

## Gender-specific use of the domestic telephone

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Research on social uses of the telephone has systematically shown clear gender differences: women use the telephone at home more often than men (Chabrol and Périn 1993; Claisse and Rowe 1993; Dordick and LaRose 1992; Ling 1998; Moyal 1992). Women's inclination to use the telephone at home has generally been explained by the gender distribution of family roles and by women's investment in private life and intimate relationships. Using Bakan's (1966) "agency" *versus* "communion" distinction (and treating this distinction as describing masculine versus feminine identity orientations) and/or drawing on work collected by Parsons and Bales (1955) on the social division of gender family roles, various authors have centered their explanations on the social positions occupied by the sexes and on their social psychological characteristics.

Women's family role and identity, focusing on close relationships and expressiveness, originally was considered to be more suited to telephone communication. In this sense, research on intimacy and interpersonal process has shown gender differences in patterns of self-disclosure. During interactions, women disclose more than men, particularly about intimate topics (Dindia and Allen 1992; Dolgin and Minowa 1997).<sup>47</sup> This fact also may intensify women's use of interpersonal communication media, especially a widely available and essentially dyadic medium such as the telephone.

Moreover, as social network studies have revealed, women and men differ considerably in network composition though not in network size. In particular, women's personal networks--even when variables related to work, family, and age are controlled--contain more and larger proportions of kin as well as more types of kin (Moore 1990). Maintaining family solidarity and continuity of contact also seems to be a woman's task:

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<sup>47</sup> The main concept in this field, self-disclosure, is viewed either as a personality trait or as an interaction process. In the latest framework, the only one we consider here, self-disclosure is assumed to be governed by social exchange principles and/or norms of reciprocity, and therefore frequently depends on context: partner's identities, the topic of exchange and the relationship between actors. We would like to thank Lynn Smith-Lovin, who urged us to examine this domain of psychological inquiry.

as Di Leonardo (1987) has reported, women in couples often have greater knowledge about kin, even including the husband's kin.

Researchers also generally agree that women give and receive more emotional support from other close women in their network (kin, friends, or neighbors), as demonstrated by for example, Wellman's (1979) Toronto study. This implies that the gender composition of personal networks is different for women than for men. Men rarely have women friends, and in general their networks contain few women except relatives (Wellman and Wortley 1990). In contrast, women's networks are composed mainly of other women (see Cochran et al. 1993). The residential telephone is used largely to contact family and friends; therefore a separation of household roles in which the woman is responsible for maintaining relationships (combined with women's greater overall involvement in personal relationships) could explain women's more frequent telephone communication. Wellman suggests an even more general hypothesis: that "community keeping has become an extension of kin keeping, both of which are the responsibility of the women" (1992: 81).

Finally, with regard to telephone use in the home, the availability of the telephone is another factor. A woman (even a working woman) tends to spend more time at home than a man; thus she is more likely to have telephone contact at home.<sup>48</sup>

All these factors--division of household labor, division of family roles, and differences in composition of social networks, gender identities, and interaction styles--contribute to the gender-specific use of the telephone. This relatively clear gender effect on the frequency of domestic telephone use has been observed in the classic surveys cited above. In contrast, relatively little attention has been paid to the effect of gender on the duration of telephone conversations.

In the gender stereotypes about women's telephone conversations, women are associated with "endless" chatting. These stereotypes are widespread and similar in various countries. As Fischer (1992) noted, they were forged in the early days of the private

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<sup>48</sup> Despite major changes in women's participation in the labor market, gender remains a more important determinant of housework time than does any other factor (see Shelton and John 1996). According to French data, a working woman spends almost twice as much on housework as a working man (Dumontier and Pan Ké Shon 1999).

telephone in the United States and still seem to operate. As far as we know, however, this issue has never been investigated seriously in the social sciences. The methods used in standard research on telephone use (diaries and self-reports) contribute, in our opinion, to this focus on call frequency at the expense of duration.

Our data enable us to raise broader issues of gender effects on telephone use. We propose an interaction-based hypothesis in our attempt to explain gender-related differences in the conduct of telephone conversations; in particular we relate the differences we observed in the duration of telephone conversations to the sex composition of communication dyads. By examining the construction of telephone conversation identities (masculine/feminine, caller/receiver) of the actors involved in the interaction, we obtain greater insight into this complex phenomenon.

### ***Method***

Our study on the residential use of the telephone took place in 1996. Our methodology was based on the observation of telephone billing records, which we then matched with users' declarations about each telephone number in the records (e.g., to whom the number belonged). The billing records were an indispensable part of the method because they allowed us to pinpoint the date, time, and duration of the call, and the geographical distance between the callers.

The sample consisted of 312 households (residential telephone users) containing 308 adult female and 245 adult male participants. The sample was selected randomly from the telephone directories of three French regions: the city of Paris, the Lille urban area (north of France), and a rural area in southwest France. In each zone, the contacted households were stratified in the same proportions with regard to the type of household (single, couple, family), the past use of the telephone (extensive versus modest use), and the telephone subscriber's social economic status (high versus low).

Each participant gave us his or her permission to use their household's billing data in the study. The telephone billing records (all of the household's outgoing calls) were collected for four months. If the household had more than one fixed phone, we observed each line. Data for mobile phones were not collected (in 1996, the rate of mobile

telephone penetration among French residential users was very low and was insignificant in our sample).

Two face-to-face interviews were conducted with each household member age 11 or more who reported regular use of the telephone. The first questionnaire centered on individual and household demographic, social, and occupational characteristics; the second focused on telephone interlocutors of the respondent and/or of the household.

From the complete list of telephone numbers called from the house, each participant selected the numbers that he or she actually had called. Then the participant provided a standard description of each correspondent, including (where possible) age, sex, occupation, definition of the relationship (e.g., mother, father, sibling, friend, colleague, relation), and typical subjects of conversation. When more than one person in the household called a number, the interviewees together decided on the most suitable definition of the correspondent(s). This procedure was repeated until no more numbers were identified. Interviewees succeeded in identifying about 50 percent of their telephone correspondents, representing about 70 percent of all calls made from the household. The remaining 30 percent of the telephone calls, which were not identified, were generally calls to infrequent correspondents; a large proportion of these correspondents whom interviewees could not identify after four months were probably not personal contacts but businesses, institutions, and the like. We assembled unambiguous sex-of-caller information for 57,000 private calls; for 35,000 of these calls we also know the sex of the receiver.<sup>49</sup> In this report our purpose is to discuss the data only in relation to gender differences in adults' use of the residential telephone. Use by children, which seems somewhat more specific, is not analyzed here.

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<sup>49</sup> In certain cases it was not possible to identify the interlocutor's sex. In addition to the numbers that interviewees did not recognize, and calls to businesses and public bodies, there were also the calls made by more than one person or in which more than one person was called. For example, one couple may call another couple: thus it was not possible to identify just one interlocutor.

## ***Results***

### *Frequency of Telephone Use: Family Roles and Social Networks*

Our results show that women call more frequently from home than do men. Women made 63 percent of calls for which we can pinpoint the caller's sex. This disproportionate finding is also reflected in the fact that women spent twice as much total monthly time on the telephone as men. Moreover, these findings hold true whether or not the caller worked (or worked full-time rather than part-time).<sup>50</sup> Women at all stages in the life cycle spent more of their time each month in telephone conversation than did men.

The gender differences latent in the intensity of telephone use take on added depth when we view them through the lens of traditional family roles, which characterize women as “expressive” and men as “instrumental”. Thus we observe a gradual monopolization of the domestic telephone by the woman in the couple. As shown in the first column in table 9, the woman in the couple makes most of the calls, especially to kin outside the household and to friends. These differences become even more marked after the birth of the first child, and the gender gap persists in couples in later stages of the family life cycle.

This finding is consistent with the assumption of social network theory and role identity theory. That is, marriage and parenthood often limit women's opportunities to form network ties to nonrelatives outside the neighborhood, while they offer men time and opportunity to establish network ties beyond local and kin boundaries (Moore 1990). Male sociability is also more external to household life: it includes more professional contacts and meetings in public places, as compared with females' more home-centered social life. At the same time, Burke and Cast (1997) have shown that the birth of a child has a significant effect on the parents' gender identity: husbands become more ‘masculine’, while wives become more ‘feminine’. Hence the family life cycle seems to be related both to the network positions of the genders and to gender identities. Finally, family studies also have shown clearly that the arrival of children ‘traditionalizes’

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<sup>50</sup> We conducted an ANOVA on time spent monthly in telephone conversation by caller's sex and caller's occupational status (full-time, part-time, or without a job). We observed only the main effect of caller's sex ( $F(1,513)= 9.6, p<0.0001$ ). Neither the occupation effect nor the caller's sex-by-occupation interaction effect was significant in this analysis. (In France nearly 80% of women age from 25 to 50 are occupationally active; see INSEE 1997.)

family work: when a couple has a child, women assume most of the responsibility for child care, and often for other family work as well (Belsky 1990; MacDermid, Huston, and McHale 1990).

**Table 9. Distribution of Calls by Gender and by Life Cycle (Percentages)**

Stage in Life Cycle	Distribution of Calls Between Spouses <sup>a</sup>			Distribution of Calls by Relationship <sup>b</sup>		
	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total
Single < Age 45						
Family	-	-	-	29.7	25.8	27.3
Friends	-	-	-	40.2	50.2	46.5
Acquaintances	-	-	-	5.0	4.4	4.6
Others <sup>c</sup>	-	-	-	25.1	19.7	21.7
Total	-	-	-	100.0	100.0	100.0
Couple < Age 45, No Child in Household						
Family	34.6	65.4	100.0	36.7	48.8	43.8
Friends	44.5	55.5	100.0	35.6	31.3	33.1
Acquaintances	53.8	46.2	100.0	2.7	1.7	2.1
Others	49.0	51.0	100.0	25.0	18.3	21.0
Total	41.3	58.7	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Family with Young Child(ren)						
Family	16.0	84.0	100.0	32.8	56.9	50.9
Friends	30.0	70.0	100.0	25.3	19.5	20.9
Acquaintances	46.6	53.4	100.0	11.7	4.4	6.2
Others	34.2	65.8	100.0	30.2	19.2	21.9
Total	24.8	75.2	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Family with Teenager(s)						
Family	27.2	72.8	100.0	36.1	46.8	43.3
Friends	25.1	74.9	100.0	15.5	22.4	20.2
Acquaintances	29.4	70.6	100.0	8.6	10.0	9.5
Others	48.1	51.9	100.0	39.8	20.7	26.9
Total	32.6	67.4	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Couple > Age 45, No Child in Household						
Family	19.0	81.0	100.0	38.6	49.3	46.8
Friends	19.3	80.7	100.0	20.9	26.2	25.0
Acquaintances	21.1	78.9	100.0	4.5	5.0	4.9
Others	35.4	64.6	100.0	36.0	19.6	23.3
Total	23.0	77.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Single > Age 45						
Family	-	-	-	26.9	40.1	36.9
Friends	-	-	-	25.2	29.3	28.3
Acquaintances	-	-	-	15.8	8.1	10.0
Others	-	-	-	32.1	22.5	24.8
Total	-	-	-	100.0	100.0	100.0

<sup>a</sup> Only "head of the household" or his/her spouse is taken into account; *N* = 514.

<sup>b</sup> *N* = 553 (308 adult females and 245 adult males).

<sup>c</sup> "Other" category consists of nonpersonal correspondents (e.g., services, enterprises).

Women's prevalence in telephone use by couples coincides with women's 'kin-keeper orientation' (Firth, Hubert, & Forge 1969; Rosenthal 1985), which replaces the strong

friendship-based patterns of use among young single women. The division of 'telephonic roles' in the couple correlates with feminine network kin specialization, as Moore (1990) suggested, but also with an overall tendency to initiate contacts with persons in all types of close relationships.

The second column of table 9 shows the distribution of calls by relationship within each sex. Except for young single persons who, regardless of sex, are generally oriented to friendship contacts *via* telephone, we note a gender specialization of phone use, beginning with young couples. Women are more inclined than men to call relatives, whereas men seem to use the telephone more frequently to maintain relations with instrumental correspondents such as official bodies and suppliers of services. Our data thus provide a very traditional picture of family roles in regard to use of the telephone at home.

The widespread gender specialization observed in our research is reinforced by the 'gender homophily' (McPherson & Smith-Lovin 1987) observed in telephone contacts. The use of the residential telephone reveals a tendency towards same-gender communications. In the cases where we can unambiguously identify the sex-of-the-caller and the sex of the interlocutor, 59 percent of calls made by a man were directed to a male, and 69 percent of calls made by a woman were made to another woman. This tendency seems to originate in the gender composition of personal networks, as shown in Table 2. Telephone contact networks are different in the two sex groups; in addition, their gender homophily intensifies slightly throughout the life cycle.<sup>51</sup>

The "gender specificity" of telephone communication is also evident in the different types of personal correspondents (table 10). Women in particular appear to be strongly oriented toward communicating with their own gender. The only exceptions to the rule of same-gender contacts in telephone communication are kin calls made by men. Presumably this exception is related to women's kin-keeper orientation, as discussed above, but here we find a tendency on the call receiver's side: this is, the call is controlled by kinswomen outside the household. This phenomenon, when analyzed,

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<sup>51</sup> For families with young children we observe a large number of other couples in the network of telephone correspondents. Nevertheless, the interhousehold network at this point in the life cycle is increased at the expense of the number of opposite-sex correspondents

appears to be determined by the relationship between caller and the persons (or households) called.

**Table 10. Gender Distribution of Telephone Correspondents by Sex of Interlocutor(s) in Different Household Types (Percentages)**

Sex of Caller	Receiver			Total
	Male	Female	Couple <sup>a</sup>	
<b>Male</b>				
Single < age 45	47.1	37.5	15.4	100.0
Couple < age 45, no child in household	40.6	30.4	29.0	100.0
Family with young child(ren)	44.8	21.8	33.3	100.0
Family with teenager(s)	48.8	31.2	20.0	100.0
Couple > age 45, no child in household	51.4	30.4	18.1	100.0
Single > age 45	55.9	26.6	17.5	100.0
<b>Female</b>				
Single < age 45	28.0	53.1	18.8	100.0
Couple < age 45, no child in household	32.3	44.0	23.8	100.0
Family with young child(ren)	17.1	46.4	36.5	100.0
Family with teenager(s)	26.4	53.2	20.3	100.0
Couple > age 45, no child in household	27.5	50.8	21.7	100.0
Single > age 45	22.3	56.2	21.5	100.0

*Note:*  $N = 553$  (308 adult females and 245 adult males), based on 4,785 personal correspondents qualified by sex. The participants were asked to define the sex of the telephone correspondent. In cases where the telephone number was not associated with a single correspondent, but with both the man and the woman of the household, participants indicated "couple" as a definition.

The specific role played by women in communication and in the maintenance of social relations of the household, and the gender homophily of "personal telephonic networks", seem to be the major factors explaining women's dominance of residential telephone use.

#### *Duration of Telephone Conversations and Distribution of Interactional Status*

The gender differences in the intensity of residential telephone use are linked, as our data indicate, to the duration of the calls. At first glance, the duration of calls appears to be a function of caller's sex (as indicated by the main sex-of-caller effect in the analysis of the variance conducted on the duration of conversations). Thus calls initiated by a woman are a minute longer, on average, than those made by a man.

This general, stereotypic finding, however, masks a more complex reality. The duration of calls made to personal relations is affected in fact by the gender of both the caller and the receiver. In conversations with "private" correspondents (family, friends, and acquaintances), the duration of the call increased dramatically when the correspondent



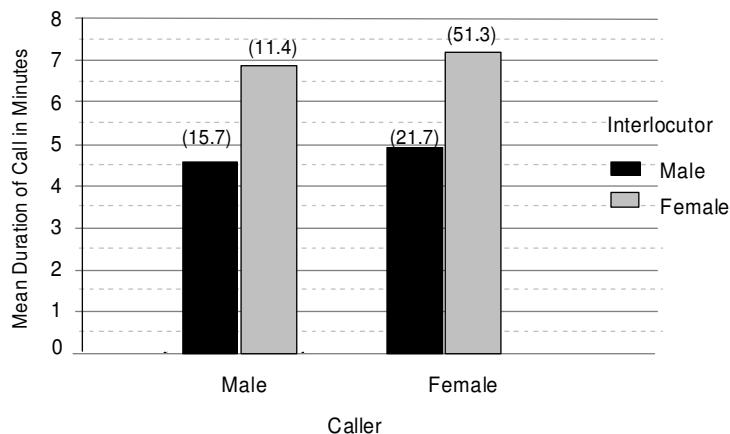
was a woman (see figure 16). We observed this effect for all types of households (single-person households as well as more complex families) and in all age groups in the sample. A subsequent study conducted by our research group during 1997 (12 months of observation, 300 households, and 233,000 telephone calls identified) confirmed the findings discussed here.

**Table 11. Frequency of Men's and Women's Telephone Contacts With Different Kinds of Correspondents, by Sex of Interlocutor(s) (Percentages)**

Interlocutor:	Caller:					
	Male			Female		
	Family	Friends	Acquaintances	Family	Friends	Acquaintances
Male	27.8	56.6	71.4	21.1	26.8	30.4
Female	36.0	31.3	19.4	49.1	58.5	56.9
Couple	36.2	12.1	9.3	29.7	14.7	12.7
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

**Note:** Based on 35,539 qualified calls. All sex-of-receiver by sex-of-caller effects are significant at  $p < .0001$  level.

**Figure 16. Mean Duration of Private Telephone Conversations by Sex of Caller and Sex of Receiver (Percentages of Observed Calls in Parentheses)**



**Note:** Based on 25,737 calls.

The effects of the interlocutor's gender made no distinction between conversations with family, friends, or acquaintances. In all these types of relationship, the presence of the woman as interlocutor increased the duration of the call (see table 12). We observed differentiation in the length of communication based both on the interlocutor's gender and the subject of the conversation. This differentiation also follows classic gender stereotypes (Williams and Best 1990). (Also see: Baumeister and Sommer 1997, who

argued that a distinction between two spheres of belongingness was associated with gender: women's intimate and dyadic sociality, and men's orientation toward larger group memberships.) For the men in our study, most calls to women were made to discuss personal matters: these accounted for 58 percent of all calls made from a man to a woman, as against 24 percent concerning everyday life, 23 percent about social life, and 7 percent about professional life.<sup>52</sup> On the other hand, men's calls to other men were associated more frequently with work (14 percent) and social life (31 percent) and pertained less frequently to daily problems (20 percent) or personal life (40 percent). Women's calls, in contrast, did not seem to discriminate among correspondents according to the topic of the conversation.

**Table 12. Difference in Duration of Telephone Conversations by Sex of Caller and Sex of Receiver: Deviation From the Mean of Duration of Conversation With Each Type of Interlocutor**

Caller:	Interlocutor:		
	Family	Friends	Acquaintances
Male			
Male receiver	-1' 54"	-2' 11"	-22"
Female receiver	+50"	+25"	+59"
Female			
Male receiver	-1' 28"	-1' 07"	-1' 28"
Female receiver	+48"	+1' 11"	+52"

*Notes:* Based on 25,585 calls qualified by sex of caller, sex of receiver, and relationship. Deviations from the mean of the conversation duration are shown within each type of relationship. This mean is influenced by more frequent calls by women and by more frequent woman-to-woman calls (as in gender homophily effects); therefore the sum of deviation means presented here is not zero.

This thematic specification seen in men may account partially for the effect of receiver's gender discussed above. Actually, calls made from a man to a woman, which were less frequent in general than same-gender calls, were usually concerned with personal issues (the type of calls that tended, on average, to be the longest in duration). In such cases, the typical length of calls approached that of calls between women. At the same time, men talked longer among themselves when their conversations concerned work matters (see table 13).

<sup>52</sup> After analyzing the motives and domains of calls made by the actors, we adopted a classification of telephone call topics according to the following four spheres (also see Chabrol and Périn 1993): work life (job or school matters); social life (sociability and social memberships including leisure, hobbies, and nonprofessional political or association activities); everyday life (practical daily problems ranging from organization of the household timetable to help or advice on housework); and personal life (all kinds of personal topics ranging from love affairs to chat).

**Table 13. Mean Duration of Private Telephone Conversations by Sex of Caller, Sex of Receiver, and Communication Topic**

Caller	Topic of Communication			
	Professional life	Social Life	Everyday Life	Personal Life
<b>Male</b>				
Male receiver	6' 36"	3' 39"	5' 02"	4' 14"
Female receiver	4' 52"	5' 16"	5' 43"	7' 34"
<b>Female</b>				
Male receiver	3' 27"	5' 54"	4' 18"	5' 23"
Female receiver	7' 17"	7' 04"	6' 27"	7' 57"

*Note:* Based on 23,523 calls

Among calls made by men, the subject of the call seemed to influence the duration more strongly than among calls made by women.<sup>53</sup> In the case of male callers, the increase in call duration when the recipient was a woman was highly visible for personal calls. For female callers, the mean time of conversation appeared to be more independent of the topic; it was shorter with male correspondents and much longer (about seven minutes) when another woman was called. Our data thus suggest that the conversational rules mobilized in telephone calls may differ significantly according to the interactants' identities. The interlocutor's gender seems to play an important role in defining the situation by influencing the length of the exchanges in this way. This is not simply a matter of the actors' communication skills, nor of women's apparent general ability in personal interactions. On the contrary, an interaction management process seems to guide the duration of telephone conversations.

### ***Discussion***

The gender differences in the frequency of domestic telephone use appear in our study to be linked to women's specific role in the household division of labor, which is correlated with the need to maintain close relationships. The general gender homophily of personal networks (as these are observed through telephone contacts) reinforces women's tendency to use the telephone more. Our data indicate that this effect is associated with the life cycle and with household composition. Thus family life and the

<sup>53</sup> A one-way ANOVA on the duration of the conversation by topic reveals a main effect of the conversation topic for a male caller ( $F(3,6484) = 16.7, p < .0001$ ).

birth of a child seem to traditionalize gender roles concerning domestic telephone use. These findings are very similar to the evidence ordinarily observed in research on social uses of the telephone (Chabrol & Périn 1993; Claisse & Rowe 1993; Dordick & LaRose 1992; Ling 1998; Moyal 1992) thus we do not discuss this point in greater detail.

The gender effect on the duration of the call, however, calls for more discussion. The regularities observed in the duration of calls seem to involve two effects: that of the polarization of interactional roles, and that of gender. Actually our data suggest that the role of the actors, as defined in the context of a phone conversation, should be considered. The presence of a woman in the interaction generally prolongs call. Thus, both men's and women's conversations with a woman are habitually longer than conversations between two men. This finding is consistent with "a tendency for females to be more overtly responsive and supportive than males during intimate discussions in both same- and cross-gender friendships" as reported by Leaper et al. (1995: 401) because, as Davis and Perkowitz (1979) have noted, responsiveness has the effect of prolonging an interaction. Dindia, Fitzpatrick and Kenny (1997) have also observed that disclosure of intimate feelings within conversations is highly reciprocal in both the same- and opposite-sex dyads. The revealing of personal, evaluative information appears to involve communicators and to call for a reciprocal response. Hence we can hypothesize that women's responsive tendency, combined with the principle of reciprocity in conversational self-disclosure, may influence the duration of telephone conversations with a woman.

Up to this point, the self-disclosure interpretation has fit well with the behavior observed. Our data, however, also reveal a gender composition effect, which causes conversation to be lengthened when a woman *receives* the call. Caller-receiver status is clearly asymmetrical: when a woman calls a man, their conversation is significantly shorter than when a man calls a woman. Because of this receiver effect, we must consider not only gender differences in "interpersonal styles" of interaction, but also gender-situated identities. In other words, women's supposed tendency to disclose more during conversations--and thus to lengthen the duration of conversations--is more evident when women receive calls than when they are the initiators.

This point implies that specific social codes of behavior are activated in telephone exchanges, depending on the interlocutors' identities. These codes of course draw on the framework established by the actors' extra-situational identity (here, their gender) and perhaps by their situated identity (caller as opposed to receiver); in addition, they are affected by the contingent and contextual aspects of the interaction. If we acknowledge that women's interaction style (more responsiveness and more supportiveness to the interlocutor, together with reciprocity of disclosure) leads to longer telephone exchanges with personal contacts, and, in contrast, that men's style of telephone contact abridges these exchanges, we can suggest further that the telephone call permits the receiver to take most of the control over the sequence of conversational exchanges.

This hypothesis could explain the difference between the duration of male-to-female and female-to-male calls, as well as the two other, 'extreme' situations: male-to-male (the shortest calls) and female-to-female (the longest). Thus the particular codes related to private contacts seem to be included in the definition of the conversational situation along with the distribution of initiator-receiver identity. This point also means that during a telephone conversation we observe an asymmetric status distribution between caller and receiver, and that gender may only play the role of "interaction style selector." Our hypothesis agrees with some observations generated by the ethnomethodologists' conversation analysis, concerning features of initiator- versus receiver-specific positions in conversation.

Many researchers have identified gender differences in forms of speech (Johnstone 1993; Lakoff 1975; also see Wolfinger & Rabow 1997, who found that in talk transcripts the speaker's gender was identified very successfully by students). They have given relatively little attention to conversations, however. The differentiation of the aims of gender talk, outlined as typically status-oriented among men and affiliative among women, also has been analyzed as a source of misunderstanding or conversational breakdown in cross-sex interactions (Tannen 1990 & 1994; for a critique, see Cameron 1998). Power distribution in gender relations has been scrutinized at the level of interaction; researchers, for example, have observed that men interrupt women more often than the reverse (West & Zimmerman 1983; Zimmerman & West

1975). The classic ethnomethodological analyses of telephone conversations (Schegloff 1979) emphasized the empirical importance of the structure of conversation, particularly conversational turns and sequencing, as an unfolding process. Yet although this work shows in great detail how conversations are managed, it hardly examines how interlocutors' extrasituational identities, such as gender, could affect ordinary telephone interactions.

In his account of Sacks's work, Watson (1994) notes that the "turn-generated" identities specific to conversation--intrinsic identities made salient and "produced" by the internal structure of conversation itself, like those in the caller-receiver pair--actually emerge in conversations, especially in telephone conversations (see Sacks 1992:360-66). In particular, the caller-receiver (or *summoner-summoned*; see Schegloff 1968) conversational identities (or roles) are highly relevant to the conversation process at the beginning (opening) and the end (closing) of the conversation. At these particular moments, the conventional rights and duties linked to caller-receiver identities appear to be most important to the alignment of the interlocutors' joint actions. In this sense, it is the caller's duty to first propose a closing of the interaction and the receiver's right to ratify this proposal or not (so as to stop or continue the conversation).

At this point, ethnomethodologists' analysis of the emergence of the internal order of conversation and identities in telephone calls reinforces our hypothesis that the receiver has more control over the conversation process, or at least over the ratification of closing proposals. According to Watson (1994:166), however, the 'intrinsic' caller-receiver conversational identities serve precisely to move all of the speakers' other, 'distal' identities (e.g., gender, ethnic, occupational) out of the realm of private conversations. This assertion does not fit our data, nor the effect of receiver's gender that we observed.

On the other hand, gender as a status characteristic in interactions has been analyzed abundantly in research on small group processes; there researchers often have examined the problem of the influence of extrasituational identities on the construction of immediate status distribution. In this research tradition it is assumed that the male's status is normally higher than that of the female; therefore males' power or influence on interaction partners during encounters will usually be greater. This is true for most of

mixed-sex situations (Ridgeway & Diekema 1992). Yet, as many authors have argued, the balance of status also depends on the type of group task--masculine, feminine, or neutral--and on other status information made salient in the group situation; this information can reverse male advantage and can shift the actual status distribution in favor of women (for a review, see Wagner & Berger 1998). Further, Ridgeway and Berger (1986) have proposed taking into account the legitimation process at work in interactional status distribution: that is, consensual beliefs associating differentially valued status positions with participants' identities, type of task, or task outcomes.

These tenets--if shared and validated by the participants--become normative and result in the production of a shared interaction status order. If we suppose that consensual beliefs activated in telephone conversations change according to the receiver's gender--because the call receiver's status seems to be higher in this situation--we can expect differences in the definition of the situation (task type and its outcomes) and in status distribution between initiator and receiver. Speaking with a man therefore will not be the same as speaking with a woman. If we admit that traditional gender stereotypes are still at work in interpersonal interactions, we can speculate that when we are calling a man, we are expected to enter a more "instrumental" conversation; when calling a woman, however, we may expect that "relational" issues also will emerge during the call. Taking into account that the receiver's status appears to influence the unfolding of the personal calls in these two situations, the receiver's gender will provide different expectations about the type of interaction style to be adopted.

We aim here to explore the relevance of our hypothesis of preferential civility codes for telephone conversations. If one considers everyday life rites such as the visit, and the civility codes that define their propriety, it is up to the caller to determine when to leave. Meanwhile the hosts validate such a decision through actions they must accomplish themselves, such as "opening the door" to allow the caller to leave (Picard 1995). Therefore the codes that are believed to rule polite face-to-face visits exhibit both role patterns and negotiation in the evolution of the situation and in the context itself.

We consider this point interesting because some phone calls may be construed by the participants as visits at a distance (hence the semantic ambiguity of the word call, which may be used both for face-to-face and for telephone interaction). This was observed to

be crucial for telephone conversations between families and hospitalized relatives; both sides constructed these as visits, and this shared meaning patterned the way in which the telephone conversation unfolded (Akers-Porrini 1997).

Similarly, certain implicit and explicit codes influence telephone behavior. For example, it is improper in France to call acquaintances after 10 p.m. except in an emergency. This norm causes a dramatic drop in residential telephone flows around that time, as testified by large telephone data sets in our possession. In addition, the telephone call can be perceived as an intrusion interrupting the course of daily household activities; hence the receiver's ratification that it is all right to continue conversation seems important.

The "civility hypothesis," associating identities attributed to the interlocutors in telephone interaction with the situation of the visit, focuses our attention on the specific know-how and the rules as they are mobilized in the telephone conversation. The visitor is supposed to observe "sustained attention" to the visited person's behavior, requirements, and timetable. Consequently it seems quite appropriate to apply the visit metaphor to telephone interaction.

If we examine the telephone call as a visit, this status distribution seems to change according to the caller's and receiver's identity. In this particular case, as indicated by handbooks on good manners (at least French ones), the status of the host(ess) is higher than that of the visitor in negotiating the unfolding of the visit (Picard 1995). Furthermore, the host and visitor roles in the construction of the visit appear quite explicit: for example, the management of situational conduct demands clear ratification by the host. Codes in civility textbooks, however, do not function as enforced norms, nor can they be used here except as guidelines for our interpretations. The importance of role patterns in the negotiation of sequences such as opening or closing calls suggests that we should try to analyze the content of actual telephone conversations. In addition, it suggests that we should look for evidence of role patterns and receiver's gender effects which clarify our quantitative observations.

### ***Content of Conversations***

From the viewpoint of our hypothesis, the major insufficiency in our telephone traffic data is that we lack the content of the conversations. To solve this dilemma, we use a



corpus of telephone conversations recorded and collected in a few French homes in the late 1980s.<sup>54</sup> A more extensive analysis is beyond the scope of this paper and will be published elsewhere (Akers-Porrini 2000); here we wish only to sketch how conversation analysis, focusing especially on gender in conversation pairs, can help us to understand the sex-of-receiver effect discussed above.

We begin with the effect, on telephone call duration, of variables defined and observed outside the context of the conversation. This analysis is based on examining the sequential construction of the call itself. The conversations between pairs of mixed- and same-sex interlocutors were isolated and analyzed (Allard 1998). In the analysis, the investigators gave special attention to participants' gender and conversational identities of the in openings, closings and sequences of topic proposition and ratification.

The first analysis points to a structure of roles and conversation patterns in face-to-face relationships. As an example of this pattern, the father takes a call, converses with his daughter, and then passes the telephone to the mother, who also talks to her daughter. The first (daughter-father) conversation is short, linear, and monothematic; the second (daughter-mother) interaction in this call is long, digressive, and polythematic. A situation of this kind was exploited in British Telecom's "It's good to talk" advertising campaign, in which a father answers his daughter's call and immediately passes the phone to the mother. French surveys on the frequency of intergenerational conversations within the household have found patterns similar to those imagined in the lay approach of British Telecom's marketing services, albeit in a less exaggerated form (Galland 1997; also see Rossi & Rossi 1990).

To summarize, girls speak more to their parents than do boys, both in frequency and in variety of subjects; daughters speak more to mothers, while sons speak more to fathers. Nevertheless, the more personal and more intimate the subject, the more the mother rather than the father is involved. To our knowledge, no such study of face-to-face sociability within the family has handled the question of who generally initiated the

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<sup>54</sup> The corpus of 62 hours of telephone conversations in four households was gathered by Louis Quéré in collaboration with our Laboratory. At our request, Laurence Allard and Ruth Akers-Porrini conducted several conversation analyses on the exchanges between pairs of men and women, either mixed or same-gender dyads, in which every interlocutor was the caller or the receiver of the call in different conversations. The research has given us some interpretative directions, which are employing in this paper.

interactions. Thus, although it is impossible to translate of such results directly to our observations of gender patterns in telephone calls, the pattern of social relationships between relatives (with its specific role structure and gender differentiation) must be taken into account as a relevant factor beyond the structure of the telephone conversations themselves.

As to the negotiated structure of telephone conversations, we observed that some conversations between women were long, multithematic, and digressive in nature with a corresponding lengthening and multiplication of closure sequences, and some conversations between men were short, linear, and monothematic. This point is not to be generalized further, however, because conversations of the first type occur also between men: there is no deterministic gender-embedded pattern for handling telephone conversations. Yet, on the assumption that a trend exists for a preferred mode of interaction (consistent, by the way, with the family data for ordinary conversations in the household mentioned above), in some intergender telephone conversations we have observed that multithematic and digressive processing of topics was initiated by women and ratified (or refused) by men. This process of ratification or refusal of particular modes of conversation seemed more constrained when the woman received the phone call. We hypothesize that within the format of the visit, it is more difficult to refuse to indulge the host in the type of interaction he wants to promote.

In addition, we assume that the caller adapts his or her behavior beforehand on the basis of his or her knowledge and stereotyped expectations, and anticipates on the basis of the receiver's gender the preferred mode of interaction in the particular case. The further conversational data analysis on telephone call openings by Akers-Porrini (2000) indicates that callers adjust their interaction style to the receiver's gender. Hence we may suggest that different gender representations are mobilized, depending on whether one is calling a woman or a man. When females call males, they may adopt a more instrumental style of interaction; when males call females, they may adopt a more sociable style. Together with our hypothesis regarding civility codes, in which the call receiver enjoys higher interactional status, this observation may provide an overall explanation of the duration of talks with women and with men.

## ***Conclusion***

More varied conversational data are needed to support our interpretation. In fact, our results indicate that the duration of telephone calls is affected not only by the receiver's gender but also by variations in topic and relationship. The corpus of conversations analyzed here does not allow us to work at this level of detail. Even so, the two different sets of data used to examine the effect of gender on duration of telephone conversations give us quite a coherent picture of influence of the receiver's gender on the call. This effect cannot be elucidated solely by a reference to gender specific forms of talk or to a tendency to disclose more or less during interactions. Although other explanatory factors also may be relevant,<sup>55</sup> we hope we have demonstrated the need to take into account the interlocutors' specific interactional positions, the civility codes mobilized to accomplish the telephone call, and the gender representations the callers activate in the function of the person they contact, in order to explain why a call from a man to a woman takes much more time than a call from a woman to a man.

Is the effect of receiver's gender universal or culture-specific? Could people in France behave differently than (say) North Americans? We believe that the effect we observed is likely to be general. At least in Western civilization, gendered behaviors and gender stereotypes seem to be relatively similar (see Williams & Best 1990). The research on telephone use that we have cited here shows analogous gender patterns in diverse countries such as the United States, Australia, Norway, and France (even though residential telephones are used more widely in the United States than in Europe, see Chabrol & Périn 1997). Nevertheless, without comparative data, we cannot be more positive here because national differences certainly exist. In France, the findings seems reliable: several recent (unpublished) French studies conducted by our group, using billing records to examine users' behavior, have replicated our original findings.

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<sup>55</sup> In alternative hypothesis, the reasons for cross-sex calls could differ according to the caller's gender. When females call males they may do so for more specific, more instrumental reasons than when males call females. At first glance, our data did not support this hypothesis: the majority of males' calls to females (58 percent) and of females' calls to males (60 percent) were defined as pertaining to personal life. Nevertheless, we use only the subjects' definitions of the purpose for the call. Nothing warrants the possibility that men and women have the same reasons in mind when they state the reasons for their calls.

