upon the relevance of relational categories, emerging in practices, is working out how much assistance is needed, or should be accepted on each occasion they face an obstacle. The offering of assistance is analysed, by parents and other adults, not only in terms of looking after each child, but also with reflection upon levels of intimacy, life stage or age category, affording the child the opportunity to progress their project of becoming more independent. It is not a simple judgement. Younger children have differing bodily dimensions and aptitudes, cumulative experiences of

terrain, and pursue growing rights of unassisted mobility as part of their ongoing strivings towards independence. In traversing bogs or streams, family members demonstrate, and learn about, what each member can do *with*, and *for*, one another. It does not stop there; family members also analyse what is *done* to them and to others and via that action. It is via the occasioned relevance of differential and categorial relationships that assistance happens. This is perceivable and accountable through family (e.g. parent-child) and walking-generated categories (e.g. 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> in a file). We consider, then, how parents assist their children and children of others, as well as other adults. We explore how helping is tied up with children demonstrating, and others recognizing and monitoring, their independent mobility.

In Goodwin and Cekaite's (2018) powerful study of everyday family interaction, walking was framed as an occasion for learning. Here, our focus is not on the flights of imagination occasioned by the walk, rather it is on walking in the countryside itself as the mobile practice enjoyed together and, perhaps, being learnt. The walk in the countryside is an embodied, intercorporeal practice that is perhaps best encountered within everyday enjoyments and as an incidental event (Dunkley/Smith, 2019). Simultaneously, it is a site for families to produce, maintain and transform who assists whom and with what, within the family (Goodwin/Cekaite 2018; Keisanen et al. 2017).

## 2. Background: Assisting others' movement

Seeking and offering assistance has been a longstanding topic for EMCA studies, rooted in studies of suicide helplines (Sacks 1992), and more recently in renewed interest in studies of recruiting assistance (Kendrick/Drew 2016). Movement assistance is particularly interesting because it is deeply tied to independence and agency. To offer and provide movement assistance is to acknowledge the fundamental social rights of others to move themselves (McHugh 2019).

Assisting the mobility of children, as noted above, is embedded in family relationships and the differential skills of family members, and is tied to particular familial forms of independence, agency and competency, which, in turn, are produced through categories of parent/adult and child within the omnirelevant device, and institution, of the family (Butler/Wilkinson 2013). Researchers have noted that parents and guardians are attentive to minimising the various child safety risks in outdoor settings (Cook et al. 2006; Joelsson 2019). Parents may act to 'protect' children when mobile, 'shielding' them, for instance, from the traffic when cycling together (McIlvenny 2014). The task of obstacle traversing is also distributed between parents and/or other adults. For example, common cultural understandings of where fathers do caring for, and intimacy with, their children is associated with outdoor adventures of the kind examined here (Meah/Jackson 2016). Moreover, central to understanding what happens in our data, is drawing upon the abiding work of 'doing being a father' via the father-child standardized relational pair in not only offering but adjusting the help offered to their children (Sacks 1992).

Where guiding has been studied within the setting of the family home, it has considered how the embodied actions of parents are deployed to get children to do domestic and dull tasks that they otherwise might resist, such as going to bed, brushing teeth, or finishing their dinner (Cekaite 2010; Sirota 2006). More broadly,



studies of children's independent mobility have tended to cast adults as restrictive or controlling of access to outdoor space (Benwell 2013), rather than considering how they guide and/or assist children's movement in outdoor spaces. Only a handful of studies have tackled how guiding is used when families are, or ought to be, having fun in places with new hazards or obstacles, such as ravines, dunes, swamps or narrow paths over a sheer drop (Keisanen et al. 2017).

## **2.1. Directing, guiding and assisting in the family**

The inter-corporeal, tactile features of everyday domestic practices are made sense of through doing family as well as doing being a household. They reveal the centrality of familiar forms of touch, alongside talk (and its prosody), in caring for one another such as through hair-brushing, hugs, and kisses (Goodwin/Cekaite 2018). They reveal how embraces are used to soothe a crying child, as well as to establish the cause of the crying and to return the child to other activities (Cekaite 2017). These practices are not limited to the family. Such practices are used to soothe, and show affection and control in more formal childcare and educational settings (Cekaite/Bergnher 2018).

Central to our understanding touch in assisting mobility, is the work of Candy Goodwin (2006) on the mobile aspects of directive-response sequences between children and adults in domestic settings. In analysing giving, receiving, and avoiding directives, she described the movement of parents and children. Yet, for Goodwin's study, the movement was incidental, while the use of facing formations was central to success in generating the desired response to a directive. Closer to our study, Cekaite (2010) focused on household mobilities of the family, examining how directives are enforced and accomplished through shepherding children.

Cekaite's (2010) study revealed three of the embodied actions that parents deploy to gain a child's compliance in domestic settings: shepherding; twisting and non-tactile steering. Shepherding is a parental response to a child resisting initial verbal directives (e.g., to brush teeth). Shepherding is a device that parents use to re-orientate a child's activities, and enforce compliance with tasks that children are likely to avoid. Shepherding and non-tactile steering are ways of moving together that are shared with the convoying and conveying of families across difficult terrain. Traversing obstacles are practices at the edge of assisting and teaching children to walk in the countryside. Although the walk in the woods that we shall examine is a playful and fun adventure, there is a seriousness to the 'endogenous pedagogy' of walking (Goodwin/Cekaite 2018). Similar to teaching young children to cross traffic, crossing water or other obstacles carries with it a hint of injury or even death, particularly in remote rural areas.

Close to our interests in traversing obstacles, Keisanen et al. (2017) followed foraging activities in Finnish forests, describing how parents' guide young children through transitions between activities outdoors. The young children in their study, similarly, required assistance within difficult terrains, such as in forest undergrowth. In their study, parents not only assist the very young children in picking berries, they engage with their children as active participants in foraging. The adults are, at times, providing the scaffolding for young children to show agency and assert independence.

Walks in the countryside are settings for using intimate knowledge of family members and their capabilities, as well as gaining an evolving sense of what they are expected, and allowed to do. Yet these are situations where children negotiate their independence and interdependencies within the family. Rural walks thereby gradually transform, and are transformed by, families as children ‘grow up’ (Goodwin/Cekaite 2018). As Tolmie and Crabtree note in their study of a family day out in the countryside, days out constitute family practice that intensify relationships between people, while for younger children, they can be occasions when “what you are really like” is “updated” (2013:190). A day-out might be an opportunity to demonstrate a move onward toward unassisted mobilities for younger children, who may, for example, no longer require an adult’s assistance to traverse obstacles. Yet, embodied tactile assistance is a “perceptually salient resources for indexing, renewing, and developing the social and affective relations of the participants” (Cekaite 2010:20).

Moving together reveals family members’ everyday standings and understandings via the use of family itself as a categorising device with its pairings, hierarchies, economies and resources for judgement (Hester/Hester 2012). As families are organised via an array of familiar and familial categories of parents, children, siblings, and other relations, individuals within the family occupy the rights and expectations that are attached to particular ages which are formulated in ‘years-old’ or ‘stage of life’ categories (Cromdal et al. 2018). Both adults and children, on occasions such as the family walk, then, use an array of categorising devices such as ‘oldest’, ‘first’, ‘mother’ to recognise, resist, account for and judge their rights and responsibilities. Yet crucially these emerge in relation to the organisation of assistance also through the assister-assisted pairing (see Smith, this volume). On that basis, for example, adults act for children on the category incumbent basis as lacking competences that they have or parents assist their children in ways that recognise current competence or project toward future capacities (Butler/Fitzgerald 2010). Keel (2020) examined families cooking together, displaying asymmetric relationships within the family, while maintaining a positive form of ‘assisting’ towards competence. The family as membership categorisation device is, significantly, if always available for use, not relevant nor used at all times. Classically, Sacks’s work on the search for help is organised through standardised relational pairs of categories and those paired categories are occasioned by that search (Watson 2015). What is particularly pertinent here is that the *offer* of assistance in traversing an obstacle can then occasion the uses of the duplicative pairing of child-parent as assisted-assister even though, as we will examine later, the child was not searching nor showing struggle in traversing the obstacle. Nor, in its delivery, is the offer simply an offer.

## 2.2. Intercorporeal movement

Walking in the countryside is distinct from walking in the city in obvious ways: walkers are likely to be walking on and off paths; the ground cannot be taken-for-granted in the ways that it is in the city and there is only a minimal, if any, pre-assembled infrastructure for pedestrian practices (Ingold 2007; Lorimer/Lund 2008; Smith et al. 2020). Countryside walkers must monitor the ground to find paths, to avoid sinking in mud, hitting rocks, falling into holes etc. They must also negotiate

obstacles that might cross their paths, such as streams and rivers, fallen trees, or human-designed obstacles such as stiles and locked gates. Yet, as Nan Shepherd (1977) recalls, children enjoy walking the ‘unpath’ in the countryside, revelling in the mud, while parents find themselves calling a child ‘to heal’. The adult category in relation to younger children, *as shepherd*, is ever more pronounced while walking in the countryside, given the necessity to inspect, for unpathed children, what could be unsteady, slippery or hazardous ground.

The walk in the countryside has other environmental features that are traversed differently from walking forward on a path. As we described above, assisting others draws upon the categorial organisation of the family, yet the displayed and recognised categories shift back and forth with walking and assisting generated categories of assister and assisted. Families are doing the walk as an outing, doing being family and doing assistance (Watson 2015). As members of a walking group, each recognises and produces their part in crossing an obstacle using the category-generated yet also category-altering capacities, experience and rights of, for example, young children in different ways than to adult peers.

The inquiry into the hazards of the obstacle and what constitutes the capacities to cross it as the ‘first’, ‘explorer’ etc. is part of preparing for and offering varying kinds of embodied assistance to others who are then analysed as belonging to categories children and adults, yet also ‘second’ (Lee/Watson 1993; Watson 2015). The synchronisation of walking with young children is different to walking with adult peers (Jensen et al. 2015). Yet even for adults, different capacities in, for example running together, involves, becoming attuned to and typifying the other runner in relation to hazards of the path of and what they can see in low light (Allen-Collinson/Hockey 2017),

Walking itself is an activity that has an array of intelligible and accountable actions that constitute it. Lee and Watson’s classic studies of walking the city demonstrated its category organisation in terms of persons showing themselves to be together, to be browsing or passing by. To arrange themselves as first, second and thirds, to pair actions and so on (Lee/Watson 1993). Recent work by Smith (2018) has drawn upon this to examine how attention, noticing and getting out of the way, are accomplished the urban intersections, especially the novel design called ‘shared space’. By sharp contrast with walking in the woods or on moorland, the hazards and obstructions at a traffic crossing are predominantly vehicles, of also the odd pothole, puddle and sandwich board. Moreover, the traversing of obstacles may have more in common in its footwork and intercorporeal organisation with practices such as climbing or dancing.

As a collective faced with an obstacle, the group arranges itself around those first crossers that might become assisters for the assistees, to see how it is done. In Broth and Keevallik’s (2014) study of learning to dance, the pupils stand around in the observer’s position in a circle. There are aspects of assisting in walking that are distinct in that the rest of the walking group do not arrange themselves to watch the crossing as a teachable feature of walking. In that way, it reproduces the family as differently capable and experienced in crossing obstacles. For a group of climbers, where the mobility is almost all obstacle traversing, there is the person climbing who may then be assisted by either/or spotters and, if they are using ropes, a belayer (Jenkins 2017).

In what follows, we will examine two closely related kinds of obstacles for walkers: bogs and streams. Investigating the crossing-relevant properties of the ground brings together visual inspections that are combined with exploratory footing-based inquiries. Touching combined with movement and body weighting reveals properties which are visible and/or reported for the other walkers as part of assessing the ground's softness, wetness, stability and slipperiness (on touching objects see: Cekaite/Mondada 2020; Mondada 2020). There is, then, a collective perception of the landscape being assembled by members as a family, and for its members, one that is done through verbal categories as much as it is through inspection via looking and touching (Smith, this volume).

### **3. Data collection: The Brecon Beacons project and family walks**

The data presented in this paper is drawn from two sources. The first is a study that explored how individuals used a mobile app to navigate the remains of a Roman Marching Camp within the boundaries of the Brecon Beacons National Park in South Wales. The research involved eight groups, each including two to four participants. Participants were asked to use the app and were given basic instructions on how to use the tablet and the app (for more details see Smith et al, 2020). Each group was given two on-body cameras, which were usually attached to their chest or on a shoulder strap. These perspectives provided a limited view of the action and often required post-hoc reconstruction of what was happening (Heath et al., 2000). However, in the data fragment we selected for this paper, the mother has detached the camera and is using it handheld, providing greater coverage of the action than from the body-mount. In this data fragment, we have 'Family 1', consisting of mother and father and two sons (aged five and four). The second data source for our paper is ad-hoc data collected by one of the authors during a walk with family and friends. The camera is handheld by the researcher and follows the action. The group consists of two families out for a walk together: The first consists of a father and his two young children; the second of three young children, two parents and two grandparents. In our analysis, we will focus on the first father and his youngest child (approx. 5 years old) and then on the three of the adults from the other family (in their 40s and 60s). We are wary of priming what categories are relevant here by mention of age as a specific matter and hope that the graphic transcripts provide helpful detail for the reader and we will anyway describe the qualities of members that feature in assisting one another.

### **4. Findings: Assistance enmeshed in inter-corporeality, independence and affection**

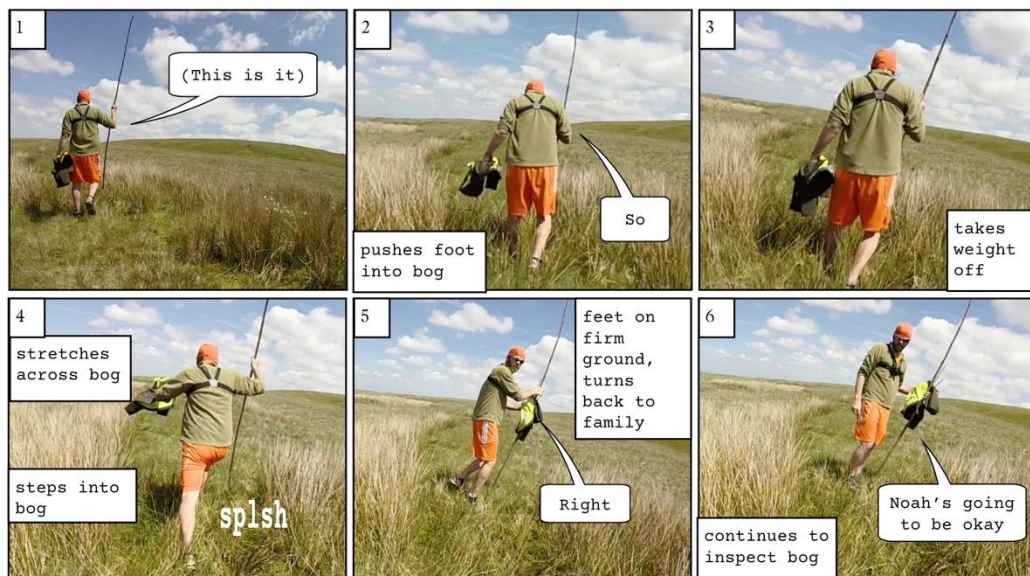
As suggested earlier, who offers a helping hand to whom matters for family relationships even as it also uses standardized relation pairings such as child-parent or daughter-father. Those events, where assistance takes place, are accountable and potentially memorable events where the standing of family members toward one another is at stake through how it happens (Cavell 2005). In traversing obstacles, standing, in the sense of "standing upright", is itself at risk for the family as walkers may slip, fall or get stuck in the mud. In what follows we will examine who offers

a hand to whom, how hands are offered, as well as how involved other family members and walkers are as both witnesses and organisers of crossings.

The two groups that we will examine face the common problem of traversing an obstacle, where actions are organized and divided as assister and assisted not only via family categorisations *as* fathers, mothers, children, but also as more or less skilled and experienced walkers. We will examine three crossings of obstacles: a bog and two streams. The events take us from situations where assistance involves lifting young children, to adults holding the hand of adults. In the latter case the assistance is produced and responded to in ways that are distinct and make apparent assisting as an occasion for maintaining or changing relationships.

Before the family needs to work out who assists whom and how to assist one another, they must firstly establish that the terrain encountered is one that requires assistance to cross. Once recognised as an obstacle, it needs to be investigated for its qualities and for how it can be traversed. The family as a unit, faced with difficulties, pursues as category-based search and allocation practice, who amongst members can assist and who requires, or ought to be, assisted (as a professional matter, by comparison, see Smith, this volume). One member becomes the one that crosses to the other side, to then assist other members across the obstacle. It is not incidental that it is an adult male each time who becomes the family member offering physical assistance, though quite how this comes to be so is part of our interest. Becoming the assister, while travelling, is an occasion wherein members of the family can and do draw upon the gendered norms of 'doing being a father' to follow it, resist it, subvert it etc. (Barker 2008; Meah/Jackson 2016). In the events examined below, both fathers are experienced hillwalkers, which complicates understanding their entitlement to assist by providing an alternate categorization device. Moreover, it provides an alternate device for how their positions as walking in first position and/or leading the walk are produced and recognised. Moreover, by their position within the mobile formation of the walking group they become the member that first assesses the obstacles and is likely then to become the assister. This then raises the question of what happens when a child is at the front position of the mobile formation. The very question that EMCA studies seek to answer is how is assisting done by parties participating as assister and assisted.

In this first crossing, Family 1 is walking in open moorland. They are following a path that runs along a dry ridge, cut through by bogs along its course. As we join them, the father is walking at a distance ahead of the mother and their two children. He investigates a potential obstacle, announces it to the group and then moves on to determining its further qualities as ground for walking on.



Transcript 1: First walking in file, and assessment of assistance

In panel 1 we see the reeds ahead of the father, as would his family members who are following behind him. The father's announcement signifies that there is a feature ahead of them, requiring collective attention, which is further secured by adding a *so* preface. Moreover, the father comes to a halt, while perceptibly stepping downwards (panel 2). This halt marks a transition to a different activity (de Stefani 2013; Keisanen et al. 2017), while the father's *so* is tied to his step down which becomes prodding at the ground. The prodding making available to the others, and to us, his investigation of the ground as obstacle. The father assesses the softness and dampness of the boggy areas, thereby discovering whether it can be crossed without wet feet and/or becoming stuck. His tactile investigation echoes Mondada's (2020) description of cheese-sellers palpating cheese (where sellers and buyers assess cheese for its ripeness). Moreover, in beginning when he does, and at a distance from the rest of the family, he does *so for* the family, rather than with them.

The father then retreats, planting his forward foot on to a tussock for firmer footing (panel 3). Then, taking a long stride, almost a jump, he makes it to the other side. Turning back to face the rest of the group (panel 5), he then provides the results of his inquiry into crossing the bog. This inquiry is produced as a judgement of the children's specific capacities to cross it without getting stuck. The father announces *Noah's going to be okay*. This might initially appear to be unexpected to the family because, contrary to the typical category organisation of capacities to respond to an obstacle, he names the younger brother, rather than the older brother, as *okay* to cross the bog. His announcement is brief, and he is not called to account for this yet (although he will later). One explanation of for the absence any verbal account by the father of why the younger brother will be okay, may be that the father is treating the wet noises of his crossing as hearable. The category puzzle of selecting the younger brother not as a recipient for assistance, could then be made sense of through Noah being the child with wellington boots on while his older brother is wearing training shoes (Smith 2020).

Having established the qualities of the obstacle, the father moves to establish himself as assister and calls on the older child (Sam). In the meantime, the other



family members have caught up with him and are standing at the edge of the boggy ground.



Transcript 2. Summons and foot as stepping stone

The father produces a stance that serves to initiate the bog-crossing (panel 3), thereby both establishing assistance as the upcoming next move and assuming the embodied category of assister in the category pair of assister-assisted (on producing non-verbal movement pairings see Broth/Keevallik 2014). He then uses the older child's name (Sam) to select him as the recipient of bog-crossing assistance. Notably, the older child has not reciprocated the father's action by readying themselves to be assisted through an assistee stance. They have remained stationary, upright and at a distance from the assister (panel 4). The child prefigured his absence of an intercorporeal response with a *what?* (panel 2). Shifting from an embodied offer to a directive, the father beckons him while saying *come 'ere* (panel 5). It may be that Sam is simply not paying attention. Yet, his very inattentiveness could be understood in terms of the older sibling resisting his selection as the assistable party when his younger brother ought to be. In that respect his *what* may be of a more confrontational kind and the absence of getting ready might also index his capacity to independently cross once his father is out of the way.

The father, at the close of transcript 2, directs the older son in how to begin the crossing by directing him to stand on his 'toe' (panel 6, transcript 2), which he then repairs to *foot* (panel 1, transcript 3). In the next fragment, immediately following from the previous, the father assists the older son across the bog, and steps away, leaving the younger child without assistance.



Transcript 3. Lifting and jumping; accusation of abandonment

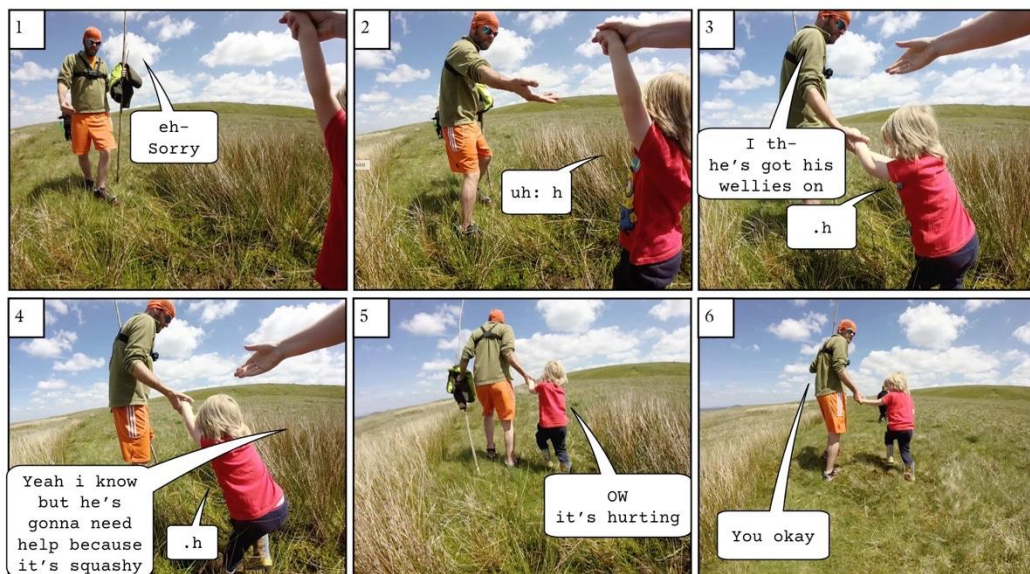
As we noted at the outset, as an inter-corporeal practice, traversing obstacles has connections to dancing. In assisting the child, the father in his sideways stance displays a base for the other party, like a dancer's lift position for another dancer (Broth/Keevallik 2014). Relatedly, the waiting child, goes through moves to be assisted, reaching up with both arms toward a projected lift. His father, as the assister is not matched to that lift, likely because his furthest arm is holding a long walking stick (see panel 4). What the father is producing instead is a stepping-stone, via his foot, accompanied by supporting his son's upper body with his arm. We begin to see how the absence of a dance's given and learnable set of moves, or indeed the formal training of mountaineers (see Smith this volume) is a significant part of what distinguishes this kind of ad-hoc family assistance. A further difference from dance, if we look at panels 1 and 2, is the attentiveness of both parties to the obstacle that the assisting is shaped around. Dance assumes that there are smooth hard floors (which, on good days, are sprung). Yet, like Broth and Keevallik's (2014) dance classes, the instructability of the action, not only organizes the actions of the pair, it also instructs those other parties waiting to cross for their first time. On that basis, the younger brother, who has watched his older brother being assisted, can then claim that he can cross (panel 3) and with the added confidence that he is able to do *all of this*. His willingness, attentive and readiness stand in contrast to that of his older brother. Of interest to us here, in the younger child's move toward becoming more independent, in that here is an occasion to do so. One that might be even more significant because his older brother required assistance.

In response to his claim, the mother seemingly agrees and provides a spatial direction for his independent movement *go in front of daddy* (panel 4). Though, we can hear in her direction that the father would need to remain where he is. Moreover, it seems that the father hears the younger son's claim to be able to cross by himself that way too, because he does not stay to assist. That the father hears it that way makes all the more sense if we look back to transcript 1 (panel 6). He began the assisting practice by announcing that the younger brother would be *okay* to cross by himself. The mother is also holding the child's hand in a high supportive



position, while he waits (panel 5). From the father's perspective, he could potentially see this handhold as projecting the mother supporting the child while walking with him rather than handing over the child. The mother repairs the father's misunderstanding, by making a complaint to the father for not assisting the younger child (*just leave him there then* – panel 6). This complaint comes in response to the father's stepping away having assisted the older child. What this demonstrates is that assisting and what it does to each party is closely analysed by each family member. The mother's work here is to use parent-child as the relevant standardized relational pairing for who needs help, to re-analyse the obstacle and the child's capacities, whilst also showing another aspect of the possible damage done in abandonment, should the younger child not be assisted.

To assist this younger child, father and mother produce a different form of crossing the bog. The mother passes the hand of the child and the father then tows him through the bog.



Transcript 4. Accounting for assistance; towing the child through

In the face of the accusation of potentially being a bad father, an account becomes necessary for Noah being *okay*. The father's account now becomes explicit that wellies exclude him from the assistee category. As an ethnographic aside here, Noah's wellies are conspicuous on this walk because they are too small and he regularly complains about his feet hurting (panel 5). We hear Noah making struggling noises, which the mother elaborates upon, formulating the ground problem posed to him: *he's gonna need help because it's squashy*. She thereby formulates the second aspect of this ground as obstacle, which the father has failed to consider, and one that is not solved by wellies: the unsteadiness of the ground for the younger child. The mother's steadying assistance was then what was embodied in the high handhold (it is lowered in panels 5 and 6 of transcript 3) which the mother produces as she projects the transfer of the child to the father. On picking up the child's hands from the mother, the father and son assemble a different form of assistance with the son using two hands to grasp. He is towed briefly across the bog (panel 4), the intercorporeal positioning itself perhaps being a way of showing

his resistance to the assistance being (belatedly) offered, though it may also be generated from the position of the father on the bank rather than in the middle of the bog.

In this first episode, we have pursued how assistance is organized as a family matter to traverse an obstacle, the qualities of which are being discovered in encountering it. In the face of one child potentially crossing unassisted, standardised relational pairs from the relation collection are used in re-establishing that all children are assisted parties and the accountability of who should help whom. Abandonment was available as a way for the mother to categorise and judge the actions of the assister as a father rather than as a lead walker. A judgement that he immediately sought to both acknowledge and repair to maintain his successful doing being an (attentive) father. Rather than understanding what was done to him as abandonment, Noah (the youngest) understood his dad's assessment as an opportunity to claim that he can *do all of this*. Noah takes advantages of the cracks in the institution of the family, opened up by the traversing the obstacle to express his personality. For the attentive parent, this is then a moment to find out what kind of personality their youngest has.

In the next section, we return to offers of assistance from parents to children, though this time we will describe different forms of embodied assistance in the traversing of obstacles, as well as further displays of competence, rights and independence from the assisted parties.

#### **4.1. Children leading the walk and traversing obstacles**

For Noah's family, walking at the front of the group coincided with leading the group, and consequently investigating what the obstacle was and how to cross it. The spatial formation of families, while walking in the countryside, varies, and it also does so in the next set of events for the two families in the group. Of the two families, out for a walk in the woods together we will concentrate in this section on Family 1 – the father and particularly the youngest of his two children. They are of interest because the youngest child is positioned ahead and so, to exert her independence, putting to use the locatively-generate category as first in the walking pair (Smith, this volume). Leading the way in one sense yet also deferring to her father, sometimes, on the recognizing, categorizing and traversing of obstacles.

##### **4.1.1. First at the obstacle; asserting and demonstrating capability; the helping hand**

We join the group in their woodland walk in an open area without a path. In travelling across the path-less forest terrain, adult-with-small-child pairs have formed in this group. There is a stage of life relevance, rather than 'youngest', to competence in traversing these forest floors, bogs and streams. Closest to the camera (see Transcript 5), in Family 2, the grandfather is walking with his granddaughter, monitoring her uneven progress across the tussocks. Our target pair are further away and the father is walking behind his daughter in a similar fashion.

Daughter 1 has stopped at a point on the bank where her older brother and the two other older boys from Family 2, have crossed. The transcript begins when

the father walks up to the bank to join his daughter in standing at the side of the stream and inspecting it. She identifies a rock for stepping on. Her father rejects it with an account and then directs her to another part of the stream.



Transcript 5. Identifying a crossing and waiting for permission

Earlier, a potential crossing point had been established by the three older boys, crossing at the part of the stream where daughter 1 is standing. Daughter 1 has not followed, even though the older boys accomplished their crossing successfully. Why not? In one sense, because the older boys have greater crossing capacities but also because they have an age-established entitlement to cross without waiting for a go-ahead from a parent. Her waiting acknowledges her orientation toward requiring a go-ahead from her father. It also shows that she can both recognise a significant obstacle for her, and from her inquiry into the obstacle, to find a feature of it, that might allow her to ford it.

As the father approaches, his daughter shouts her finding: *THERE'S A ROCK* (panel 2). It is more than just a finding, but can be heard as a suggestion for a potential crossing point. Her father rejects the suggestion, providing an account of the unsuitability of the rock as a stepping stone. His turn is left incomplete, cut short by his daughter's off-beat departure (Broth/Mondada 2013). It is likely that he is about to venture a reason (e.g. under the water & slippery). By her off-beat departure Daughter 1 successfully resumes her leader position, checking the bank for next potential crossing points (panel 3). Her departure shows, then, her desire to lead the investigation of where to cross the stream, even if the crossing itself requires a form of permission from her father.

Although the daughter is using her location in the pair to lead, her father from rear position, directs his daughter towards distant rocks: *the rocks are here*, that he has identified as suitable. Meantime, her attention is toward an earlier candidate crossing point (panel 3), manifest in her adjustment of pace and gaze. In slowing and pausing briefly, her father catches up, altering their mobile formation into a close couple (panel 4). While the father's first directing failed (panel 3), the second



upgrades the directing, by shepherding (Cekaite 2010) her away from that crossing (panel 4).

As they walk along the stream, they shift from looking at the distant rocks to looking at the immediate ground. Walking as a close couple, they shift between a file to side-by-side arrangement (transcript 6, panels 1 to 2) which supports a shared perspective and shared scrutiny of the ground ahead.



Transcript 6. Guiding child's walking & changing mobile formation

The father's warning of the hazard, *that'll be very... boggy*, is produced as a lovely suspension of the problem category. His turned suspended at the very point where his daughter is putting her foot in it (panels 2 to 3). What was an account for recognising *that bit* and potentially avoiding a hazard then becomes a visible and audible demonstration of the problem: that the ground is *boggy*. The warning of the risky territory ahead is itself produced so that it leaves room for his daughter to show her walking capacities. She could avoid it and, moreover, could complete the account. However, her onward rush, reproduces the ignoring of her earlier departure in transcript 5, in that it ignores the projected hazard from the father's warning. From the father's witnessing of these two episodes, he can use them as mechanisms to provide evidence for continuing to keep his daughter close and control her movement through more challenging terrain. It is evidence for him for this walk, though also a resource in judging how much freedom he gives her on future walks.

Yet we need to be careful in simply attributing the daughter's foot in the mud, as a failure of attention. As Shepherd (1997) reminds us, children deliberately put their foot in the mud for the sheer pleasure of squelching. It is in the character of walking in the countryside, as enjoyment for the family, that it provides sites for pleasure for children which are often in tension with their parent's project of keeping their feet dry, clothes relatively clean and teaching them proper walking. It is also not incidental that the daughter is equipped with sturdy wellies that allow for putting your foot into puddles, streams and bogs. Moreover, when warned to *watch that bit*, the daughter adjusts her step, dealing with it by stepping down into it. The father had not formulated, at the point of her stepping, whether it is boggy qualities rather than the dip that was the hazard. However, while that shows response, it fails to show recognition of the hazard.

As they continue toward the crossing point, the daughter increases her speed again, anticipating and swinging herself around to beside her father at the rocks. The father then shows her where to cross by stepping on the stones himself as an instructed-action. He makes an offer of assistance which appears not to be taken, and he reconfigures his touch to support the crossing nevertheless.





Transcript 7. Showing the stepping stones; offering and providing assistance

The father in crossing (panel 3) is watched by his daughter (and daughter 2 and her grandfather). We can note that his *cross here* instructs her seeing of where to cross rather than how to cross the stream. Daughter 1 follows him without pause for further inspection and displays no show of uncertainty. She begins to cross, in fact, ahead of her father offering his hand. He reaches out just as the daughter's foot stretches to find the stepping-stone. She has not waited nor sought further assistance by, for example, verbal request. The daughter does not take his offered hand when she steps out onto the rock. We can appreciate through her following of his move, refusing the offer of a helping hand, how she then displays herself as requiring no further assistance, other than being shown where to cross.

Meantime, rather than accept her refusal of assistance, the father's hand is not withdrawn. He adjusts it to make a brief beckoning gesture and then, once his daughter is close enough, he transfigures his extended arm gesture into gently pulling her across via her upper arm. The readiness of the father appears similar to the way bouldering partners support one another via 'spotting' (Jenkins 2017). Yet the pairing between professional climbers versus the ever-present father-daughter is quite distinct. His holding of her arm is in the context of her showing no acceptance.

The father provides a completion account *there you are*, which produces, post hoc, in the wake of the delays and corrections beforehand, their final crossing as a successful demonstration. The walk therefore becomes a place for the father's work

of providing ongoing tutelage in crossing streams using rocks. Yet, whether this tutelage is heard as that, is harder to fathom, given the absence of a verbal or other response from the daughter. It is part of doing being the family that parents are training their young children in, and as, repetitious repetitions in how to do this or that, and showing that there is a thing to be learnt or that has been learnt. In the paired category child to parent that they need not respond, acknowledge or appreciate these moments of parental assistance. We can add though that neither do they object to such demonstrations as patronising or un-necessary. Their competence is not at stake in those ways.

In this second traversing of an obstacle by a family we have examined how a father and child are sensitive to, and continue to reproduce, the rights of the child to act in dealing with obstacles herself (Butler/Wilkinson 2013). By comparison with our earlier crossing, the child is investigating and selecting crossing points, even if each is rejected. In the face of their child's witnessable assertions their independence we have traced the father's redirecting, guiding and helping. We have considered the helping as an everyday occasion for the father to examine his daughter's positioning between competence and incompetence. The crossings are accomplished in ways that allow the child to do crossing themselves, rather than being lifted or towed.

#### **4.1.2. Capable yet assistable; taking care; holding hands**

From the previous two events, we examined how children were assisted in different ways to traverse bogs and streams. What though of the helping hand offered when all the parties are categorizable as adults? It offers us further insights into helping one another, as part of doing being family, while also providing a comparison with the specific pairing of parents with small children we have examined earlier. What, then, does offering and accepting assistance do amongst adult family members and how is it done?

Before we respond to that question, we will briefly describe the assistance given to daughter 2 to cross another stream encountered in the wood. We re-join the walk from our previous fragment, although this time in the frame we have the grandfather and grandmother, mum and daughter 2 (transcript 8, panels 1 to 2, below), and later the father and daughter 1 (panels 3 to 4). They have encountered another stream in the woods, but this time there are no stepping-stones. The banks of the stream are steeply sloping requiring extra care for finding secure footing on them, and the adults have arranged themselves along its banks. Their arrangement produces a line of assisters that support daughter 2 (who, is of course, also categorizable as the granddaughter). The stream itself is narrow enough for an adult to stride across, but too wide for a small child. The grandfather has adopted a bridging and lifting stance, ready to give assistance. Given the grandfather's stance across the stream, he is establishing readiness to give a *lifting assist*. Note his lowered hands and bent back, projecting a grip around the torso of the child.



Transcript 8. Categorising as assistance-relevant; passing & assisting grand-daughter

As daughter 2 begins to walk towards her grandfather, the grandmother makes an order of family categorisations relevant to the assister: *your wife and then your daughter*. It seems humorous: going categorial as a basis both to mark his obligation and the dual aspects of the mother and grandmother's arrangement on the bank (panels 1 to 4) which can be seen as either: the assisting line for the grand-daughter or as a queue to cross. Moreover, it plays self-mockingly on their incapacity to cross the stream, in the face of father 1, father 2 and the grandfather that have crossed it without assistance. It is interesting in its collection of female categories that while they are gendered, it selects family rather than female (Stokoe 2011). Its non-seriousness is displayed in their next actions, once their assisting of daughter 2 is complete, as they both step forward rather than toward the grandfather. The grandmother scans the opposing bank, projecting their independent crossing of the stream as the next action rather than being assisted. This event is perhaps the closest to the practice of recruitment identified by Kendrick and Drew (2016) yet sits within a more open texture of relevancies, key being that recruitment is one alternate way of seeing their activity.

Once his assisting of the granddaughter is complete, the grandfather returns his gaze and offers a hand toward the remaining walkers on the bank. What he can see here is a lack of readiness from the grandmother and daughter to be assisted (Broth/Keevallik 2014). Whilst retaining his position, he clarifies that he will also be helping them by summoning them: *C'mon then over you come*, while keeping his arms and hands open in readiness. His daughter and wife show their ongoing stance, on the need for assistance to cross, by laughing. The grandfather assists his daughter to cross, and she provides a further stance marker on his assistance before losing her footing on landing on the far bank.





Transcript 9. Stance on offer; sweetness of the offer

The grandfather's *c'mon then* marks his taking seriously the ironic claim on his categorial responsibilities from his wife. We can note the difference from our first event in the bog. In that crossing, the father summons his son with *come 'ere* (transcript 2, panel 5), without projecting or verbally formulating what will happen next in relation to traversing the bog. It is only when he then places his foot and instructs his son to stand on it, that it becomes apparent what form the embodied assistance is to take. By contrast, in the present example, the grandfather has to use summons twice because the competent adults are not expecting assistance from him. Their slow response is dealing with surprise, but also whether such an offer will be maintained. Indeed, the daughter's stance on the seriousness of his offer of assistance is made clear by her extended laughter to mark his offer as un-necessary (panel 2). Her laughter is followed by quieter laughter from both the grandmother and father 1 (panel 2). All the adults thereby treat the assisting as about something other than being necessary or expected by, or for, its recipients.

When she is being helped, the daughter reconfigures the assisting as a sweet gesture in her assessing *aw* (panel 3). She also smiles throughout the crossing and so does his wife. Nevertheless, the grandfather's tactile connection remains strongly supportive: with not only the upward handhold but also his other hand supporting the assisted person's shoulder from behind, and he does not provide an audible response to his daughter's *aw*.

However, despite the po-faced assisting by the grandfather, we do see how his daughter reconfigures a potential question around her competence in walking (in this case, crossing the stream), as fatherly care. The helping hand here, for adults who are related or close friends, is that one that could be given rather than that needs to be given or ought to be given in the pairing of parent and small child. Indeed, if it were not for the daughter activating the father-daughter relationship here, the repeated offer of assisting across the stream might have been interpreted as treating the assisted as lacking capacity, rather than a caring gesture.

While the daughter continues to walk away from the obstacle, the grandfather then assists his wife across via the same inter-corporeal move of the strongly-

supporting, upward handhold (transcript 10, panels 2-3). She provides an acknowledgement appreciates the help with crossing the stream (panel 3). Having completed her crossing, she shrugs and joins her daughter's laughter at having been assisted.



Transcript 10. Assisting wife; stance on assistance

On completion of the assistance, what is to be made of it, is taken up again by the grandfather's daughter when she begins laughing again. She has adjusted her orientation so that she is now watching and is a witness to the assistance of her mother. The grandmother shrugs in response to becoming the object of her daughter's laughter (panel 4). Her shrug perhaps displays a downplaying of her significance in this sweet event. Afterwards, the grandmother laughs briefly to mark her affiliation with her daughter and continue the sense of the assistance as sweet and funny.

If we now rewind across the assisting events across all our examples in this paper, an element that we have hinted at, is that there are other family members and members of the walking group who are peripherally involved as the audience for the assistance. In this final crossing, who is witnessing moves from the grandmother and mother watching the granddaughter lifted across, with daughter 1 then emphasising the seriousness of the obstacle (*very, very deep*) with father 1 watching beside her (transcript 8). Daughter 1 continues to monitor the crossing, and the granddaughter, once assisted, positions herself to watch the mother and grandmother being assisted. The assisting then is an occasion for family members and others to watch and see what each member of the family are doing to one another and potentially to them (see Sacks 1992, vol 2:101-102). The grandmother plays upon the assistance being given by the grandfather to ironically suggest they should also be assisted. Once underway, what the assisting is doing is then being monitored by the small children who remain to be assisted where that assistance is done to them rather than requested or recruited. The granddaughter is being presented then with how she should understand the grandfather helping adults across the stream. The grandfather does it competently, seriously and indeed

showing his experience as a lifelong and trained hillwalker. The recipients of his assistance bring out another understanding of what it is doing for them: the grandfather is looking after them. The giving of assistance is always more than just an inter-corporeal and embodied transportation across rough ground, it is also the occasion for the intimacy of holding and touching one another as members of the family and others to look on.

## 5. Conclusions: Safe help

Sacks (1992) considered one of the practices commonly found in multiparty talk: making 'safe compliments'. When we have more than two people engaged in talking together, Sacks was interested in how those others analyse the actions of one member to another member. The safe compliment is hard to make, or may become quite bland, because it should not do anything else to other parties present in making it. On the family walk, with more than a pair of walkers, where members of the family are assisting one another, it is analysed by those other family members for what it does to, or for them. As we described in the first crossing of the bog, the mother accuses the father of abandoning the youngest child. In the final example, quite the opposite, the grandfather left no one behind even though they would likely have found ways of crossing without his assistance. He offered 'safe help' by doing it to everyone waiting, yet even safe help was available, of course, to be made more of by the rest of the family.

As we argued at the outset, obstacles of the countryside such as bogs and streams are not so dissimilar from traffic lights or other urban crossings. There is a feature ahead, which in relation to a family walk will require traversing and the assistance of young children, yet also a mutual coordination to traverse it as a mobile formation yet one that is also organised around the omnipresent device of the family and its members (Smith 2018). Walkers as parents are expected to respond, organise and assist their children in relation to the obstacle. Such analysis itself is built out of parents' and other adults' intimate knowledge of each child's capacities to jump, climb and balance at just this time in their lives.

In the first event, crossing the bog, although assistance is given by both parents, the children also build an assisting pair to successfully cross. They are not simply lifted as non-responsive objects over the obstacle. In the second event, crossing the stream, we showed how a child's desire to become more independent is made recognisable in the face of directives, guidance and assistance from their parent. In the third event, crossing a more substantial stream, we showed how adults are assisted; how they mark the assistance as un-necessary and transform it into a humorous and affectionate moment. Across all of these, then, what each member of the family is like right now, is open to the monitoring of all other family members. For the younger children with restricted independence their project is to show that they are more capable, surer on their feet, can perceive the environment and then will be given more rights to roam.

We have also noted how children acquire their extended rights to mobile competency within the family, and, in doing so, mobilise the categorial resources of the family, whilst simultaneously asserting rights as independent walkers. Echoing how EMCA studies have shown how children are treated as 'incompetent' and by other adults (Butler/Fitzgerald 2010), or in need of 'shepherding' to achieve



adult-led tasks at home (Cekaite 2010), here we have also shown how adults carefully monitor their children's mobile actions, capacities, (and footwear), to assist them across obstacles, but also to assist their growing independence, to deal with them as an 'evolved natural object' as Sacks (1992:330) put it. As they graduate from age to age, they will become less needing of assistance and continue to acquire further rights to move without monitoring or assistance.

Our paper has, then, sought to deepen the understanding of assisting one another as practical matters in the constitution and transformation of families. It offered insights into both what happens during walks in the countryside that makes them of value and interest to families. It also demonstrates how the family, as a differentiating and categorially organised collective, responds to routine trouble. We have extended the EMCA studies of tactile practices in the caring work of family members in showing how assistance is given and received with a sensitivity to independence, capability and yet also to the material details of obstacles around, through, or over, which conveying is accomplished.

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