

Mother as Troubles Teller: A Discourse Analytic Case Study of Mother-Adolescent Daughter Interaction

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Abstract : Viewed as a type of rapport-talk, troubles telling is a common conversational practice among female friends who wish to establish connection, show empathy, or share a disconcerting experience. This study shows how troubles talk between a mother and her adolescent daughter has a different interactional outcome. Specifically, it reveals how discursive interaction with an adolescent daughter becomes increasingly volatile when the mother steps out of the role of nurturer and into the role of troubles teller. Naturally occurring interactions between a mother and her 15-year-old daughter were videotaped in their family home over a two-week period. The data were primarily analyzed from an interactional sociolinguistic perspective, using conversation analytic techniques for transcriptions and discursive analysis. The following questions guided this research: (1) How are troubles telling discursively accomplished in the everyday talk of a mother and her adolescent daughter? and (2) What topic prompts the mother to engage in troubles talk? The data show that the mother engages her daughter in troubles to talk on issues related to body image and physical appearance and does so by (1) repeated questioning, (2) not accepting the daughter's response as adequate, and (3) proffering self-deprecation. Findings reveal that engaging an adolescent daughter in a conversational practice reserved for female friendship groups creates a negative connection and relational disharmony. Since 'telling one's troubles' assumes an egalitarian relationship between individuals, mother's trouble telling creates a peer-like interaction that the adolescent daughter repeatedly resists. This study also proposes a discursive consciousness raising, which hopes to enhance communication between mothers and daughters by revealing the signals that show an adolescent daughter's unwillingness to participate in troubles talk. Being in tune to these cues may prompt mothers to hesitate before pursuing a topic that will not garner the positive interactional outcome they seek.

Keywords : discursive interaction, maternal roles, mother-daughter interaction, troubles telling

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