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Routines of ‘sitting’ and ‘enjoying ourselves’ in the common room of a dementia unit

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Abstract

Routinized activities create security for persons with dementia (PWDs) and help care staff manage everyday tasks related to personal care and mealtimes, but care staff also assist PWDs with constructing routines during their leisure time. This paper investigates how a PWD negotiates how to use the common room in a dementia ward as a social space with co-present staff members, other residents and a visiting researcher. Based on ethnographic observations and video recordings and using conversation analytical methodology, the paper presents sequential analyses that indicate that the PWD treats care staff as being in charge of the social organization of common room, and it shows how the PWD is routinely guided to sit calmly, minding his own business. Further, analyses show that the PWD relies on ritualized action and routine activities when managing co-presence and interaction with the visiting researcher in the room, but they also show that a previous joint activity is used by the PWD to take initiative and thereby re-establish a joint social activity. Hence, we argue that routine and ritual both provide constraints but also resources for PWDs to actively co-co-create new shared activities with co-present others.

Keywords: dementia; conversation analysis; routine; person-centred care; joint activity; incipient talk; ritualized behavior
**Introduction**

Participation in activities is associated with quality of life for persons diagnosed with dementia (PWDs) [1] and is indicative of person-centred care [2]. However, what counts as a meaningful and possible activity to engage in for PWDs relates among other things to the stage of dementia concerned, and research mentions routines as an important factor for well-being as it establishes security [3].

At moderate to late stages of the condition, many PWDs are moved to nursing homes where they are assisted with everyday care such as personal hygiene, eating and drinking, getting into and out of bed etc. Moving to a nursing home thus results in support in carrying out everyday routines, but it also means a change in the environment which entails a change of co-habitants. In other words, sharing social spaces such as a common dining or living room results in a change of rights and responsibilities. The participants in this study are residents in a care facility who spend part of their everyday life and do everyday leisure activities in this kind of common room.

This paper investigates the organization of the common room as a social and interactional space, and in particular how one resident, pseudonymized Jacob, negotiates how to use this space with co-present staff members, other residents and a visiting researcher. In particular, it focuses on ways in which participants construct and invoke routines using among other things ritualized actions in order to manage co-presence and to make sense of and negotiate how the shared space may be used.

**Data**

Data for this study builds on ethnographic observations and video recordings from the common room in a dementia unit in Denmark. The authors made ethnographic observations and video recordings in
two dementia units for a period of about nine months resulting in about 19 hours of video recorded data. Written consent has been provided by the participants according to Danish legislation.

The visiting researchers spent time in the unit while recording, as they either participated in ongoing activities, conversed or observed, and thus necessarily changed the organization and frameworks for activities and participation, simply through their presence in the common room. One way in which their presence changed the environment was that they often displayed availability for conversation. Recordings from the common rooms when there was not a visiting researcher present show that except at meal times and at visiting hours, almost no interaction took place, since staff was occupied with e.g. care tasks.

The seven residents in the unit had different types of dementia at different stages and their patterns of behavior differed too: the visiting researcher observed that in this specific unit most residents spent most of their time in their room, while mainly two residents, Jacob and Barbara, would regularly spend leisure time in the common room.

The dementia unit consists of a short hallway with a small apartment for each resident and a common room at one end which includes an open one-wall kitchen, a dining table and a space with a sofa, a coffee table, some armchairs and a TV.

The residents who were in the common room outside of mealtimes would sit with a magazine or newspaper, watch TV, talk to themselves, hum on their own, tidy their clothes etc. much of the time, and they would rarely converse with each other. One or two staff members might also be present, but most of the time they would focus on tasks such as preparing food, doing laundry etc.

Ethnographic observations indicate that Jacob required a lot of attention from staff because of e.g. verbal and non-verbal initiatives most often addressed at staff, self-directed talk, singing and humming, which may be seen as ‘repetitive’ [4], and that he was perceived as a nuisance by other
residents. Several residents described and treated his behavior as transgressive and conflictive. During the data collection period, he was hospitalized for about a week with the purpose of examining whether he would benefit from further medication.

Methods and analysis

The paper uses ethnomethodological conversation analytic (EMCA) methods as an approach to investigating interaction with Jacob [5, 6]. EMCA research presents empirical analyses of interactions focusing on how participants achieve a common understanding through sequential, linguistic, embodied and physical resources. It has shown that when people interact with each other, shared understanding as well as lack thereof is a shared accomplishment between the participants [7]. This, in turn, means that the production of an action and turn at talk [8] is dependent on the linguistic, cognitive, social and sometimes institutional resources available to all the participants and thus that a participant’s possibilities for participating are dependent on the contributions of the co-participants [9]. Sometimes in interactions involving people diagnosed with cognitive and/or communicative disabilities, social practices are reorganized such that an action that is typically produced by one speaker may be co-constructed in systematic ways across two or more participants [10]. Research in interaction involving PWDs shows that non-diagnosed co-participants may adjust their speech, speak for the PWD or in other ways take responsibility for the management of conversation [9].

Data is transcribed according to CA conventions [11]. When available from the recordings, gaze is indicated below each turn-at-talk, and the symbol > should be read as “gazes towards”, change in gaze during a turn is indicated with the symbol |.

The analyses present 4 excerpts involving the social organization of the common room as negotiated between Jacob, staff persons and the visiting researcher. The first two excerpts illustrate how staff
members are treated as and treat themselves as managers of the social organization in the common room as they, upon request, guide Jacob to spend leisure time during the afternoon sitting quietly and calmly, and the last two excerpts show how Jacob treats the visiting researcher as a communication partner as he relies on routines himself and ritualistic actions to manage conversation and take initiatives for joint activities.

The common room as a place to sit

As mentioned, the common room of a dementia unit is a special setting in that it is a part of a home shared by several residents and in that it is managed by staff members. The following example in which Jacob enters the common room shows the participants’ orientations to this shared space with asymmetrically distributed rights to make decisions about how the space can be used; Jacob treats the staff members as in charge of the shared space and of how residents may organize themselves in it as he asks to be assigned a seat. A staff member takes on this assumed responsibility as she promptly designates him a seat in the sofa where the visiting researcher is also seated.

Example 1: Where may I sit

1  ((J walks from his room towards the common room, two staff members, TR and RA, are in the kitchen area talking in a low voice))

2  *JA: $lalalalalalalalalalala:$

3  *JA: hvor må jeg sæt: mig hen:

   Where may I sit

4  *TR: ovre i sofaen

   Over there in the sofa
Jacob enters the space of the common room while humming (line 1-2). Two staff members are talking in the kitchen area, and two residents are placed in armchairs, one of them reading in a magazine. Emma, the visiting researcher, sits in a sofa next to one of the other residents, holding a magazine while interacting with the resident Barbara. Jacob requests to be assigned a seat (line 3), thereby indicating sitting as a relevant action and also assigning the rights to placing him to others. A staff member, who is conversing with another staff member in the background, assigns him a seat in the sofa (line 4). Jacob points towards the sofa, thereby indicating that he recognizes the seating space, and requests confirmation, which staff delivers in line 7. Then he lowers his hand and walks towards the sofa while humming. In this instance, as in many others in the data, sitting, minding one’s own business, is oriented to as an ordinary way of being in the common room, an everyday routine way of spending leisure time in the common room. In comparison, [12] present a detailed study of how a staff member places a resident in a chair in the common room in a dementia unit and constructs the placement as serving mainly the resident’s needs.
Managing co-presence in the common room by using ritualized action and (re)establishing routine activities

Schegloff and Sacks [13] noted a tendency for so-called “incipient talk” in co-present situations such as co-presence of family members in living rooms. Situations in which continuing states of incipient talk occur are often characterized by physical proximity between the participants, and interaction is shaped by the event in which it occurs, e.g. by physical co-presence in a shared space such as in a home, or co-presence of travelers in cars, airplanes etc. [13]. Characteristic of incipient talk is that it may lack openings and closings and that silences and lapses often occur between conversational sequences. Hence, the basic features of conversation such as recurrence of speaker exchange are not present at all times [14].

Lapses between talk may be occasions for topic initiation, and studies of how people deal with this possibility show that people who are in public spaces may display un-availability for interaction, for example by reading a magazine [15] or by using their mobile phones [16].

As shown in [4], Jacob often initiated talk when placed in the common room. On many occasions in the data in which a visiting researcher is co-present, Jacob initiates talk by using variations of the same question formulation. A sequence initiated by Jacob with such a formulation is shown in example 2 below: While another resident is making sounds not addressed to anyone and not responded to, Jacob asks, “what may we then do” (hva må vi så gøre), line 27. This question format indicates an understanding that no joint activities are occurring at that moment and that co-presence in this space makes it relevant that participants do something together; he does not ask co-participants if they want to do something with him but asks what they may do. As in his question in example 1, Jacob uses the verb “may”, asking about permitted actions, which may indicate an understanding that staff persons are in charge of the organization of activities in the common room.
Example 2. We are just going to sit

26  *BA: thh $\\text{www}\ldots$$\\text{www}$

27  *JA: [hva má vi så gøre?] What may we then do

gaze: J>C

29  *JA: [ingenting→]

nothing

gaze: J>C

31  *BA: [HOLD K ]ÆFT mand [man blir jo] de vu de vu so[ men] [pimen.]$^1$

shut up man one becomes surely xx xx xx xx but xxxxx

gaze: ((B>magazine in her hands))

32  *EM: [hm hm]

33  *CA: [nej ]

no

34  *CA: [vi ska bare]

35  sidde.

We are just going to sit

gaze: C>J

37  (0.2)

38  *JA: [ska vi bare hygge→] Are we just going to enjoy ourselves

39  gaze: J>C

40  *BA: [han sir vi ska ] bare [[bare se b]e be: He says we should just just xx xx xx

41  gaze: [B>J

---

$^1$ Barbara produces both words, syllables and sounds. Syllables and sounds not recognizable to the authors as words are indicated in the translation as x’s.
In the example above, Jacob deals with the co-presence of other non-staff persons and their possibilities for joint activities by posing a question in which he requests staff to come up with things to do. The ritualized character of such formulations and their function as resources for managing co-presence are humorously illustrated in the animated movie The Jungle Book in which a group of vultures sit in a tree and in turn ask each other “what are we gonna do?”, while the recurrent response from addressed co-participants is: “I don’t know, what do you wanna do?”

The responses to the question in example 2 indicate that the question is treated as a ritualized action; before the staff member responds, Jacob suggests a possible response himself: “Nothing” (line 29). Jacob’s action may be viewed as an elliptic question with an inbuilt candidate answer, i.e. “may we do nothing?”, with which he closes the first response slot for the staff member and provides a new slot in which a yes/no response is type conforming [17]. Hence, Jacob anticipates a specific answer by suggesting one, that treats his question as a ritual, in that it will get an answer that nothing is going to happen between the participants as always at this time in this place.

By posing the question about joint activities, Jacob also deals with the fact that there are several participants co-present in the room, and perhaps he also deals with the fact that not all of them seem
occupied and hence may be available for interaction. He initiates talk and assigns recipiency to a staff member by gazing at her. Cat, a staff member standing in the kitchen area responds while Barbara, another resident, is talking (possibly commenting on Jacobs action with an outcry: “shut up man” (hold kæft mand), line 31). Following Barbara’s exclamation and while Barbara is still speaking (mostly unintelligibly), Emma hearably responds by providing small laughter tokens (line 32). Cat responds to Jacob with a “no” followed by a specification (“we are just going to sit”, line 34). Her action may be understandable as a correction and then a specification of what “nothing” means by which she also provides an answer to the initial question: “what may we do now” (line 27). In her indication of an action, however, Cat uses the modal verb “shall” (or “are going to”, Danish “skal”), rather than “may”, which may imply that there are no other options available to choose between and that her response is not based on entitlements related to permission indicated through “may”, but related to her knowledge of what is in fact going to happen (indicated with “are going to”/”shall”). This is a way of indicating that she is in charge of the activities that occur in the common room and may be seen as a way of co-creating certain routines of how to spend leisure time in the common room with Jacob.

Jacob indicates his understanding of Cat’s action as a response to his request by subsequently requesting confirmation (line 38: “Are we just going to enjoy ourselves”). In this instance, Jacob uses many lexical items from Cat’s previous turn, and in addition he replaces the verb “sit” (sidde) with “enjoy ourselves” (hygge). His talk works to align with Cat’s action in terms of closing the possibility of doing other things than what they are actually doing, i.e. ’sitting, minding one’s own business’. Barbara seems to be preoccupied with Jacob’s actions as she possibly gives a report of what he is saying (line 39) and gazes at him. Cat confirms Jacob’s indicated understanding (“yes”, line 42) while Barbara is still speaking, Emma gets up and starts walking towards a cupboard with a pile of board games, and Jacob starts humming. Both Barbara’s and Emma’s actions may be seen as possible
reactions to Jacob’s initiative and/or how it has been dealt with. Barbara possibly points out Jacob’s action as noticeable, maybe as it breaks with a routine way of spending time in the common room at this time of day, the afternoon, namely staying quiet, minding one’s own business, and maybe as it does so in a ritualistic way. Also, Emma, who gets up after a member of staff has just told Jacob they are going to sit (line34), does not align with the action. By staying seated and starting to hum, Jacob “sits”, does “nothing”, “enjoys himself” and he displays himself as preoccupied with doing the routine ‘enjoying oneself’ as one minds one’s own business in terms of the routinized solitary activity of humming.

Managing conversation by invoking routine

As mentioned, the visiting researcher Emma attempted to initiate and maintain conversation with Jacob during her visits at the times in which he and other residents would routinely spend their time on their own as staff was occupied with instrumental tasks. Often, she initiated conversational sequences by posing questions. One example is shown below (example 3) in which Emma requests information about the interior design in Jacob’s room, which requires Jacob to present specific knowledge about a specific place.

Other studies have hypothesized on and investigated the relation between question types, cognitive demands and response success [18] and person-centered communication [19], respectively, in interactions involving PWDs. Small and Perry [18] study shows that questions that require access to specific knowledge about persons, events, places etc. (episodic memory) in responding to questions posed to a PWD lead to breakdowns twice as often as questions requiring general world knowledge (semantic memory). However, as is evident from example 3, although Emma poses a question that requires Jacob to remember how his room is decorated, Jacob responds relevantly to the question, and no communication breakdown can be observed. Using a type-conforming response form [17],
“no”, line 70, to a yes/no question and then specifying it “I don’t” (det har jeg ikke), line 71, i.e. using the resources from the question such as matching pronouns and the same verb, Jacob accomplishes to respond relevantly to the question and does not indicate communication difficulties by for example initiating repair. Of interest to this study is the fact that Jacob then turns to staff and invokes what is a routine activity in the common room performed by residents and managed by staff: eating.

Example 3. What may what may we ask for some food

69   EM: har du har du pynt inde på dit værelse
       Do you have decorations in your room
       gaze: E>J, j>down
70   JA: aj
       No
       gaze: J>down, E>table
71   JA: det har jeg [ikke]
       I don’t
       gaze: J>down, E>table
72   EM: [(nå) okay]
       Oh okay
       gaze: J>down, E>table
73   (1.3)
       gaze: J>kitchen/CAT, E>J
74   JA: hva må hva må vi be om noget mad
       What may what may we ask for some food
       gaze: J>kitchen/CAT, E>J
75   (2.3)
       gaze: J>kitchen/CAT, E>kitchen/CAT
76   CA: ik mere
       No more
In his response (lines 70-71), Jacob manages the normative expectations that when addressed and asked about something, you should respond and format your response such that it fits the question type [13]. However, one might say that he uses the minimal required form and the response rests heavily on the question format. Further, Jacob does not elaborate on the response, e.g. by accounting for why he does not have any decorations, so he doesn’t elaborate on the topic “decorations” nominated through the question.

Emma acknowledges his response and does not elaborate on the topic any further, and so silence occurs for 1.3 seconds (line 73). This silence provides for a possibility to pick up the topic again, initiate a new one, or to develop it into a lapse in the interaction in which participants may engage in individual activities. Jacob manages these possibilities by changing the participant framework [20] as he gazes towards a staff member standing in the kitchen area and requests for her to provide food (line 74), which is, as mentioned, central for accomplishing a routine activity in the common room: eating. Again, Jacob orients to the care staff as the ones in charge of the organization of activities in the common room. This time he asks them to provide knowledge about what kind of food he can have, and he formulates his request using a polite form “may we ask for” (må vi bede om), a formulation that children are often socialized into using when making requests, often related to requests for food and drink. Thus, Jacob uses a conventional ritualized request form which also in format resembles the question format used in example 2 (“What may we then do” (hva må vi så gøre)), and through this request he also in this situation invokes a routine activity in which a visiting researcher is initiating social interaction with him. This activity stands in the way of any activity that the visiting researcher may aim at initiating.

After quite a long pause, 2.3 seconds (line 75), the staff member responds that no more food will be served. She responds using a minimal form: “no more” (ikke mere) (line 76), and she does not elaborate on her response, i.e. use Jacob’s request as a possibility to initiate further interaction with
him. Through her two-word response, she also indicates the reason why Jacob will not be offered food now. This indication further contributes to the construction of mealtimes as a highly routinized activity between the participants, and possibly the long pause before she responds indicates an understanding that Jacob’s request is somehow problematic, possibly because he recurrently makes such requests about common activities (see example 2 and 4) and routine activities involving food and drink.

Co-constructing a joint activity referring to previous activities during leisure time in the common room

Our ethnographic observations and video recordings from the common room show very few examples of inclusion of PWDs in everyday activities such as food preparation, watering plants, cleaning etc., and this may be for very good reasons. Most residents are in moderate and late stages of dementia, and some degree of mutual accomplishment of such activities may be either impossible or highly demanding, which may explain why much interaction between care staff and residents is characterized as service-oriented [21]. As the excerpts presented in this paper illustrate, conversation between Jacob and staff is seldom encouraged or initiated by staff in this unit during leisure time, and likewise joint activities are often avoided. The visiting researcher, Emma, had no care responsibilities when she spent time in the common room. Sometimes she brought playing cards or a coloring book, and she would for example play solitaire with the cards or color in the coloring book, thus occupying herself. Sometimes she invited Jacob to participate, for example by showing him the cards or the book, by asking him to select a color etc. Often, communication breakdowns occurred, or one or more of the participants creatively and competently managed the conversation by using available resources. For example, it could be managed by Jacob by using methods as shown above in example 3 in which he responds to a question in a type-conforming manner recycling resources from the previous turn.
Example 4 below is a continuation of example 1 in which Jacob enters the common room, asks to be assigned a seat and is assigned a seat next to Emma by a staff member. When Jacob enters, Emma is seated in the sofa, occupied with interaction with another resident, placed in a chair to her right. As Jacob is assigned a seat in the sofa, Emma gets up in order for Jacob to reach a seat there.

In front of the sofa there is a coffee table on which Emma’s coloring book and colors are placed. Jacob takes a seat while noticing that Emma has got up from her seat, and he invites her to sit down again. Thus, it seems that Jacob is not only concerned with where he may sit (see example 1) but is also concerned with the placement of others in the room. After Jacob is seated, he initiates interaction with Emma requesting information and an up-date on a previous shared activity between them (he uses the pronoun “we” (vi)).

Example 4. How far have we come

110 ((2 staff members, TR and RA, talk in a low voice throughout, not visible on camera))

111 JA: me det var jo ik fordi at |(.) I ik må være her ((J walks up to the side of the sofa))

   but it surely wasn’t because you may not be here

   gaze: J>E|J>sofa, E>J

112 EM: men jeg ka jo sæt mig igen hvis jeg må det ((J turns body so that the backside turns towards the sofa))

   but I can surely sit down again if I may

   gaze: E>J, J>down backwards towards sofa

113 (TR): så: ((J takes two steps to his left towards the middle of the sofa))

   so
gaze: E>J, J>down backwards towards sofa

114 (2.0) ((J takes another few steps and starts lowering body to seated position))

gaze: J>down, E>J/sofa

115 JA: skal jeg bare sætte mig her ((J reaches seated position))

    should I just sit here

gaze: J>E, E>J

116 EM: det vil være fint((E turns backside towards sofa and starts lowering body

    towards seating position))

    that would be fine

gaze: E>J, J>E|J>down

117 JA: du må da os gerne sætte |her

    You may also sit here of course

gaze: J>E’sbody/seat, E>J|E>magazine

118 EM: tak skal du (ha)

    thank you

gaze: E>magazine, J>magazine?

119 EM: (du må | gerne få det -|[igen]) ((E turns body towards B on her right and shows

    her a magazine in her hands, J leans forward and takes left hand to Cbook))

    you can have it again

gaze: E>magazine |E>B|E>magazine, J>coffee table/Cbook

120 JA: [hvor] langt er vi kommet

    how far have we come

gaze: J>coloring book |J>E, E>magazine

121 (1.8) ((E turns towards J on her right side, J’s body and face faced slightly in
E’s direction))

gaze: J>coloring book?

122   JA: hvor langt er vi kommet ((J has left hand on Cbook))

   how far have we come


123   EM: vi er ikke kommet så langt=

   we haven’t come that far

gaze: E>Cbook, J>Cbook

124   EM: =(vi) mangler jo stadig (.) alle de [blade der]

   [((E circulates right hand above the painting book))]

125       (0.7) ((E leans torso back))

   We still miss all those leaves there

gaze: E>Cbook, J>Cbook

126   JA: ja det mangler mange ((J moves painting book a bit to his right, E moves body forward in sofa))

   Yes it misses many


127   EM: ja ((E reorganizes her body in sofa))

   Yes

gaze: E>Cbook, J>Cbook

128       (0.4)

gaze: E>Cbook, J>Cbook
When Jacob and Emma are seated next to each other in the sofa, Emma initiates interaction with Barbara, turning her body towards Barbara and holding up the magazine in her hands, inviting her to focus her attention on it and take it as she says “you can have it again” (du må gerne få det igen), line 119. This means that Emma’s back is turned towards Jacob, and thus, Emma is not treating Jacob as a ratified participant in the interaction she has initiated concerning the magazine [20]. Hence, in this situation the physical organization of Emma’s body and her gaze does not invite Jacob to interact with her. Although Emma does not display availability for conversation with Jacob, he initiates interaction with her, thus orienting to Emma as someone with whom one might carry out joint activities although she does not invite it at this moment. He initiates conversation by posing a question formulated as “How far have we come” (hvor langt er vi kommet), line 120. Jacob thereby initiates interaction and a possible joint activity by referring to a previous one which may not be completed, and which may thus by implication be continued.

Emma turns her upper body and face towards Jacob who repeats the question, to which Emma provides an elaborated response. Jacob agrees with Emma’s assessment about how much they still need to color to be finished, and Emma acknowledges Jacob’s action, reorganizing herself in the sofa as an embodied acknowledgement of a shift in the participant framework. Through these actions, Jacob and Emma establish a common understanding about a previous activity they may (re-)engage in collaboratively.

This example illustrates how previous joint activities may become a resource for interaction as this activity is referred to and used and understood as an invitation to reengage in it. This indicates that new activities and ways of being together in the common room may actually be established and may even be initiated by PWDs like Jacob, who otherwise may rely on ritualistic actions in ‘doing nothing’ as a routine in the afternoon. As other persons with dementia, the residents in this unit often do not
take initiative for social interaction, are not always included [9] and may not be motivated to participate in activities due to this [22].

Discussion

Staff members manage and assist PWDs in a variety of care tasks during a day, and these tasks become routinized between the participants and may not involve much conversation. As this paper points to, staff members also assist and guide PWDs in how to behave and which routine activities to get involved in when being in the common room in which other residents, staff members and visitors may also be present. Sequential analyses and ethnographic observations show that during leisure time in the afternoon Jacob is being guided by staff to use the common room to sit calmly in an assigned seat in a sofa or armchair and mind his own business. Jacob’s collaborative behavior of turning to staff and requesting permission and guidance from them may indicate that he knows that the common room is managed by staff and that they decide how the room may be used and how one may organize interaction and being in the room. Analyses also show that Jacob aligned with staff in doing daily routines including sitting, minding one’s own business as he for instance used the space for activities as for instance to sit and sing or hum alone. He also invoked routines such as mealtimes to manage co-presence in the room and conversation with a visiting researcher who did not take part in care tasks.

Staff and the residents rely heavily on routine activities to manage everyday life. For staff members, everyday professional activities center around care tasks involving the PWDs. And practices of assisting the residents with creating and managing everyday leisure time in terms of inviting them to engage in routine activities which do not include much social interaction, support the accomplishment of professional everyday care tasks; through the practices staff may avoid time-consuming social and
interactional troubles that may occur in interaction with PWDs who have limited cognitive and communicative resources. This is in line with patterns found in other research [12, 21, 23, 24].

Research on communication involving PWDs points to the fact that interacting with PWDs may indeed be challenging and involve communication breakdown, losing face, conflict, confusion etc. [25]. Some of these may concern ritualistic behavior and talk [26]. However, research concerning person-centered care for PWDs argues that social interaction is a basic human need and that active participation from all participants is a part of successful collaborative communication with PWDs [2]. Further, research has shown that so-called disruptive behavior can be decreased during social interaction [27].

Our data also indicates that Jacob relies on ritualistic actions, among other things when he enters and stays in the common room to manage how to share this social space in terms of what to do in it. With these ritualistic actions he invokes previously established routine activities such as mealtimes and orients towards his ritualistic openings as openings of (and reestablishing) routine activities as shown in the case of ‘doing nothing’. This may suggest that possibilities to take initiative, including the types of initiatives and their frequencies, rely, among other things, on the routines that have been established for and with him in the common room. So, when staff is challenged by Jacob’s ritualistic, repetitive actions, it may be helpful to (re)consider the provision of possibilities for Jacob to spend his leisure time, which includes a range and diversity of possible activities and relevant resources for engaging in them. If new social activities seem relevant, they should of course be introduced with sensitivity to PWDs’ expressed wants and needs and the dangers of overstimulation [28]. We have shown how Jacob initiated a social activity with a visiting researcher which she introduced previously that day and which he engaged in then. We propose that offering, guiding and maybe assisting the residents in engaging in other social activities than routines may possibly reduce repetitive actions
such as food requests and requests for knowledge about what is going to happen next which is, according to staff, cause annoyance.

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