

Conversation Analysis at the ‘Middle Region’ of Public Life:

Greetings and the Interactional Construction of Donald Trump's Political Persona

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Abstract

Politicians’ greetings are usually studied for their symbolic significance as media events rather than as interactional practices. This article uses conversation analysis to study the greetings that occur just before the start of a stage-managed White House media event. We first operationalize and illustrate the constellation of co-constructed practices that enable a ‘greeter’ to pivot between multiple ‘greeteds’, and we show how such an activity reconstitutes participants’ situated social identities. We then broaden the scope of our inquiry to consider how such interactional practices contribute to Trump’s political persona. We conclude by arguing that our approach can illuminate both the communication styles of specific individuals, as well as the generalized methods through which political personae are constructed in and through social interaction.

Key words

Conversation Analysis; Social Interaction; Greetings; Trump; Handshakes

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Introduction

Analyses of handshakes involving Donald Trump have become a frequent headline news item. For example, “Trump’s handshakes with world leaders are legendary – here’s a roundup of the most awkward ones” (Krantz 2017) in *Business Insider*, “Donald Trump’s Awful 2017 Handshakes, Ranked” (Weaver 2017) in *Vanity Fair*, and “All The President’s Handshakes: Analyzing President Trump’s handshakes with world leaders has become something of a sport, so we had two professionals do it” (Rogers 2017) in the *New York Times*.¹

While the demagogic rhetoric of the 2016 Trump campaign (Drury and Kuehl 2018) should not be understood as ‘normal’ (Hinck 2018) in any sense, the news media’s fascination with the minutiae of politicians’ handshakes and other gestures is hardly a new phenomenon (see, e.g., Streitmatter 1988). Manusov and Milstein (2005), for example, argue that news media reports of the 1993 handshake between Yitzhak Rabin and Yasser Arafat create two key interpretative frames (Gumperz 1982: 21) for the event, through which even tiny bodily movements were magnified in importance and treated as either a representation or a transformation of macro-political processes and issues. Hjarvard (2013: 67) describes this focus on social interaction between leaders as part of an increasing ‘personalization’ of politics through which a public persona and a political agenda are constructed through stage-managed ‘pseudo-events’ (Boorstin 2012). Dramaturgically, such events occupy neither the “front stage” of public policy nor the “backstage” (Goffman 1956: 78) of politically sensitive leaks (Mair, et al. 2016), but rather constitute a semi-visible ‘middle region’ of stage-managed, personalized politics (Hjarvard 2013; Meyrowitz 1977). The methodological challenge for empirical studies of these kinds of interactions is that the primary data is always already ‘mediatized’ (Hepp 2012: 127). If

Trump's handshakes are optimized for the news camera from the outset, what can we learn about the construction of this political persona beyond the reflections of its made-for-TV contrivance?

The present analysis initially emerged from an inter- and trans-disciplinary panel at the annual meeting of the American Anthropological Association (AAA), which aimed to examine President Donald Trump's 2017 Black History Month Listening Session (CSPAN 2017²). Groups of anthropologists, linguists, and discourse analysts from different theoretical and methodological traditions were invited to study this single piece of data, which lasts about 12 minutes, and to reflect on how different methods might lead to different kinds of questions and analytical approaches. In this paper we adopt the theory and method of conversation analysis (CA) to examine the first minute of this multiparty interaction—from Trump's entrance into the room, to the launch of his prepared remarks. While there is a rich conversation-analytic literature focusing on televised interactions involving political figures, these tend to focus on the 'main event' of stage-managed speeches, news broadcast interviews, and audience responses (Atkinson 1984; Clayman and Heritage 2002; Heritage and Clayman 2010), rather than the moments immediately before or after such events (Lundell 2010). Here, however, we focus on a first round of greetings before the meeting starts that begins as Trump walks into the room and continues until he begins his speech by officiating a second round of introductions where, by contrast, each guest in turn states their name and their involvement with Trump's campaign. The initial round of greetings as the activity shifts toward the more formal, camera-oriented self-presentation provides an opportunity to explore the detailed, collaboratively constituted structure of handshakes and other bodily and vocal conduct in this ostensible 'middle region' between varied degrees of political back- and front-stage activity.

While greetings and other phenomena that occur during interactional openings have been widely studied from a conversation-analytic perspective (for a comprehensive overview, see Pillet-Shore 2018), here we see such exchanges occurring in a very particular institutionalized setting, with very particular participants, and in the presence of an overhearing audience such as journalists and at-home viewers (Heritage 1985; Clayman and Heritage 2002; Heritage and Clayman 2010). In this sense, although there are similarities in the shift from informal talk to the official business of the meeting, this situation differs significantly from the kind of everyday ‘pre-meeting talk’ explored by interactional studies of non-televised meetings (e.g., Boden 1994; Mirivel and Tracy 2005; Raclaw and Ford 2014). Our aim here, then, is to unpack Trump’s initial interactions with those present in the room: whom does he greet, and in what ways, and how is he greeted in return? Moreover, we ask how these greeting practices contribute to Trump’s specific interactional style, and thus we will discuss the social identities and relationships that are reconstituted “for another first time” (Garfinkel 1967) in and through the practices that make up these brief introductory exchanges. Our analysis therefore offers insights not only into this specific individual’s interactional style and this particular setting, but also into how greetings operate more generally in multiparty discourse of this sort. In addition, by way of this substantive inquiry into the particulars of political greeting exchanges, we also aim to offer a methodological contribution by being open and transparent about our research process, and by illustrating what can be done, analytically, primarily using the audio-visual material that is available for observational analysis. We first use this material to explore the shared practices that the participants produce and rely on, without immediately focusing on the stage-managed framing of the political persona in question. We conclude by then *re*-personalizing the

depersonalized practices identified here, situating them within the context of the Trump presidency more broadly.

Methodological Preliminaries

For the purposes of the aforementioned AAA panel, we were given a single piece of data to analyze: the first 12-or-so minutes of President Trump’s Black History Month Listening Session, which took place in February of 2017. As conversation analysts, we could approach this interaction in two ways.

On the one hand, we could examine the session with a *single-case analysis* approach, in which findings from previous collections-based analyses of interactional phenomena would be brought to bear on the examination of this single interaction (e.g., Schegloff 1987a). Such a paper would, in Schegloff’s (1987a) words, “not primarily [be] addressed to the development of previously unknown findings,” but rather would have the goal of “assess[ing] the capacity of [CA as an] analytic enterprise” by applying past results to new data (101). We decided early on that using this particular piece of data in such a manner would do little more than rehash old theoretical and methodological arguments that have already been heavily debated in the literature between CA and other methods (e.g., (Critical) Discourse Analysis, Post-Analytic Ethnomethodology; see, e.g., Billig and Schegloff 1999; Clift and Raymond 2018; G. Raymond 2018; C.W. Raymond 2019a; Schegloff 1987b, 1997b, 1998; Wetherell 1998). Moreover, such an approach would prevent us from taking time to sufficiently examine the particulars of this specific situated context and its participants, which was our primary objective.

Accordingly, we have opted for a *collection-based* approach that seeks to identify and explicate a *single interactional phenomenon* of which we have collected *multiple instances* of its occurrence during the interaction. Collections of multiple cases are essential to how conversation

analysis supports its findings. This is because collections “help us convert mere *interpretation*, based on what something seems or appears to be, into *analysis*, where that ‘seeming’ is empirically grounded in analytically formulated features of the conduct, features by which it does what it is designed to do, and gets so understood by co-participants (Schegloff 1997a: 502). Collections are thus, as Clift and Raymond (2018: 97) argue, “the *sine qua non* of analysis; without them, all that remains is interpretation”. Despite the limitations of drawing on a single minute of video, by making and analyzing a collection of a specific, recurrent interactional phenomenon, our practice-based approach aims to use the data to offer novel insight into a small piece of the procedural infrastructure of human social interaction.

In what follows, we offer some brief background on the specific phenomenon under analysis here, namely greetings and their sequential organization. We then turn to the greeting sequences in the Listening Session, which are taken from the first minute of the video, as Trump enters and then makes his way around the room before sitting down and initiating the meeting. We argue that the way these sequences unfold provides us with a concrete, empirically grounded account of a specific species of greeting sequence, which we aim to characterize as an *interactional achievement* (cf. Schegloff 1986). The depersonalized examination of this single, tractable phenomenon will then allow us to return to broader questions about the interactional construction of Trump’s political persona—that is, to *re-personalize* our findings in the context of this particular individual and his particular brand of “‘doing being’ president” (cf. Sacks 1984b).

Greetings and Greeting Sequences

Greetings and other phenomena that occur during interactional openings have been widely studied from a conversation-analytic perspective since the field’s inception (e.g.,

Schegloff 1968; for a comprehensive overview, see Pillet-Shore 2018). This body of research includes the numerous permutations and particularizations of greeting sequences in diverse institutional (e.g., Wakin and Zimmerman 1999; Whalen and Zimmerman 1987; Zimmerman 1998), linguistic (e.g., Mondada 2018a; Raymond 2014, 2019), and cultural contexts (e.g., Duranti 1992, 1997; Irvine 1974). More recently, this work has been extended to explore the multimodal production of greetings as embodied actions (Mondada 2009, 2018b).

Cross-culturally and cross-situationally (Duranti 1997), greetings constitute a canonical example of an adjacency pair sequence: “Given the first, the second is expectable; upon its occurrence it can be seen to be a second item to the first; upon its nonoccurrence it can be seen to be officially absent—all this provided by the occurrence of the first item” (Schegloff 1968: 1083; Schegloff and Sacks 1973). A first action like a greeting can thus be conceptualized as setting up an interactional ‘slot’ in which a pair-type-related second action (i.e., a reciprocal greeting) should (optimally) occur and be interpreted (Sacks 1987 [1973]; Schegloff 1968, 2007). In the following case, for instance, after Marsha answers the phone, Tony greets her with “Hi Marsha,” (line 2). Marsha then immediately responds to this greeting with the reciprocal greeting “Hi:.” in line 3, thereby closing the greeting sequence and providing for the launch of the first topic in line 4.

(1) [MDE:MTRAC:60-1:3] [standardized orthography]

01 Marsha: Hello:?
 02 Tony: -> Hi Marsha,
 03 Marsha: -> Hi:.
 04 Tony: Joe got here I just wanted to let you kno:w he uh...

Sequences used to open interaction—sometimes called the opening ‘phase’—routinely consist of more than just a greeting sequence. Participants can also orient to ‘sequences of sequences’ (Schegloff 2007: 252), in which one sequence normatively projects another to follow. *How-are-you* sequences, such as those seen in Extract 2, are a canonical example of this.

(2) [NB:II:4] [standardized orthography]

01 Emma: -> HI: HONEY HOW ARE y[uh.
 02 Nancy: -> [Fine how're you.
 03 Emma: -> .kh.hh.hh.hahh AOH: I'M PRETTY GOO::D I HAD A LITTLE
 04 O:Peration on my toe this week I had to have (0.2) n
 05 toenail TAKEN O:FF,hh

Here, Emma greets Nancy and launches a *how-are-you* sequence in line 1. The second-pair part of this sequence is quickly provided in partial overlap in line 2 with Nancy's "Fine". Nancy then immediately launches a reciprocal sequence with her "how're you.", to which Emma responds in lines 3-5. Thus what might be called the opening 'phase' of this interaction is composed of several, comparatively 'smaller' adjacency pair sequences.

The existence of sequence organization of this sort is not predicated on the fact that each and every first-pair part utterance receives a corresponding second-pair part to complete the adjacency pair (Schegloff 2007: 13-16). Such a claim would, of course, be easily disproven: It is obvious that greetings are not always returned, that questions sometimes do not receive answers, and so on. CA's adjacency pairs are thus not an empirical claim of invariance or even statistical regularity, but rather a *social norm*: Interactants hold one another *normatively accountable* for adhering to this rule as a readily observable, naturally occurring practice (Heritage 1984). Indeed, the most striking form of evidence for the existence of the adjacency pair structure comes in interactants' orientations to "official absences" (Schegloff 1968)—that is, when a second-pair part is not forthcoming. For example, in mundane conversation, if one speaker greets another, and the greeting is not returned, the first speaker may pursue a response (Pomerantz 1984b) or (privately or publicly) account for the case of non-compliance—e.g., that the second speaker did not hear the greeting, their mind was somewhere else, they are angry with the first speaker, etc. (Heritage 1984). We find concrete evidence of such participant orientations in, for

example, vocal pursuits of various sorts, eye gaze and embodied conduct, provisions of accounts and apologies, and various other interactional practices (see, e.g., Couper-Kuhlen and Thompson 2005; Davidson 1984; Heritage 1984; Heritage, Raymond and Drew 2019; Jefferson 1981; Pomerantz 1984; Raymond and Stivers 2016; Rossano 2009, 2013; Stivers and Rossano 2010; *inter alia*). So rather than constituting evidence *against* the existence of reciprocal greeting-greeting exchanges, such ‘deviant cases’ in effect are the exceptions that prove the socio-normative structure of the rule (Heritage 1984).

Note that the examples we have presented here are from mundane, personal telephone calls between known parties. Opening phases in this setting normatively include a summons-answer sequence, a recognition/identification and greeting sequence, and a *how-are-you* sequence, though these are also subject to the contingencies of the call itself such as its urgency or whether it is a ‘return call’ (Schegloff 1968, 1986). In other situations, such as service calls to businesses or emergency dispatchers, opening sequences are structured to accommodate the particulars of each setting—for example, call-takers may provide a business name on answering the phone, rather than attempting voice sample recognition (Wakin and Zimmerman 1999; Whalen and Zimmerman 1987). But what about face-to-face greetings in other, very particularized interactional contexts? And with very particular persons such as the President of the United States? That is, how is this interactional structure adapted to the “special and particular constraints” (Drew and Heritage 1992: 22) of a meeting like the Listening Session we are examining here?

The interactional environment of the White House Listening Session

The Listening Session, and the specialized constraints on the structure of greetings in this setting, are premised on a carefully stage-managed interactional situation that requires a brief introductory description before proceeding to a detailed analysis of our focal phase of greetings.

The CSPAN video begins before the President's entrance while presidential aids, cabinet officials, and White House guests are seated around a large conference table, talking to one another in small groups. A secret service person opens the door and moves aside as the President enters followed by the Vice President and a group of officials. The guests that had previously been talking to one another across the table then hush, stand up, and begin to clap, transitioning from a set of diffuse collectivities (Lerner 2009) to a single group applauding the President's entrance. At the first few claps of applause, the President utters his first greeting, which ostensibly targets the whole room with "hello everybody". This sequence of activities pragmatically divides the parties into those *arriving* (the President and his retinue), and those *already-present* (who had, presumably, previously greeted and been interacting with one another). The structure of this 'entrance' phase also establishes the participation roles that begin to index the institutional identities of those involved in the greeting phase of the event that follows. For example, the secret service agent opens the door and swiftly steps aside just before the applause begins, while the President treats the applause as directed towards him by responding to it with his greeting to the room. The particulars of this environment plainly present very different interactional constraints relative to mundane phone chats or service calls. Accordingly, our approach to this setting is to use it as a site to collect and analyze multiple instances of a specific phenomenon—in this case a type of greeting—to understand how a specific set of practices is fitted to, and thereby helps constitute, this interactional environment.

This preliminary account of an interactional phenomenon lends itself to a collections-based approach rather than, for example, a broader comparative analysis. In order to warrant a comparative analysis of interactional phenomena in data drawn from different occasions, the target practice must share a consistent procedural infrastructure (Schegloff 2009a). Given that even the structure of very routine interactions such as service call openings can vary considerably between different service types (e.g., Heritage and Clayman 2010; Wakin and Zimmerman 1999), comparisons between greetings in our target situation and those involving different politicians, or a differently stage-managed situation, would risk conflating settings with potentially quite different procedural infrastructures and interactional constraints (see Raymond et al., submitted). The primary aim and scope of this paper is therefore to offer a detailed analysis of this particular setting, which may then form the basis of future examination of greetings between other political personae in settings with potentially related procedural infrastructures and interactional constraints.

In what follows, we examine the procedures through which Donald Trump greets his Listening Session guests in the context of this stage-managed occasion. Specifically, we identify a specific pattern in which he initiates one greeting sequence, then moves on to the next without attending to the greeted party's responsive greeting, if indeed one is produced. We also document several 'deviant cases' of a similar sequential pattern of activity in which Trump treats actions initiated by others as in some way problematic or inapposite. We then discuss some related asymmetries in this series of greeting sequences that bear on the situated roles and identities of greeters and greeting-recipients, and the social rights and obligations they orient to and manage in the construction and organization of these courses of action. In the following

extracts we use Mondada’s (2018b) transcription conventions, developed to exhibit the multimodal details of embodied interaction (see appendix A).

An initial characterization of the phenomenon

We begin our analysis with a first example of how a vocal greeting and a handshake are accomplished asymmetrically—that is, where Trump initiates a handshake with Ja’ron Smith, but moves on while Smith is in the midst of completing the greeting-response sequence.

Extract 1 (<http://bit.ly/gh-ex1>)

```

7   TRU:           How are yo*u:
      ..>+handshake.....-----ends,,,+
8   SMI:           £Al right£
      >>$gaze #fixed on Trump----->>
      tru:         *#gaze shift---*
9   TRU:           He:lllo %everybo:dy,
      ale:         %dips head, opens mouth->>
      fig          #fig.1   #fig.2

```



fig.1



fig.2

Trump moves towards Smith, both hands extended, and grips him by the hand and arm while saying “How are you:”. He then shifts his gaze towards Monica Alexander and issues the next greeting: “He:lllo everybo:dy” while Smith is still in the midst of responding, smilingly, with “£Alright£”.

Smith's "£Alright£" is fitted to Trump's "How are you:", and treats it as an initial question by answering it. The way Smith's answer occurs after Trump has begun to shift his gaze (see fig.2) and move toward the next greeting struck us as a distinctive candidate phenomenon³: a practice where an initial 'greeter' disattends to the reciprocal greeting of a 'greeted'. In addition, while Smith does provide a response to Trump's initial *how-are-you*, that response does not project further talk from either party (in contrast to the 'sequence of sequences' that follow greetings and *how-are-yous* in other contexts, as described above). We thus have preliminary evidence, from the conduct of both participants, of this asymmetric greeting sequence as a collaboratively achieved outcome—from Trump, who does not attend to Smith's response, and from Smith in his corresponding choice of a minimal, non-expansive reciprocal greeting. Additionally, we can analyze Trump's second turn (line 9) as launching a new greeting sequence, not only by his lexical choices in designing the turn—that it starts with a conventionally initial "hello" and is explicitly directed towards "everybody"—but also because as he completes it, Alexander treats it as a new greeting directed towards her by dipping her head and opening her mouth to respond.

With these preliminary observations of a single case in view, the next step was to gather additional instances to nail down the particular practices that constitute the activity in question. In Extract 2, which occurs just prior to Extract 1 above, Trump enters the room and shakes hands with James Davis. We can't see Davis' face, but his head and shoulders remain oriented towards Trump throughout.

Extract 2 (<http://bit.ly/gh-ex2>)

```

4      TRU:  How are [you:+ ]
      >>*shake-#----- , , , , , , *
      + ...#-----orientation shifts to Smith-->
5      (DAV:)  [Mister] President.
      fig      #fig.3      #fig.4

```



fig.3



fig.4

At the precise moment that Trump completes the first part of his spoken greeting in line 4, he turns his head to the left and moves towards the next greeting recipient just as Davis begins his responsive spoken greeting. From the timing, movement and mutual orientation of their shoulders, it appears that the handshake is ongoing throughout the illustrated portion of the clip, however, their commitment to both the spoken greeting and handshake is asymmetrical in that Trump disengages and moves on while Davis remains oriented towards him in line 5.

The asymmetry of these interactional practices solve a simple and obvious practical problem for the co-participants: Trump has many people to greet, whereas others only have to greet Trump. Here, we argue, our candidate phenomenon is constituted by the specific practices highlighted in our analysis of these extracts and those that follow. This set of practices and the particular species of greeting they effectuate provide a solution to managing asymmetrical roles: they solve a practical problem and, in so doing, simultaneously interactionally achieve the president's officially central identity. Similarly, we can also see how Trump's greetings are constructed in ways that are useful for greeting multiple people in quick succession, without committing to one reciprocal sequence at a time. If we return to our first greeting example—

ambiguities (cf. Jefferson 1978) in the moments ‘between’ greeting sequences facilitates the President’s overall progress around the room, as they give the President the option to equivocate over the relevance of an expanded reciprocal greeting sequence with any other party. Similarly, Trump uses the phrases “how are you” and “nice to see you”, where each unit is hearable as either an initial or a reciprocal greeting and can target either a group or an individual. The pragmatic ambiguities of this greeting practice smooth his transition from one recipient to the next, providing opportunities, but no obligation, to extend them into more substantive exchanges.

While he is still shaking hands with Smith, Trump shifts his gaze towards Alexander as she readies her right hand for a shake by starting to move her pen to the other hand (fig. 6.1). The coordination of Trump’s shift between greeting sequences and greeting recipients is thus interactionally achieved and, given Alexander’s preparation to shake hands, this shift seems evidently projectable, at least to her. Furthermore, the way that Alexander clearly prepares for an incoming greeting, but does not, herself, initiate one provides further evidence for the normative practices that constitute this asymmetrical greeting activity: the greeter (here, the President) initiates greetings, whereas others do not. As we will see later when analyzing some ‘deviant cases’ that show transgressions of this putative norm, the greeter’s prerogative—to initiate courses of action, but not acquiesce to others’ initiations—can extend beyond greeting sequences to other social actions as well.

As well as pivoting between greetings, our candidate activity provides a specialized method for engaging in greeting exchanges with many people at once, allowing for degrees of differentiation and adjustment in terms of how each greeted party is treated. In Extract 4, Trump’s exchange with Alexander develops into a one-to-many greeting involving a smile and a

thumbs-up gesture rather than the handshake that Alexander's pen-shifting hand preparation had anticipated.

Extract 4 (<http://bit.ly/gh-ex4>)

```

7   TRU:   How% are y*ou:
           #           *shifts gaze past Smith*
8   SMI:           %£Al [right£
9   TRU:           *   He%:llo every%bo*: dy,%
tru:           *..#--thumb,,*           #
ale:           %pen.....%clasp-%           %head dip%
10  ALE:           [Hi*::.]
tru:           *...moves to next greeting...>>
fig           #fig.7 #fig.8           #fig.9

```



fig.7



fig.8



fig.9

As described earlier, while Smith responds to Trump's 'how are you' in line 7, Trump shifts his gaze towards Alexander, who begins to move her pen to free her right hand for a handshake. As Trump says "hello everybody", he turns his body towards the camera, and his right hand moves out of range for a handshake with Alexander. Alexander stops moving her pen, clasps her hands under her notepad and dips her head while saying "Hi::." as Trump lifts his left hand in a 'thumbs up' gesture. At the apex and retraction of this gesture, both Alexander and Leah LeVell look up and return his smile; both are still smiling towards Trump as he moves on. They both look down towards Trump's right hand while their gaze tracks his progress to the next greeting

recipient. This one-to-many greeting process aggregates multiple recipients and constitutes another situated greeting practice. Trump uses the phrases “how are you”, “nice to see you”, “nice to see you folks”, and “hello everybody” while shifting his gaze and bodily orientation at points of pragmatic ambiguity as to his possible addressee(s). Contrast this with responses such as Davis’ or Smith’s “Mr President”, which clearly individuate President Trump. This produces a seamless transition and accomplishes multiple greetings, while potential recipients can produce second-pair parts that claim and constitute their role as a ‘greeted’ party.

For example, in Extract 5, Earl Matthews responds to Trump’s ‘aggregated’ greeting as a greeted party.

Extract 5 (<http://bit.ly/gh-ex5>)

18 TRU: Nice to see you fo:~lks,
 19 MAT: [Goo*d seeing you sir.
 tru >>*---#looks towards Dennard--*points.....>
 20 TRU: °Yes° yo:u *do such a good JOB.
 -->points---,,,,,*turns & points again....---,,,,,*
 Fig #fig.10



fig.10

Trump’s aggregated greeting to “you folks” in lines 18-20 is produced as he looks down the table to his left, pointing towards conservative CNN commentator Paris Dennard. However, in line 19 Matthews, who is outside Trump’s direct angle of orientation (Kendon 1990: 212), responds quickly with a second-position greeting, tying the format of his response “Good seeing you sir”

to the “nice to see” of Trump’s first-pair part, and clearly directing his response specifically at Trump by placing contrastive stress on “you sir” (see Couper-Kuhlen 1984). Nonetheless, Trump does not attend or orient to Matthews’ reciprocal greeting, instead moving on to launch a positive assessment of Dennard (line 20).

These greeting sequences in extracts 1-5 all show how participants use asymmetrical solutions to the practical problem of performing a series of one-to-many greetings. The interactional practices we describe here solve these problems collaboratively: The greeter does not attend to reciprocal greetings (if the greeted party even produces one), while the ‘greeteds’ do not initiate their own greeting or *how-are-you* sequences. Similarly, the greeter uses aggregated greetings to “everybody” or “you folks”, while greeteds formulate greetings that individuate the greeter. These asymmetrical greeting sequences are accomplished as accountable, recognizable, and ostensibly unproblematic practices that make up the opening phase of this particular interaction. Crucially, we have shown that these practices constitute a situated context and activity in which all parties are able to sidestep the kinds of symmetrically individuated and mutually attentive greeting exchanges that might be expected in more everyday social situations.

What about “deviant cases”?

The interactional work achieved by these greeting practices, we argue, manages both the exigencies of this sort of greeting situation (to greet many people accountably, but minimally, and in a way that can be adapted and differentiated for degrees of ‘greetability’), and reflexively, the interactional roles and identities of the greeter and multiple ‘greeteds’. As described earlier, though, such an argument does not amount to a claim of invariance. As such, it is possible to identify instances in these data where these asymmetrical greeting practices go wrong.

Nonetheless, as we illustrate in this section, the notion of the practices ‘going wrong’ is not an overhearing analyst’s exogenous characterization; rather, participants’ moves to repair their talk and courses of action, and account for deviations, reveal the participants’ own orientations to the normative status of the practices and procedures described here.

In Extract 6, for example, Trump approaches Ben Carson, his Secretary of Housing and a core member of the Trump administration, while beginning to repeat what appears to be another aggregated greeting: “nice to see...”.

Extract 6 (<http://bit.ly/gh-ex6>)

12 TRU: Ni*ce to see- Hey *Be:n,
 >># lift hand....*shake-----, , , , , , *
 13 CAR: [He:*:y fI mixed in£ [hheh] heh
 tru: *gaze @hand *gaze # @cameras----->>
 14 TRU: [Be:n]
 fig #fig.11 #fig.12



fig.11



fig.12

In line 12 Trump cuts off his aggregated greeting and repairs it to an individuated “Hey Be:n”, as he looks down and tracks the movement of his right hand into Carson’s. Trump then turns towards the cameras and places his left arm on Carson’s back repeating “Be:n” in line 14 while Carson responds, smiling while saying, “He::y fI mixed in£” into the side of Trump’s now-turned face. Trump’s self-repair to an individuated greeting, and his repeat of “Be:n”, treat his initial aggregated greeting as a repairable error, while Carson’s response treats the error as a ‘laughable’, offering “I mixed in” as an account for it—that Trump could not distinguish Carson

from other, less individuated ‘greetables’ in the room. Their sustained handshake and Trump’s turn towards the cameras as he re-does the greeting also suggests he treats this greeting with Carson as a possible photo opportunity (see Streitmatter 1988; and on political interactions for overhearing audiences more generally, see Heritage 1985; Clayman and Heritage 2002; Heritage and Clayman 2010).

The asymmetries of the practices described above are thus sustained in this example: Trump turns away from Carson (though still apparently holding his hand), and greets the next person while Carson is still facing and speaking to Trump. Most revealing in this example, however, is precisely how their situated identities and roles are managed: Trump’s self-repair demonstrates his treatment of Carson as someone who *should* be greeted individually and publicly (cf. the other, aggregated ‘greeteds’ who have been greeted thus far) , while Carson’s provision of an account for Trump’s initial mis-greeting orients to the asymmetries of this greeting situation: that Carson ‘mixes in’ with the crowd.⁴ Whatever racialized inferences may also be drawn from this episode⁵, the procedural troubles that are evident in such a self-repair and the provision of an account support our analysis of the activity’s normative asymmetries, while also collaboratively reconstituting the relevant social identities and relationship of these two individuals.

We find another source of support for our analysis of our candidate phenomenon in social actions beyond our primary focus on greetings. Disattending to greeting responses solves the greeter’s practical problem of one-to-many greeting exchanges, but we also find two instances in the data where similarly structured disattendings to other actions constitute and uphold related asymmetries. In Extracts 7 and 8, Omarosa Manigault, then-Director of Communications for

Public Engagement at the White House, picks up on the trajectory of Trump's greetings and expands on them, offering positive assessments of meeting attendees as he greets them.

Extract 7 (<http://bit.ly/gh-ex7>)

- 15 TRU: Howareoo nice to see yo::&u.*
 >>* #gaze right----- *#gaze shift left*
 man: &leans towards Trump----->
 fig #fig.13 #fig.14
- 16 MAN: I [just love her singi&ng] °eh-°
 -->&turns.....&smile-----#close mouth&
- 17 TRU: [Nice to see you fo::lks,
 fig #fig.15



fig.13



fig.14



fig.15

As Trump turns from Carson, he greets Pastors Belinda and Darrell Scott (who are standing out of frame, across the table from Trump) with an aggregated “nice to see you::u”. Manigault remains oriented to and smiling towards the Scotts, then turns to Trump to assess Belinda Scott’s singing in line 16. Trump, however, is already greeting the next aggregated group of ‘folks’ at the other end of the table, leaving Manigault’s first-position assessment disattended-to. Manigault’s assessment is clearly spoken towards Trump and can be analyzed as constituting at least two related interactional proposals with quite different outcomes. Firstly, had the assessment been taken up by Trump, it would position Manigault as a joint greeter (with Trump) in the just-completed greeting of Belinda and Darrell Scott. Secondly, Manigault’s assessment attempts to launch a line of talk about Belinda Scott’s singing as a possible topic for expansion, but she abandons this topic without pursuing a response or marking Trump’s non-response as

problematic. It is also possible that Manigault's first assessment was not yet complete with "I just love her singing", given the cut-off "eh-" that occurs immediately afterwards. The way she halts her in-progress turn-at-talk as Trump initiates his next greeting sequence further suggests Manigault's orientation to the interactional asymmetries of this situation. That is, Manigault closes her mouth and *abandons* her pursuit for the second assessment that would normatively become relevant following a first (Pomerantz 1984b), and in so doing, she upholds the asymmetry of the aggregated greeting of Belinda and Darrell Scott and treats Trump as the sole greeter: unaccountable, not only for attending to reciprocal greetings, but also for responding to other initiating actions such as assessments that may be produced during the greeting activity.

Our final example in Extract 8 suggests that there may be more at issue than just the greeter's procedural problems of minimizing a potentially extended series of greeting sequences. Here Manigault again picks up on one of Trump's exchanges, this time directed towards Paris Dennard, as Trump points towards him, picking him out from the aggregated group of 'folks' he has just greeted.

Extract 8 (<http://bit.ly/gh-ex8>)

- 20 TRU: °Yes° yo:u d*o such a good JOB.
 >>points-#,,,,,,,*turns to Scotts & points again....>
 fig #fig.16
- 21 MAN: £Yes:::,£
 tru: ..>#....---,,,*
 fig #fig.17
- 22 TRU: Paris.=
- 23 MAN: =He& is ama:zing.&=
 &points....---,,&
- 24 TRU: =°mm I lo-° I think he's fantastic.
 fig #fig.18
- 25 TRU: How are tyou::.. (.) nice to see you Armstrong.



fig.16



fig.17



fig.18

In line 21, Manigault follows up on Trump's compliment to Dennard with a stretched-out, smiling, “£Yes:::,£”. After dropping his first point toward Dennard, Trump points at him again while identifying him as “Paris,” using his first name and looking toward Darrell Scott. In line 23, Manigault then also points and provisions an upgraded second assessment of Dennard as “amazing”. Manigault's assessment achieves a delicate balance: on the one hand, it is latched to Trump's naming of Dennard in line 22, building on her agreement with his compliment in line 20, which positions the turn as an agreeing second assessment. On the other hand, some features of her assessment's design also claim a degree of epistemic authority or primacy (Raymond and Heritage 2006): Stress on the copula ‘is’ in “He is amazing” asserts a contrast with—and thereby indexes epistemic authority in relation to—a prior assessment from second position. As Stivers (2005) argues, such ‘modified repeats’ “work to undermine the first speaker's default ownership and rights over the claim and instead assert the primacy of the second speaker's rights to make

the statement” (131; see also Raymond 2017). Indeed, there is data-internal evidence that Trump interprets Manigault’s assessment as an attempt at asserting epistemic primacy. First, he begins to respond with “°mm° I lo-” but abandons this formulation. Whatever the rationale for Trump’s cut-off and repair may be, one of the achievements of that repair is to give way to an independent assessment as he turns toward Manigault and says “I think he’s fantastic”, which replaces his initial, quieter, “°mm°”-prefaced response in line 24. That is, the repaired version of Trump’s turn is designed such that it is no longer parasitic on Manigault’s assessment or sequentially occasioned by it, but rather is offered up as an independent evaluation (Thompson, Fox and Couper-Kuhlen 2015: ch. 4). This sequence suggests a possible extension of our candidate phenomenon beyond the practical solutions it offers to the relatively straight-forward problem of one-to-many greeting situations. Alongside the asymmetries of agency in greetings, there may also be asymmetries of situated authority to assess (see, e.g., Heritage and Raymond 2005; Raymond and Heritage 2006), or to take on agentive roles in sequences of social action of various sorts.

The procedural characterization of Trump’s greetings developed through this analysis has enabled us to explore its uses and outcomes in this particular situated context. In the following discussion, we review this phenomenon in relation to the core findings of conversation analysis and situate it within broader areas of research in the field. We then return to the methodological question of how to use CA to study ostensibly ‘mediatized’ moments in political life, and to ask what the practices described here can contribute to scholarship on political communication more broadly, and the interactional construction of Trump’s political persona in particular.

Discussion

Our objective here has been to investigate and characterize a particular set of greeting practices from a conversation-analytic perspective, which necessitated a depersonalized examination of how a specific asymmetric greeting procedure is achieved by the co-participants in this situation. The media interpretations of Trump's handshakes with other world leaders, and the way they are described as a means of characterizing his political persona glosses over, and thereby occludes, the ground-level practices mobilized by the interactants to constitute it. And as Clift and Raymond (2018: 92) put it, "an account that floats free of the practices that produced it cannot, by definition, be an empirical account of action". Therefore, our challenge was to offer a procedural description of how this specific greeting activity and its political personae are collaboratively accomplished on a moment-by-moment basis. These procedural descriptions provided a set of empirically grounded criteria for selecting a collection of cases for examination. While our collection of greetings was drawn from only the first minute of a thirteen-minute meeting, the limited sample nonetheless yielded multiple instances that reveal systematic aspects of our procedural description. The most distinctive feature of this activity in all these cases is the asymmetry of initiation and response in greeting sequences. The greeter initiates the greeting, and the greeteds attend to the initiation in some demonstrable way, but the greeter has already moved on to initiate the next greeting. We also showed how this asymmetry was jointly accomplished by both parties. For example, the greeter designs ambiguously targeted greeting turns such as "how are you" or "good to see you" while the greeteds use "Mr. President" and do not launch their own greeting or other sequence of action. The ambiguous designs of these turns facilitates one-to-many greetings by aggregating the greeteds while individuating the greeter. They achieve this by maintaining a degree of ambiguity as to whether a greeter's turn

constitutes either an initiating or a responsive action, thereby allowing the greeter to pivot from within one greeting sequence directly into the next. Finally, we examined some deviant cases where a participant other than the greeter initiates another sort of action during this activity—in these cases assessment sequences—and showed how these sequences were either abandoned by the speaker without getting a response or were treated as in some way inapposite by the greeter, thus providing further evidence for, and expanding, our understanding of this situated greeting activity as an interactional achievement.

Asymmetrical greetings in normative and institutional contexts

In all these cases, our analysis reveals something specific about the procedural course of particular social actions in relation to established norms of reciprocal greeting exchanges. Common variations on those norms have been documented many times, in many other specific situations over the last-half century of social interaction research, although this paper is, to our knowledge, the first to focus on the procedural infrastructure of this specific species of greeting activity. This is one way that CA has tended to pursue its findings: through the incremental discovery and documentation of the “seen-but-unnoticed” (Garfinkel 1967: 36) details of social life. For example, in their foundational description of the turn-taking system of conversation, Sacks, Schegloff and Jefferson (1974) focus on the normative structure of turn-construction and turn-allocation in everyday talk. They distinguish their focus from the analysis of speech exchange systems in other settings such as “ceremonies, debates, meetings, press conferences, seminars, therapy sessions, interviews, trials, etc.” (Sacks, Schegloff and Jefferson 1974: 729). They also distinguish their notion of ‘everyday talk’ based on their recorded examples (see also Moerman 1988; Sidnell 2001), from speech exchange systems such as those documented in ethnographic studies of specific cultures, notably including Albert’s (1964: 40-41) study of the

hierarchical turn-taking system in Burundi, where “the order in which individuals speak in a group is strictly determined by seniority of rank”. In this study, we find something akin to this orientation to social status in how participants structure the procedural norms of reciprocal greetings in this specific situated context. The structure becomes recognizable—to us as analysts, as much as to the participants involved—as a contextual norm that gives primacy to one party as the initiator of one-to-many greetings and other actions.

The practices identified here also reveal participants’ understandings of this situation as a specific institutional context. Institutional talk differs from mundane interaction in that its participants orient both to “some core goal, task or identity”, as well as to “special and particular constraints on what one or both of the participants will treat as allowable contributions to the business at hand” (Drew and Heritage 1992: 22). For example, the chairperson of a business meeting has specialized methods to shift from unconstrained ‘pre-meeting talk’ into a pattern of chair-mediated turn-taking recognizable as ‘meeting-talk’ by calling a meeting to order (Raclaw and Ford 2014). Here we contribute to research into pre-meeting activities by arguing that this type of asymmetrical greeting provides a solution to the practical problem of one participant needing to greet many. This practice thereby constitutes a sustained orientation to the joint need to move through the preliminary opening phase of the meeting and to arrive at the institutional goal of the interaction—ostensibly in this case, a discussion of Black History. Second, through detailed analysis of the particulars of the practices involved in this type of asymmetrical greeting activity, we are able to see the *demonstrable relevance* and *procedural consequentiality* (Schegloff 1987b, 1992) of the respective social statuses and institutional identities involved. That certain actions are treated as unproblematic for the greeter, but as accountable deviations for others, both reflects as well as constitutes Trump’s institutional identity in this situated context, which is

thereby collaboratively achieved “for another first time” (Garfinkel 1967: 9) with each and every jointly-constructed asymmetrical sequence of action. Nonetheless, while this description does show us how people work together to achieve the institutional identity of president in general, it says little about how these practices contribute to Trump’s mediatized identity in particular. Since an asymmetrical greeting is, in at least one sense, a depersonalized method for achieving one-to-many greetings, what can this process reveal about the specific interactional practices that Trump uses to craft his political persona?

How asymmetrical greetings contribute to Trump’s political persona

Hall, Goldstein, and Ingram’s (2016) prescient paper “The Hands of Donald Trump”, written before the 2016 US elections, explores the highly effective discursive construction of Trump’s political persona at the ‘front stage’ of political life. The authors write that “Trump’s gestures serve him well, particularly in a mediatized and visually oriented twenty-first-century politics” (75). In presenting examples taken from twenty-seven hours of video of the 2016 Republican primary speeches, the authors show how Trump emulates transgressive entertainment genres such as stand-up comedy through his use of iconic gestures (Streeck 2008), bodily quoting (Keevallik 2010), and gestural re-enactments (Sidnell 2006), and how he combines repetitious performances of these interactional behaviors into harsh rhetorical characterizations of his political opponents. In a series of related post-election studies, scholars have followed up on these analyses to make sense of Trump’s electoral victory despite (or, indeed, because of) his rhetorical invocations of gendered and racialized nostalgia (Goldstein and Hall 2017), white nationalism, and racist imagery (Maskovsky 2017; Roland 2017). The methodological challenge that Hepp (2012: 127) draws our attention to regarding such analyses is precisely how to capture the detailed workings of political discourse when the available data is

already so carefully composed for mediatization. In this vein, Lempert (2018) suggests that methodological advances are required to study Trump's 'messaging': how his performances produce his political persona as a highly effective "semiotic composite, a projectable distinctive (and thus differential) narrative or biography" (Silverstein 2017).⁶

By focusing our analysis on the "middle region" of political life (Hjarvard 2013; Meyrowitz 1977), we have shown how conversation analysis can be used to explore the transitional moments, captured on camera, *between* 'back-stage' and 'front-stage' politics. We posit that CA, used to study these moments, can provide an interactional grounding for analysis of the political spectacles that follow, and can yield crucial insights into how a political persona such as Trump's is constituted and reconstituted in relation both to established social norms and to deviations from them.

The interactional achievement of the greeting activity documented here reflects a straight-forward asymmetry of a single greeter dealing with multiple greeteds in quick succession. In our analysis, we have shown how this asymmetry casts Trump as the 'greeter-in-chief' and, more broadly, in his non-acquiescence to Manigault's initiating actions in Extracts 7 and 8, as the 'initiator-in-chief'. But these roles and actions do not reflect binary or invariable status hierarchies. There is orderliness in how these interactants vary the degrees of entitlement, contingency, and/or primacy they claim and ascribe through the design of their greetings and other actions (cf. Curl and Drew 2008; Heritage and Raymond 2005; Raymond and Heritage 2006). Trump clearly singles out some 'greeteds' (e.g., Carson), while aggregating others (e.g., Alexander and LeVell) with a wave and a non-individuating "hello everybody". Furthermore, Trump's 'upgrade' from a mere aggregated greeting for Carson ("nice to see-") to a more individuated format ("Hey Ben") in Extract 6 suggests a further level of structure within this

activity. Trump is thereby seen to calibrate the aggregated or individuated format of his greetings on a scale of relative importance: Naming Carson as “Ben” and engaging him in a long handshake while smiling towards the cameras singles out Carson as an especially ‘greetable’ and important participant. Trump’s wave and aggregated greeting toward individuals like Alexander and LeVell, on the other hand, is calibrated to treat them as less greetable and, as such, less important.

The depersonalized examination that we have offered in our highlighting of concrete interactional practices is essential to making this argument. On the one hand, in the case of greetings, the practices that Trump uses can be argued to constitute a practical participants’ solution to a practical participants’ problem, namely greeting many different people in a short period of time, as any sort of leader might find themselves in a position to do. But consider the counterfactual case: what would it mean for a President to stop, listen, and respond to an ongoing sequence of reciprocal greetings, and exchange *how-are-yous*? This would clearly constitute a deviation from the normative procedural structure of our candidate greeting practice. By virtue of its one-to-many structure, this type of asymmetrical greeting is necessarily an observed activity (by co-participants as well as by at-home viewers), and so this deviation would visibly suspend the progress of the greeter and become recognizable as a display of attentiveness. By extension, showing this kind of attentiveness to someone in an ostensibly junior position would become recognizable to overseers as an act of humility. And indeed, the public regularly sees leaders actively working to invoke just this kind of “rhetorical situation” (Burke 1973: 268)—to undercut the normative structure of this asymmetrical greeting in the service of creating a more personable political persona. Without having the space to analyze any specific instances here, it is easy to find examples of politicians stopping to greet and kiss babies, and more recently, to

take ‘selfies’ with supporters who are unknown to the politician and have no special status. Here, however, we see Trump’s greetings and other actions *conforming* with, and simultaneously *reconstituting*, the normative structure of an asymmetrical greeting activity. His greetings vary in degrees of individuation and aggregation in ways that display his ostensible orientations to the official—and perhaps unofficial—‘inferior’ status of the greeted party. That is, we see Trump’s choices at each point in this series of actions upholding and reinforcing the normative priority and importance of his own role, and the hierarchical structure of the roles of others. Through the interactional achievement of this asymmetrical greeting activity and through systematic variations to its normative structure, Trump constructs and upholds a consistent political persona, greeting by greeting.

In short, then, what the at-home viewer bears witness to in these brief exchanges is a president whose interactional practices actively—and consistently—work to (re)establish social hierarchy. Analysts have thus far been drawn primarily to the most overt of Trump’s comments in this regard, and understandably so: Whether he is attempting to exhibit his dominance over women by claiming to be able to “grab ’em by the pussy”⁷, dominance over the press by suspending White House credentials of reporters who challenge him (Baker 2018), or dominance over the entire American public through his praise of North Korean Dictator Kim Jong-un (“He speaks and his people sit up at attention. I want my people to do the same.”) (Pramuk 2018), the sheer outrageousness and repugnance of such remarks has rightly drawn the attention of both social scientists and members of the general public. Yet in the data presented here, we see that it is not only in the explicitness of such comments that Trump actively invokes and reproduces hierarchy and dominance; it is also in various under-the-radar practices of the most mundane

sorts—greeting (or not greeting) attendees at a meeting, and in particular ways, offering assessments of individuals, and so on.⁸

Moreover, our examination of the ‘middle region’ of political life allows us to situate other, more specifically ‘front stage’ events vis-à-vis a broader view of Trump’s interactional practices, and vice-versa. For example, *USA Today*’s article entitled “Awkward: Merkel asks Trump for a handshake, Trump doesn’t respond” (Estepa 2017) describes how after Trump’s March 2017 meeting with German Chancellor Angela Merkel, photographers and reporters could be heard to shout “Handshake!”, after which Merkel asks Trump, “Do you want to have a handshake,” which Trump appears to ignore. The analysis presented here allows us both to appreciate the uniqueness of this moment between the two leaders, as well as situate that moment within Trump’s overwhelmingly non-acquiescent interactional practices more broadly.

In sum, then, when the public sees Trump interact with others—be it in the ‘front stage’ of a debate, the ‘back stage’ of leaked audio tapes, or the ‘middle region’ that we have targeted in the present study—we are presented with a president who prioritizes and conforms to the hierarchical dominance of his role. This is the particular brand of “‘doing being’ president” (Sacks 1984b) that Trump cultivates—not only in his explicit and on-record comments, but also, as we have shown here, in the “seen-but-unnoticed” (Garfinkel 1967: 36) practices of dominance that he exerts so ubiquitously in social interaction more generally.

Conclusion

Our aim in this paper was first to de-personalize the moment-by-moment *practices* used to collaboratively achieve a particular species of greeting in a specific interactional environment. This offers a range of benefits. First, the systematicity of the practices deployed here would have been altogether undiscoverable if we had used invented examples (Sacks 1984a). That is, we

would have been constrained by our own imaginations, in addition to being forced to simply hope that other scholars would believe what it was that we had imagined. By focusing on the practices that were actually mobilized in this interaction, we have been able to offer an account of this phenomenon that is empirically grounded in the details of the participants' conduct, thereby also allowing other researchers to interrogate our claims by inspecting the data for themselves. In addition, examining the practices that constitute this type of greeting activity as an interactional achievement invites several further lines of inquiry to test the generalizability of these practices beyond the particular situated context and specific participants involved in these data.

Firstly, is this type of asymmetrical greeting specifically a Trumpian phenomenon? As much as President Trump is a unique and singular social interactant, he—like any other interactant—must jointly produce recognizable actions with others (Sacks 1992). In other institutional contexts, participants may find themselves under similar constraints as Trump and colleagues are in these data, related to the practical problem of needing to finish greetings quickly in the service of getting down to the business at hand, whatever it may be. Are the specific practices described here produced in the same way in other such contexts? If so, by collaboratively producing and recognizing the practices that constitute this activity, do participants in other institutional contexts similarly make relevant and actionable the distinct identities and social statuses present in those interactions?

Secondly, are these interactional dynamics specific to greeting sequences, or are the asymmetries observed in our analyses also reflected in other actions which, like greetings, are normatively produced *reciprocally* in mundane conversation? Here we explored a few 'deviant' examples of asymmetries in assessment sequences, which leaves open the question of when non-

reciprocity is considered normative, and when is it oriented to as an accountable deviation. Moreover, while the non-reciprocated sequences analyzed here contribute to the collaborative achievement of this activity in a particular context, might asymmetric greetings be a politically-inflected or -contextualized variant of a larger set of practices that is specifically achieved through the non-reciprocity of action? Our practice-oriented approach turns these into empirical questions that can be explored in future research, thereby providing for the discovery of both context-specific particulars as well as cross-contextual and cross-cultural generalizations.

After uncovering the practices used to constitute a specific type of asymmetrical greeting, we then re-personalized those practices within the context of the Trump presidency. What does it mean when Donald Trump, specifically, engages in these practices, and how does his doing so contribute to the political persona that he cultivates more broadly? Using the data examined here, we argued that it is not only in his well-known and overtly egregious remarks that his attention to dominance and hierarchy is visible; it is also in the “seen-but-unnoticed” practices that he uses to interact with others more generally, the cumulative import of which continually shapes the public’s impression of him.

Hepp (2012: 127) suggests that analyzing the ‘front stage’ of political life presents a methodological challenge since the data are designed and built for a mediatized context. We have illustrated how focusing on the interactional details of the ‘middle stage’ provides a useful analytic framework to take up this challenge. We argue that our process of analytic depersonalization followed by re-personalization offers valuable empirical insights into the production processes of a political persona, attending to the larger socio-political context without losing sight of the moment-by-moment practices that constitute political life in and through social interaction.

Notes

¹ In addition, Trump's gestures more broadly—that is, beyond just handshakes—have similarly been topicalized by scholars of social interaction, as seen, for example, in Hall, Goldstein and Ingram's (2016) "The hands of Donald Trump: Entertainment, Genre, and Spectacle". Indeed, we will return to this and other work in a later section.

² Video of this federal government event (C-SPAN 2017) is in the public domain. Video clips are therefore provided online (<http://bit.ly/gh-Ex-all>), enabling readers to download and consult them alongside the transcripts and analysis presented here.

³ On candidate cases and 'initial noticings' of this sort, see Schegloff (1996: 174-6).

⁴ Carson's status as somewhat 'special' compared to that of other 'greeteds' in the meeting is reflected in the pre-arranged seating at the meeting table where Carson is seated directly next to Trump. Carson's elevated status is further indicated when the attendees sit down and Carson initiates a one-on-one exchange with Trump by whispering a few turns into his ear. While we cannot hear what Carson says, we can hear Trump working to defer this discussion until after the meeting. Furthermore, during the portion of the meeting where most people around the table offer self-introductions, Carson, along with Vice President Mike Pence, are seemingly exempt from this task, suggesting that these prominent administration officials need no introduction.

⁵ It may be, for example, that Carson's account for Trump not initially recognizing him—namely that he "mixed in"—constitutes an orientation to the racial makeup of those participants present at the meeting, the majority of whom are African American, as is Carson. Nonetheless, as we cannot identify any specific evidence in the data that would disambiguate between such an analysis and one in which the 'mixing in' is due simply to the large quantity of individuals in the room (i.e., regardless of race), our analysis of Carson's account as specifically racialized remains

equivocal. However, as Hansen (2005) and Shrikant (2015) point out in their analyses of official business and governmental meetings, equivocal and ‘off-record’ methods are often used as resources for the discursive construction of racial ascriptions and membership categorizations. For similar arguments regarding the ‘off-record’ categorization of individuals based on gender and sexuality, see, e.g., Hopper and LeBaron (1998), Kitzinger (2005), and Raymond (2019a).

⁶ Lempert (2018) calls for a ‘pragmatic-poetic turn’ within discourse analysis and ‘discourse poetics’ (Fleming & Lempert 2014) as a form of ethnomethodologically grounded rhetorical analysis.

⁷ The full transcript of this interaction is available here:

<https://www.nytimes.com/2016/10/08/us/donald-trump-tape-transcript.html>.

⁸ It is also noteworthy in this regard that Trump held only one official solo press conference during his first year in office, far fewer than his predecessors (Estepa 2017). As press conferences would inherently place Trump in a position to respond to others’ questioning, as opposed to initiate his own courses of action, his avoidance of such events altogether fits well with the analysis presented here. See also Baker (2018).

Appendix A: Transcription Symbols

Talk is transcribed with the conventions developed by Gail Jefferson (2004). Embodied actions are transcribed according to the following conventions developed by Lorenza Mondada (2018b).

- * * Descriptions of embodied movements are delimited between
- + + two identical symbols (one symbol per participant's line of action)
- and are synchronized with corresponding stretches of talk/lapses of time.
- *---> The action described continues across subsequent lines
- >* until the same symbol is reached.
- >> The action described begins before the extract's beginning.
- >> The action described continues after the extract's end.
- Preparation.
- Full extension of the movement is reached and maintained.
- ,,,,, Retraction.
- tru Participant doing the embodied action is identified when (s)he is not the speaker.
- fig The exact moment at which a screen shot has been taken is indicated
- # with a symbol showing its temporal position within turn at talk/segments of time.

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