COMPLIMENTS AND SELF-DEPRECATORY ASSESSMENTS: A QUILTER'S RESOURCE IN THE CO-CONSTRUCTION OF PERFORMANCE EVENTS

by

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This paper examines the use of two assessments types: self-deprecatory assessments and compliments in the show-and-tell performance event in a specific community of practice, the American quilting guild. In this discourse event, compliments and self-deprecatory assessments play different roles. Self-deprecatory assessments are used to assess people's abilities as well as the objects, while compliments are only used for the objects themselves. The study posits that the women use these assessments as linguistic tools to resolve the tensions between a positive self-identity and egalitarian social norms of the quilting guild that stress the avoidance of self-praise.

1. Introduction

Assessing events and objects is part of our daily interactions. For instance as speakers, we use assessments to create a shared experience of an event by inviting our coparticipants to collaborate with us in the evaluation. This collaboration among speakers allows assessments to achieve goals beyond simple evaluation. For instance, assessments can be used to structure interactive coparticipation in an activity or experience, such as defining a situation, creating solidarity, or constructing different social identities.

This paper hopes to add to the growing body of work both on assessments and on women's use of language. In fact, one goal of this study is to examine the relationship between social practices and the types of linguistic strategies selected by women. This study is situated in a quilting guild in the southeastern United States, a specific 'community of practice'[1], in order to explore the local use of self-deprecatory assessments and compliments within a specific parti-cipation framework, the show-and-tell performance event. The quilting guild provides an ideal setting to study assessments, since it is a small group with recognized norms, traditional practices, and an informal interactional structure.

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The paper will explore the relationship between social identities constructed by women in this guild and their use of self-deprecatory assessments and compliments. Specifically, it will illustrate how the quilters use self-deprecatory assessments and negative assessments to call attention to their own work or their sewing ability. It will also examine a contrasting use of compliments. One important finding of this study is a clear distribution pattern in the talk for these two assessment types where one type, compliments, is used for objects and the other types, self deprecatory assessments, is used for abilities. Further, it posits that the reason that these assessment types are employed by the women in this way is that it provides them with one set of linguistic resources to resolve tensions that exist between a positive self-identity and the social norms of the guild that stress cooperation and the avoidance of self praise.

1.1. Women and Language

In recent years, the feminist movement has drawn attention to the need for the study of language use by women, and previous studies have characterized women's language as cooperative, interaction-oriented, noncompetitive, collaborative, and inclusive (Coates 1986; Gilligan 1982; Tannen 1990; Troemel-Ploetz 1993). Other studies, in contrast, have taken the position that the perceived differences in the use of language by women and men are determined by power and by women's unequal status in American society (Crosby and Nyquist 1977; Fishman 1983; Lakoff 1975; Smith 1990; Spender 1980). More recently, researchers have called for studies that focus on the social practices that produce different styles of talk in order to better understand the linguistic choices of women (Eckert and McConnell-Ginet 1992). Instead of focusing on a correlation between a particular form and function, these studies stress the interactional uses of different linguistic resources within specific contexts or communities as a more accurate means to understand and articulate the complex intersection of gender and language. This study follows the patterns of these newer studies in examining a particular set of linguistic resources within a specific community of practice.

1.2. Language and Identity

The relationship between identity and language has long been recognized by sociolinguistics. For example, variational studies and other studies of networks and social groups have drawn direct links between certain linguistic features and membership in a specific ethnic group or class (Labov 1966, 1972; Trudgill 1974; Milroy 1980; Le Page and Tabouret-Keller 1985).

While linguistic constructions are important indicators of social identity, no direct correspondence exists between a certain linguistic form and a particular social identity; rather, the relationship is indirect. It is mediated by the participant's understanding of the community's conventions for structuring social identities (Ochs 1993). Thus, an individual's language choice is seen as indexical of a specific identity. In this study's setting, the use of assessments by the quilters shows a manipulation of linguistic forms to build the identities that are important for the social practices in which they are currently engaged.

Moreover, the construction of a social identity is done actively in collaboration with one's interlocutor within interactions. Goffman (1959), in his use of the metaphor of the theater as a description of interaction, claims that the individual is a performer who constructs a character, an identity, in interactions. This construction of identity takes place within a reference group or community and is guided by the standards or practices of the community, in our case, the standards of the quilting guild. For instance, Goffman (1961:148) writes that

> ..the self arises not merely out of its possessor's interactions with significant others, but also out of the arrangements that are evolved in an organization for its members.

So the process of creating identities evolves from the community practices of small groups, from their norms, as well as from individual interactions.

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2. Fieldwork and Methodology

The data was collected while I was a participant observer with a quilters' guild in a small city in the southeastern United States. In the meetings that I audio-taped, I took part in the discussions and brought in my own quilting projects to share. However, when I video-taped two demonstrations of different quilting techniques, my status changed to that of an observer only. Overall, I collected eight and one-half hours of audio and video tape over a three-month period. The data has been transcribed using the conventions established by Jefferson (Sacks, Schegloff and Jefferson 1974). A guide to the symbols used in the data is found in appendix A.

These data are analyzed using the framework of conversation analysis (CA), which focuses on talk as social action. One of the goals of CA is to examine the strategies that actual speakers use to organize and participate in everyday social interaction, that is, to see how speakers accomplish the production and understanding of actions through the use of an established and observable set of procedures within their talk (Garfinkel 1967). Thus, research in CA concentrates on the socially organized features of talk within a given interaction or context (Jefferson 1973; Schegloff and Sacks 1973; Schegloff, Sacks and Jefferson 1977).

2.1. Ethnographic Background

This quilting guild is a formal organization which collects dues, has regular meetings, has a resource library, and sponsors a yearly quilt show. However, there is no formal hierarchical structure in the meeting format, no formal opening or closing ritual. On a normal night, there is an average of 10 women present. The women in the group are white, middle class, and range in age from late 20's to 60's. The format varies from meeting to meeting since the women do not quilt around a frame, but instead bring in individual projects to share. The space that this group uses is an old classroom; they

rearrange the tables and chairs if there is a planned activity such as a technique demonstration. At most of the meetings, the women share their work by putting it out on the tables, and commenting on it, an activity that they call 'show-and-tell'. The show-and-tell sequences take place around two tables shoved together in the center of the room. The women lay their projects out on this center table and the rest of the group stand around and assess the quilts in progress. When latecomers arrive, they are asked to show their work as well. After this activity, the groups break down into pairs or smaller groups for discussion; the women do not do much actual sewing at these meetings.

The group functions along egalitarian principles where solidarity plays a more important role as a group norm in determining inter-actional strategies. This egalitarian structure and cooperative inter-actional style has been observed in studies of other quilting guilds (Cerny 1992; Ice 1993; Langellier 1991). These studies found that group projects called for shared decision-making on the part of all members. In addition, women were recognized for their particular talents, and each contributed to the group; no one was directly criticized and each person's work or contribution to the group was praised and encouraged.

For instance, Ice (1993) noted a preference for stressing com-munity in her study of Texas quilters, where beginners' work was always encouraged and praised. Further, the quilters she studied felt that their guild filled a need for connections among women and provided a forum for intergenerational relationships in a time when families are more and more scattered. Moreover, in her study of Maine quilters, Langellier (1991) noted a similar non-competitive and non-judgmental atmosphere; the guild there served to bring together women of different social classes and regional backgrounds. These attitudes tie directly in with the history of quilting and its role as a activity which connects groups of women together in com-munities. The traditions of quilting and the position they occupied in the lives of women have contributed to the evolution of particular practices, both linguistic and social, that mark the quilting guild as a unique community. The interactions I observed and the data that I

collected during my time in the quilters' guild appears to corroborate the findings of these earlier studies.

3. Assessment Types

An assessment is defined as a type of speech act that includes positive and negative evaluations of events and objects about which the speaker claims knowledge, for example, evaluations of experiences, performances, news, objects, or the weather (Pomerantz 1994). In this setting (and in general), the speaker claims knowledge about the thing she is assessing or takes a position toward what is being assessed. Further, the speaker can be held responsible for the position she takes by her coparticipants, who may judge the competence of a speaker by the assessment proffered (Goodwin and Goodwin 1992:155).

Therefore, an assessment is a resource used to structure interactive co-participation in an activity or experience. The assessment sequence can either constitute the entire interaction or be embedded in a larger ongoing interaction, as in the following example which assesses a quilt block shown by Lisa in the course of her show-and-tell sequence.

(3-1) [SL: QTL 1092-1MS3]
1   JN: Don't you like that one.
2   I: Yeah that's pretty.
3   M: Yeah I like that too.

Here, the block is being assessed by three other participants in the interaction. Jean makes the first assessment of the block. She phrases her assessment in such a way as to directly include her interlocutors with the use of the second person pronoun, 'you'. Her coparticipants both agree with her assessment; they both preface their compliments with the marker, 'yeah'. Inda also gives an evaluative token, the block is 'pretty', while her other coparticipant, Meg, recycles Jean's utterance in her turn, <Yeah I like that too>.

This sequence follows the normal pattern, where a speaker expects her coparticipants to agree with the prior assessment, to collaborate in the 'activity' of building an organized co-experience. Such assessments, therefore, evolve as products of ongoing interactions and provide speakers with a means of achieving sociability, support, and solidarity.

3.1. Compliments

The most obvious type of assessment used in the data is the compliment. Previous studies have demonstrated the formulaic nature of compliments, and have detailed important correlations between compliment use and the gender of the speaker (Manes and Wolfson 1981; Holmes 1988; Herbert 1989, 1990). Their formulaic nature allows compliments to be easily recognized and thus to serve specific functions in interactions.

 Most researchers claim that one of the most important interactional function of a compliment for women is to create or reinforce solidarity. Working within the framework of Brown and Levinson (1978), Holmes (1988) posits that women view compliments as a positive affective speech act, one that reduces social distance and builds solidarity. Moreover, Manes and Wolfson (1981) argue that the compliment's easily recognizable syntactic formula is necessary to accomplish the goal of solidarity; a compliment must be easily recognized or misunderstandings could occur and solidarity would not be achieved. Finally, Herbert (1989) posits that the principle of solidarity operates on two levels: the individual and the societal. When speakers establish solidarity with an individual, they also maintain solidarity with the community.

 Since the importance of solidarity as a community practice has been established for the quilting guild (Ice 1993; Langellier 1991; Cerny 1992), it is not surprising to find compliments in the conversations of the quilters in the data. However, what is interesting is how they are used to create solidarity. In the data, the quilters themselves do not receive compliments, instead the compliments are given to the objects the quilters have on display.

3.2. Self-Deprecatory Assessments

The second type of assessments used in the data are self-deprecatory assessments. In contrast to compliments, self-deprecatory assessments use disagreement to accomplish support and solidarity. Disagreement is the preferred response after self-deprecatory assessments, since agreeing with the assessment would constitute agreeing with the negative self-criticism of the speaker. The preferred action shows support for the speaker, and offers a positive self-image for that speaker. The preferred response, disagreement, is usually given by coparticipants in the next turn (Pomerantz 1984).

In her analysis of the turn structure of assessment sequences, Pomerantz (1984) identified three main patterns for disagreement preferred responses to self-deprecatory assessments:

1) a partial repeat that challenges or disagrees with the assessment;
2) a repeat of the prior assessment term with negation added; and
3) a disagreement through the use of a favorable evaluation term such as a compliment.

However, in my data, I found very few examples of disagreement preferred responses that fell into the three patterns Pomerantz had observed. In contrast to her findings, the types of responses I found, questions and challenge assertions, seldom made use of the prior utterance to formulate the disagreement response.

4. Data Analysis

The show-and-tell sequence of the quilting guild is a team performance, where the participants co-construct a definition of the situation in accordance with group norms. In this performance event, assessments are used by the participants as one means to co-construct multiple identities, identities that may contradict the

traditional definitions appropriate to middle class American women outside of the quilting community.

In her study of Maine quilters, Langellier (1993:128) defines the show-and-tell sequence as a performance event where each speaker assumes a responsibility for a display of competence, both of speaking and quilting. As an 'event' it is meaningful within several relevant contexts: the particular social situation, the scene of the performance, and the overall quilting culture. Langellier argues that this sequence

> functions as an 'oppositional' practice that allows quilters to maneuver within the constraints of femininity, of public speaking, and of the emergent and changing culture of the contemporary quiltmaking revival. (1992:129)

She also portrays this sequence as an interactive structure which contains support strategies such as questions, backchannel tokens, and comments.

Show-and-tell sequences are the talk of women who are for all practical purposes showing off. They want to present themselves as skilled and creative, yet they are constrained both by an egalitarian group norm and a wider social norm from doing this openly. In my data, the quilter showing her blocks in the show-and-tell event uses self-deprecatory assessments to assess her own quilting abilities, while her coparticipants use compliments to evaluate her product, the quilt blocks. They also provide disagreement as preferred responses to her self deprecatory assessments, which then function to (re)evaluate her skill as a quilter. I posit that self-deprecatory assessments are used by quilters within the show-and-tell sequence to call attention to their sewing abilities or their work, while avoiding self-praise. Thus, they are able to display their competence both as quilters and as speakers.

4.1. The Structure of the Show-and-Tell Event

In order to show how the assessments function in the show-and-tell event, a discussion of compliments and self-deprecatory and negative assessments will be presented, using data from seven show-and-tell sequences. Show-and-tell sequences are initiated either by the quilter herself (self-initiated) or by another woman in the group (other-initiated). Once the show-and-tell sequence has been initiated, the talk is then divided into several components related to the objects being displayed. The designated quilter may give informational talk, negative assessments about the blocks or self-deprecatory assessements that downplay her quilting ability, while her coparticipants offer positive assessments using compliments or counters to the negative self-assessments. There are three basic types of informational talk found in the data: information given about the quilt patterns, information on the quilt/block's progress, and information on related quilting paraphernalia.

Within the show and tell sequence, both positive and negative assessments are found in the following contexts: 1) prior to display of the object, 2) during the display of the object (that is, while the quilter is laying out the individual blocks), and 3) when the object is already on display. Compliments primarily occur in contexts 2 and 3, while the blocks are being laid out or when a quilter has a quilted bag or wears an article of clothing like a jacket. Self-deprecatory assess-ments and/or negative assessments occur in all three contexts.

Compliments are an integral part of the show-and-tell sequence. In these sequences, however, they appear to be restricted to the object, the quilt block. In none of the data analyzed are compliments on her sewing abilities given to the quilter directly. In contrast to their use of compliments, the quilters use self-deprecatory assessments to evaluate either their quilting abilities or their own work. While compliment tokens may occur as part of these self-deprecatory assess-ment sequences as a disagreement preferred response, they are never directed at the person, but are only offered as an evaluation of the object under discussion. Thus, the use of these two assessments types appears to be complementary in these interactions.

Pragmatically, the responses to the quilter's self-deprecatory assessments are a type of upgrade, similar to what might be used in a

normal compliment response (Herbert 1990), or they challenge the quilter's negative self-assessment. However, the women here do not, as Pomerantz (1984) found in her data, consistently reuse parts of a prior utterance in the disagreement preferred responses. Instead, the responses take the form of either a question or an assertion that offers a different perspective. Often, the original speaker will counter her coparticipant's challenge with another self-deprecatory assessment as part of her next turn.

Self-deprecatory assessments play a role in the opening or initiation bid for a new show-and-tell sequence. In addition to their placement at the beginning of the sequence, they can also be found within the sequence as the quilter assesses her sewing ability as it relates to the objects she is displaying.

4.2. Initiation Sequences

Self-deprecatory assessments appear in 6 out of the 7 initiation bids in the data analyzed. These self-deprecatory assessments often take the form of a negative assessment of the work about to be displayed. This type of negative assessment is used by the quilter to indirectly downplay or question her sewing abilities. When the show-and-tell sequence is self-initiated, the quilter generally uses some type of self-deprecatory assessment as part of her bid to show her work; when it is other-initiated, the designated quilter may use a self-deprecatory assessment as a response to being chosen to show her work.

The following are examples of self- and other-initiated show-and-tell bids. The first example is of a self-initiated sequence for the second show-and-tell sequence of the evening. It illustrates a transition between sequences which includes a disagreement pre-ferred response utilizing the question challenge to a speaker's prior assertion. It also appears to be a combination of self- and other-initiation, since at the beginning of this sequence, Jean (self) makes a bid to show her work at the end of Anne's show-and-tell sequence. Then, Lisa, (other), another participant, picks up on Jean's bid to

show her work and then in her next turn (line 13) selects Jean to go next.

(4-1) [SL: QTL 1092-1MS1/2]

1	A:	I have to get them all done,
2		and lay them out, an' look at them, for a few days.
3		An' (0.1) an then I number 'em. an' you know start with-
4	GP:	{hehhahh m⌈ hh}
→ 5	J:	⌈At least you have a method to yours,
→ 6		mine is ter(h)r(h)ble haha
→ 7	L:	How many dozens have you done by now? hahah
→ 8	J:	Well, actually I did. what I'm uhm. (0.1)
9		I did what I'm goin' do. for (0.1) my (.) sampler.
10		I mean I've done with it, basically, my squares.
11	L:	Uhhuh.
12	J:	So that's-
13	L:	We:ll l let's see 'em.
14	J:	Well, you can see 'em.
→ 15		But mi-I mean mine doesn't have a-a method,
→ 16		to it mine is just (.) mad. hahaha
17		*{pulls out stack of squares from basket}*
18		We don't have to lay mine out. *{picks up first one}*

The initial self-deprecatory assessment occurs in lines 5 and 6 where the speaker, Jean, calls attention to her sewing method, characterizing it as methodless. This negative assessment, however, produces a question challenge from Lisa (line 7). She offers another view of Jean as one who accomplishes a lot; despite her lack of method, she continues to produce 'dozens'. Jean doesn't respond

directly (line 8) to Lisa's challenge; instead, she begins to explain her plan for her sampler. Later, when she actually begins to show her blocks, she prefaces her actions with a repeat of the prior negative assessment of lines 5 and 6, then, in lines 15 and 16, recycling parts of her prior utterance, shifting the pronouns, from <you> to <I> (line 15) and the adjectives, from <terrible> to <mad> (line 16).

The second example is other-initiated. Gwen is wearing a quilted jacket that she has copied without a pattern from one that someone had brought to the last meeting. Here the object, the jacket, is already on display and another participant calls attention to it.

(4-2) [SL: QTL 1292-4MS1]
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  ──►    1    MR:   Where do people have all this time-
         2          now your jacket it's-jus-
         3    S:    Uhhuh.
  ──►    4    G:    A::h thank you but it really is a botch.
         5          It's a:ll of what not to do.
  ──►    6    S:    No-this is (not how it) looks.
         7    G:    I'll show you all of the mistakes,
         8          first of all-I used four inch squares,
```

In Marie's turn (line 1), she shifts from the previous activity – looking at a handmade doll to focusing attention on Gwen's jacket. In response, Gwen employs a negative assessment of the jacket in line 4 to criticize her sewing skills. In line 6, she gets the preferred dis-agreement from Sara. Gwen, then, continues in the long turn (15 lines) that follows line 7 to catalogue all of the 'mistakes' she made in order to further downplay her sewing skills. At the end of Gwen's long turn, she receives a challenge to her negative self-assessment from her interlocutor, Marie.

The next example is also an example of an other-initiated sequence. Here, Lisa had called attention to Anne's wrapped-up blocks in line 1. Anne, while accepting the bid to display her work, nevertheless, opens her show-and-tell sequence with a negative assessment of the blocks as a whole (line 3). However, one of her coparticipants counters her negative assessment with a compliment in line 7.

(4-3) [SL: QTL1092-1MS101]
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  ➤   1    L:     Now these blocks.
      2           (0.4) {unwrapping stuff}
  ➤   3    A:     Some of them that I have I'm going to redo,
      4           'cause I don't like the colors.
      5              (0.2)
      6           But here're the  [ ones I'm planning to use.
  ➤   7    M:                      [ Oh these are neat.
      8              (0.2)
      9    A:     Yeah.
```

4.3. Show-and-Tell Talk Components

Once the show-and-tell sequence has been initiated, the talk is then divided into several components related to the objects on display. These include the designated quilter's informational talk about her blocks, the coparticipants assessments of the blocks, and the quilter's responses to her interlocutors' assessments. In addition to the designated quilter, coparticipants also initiate talk about the objects on display. Compliments occur as a response to the informational talk with the quilter's coparticipants assessing the blocks being shown. The quilter displaying her work never offers positive assessments of her own blocks.

   One type of informational talk, naming the quilt pattern, is a common way to introduce blocks. The first example illustrates this type of talk. It occurs at the beginning of Meg's show-and-tell sequence. She names the pattern she is using as she lays out her pieces. The block elicits a compliment token in line 3.

(4-4) [SL:QTL 1092-1MS5]
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      1    M:     Uhm. {pause while getting pieces out}
  ➤   2           I'm working on a Grandmother's fan quilt.
  ➤   3    J:     Oh that's pretty.
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The second example is taken from Lisa's show-and-tell sequence. Here, Jean has initiated talk about a block that Lisa has set out. She is trying to identify the pattern in her turn (lines 1-3) and Lisa (line 4) names it for her. This segment does not involve any assessment of the block, in contrast to most of the segments.

(4-5) [SL:QTL 1092-1MS3]

→	1	JN:	Now this one has a name,
	2		tr-like somebody's choice,
	3		tray's choice or something n-
→	4	L:	Tray's choice.
	5	JN:	Tray's choice,
	6		that's right.

The next example is also from Lisa's show-and-tell sequence. She has identified the pattern as Starry Path in a prior turn. In line 1, she tells the group that the pattern is not in her reference book (line 1). The block receives three compliments. The first, in line 2, is very brief, as the speaker is cut off. In the second set of compliment tokens (lines 3 and 4), the second half of the first utterance <it's pretty> is recycled by the second speaker as the first part of her utterance, and then a further evaluation of the block follows the discourse marker <but>.

(4-6) [SL: QTL1092-1MS3]

	1	L:	I couldn't find it anywhere.
→	2	?:	That's great I-
→	3	M:	I think it's pretty.
→	4	I:	It's pre:tty but it looks hard.

In addition to naming the pattern, quilters also give information about the progress of their work. This example is from Marie's show-and-tell sequence; here she identifies the block as one that is new to her coparticipants. Her work has been assessed prior to her arrival as using bright colors. This use of colors is mentioned in the positive evaluations in lines 3, 4, 8, and 9. The same speaker, Inda, gives two compliments to the blocks, first in line 4 and then in her next turn, which starts with line 8. The compliment in her second

turn recycles parts of her first compliment, but she strengthens it in line 9 with the addition of the intensifier, *really*, <I really like these>. The deictic is ambiguous in the utterance, since it can be read as a replacement for <colors> from the previous utterance (line 4) or a reference to the blocks in general.

(4-7) [SL: QTL 1092-1MS4]
```
  ➤  1   MR:   {Lays down next block}   Y'all haven't seen
                 that.
     2   I:    ⌈Ah.
  ➤  3   J:    ⌊Pretty, pretty.
  ➤  4   I:    Now I like ⌈these colors=
     5   E:              ⌊yeah I saw,
     6         =yah I saw that one=
     7   L:    =I told you you would?
  ➤  8   I:    Yes I do,
  ➤  9         I really like these.
```
In addition to the informational talk used by the designated quilter, other interlocutors also initiate talk about the objects under discussion. The following two excerpts are examples of this; the first example occurs at the beginning of Lisa's show-and-tell sequence. In line 1, Eleanor calls attention to Lisa's bag – her carryall, with a compliment and then a question <did you make that?>. Lisa has anticipated the question, since her answer (line 3) overlaps with Eleanor's turn. Eleanor then reinforces her positive assessment of the bag with another compliment in line 5. Further positive attention is given to the bag by a second person, Inda, in her turn (line 6).

(4-8) [SL: QTL 1092-1MS3]
```
  ➤  1   E:    Oh I love your carryall.
     2         ⌈Did you make that?
  ➤  3   L:    ⌊ Yes,
     4         yes.
  ➤  5   E:    That's nice.
     6   I:    You made th<u>a</u>t, Lisa?
     7   L:    Yes?
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In this example, Lisa identifies the pattern of Anne's block for another participant. A pause follows and then three positive assessments of the block occur. The first assessment does not follow the traditional compliment formula but is positive, nevertheless, since the speaker wishes to possess the block in question. The next two utterances, lines 4 and 5, confirm its status as a desirable object.

(4-9) [SL: QTL 1092-1MS1]
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         1    L:    This is Ohio Star.
         2              (0.7)
         3              If this one disappears, it's because it matches
                       mine.
   ───▶   4    ?     This is just gorgeous!
   ───▶   5    M:    Isn't it something.
```

4.4. Negative Assessments

The designated quilter never offers positive assessments of her own work. However, she sometimes offers negative assessments of her work. These negative assessments often occur at the beginning of the show-and-tell sequence as part of, or a response to, an other-initiation bid. This happens for four of the seven initiation bids analyzed. The quilter either receives some encouragement, or counters to her negative assessment, or she keeps control of the turn sequence and no counters are given.

The first example of a negative assessment occurs at the beginning of a show-and-tell initiation, – where attention has been called to Sara's work by another participant. At this point, Sara has been laying out a whole series of blocks in the shape of a quilt on the table. In line 2, she gives a negative assessment of one block, <I'm not happy with that one>; line 4 provides the explanation for the negative assessment. She probably does not receive any counters to her negative assessment, since the reason for the negative assessment is the block's size, which is normally determined by the pattern's instructions or personal preference.

(4-10) [SL:QTL 1292-4MS2]

	1		{*pause as Sara lays out a block*}
►	2	S:	I'm not happy with that one.
	3		{*Sara lays another block out*}
►	4		I like the smaller ones better.

In the second example, Anne is being requested to show a finished quilt that she has brought. In line 2, Jean asks to see the quilt. Anne responds with an excuse, <this-that's my first>, in line 4. She is reluctant to display the quilt. She implies, since it is her first quilt, that it is not worth looking at. However, Anne's assessment is challenged by both Jean and Lisa (lines 5 and 6). Moreover, Jean offers a second challenge assertion in line 9; Anne is one step ahead of her, since she has a quilt finished.

(4-11) [SL:QTL 1092 1MS6]

	1	J:	Ok (.) all right-
►	2		Can I see yours? {*to Anne*}
	3		How did you do yours?
►	4	A:	This-that's my first.
►	5	J:	But I want to see it.
►	6	L:	We-we still want to see it.
	7	A:	Ok.
	8	L:	hahhha
►	9	J:	Well if you've got a first,
			you're-you're one ahead of me.
			hahhahh

In the next example, Lisa gives a negative assessment of a set of blocks that she has made (line 6). It is the same pattern that one of the other quilters, Anne, in the prior talk, has just said was difficult to do. Anne's assessment of the block as difficult to make is upheld by the group, as seen in lines 8, 9, and 10. In line 9, Lisa also affirms the pattern's difficulty. After some discussion of how the block is made, Lisa receives a compliment on her blocks that counters her negative assessment of them.

(4-12) [SL: QTL1092-1MS101]
```
        1    L:    I did four?
        2    A:    Of those?
        3    L:    Yea::s.
        4    A:    You're a glutton for punishment=
        5    L:    =Yes I know. {getting stuff out}
——▶     6          But they don't all look quite right.
        7    ?:    (( let's see))
——▶     8    I:    See that look-that looks hard to me.
——▶     9    L:    [It wasn't easy- Y [eah it really wasn't=
——▶    10    A:    [It was-            [yeah it's not an eas-
```

The next two segments present Jean's negative assessment of her appliqué[4] block of a tulip. In describing this block, she makes use of both self-deprecatory assessments and negative assessment tokens to evaluate her own work. In this first segment, she gives her evaluation prior to the actual display of the block.

(4-13) [SL:QTL 1092-1MS2]
```
        1    J:    =an it's easy so I can enjoy and do it,
——▶     2          if it's too difficult then,
        3          I (.) I get frustrated.
——▶     4          Like I mean  my tulip is pitiful,
        5          my-my mother just said ah-ah
        6    L:    She di:d huh.
        7    J:    She said do-do that one over an' I said  mo-[
        8    GP:
                   [haahehhh
        9          heeha
```

Jean is a beginning quilter and makes use of self-deprecatory assessments throughout her show and tell sequence to construct herself as an unskilled sewer. One way she constructs herself as unskilled is by the choice of adjectives that she uses to describe the patterns she sews. For example, prior to this segment, Jean has been

describing a new pattern she has tried. One advantage she sees for this pattern is that it is *easy* (line 1). In the next line, (4), the use of the discourse marker <I mean> signals a modification in the orientation of her talk. Schiffrin (1987) states that speakers can use *I mean* to provide an explanation of either ideas or intent. Here the <I mean> signals an explanation of the idea – it emphasizes the negative quality of the block. The negatively assessed tulip block that follows the discourse marker is an example, or proof, of what happens when she attempts something too difficult (line 2).

The utterances with the reported speech from Jean's mother (line 5) are treated as a self-deprecatory assessment by her coparticipant Lisa, who tries to counter Jean's claim in line 6 with an expression of disbelief, <she di:d huh>, a challenge assertion. In her response to Lisa's challenge, Jean recycles portions of her own former utterance. Instead of <my mother said>, she substitutes the pronoun <She> and then reports what her mother finally said about the block, that is, to do it over. The reported speech of her mother is used as a counter to her coparticipant's challenge and to reinforce her own assessment of the tulip as <pitiful>. At this point in the interaction, the group has to take her word for the appearance of the block.

The second sequence with the tulip occurs later, after several of her other blocks have been shown and positively assessed. The sequence contains two self-deprecatory assessments that employ different structures. The second self-deprecatory assessment shifts the attention away from the speaker and is a preface to a topic shift. In addition, this sequence makes extensive use of format tying, which enables a speaker to make salient a part of the utterance. Speakers often reuse or substitute parts of a prior utterance in the next turn. This reuse, or substitution, highlights or focuses attention on the object/event that speaker wishes to emphasize (Goodwin 1990:182).

(4-14) [SL: QTL1092-1MS2]
```
  →   1    J:      Then here's my pitiful tulip.
      2                    (2.0)
  →   3    I:      Why do you call it your pitiful tulip?
```

⟶ 4   J: Ah 'cause it's pitiful (.) haha

     5   M: ° I do:n't like to do appliqué. °

     6   J: I'm just not any good at it.

     7   You're- you're-yours <u>is</u> s<u>o</u> good. *{addressing Anne}*

     8   But you know I like simple things like this,

     9   like I rea:lly l<u>i</u>ke th<u>is</u>. *{referring to next block}*

Here, Jean finally shows to the group the block that she has negatively assessed in the previous sequence. She introduces the block with her negative assessment (line 1). This assertion is challenged by Inda with the question in line 3, <Why do you call it your pitiful tulip?>. This challenge recycles part of Jean's assessment, <my pitiful tulip>, and shifts the pronouns from <my> to <your> to counter Jean. However, Jean reasserts her negative assessment (line 4), again using a compliment syntactic pattern, and reusing the assessment token <pitiful>. The reuse of the adjective <pitiful> and the pro-noun substitution demonstrates format tying.

This use of format tying is especially clear in the second self deprecatory assessment of this sequence. Here, Jean reuses almost her entire utterance, (line 6), <I'm just not any good at it> to construct her compliment of Anne. First, she shifts pronouns <I'm> to <You're> and <yours>, highlighting a shift in persons. Second, she shifts from the negative quantifier <any> in line 6 to the intensifier <so> in line 7, highlighting a difference in ability. Jean uses this turn to do two things: 1) she deflects attention away from her and her block to Anne by complimenting Anne, <-yours <u>is</u> s<u>o</u> good>, and 2) she shifts the topic (line 8) when she returns to her negative self-assessment as one having only simple skills, with the reference to *simple things* (line 8).

Probably the group more or less agrees with Jean's assessment of her block since they don't offer any compliment tokens to counter her assessment. However, they are constrained by a group norm, one that encourages, rather than criticizes beginners from offering any stronger types of dispreferred agreements (Ice 1993).

Another use of negative assessments is to build group solidarity. Here, three members of the group offer negative assessments of their ability to sew a difficult pattern block. Using negative assessments in this way is similar to the case of story rounds, where participants tell stories on the same topic or theme; here, each quilter offers her own experience in trying to sew this pattern. Anne starts in lines 2 and 5, detailing her problems. Jean picks up on the problem that Anne mentioned, cutting the pattern out correctly, in her turn (line 9). She and Anne co-construct their negative assessment through overlap, in lines 10-13, creating a collaborative floor. Lisa joins the collaboration in line 13 and continues the theme in the rest of her turn.

(4-15) [SL: QTL1092-1MS101]

1	J:	[That's why that's why.
2	A:	{*louder}* Three times.
3		And I decided [this is not I'm not doing this one.
4	J:	[but you-
5	A:	Its not gonna be in my quilt ah-an,
6		then the third one was ok-its not great but it's ok,
7		an I thought I'm not doing it a four-I'm,
8		not cutting these things an' doin' it a fourth time.
9	J:	Did you-did you cut it out wrong the first time?
10		I did mine b [ackwards.
11	A:	[I JUST COULDN'T get it together-
12		[I just could not get it together and I cut it again.
13	L:	[Yeah I did too.
14		and I did it you know, I-I laid out all the pieces,
15		you know the pattern pieces,
16		this is the way it goes,

17   and I cut accordingly and I st<u>i</u>ll couldn't get it together,

18   and I put it away for two weeks,

19   an' I pulled it out again and,

20   I said this is (.) ha this is it if it works it works,

21   if it doesn't it doesn't go.

Coates (1995) has observed the use of overlap by women in informal conversation as a strategy to contribute different, yet related aspects of the same topic at the same time in the interaction. Moreover, she also observed that speakers tend to adjust their talk in response to the overlap, seeing the overlap as a contribution to the ongoing talk rather than as a bid to take over the turn.

Here, the three women relate their various experiences cutting out the pattern, building on each other's talk both through overlap (lines 3 and 4; 10 and 11; 12 and 13) and by recycling parts of each other's utterances. For example, Lisa recycles Anne's phrase, <I couldn't get it together>, in her turn (line 16). They use negative assessment to construct a common experience around a difficult sewing task, thus building group solidarity.

4.5. Disagreement Preferred Responses to Self-Deprecatory Assessments

The following excerpt is an example of a disagreement preferred response using a challenge assertion. The challenge assertion can serve both to reinterpret the quilter's negative assessement and to assert group solidarity. In this example, the respondent, Anne, challenges the first speaker's, Jean's, description of the difficulty of the pattern in line 3 with a reassessment of the quality needed to do the pattern, <fortitude> instead of <brain power>. Fortitude is more inclusive than brain power; it is a quality not dependent on intelligence, but one where sticking with the project matters. This type of challenge functions to assert group solidarity, to reinclude Jean, since no type of quilting is considered beyond the ability of

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any member, if she is persistent. To reinforce this view, Anne has recycled syntactic elements from Jean's utterance, substituting <it> for <that> and <fortitude> for <brain power>, producing an echo effect.

(4-16) [SL: QTL 1092-1MS2]
1	J:	You know I mean it- it to me,
2		this is just as sat-satisfying as doing like this one,
→ 3		that takes a lot of (.) brain power.
4	L:	Uhm.
→ 5	A:	No it takes fortitude.

Self-deprecatory assessments and negative assessments function as important elements in the show-and-tell sequence. They provide quilters with the means to begin or bid for the right to show their work and to receive positive feedback and encouragement on their quilting ability through their coparticipant's use of disagreement preferred responses and compliments.

5. Discussion

Prior studies on quilting guilds tended to focus on the social practices and group norms of each guild (Cerny 1992; Ice 1993; Langellier 1991, 1993). This study is different since the analysis focuses primarily on the talk. Such an analysis of the talk itself allows us to better understand how the social practices of the guild are actually realized, since language is one of the primary ways we produce and re-produce culture.

The earlier studies on quilting guilds identified the show-and-tell event as a central practice for the guild. In the structure of the show-and-tell event, this study found that assessments play an integral role. Using Goffman's metaphor of a team performance, the actions of the speakers can be examined as two parts of a team, where the main speaker and her coparticipants each build up one half of the structure. As a team, they construct a definition of self for each

participant that is centered in this particular community of practice, the quilting guild. The examination of the function of assessments within the discourse practices of the show-and-tell event reveals a complex layering for the use of these linguistic resources.

One important finding is the complementary distribution pattern for the two types of assessments that is found in the discourse. In the data, the women use compliments and self-deprecatory assessments in complementary contexts, with com-pliments having a more restricted context than self-deprecatory and negative assessments. In the show-and-tell sequence, self-deprecatory assessments are used to assess people's abilities as well as the objects, while compliments are restricted to the objects themselves. This restricted use of compliments has not been observed in previous studies (Holmes 1989; Herbert 1989, 1990; Manes and Wolfson 1981; Pomerantz 1978).

In the data, the quilter showing her work uses self-deprecatory and negative assessments to question or downplay her sewing ability. These negative assessments of her skill are countered by her coparticipants with challenge assertions. One function of these negative assessments is to allow the women to avoid self-praise, while calling attention to their work or their abilities. They are thus able to maintain the egalitarian norm of the quilting group and at the same time ask for, and receive, recognition or encouragement for their quilting. In contrast to their use of negative assessments, the quilters use only compliments for the objects (quilt blocks, tops, jackets, etc.) on display. This use functions to build solidarity, as well as to maintain the egalitarian norm, since this use acknowledges the creativity of each quilter without praising her directly.

Within the wider context of women's language and identity, such a team performance allows the women to pay lip service to the traditional view of a woman's role in which women are expected to be self-effacing. The use of negative self-assessments allows the quilters to avoid self-praise. But it also allows them to call attention to their creativity and skill – positive characteristics often absent from traditional definitions of women's identity. By performing a type of complementary function in the discourse, self-deprecatory assess-ments and compliments are resources that the quilters can use

to resolve the conflicting tension between group (and societal norms) and a positive self-image for themselves.

Moreover, this use of assessments to resolve the tension between asserting self above others and the egalitarian group norm of the quilting guild, allows the women to meet a number of goals simultaneously. The women promote solidarity through the non-acceptance pattern of compliments, while the strategic use of self-deprecatory assessments can elicit acknowledgment or encouragement for each quilter's skill. Thus, the women can use these assessment types both as a means of resistance to the group norms and as a way to maintain those same norms.

Therefore, the quilters make use of several discourse techniques to construct a team performance that reflects quiltmaking itself. Their talk is stitched together like the quilts they make, with the creative use and reuse of traditional linguistic patterns.

Further study is needed to ascertain if this use of assessments is confined to this particular community, the quilting guild, and the show-and-tell performance event. In order to generalize these findings beyond this study, other quilting guilds and other communities of women will have to be examined for similar use of these assessment types.

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Notes

1. A 'community of practice' is one of social engagement defined by its activities as well as its membership (Lave & Wenger 1991).
2. Pieced/piecing is the sewing together of the small individual pieces of cloth cut into different shapes, that sewn together make up the different quilt patterns of the individual block. Piecing

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    used to be done by hand, but now it is also done on a sewing machine.

3.   Herbert (1990) defines NO RESPONSE/TOPIC SHIFT as a response category where the addressee gives no indication that she/he has heard the compliment. The addressee either shifts the topic or gives no response. SCALE DOWNS are a response category where the addressee disagrees with the compliment by pointing out a flaw in the object or giving some indication that the compliment is overstated (p. 209).

4.   Appliqué/appliquéd is a technique in which the design is created by sewing small pattern pieces to the top of a square of cloth; it requires the use of tiny stitches to sew the pieces in place.

5.   Quilts are made in three layers. The pieced or appliquéd top, the batting or filler, and the bottom (a single piece of material with no sewn pattern). These three layers are stretched on a frame and quilted, that is, sewn together with tiny stitches.

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Appendix A

Transcription Conventions

Characteristics of speech delivery

:	a colon indicates a lengthened sound
.	a period indicates a stopping fall in tone
,	a comma indicates a continuing intonation
?	a question mark indicates a rising intonation
!	an exclamation point indicates an animated tone
-	a single dash indicates an abrupt cut off
--	multiple dashes connect the syllables or strings of words to give a stammering quality
<u>a</u>	an underline indicates emphasis
CAP	capital letters indicate that part of the utterance is louder than the surrounding talk
o	a degree sign indicates that the talk is softer

Continual utterances

=	when two utterances are adjacent without overlap they are linked with equal signs
[	a bracket indicates overlapping utterances

Intervals between utterances

(0.1)	silences are timed and marked in tenths of a second in parentheses

Transcription doubt

(xx)	uncertain words are enclosed in parentheses
( )	empty parentheses indicate that part of the utterance could not be deciphered