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Ethnomethodological and Conversation
Analytic Studies of Race and Systemic Racism in
Everyday Interaction

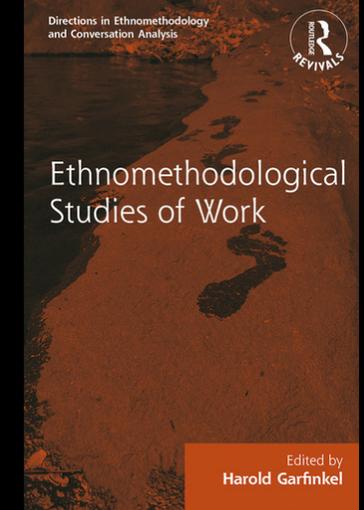
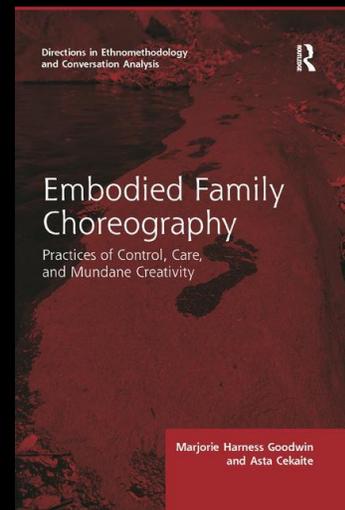
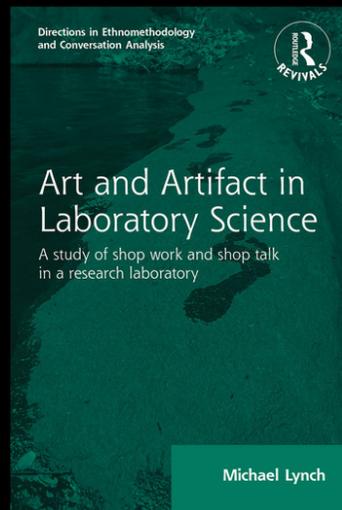
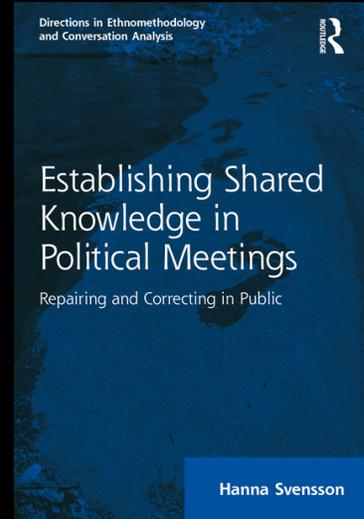
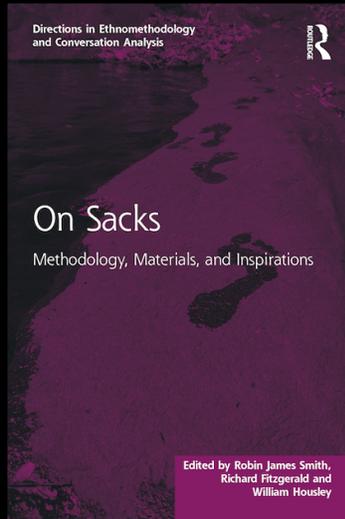
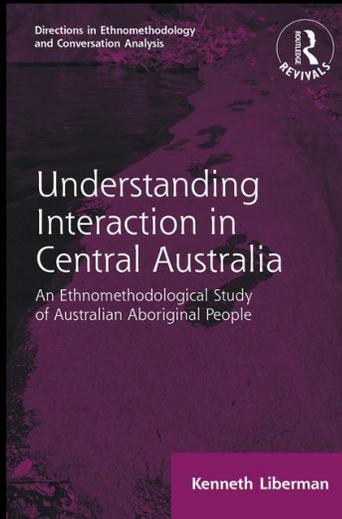
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Introduction

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Introduction

Harold Garfinkel, the founder of Ethnomethodology (EM), began formal research on Race and racism in Spring 1940, and Harvey Sacks, the founder of Conversation Analysis (CA), took up the issue of how social categories and membership categorization as used in talk produce inequality and exclusion in 1962.¹ For Garfinkel and Sacks, personal experiences as Jewish Americans – that they often discussed in conjunction with their work – gave them insight into the social processes of exclusion, which informed the development of their perspectives. Inspired by their efforts, many EM/CA scholars have done research on Race and exclusion, examining how racialized categories, “stereotypes”² and social expectations have become so embedded in tacit taken-for-granted aspects of ordinary interaction and conversation that people are constantly participating in systemic institutionalized racism and inequality without being aware of it.

This long history of research on Race and racism in Ethnomethodology and Conversation Analysis (EM/CA) has, unfortunately, been overshadowed by conventional research on Race that not only obscures the tacit aspects of racism embedded in social interaction, but also attempts to ignore the moral loading of the processes involved (Duck and Rawls 2020b). The omnipresence of Race and racism in contemporary society has thus been obscured by the virtual hegemony of conventional research approaches that don’t look beneath the surface appearances of social facts, categories, and institutional accounts (and their statistical representations) to see how those appearances were produced. Not looking beneath the surface, the bulk of sociological research not only misses, but often hides, the tacit institutionalized racism that shapes those appearances. Crime rates are just one example of social processes that are shaped by institutionalized racism, which have nevertheless been allowed to pass for objective facts (Garfinkel 1942, 1949; Meehan 1986, 1988; Meehan and Ponder 2002).³

Recognizing the centrality of research on Race to sociology as a discipline is a pressing



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concern. Currently, Race is treated by most sociologists as a specialized area of research, of interest primarily to Black and excluded scholars, rather than a central theoretical and methodological concern. For Garfinkel and Sacks, by contrast, Race and exclusion are the key to the big classic issues of social order and meaning. It is by focusing on Race and exclusion – on the social problems and “troubled” interactions that indicate breakdowns in reciprocity – that we can best reveal how society works. It is the taken-for-granted, seen-but-unnoticed, tacitly exclusionary and racialized aspects of interactions that are the origin of these troubles. But because they are taken-for-granted they are not usually noticed by all participants at the time. Not recognizing the importance of interaction to unlocking the big issues of Race and inequality, mainstream sociology has marginalized as “micro” the very studies and scholars with the potential to reveal the hidden practices that create and sustain systemic racism.

The importance of getting beneath the surface in order to see how racism works makes the research contributions of EM/CA scholars that show how Race and exclusion both shape and are created in interaction, central sociological concerns. It also makes the contributions of minority scholars, who are more likely to be aware of this tacit racism, essential sociological theory and research. Historically, the contributions of Black, Latinx, Jewish, Asian and other sociologists of color, whose life experiences alert them to the racism in interaction, have been distorted and marginalized. There has been a strong tendency to treat their insights as “too personal” to be scientific, while at the same time the “objectivity” of majority scholars, who are not even aware of the racism around them (including the institutional racism that shapes their data), is entirely taken for granted.

Many such scholars, whose minority perspective has given them insight into how society works, have done their work in the EM/CA community, which also goes some way toward explaining the stigmatized position of EM/CA within the larger discipline. All of this, academic racism, elitism, and positivist naiveté, has further obscured this vitally important area of research.

The remedy is to build on the work of such marginalized scholars – among whom we include Du Bois, Durkheim and Goffman, along with Garfinkel and Sacks – and bring their contributions to the center of the discipline where they belong. In the process, we need to refute the assessment of these scholars as conservative by mainstream thinkers who did not appreciate the implications of their work. Not only were they not



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conservative, they challenged the conservative positivist theoretical and methodological basis of sociology in their quest to bring to light the hidden taken-for-granted processes that underpin inequality. Doing this work will clarify for sociology generally, as well as for members of the EM/CA Section, the orientation of this approach toward exposing inequalities of Race, gender, class, ideological stigma, and disability (Rawls 2008, Rawls 2019, Rawls forthcoming). Doing so promises to elucidate structures of systemic institutionalized racism and the “tacit” interactional processes they give rise to, and through which they are reproduced, moving toward the general awareness of racism in everyday interaction that we need. It will also encourage the EM/CA section and scholars more generally to take this mandate seriously. If we cannot find the wisdom to accept that the minority/marginalized scholars in our midst – who have worked so hard in the face of racism, anti-Semitism, stigma and exclusion of many sorts – know more about racism and exclusion than the elite White majority, then as sociologists we do not deserve to call ourselves a science. It is time!

This eBook offers a collection of articles by EM/CA scholars on topics related to Race, exclusion and category stigma that have been published by Taylor and Francis. There are many other articles on Race and categorization by EM/CA scholars, including Garfinkel and Sacks, that cannot be included here because other publishers hold copyright (and three we cannot use because they have been made available in another open source collection, Goodman and Speer 2007, Meehan and Ponder 2002, and Whitehead 2012). We mention some of these in our introduction and list the others in the references.

We open with an overview of the significance of Race and racism in the development of ethnomethodology. In doing so, we consider a much overlooked synergy between Garfinkel and Du Bois – first mentioned twenty-years ago (Rawls 2000) – that treats Garfinkel’s focus on “troubles,” taken-for-granted processes of exclusion, and what they reveal about “normal,” as a way of producing something very like what Du Bois called “double consciousness.” This is the case precisely because Garfinkel’s own experiences with discrimination (and those of Sacks, et al.) gave him/them this insight. In other words, EM/CA has from the beginning been powered by insights that are only available from a minority/excluded viewpoint – and are thus of particular importance in the current crisis – as the world tries to come to grips with systemic racism. We also consider important connections to Durkheim: another Jewish scholar with profound minority insights, which have been obscured by misinterpretation.⁴ Connections



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between Durkheim, Du Bois and Garfinkel/Sacks (and Goffman), have the potential to better situate their work in a way that rejuvenates classical sociological questions – makes them more relevant to issues of Race and inequality – and resuscitates classical social theory.

The overview is followed by two sections; the first summarizes Garfinkel’s research on Race and racism, and his argument about how categories are used to structure inequality and exclusion; while the second discusses Sacks’ research on how categorization works in actual interactions, and its relationship to Race and inequality. Because this work was done before the adoption of the terms “Black” (1966) and “African American” (1988), the terms for Race in use at the time, “Negro” and “Colored,” are found in their work.⁵ In these sections, we provide substantial details on the work of Garfinkel and Sacks in this regard, since none of their articles are included in this eBook.

The eBook contains eleven articles and chapters. At the end of this introduction, we provide a summary of each, and describe their relationship to the main issues we outline.

Overview of the Intersection of Race and Ethnomethodology

Garfinkel’s work on the social construction⁶ of Race, gender and other forms of inequality began with his first publication, “Color Trouble” in 1940, and continued to develop through his 1942 MA Thesis on Intra- and Inter-Racial Homicide, and his research for the Army during WWII (in a psychiatric hospital). After he arrived at Harvard in 1946, Garfinkel wrote a paper, titled “The Red” that outlined the social uses of the categories “Red,” “Negro,” and “Jew” ([1947]2012). By 1948 he was documenting a need for reciprocity and mutual commitment to what he later called “Trust Conditions” underlying interaction; showing that persons in asymmetrical social positions (whose category/label can be assigned without their consent) have extra difficulty achieving mutual intelligibility in interaction (1947, 1952, 1956, [1960]2019, [1962]2019, 1963).

Garfinkel was the first to study how people are disenfranchised during interaction by asymmetry in the assignment of categories (Negro/White 1940, 1942; Negro/Jew/Red [1947]2012:20); in the assignment of labels (Sick soldier/Cured soldier [1948] 2006:154-62); in the social achievement of gender (Male/Female 1967); through inequalities embedded in frames and framing (1947: 33, [1948]2006: 142-3, 172); and



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by asymmetry built into the institutional “accounts” that embed those frames, labels and categories, and the statistics they generate (1940, 1942, 1949, 1967). Garfinkel also did early research on the performance of identity in interaction; his first nine dissertation prospectuses (e.g. 1948a, 1948b) focusing on problems in performing Jewish identity (Turowetz and Rawls 2019); and, later his famous study of “Agnes” and 14 other transsexuals ([1958]1967) initiated research on the social construction of gender, “passing” and “intersexed” identity.⁷

For Garfinkel all “signs” in a modern society, even the more durable symbols he referred to ([1948]2006:98) as “signposts,” acquire meaning in and through interaction. Insisting that research should focus on the back-and-forth exchange of the visible/hearable actions that comprise interaction, turn-by-turn, sequence-by-sequence, Garfinkel treated every creation of a social fact as a situated accomplishment (1940, 1946, 1947, 1948, 1967). He insisted that whether the moral conditions for this mutual creation are met is an empirical matter, which varies across situations, but always leaves empirical evidence, because inequality interferes with sense-making turn-by-turn.

Garfinkel began working with Sacks in 1960 and their joint discovery in 1962 that the order properties of interaction can be specified in details using transcripts of conversation enhanced their ability to document the reliance of successful interaction on equality and reciprocity across sequences of interaction and sequences of turns at talk. To the extent that it is the tacit taken-for-granted character of constitutive practices that hides and enables inequality, Garfinkel’s quest to document the taken-for-granted in empirical detail is particularly important; laying the groundwork for contemporary studies of how Race, and other stigmatized categories are actualized through tacit taken-for-granted practices in situated interaction of all kinds.

In emphasizing that the founders of EM/CA were themselves members of marginal categories whose experiences of Race and inequality gave them a heightened awareness of the essential building blocks of social life that remain invisible to most White Americans, we are inspired by W.E.B. Du Bois’ conceptions of “double consciousness” (1903) and “the submissive man” (1890). Garfinkel and Sacks, like Du Bois, recognized that the heightened awareness that comes from exclusion was an essential foundation for sociology, and made the “scientific” production of such awareness a research objective. Garfinkel studied social interactions involving troubled identities, because he understood that the interactional barriers and sanctions that people who are assigned such identities face, give them a heightened awareness of the



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taken-for-granted, “tacit” practices everyone uses to achieve social categories, but of which most are not aware. Sacks also focused on trouble and repair in his quest to explain how people accomplish successful talk. Garfinkel proposed to use this awareness to rewrite social and cultural theory (Rawls and Turowetz 2018).

That Garfinkel’s (1967) insight is similar to Du Bois’ “double consciousness” is not surprising, since for both scholars the insight developed through their own experiences of discrimination. As a Jewish man in the 1930’s and 1940’s Garfinkel experienced explicit anti-Semitism and even anti-Black racism. In the South, where he lived from 1939-1946, he was not considered White, and was turned away from “White only” hotels and restaurants. Those with difficulty achieving “normal” identities are, for Garfinkel, like “natural experiments” whose awareness of social practices can be probed to show the rest of us – who lack this awareness – what we are all doing to achieve what we take-for-granted as “normal.”

Just as there is a growing recognition of the importance of Du Bois and the cost of excluding his scholarship from the sociological canon (Morris 2015; Bobo 2000; Hunter 2013; Wright 2002a, 2002b), there has been a similar barrier with a similar cost to the marginalization of EM/CA and their Jewish founders. Recognizing the importance of Du Bois’ conception of double-consciousness, and the empirical elaboration by Garfinkel and Sacks on the insights that come with it, as a program of sociological theory and research will require integrating social constructionism and the interactional processes through which it is achieved into mainstream theory and research *on terms consistent with EM/CA*.

Race not only was the central problem of the Twentieth Century, as Du Bois predicted, but the failure to come to terms with Race and racism has become the defining issue of the Twenty-First Century. This is the case in society, as White Nationalism raises its ugly head in a context of increasingly obvious systemic racism and violence, and in social theory and research, as we struggle against the limitations of a sociological tradition steeped in positivist individualism. *Race is not just a sub-field of sociology. Understanding Race is the key to modern society as a whole.* Before sociology can embrace this idea, however, a general “double consciousness” regarding Race and racism, and the role played by Race in structuring society at every point, needs to be achieved. We argue that this can best be done through studies of Race in interaction inspired by Du Bois and Garfinkel/Sacks.⁸



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When Jewish sociologists like Durkheim, Garfinkel, and Sacks, who refused to take the existence of social objects and meanings for granted, are interpreted from the White side of the Black/White dichotomy, there has been a tendency to render them in individualistic, positivist and naturalist terms. As a result Garfinkel – who focused on collective processes of sense-making – is transformed into a “micro” sociologist. He and Goffman are treated as scholars of the trivial, even the absurd. Durkheim (1893) – who argued that the inequality of inherited wealth fractures social solidarity and makes it impossible to achieve constitutive social facts, is distorted into a conservative consensus theorist who allegedly sacrificed morality for social solidarity (Rawls 2008, 2012, 2019). Du Bois, who founded the first American school of sociology (Morris 2015), is rendered as a “Black” scholar of “Race” understood as a specialized area of research that is of interest primarily to other Black scholars.

The understanding of Race as a social construction was one of Du Bois’ many contributions to sociology (Morris 2015; Hunter 2013; Wright 2002, 2006). Today most sociologists accept this idea without acknowledging its connection to Du Bois, or grasping the broader implications for social theory and research. Accepting this proposal means accepting that conceptions of Race (and other social objects) need to be socially constructed. They are deeply embedded not only in social structure, but also in daily interaction: in how White Americans see themselves and Others through what Joe Feagin calls The White Racial Frame (2014). The very conception of “Whiteness” has a deeply racist history.

The contributions of marginalized scholars are absolutely central to the theoretical concerns of sociology as a discipline. They may have been marginalized, but their work is not marginal. Focusing on Race and inequality they reveal the hidden tacit systemic structures of social life. Insofar as Race and exclusion hold the key to understanding society, Du Bois, as the first American classical theorist, the first to point out hidden aspects of social experience related to Race, should take a position with Durkheim, his contemporary, who introduced the idea of constitutive social objects in 1893, as the two most important classical sociological theorists. Durkheim started the first French school of sociology, while Du Bois started the first American school of sociology (Morris 2015; Hunter 2013; Wright 2002c, 2006).

Garfinkel, Sacks and Goffman, who explored the social construction of categories and identity, should take their places as the most important contemporary sociologists in the Du Bois/Durkheim lineage. There is a common thread running



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through Du Bois and Durkheim to Garfinkel (and from there to Goffman and Sacks) that is essential to achieving adequate contemporary social theory and research. That common thread involves the shared experience of marginality and racism that informs their approach to sociology.

Du Bois/Durkheim and Garfinkel/Sacks (and Goffman) all spent their careers challenging the Eurocentric conception of a “rational individual,” arguing that the social being is an achievement, and as such, is vulnerable to social processes, and deeply impacted by injustice. For Garfinkel, making social facts requires a degree of cooperation and reciprocity in interaction that fails unless all participants commit to the same expectations, which he (1963) called “Trust Conditions.” Durkheim (1893) argued that without justice and a commitment to what he called “constitutive practices” the cooperation necessary to achieve social facts in a modern society fails – and he pointed out in Book III of *The Division of Labor* (on Abnormal Forms) that modern society was failing. Du Bois (1903:5; 148-9) wrote that racial inequality had led to the formation of two separate worlds, one Black the other White, between which communication and shared experience are highly problematic.

The essential pieces are: Du Bois’ conception of “double consciousness” and the awareness of interpersonal morality that follows; The critique of utilitarianism/individualism that Durkheim and Du Bois share (Duck and Rawls 2020b); Du Bois’ argument that an orientation toward the good of the group, which we call “submissive civility,” is better suited to democratic society than individualism; Durkheim’s realization that modern social facts are fragile creations that require justice and equality; Garfinkel’s recognition that persons in marginalized identities develop a heightened awareness of what they need to do in interaction to avoid “trouble” – and his focus on ethno-methods as a way of generating that awareness; Goffman’s conception of Interaction Orders; and finally, Sacks’ analyses of how categories invoke a moral order in interaction. When we can show how systemic racism and exclusion are being produced, *we hold the key to the social order that is producing it.*

Harold Garfinkel’s Research on Race and Inequality

When Garfinkel went to North Carolina to attend graduate school in 1939 he was shocked by the racism he found there. Working with Howard Odum and Guy Johnson, both well-known scholars of Race and Black American culture, Garfinkel began



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observing and writing about the racism he observed. His first publication described racism on a segregated bus Garfinkel was traveling on in the spring of 1940. That observation was published in the Urban League journal *Opportunity* with the title “Color Trouble.” The article is interesting both for the incident it describes, and for its focus on the way racism worked through accounts and presuppositions in the interaction. For his 1942 MA Thesis Garfinkel studied how Race was invoked in courtroom accounts (by judges, prosecutors, defense attorneys and defendants) in ways that determined case outcomes, but disappeared from the statistical record, making it look as if Race and racism had nothing to do with the courtroom process when it had everything to do with it.

Garfinkel would go on to do research on persons in marginal identities, whose difficulties satisfying the expectations of majority actors made them what he called “natural experiments.” Over the years, in addition to Black Americans these “natural experiments” would focus on mentally-ill soldiers (during WWII), communists/Reds (1947), Jewish students (1948), criminals (1952), transgendered persons (1958-1967), and the blind (1986).

Garfinkel’s Jewish identity is an important part of the story. It is largely overlooked that he entered Harvard with the first wave of Jews who were allowed to join the academy after the war. For his PhD Garfinkel formulated an argument loosely based on an article by Jean Paul-Sartre (1945) on anti-Semitism and gave it the title “The Jew as a social Object.” He was interested in whether the contrast drawn by Sartre between four ways of thinking that correspond with discrimination and efforts by those discriminated against to assimilate (similar to Fanon’s (1954) “colonial mentality”) could be reproduced in controlled experiments with Jewish and White students. Garfinkel recruited groups of pre-medical candidates and played a recording of what he described as a candidate having an interview for admission to medical school. He then asked the students to evaluate the interview. Garfinkel purposely scripted the interview so the candidate would appear as a stupid, pompous bore, and the students clearly saw him that way. But, after they gave their negative evaluations, Garfinkel told them the candidate had done a wonderful job and been accepted into medical school. The idea was that as outsiders with a precarious grasp on what the White establishment was looking for, Jewish candidates would be more anxious and confused when told they were wrong than White students, and that their reasoning about what happened would be different. For some, finding they were wrong required rethinking basic assumptions. For others the basic assumptions were somehow strengthened by the exception.⁹



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Excluded minorities are always needing to take the perspective of strange and unknown others toward themselves. This is difficult and there are many hazards. It is something the White majority is not forced to think about: They are not forced to look at themselves as minorities see them. Because of this the minority position is always subject to challenge/rejection, and minorities need coping strategies for how to deal with these rejections so as to retain their conceptions of themselves (Rawls and Duck 2017 examine some of these strategies). Majority White people do not need such strategies.

Garfinkel's principal students in the early days were also Jewish, and their discussions (recordings and papers in the Garfinkel archive) often touched on the topic of racism and exclusion. With Egon Bittner, who became his student in 1955, Garfinkel studied German concentration camps, of which Bittner had personal experience as an inmate at Auschwitz. Garfinkel's archive contains transcriptions of survivor narratives made in 1946 and 1947. What Garfinkel learned about how concentration camp guards varied the rules to make it impossible for camp residents to make sense of what was happening – one time sending people at the front of the line to the gas chamber, the next sending the end of the line, and another time sending those in the middle – informed his formulation of the trust conditions for stable meaningful interaction. He was still using concentration camp examples to explain trust conditions in 1975. The argument is that violations of basic social rules make a nonsense of experience, and therefore there is a social/moral obligation not to violate them.

“Color Trouble” 1940: Institutionalized Accounts Enable Racism

Garfinkel's first publication, “Color Trouble,” analyzed a racial incident he observed on a bus ride from Newark New Jersey, where his family lived, to North Carolina, where he was a graduate student. The bus stopped in Petersburg, Virginia, on May 23, 1940 (Easter break). Many Black passengers left the bus, leaving two Black passengers sitting in the middle seats, rather than at the back where the Jim Crow law of the time required them to be. One of the two was dressed as a woman, the other as a boy. The “boy” was, unbeknownst to Garfinkel, Pauli Murray, a famous transgender civil rights activist. Because of Murray's presence, the incident became famous, has a presence in the history of civil rights, and generated comparisons between Murray's own account of the incident and Garfinkel's.¹⁰



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The driver explained that he could not load new passengers and continue the journey until the two Black passengers moved to the back of the bus. They refused to move all the way back, but offered to move back into a broken seat if he could fix it. The driver initially accepted the compromise as preserving the appearance of Jim Crow, and fixed the seat. But the agreement broke down when they asked for an apology and the bus didn't move for two hours as the incident unfolded.

The article reporting Garfinkel's observations first appeared in *Opportunity* (published by the *Urban League*) within days of the incident in May 1940, and was then reprinted as if it were fiction in *Best Short Stories of 1941* (and again in *Primer for White Folks*, 1945). The 22-year-old Garfinkel did not write it as fiction, but as ethnography. Although the analysis employs literary devices (representing the thoughts of participants) that Garfinkel did not use in later work, these devices are used to portray tacit presuppositions about Race and inequality that he observed at work in the interaction.

Garfinkel opened with the observation that the racial troubles he observed were related to the institutional obligations of bus company workers, "accounts" the company will accept for failures like lateness, "accident cards" that need to be filled out to bolster such accounts, and how these clash with the requirements for making sense in the interaction. If the company did not accept those accounts the bus driver could still be a racist, but would have had trouble acting on his racism without getting fired. This focus on accounts was inspired by a combination of courses Garfinkel took in accounting as an undergraduate and Kenneth Burke's work on accounts (1939, 1945).

At the end of the incident Garfinkel (1940:113) described the driver as enraged. Just as it seemed he had a compromise worked out, Murray's companion requested an apology: (1940:113) "You're a gentleman, and I'm a lady...and therefore..., I think that as a gentleman to a lady you owe me an apology." "This" Garfinkel (1940:114) says, "was the opening, here was something to understand; the fog had finally dissipated and the barriers were down." In Garfinkel's account the driver finally understands something that makes further dialogue impossible: "He backed up with a snarl, 'You black...' Growling and blind with rage, he was out of the bus in three clattering leaps. '...fool...' He was yelling for the police even before he was out of earshot."

At that point the driver has nothing more to say. He is done – gone silent. Angry that his efforts have failed. But, more importantly, enraged by the Race-neutral



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presumption behind her request for an apology that challenges the foundations of his world. There are consequences all around when the compromise collapses: The driver is embarrassed, the passengers are embarrassed. The veneer behind which the ugliness of Jim Crow normally remains hidden was lifted and the whole social situation collapsed. It would now be necessary to reassert “normality”, which will require a great deal of work.

Later studies by Garfinkel, his students and colleagues, would show how institutional accountability can interfere with reciprocity and Trust conditions, distorting sensemaking and statistical accounts (notably Weider 1974a, 1974b, Sudnow 1965, and Meehan 1987, 2002). The institutions that most sociologists treat as the bedrock of democracy – including the police and “the rule of law” – Garfinkel reveals as hidden agents of inequality.

“Inter and Intra-Racial Homicide” 1942: Racialized Accounts Determine Outcomes

Garfinkel’s second major work, his 1942 MA Thesis on Inter- and Intra-Racial Homicide, an abridged version of which was published in *Social Forces* 1949, focused on how courtroom outcomes that appear statistically to be “fair” are actually based on racialized accounts produced in court during the trial. At a time when sociology was advocating a turn toward statistics, Garfinkel was demonstrating the pitfalls of a statistical approach, particularly in getting at issues of racial discrimination. The assumption that research based on statistics is objective is naively wrong when the numbers in question refer to things like trial outcomes that were produced using institutional accounting processes that treated Race and racialized narrative accounts as a taken-for-granted aspect of the legal decision-making process.

Garfinkel’s thesis project was ambitious, requiring extensive field research in ten North Carolina county courthouses. His analysis focused on narrative accounts tied to Race categories that were offered in court by those involved officially in the cases (including judges, prosecutors, attorneys, and witnesses). These accounts he recorded by hand. These racialized accounts played a key role in determining case outcomes. The puzzle was that when looked at statistically the distribution of punishments by Race looked “fair.” Garfinkel realized the results of two contrasting sets of institutional accounts neutralized each other so that statistically it looked as if Race were *not* playing an important role in the determination of cases when in fact it was playing *the*



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determining role. He also saw that this could be happening in any social institution to produce a false appearance of fairness or equity.

The way it worked was simple. Accounts were offered about the moral character of both the offender and the victim: character assessments. These accounts were framed in terms of shared cultural assumptions about Race. In other words, Black and White men were not expected to behave the same way, and judgments of character reflected these not-so-tacit category-bound presuppositions. Good White men contribute to the community. Good Black men know their place. Simply put, Garfinkel found that when the victim was Black “good” White men were rewarded (with lenient sentences or dismissal) for killing “bad” Black men and “good” Black men could be rewarded for killing “bad” Black men and “doing the community a favor.” Statistically (holding constant other factors) White and Black men in these two categories had a similar probability of getting lenient sentences. When the victims were White the sentences were harsher, although Black men were much more heavily penalized. But these inter-racial homicides made up a very small percentage of cases because most homicide occurs within Race.

The more lenient sentences for White men killing Black men and Black men killing bad Black men, cancelled each other out and obscured the racial bias. Not only was the fact that Black men were *always penalized* for killing White men, while White men were *rewarded* for killing Black men obscured, but the fact that the decisions were based on racist courtroom accounts remained hidden. The numbers were telling a big fat lie.

Consequently, a situation that in the courtroom was *openly discussed* in racialized terms appeared statistically to be the result of a just and fair legal process. It is a huge social problem that actions that are explicitly determined by Race and tacit assumptions about Race can look fair in the aggregate.¹¹ It is also remarkable that given such a clear demonstration of how racism can be rendered invisible by statistical accounts as Garfinkel gave (1942, 1949), it is accepted legal criterion in the US that claims of Race (and other forms of discrimination) must be accompanied by statistical proof that an institution has a “pattern” of bias.¹²

“The Red” 1947: Explication of the Symbols “Red” “Jew” and “Negro”

“The Red as an Ideal Object,” completed in Spring 1947, elaborates on a theory of social



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objects Garfinkel was developing his first year at Harvard. The “Red” in the title refers to the American attitude toward Russians in 1947, just after World War II, when anti-communist sentiment was high, and is the primary subject of the paper. But, in writing about the functions of the “Red symbol,” Garfinkel contrasts the way that symbol works and the moral baggage it carries with the way the symbols “Negro” and “Jew” work. He analyzes these in terms of symbolic pairs: good/evil, sacred/secular, benign/malignant and insider/outsider, arguing that they invoke moral meanings that attach to people without their consent.

Although “The Red” was written during his first year at Harvard, it addresses many of the questions Garfinkel would develop over the course of his long career. The entire meaning of an object, what it is “as an object of action, is found,” he says (1947:2) “in the meanings it has for an actor employing a given way of attending to these meanings.” This idea of “ways” of attending would resurface later as “ethno-methods.”

That there is more than one kind of social object and that the processes of their constitution, and how they “mean,” differ is his central point. This multiplication of object types challenged the sociological wisdom of the day, which was increasingly tending toward a *unified* conceptual approach. The “Red” Garfinkel says (1947:1) is an “ideal-axiological object” as distinguished from an “existential-practical” object. According to Garfinkel (1947:2), “The Red is an ideal object in the same way that we say a triangle is an ideal object.” The point is that “The term Red refers to an object which does not exist; rather it is meant.” Some objects have existence in their own right – even though as meant they are social objects. Other objects exist only as “meant.” John Searle’s Speech Acts are social objects of this second type. As Garfinkel points out, triangles and social categories such as “Red” “Negro” and “Criminal” only exist as socially meant categories and have no other mode of existence. The “Red” exists entirely as a social object – as meant. This means that as an object it depends entirely on “the ‘manipulations’ of various systematically related ideas and beliefs.” The same is true of “Negro” as an ideal object.

There are constitutive prerequisites for various states of such objects. These include interactional practices and a working agreement with regard to them that specify: 1) The identity or identities from which (or by which) a particular object can be constituted; 2) The situation within which it can be constituted; 3) The other identified objects against which it can be constituted, and so on.



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Garfinkel (1947:2) considers three aspects of the ideal social object. The third aspect is the character of the object as what he calls an “ideal role.” This involves an important discussion of objects as having roles and role properties just like actors (identities). In both cases, the role properties belong to situations/interactions and are constitutive of the objects that are said to take on those roles. To say that an object has a role carries the same implications of obligation that it does with identities. To say that an object has role properties (or to say that in a particular situation an object has a certain role) is to say that it is bound by the obligations of that role. Therefore, for Garfinkel the “Red” as a social object carries certain moral tones of obligation and role relations as a constitutive property. That “Negro” carries moral properties in much the same way he demonstrated in his MA Thesis.

This is not how conventional sociology analyses categories. The scientific process would do away with emotional and moral factors. Garfinkel’s point is that considerations of morality are actually *constitutive of social objects* (including Race): how they mean and how they behave in the actual world. The objects are themselves morally loaded. Therefore, the proposal to treat them “objectively” that was coming to prominence in the late 1940’s is not one that can – or should – be carried through. George Lundberg had famously argued in 1943, as president of the *American Sociological Association*, that scientific clarity could only be achieved by getting morality and emotion out of science and he made the argument with direct reference to Jewish sociologists. Lundberg’s position was echoed by other sociological elites (Rawls 2018). Garfinkel was directly challenging that position (with references to Lundberg) arguing that for some very important social objects like “Red” and “Negro” emotion and morality are constitutive of the objective clarity of the object.

Moral issues, Garfinkel says, are typically felt to “complicate the objective clarity of the symbol’s meaning.” But, in actual use the “Red” symbol, like the other ideal symbols, gets its objectivity from “the maximum heaping up of these emotional factors.” The Red and other symbols such as “Negro” “Criminal” and “Jew” do powerful work in the social world by tapping into morality. To remove their moral character would be unscientific. To remove emotion and morality from social science would in all of these cases lose the “objectivity” of the object altogether.

Having established the objectivity of moral considerations, Garfinkel contrasts the moral functions of “Red” and “Negro” in ordinary language, saying that the symbol “locates the referent relative to a legitimate moral order.” In the case of “Red” the



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location is outside of a legitimate moral order. In the case of “Negro” the location is inside a legitimate moral order. The symbols are in themselves a miniature act – like a speech act – that “provides a legitimate rationale of either acceptance or rejection and provides this rationale in sacred or profane accents” and “provides a legitimate rationale of hostility.” In comparing the moral loading of these categories Garfinkel (1947:14) says:

The Red is most commonly viewed as the malign evil, and can be compared on this point with the Jew who, while also seen piously, familiarly, and as a secular evil is considered benign. Both are to be compared with the Negro who becomes of interest by virtue of substituted dimensions of illegitimacy and malignant evil. Interestingly enough, the differentiations of interest that are found within the moral categories of Jew and Negro are not found with the Red whose mode of reality is marked by the singular invariance of all dimensions except that of evil which may fluctuate between the two indicated types, although it is most frequently considered malign.

It makes a difference that there are social objects of this kind. Because they have logics of combination attached to them, attempts to detach them from their moral functions and treat them as natural objects fall into ambiguities. According to Garfinkel (1947:15) “There is a requiredness about the meaning evoked by these symbols.” The test of the “truth” of the use of a term is in the reaction of real people in ordinary interaction – not in scientific logic, or the thought experiments of scientists. Following through on this advice would require recording actual conversations and Garfinkel began recording everything in 1949.

It is with regard to this moral “requiredness” involving the use of “Red” and “Negro” that we enter the territory of systemic institutionalized racism in everyday language use.

Harvey Sacks and the Analysis of Categories-in-Action

For Harvey Sacks, who began working with Garfinkel in 1960, early conversations also involved being Jewish and how that identity limited and shaped his life possibilities (Garfinkel archive). These discussions sometimes included Talcott Parsons, who demonstrated that he understood what they were talking about, and how their experience of being “different” – which we have referred to as a kind of



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double-consciousness – informed both the development of ethnomethodology and its focus on disruptions and troubles as the openings that would allow the observer a view behind the veil of “normal” taken-for-granted social life to see the way inequality, Race and exclusion are structured into the very fabric of social interaction.

Sacks, even more than Garfinkel, focused on Race and inequality as unintended features and outcomes of situated social practices. In remarking on the contributions of his work, his collaborator Emmanuel Schegloff (1992:xxiv) noted Sacks’ proposal “that much of the observable orderliness of the world may be better understood as the by-products of ambient organizations which are quite unconcerned with these outcomes, rather than as products which were the design target of some organization” (also see Raymond 2019). This orientation is evident in the numerous observations on Race and racism available in his work.

Foremost among these observations are those in his (1984, 1986) analyses of a speaker’s use of a racial person reference during the course of a story told in a telephone conversation between friends regarding an incident outside a department store witnessed by the teller of the story.¹³ In his analyses, Sacks considers how, by referring to one of the people at the scene she is describing as a “Colored lady,” the teller “works to put in information relevant to seeing what was happening” (Sacks 1986:134), implying by the use of the racial category that the woman was attempting to rob the store. As Whitehead (in press) notes, these analyses demonstrate how racial categories can be mobilized to tacitly account for a referred-to person’s actions (as provided-for by their membership in the category), with this constituting a mechanism through which the common-sense knowledge associated with racial categories is reproduced as a “by-product” of whatever the participants are doing, rather than being the “design target” of their activities. Sacks thus offers an early example of how critical studies of Race and racism – providing for insights into such features as implicit and taken-for-granted Race-based privilege, racialized ways of seeing, and associated obstacles to the accomplishment of empathy across racial lines – can be grounded in the details of participants’ orientations and conduct in everyday interactions.

Many valuable observations on interactional features of Race and racism can also be found in Sacks’ (1992) lectures. In a discussion of “rather subtle ways of doing things like anti-Negro, anti-Semitic, whatever else, activities,” Sacks (1992, Vol. 1:338, emphasis added) offered this example of how associations between Jews and economic crimes are invoked by reports on such crimes:



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They don't claim to be prosecuting Jews at all. They don't mention that these people are Jews at all. They need only – at least for internal consumption – prosecute some people and then put out in a newspaper article, a list of the names of the persons who were convicted. Then, given the fact that everyone knows that Jews are profiteers, “Jews” now being relevant to possibly explain who it is that did the economic crimes, one looks to the names to see whether they are Jewish names; since Jewish names are, among Russians, fairly identifiable, no claim at all need be made that these are Jews for everyone who cares to see that they are Jews to see that, and to see that what was done was something that Jews do.

That “everyone knows that Jews are profiteers” can thus be mobilized by Russian authorities simply reporting the (recognizably Jewish) names of those convicted of these crimes, thereby reinforcing these anti-Semitic associations while claiming “that they're not doing anti-Semitism at all” (1992, Vol. I:338). As Race scholars have since recognized, Black and other racialized names are often similarly identifiable, and as a result they may, together with other markers of Race, serve as resources for the tacit – and hence deniable – accomplishment of racism (see, e.g., Bertrand and Mullainathan 2004; Downing and Husband 2005; Haney López 2015).¹⁴

Sacks (1992, Vol. I:82) also observed how both racist and anti-racist actions can be accomplished entirely wordlessly, using as an example exchanges of glances in which an initial glance conveys participants' orientations to interracial couples as “odd,” followed by responsive glances that negatively sanction the orientation conveyed by the initial glance:

For example, on the Berkeley campus or in places in Berkeley, you often find interracial couples wandering around, one of whom is Negro, one of whom is white. And people who look like tourists, visitors to the campus, etc. – that is, strangers – will stop to look at these couples, and then check out with others around. The question-form might be seen as something like ‘Am I in Rome, or am I here?’ That is, Rome, generically. ‘Do I know where I am so that I know that that's something okay or something odd.’ And when they do that, people will not infrequently just look back at them and give them a negative stare. As if to say, ‘Who the hell are *you*.’”

Moreover, Sacks articulated the potential unintended consequences of completely doing away with racial categories in the 1960's, some decades before Race scholars



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(e.g., Bonilla-Silva 2017; Brown 2003; Omi and Winant 2015) sounded the alarm about the dangers of professing to be “color-blind,” referring to it as “color-blind racism.” Getting rid of Race categories does not get rid of racism, but as Sacks (1992, Vol. 1:339) notes, it would interfere with the ability to recognize and denounce racism:

The sheer knowing of the fact that this case is the case of a Negro murdered, much less a Negro murdered for civil rights reasons, takes some of these relevance rules as essential to the finding of what the hell is happening. And that you can then look to some white man who is a member of a rightist organization, for example, is not given by the fact that some X died who had certain properties, but that one sees that it was a Negro church burned, or whatever.

And many people who would like, for example, the information about Negroes to be undercut, to be said to be proved to be false by virtue of the fact that it isn't true about all Negroes, would find it very hard, then, to preserve such matters as that in fact Negroes have been murdered in the South, which they ought also to be able to say, and which follows as a part of the same apparatus. One has to be careful to pick one's weapons so that they don't destroy more than one would like.

Sacks' point is that we need these category terms to point out problems with Race and exclusion and will need them as long as there are systemic inequalities that need to be noticed and talked about. He is also pointing out that acts can be racist without occurring in a statistical pattern. Pretending that Race does not exist – while denying ourselves use of the terms – would make things worse, not better.

Notwithstanding the significance of these and other observations by Sacks, his most enduring and widely-recognized contributions to research on Race and racism lie in his setting forth a framework for analyses of how members use, manage, and self-administer social categories in everyday interactions – and in the process reproduce and/or resist them. Central to this work is Sacks' account of “membership categorization devices” (MCDs), as a set of resources and practices that members systematically orient toward and deploy as bases for inference and action – an account that was informed by Garfinkel's early work, as described above, on categories and categorization in “The Red” (Garfinkel [1947]2012), and that converges with Garfinkel's focus on common-sense knowledge, thus in turn tying Sacks' work to the social



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phenomenology of Alfred Schutz (also see Heritage 1984), and Kenneth Burke's (1939) groundbreaking work on accounting practices.

Sacks (e.g., 1972a, 1972b, 1992) describes MCDs as consisting of collections of categories together with “rules of application” that participants use in relation to them. These collections – “things like sex, age, race, religion, perhaps occupation” (Sacks 1992, Vol. I:40) – are made up of categories of person that Sacks describes as “inference-rich.” As Schegloff (2007:469) puts it, these categories, “are the store house and the filing system for the common-sense knowledge that ordinary people – that means ALL people in their capacity as ordinary people – have about what people are like, how they behave, etc.” Importantly, this common-sense knowledge is “protected against induction,” meaning, as Sacks (1992, Vol. I:180) notes in relation to racial categories, that exceptions don't change them:

...exceptions just don't matter. That's easiest to see by seeing that the first Negro and the first ten Negroes you know, can be seen by you to be exceptions to what you know about Negroes. It's not the case that exceptions involve any change in what you know about the category's members. For all the categories that have such kinds of characteristics as that there are a bunch of activities bound to them, exceptions don't matter. It's built in that there are exceptions, and they just don't affect what you know. You know that category does the following, and you know that there are exceptions, and they do not involve you in modifying what you know.

What Sacks is describing here also relates to Garfinkel's PhD research on reasoning that preserves original assumptions against disconfirming information (see footnote 6).

Social psychologists have popularized concepts such as “attitudes,” “prejudices,” “stereotypes” and, most recently, “implicit bias” (see Greenwald and Banaji 1995), in dealing with Race and racism, using these concepts to account for the relatively enduring character of attributes and activities associated with members of categories, and hence to explain the mechanisms underpinning racial discrimination and other racist actions. In contrast, Sacks' focus – consistent not only with EM and CA, but with sociology more generally, is on how participants use and manage these features of categories as resources for the accomplishment of action during the course of their everyday interactions. Moreover, as Garfinkel did with regard to the Red category, Sacks emphasizes the moral requiredness of these features of categories – the ways in which



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they are not just socially shared, but also morally enforced. This approach to categories provides an interactional alternative to conventional social psychological approaches to Race and racism – one that is grounded in the observable empirical details of everyday interactions, rather than relying on inferences about “inner psychological” structures and processes that operate “behind the backs” (i.e., beyond the conscious awareness and agency) of participants (also see Whitehead 2018).

Sacks’ work on membership categorization has been criticized by some for leaning “towards giving a more solid, fixed or reified property to some categories and their organization in social action” (Housley and Fitzgerald 2015:10; also see, e.g., Hester and Eglin 1997; Watson 2015). While Watson (2015) suggests that this tendency was most marked in Sack’s earliest work, it is noteworthy that as early as 1965 and 1966, in lectures on “‘hotrodders’ as a revolutionary category” (Sacks 1992, Vol. I:169-174, 396-403; subsequently published in Sacks 1979), Sacks discusses how categories may serve as a basis for social control, and how those who are subject to it may resist or challenge it by taking “ownership” of the categories through which their attributes and actions are interpreted and enforced (cf. Whitehead and Lerner 2009). In concluding this discussion in the 1966 iteration of this lecture, Sacks (1992, Vol. I:402) suggests that:

the important problems of social change, I would take it, anyway, would involve laying out such things as the sets of categories, how they’re used, what’s known about any member, etc., and beginning to play with shifts in the properties of a category, and shifts in the rules for use.

Among the countless cases that could be noted of movements for social change working to bring about shifts of these sorts, the introduction of “Black” to replace “Colored” in 1966 can be recognized as a move by members of this category to take ownership of the terms in which they were described (also see Whitehead’s 2012 discussion of the Black Consciousness Movement in South Africa). Similarly, we can observe that the affirmation “Black Lives Matter” is an intervention explicitly designed to shift an all-too-often taken-for-granted position with respect to those seen as members of the category “Black” – that their lives do not matter – which underpins the types and degree of social control and violence to which they are disproportionately subjected. Moreover, the more recent modification to “All Black lives matter” invokes and critiques the elision of members of marginalized gender and sexual identity categories in light of their heightened vulnerability to violence relative to other



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members of this racial category.

Sacks' descriptions of MCDs as a “generic” apparatus that participants deploy and orient toward similarly across interactional occasions and collections of categories has provided foundational analytic resources for researchers using approaches grounded in EM, CA and those doing what they call membership categorization analysis (MCA)¹⁵ who have applied them to interactions involving a wide range of MCDs. These include a number of the contributions to the present volume, which explore racial issues involved in membership categorization in ways that are directly inspired by Sacks. Sacks' work on MCDs has thus provided a fruitful foundation for research on how Race and exclusion are accomplished – as well as resisted – through ordinary uses of categories in everyday interactions.

Descriptions of the Eleven Articles included in this eBook

Some of the papers included in this eBook follow up on Sacks' elucidation of categories and MCDs. These include Berard (2005), Hansen (2005), Huynh and Woo (2015), McHoul (2007), Scarpetta and Spagnolli (2009), Shrikant (2018), and Whitehead (2011, 2013), with many of these also considering intersections between categories and other orders of the organization of interaction (including turn-taking, sequence and preference organization, and repair). Hester and Eglin (2017) follow up on Garfinkel's preoccupation with Race and racism, focusing on how Race is criminalized through actions taken at many “crime” relevant worksites, and asking how the “normal” use of work practices of by the police and other actors in the criminal justice system could be producing racism. Liberman (1985) draws on his classic EM study of members' methods in describing both the White fear of talking about Race, and the ways in which embedded cultural preferences, when they clash with those of outsiders, can have racist results. Rawls and Duck (2017) elaborate further on this point, building on Du Bois, Garfinkel and Sacks, to argue that centuries of separation between Black and White Americans have resulted in a situation where the basic constitutive rules of social action are not the same across these categories. This was also the argument of Rawls (2000), which is not included in this volume. This separation – and the clashing basic and preferred rules it gives rise to – produces many conversational and interactional troubles, and, for Black Americans it also produces constant experiences of Double Consciousness: they are not seen by White others the way they see themselves – but racism constrains their assertions of their own conception of themselves. Meanwhile



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White participants in such interactions have no idea that any of this is going on (Rawls and Duck 2020).

Taken together, these contributions (listed alphabetically) demonstrate some of the myriad, and often mundane and unremarkable, ways in which the tacit fibers and threads that constitute the social institution of Race and systemic racism are continually woven into the fabric of everyday interactions (cf. Heritage's 1984:197-198 reflections, in relation to Garfinkel's study of Agnes, on the reproduction of gender). These mechanisms for the reproduction of racial and other intersecting categories both rest on, and provide resources for, the situated accomplishment of the generic practices and structures of interaction through which both racist and anti-racist actions are produced (cf. Whitehead 2009; Whitehead and Lerner 2009). Understanding how they function is a crucial part of working toward a more just social order. As Sacks (1987:67) noted, "you cannot find what [people are] trying to do until you find the kinds of things they work with" – and if we wish to bring about change, we will need to know what we are up against.

In **On Multiple Identities and Educational Contexts: Remarks on the Study of Inequalities and Discrimination, Berard (2005)** considers how "politically salient" MCDs (e.g., class, Race/ethnicity, and sex/gender) become relevant alongside a range of locally situated MCDs (e.g., age/generation and occupation) and "discourse identities" (e.g., "accuser" and "accused") in an interaction involving a dispute occasioned by accusations of discrimination against a professor. He thereby demonstrates the value of analytic attention to how multiple intersecting MCDs and categories may be variously "in play" in education-related (and other) interactional contexts.

In **A Practical Task: Ethnicity as a Resource in Social Interaction, Hansen (2005)** describes how racial and ethnic categories are deployed as participants' resources in taking positions on the merits of a proposed charter school during the course of a public planning meeting. Using this analysis, Hansen seeks to complicate accounts of social conflicts as based on ethnicity, prior to and independently of their realization as such in and through participants' situated interactional practices.

In **"Race" (from *A Sociology of Crime, Second Edition*), Hester and Eglin (2017)** consider how Race features in what gets criminalized and how, and also how professional sociology has sought to explain the criminalization of people of color, and "the grammar of race" in relation to criminalization. In the process, they examine how a



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range of actors, including sociologists, police officers, attorneys, judges, defendants, and admitted perpetrators of violent crimes, use racial categories in ways that varyingly contribute to and/or account for racist outcomes in relation to the criminal justice system.

In **'Asian Fail': Chinese Canadian Men Talk about Race, Masculinity, and the Nerd Stereotype**, **Huynh and Woo (2015)** describe how Chinese Canadian men either embrace or resist self-categorization in terms of Race, and with respect to the association between the categories "Asian" and "nerd." In doing so, they consider whether membership in the former category implies membership in the latter, and thus how participants negotiate membership with respect to multiple categories that are commonly seen as closely associated with one another.

In **"Cultural Politics" (from Understanding Interaction in Central Australia)**, **Liberman (1985)** explains, based on ethnographic research, how a curtain is needed to shield the private lives of Australia's remote Aboriginal people from Anglo-Australians because it is the best defense Aboriginal people have against the assertive and intent-upon-domination micro-interactional structures of mundane Anglo-Australian social interaction. Their quiet campaign to protect themselves has resulted in their offering Whites the appearance of acquiescence, while steadfastly refusing to acculturate to Anglo-Australian individualist social forms. Unfortunately, their success has only led Anglo-Australians to double their efforts to dominate. Thus, a century-long cultural political struggle continues on the battlefield of daily life in Australia's Western Desert.

In **Killers and Friendlies: Names Can Hurt Me**, **McHoul (2007)** addresses media reporting on a 2003 incident in Iraq in which two American fighter pilots mistakenly fired on a "friendly" British convoy. By considering combinations of contrasting pairs of categories (e.g., "friend"/"foe") and predicates (e.g., "killed"/"engaged"), they demonstrate how the lethal actions of pilots can be rendered either morally acceptable or blameworthy in a context with implicit racial implications.

In **"Fractured Reflections" of High Status Black Male Presentations of Self**, **Rawls and Duck (2017)** show how Interaction Order differences, combined with racialized expectations about status identity, can produce what they call "Fractured Reflections" of self-presentation as a type of interactional event. In the normal course of interaction people present themselves in an identity appropriate to the situation they are in, and



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then other participants confirm that presentation if it is competent, or question it if it is not. For Black Americans, however, there are many situations in which White Others do not recognize their competent high status performances of identity. The “Fracturing” event occurs when the person presenting Self gets back from the Other(s) a reflection of their identity performance that is not recognizable to them and they ignore it. This happens because White people fail to recognize the identity performances of Black Americans so often that they need to learn not to treat the failed response as accurate feedback about something they are doing wrong, and should correct, but rather, as feedback they must ignore to maintain their identity. Rawls and Duck refer to this as a “Null Response.”

In **The Interactional Context of Humor in Stand-up Comedy, Scarpetta and Spagnolli (2009)** examine stand-up comedy shows performed by African American comedians, describing how joke sequences differ for Black versus White audiences. They demonstrate how the interactional setting of stand-up comedy, in which comedians count on audience laughter in the face of “trouble,” often requires them to tell extreme jokes that may otherwise risk being considered sexist or racist. If the audience laughs at the “trouble” they receive the affiliative responses that comedy requires, with the audience thereby both co-constructing and becoming co-responsible for the comedians’ actions.

In **“There’s No Such Thing as Asian”: A Membership Categorization Analysis of Cross-cultural Adaptation in an Asian American Business Community, Shrikant (2018)** examines how members of an Asian American Chamber of Commerce (AACC) adapt to the U.S. racial order by adopting the American racial category “Asian” while at the same time deploying varying definitions of “Asian” in ways that contribute to their own cultural and institutional goals. This analysis thus demonstrates creative ways in which participants can use racial categories as resources for action while at the same time resisting essentialist racial ideologies and working to shift common-sense knowledge about categories.

In **An Ethnomethodological, Conversation Analytic Approach to Investigating Race in South Africa, Whitehead (2011)** provides an overview of an approach to the study of Race, informed by EM perspectives, that employs CA methods to collections of cases of target phenomena of interest. He uses as an illustrative case a study of interactions on South African talk radio shows in which Race was either explicitly, or tacitly, treated as relevant.



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In **Managing Self/Other Relations in Complaint Sequences: The Use of Self-Deprecating and Affiliative Racial Categorizations**, Whitehead (2013) describes two racial categorization practices – self-deprecating self-categorization and affiliative other-categorization – that participants can use to manage the self/other relations that are implicated in the production of complaints (including those that speakers orient to as possibly racist) in sequential contexts in which Race has been made relevant.

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Notes

¹ The word Race is capitalized throughout to highlight its status as a social construction, or convention that is created and recreated in interaction. There is no biological basis for Race.

² "Stereotypes" in EM/CA usage are not psychological, which we discuss in the section on Sacks. Rather the term denotes social categories and framing devices that are public and shared – part of overall systemic institutionalized racism.

³ Meehan and Ponder (2002) describe police surveillance and traffic stop practices profiling African Americans. They found that the police were not only stopping, but "watching" drivers by Race. The police relied on commonsense expectations about the proportion of Black drivers, based on the assumption they did not "belong" in this (hyper-segregated) community; i.e., that their presence on these roadways signified criminality. Because this expectation was incorrect, Black drivers were *both* surveilled and *stopped* at rates 2-3 times higher than White drivers, while Black drivers were the *least likely* to have legal problems.



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⁴ Durkheim's experiences with Anti-Semitism are a public matter. As a consequence, we know he had the kinds of experiences that Du Bois and Garfinkel write about.

⁵ Jesse Jackson persuaded Americans to adopt the term "African American" in 1988. Stokely Carmichael (Kwame Ture) and Willie Ricks (Mukasa Dada), were the first to popularize the use of the term "Black" as a political and racial category in 1966.

⁶ "Social construction" for Garfinkel was never a conceptual matter as it often was for symbolic interaction. All recognized identities and social objects must be achieved in social interaction – that is, they must be socially constructed by actual people interacting together. The "real" life identities and categories that persons find themselves assigned to, as Garfinkel says, without their consent, are entirely social in both conception and in how they are made actual in daily interaction.

⁷ Goffman read and commented on Garfinkel's manuscripts on identity in interaction before he completed his book on the presentation of self. Goffman had also originally planned to publish his essay on "Stigma" with Garfinkel's essay on "Agnes" in a volume co-authored with Garfinkel titled "On Passing." New information about Agnes held up the completion of Garfinkel's essay and he urged Goffman to publish without him, which he did.

⁸ Victor Rios has also argued that sociology should take a double consciousness approach, see Rios Carney and Kelekay 2017.

⁹ Whereas Sacks (1992, Vol. I:180) would later talk about categories and category-bound activities that are "protected against induction," in his 1948 PhD thesis research, Garfinkel was proposing *a form of reasoning* that is protected against induction (i.e., no amount of exceptions will change the original premise).

¹⁰ To complicate matters, Murray was secretly a cross-dressing female – identified by Garfinkel as an adolescent boy. Garfinkel's description of Murray as a "boy" is consistent with his discussion of Agnes (a transgendered person) as a woman. Murray "presented" as a boy – and hoped to be seen as a boy. Garfinkel obliged. Murray's account can be found in the Harvard University Schlesinger archive.

¹¹ For instance, the fact that Black men were and are in general more likely to be arrested means that in court cases, holding "other factors" (such as prior arrest) constant, creates racially biased conviction and sentencing rates that nevertheless appear to be racially unbiased.



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¹² Because they are accountable in various ways, most institutions have become adept at making sure that their institutional accounting practices leave no such “pattern” of bias.

¹³ Sacks originally presented these analyses in several lectures in 1970 and 1971. These lectures, along with others he delivered at UCLA and UC Irvine between 1964 and 1972, were recorded by Sacks’ student and collaborator, Gail Jefferson, who transcribed and edited them for publication in various outlets, including ultimately a complete two-volume collection of his lectures (Sacks 1992) after his untimely death.

¹⁴ US political adds that reference “Hollywood money” and “George Soros” are invoking anti-Semitic associations implicitly in a similar way.

¹⁵ While there is a lack of consensus as to whether CA and MCA can properly be considered distinct enterprises (see, e.g., Carlin 2010; Schegloff 2007; Stokoe 2012), Stokoe (2012:278) provides a useful summary of the foci evident in research identified with each, noting that they have

attended to related but consequentially different aspects of discourse practice. Whereas CA ‘...specifies the normative *structuring* and *logics* of particular courses of social action and their *organization* into *systems* through which participants manage turn-taking, repair, and other *systemic* dimensions of interaction’ (Heritage 2005:104; emphasis added), MCA focuses on ‘members’ methodical practices in describing *the world*, and displaying their understanding of *the world* and of the *commonsense* routine workings of *society*’ (Fitzgerald et al. 2009:47; emphasis added). ... CA works principally across large conversational data corpora to identify, cumulatively, robust structural patterns in turn-taking, repair, sequence organization and action formation. In contrast, MCA mainly produces case studies of distinct interactional and textual settings, focusing on turn-generated ‘identities-for-interaction’, morality, culture and other categorial matters.

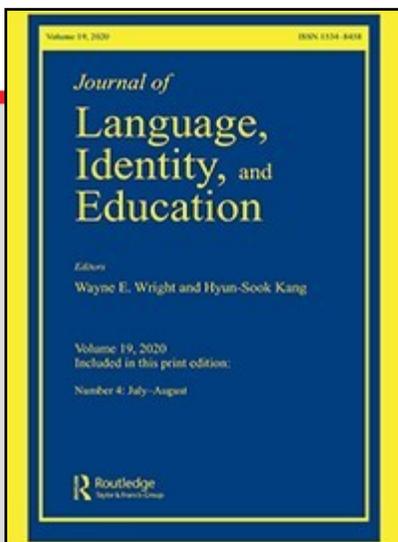


CHAPTER

1

ON MULTIPLE IDENTITIES AND EDUCATIONAL CONTEXTS

REMARKS ON THE STUDY OF INEQUALITIES AND DISCRIMINATION



This article by T. J. Berard
was published in

the *Journal of Language, Identity, and Education*, 4(1),
67–76

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ON MULTIPLE IDENTITIES AND EDUCATIONAL CONTEXT

REMARKS ON THE STUDY OF INEQUALITIES AND DISCRIMINATION

By T. J. Berard, excerpted from the *Journal of Language, Identity, and Education*

Concerns about identity in educational research and theory have understandably focused on *politically salient* identity categories, especially class, race/ethnicity, and sex/gender. This focus contributes to political discourse, but offers a simplistic if not totally misleading picture of *which* identities are observably relevant in educational settings and practice. Politically salient categories are not always relevant in particular educational contexts, and even when they are, their relevance cannot properly be understood without an appreciation for the *multiplicity* and *diversity* of identities which become relevant in particular contexts and courses of action. These arguments are illustrated with reference to the case of Mary Daly, the feminist professor who refused to integrate male students into her women's studies courses. A detailed analysis of a news interview excerpt, drawing upon ethnomethodological conversation analysis, suggests how identity can be respecified more widely *and* more finely by situating identity within natural language use and social interaction.

Key words: identity, sex, gender, discrimination, education, language

Status hierarchies of class, race/ethnicity, and sex/gender are common, almost unavoidable concerns in a wide variety of social-scientific theorizing and research. The sociology of education is no exception, especially because educational institutions either perpetuate or transform class relations, race/ethnic relations, and sex/gender relations. Such concerns, *as important as they are*, have nevertheless led to an unfortunate tunnel vision which blinds us to the great variety of social identities and social relations which are relevant and important in one or another educational context, beyond these three conventional categories. And because class, race/ethnic, and sex/gender categories and relations are never, as an empirical matter, so abstract and discrete as to be observable except amid other categories and relations, tunnel vision focused on class, race/ethnicity, or sex/gender often distorts the very phenomena which are its focus, simplifying if not obscuring the social contexts and practical activities in which these categories become relevant, including educational contexts and educational activities.

Although it is very common for theorists and researchers to approach empirical data with the goal of comparing the attributes of different status groups (read: class, race/ethnicity, sex/gender), or even finding evidence of social inequality along these lines, according to a preformulated theoretical (or political)



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program, there are other traditions of social inquiry less driven by theoretical (or political) concerns, or even altogether indifferent to them.

Two such alternative traditions of inquiry are ethnomethodology (the empirical study of cultural methods of practical action and practical reasoning) and conversation analysis (devoted to empirical studies of talk-in-interaction). These two traditions of inquiry enjoy overlapping histories, principles, and findings, and both could be characterized as *naturalistic* human studies of social interaction, naturalistic in the sense that both traditions attend to their phenomena with methodological and analytic respect for how these phenomena occur naturally in society, in their naturally occurring details and naturally occurring social settings. Naturalistic inquiry does not involve make believe or intervention, as in experimental methods. Naturalistic inquiry does not involve stripping data down or aggregating data up, into theoretically imposed or methodologically contrived categories, as in content analysis or variable analysis, which in effect reduce the details of multiple local orders to a small number of generic terms for the purpose of building, fitting, or testing a single general theory. Naturalistic inquiry does not aim at the discovery of laws of social interaction or causes of social behavior, as if the social sciences should be modeled after textbook physics, nor does it seek to provide program evaluation or policy analysis, which too often conflates empirical description with political prescription. Naturalistic inquiry is observational and descriptive, aiming simply at identifying and explicating the detailed orderliness observable in naturally occurring social interaction and talk-in-interaction.

Ethnomethodology and conversation analysis in a sense share a mutual subfield called membership categorization analysis (MCA), a body of research that is especially relevant to questions of social status and relations between members of various status groups. The substantive scope of MCA *includes* those identity categories (or membership categories) which are pivotal for purposes of social criticism and progressive politics (class, race/ethnicity, sex/gender, etc.) *as well as all other identity categories*. Within the wide range of identity categories, the conventional sociological categories of class, race/ethnicity, and sex/gender receive *no privileged treatment* in MCA; MCA research does not set out to find where such categories are relevant or to prove that such categories are relevant. In keeping with the principles of naturalistic inquiry, MCA involves the study of naturally occurring social interaction with an interest in *whichever* identities can be discovered to be relevant *to the members themselves* in the members' practical



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action and practical reasoning, as these are available for rigorous empirical analysis by virtue of, for example, audio recordings of members' talk-in-interaction. By "members" I am referring to the members of a culture, specifically those who constitute and create the subject matter for the social sciences, that is, the "population" of a society, the "staff" of an institution, and each and every "cohort" of every actual social interaction and social setting, including, for example, the students, teachers/professors, counselors, and administrators who populate educational contexts and perform educational activities.

Whereas in much social research, particular social identities are assumed or stipulated to be relevant, in MCA the interest is in finding out just what identities are relevant and how these identities are relevant, where "relevance" means *relevance to members* and observably, demonstrably so, as a discernable feature of the data, that is as an empirical *finding*.

In the following "data analysis" section, some elements of MCA will be illustrated, including especially (a) a concern to provide readers not only with analysis but also with the data to which the analysis is accountable and (b) the principle of starting with the data and from the data finding the endogenously, practically relevant identities, as these are displayed by and to members, in the first instance and as a feature of the local setting.

DATA ANALYSIS

The data which immediately follows is a transcript of the closing statements in a television interview by Katie Couric, featuring Mary Daly, a famous feminist professor, and Jack Dunn, representing Boston College, on the occasion of a dispute between Mary Daly and the administration of Boston College concerning Mary Daly's practice of excluding men from her women's studies courses at that university.

MR. DUNN:

Again, Professor Daly, in the preliminary injunction, the judge has said very clearly that Boston College has a policy of allowing all students into the classroom. Professor Daly refuses to let males into that classroom. So therein lies the dilemma. But we expect to triumph in court when it comes up next summer. We've already triumphed in the preliminary injunction. We've triumphed in the



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court of public opinion. Professor Daly has alienated everyone with this absurd stance that somehow men and women can't co-exist in a classroom. They do in women's studies classes all throughout the country. No exception should be made because one discriminating professor prefers not to allow men in her classroom.

COURIC:

Professor Daly, I'll let you have the last word.

MS. DALY:

Well, it's unfortunate that a young PR person such as Jack Dunn feels that he's an authority on theology, philosophy and women's studies and women's studies around the country of which he is completely ignorant. There are many, many women's studies professors who want to do this and who try to do this because everyone knows it's a pedagogical device that helps very much for instruction in women's studies. And, you know, it would be nice if I were talking to a peer.¹

This exchange is remarkable in a number of respects, but I would like to (a) explicate how it is designed as an accusation of sex/gender discrimination and a subsequent defense-account, which is clearly the primary work accomplished here, and (b) emphasize the work of membership categorization practices in the work of making an accusation and responding to an accusation of sex/gender discrimination. This work could be characterized as the practical negotiation of situationally relevant identities. In previous studies, I have referred to such work as involving a "micro politics of macro categories."

First, the accusation: Mr. Dunn discusses a policy "of allowing all students into the classroom." Note that we do not hear this literally but rather as referring to an institutional policy against discrimination in educational practices, including course registration and supervising attendance at class meetings. Professor Daly is clearly bound by such policy, because she is a professor at Boston College, which identity Mr. Dunn very clearly includes in his accusation.

But Professor Daly's actions are described not only as violating the applicable university policy but also as doing so in a way that is not sanctioned by the courts (thus far in the legal dispute), that will not be sanctioned by the courts in the future, and that is not sanctioned by public opinion, either. Professor Daly is thereby portrayed as in violation of university policy, on the losing side of a legal



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dispute, and without public support. Indeed, she is described as having “alienated everyone.” Subsequently, her position is portrayed as a (personal) preference, further undercutting any effort she might make to claim justification based on any professional or legal identity category or to claim rational grounds. This rhetorical strategy, of progressively denying someone the sources to corroborate his/her version of reality, or rational grounds for holding to a position, has been discussed in the context of mental illness by Dorothy Smith, who refers to it as a process of “cutting out” (1978). In addition, Professor Daly’s position is described as absurd, and paraphrased in such a manner that it seems not only absurd but patently false: “men and women can’t co-exist in a classroom.”

Continuing with the accusation, Professor Daly’s actions are described as anomalous even compared to the standard practices of her peers “in women’s studies classes all throughout the country.” This description can be seen as a prospective defense against a potential claim to special or extenuating circumstances, justifying an exception from university policy. The element of prospective defense is an aspect of its design but is also indicated by the next sentence, which continues, “No exception should be made ...”

Finally, Mr. Dunn charges Professor Daly with discrimination. Note how this accusation is only the crowning achievement of a huge amount of subtle but powerful discursive work; it follows obviously and naturally from such work and derives its intelligibility and its force as a conclusion or summary of all that goes before.

Now let us consider the defense-account. Professor Daly begins by orienting to Mr. Dunn’s identity as a “Public Relations Professional.” This is a highly significant move, because it makes relevant attributes and characterizations and evaluations that are conventionally (socio-logically) tied to this identity category, attributes and evaluations such as “manipulative” or “biased” and characterizations such as “hired guns,” that is, people who have no personal stake in their words. Professor Daly’s reference to Mr. Dunn’s professional identity does the additional work of introducing the fact that Mr. Dunn is not one of her peers, as she later emphasizes: he is not a fellow member of identity categories such as “professor” or “academic.” This sets up Professor Daly’s invocation of her membership (identity) category-tied knowledge and category-tied concerns in defense of her actions, knowledge which she has by virtue of her identity as a “women’s studies professor” and pedagogical concerns which she can claim by virtue of her identity as a



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“professor” or “academic.” Because Mr. Dunn does not share incumbency in the category “professor,” or “women’s studies professor” (or even “woman”), he can be treated and dismissed as ignorant of the extenuating circumstances, which can plausibly be claimed in the context of women’s studies classes, and both ignorant and unconcerned about pedagogical issues. Professor Daly’s orientation to Mr. Dunn’s youth sets up an implied disparity in age categories as well, which also assists in her characterization of Mr. Dunn as ignorant, not to mention presumptuous and impertinent. Professor Daly thus invokes category-tied knowledge and concerns as her justification and motivation for treating women’s studies classes as an exceptional case, a case that could rationally be claimed to fall outside of university policy or to deserve exemption from university policy. Whether this knowledge and concern is treated as bound to her identity as “old(er),” “woman,” “professor,” “women’s studies professor,” or any combination thereof, it is knowledge and concern which can be denied of Mr. Dunn, who is described as having no such identities and who is thus not in a position to understand her claim that women’s studies classes are exceptional, let alone in a position to accuse her of discrimination on national television.

With reference to Dorothy Smith’s notion of “cutting out,” Professor Daly can be said to resist being “cutout” from the sources of possible support or vindication, even to “step back in” to various social circles, including, most important, the circle comprising rational members (of our culture). In some sense Professor Daly in turn “cuts out” Mr. Dunn from the circle of people who are qualified to make an informed judgment about her case. But more important, I would like to suggest, Professor Daly’s explicit and implicit invocation of her special identities or statuses vis-à-vis Mr. Dunn allows her to imply that she has special grounds for exceptional treatment that Mr. Dunn is not in a position to know about, let alone appreciate.

I would like to suggest that this defense account illustrates a type of rhetorical device of great importance for understanding defense-accounts against discrimination charges, especially those offered to customers from employees, to citizens or clients from officials, or any other case where the action which was ostensibly discriminatory is performed by someone whose *professional or authoritative identity* provides them with relevant specialized knowledge, responsibilities, skills, and so forth, which are unknown to the accuser. I would like to call this device, after the phenomenological sociologist Alfred Schütz, a “denial of the reciprocity of perspectives.”



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Schutz (1962) described the “reciprocity of perspectives” as an assumption or idealization in commonsense reasoning, holding basically that people will see things in their common social environment *similarly* until or unless there is reason to believe they will not see things similarly (pp. 11–12). This arrangement is somewhat of a pragmatic necessity, Schutz suggests, in that collective life would be difficult to live and difficult to understand were it premised on the contrary assumption that people see things in their common social environment *differently*. The reciprocity of perspectives, however, is a defeasible assumption—life provides us with many counter examples in which people see things in their common social environment *differently*, and some of these situations are problematic not only because of the differences of understanding but also because differences of understanding can be unexpected and confusing by virtue of the fact that they run contrary to the typical assumption of the reciprocity of perspectives.

A *denial* of the reciprocity of perspectives, when offered by a professional or official, often works by suggesting that a layperson, operating according to (mere) commonsense knowledge, is not in a position to evaluate the action in question, by reason of his/her lack of specialized knowledge about the context of action. In other words, the device works by suggesting that what appears, to the untrained eye, as for example discrimination, is actually not what it appears and has to be evaluated by someone with a superior perspective, informed by specialized knowledge (such as the knowledge enjoyed by the alleged discriminator). Such defense-accounts implicitly acknowledge that the accusation at least has *some commonsensical grounds* but dismiss these grounds as misleading, suggesting instead that there are exculpatory contextual details of which laypeople are ignorant.²

CONCLUDING COMMENTS

The data analyzed here provide an especially nice opportunity to address those varieties of social science and social criticism which treat a single “variable,” such as class, race/ethnicity or sex/gender, as *omni-relevant*. Although the exchange could not be adequately understood without an appreciation for the relevance of sex/gender categories and sex/gender relations, I would suggest that this is far from the whole picture. In addition to sex/gender categories and sex/gender relations, Mr. Dunn and Ms. Daly are also orienting to, invoking, presupposing, and otherwise making relevant several *other* identity categories and status relations,



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including those of “age/generation,” and “occupation.” In fact, I think it is clear from the analysis that the occupational categories “PR representative” and “women’s studies professor,” with their disjunctive category-tied motives, concerns, knowledge, responsibilities, entitlements, and soon, are just as relevant and just as consequential for the structure and content of this dispute as are “sex/gender” categories and relations between them. Arguably, based only on the data at hand, I would suggest that occupational categories are even *more* relevant and consequential than sex/gender categories; they are *most certainly more relevant and consequential than class and racial/ethnic categories*. Tellingly, even the claimed rights of the interested parties to be free from sex/gender discrimination, or to be free to teach women’s studies classes as one sees fit, are rights bound to *sex/gender-neutral* membership categories such as “student,” “citizen,” or “professor,” rather than to the sex/gender categories with which they are often associated. More than anything else, however, the observable social structure of this particular exchange is best understood by reference to *transient, situational identities*, specifically the “discourse identities” (Zimmerman, 1998) of “accuser” and “accused.” Similarly, the action involved is more closely and more accurately portrayed as an *accusation* and a subsequent *defense account* than as an instance of sex/gender relations or sexual discrimination.

The upshot I would like to draw from all this is to recommend that data be approached with sensitivity to those identities that are *demonstrably relevant to participants*. For theoretical, political, or personal purposes, one can begin with an interest in class, race/ethnicity, or sex/gender, according to a maxim such as “class matters;” but for methodological and ethnographic purposes, I am proposing that this type of approach leads invariably to tunnel vision, often to distortion, and in cases such as this, possibly even to delusion. If class (or race, or gender) *always* matters, *regardless of the data at hand*, then we really need to ask *in what sense* it could matter, and *to whom*? A better *methodological* question would be, not *how class matters* (or race, or gender, etc.), but rather *what matters*? This is a question to be answered on a case-by-case basis, on the basis of rigorous attention to the available data.

If class, or race/ethnic, or sex/gender identities observably and demonstrably matter for a given interaction, then a naturalistic, empirical analysis will find that to be the case. The fact that politicized categories of sociological analysis are not privileged in naturalistic human studies does *not* mean that such studies are blind



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to the frequency with which these categories are relevant in social interactions or the degree of their importance in these interactions. What it *does* mean, when I say that categories of class, race/ethnicity, and sex/gender are not privileged in naturalistic human studies, is that naturalistic studies offer the hope of finding *whichever* identities are relevant, in all their awesome variety, multiplicity, and complexity.

Even if one wants to focus on the role of sex/gender relations in college settings, for example, one way of doing this is to look at interactions in college settings, asking *which identities are relevant, and how do they become relevant?* By conventional sociological reasoning, such a method would be terribly over-inclusive and unjustifiably time-consuming, expensive, and, in a word, *messy*. But such a naturalistic line of analysis would uncover, *among many other phenomena*, sex/gender identities and sex/gender relations, and it would uncover them in action, as it were, in natural action-environments, environments that include many other varieties of status and discourse identities. Only such a naturalistic analysis could suggest the patterns of confluence which characterize the relations between sex/gender categories, professional identity categories, and discourse identity categories that can be involved (inextricably) when, for example, a nonacademic accuses an academic of sex/gender discrimination in the classroom. Which is to say that naturalistic inquiries are capable of discovering politically salient phenomena such as sex/gender identities and sex/gender relations as contingent and practical concerns which (*sometimes*) occupy the attention of real people, involved in real interactions, occurring in real time, subject to empirical observation and demonstration, and capable of surprising us and humbling us with subtleties and complexities which are (as Harold Garfinkel might say) not predictable, only observable.

One prediction that I will hazard, however, is that interactional/discursive data from educational contexts will *routinely* display the interactional relevance of specifically institutional or professional identities such as teacher, professor, counselor, academic social worker, administrator, student, parent, PTA member, admissions officer, hall monitor, and so forth. The very formulation of a context as an *educational* context suggests (either as an empirical claim or as a theoretical stipulation) the relevance of such institutional and professional identities and suggests as well the operation of an institutional/professional system of relevances which does *not* (in the contemporary United States) stipulate any



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general relevance for class, race/ethnic, or sex/gender identities and in fact *denies* these categories any *general* relevance within educational institutions. To the degree that such “external” status characteristics “intrude” upon interactions in educational contexts, such “intrusions” can and should be understood in the wider context of *what else* is going on in educational contexts, as an empirical question, and what *should* be going on in educational contexts, as a normative question, but a normative question which can be respecified as an analytic topic and addressed analytically by means of empirically explicating the institutionally tied, conventional relevance of activities such as teaching and learning. All this *what else* which is going on in educational contexts, aside from class relations and race relations and sex/gender relations, will inevitably include much that would be lost or distorted by theoretical or political emphasis upon the limited and limiting range of identity categories featured in so much sociological analysis and social criticism.

ENDNOTES

¹*Today Show*, August 18, 1999. NBC News Transcripts. National Broadcasting Co. Inc. Retrieved September 27, 1999 through Lexis–Nexis.

²See Harvey Sacks’s introduction of the relational pair of membership categorizations “professional/layperson,” which he discusses as comprising “Collection K” (1972, pp. 39–40). That Sacks considered this pair or collection important enough to be named, in the absence of any conventional term for it, could perhaps be suggestive of his estimations of its heuristic value; I would like to suggest the heuristic value of this pair is even much greater than comes out in Sacks’s work.

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CHAPTER

2

A PRACTICAL TASK

ETHNICITY AS A RESOURCE IN SOCIAL INTERACTION



This article by Alan D. Hansen
was published in

Research on Language and Social Interaction, 38(1):
63–104.

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ETHNICITY AS A RESOURCE IN SOCIAL INTERACTION

By Alan D. Hansen, excerpted from *Research on Language and Social Interaction*

Ethnicity has been treated historically in social sciences as a past-oriented feeling of "peoplehood." Despite seminal language and social interaction (LSI) scholarship that treats ethnicity as an ongoing, situated practical accomplishment (see Moerman, 1988; Wieder & Pratt, 1990), there is a paucity of scholarship that expressly considers how ethnicity is utilized by participants as a resource in conducting the business of, and in attending to myriad exigencies in, social interaction. In this analysis, which employs membership categorization analysis in examining a 19-min span of a public planning meeting, I show how ethnicity emerges in social interaction as a resource for participants in discussing the merits of a proposed charter school. Implications for ethnicity's place in LSI scholarship are discussed.

In his classic essay, Weber (1968) posited that an ethnic group is made up of individuals who "entertain a subjective belief in their common descent" (p. 389) on account of similarities in physical type (race), customs, and shared memories such as those of colonization and migration. According to Weber (1968), membership in an ethnic group, or ethnicity, is based on "presumed identity" (p. 389). This view of ethnicity is also advanced by Gordon (1964, pp. 23–24), for whom ethnicity is a "sense of peoplehood" and an ethnic group is a group that possesses this shared feeling of peoplehood. In this classical articulation of ethnicity, ethnic bonds are formed when there exists a psychological sense of group belonging based on belief in a common ancestry tied to basic group-identity traits given at birth (see Isaacs, 1974). Under this view, then, ethnicity is essentially a form of past-oriented group membership that provides to members a sense of continuity and shared history of common origin (see De Vos & Romanucci-Ross, 1975).

Building on this classical view of ethnicity, scholars observe the fluid (Barth, 1969; Yancey, Erickson, & Juliani, 1976) and instrumental (Glazer & Moynihan, 1970) character of ethnicity. This reformulation of ethnicity was captured by Waters (1990): "Far from being an automatic labeling of a primordial characteristic, ethnic identification is, in fact, a dynamic and complex social phenomenon" (p. 16). Ethnicity is situational (see Waters, 1990), that is, it "can change according to variations in the situations and audiences encountered" (Nagel, 1994, p. 154). Scholarship has thus moved away from conceptualizing ethnicity as a prearranged inheritance toward conceptualizing ethnicity as a fluid and instrumental resource that is constructed in and through the concrete



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activities that comprise social life.

That ethnicity is socially constructed in the practices and interactions comprising everyday life is widely accepted and found useful by ethnographers (e.g., Anderson, 1990; Basso, 1990; Fitch, 1998; Goode, 1998; Horton & Calderon, 1995; Moerman, 1988; Philipsen, 1992) and scholars of race and ethnicity (e.g., Alba, 1990; Massey & Denton, 1993; Nagel, 1994; Omi & Winant, 1994) in their examination of the nature of group life and relations between groups (Nagel, 1994). An implication of approaching ethnicity as a social construction—one that is particularly favorable for scholarship on language and social interaction (LSI)—is that ethnicity is an interactional accomplishment (see Wieder & Pratt, 1990) and therefore a resource for participants in social interaction. Moerman (1993) linked the social construction of ethnicity to the study of interaction:

Ethnicity was not, to use Sartre's chilling metaphor for the family, a skin into which persons are sewn, but rather a cloak among others in their wardrobes; not a "full time job," but a practical task sometimes performed, a role sometimes enacted, a reflex sometimes elicited. When ethnicity is seen as a task, we can ask what it accomplishes. (p. 90)

Thus, moving beyond the simple notion that ethnicity is socially constructed, Moerman (1993) posited that ethnicity is an ongoing, situated practical accomplishment.¹ Because it presents ethnicity as a situated and contingent "accomplished phenomenon" (Heyman, 1990, p. 38; see also Wieder & Pratt, 1990), this move locates social interaction as a principal site for its emergence and utilization. However, despite large bodies of work on ethnicity and social interaction, there is a paucity of scholarship that expressly considers how ethnicity is utilized by participants as a resource in conducting the business of social interaction and in attending to the myriad exigencies of specific interactional moments.²

ETHNICITY (AS A RESOURCE) IN SOCIAL INTERACTION

As a classical dimension of social behavior, ethnicity emerges in LSI insofar as participants themselves orient to it, that is, insofar as they treat ethnicity as relevant in particular moments of interaction (see Schegloff, 1987).



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That ethnicity itself has been characterized the product of “a kind of labeling process” (Nagel, 1994, p. 154) attests to the prevalence of ethnic labels—including related pronominal referents such as *we/us* and *they/them* (see Verkuyten, de Jong, & Masson, 1995)—in invoking ethnicity in social interaction (Moerman, 1993). Labels and associated referents are commonly utilized to identify oneself as well as to invoke the other in social interaction (McIlvenny, 1996; Moerman, 1993; Verkuyten, 1997; Verkuyten et al., 1995).

Based in large part on Sacks’s (1974, 1992a; see also Antaki, Condor, & Levine, 1996) observation that people are described and characterized in certain ways amid other potentially relevant descriptors, ethnic categories are important in membership categorization analysis (MCA) treatments of the emergence of ethnicity in social interaction (see Day, 1998; Watson, 1974; see also Moerman, 1988). Yet because speakers ordinarily avoid using ethnic labels in social interaction (see Day, 1998; van Dijk, 1984, 1987), ethnicity emerges in interaction through other means. Locating ethnicity in interaction thus entails identifying the local, interactional devices in, by, and through which ethnicity is made relevant for participants in social interaction. That is, as Sacks (1992a) put it:

[I]f we’re going to describe Members’ activities, and the way they produce activities and see activities and organize their knowledge about them, then we’re going to have to find out how they go about choosing among the available sets of categories for grasping some event. (p. 41)

Sacks identified (1992a) some collections of categories as “inference-rich,” meaning that “a great deal of the knowledge that members of a society have about the society is stored in terms of these categories” and that categories stand “as the adequate basis” for participants to infer certain things about others by virtue of their association with certain activities (p. 40). According to Sacks (1992a), “many activities are taken by members to be done by some particular or several particular categories of members” (p. 249). Category-bound activities have come to be understood as “those activities that are expectably and properly done by persons who are the incumbents of particular categories” (Hester & Eglin, 1997b, p. 5). In this manner, members’ activities, insofar as they are discursively associated with categories (Drew, 1978; Silverman, 1998), facilitate membership categorization:

The fact that some activities are bound to some categories is used, then, in



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a tremendous variety ways, and if somebody knows an activity that has been done, and there is a category to which it is bound, they can damn well propose that it's been done by such a one who is a member of that category. (Sacks, 1992a, p. 180)

Subsequent work on membership categorization expands Sacks's notion of "category-bound activities" to include any feature that "can conventionally be imputed on the basis of a given membership category" (Watson, 1978, p. 106; see also Hester & Eglin, 1997b; Jayyusi, 1984; McIlvenny, 1996; Payne, 1976; and Sharrock, 1974). Features associated with categories thus might include not only activities but also members' "expectations, rights and obligations concerning activities or actions which are expectable of a member of that category" (McIlvenny, 1996, p. 18; see also Hester & Eglin, 1997c; Watson, 1983). These features, on which membership in given categories is predicated for participants, provide for the relevance of the categories to which they are tied (Sacks, 1992a, p. 301).

Although it has been both argued and empirically demonstrated (e.g., Hester & Eglin, 1997a; Jayyusi, 1984; Sacks, 1992a) that (and how) activities (etc.) are bound up in membership categories, there exists the danger in analysis of overextending the connection between categories and the features to which they are tied. To say that category-bound predicates "are expectably and properly done" (Hester & Eglin, 1997b, p. 5) by members of certain categories and that these features are discursively associated with categories is not to say that identifying such predicates and accompanying categories is at all straightforward. Schegloff (1992, p. xlii) observed a "promiscuous" use of category-bounded predicates, that is, inferring on the investigator's authority that certain activities (etc.) are bound up in certain categories with little or no analytic attention to establishing participants' own "adequate bas[es]" (Sacks, 1992a, p. 40) for making such inferences. Practically speaking, the danger comes in inferring a connection between a given category and a particular feature or set of features without showing that and how this connection operates for participants. Because this connection is often equivocal for both the analyst and participants—at times by (participants' own) design—an outcome of avoiding "promiscuous" use of the category boundedness is failing to account for and build this equivocality into the analysis itself.

Sacks (1974) noted that membership categorization devices are locally



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assembled, and this has been emphasized in subsequent work (e.g., Hester & Eglin, 1997c; Schegloff, 1972). Jayyusi (1984) noted that although

there are a host of features that, as clusters, can be oriented to and conventionally expected to go together with some categories, ... [w]hat is situatedly provided for or invoked as being category-bound is, of course, an occasioned matter and a methodic achievement on the part of members. (p. 35, italics omitted)

The local assemblage or, as Jayyusi (1984) put it, “occasioned” character of membership categorization is central to the present application of Sacks’s (1974, 1992a, 1992b; and others’) work on membership categorization. To say that membership categorization—or any other interactional phenomenon or practice—is an occasioned matter is to say that sequential organization is also relevant in analyzing talk. However, given the uneasy relation between membership categorization *in* talk (an occupation of MCA) and the sequential organization *of* talk (an occupation of conversation analysis [CA]),³ analysis that explicitly treats both categorization and sequential aspects of talk is hardly done (see Watson, 1997). Despite its rarity and the difficulties involved, however, adopting the analytic view that membership categorization and sequential aspects of talk are “mutually constitutive” might render a more complete and “nonpromiscuous” (see Sacks, 1974; Schegloff, 1992) analysis and an analysis that is more closely tied to how interlocutors produce and monitor talk in real time (Watson, 1997, p. 54; see also Cicourel, 1973, pp. 53–56; Schegloff, 1987, pp. 218–220).⁴ The point is that categorization and sequence both are important in answering the question “Why that now?”—a question that is asked by participants in as well as analysts of social interaction (see Mandelbaum, 1990–1991) as they monitor talk. Thus, both categorization and sequential analysis are needed in an analysis that shows how ethnicity is “locally organized” (see Schegloff, 1972, p. 93) in the talk analyzed here, that is, how ethnicity is assembled as an issue of particular importance and is utilized as a resource in social interaction as meeting participants discuss a proposed charter school.

CONTEXT: THE ALLENDALE CHARTER SCHOOL

The charter school represents the most recent (and by some accounts, the liveliest) movement to reform public education in the United States (see Manno, Finn, &



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Vanourek, 2000). Since 1991, charter school legislation has been enacted in more than 40 states. In general terms, this legislation provides for institutions (including for-profit and nonprofit organizations and many universities) a means of applying for a charter to organize a school (Grades kindergarten through 12) and, if the charter is granted, of operating a public school relatively independently of state administrative and curricular regulations. In this manner, charter schools (as independent public schools) are intended to fuse the best of American public and private education (Manno et al., 2000). Charter school reform appeals to some based on the administrative and curricular flexibility that the schools afford and the competition that they provide to government run public schools. Others—including many teacher unions, school boards, and superintendents—view charter school reform as dangerous and argue that charter schools take away funding that could benefit traditional public schools (see Fusarelli, 2002) and rarely serve the students who might benefit most from them (see Nathan, 1998).

Economics and diversity (including ethnic diversity) are thus central in the debate about charter school reform. At issue is whether the increased flexibility afforded to schools facilitates assisting students who are in other ways overlooked in traditional public education (and with greater economic efficiency) or whether charter schools make it more difficult for the traditional public school to provide quality education (see Good & Braden, 2000).

It is in this climate that two organizations located in the mid-size city of Allendale⁵ (population 19,000, in upstate New York) collaborated in organizing a charter school and applied for a school charter from a New York State chartering agency. Although the organizers⁶ of the proposed Allendale Charter School sought the opportunity to innovate the local educational landscape, opponents perceived the proposed school as potentially contributing to continued deterioration of local public education by taking needed funding and resources away from the school district. The city's limited resources (owing to a flagging economy and a shrinking tax base) and the local school district's ongoing budget crisis made the possibility that the charter school would further compromise the district's resources both likely and unwelcome. Also, the organizers' connection to Allendale's Latino population⁷—as well as the city's history of interethnic strife surrounding economic and education issues (Dauria, 1994) and recent history of conflict between Anglo and Latino residents (Bigler, 1999)—made debate about the merits and drawbacks of the Allendale Charter School particularly complex and volatile.



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Perhaps anticipating contention and divisiveness on account of their efforts to organize the charter school, representatives of Junta and IFI formed a planning committee to plan the school and provide information to Allendale residents about the application process. Given the potential for ethnic divisiveness in charter school reform (Good & Braden, 2000) and the propensity for ethnicity to prove an incendiary topic in the Allendale community (see Bigler, 1999), these planning meetings are a rich site to explore how ethnicity is utilized as a resource in social interaction as they discuss the school.

The talk analyzed here is from the third of six meetings held at the Junta offices by the charter school organizers. This meeting was intended to serve both as a public informational session for Allendale residents and as a planning meeting for the charter school organizers. Sixteen people attended this meeting—some self-identify as members of the planning committee, whereas others self-identify as interested parties who are not members of the committee. In this analysis, I examine a 19-min span of discourse from the 2-hr planning meeting. I recorded the meeting via audio and video and utilized the video aspect primarily as an aid to transcribing the talk.⁸

During the period of talk analyzed here, ethnicity emerges as important to meeting participants and is utilized as a “practical task” as participants attend to moment-by-moment exigencies in interaction. Although ethnicity is not referred to by name or label (e.g., “Latino” or “Hispanic”) until well into the 19-min period analyzed here, the analysis shows that ethnicity—in terms of activities, commitments, and concerns bound up in it—appears to emerge well before it is expressly named. The excerpts are analyzed chronologically to capture the equivocality and off-record (see Brown & Levinson, 1978) nature—for the participants and analyst alike—of this (apparent) emergence of ethnicity, in the real-time manner in which the participants themselves produce and monitor the talk.

THE (APPARENT) EMERGENCE OF ETHNICITY

This section features analysis of repeated attempts primarily by one meeting participant (“Mark”) to elicit identifications of various aspects of the charter school including its intended student population, qualifications of its teachers, and its curriculum. Of interest here is how ethnicity appears to emerge as



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something to which meeting participants orient in discussing the school but in an equivocal and off-record manner for both the participants and analyst.

Consider Excerpt 1 following, an exchange between Jorge, the facilitator of the meeting and co-organizer of the charter school, and Mark, a school board member who has identified himself as a nonmember of the planning committee. Here, Jorge is describing the outcome of a planning meeting held about 2 months earlier, the details of which he had summarized in a handout (“this list,” line 1) and disseminated to the participants at the beginning of the meeting:

Excerpt 1 [CS3: 1701–1719]

- 1 Jorge: If we jump to curricula:m .hh on this list, the things
 2 that people talked about in terms of curriculum and I
 3 think were .hh ahm curriculum issues .hh were that it
 4 would be a school <that would> be bilingual, (,) that
 5 would have a focus on the fundamentals, =
 6 Mark: =What’s the second [language]
 7 Jorge: [initially.]
 8 Jorge: I’m sorry?
 9 Mark: What would be: the second language
 10 (1.0)
 11 Jorge: Ah:m when we’ve talked about bilingual I think (the
 12 thought) was because this community has many students
 13 who are Spanish speaking that Spanish would certainly
 14 be:: .hh one a the things we would focus on <although
 15 the language> had not been identified.
 16 Jorge: It could be multilingual as well as- as, (and) instead
 17 of bilingual.=This is just what (,) the
 18 [first group wrote on the board.]
 19 Mark: [(It) should be part of the job descrip] tion then.

In reviewing the outcome of the planning committee’s prior meeting, Jorge describes the curriculum of the proposed school in two ways: as “bilingual” (line 4) and as having “a focus on the fundamentals” (line 5). At this point in Jorge’s description, Mark enters to ask, “What’s the second language” (line 6). Because the descriptor “bilingual” implicates that two languages would be taught at the school, Mark’s question clearly orients to “bilingual” (not “fundamentals”) in Jorge’s



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description. Insofar as language is a powerful social and political symbol (see Fishman, 1977), the languages of instruction in a bilingual curriculum serve as powerful indicators of the school's educational, social, and political objectives and commitments. Thus, in recognizing as remarkable and soliciting additional information about the "bilingual" curriculum, Mark displays at least an interest in finding out what *kind* of school (in general terms) Jorge is presently describing.

Mark's initial question (line 6) makes, implicitly, the following three claims (see Schegloff, 1972) as to what he and Jorge know about the school's bilingual curriculum. First, Mark's question embeds the claim that he does not know what the second language is and that the bilingual curriculum is at least something that needs elaborating. (The absence of an elaboration on "bilingual" by Jorge might account for the placement of Mark's question only after Jorge makes it evident that an elaboration is not forthcoming by listing the next descriptor, "fundamentals.") Second, Mark's question about the second language embeds the claim that both Mark and Jorge know what the first language is. Indeed, not only Mark but also Jorge (see lines 11–15 in Excerpt 1) and others (see also Heidi's contribution in lines 38–39 and 41–43 in Excerpt 2) appear to share the assumption bound up in Mark's question: that English is the first language in the bilingual curriculum. Third, this what question embeds a claim that in describing the school as "bilingual," Jorge has (or the organizers have) settled on or assumed that the school would adopt a specific second language.⁹ (Contrast Mark's question with a yes–no interrogatory [see Raymond, 2003] such as *Have you decided on a second language?*, which does not embed this claim.)

Given that for all of the students in the district's extensive English as a second language (ESL) program, the two relevant languages are English and Spanish (a point reinforced by Heidi in Excerpt 2 following), Mark's question is curious in that his first two claims (that English is the first language and that the organizers have settled on a specific second language for the curriculum) appear to be inconsistent with his third claim: that he does not know that the second language is Spanish. Spanish is not mentioned, even though its status in the local school district plausibly merits its mention at least as a candidate answer (see Pomerantz, 1988). Moreover, Mark's question structurally establishes the name of a language (besides English) as the preferred response form (see Raymond, 2003). Thus, it is plausible that Mark suspects that the answer to his question is "Spanish" but attempts to elicit from the organizers themselves a description of what kind of



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school is being organized. He does this possibly to avoid coming off as presumptuous about what kind of school it is.¹⁰

In response, Jorge first initiates a repair sequence with “I’m sorry?” (line 8). Although this class of repair initiator (to which Drew, 1997, referred as “open”) does not locate for the participants or analyst the trouble source (Drew, 1997; see also Schegloff, Jefferson, & Sacks, 1977), it is possible that the repair initiator occurs based not on a simple mishearing but on Jorge being puzzled by Mark’s question or hearing the question as sequentially inappropriate or impertinent (see Drew, 1997, pp. 83–85). In this light, Jorge plausibly treats Mark’s question as sequentially premature (given that he had not finished his description of elements of the charter school that were discussed at the prior meeting; he orients to finishing this description in lines 58–59 in Excerpt 2) or plausibly as out of place because it requests elaboration on something that should be common knowledge: that the second language in the bilingual curriculum would be Spanish.

Once Mark again asks the question, Jorge (in lines 11–15) displays that he hears the question as an attempt to elicit from him information about the kind of school they are organizing. Jorge’s response supports the notion that Allendale residents involved in the local school district (as are all meeting participants) would consider English and Spanish as the most likely languages in a bilingual curriculum by confirming “Spanish” as a plausible second language and provides a warrant this being the case (“because this community has many students who are Spanish speaking,” lines 12–13 in Excerpt 1).

Jorge’s repeated reference to participants in the prior planning meeting (“we,” lines 11 and 14) is consistent with his initial description and positioning of the elements “bilingual” and “fundamentals” as coming from discussion in the prior meeting (see lines 1–2). Jorge’s response fails to conform to the action-type preference (naming the language) that is built into Mark’s question, which nonconformity tends to coincide with dispreferred responses (Raymond, 2003). Moreover, Jorge’s response also carries many of the hallmark characteristics of being dispreferred (see Heritage, 1984, pp. 265–269): It is delayed by both a 1-sec pause before delivery (line 10) and the use of a preface (“Ahm” in line 11); and it is replete with mitigation (“I think (the thought was),” lines 11–12), hedging (“certainly be one a the things,” lines 13–14), and account making (“because this community,” line 12; and “the language had not been identified,” line 15).



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The dispreferred turn shape of Jorge's response and its hearable departure from (see Clayman & Whalen, 1988–1989) or nonconformity to (Raymond, 2003) Mark's question are implicative then of Jorge's stance toward the kind of information about the school that Mark is requesting. That is, in orienting to Mark's question as an attempt to elicit information about the school's (and organizers') commitments regarding "bilingual" instruction, Jorge displays a profound disinclination to link the proposed charter school to Spanish-speaking students in Allendale. Given that turn type departures have been found to function as moves to preempt negative inferences (Stivers & Heritage, 2001), Jorge's response likely orients to the possibility (even likelihood) that negative inferences about the charter school would be gleaned from connecting the charter school to Spanish-speaking students in Allendale.

Note that ethnicity emerges in this exchange *only* insofar as and the extent to which, for the participants, speaking Spanish is bound up in membership in an ethnic category. The relevance of ethnicity here is equivocal and off record: Jorge refers to "students who speak Spanish," which can be heard as implicative of an ethnic group, but this connection is left unelaborated. In this light, Jorge's subsequent proposal, that what has been termed a "bilingual" curriculum could just as well be characterized as "multilingual as well as- as, (and) instead of bilingual" (lines 16–17),¹¹ not only accentuates the overall hedged nature of his response but also weakens the already equivocal relevance of ethnicity by rendering moot Mark's question about a second language in the curriculum: As opposed to a "bilingual" curriculum that (for these participants) likely makes relevant both Spanish and English, the status of Spanish (as well as English) is ambiguous and unspecified in a "multilingual" curriculum.

Concurrently with and following¹² a brief exchange (about 25 sec involving mostly Mark and Jorge) about including "multilingual" in the discussion of teacher qualifications and featuring Jorge's addition of "multilingual" to a list of staff qualifications, Heidi (a Junta staff member) asks Lloyd (superintendent of the Allendale School District) about languages other than English:

Excerpt 2¹³ [CS3: 1738–1768; simplified]

38 Heidi: Lloyd are there any (students who speak) a language
39 besides Spanish in the Allendale School District
40 (3.0) ((Lloyd indicates that he did not hear Heidi.))



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- 41 Heidi: Are you (aware) of any students at this time (who
 42 speak any languages besides Spanish and English)
 43 currently in the Allendale School District.=
 44 Lloyd: =hhh We ha:ve, I'm not sure at this very m:oment
 45 whether we are or not. ah Polish Czeck. ah::m Italian
 46 we've had um, (0.2) Portuguese, yeah.
 47 Heidi: I'm cu- I'm curious I know there has bee:n, but- the
 48 time that I was- that I was with ((1 syl.)) Special
 49 Education of course
 50 [you know you have (primarily) ((2 syl.))]=
 51 Lloyd: [It was mostly: ah (.) Spanish speaking. Correct.]=
 52 Betty: =Mostly Spanish speaking.=
 53 Lloyd: =Vietna:me:se ah, about ten years ago we had a large
 54 group a Vietnamese here. Yes.
 55 (1.5)
 56 Mark: Well- it seems like ahm (1.2) (>°forget it°<) (.) °bag
 57 that°
 58 Jorge: Le'm- let me go ba:ck, the:n to your issue then about
 59 ah:m (0.7) curriculum. ((continues))

As this excerpt opens, Heidi asks Lloyd (the district superintendent) if there are students currently in the district who speak a language other than English or Spanish (lines 38–39 and 41–43). Lloyd answers by stating that he does not know and then lists non-English, non-Spanish languages that district students have spoken in the past (lines 45–46). Heidi presses for an answer with “I know there has been” (line 47) and cites her time working with the district as a case in point (lines 48–50), to which Lloyd replies that at that time, it was “mostly ... Spanish speaking” (line 51).

Heidi's question to Lloyd hearably investigates and even challenges Mark's initial question (“What's the second language”). If the district superintendent states that there are no current ESL students in the district for whom both Spanish and English are *not* relevant, then Spanish is not only the most plausible second language but the *only* plausible second language—and this would construe, reflexively, Mark's prior question as unnecessary. The point, then, that Heidi appears to press (with the assistance of Betty, line 52), and artfully (by trying to get the district superintendent to make it), is, *Of course the second language would be*



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Spanish.

Lloyd fails (possibly refuses) to help Heidi make this point. Not only does he not state that there are no current ESL students who do not speak Spanish, but he does not comment at all on the current ESL program. Instead, Lloyd makes relevant a host of non-English languages that are not Spanish. In doing so, Lloyd is the first to bind language to ethnicity, that is, he is the first to construct speaking a certain language as a category-bound activity tied to a category in the collection *ethnicity*. However, it is not the Spanish language that is bound to an ethnic category here but the Vietnamese language that is tied to a category articulated as “a large group of Vietnamese” who lived in Allendale a decade prior (lines 53–54). Lloyd’s contribution to the emergence of ethnicity for the meeting participants is thus complex and equivocal: Whereas on one hand, he displays categorical knowledge (Jayyusi, 1984), that is, that language is bound up in ethnicity (and that the activity of speaking Language X and being a member of Ethnic Group X are mutually constitutive), on the other hand, he distances speaking Spanish from any relevant ethnic category in the ethnicity collection.

Following the exchange between Lloyd and Heidi and a gap of 1.5 sec (line 55), Mark produces “Well- it seems like” (line 56), which is hearable as the preface (see Nofsinger, 1991) to an assessment. That is, Mark hearably projects an assessment and then shuts down before offering it. Further, that the preface also marks the projected (but not delivered) assessment as dispreferred (the gap in line 55, the markers “well” and “ahm,” and the pause in line 56) serves to project the formulation of a negative assessment (see Heritage, 1984) in the form of a complaint or accusation. Also remarkable is that Mark shuts down the negative assessment noticeably with “forget it” and “bag that” in lines 56 to 57. In projecting a *negative* assessment that is shut down before it is formulated—and producing all of that to be recognizable as such (see Sacks, 1992b, pp. 222–223)—Mark displays that he desires to bring to light an unpleasant matter but feels constrained (by something or on some level) from doing so. This accomplishment of doing being constrained (see Wieder & Pratt, 1990) also plays into the equivocal status of ethnicity in the interaction for the participants as well as the analyst: Mark displays a desire to make something an “on-record” matter—and it is as if this “something” were tied to ethnicity—and appears to decide against doing so; and his utterance is produced to be heard precisely this way.

The next several (about 8) minutes in the meeting include two additional



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exchanges in which ethnicity appears relevant in an off record, equivocal way. I analyze these moments in Excerpts 3 and 4 following.

First (in Excerpt 3), as Jorge wraps up his description of curriculum issues that were discussed at the prior planning meeting, Mark again enters and attempts to elicit from Jorge information about the charter school:

Excerpt 3 [CS3: 1834–1844]

- 135 Jorge: So:- so those are- the: (0.2) curriculum based
 136 comments that came out a that original planning group.
 137 (1.7)
 138 Jorge: That's what people saw as critical in reference to the
 139 [the curriculum.]
 140 Mark: [Have you] developed a profile of the student
 141 that would (0.2) most likely attend?
 142 (0.7)
 143 Jorge: No not ^ yet.
 144 (.)
 145 Jorge: (Cz) we haven't gotten that far.
 146 (1.0)
 147 Mark: We haven't gotten that far.=We've gotten as far as
 148 what you have in front of you, a:nd what we've done
 149 today.
 150 (0.5)
 151 Jorge: Which is, further than the last time cuz we've only
 152 had those three meetings.

In this sequence, Jorge marks that he is finished describing the discussion from the prior planning meeting (the “curriculum based comments,” lines 135–136) by accomplishing a wrap-up: “So:- so those are-” (line 135) of the description. A gap of 1.7 sec ensues (line 137) after which Jorge produces a second wrap-up move (lines 138–139). At this point, Mark asks if Jorge has (or the organizers have) “developed a profile of the student” who “would most likely attend” the school (lines 140–141). This question does not embed the presumption that the organizers indeed have done this (as opposed to his question about the “second language,” lines 6 and 9, Excerpt 1). However, Mark’s question in this instance—a *yes-no* interrogatory—is similar to his prior question in that both questions make



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relevant “a limited range of type related responses” (Raymond, 2003, p. 944): Mark’s prior question made relevant a non-English language, and the current question makes relevant *yes* or *no*.

Moreover, consider the status of the information requested: Whereas before, information was requested about the kind of curriculum that would be taught at the school, here the information requested involves what kind of *student* would most likely attend. Also, whereas before, the answer appeared to implicate the Spanish language, which is at most a feature bound up in an ethnic category, here the implicated answer consists of a category of student, which at most features an ethnic category (even one tied to speaking Spanish).¹⁴ This possibly accounts for Jorge’s response: Although Jorge indicates that a profile has not been developed and is forthcoming, his response nevertheless is marked as dispreferred (with the gap that ensues before Jorge answers, line 142, and the provision of an account in three contiguous turns, lines 145, 147–149, 151–152; see Heritage, 1984). This suggests that Jorge orients to Mark’s question as problematic in some way, just as Mark’s apparent withholding of uptake (in lines 142, 144) suggests that he in turn finds problematic Jorge’s response.

Second, about 6 min after the exchange just examined and following an extended exchange between Mark and Jorge about the best way to proceed in discussing the proposed charter school (including some disagreement between them and displayed frustration by both), Mark (as did Heidi in Excerpt 2) enlists Lloyd’s assistance in—as it turns out—pointing out that they know nothing about the kind of student who would attend the charter school. As Excerpt 4 (following) opens, Jorge scolds Mark for disrupting the discussion by moving the discussion across topics:

Excerpt 4 [CS3: 2056–2082]

- 356 Jorge: If you want a go to curriculum as a group let’s go to
 357 curriculum.
 358 (1.5)
 359 Jorge: I don’t have a pro:blem with that. But we need to
 360 stick on o::ne (0.2) and stop sayin we have to do the
 361 other ones [to get to tha:t o:ne-]
 362 Mark: [It’s my opinion (.)] you know there are
 363 other people here, that are free to express themselves



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- 364 and I think- (0.5) there are people more ah: (1.0)
 365 steeped in the education process than me: you know
 366 I'll turn tah Lloyd and ask him for a suggestion. If
 367 you were to develop a program (0.2) what would you
 368 look at first?
 369 (1.5)
 370 Mark: Put cha on the spot.
 371 Lloyd: The needs of the students.=Obviously.
 372 Mark: So what are those needs?=Have we identified them?
 373 (2.7)
 374 Lloyd: Have we identified the:m (.) at this point- (.) I- I-
 375 (need you to tell me where you're) coming from Mark.=
 376 Mark: =Huh?
 377 Lloyd: Where are you coming from (now)?
 378 (1.2)
 379 Mark: My point is you know who's the student? n w- d- and
 380 what're we tryin to teach em?
 381 (2.2)
 382 Mark: Obviously it's gonna be anybody that applies. heheh.

As outlined previously, the excerpt opens with Jorge chiding Mark for moving discussion across topics in (what is to Jorge) an inefficient manner (lines 359–361). In response, Mark hearably chides Jorge for monopolizing discourse (with “there are other people here, that are free to express themselves” in lines 362–363). Mark utilizes a disclaimer about his lack of expertise in “the education process” (lines 364–365) as an occasion to turn to Lloyd, the district superintendent. For his part (and as illustrated in Excerpt 2), Lloyd appears to occupy a pivotal role in the charter school discussion: On one hand, he is the official spokesman for the school district (which officially and, in time, aggressively opposes the charter school), and on the other hand, he is a member of the charter school planning committee. This complex status is instantiated in Excerpt 4, as he is identified by Mark as one who is “steeped in the education process” (line 365) and asked what he would “look at first” if he were to establish a school (lines 366–368). Lloyd displays reluctance to fully engage Mark’s request for “a suggestion” in several ways. First, despite having been selected explicitly by Mark as the next speaker (see Sacks, Schegloff, & Jefferson, 1978)—first called by name (line 366) and then posed a question in the second person (lines



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366–368)—Lloyd does not provide uptake immediately and does so only after a delay (line 369) and a prompt from Mark (in line 370). Second, Lloyd’s initial response—that he would consider first “The needs of the students.=Obviously” (line 371)—is hearably (based on Mark’s follow-up question, line 372) and admittedly (based on Lloyd appending “obviously” to his response) excessively nonspecific and therefore probably unhelpful. Third, following Mark’s follow-up questions (line 372) about students’ needs and whether they have been identified, Lloyd treats Mark’s questions as problematic (see Drew, 1997) by repeating the second question and adding the candidate specification “at this point” (in line 374) before locating the source of trouble in Mark’s need to tell him where he is “coming from” (lines 374–375)—that is, what Mark’s motive or intent is in asking the question. After Mark in turn treats Lloyd’s response as problematic (line 376), Lloyd again asks Mark where he is “coming from” (line 377).

Lloyd’s displayed reluctance to participate with Mark in pointing out that it is not known which needs of students the charter school would meet (or whether these needs have been identified) forces Mark into the precarious position of being “on the spot” himself. Thus, in answering the question posed to him (about where he is “coming from”), Mark lays bare the agenda behind his having solicited a “suggestion” from Lloyd. Although the matter explicated (“who’s the student? ... and what’re we tryin to teach em?” in lines 379–380) resembles a question, Mark positions it here as the “point” (line 379) that he has been trying to make—this coincides with the action Mark first projects (with “It’s my opinion” in line 362) before abandoning this move to appeal to Lloyd. Mark’s “point” then is that the kind of students who would attend the charter school and what they are to be taught in the school are unknown. That Mark speaks next, after a pause of 2.2 sec (line 381) in which (hearably) Lloyd does not provide uptake, evidences the awkward interactional place at which Mark arrives in this sequence. The substance of Mark’s self-selected response—“Obviously it’s gonna be anybody that applies, hehe” (line 382)—marks this as another failed attempt to elicit information about what kind of school the Allendale Charter School would be and what kind of student would attend. Similarly to Excerpt 3, pursuing issues involving the type of school and student the organizers are committed to—in this case, the kinds of needs that students at this school would have—could very well produce an interactional environment in which ethnicity emerges as explicitly relevant. However, this possible road is not taken, largely because participants do not engage Mark’s attempts at eliciting information about the school.



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In Excerpt 5 following (a continuation of Excerpt 4), Mark continues to press for the information about the kind of school that is being organized:

Excerpt 5 [CS3: 2082–2103]

- 382 Mark: Obviously it's gonna be anybody that applies. heheh.=
 383 Jorge: =hm hm?
 384 Mark: So:: ah (0.2) if ya need to have multilingual
 385 teachers, (0.5) (and) what language are they gonna
 386 speak.=°You know-° Obviously- Spanish [is a (1.0)
 387 Brenda:(((nods))
 388 predominant language] in this [community.]=
 389 Brenda:((nods))] []
 390 Jorge: (((nods)))
 391 (Betty)) (((nods))) =hmhm?=
 392 Mark: =Is it the o:nly language,=no.
 393 Jorge: ((shakes head))
 394 Mark: So do ya nee:d- (0.5) I know the hospita:l, would have
 395 interpreters, cuz they (were) prepared to deal with
 396 any- person who came in, who spoke any language. .hh
 397 Do you need to have mult- do you have to limit the
 398 teachers to ^ Spanish? Why?
 399 (0.5)
 400 Mark: You're already targeting the group.
 401 (.)
 402 Mark: (Now) you're tryin to get away from (0.2) targeting
 403 students, uh- (a:s)-

Following Mark's answering his own (first) question, Jorge offers the particle "hm hm?" (line 383). This is hearable as a tacit agreement with the notion that students at the school will consist of those who apply¹⁵ and possibly also as an invitation or prompt for Mark to continue to speak (see Drummond & Hopper, 1993). Over the next sequence, Mark appears to make the argument that he has unsuccessfully entreated Jorge and Lloyd to assist him in making: that the charter school organizers are "targeting" a "group" of Spanish-speaking students (see line 400). Consider Mark's argument as he formulates it on the basis of the following claims: (a) "Multilingual" teachers will "speak" (hearable as *teach*) a language (apparently in addition to English; lines 384–386); (b) Spanish is "a predominant



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language” in Allendale (lines 386, 388) but (c) not the only (non-English?) language (line 392); and (d) the charter school organizers are “limit[ing] the teachers to Spanish” (lines 397–398), which (e) is accountable given an apparent need (as the local hospital is) to be prepared, through interpreters, to serve its clientele regardless of the (non-English) language they speak (lines 394–396). By conflating the practice of “limit[ing] the teachers to Spanish” (lines 397–398) with “targeting the group” (line 400), Mark provides to understand that the “group” in question, although unelaborated in the accusation, refers to Spanish-speaking students.

By employing the term “multilingual” in formulating an argument that the organizers are targeting Spanish-speaking students, Mark expressly displays that he has not heard Jorge’s prior proposal of a “multilingual” curriculum (see Excerpt 1, lines 16–17) as retreating from and revising the (implied) notion that Spanish and English would constitute the school’s language curriculum. He also follows up his assertion that the organizers have targeted students with the assertion that they are attempting to conceal that they have done so (with “tryin to get away from targeting students” in lines 402–403). Mark’s accusation is thus twofold: The organizers are targeting Spanish-speaking students *as a group*, and they are attempting to conceal the fact that this is what they are doing.

Although he stops short of placing a label on this “group” of students whom the organizers are accused of targeting, Mark connects speaking Spanish as an activity to being a member of a category or group. Thus, although unnamed, speaking Spanish is now formulated as an activity that is tied to a category (see Jayyusi, 1984), that is, as an activity in which incumbents of a (particular) category regularly engage. Ethnicity thus emerges in Mark’s accusation again insofar as speaking the Spanish language is bound up in membership in an ethnic group. Also, it would be increasingly difficult—for the analyst as well as for the participants—to deny that ethnicity has emerged as a matter of record in the meeting. Leda’s response to Mark (in Excerpt 6 following) is consistent with this reading, as she treats focusing on Spanish as commonsensical by calling on national population trends:

Excerpt 6 [CS3: 2102–2120]

- 402 Mark: (Now) you’re tryin to get away from (0.2) targeting
 403 students, uh (a:s)-
 404 Leda: It would make sense Mark (as being) Spanish is the



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- 405 second language .hh when (0.2) the statistics shows,
 406 by year two thousand ten they will be the largest
 407 minority (.) community (0.2) in United States, (0.2)
 408 a- uh: and here (.) they are gro- ah- growing. Uh;
 409 (then) it's common sense (.) that <in the future, (.)
 410 employers> are gonna be looking for bilingual people,
 411 and they're not gonna be looking fo:r, German.
 412 language. They're gonna be looking for bilingual
 413 people who speak Spanish. I mean common sen- (it's) a
 414 common trend. Then, (0.2) ah- if someone
 415 [(at the high level of education,)]
 416 Mark: [They need to speak English] first. Then learn
 417 [Spanish.]
 418 Leda: [(That is- (of)) course. It is- that's given. In our
 419 school classes are not gonna be in Spanish..hh We are
 420 talking about <second language [taught.> ((continues))

In responding to Mark's accusation that the organizers of the charter school are "limit[ing] the teachers to Spanish" and thereby "targeting the group" (lines 397–398 and 400 in Excerpt 5), Leda (much like Jorge had argued previously) states that Spanish "would make sense" as "the second language" in the school's curriculum (lines 404–405). Whereas Jorge (in Excerpt 1) left this point unelaborated, Leda provides a warrant for the commonsense nature of Spanish and in doing so, hearably formulates speaking Spanish as a category-bound activity. Given that pronouns are produced to be heard as standing in for categories (see Sacks, 1992a, pp. 711–715), Leda's use of the third-person pronoun "they"¹⁶ in making the argument is hearably produced to refer to people who speak Spanish. Moreover, it is evident that the descriptor "minority" is shorthand for ethnic minority.¹⁷ Similarly, the term "community" (line 407) contributes to bind the Spanish language to a group or category of people who speak Spanish. Accordingly, in stating that Spanish makes sense because "they" (speakers of Spanish) soon will represent the nation's largest minority community, Leda hearably (and clearly so) refers to Spanish speakers as a group—perhaps in the strongest sense possible of doing so without actually naming the ethnic category to which speakers of Spanish belong (e.g., the panethnic categories *Latino* or *Hispanic* or specific ethnic categories such as *Puerto Rican* or *Dominican*).



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Similarly, Leda makes this national population trend relevant to Allendale itself by employing the pronoun “they” in conjunction with the location formulation “here” (line 408). The term “here” implicates that the location referred to is shared by the participants (see Schegloff, 1972) and thus implicates Allendale (the city of which they are residents) as the location at which a minority community of Spanish-speakers is growing. Doing this serves the argument that Leda builds here: Given that Spanish-speaking persons represent a growing (and soon the largest) community nationally—and given that this is also the case in Allendale—a Spanish/English bilingual curriculum “make[s] sense” because it positions Allendale students for a future in which Spanish/English bilingual people (as opposed to, for instance, German/English bilinguals; see line 411) will be needed in the workforce (lines 409–414).

This hearing of “they” as referring to a minority community of Spanish speakers continues in Mark’s inserted objection to Leda’s argument that “they”—hearably speakers of Spanish and possibly (Spanish-speaking) students at the charter school—“need to speak English first” before learning Spanish (lines 416–417). Mark’s objection also sets up what follows next (shown in Excerpt 7 following): In recasting the objection shortly (nearly 2 min) following the exchange shown previously, Mark names the ethnic category to which the speakers have been referring most recently as “they” and plausibly the category that has been, it appears, off record for the past several minutes. As the excerpt opens, Jorge employs the analogy of “putting together a jigsaw puzzle” in explaining how the organizers’ approach to planning the school differs from Mark’s:

Excerpt 7 [CS3: 2178–2210]

- 478 Jorge: I think the other potential is, you’d look at the
 479 pieces and you’d get so stuck on the pieces .h that
 480 you’d get up and walk away from the puzzle. .h
 481 [(Now) that’s frustrating.]
 482 Mark: [(Now-) I’m not saying that:] but I’m saying- (0.7)
 483 okay, you know let’s go back, uhm I’ll- I’ll raise
 484 this point >then I’ll ((3 syll.))move o:n< but the
 485 point i:s, if y- if you teach bilingual educa:tion,
 486 ih- I mean if you’re requiring teachers to be
 487 bilingual [an- and the language choice is]
 488 Betty: ((gaze at Jorge)) [He’s (saying) this (again)]



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- 489 Mark: Spanish .hh that sends a message to the people that-
 490 (in:, (.) parents) that
 491 [(.) send yer- send Spanish-]
 492 Leda: [Teachers don't [have to be [bilingual just] Spanish
 493 Betty: [No. [No.
 494 Leda: the person teaches Spanish.
 495 (0.2)
 496 Betty: Mark I think [you're- you're,] misreading this.=
 497 Mark: [I think-]
 498 Mark: = [What- what we:, (0.5) what]
 499 Leda: [(Not every teacher has to be bilingual)]
 500 Betty: we::, meant by bilingual is that (0.7) Spanish would
 501 be offered in the classroom [starting (0.5) not
 502 Mark: [But (.) if I'm a parent
 503 of a child with a Hisp- a- Hispanic parent .hh I'm
 504 gonna send my kid here. Rather than (.) put my faith
 505 in public school because (.) hey they got bilingual
 506 teachers.
 507 (.)
 508 Mark: [((2 syll.)) meet my needs.]
 509 Betty: [No it's not bilingual] teachers.(Yer sti:ll-)
 510 (.) yer still (.) missing it

As Jorge wraps up his extended explanation of their different approaches to thinking about the charter school (which also accounts for their frequent discord), he states that Mark's frustration with the process could lead him to "walk away from" the charter school organizing process (lines 479–480). Mark disagrees with this characterization and projects his own characterization of what he is "saying" (line 482) before explicitly shutting down that line to pursue something else. In reformulating what he is saying, Mark projects not an alternative to Jorge's characterization of his involvement but the revisiting of something (e.g., a point he wants to make) before allowing the group to move on (with "let's go back," lines 483–484). Mark thus hearably refers back to two prior moments in the interaction: when he projected a negative assessment and then shut it down (Excerpt 2, lines 56–57) and when he referred to a "point" that what kind of school they were talking about was unknown (Excerpt 4, lines 379–380). In doing so, Mark formulates what comes next as a recasting—even recycling—of prior



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discussion.¹⁸ Mark then argues that “requiring teachers to be bilingual” in English and Spanish (lines 486–487, 489) constitutes an express invitation to speakers of Spanish (line 491)—and that to do this is (using Mark’s prior phrasing) to “target the group.” However, forceful objections by Leda (lines 492, 494, 499) and Betty (line 493) serve to shut down Mark’s “point” before it is fully made in this instance: Beyond using the categories “the people” (line 489) and “parents” (line 490), Mark has not yet named the group that the charter school organizers appear to be targeting. Following an objection by Betty in which she states that Mark is “misreading” the organizers’ intent in “bilingual” (lines 496, 498, 500–501), Mark restates his point, building (with “but,” line 502) what comes next as a rejoinder to Betty’s most recent explanation of the bilingual curriculum. Also, this time he employs the category “Hispanic,” thereby informing what he said just prior: Thus recast, Mark’s point is that “Hispanic parent[s]” (line 503)—that is, parents of Hispanic children as he appears to have started to say (lines 502–503)—will understand the emphasis on a “bilingual” curriculum (which he understands to be Spanish and English) to be “a message” (see line 489) to send their children to the charter school rather than to “put [their] faith in” (lines 504–505) traditional schools in Allendale.

Hispanic ethnicity has now emerged as an “on-record” matter of discussion in the interaction and arguably, reflexively provides for the hearing of prior talk as having indexed ethnicity as well. This is done through Mark’s production of this most recent formulation as are formulation of prior attempts of introducing this accusation against the charter school organizers. Accordingly, the most recent accusation provides for a hearing—by the participants and analyst alike—that Mark’s prior attempts (beginning with his first question about the “bilingual” curriculum and moving forward) are about “Hispanic” ethnicity and that they have been all along. Also, once a matter of record, ethnicity must be dealt with as an undeniable element of Mark’s accusation that the charter school organizers are targeting members of Allendale’s Hispanic community. The participants capitalize on ethnicity’s now “on-record” status by employing ethnicity as a practical task in dealing with Mark’s accusation.

ETHNICITY: A “PRACTICAL TASK”

Moerman’s (1993) observation that ethnicity is a “practical task” serves



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as a conceptual basis for showing not only how ethnicity weaves in and out of social interaction but also what participants *do* with ethnicity once it is an incontrovertible matter of record. The preceding analyses track the “off record,” ambiguous, and sporadic *hearable* emergence of ethnicity in Mark’s repeated attempts to elicit information about the charter school and others’ attempts to manage these attempts and the eventual emergence of ethnicity as a matter of discussion in and through Mark’s accusation. In the analysis that follows, I examine how meeting participants use ethnicity in managing the local exigencies of interaction implicated by this accusation. Excerpt 8 (following) occurs just over 1 min following the exchange between Mark and Betty analyzed in Excerpt 7. Preceding the talk shown in Excerpt 8, Betty explains that the “bilingual” curriculum means teaching Spanish classes at an early age rather than waiting until junior high school as is done in the Allendale School District. Of interest is how Brenda (the principal of a parochial school in Allendale) employs ethnicity in responding to Mark’s renewed objection and accusation of the charter school organizers. As the excerpt begins (in line 557), Betty summarizes and winds down her explanation of what the organizers meant by “bilingual”—that an emphasis on bilingual education (for instance, teaching Spanish as a second language) would be a part of the school’s curriculum:

Excerpt 8 [CS3: 2257–2283]

- 557 Betty: That’s part of [our curriculum]
 558 Mark: [See that’s (wt)] that’s what I’m
 559 sa:yin,=all these things link. Why did you ch- ^ pick?
 560 bilingual (.) as a choice for ah: all
 561 [we need in school.]
 562 Betty: [Because of what] we just ^ said.
 563 Mark: Well
 564 Brenda:I think-
 565 Betty: [i- i- it’s also the <u:pcomi:ng>]
 566 Mark: [(you know) it’s an i:ssue: and >it’s part a the
 567 curriculum<.]
 568 (0.2)
 569 Brenda:I think a [lot a] people in the community (.) ar-
 570 Jorge: [Yeah]
 571 Brenda:are ah- ah:, (1.2) mixed up on this bilingual



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- 572 [a:lso .h in that (.) people in the community are
 573 Betty: [hmhm
 574 Brenda:<thinking> tha:t (0.5) this school wants to begin in
 575 Allendale, strictl [y: to
 576 Betty: [No.
 577 Brenda:teach (.) [Hispanic >children<.=I know.]
 578 Leda: [(shakes head)]
 579 Brenda:= [But I'm [sa::ying what I'm hearing.]
 580 Betty: [(I know [(4 syll)]
 581 Mark: [That's [exactly what people are saying.]
 582 Leda: [(nods head)]
 583 (Betty): See that's (what [I was-)]
 584 Brenda: [<And] that is a confusion.>=
 585 Betty: =Right.=

Betty's (extended) explanation of the school's bilingual curriculum, summarized as the excerpt begins (line 577), is treated by Mark (with "see that's what I'm sayin," lines 558–559) as relating, in some way, to the argument (or "point") that he has made earlier. The pronounced emphasis on "pick" in Mark's question—why the organizers chose (or "picked") bilingual education as the emphasis of a school (lines 559–561)—implicates that the organizers have had some reason or motive for doing so. Moreover, that the question formulates the emphasis on bilingual education in its most extreme case—as "all we need in school" (lines 560–561)—evidences that Mark here is formulating and legitimizing an accusation (see Pomerantz, 1986). These features support a hearing of Mark's question as renewing his prior accusation that the charter school organizers are targeting Hispanic students.

Betty responds Mark in two ways—and these also constitute a recycling of prior responses to his accusation: First, Betty justifies organizers' emphasis on bilingual education on the basis of "what we¹⁹ just said"—that is, that "bilingual" refers to teaching Spanish as a second language. Second, following Mark's displayed disagreement (with "well" in line 563), Betty (in line 565) appears to start to recycle the argument offered prior by Leda (see Excerpt 6): that the Spanish language (or the Hispanic community), hearably the referent of "it," is "the upcoming" language (ethnic group) in the United States and/or locally. However, Betty does not finish this point, the whole of which is offered simultaneously with



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a summary by Mark that “it” (possibly the “bilingual” curriculum or that the organizers are targeting Hispanic students) “is an issue and it’s part a the curriculum” (lines 566–567). This instance of extended turn overlap—which is relatively rare in conversation (Schegloff, 2000)—evidences the speakers’ competition for the speaking floor, just as adjustments made by both (Betty’s turn elongation on “upcoming” and Mark’s speeding up of his turn on “it’s a part a the curriculum”) indicate mutual awareness of the competitive nature of the overlap (see Schegloff, 2000). The overlap is resolved as Mark completes his utterance simultaneously with Betty cutting off before completion (in that the object of the modifier “upcoming” is not given). According to Schegloff (2000, pp. 32–41), following or “in the aftermath” of overlapped talk (or in its “post-resolution phase”), speakers display a stance toward the overlap. That this phase includes a noticeable gap (line 568) and moves by speakers other than Betty and Mark (see lines 569–570) to gain the speaking floor suggests a mutual stance, by Betty and Mark, as having arrived at a kind of impasse in the exchange. It is at this hearable impasse that Brenda enters (line 569).

Brenda, an Allendale resident who is not an organizer of the charter school, gains the speaking floor on her second attempt (see line 564). Her contribution is both sequentially organized (in the postresolution phase of overlapping talk) and substantively produced (with the assessment marker: “I think,” line 569) to settle the impasse at which Mark and Betty have arrived in just prior. Of particular interest is that and how Brenda utilizes ethnicity as a practical task in moving to settle this impasse.

To begin, Brenda formulates a two-part assertion: first, that “a lot a people in the community” (line 569) are “mixed up” by the “bilingual” aspect of the school (line 571) and second, that “people in the community” think that the charter school is “strictly” for “Hispanic children” (lines 572, 574–575, 577). This assertion is markedly careful in its ambiguity about who is thinking and (perceived as) doing what: The category “(a lot a) people in the community” might be heard as “(many) Allendale residents,” but is not elaborated. Similarly, the agent—identified as (allegedly) intending (with “wants,” line 574) to start a charter school “strictly to teach Hispanic children” (lines 575, 577)—is “this school”: This hearably is an indirect reference to the charter school organizers as agents, but Brenda expressly (and somewhat awkwardly) avoids naming them.

The disaffiliative responses by Betty (in line 576) and Leda (line 578) to the



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notion that “this school wants to begin in Allendale strictly to teach Hispanic children” justifies the tremendous care Brenda takes about not naming specific agents. These responses occasion repair by Brenda as she acknowledges (with “I know,” line 577) and clarifies that the assertion comes not from her but from others (with “But I’m saying what I’m hearing,” line 579). Even as she clarifies her assertion—that many Allendale residents think that the charter school is organized strictly for Hispanic students—it is ratified simultaneously by Betty (with “I know” in line 580), Mark (with “That’s exactly what people are saying” in line 581), and Leda (by nodding her head, line 582). Having located a notion on which Betty and Mark agree, Brenda continues in this vein (of settling the interactional and ideological impasse at which they have arrived) by characterizing this “thinking” in regard to the charter school as “a confusion” (line 584). This characterization is consequential in that Brenda here artfully finds a way to uphold as pure the motives of both the charter school organizers and “people in the community” who are critical of the charter school: The charter school organizers are not targeting Hispanic students, and critics’ accusations that they are result not from malice but “confusion” or being “mixed up” (line 571). In so doing, Brenda has provided a neat interpretation of not only the prior impasse between Betty and Mark but of the charter school debate as she hears it occurring in Allendale outside of this meeting.

This interpretation of the charter school organizers’ and critics’ respective positions sets up, for Brenda, a way to utilize her own ethnicity as an interactional resource in settling how it is that having a “bilingual” curriculum means something other than “targeting” Hispanic students. In the analysis of Excerpts 9 and 10 (following)—continuing the talk left off at Excerpt 8—I show how Brenda utilizes ethnicity as a practical task, and I demonstrate, through analysis of Brenda’s use of *that* ethnicity in *that* interactional moment, how participants in social interaction call on (particular) ethnicities to solve (particular) interactional problems.

Excerpt 9 [CS3: 2285–2335]

- 585 Betty: Right.=
 586 Brenda:=And now- I: I speak a certain amount of- (.) ^
 587 Polish.
 588 Betty: °hmhm°
 589 (.)
 590 Brenda:Would I be able to come into the school?!



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- 591 (0.2)
 592 Brenda:And- perhaps if there was- (0.2) We- are getting an-
 593 an [influx (1.2)] of (.)
 594 Lloyd: [(I could a guessed you) were bilingual.]
 595 Brenda:d- ^ right (0.2) Polish children. We are getting an
 596 influx of Polish families here in this city too. .hh
 597 Not as large a [population] nowhe:re as- the
 598 Leda: [((nods head))]
 599 Brenda:Hispanic children but (0.2) if you had that, if
 600 children were coming to pre Kay: .hh and Kay:, (.)
 601 could I come in?
 602 (0.2)
 603 Brenda:and help you out with that? Could [I:]
 604 Leda: [((nods head))]
 605 Jorge: [(You bet.) Why not?]
 606 Betty: [That's where we go back to staffing
 607 Brenda: [But we want them to
 608 go (0.2) from speaking strictly Po [lish,
 609 Betty: [ri:ght?
 610 Brenda:to (.) [knowing the] English.
 611 Betty: [Exactly.]
 612 Jorge: Right
 613 Brenda:Okay? .hh And- isn't that what you want the
 614 [Hispanic children] to [do also]?
 615 Leda: [((nods head))]
 616 Betty: [Yes.] Abs[olutely.]
 617 Jorge: [Learn]
 618 [everything.]
 619 Brenda:[To become-]
 620 (.)
 621 Brenda:Right.=
 622 Jorge: =Right.
 623 Brenda:To become- (.) but- people in the community are
 624 thinking [.hh that the Hispanic] people: (0.2) from
 625 Betty: [It's a misconception.]
 626 Brenda:Junta Municipa:l- and Allendale that are Hispanic (.)



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I argued previously that Brenda's query (formulated over multiple turns, lines 586–603) serves to articulate what a bilingual curriculum that does not target Hispanic students would look like. By doing this in the form of a query to the charter school organizers, Brenda provides an interactional slot (see Antaki, 1994) for the organizers to validate—and in a sense to “own”—her articulation and in this manner, refute the accusation that the organizers are targeting Hispanic students. Jorge and Leda, particularly Jorge, do just that (see lines 604–605). Each of the two parts of Jorge's response (“You bet. Why not?” in line 605) is consequential. First, with “You bet,” Jorge provides unqualified and enthusiastic support of Brenda's proposal, thereby ratifying her model of a bilingual curriculum that does not target Hispanic students. Second, with “Why not?,” Jorge reflexively constructs Brenda's model of the curriculum and school as representing what the organizers had in mind all along. This articulation of the school's bilingual curriculum then is formulated by Brenda and Jorge as the prevailing version and as collaboratively built.

In what comes next, Brenda (and the organizers, subsequently) appears to orient to a specific aspect of Mark's “targeting” critique: that in targeting Hispanic students, the charter school will become a kind of haven for the Spanish language at the expense of the English language. Mark hints at this aspect earlier in the meeting by stating that Spanish-speaking students “need to speak English first. Then learn Spanish” (lines 416–417, Excerpt 6) and in formulating the practice (by parents of Hispanic children) of selecting the charter school (because of its Spanish–English curriculum) as displaying their lack of “faith in public school” (lines 504–505, Excerpt 7). Accordingly, this specific aspect of Mark's “targeting” complaint is that targeting Hispanic students perpetuates learning the Spanish language as exclusive or primordial and that this relegates to the background education in the English language. Brenda hearably moves to counter this critique by confirming with the organizers that the purpose of teaching Polish children and Hispanic children is one in the same: to facilitate the teaching of English (lines 607–608, 610, and lines 613–614). Similarly to her prior queries, the queries here provide opportunities for the organizers to ratify her version of the school's curriculum—and these opportunities are amply taken by Betty (lines 609, 611, 616), Jorge (lines 612, 617–618), and Leda (line 615).

That Brenda's queries—first about the plausibility of her participation in the school and next about the purpose of bilingual instruction—are built in the



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process of articulating a prevailing version of the school's bilingual curriculum is evidenced by Brenda's move out of the discussion of second-language learning. Brenda returns to the assertion with which she first moved to settle the impasse between Betty and Mark (and charter school organizers and their critics generally): that "people in the community" mistakenly think "that the Hispanic people from Junta Municipal and Allendale that are Hispanic want their children to only learn in Hispanic" (lines 623–624, 626–627).²⁴ This articulation of her assertion is marked by wholesale agreement from the organizers (Betty in line 625 and 629, Jorge in line 630 and lines 633–634). However, whereas Brenda's first and second versions of the assertion both uphold as pure the motives of critics of the charter school by attributing critics' stance to their misunderstanding of the bilingual curriculum (with "mixed up," line 571, Excerpt 8; "confusion," line 584, Excerpt 8; and "misconception," line 625), Jorge offers an upgrade of this characterization by framing critics' stance as a "misrepresentation" (lines 630, 633–634). By characterizing critics as *misrepresenting* (as opposed to *misapprehending*) the organizers' efforts as targeting Hispanic students, Jorge frames their motives as less than pure, and this serves to modify Brenda's assertion. This revision of the prevailing characterization of the charter school debate is hearably accepted by Brenda (with "And it is. Yes it is" in lines 631–632).

In what follows, Jorge responds to a renewed objection to the charter school by extending Brenda's use of Polish ethnicity as a resource in framing the school's bilingual curriculum. Consider Excerpt 10 following (a continuation of talk analyzed in Excerpt 9):

Excerpt 10 [CS3: 2335-2350]

- 635 Brenda:[that's the ^ brai:n.]
 636 Mark: [(Being, that)] as Lloyd points out (0.2)
 637 segregati:ng, creating this:- (0.2)
 638 [lack of integration] concept.
 639 Brenda:[(I think that's what) ((3 syll.))]
 640 Mark: That's (what I [think].)
 641 Jorge: [>Yeah but<] that's- that's
 642 pa:rtially becau:se the community for one reason or
 643 another hasn't been exposed to the six <panels that>
 644 .hh ah:m a very diverse group of people I thought,t,
 645 put together when they first sat down at the table.



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- 646 .hh And they talked about things like individualized
 647 approach to education which would say; (.) if the
 648 chi:ld's interest and need and desire and the
 649 parents' i- i- is- is to work on- on Polish as a- that
 650 would not be:: (0.7) that would not be something that
 651 would be left out a the process cuz it's based on that
 652 child and >what the needs are of that child and where
 653 that child is in term- < that's my understanding of
 654 what the individualized approach meant. .hh The
 655 lingual part (.) could a been multilingual instead a
 656 bilingual and might have eliminated <some of the:>
 657 Brenda:Right. [Multilingual.]
 658 Jorge: [Some of the] context about what that
 659 mea:nt, .hh Everything te:lls us this is a world in
 660 the future where people are gonna have tah understand
 661 other cultures a:nd be multilingual if they're gonna
 662 be successful. .h First thing we do when we send
 663 somebody- into business in Japan what do we do:? we
 664 teach them the culture and the [lang]uage so that
 665 Lloyd: [°Yep.°]
 666 Jorge: they can be effective
 667 [in doing business. .h It's] only logical.
 668 Leda: [That's ^ right. That's right.]

As it stands, Brenda (with the collaboration of the organizers) has articulated the charter school as having a bilingual curriculum that facilitates students' learning of the English language and has employed Polish ethnicity as a resource in doing so.²⁵ Moreover, Mark's accusation (and that of "people in the community," as meeting participants have formulated it) that the organizers are "targeting" Hispanic students has been attributed to misapprehension (by Brenda) and misrepresentation (by Jorge) of the organizers' motives regarding the school's bilingual curriculum.

Mark hearably rejects this characterization by stating that the charter school would effectively segregate students (lines 636–637). Given prior accusations that have expressly named Hispanic students as the organizers "target" population—and factoring in that "segregation" has been an issue in debate about



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the charter school²⁶—Mark’s reference to segregation is hearable as an assertion that the school would segregate Hispanic students from their non-Hispanic counterparts (and lead to the undesirable outcomes he has outlined elsewhere). That he denies authorship of the critique and instead attributes it to Lloyd²⁷ suggests that Mark orients to the critique as face threatening—and this also supports a hearing of “segregation” as indexing race and ethnicity by referring, indirectly, to racial/ethnic segregation.

In response, Jorge first refers to the work of the planning committee—“a very diverse group” (line 644), which similarly to “segregating” (as analyzed previously) hearably refers to racial/ethnic diversity—in outlining what the charter school would look like. Jorge explains (in lines 646–654) that in identifying a bilingual curriculum, the organizers were oriented to an “individualized approach to education” (lines 646–647)—that is, a focus on students’ intellectual and developmental needs and a concern with pedagogy (rather than social engineering or politics). That is, Jorge asserts that an understanding of discussion of an “individualized approach to education” would nullify an allegation of “segregation” because this approach focuses on students’ individual needs rather than the political or social (e.g., ethnic, racial, cultural) needs of any person or group.

Jorge then moves (with “which would say,” lines 647) to illustrate or apply this “individualized approach” to the Allendale Charter School (lines 647–651). That Jorge employs “Polish” (line 649) to carry the application is consequential: Given prior discussion, employing “Polish” (as opposed to “Spanish”) in this slot allows Jorge to outline what an “educational approach” would look like in the Allendale Charter School in a way that upholds Brenda’s prior outline of the school as a program that would benefit students equally. Simply put, it is the Polish language—not the Spanish language—which permits this application of an “individualized approach” in countering Mark’s claims regarding segregation and “targeting”: Using “Spanish” in this slot in place of where Jorge used “Polish” would clearly perpetuate the accusation that Mark has repeatedly advanced—that the organizers are “targeting” Hispanic students (which will lead to segregation)—and also would undermine Brenda’s artful framing of the school as potentially helping students of multiple (and non-Hispanic) ethnic backgrounds.

Following further explication of the “individualized approach to education” as he understands it (lines 651–654), Jorge returns to his prior offer of “multilingual” in place of “bilingual” (lines 654–656, 658–659). As opposed to



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Jorge's original offer in which the languages that would make up a "multilingual" curriculum were ambiguous and unspecified (see lines 16–17, Excerpt 1), this offer of "multilingual" implicates at least the English, Spanish, Polish, and possibly Japanese (see 662–667) languages but without naming them or attaching them to ethnicities of incumbents who speak them.

Moreover, Jorge neatly positions "multilingual" as what should have been meant all along by stating that the term captures what was intended by the group (lines 649–650) and a necessary skill for student success generally (lines 660–662). Jorge states that use of "multilingual" would have "eliminated ... some of the context" (lines 656, 658) about what kind of school was being organized. Jorge (with collaboration from Brenda, line 657; Lloyd, line 665; and Leda, line 668) thus casts the disagreement and extended discussion that has occurred over the past several minutes—related to the "bilingual" curriculum and Mark's accusations that the organizers are "targeting" and "segregating" Hispanic students—as originating in a fundamental, correctable, and *corrected* misapprehension of the planning group's intentions.

The extended episode analyzed over Excerpts 7 through 10 illustrates the use of ethnicity as a practical task: Once Hispanic ethnicity emerges undeniably for the participants as a conversational matter, Polish ethnicity is employed to assist in accomplishing local exigencies in interaction (e.g., settling interactional difficulties, countering prior claims). Jorge's focus on the "Polish" language (rather than "Spanish") in his explication of the school demonstrates that certain ethnic labels and predicates accomplish interactional work that others cannot; and Jorge's return to "multilingual" illustrates a manner in which ethnicity is made to withdraw from the record once its work is accomplished.

ETHNICITY AS A PHENOMENON IN SOCIAL CONFLICT

Scholarship on ethnicity in the contemporary United States generally treats ethnicity as stable, enduring, and as existing prior (both temporally and in importance) to discourse and social interaction. This scholarship approaches ethnicity as given by structural arrangement and relations in focusing on economic and social incorporation (e.g., Portes & Rumbaut, 1996; Waldinger & Bozorgmehr, 1996), prejudice (e.g., Hopkins, Reicher, & Levine, 1997; van Dijk, 1984; van Dijk, Ting-Toomey, Smitherman, & Troutman, 1997; Verkuyten et al., 1995),



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and ethnic mobilization (e.g., Browning, Marshall, & Tabb, 1984, 1990; Horton & Calderon, 1995; Lamphere, 1992; Pardo, 1998; Torres, 1995) in diverse localities. This diverse body of work—comprising research in sociology, anthropology, social psychology, communication, psychology, and political science—shares the commonality of approaching social interaction as a product or outcome of ethnicity and interethnic relations. In this scholarship, ethnicity exists and occurs prior to and outside of social interaction—that is, as an “atemporal, self-sufficient, isolatable, independent, propertied [substance] standing *out there* over and against engagement with [it]” (Wieder, 1999, p. 165).

In this light, conflict and contest surrounding the Allendale Charter School would serve as a clear case of an “ethnicity-based struggle” (Torres, 1995; see also Giménez, 1999) in that two ethnic groups (Latinos and Anglos of various European ethnicities, in this case) compete for social, political, and economic resources. Under this view, the content of the conflict—that is, the interaction between members of these groups in planning meetings, public hearings, and through various media outlets—reproduces interethnic conflict that in fact exists in the institutional, historical, political, and social relationship between these groups prior to and independent of interaction between members; and under this view, ethnicity itself is an object that is employed by the analyst in examining and characterizing the conflict.

In contrast, LSI scholarship (as delimited in, for instance, Wieder, 1999) considers the approach to ethnicity outlined previously to be “unanalytic” (see Sacks, 1992a, pp. 41–48) in that it grossly underspecifies (see Hopper, 1990) ethnicity as a participant resource that exists in and through social interaction as participants bring it into being in myriad ways and under myriad circumstances. In this article, I have described one set of circumstances and have outlined a few of the ways in which ethnicity “exists” in social interaction. Because LSI scholarship sees ethnicity as existing only insofar as it is “visible and recognizable to the participants” in social interaction (Wieder, 1999, p. 166; see also Heritage, 1984), the task for LSI scholars is to treat ethnicity as a phenomenon—that is, as an object to which participants orient in the course of participating in social life and social interaction (see Mandelbaum, 1990)—in the manner in which it exists for participants in observed social interaction. In taking this to be the role of and approach to ethnicity in LSI scholarship, what is offered here is a way to see ethnicity in all its complexity and embrace the ongoing contingency of and



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common equivocality in its relevance. What is offered here is a way to capture in analysis the unanticipated, unpredictable, and eminently practical applications of ethnicity in social interaction.

NOTES

- 1 This stance on ethnicity is similar to ethnomethodological treatments of categories/identities such as gender (see Hopper & LeBaron, 1998; West & Zimmerman, 1987) and age (see Paoletti, 1998).
- 2 Notable exceptions include Day (1998); Moerman (1988, especially chap. 5); Verkuyten, de Jong, and Masson (1995); and Wilkinson and Kitzinger (2003).
- 3 It is beyond the scope of this article to review the relation between MCA and CA other than to note that these traditions are intellectual siblings (in that they both find much of their origin in the work of Harvey Sacks) and that some scholars have pointed to their relation as troubled. See Watson (1997) and Hester and Eglin (1997c) for reviews of this relation from the vantage point of MCA. For a comprehensive discussion of many of the same issues cast as juxtaposing ethnography and CA, see the special section (Hopper, 1990–1991) in *Research on Language and Social Interaction* titled, “Ethnography and Conversation Analysis After Talking Culture.” See also Sanders (1999) for a theoretical recasting of these issues.
- 4 That talk is produced and monitored in terms of both membership categorization and sequence and that there is a reflexive relation between them is illustrated in Sacks’s (1992a) analysis of “we were in an automobile discussion” as constituting an invitation (see Sacks, 1992a, pp. 300–305). Two commonly cited (e.g., Hester & Eglin, 1997b) studies that have also illustrated this reflexivity are Sacks (1974) and Schegloff (1972).
- 5 This is a pseudonym.
- 6 Leading and organizing this effort were Leda, executive director of Junta Municipal de Allendale (hereafter Junta), a community-based social service agency that serves primarily Latinos, and Jorge, president of Inspiring Force, Inc. (hereafter IFI), an educational consulting firm.



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- 7 Junta is connected to Allendale’s Latino population (which comprised between about 20% of Allendale during this debate) in geographic, political, and sociological terms. For some time, Junta (headquarters of which are located in the Allendale neighborhood most densely populated with Spanish-speaking residents) has been engaged in a neighborhood revitalization project called “*La Segunda Casa*” (“The Second Home”). This project entails procuring public and private grants to build a community complex that would include a community center, performing arts center, community cafeteria, gymnasium, and business incubators. Although serving Allendale’s population generally, the organization expressly focuses its efforts and programs on assisting youth from Allendale’s Spanish-speaking population. Junta is widely recognized as an institutional leader of the Latino population in Allendale and takes the lead in most activist and organizing efforts. For its part, IFI is also closely connected to the Latino community in Allendale in that Jorge, the president/founder of IFI, is a former a member of the Board of Directors of Junta Municipal, and Jorge’s wife, Betty, was the president of Junta’s Executive Board of Directors at the time of the charter application.
- 8 I also provide details, selectively, which are available only via the video recording—such as when participants nod or shake their heads and to track some instances of gaze—when it is abundantly evident that these behaviors are consequential in the organization of the talk.
- 9 This third claim is perhaps softened in the second version of Mark’s question—“What would be the second language” (line 9)—in that it does not necessarily presuppose that the organizers have settled on a second language. Yet this version assumes, similarly, that a second language has been discussed and considered.
- 10 Also, depending on the connection for the participants between language and ethnicity, one might argue that Mark asks this way to avoid coming off as bigoted.
- 11 Note also Jorge’s restart and correction of “as well as” in that there is attention to replacing “bilingual” with “multilingual” rather than (merely) treating “multilingual” as an equal to “bilingual” in describing the curriculum.
- 12 Heidi first asks Lloyd (see lines 38–39) simultaneously with an exchange



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by Jorge and Mark regarding Jorge adding “multilingual” to the description of the curriculum. After Lloyd indicates to Heidi that he did not hear her (line 40), Heidi repeats the question—by the time she gets to “currently” in her second attempt (line 43), she has the speaking floor to herself.

- 13 From Excerpt 2 forward, line numbers are marked as continued from Excerpt 1 to provide some sense of the passing of time between excerpted talk.
- 14 It is likely that ethnicity would be a central feature of a student profile in Allendale. Not only is ethnicity is an important category in Allendale historically and in the present era (Dauria, 1994), particularly relating to issues of schools and education (Bigler, 1999), but it is pervasive in the discourse of Allendale residents generally and in the matter of the Allendale Charter School (Hansen, 2002).
- 15 During this meeting, Jorge notes that charter school legislation would not permit them to select students (they would conduct a lottery if applicants exceed spots). Mark’s statement is technically and procedurally accurate.
- 16 Implicit in Leda’s use of the third person is that she is *not* a member of the category to which the pronoun refers. This is consistent with hearing “they” as referring to “a minority community” of persons who speak Spanish (as argued shortly) in that Leda—while as executive director of Junta Municipal is commonly mistaken as Latina—is Iranian. (During my observation period at Junta, I observed that Leda in fact sometimes made a sport of this by asking newcomers to the organization—including myself on one occasion—to identify her ethnicity.)
- 17 See Hansen (2002, pp. 141–143). Inspection of the excerpt that follows (from earlier in the same meeting [CS3: 537–539, 555–556] supports the notion that the term “minority” is nominally tied to ethnicity in that Mark’s offer of “ethnic” as a candidate answer to what is meant by “minority” displays his knowledge (see Pomerantz, 1988, p. 369) about terms that (as categories) index ethnicity as a “collection”:

Jose: We’ve talked about it in terms of that (0.5) <simple issue> of there are a minority student- a minority group of students .hh who do not successfully complete their



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traditional environment.

((14 lines omitted))

Mark: You said minority are you talking about ethnic minority er
[(jis)]

Jose: [No I'm talking] about in terms of numbers.

- 18 Note that at least one participant, Betty, also observes that Mark's current "point" is a recycling of prior talk as he has hearably formulated it to be (line 488).
- 19 With the pronoun "we" (line 562), Betty formulates her response as being on behalf of the charter school organizers and displays hearing Mark's accusation as against the organizers collectively. See Sacks (1992a, pp. 711–716).
- 20 A hearing of Brenda's queries in this segment as directed to the charter school organizers is plausible based on Betty's continuer (line 588) and Leda's (line 604), Jorge's (line 605), and Betty's (line 606) eventual responses to the query. Although not transcribed, this hearing is also supported by the direction of Brenda's gaze, which appears to alternate between Jorge, Betty, and Leda.
- 21 The downgraded and perhaps somewhat guarded manner in which Brenda avows the ability to speak Polish is important here in that stating the ability to speak "a certain amount" of a given language might just as well come from studying it in school or visiting a place where the language is spoken as being of an ethnic group that speaks that language.
- 22 It is eminently clear that as opposed to her first query in which "Polish" identifies a language only, Brenda here is using "Polish" to mark both a language and an ethnic group. First, Brenda refers to "Polish children" and "Polish families," which indexes ethnicity as well as language. Second, she refers to this influx as being a "population." Third—also as opposed to her first query—it would be implausible to hear Brenda as stating that the children in these Polish families speak the Polish language for any reason other than that they *are* Polish (in ethnic terms).
- 23 Conduct of a nonpromiscuous analysis (see Schegloff, 1992) of this interaction prohibits the claim that Brenda avows Polish ethnicity in this



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interactional moment. Indeed, Brenda only self-identifies as having the ability to “speak a certain amount of Polish” and does not confirm or deny any ethnic tie. Also, although use of “we” (lines 592, 595) could serve under some circumstances as avowing ethnicity, in this instance “we” more plausibly refers to Brenda speaking as an Allendale resident generally (see “in this city,” line 596) than as a member of Allendale’s Polish population. However, as the analysis demonstrates, showing that Brenda avows *for herself* membership in an ethnic category is not necessary in sustaining the overall claim that Brenda utilizes as a resource Polish ethnicity *generally* as a feature of prospective Polish-speaking students of the charter school.

- 24 Note that adding to “carry that on” (line 628) hearably orients to the specific aspect of the “targeting” complaint: that to target Hispanic students foregrounds learning in Spanish (or “Hispanic”) and undermines learning in English.
- 25 Brenda also makes a reference to cognitive learning theories (see line 635), which suggest that children are able to master language learning at an early age. This was discussed just prior to the talk given in Excerpt 8.
- 26 Standard usage of the term “segregation” commonly makes relevant race and ethnicity, and this term was used in Allendale to refer to segregating Hispanic students from their (mostly Anglo) counterparts. To illustrate, consider the following from a community hearing some 7 months following the meeting analyzed here:

And a lot of people assume that means (this is) a charter school for Hispanic children. If that’s the case, aren’t they [the organizers] bringing us back to the days of segregation. (ASD8: 784–788; simplified)

- 27 This comment attributed by Lloyd was not made during this planning meeting, and no specific remark to which Mark might be referring here has been located. It is possible that this remark was published in a local media report, in a school board meeting, or even in a private interaction between Mark and Lloyd. Of interest for analytic purposes is that Mark attributes the remark to Lloyd and that Lloyd does not reject the attribution.



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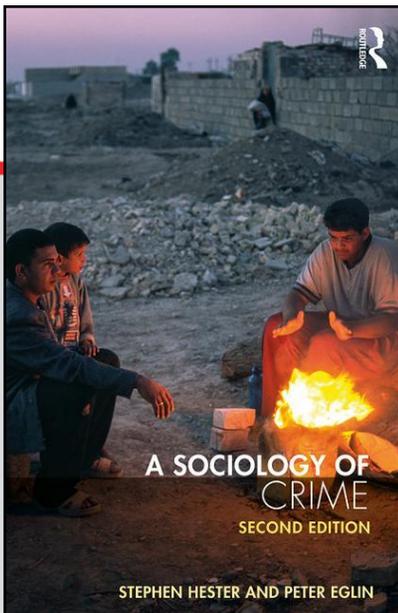
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CHAPTER

3

RACE



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RACE

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A black friend told me ... that she selects her clothes so that she doesn't look threatening to white people.

(Richardson 2016: para. 7)

If you f---ing move, I swear to God!

(Police officer to Alton Sterling, cited in Kelly 2016: para. 4)

Perhaps by the time you are reading this book, the subject of this chapter will have resumed its social position as one of those issues that for the most part resides just below the surface of public consciousness and discourse, though occasionally bursting into prominence for a short time in connection with some horrific incident. At the time of writing (2016), however, and as graphically illustrated in the epigraphs above, race had been occupying the public conversation for some considerable time both in the English-speaking world and in continental Europe. See, for example, the Winter 2016 issue of *Canadian Dimension* devoted to "Racism." Or simply watch this "traffic stop": www.youtube.com/watch?v=3P9-BjYxTu8 (accessed 15 July 2016). According to the first comment on this video, from August 2015, "Denver Police cleared all the officers of wrongdoing and they remain on the force today. The Denver City Council quietly approved an out of court settlement with the family for [\$]795,000.00." African Americans are, once again, in their centuries-long struggle to gain recognition of their basic humanity from Europeans and their white colonial transplants, having to assert that "Black Lives Matter," and having to deal with the often racist response to that declaration. The following video is instructive: www.youtube.com/watch?v=jQ_0bqWKO-k&list=PLnvZ3PbKApGM-hHuQ9INc5oSKsusjn0Z6 (accessed 15 July 2016). Their resistance is being directed particularly at the horrific killing of young black men by police in the United States (Schenwar et al. 2016).

Arabic/Muslim citizens of "Euro-world" (Europe, Canada and the United States, Australia and New Zealand) continued to be the victims of Islamophobia, including the grotesque, quasi-fascist pronouncements of the Republican candidate in the 2016 US presidential election. And throughout the world, but notably in Canada, Australia and the United States, not to mention the Occupied Territories of Palestine, the indigenous peoples of settler colonialist societies were forcing on their white rulers the demand that they finally come to terms with their racist pasts and presents. Official apologies, truth and reconciliation commissions, plus other commissions of inquiry into particular oppressions (residential schools, missing and murdered aboriginal women, discrimination in the provision of child



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welfare services) filled the airwaves. In all cases, lawsuits and criminal trials kept the subject alive in the public mind. From university campuses in the United States, United Kingdom and Canada, to the Canadian RCMP, to the UK, US and Canadian governments themselves, major institutions were having to address the stubborn refusal of “systemic racism” and racist practices to go away.¹

And yet the criminals in society are widely perceived by white, hard-working, God-fearing, property-owning, tax-paying citizens to be those who have been traditionally coloured as black, brown, red, and in an earlier time, yellow. (If you are offended by the colour references here, listen to them in the last verse of the song “Everyday People” by Sly and the Family Stone.) East Asians no longer bear that stigma (so much), but the rest continue to do so. These are the categories of person who are feared and from whose imagined threats to its safety white society organizes to protect itself (Reiman and Leighton 2013: 69; Kappeler and Potter 2005: 33–34).² The popular/official street criminal is black (see the Introduction to Part III), the popular/official terrorist brown, the popular/official drag on society red. And there is evidence to support such views. While Arabs/Muslims are subjected to special scrutiny only in relation to suspected involvement in terrorism, people of African and aboriginal descent are significantly over-represented in the criminal justice system in general. From police apprehensions to court appearances to imprisonment, these two minorities constitute a far greater proportion of the criminalized than would be expected on the basis of their percentage of the general population. In the cases of African Americans and aboriginal Canadians (especially women), the figures are . . . what? Marked? Striking? Dramatic? The author struggles for an appropriate descriptor. Surely the figures are an appalling indictment of the societies in which they occur.

Our approach in this chapter is somewhat different from that of the previous chapters. We begin by presenting some official facts and figures pertaining to the criminalization of people of colour before turning to discuss how professional sociology has sought to account for them. The studies we review are embedded within both of these parts. Because recent events may well be fresh in readers’ minds, we consider some less recent cases to show that the matters being described are persistent features of the interaction between the criminal justice system and radicalized minorities across the Western world, if not beyond. We then turn to discuss the grammar of race in relation to criminalization before concluding the chapter. One particularly useful account of these matters in the



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Canadian context is *Racialization, Crime, and Criminal Justice in Canada* by Wendy Chan and Dorothy Chunn (2014).

The official facts

African-Canadian experience

“DWB,” “Driving While Black,” is the ironic title that African Canadians and African Americans in the 1990s started giving to an offence that only they appear to be able to commit (Harris 1997; Meehan and Ponder 2002). In so naming their perceived discriminatory treatment by white police officers, the alleged victims attempt to turn the tables on the alleged offenders by making self-evident the nature of the alleged offence against them. The acronym DWB (Driving While Black) is modelled on the short-title form of standard criminal code offences such as B&E (Break and Enter), ADW (Assault with a Deadly Weapon) or DUI (Driving Under the Influence). But, as everybody knows, and despite a long history to the contrary, the criminal law is supposed to criminalize only people’s actions, not their ascribed characteristics such as race or gender or sexual orientation. Thus, as the name of an offence, DWB makes the racism to which it points self-evident in the name itself, without having to be formulated in an explicit accusation.

The salience of the complaint was given fresh support in the Fall of 2002 when *The Toronto Star* published a series of articles based on the records of the Metro Toronto Police Force itself, which appeared to show that “racial profiling” was a common practice in the force. The furore caused by the articles was surprising, given that racism in the Ontario criminal justice system had been documented at least twice in the previous decade, with substantial publicity on each occasion. Moreover, the two inquiries themselves followed a period of black activism involving the formation of the Black Action Defence Committee (Lennox Farrell, Sherona Hall, Dudley Laws and Charles Roach) after fatal shootings by police of young black men (Michael Wade Lawson and Lester Donaldson) in Toronto in 1988. The subsequent fatal police shooting of Raymond Lawrence, and the not guilty verdict in the trial of the Los Angeles police officers videotaped brutally beating Rodney King set off further protests and civil disturbances in May 1992, leading to the first of these inquiries. In his June 1992 report to the Premier of Ontario, Stephen Lewis³ stresses that the principal target of racism in Ontario is African Canadians. He reports the fear experienced in African-Canadian



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communities in Ontario as a result of this racism. He describes the gap between the Metro Toronto Police and organizations representing the African-Canadian population as a “chasm,” and indicts the province’s criminal justice system. He recommends the appointment of a Commission of Inquiry, which duly reported in December 1995. The report is damning, showing systematic racial discrimination in the processing of African-Canadian citizens, suspects and defendants at every stage of the criminal justice system.

The report’s study of police stops finds that 43 per cent of male black respondents reported being stopped by police in the previous two years, in comparison to 25 per cent of male whites and 19 per cent of male Chinese. For being stopped two or more times, the corresponding figures are 29 per cent, 12 per cent and 7 per cent respectively. The rates are highest for the 18–24 years age group in each racial category, and decline with increasing age.

The Commission’s findings suggest that racialized characteristics, especially those of black people, in combination with other factors, arouse police suspicion, at least in Metro Toronto. Other factors that may attract police attention include sex (male), youth, make and condition of car (if any), location, dress, perceived socioeconomic status and lifestyle. Black persons perceived to have many of these attributes are at high risk of being stopped on foot or in cars.

(Commission on Systemic Racism in the Ontario Criminal Justice System 1995: 92)

The report’s stance is expressed as follows:

Racism has a long history in Canada. It has led to denials of basic civil and political rights to Canadian citizens. It excluded adults from jobs and children from schools, limited opportunities to acquire property, and barred people from hotels, bars, theatres and other recreational facilities. In these ways, racism has restricted the life-chances of some Canadians while it benefited others.

Though many Canadians throughout history have accepted racism, others have vigorously resisted it. These efforts have had significant results. While the law once promoted or permitted unequal treatment because of race, today it generally prohibits such discrimination.



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Despite these important achievements, racism is still entrenched in Canadian society. Racism in Canadian society continues to shape the lives of Aboriginal, black and other racialized people. In order to make further progress in eliminating racism, Canadians must grapple with racism's systemic dimensions.

(Commission on Systemic Racism in the Ontario Criminal Justice System 1995: 21)

Eighteen years later, in 2013, Canada's Correctional Investigator reports that "9.5 per cent of federal inmates today are Black (an increase of 80 per cent since 2003/04), yet Black Canadians account for less than three per cent of the total Canadian population." He notes that "all black inmates were viewed as having gang affiliations by correctional staff, even where the label was demonstrably false" (White 2015: front page, citing Office of the Correctional Investigator 2013: 9). Moreover,

Over the past 10 years, the Aboriginal incarcerated population increased by 46.4 per cent, while visible minority groups (e.g. Black, Asian, Hispanic) increased by 75 per cent. During this same time period, the population of Caucasian inmates actually declined by three per cent.

(Hunter 2013: para. 4; see also McIntyre 2016)

But then 140 years before 1995, the black Canadian abolitionist Samuel Ringgold Ward writes,

I beg to say, that sometimes the unfortunately disproportionate number of Negroes in prisons is pointed out to me as evidence of the very great criminality of my people. I ask any one to say, what chance of a fair and just trial a Negro could have, before such a judge as Mr. Justice Haliburton, when a white man was prosecutor? (I happen to know how Negroes have suffered in such cases.)

(Ward 1855: 266, quoted in Jones 2016: n. p.)

To appreciate the contextual reference to Mr Justice Haliburton, readers are strongly encouraged to turn to the "Saturday Morning File" by El Jones (2016) that is the source of this quote from Ward. There is no more acute Canadian commentator writing today about race and the criminal justice system, or racism in general, than the remarkable El Jones.



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Aside, then, from the genocidal subjection by European settlers of the aboriginal peoples of the Americas (taken up in Chapter 11), racism's long history in Canada includes a substantial period of black slavery, a fact of which many Canadians seem unaware. After confederation in 1867, "if you did a chart of Canadian immigration policies right up to and including the early 1960s, it would be like a chapter out of a scientific racism textbook," according to University of Waterloo professor of History, James Walker.⁴ That history includes the immigration experience of Chinese, Japanese and East Indians in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, culminating in the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1923; the internment of Japanese Canadians in World War II (not one ever being charged with espionage); the exclusion of African Canadians from professions, employment, hotels, clubs, resorts, places of entertainment and the like, lasting in some places into the 1950s and 1960s; the similar exclusion of Jews and the turning away of the ship, the *St Louis*, carrying Jewish refugees from the Nazis in 1939 and so on. Walker (1997) tells the story of racism's legal history in his *"Race," Rights and the Law in the Supreme Court of Canada*. An artistic version is rendered in James Rolfe and George Elliot Clarke's remarkable opera *Beatrice Chancy*, while students should not pass up the Canadian sociological classic, *Africville* by Clairmont and Magill (1999). Canadians are better acquainted, it often seems, with the story of slavery in the American South and the continuing racism entrenched in US society.

The contemporary aboriginal experience

"Racial tensions flare in Saskatchewan after killing of First Nations man" was *The Globe and Mail* headline on 14 August 2016 (Canadian Press 2016). A white farmer opened fire on five indigenous men who drove onto his property looking for help with a flat tire. One was killed. The initial RCMP "press release said that people in the car had been taken into custody as part of a theft investigation" (Canadian Press 2016: para. 15). Some social media commentary was "racist and derogatory," expressing satisfaction with the killing. The farmer was charged with second-degree murder.

There is a long precedent for such events. An inquiry into how the legal system in the neighbouring province of Manitoba treats aboriginal people was undertaken in the Spring of 1988. The two judges, Justice A. C. Hamilton and Judge Murray Sinclair, who conducted Manitoba's Aboriginal Justice Inquiry published their report in August 1991 (Aboriginal Justice Inquiry of Manitoba 1991). The



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inquiry was sparked by two cases, involving aboriginal people as victims, in which racism appeared to play a role in the crime, the investigation and the actions of officials and citizens. These cases were seen by many as examples of the way Manitoba's justice system was failing aboriginal people.

The first was the murder of Helen Betty Osborne in The Pas in November 1971. She was a 19-year-old Cree woman who was abducted by four men, driven to a remote lake, sexually assaulted and brutally murdered. No one was charged with the murder until 1986. The inquiry found that Betty Osborne would not have been murdered if she had not been aboriginal. The four men went looking for an aboriginal girl to party with, and when Betty Osborne refused, they took her out of town and killed her. The inquiry found racism in the RCMP's investigation of the case. The first suspects to be rounded up were aboriginal youths, some of whom were taken away for questioning without the consent of their parents. The non-aboriginal suspects in the case were not subjected to the indignities and insensitive treatment that the aboriginal people received at the hands of the police. Racism and the racial segregation of the town of The Pas were partly responsible for the silence of the people who knew the identity of the assailants – a silence which resulted in the 16-year delay in bringing suspects to trial and which continued to protect the identity of two of the four men involved in the crime. The inquiry also identified racism in the jury selection process. Ultimately, one man only was convicted of any crime (York and Roberts 1991a; Valpy 2015).

The second case was that of the fatal shooting of aboriginal leader, J.J. Harper, by a constable of the Winnipeg Police Department in March 1988 (Sinclair 1999). The inquiry found negligence in the investigation by the police department which was primarily concerned with vindicating the police by constructing a version of events in which Mr Harper could be blamed for his own death. In addition to negligence, the inquiry found racism in the police department, expressed in jokes and racist slurs (York and Roberts 1991b). The report of the inquiry revealed that aboriginal people, while comprising 11.8 per cent of Manitoba's population, represented at least 50 per cent of its prison population. Two paragraphs from the report summarize its findings:

The justice system has failed Manitoba's aboriginal people on a massive scale. It has been insensitive and inaccessible, and has arrested and imprisoned aboriginal people in grossly disproportionate numbers. Aboriginal people who are arrested are more likely than non-aboriginal



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people to be denied bail, spend more time in pre-trial detention and spend less time with their lawyers, and, if convicted, are more likely to be incarcerated.

It is not merely that the justice system has failed aboriginal people; justice also has been denied to them. For more than a century the rights of aboriginal people have been ignored and eroded. The result of this denial has been injustice of the most profound kind. Poverty and powerlessness have been the Canadian legacy to a people who once governed their own affairs in self-sufficiency.

(Hamilton and Sinclair 1991, citing Aboriginal Justice Inquiry of Manitoba 1991, Vol. 1: 1–2)

Among the reforms recommended in the report are the following (York and Roberts 1991c: A2):

- formal recognition of aboriginal self-government;
- the setting up of aboriginal courts as the first step in establishing an aboriginally-controlled justice system whose courts would have clear and paramount authority within aboriginal lands; alternatives to pre-trial imprisonment of accused people;
- alternatives to putting people in jail, such as stronger community sanctions against an offender;
- recruitment of more “natives” for employment in courts, the National Parole Board, jails and police departments;
- and the drafting of a charter of rights and freedoms that reflects aboriginal customs and values.

The authors of the report emphasize that more important than the reforms they recommend is this realization:

[T]he relationship between aboriginal people and the rest of society must be transformed fundamentally. This transformation must be based on justice in its broadest sense. It must recognize that societal and economic inequity is unacceptable and that only through a full recognition of aboriginal rights—including the right to self-government—can the symptomatic problems of over-incarceration and disaffection be redressed.

(Hamilton and Sinclair 1991, citing Aboriginal Justice Inquiry of Manitoba 1991, Vol. 1: 2)



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Manitoba's problems were put in a national context by the 1996 multi-volume report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (RCAP). Yet 22 years after the Manitoba report and 17 years after the report of the RCAP, Canada's Correctional Investigator reported in 2013 that for the country as a whole, "Aboriginal people represent a staggering 23 per cent of federal inmates yet comprise 4.3 per cent of the total Canadian population" (Hunter 2013: para. 5; see also Razack 2015). In February 2016, following a month-long investigation, Maclean's magazine reported that Canada's crime rate was at a 45-year low, dropping by half since its peak in 1991. Yet,

[b]izarrely, . . . the number of people incarcerated hit an all-time high. [Moreover,] while admissions of white adults to Canadian prisons declined through the last decade, Indigenous incarceration rates were surging: Up 112 per cent for women. Already, 36 per cent of the women and 25 per cent of men sentenced to provincial and territorial custody in Canada are Indigenous – a group that makes up just four per cent of the national population. Add in federal prisons, and Indigenous inmates account for 22.8 per cent of the total incarcerated population.

(Macdonald 2016: para. 2)

The reporting evidently had its effect. Five months later, the then recently elected liberal Canadian government was recognizing that too many people were in prison and that thoroughgoing reform was needed. Even as official violent crime rates fell to their lowest level in 50 years, the number incarcerated in federal prisons had risen 17 per cent between 2006 and 2016 during conservative Prime Minister Harper's time in office. One participant in a group assembled by the liberal Minister of Justice to brainstorm the issue summarized the views of others at the meeting: "There's too many people in jail . . . There's too many First Nations in jail. There's too many people with mental-health issues. There's too many women in jail. There's too many vulnerable in jail." (Fine 2016: para. 12).

The African-American experience

Useful and damning accounts of ongoing racism in the US criminal justice system are to be found in the reports of Amnesty International (for example, 1990a, 1992a, 1992b, 1998, 2003), which focus on police brutality (including torture), violations in prisons and jails, and arbitrary, unfair and racially prejudiced applications of the



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death penalty. The stories that hit the front pages of the world's press in 2015 (reviewed in Patterson 2015) about the Chicago Police Department's torture centre or "black site" at Homan Square (touched on in the CBS legal TV series, *The Good Wife*) only repeat what Amnesty International (1990b) and the police department's own Office of Professional Standards had reported in 1990: "Police routinely abused and tortured suspects at a station on Chicago's poor, predominantly black south side" (Associated Press 1992: H8). Between 2004 and 2015, more than 7,000 predominantly black, often low-level drug offenders, whose detention resulted in arrest, were detained there. How many were detained without arrest is officially unknown since the "station" kept no booking records. People "were essentially 'disappeared' – held and questioned without access to attorneys or phone calls" (Patterson 2015: para. 3) for an unknown period. In 2015, "after years of advocacy and a sustained grassroots direct action campaign, Chicago . . . became the first city in the [United States] to pass a reparations ordinance to compensate victims of police torture" (Hayes 2015: n. p.). Here we will focus on the gratuitously violent treatment meted out to those they encounter by officers of the Los Angeles Police Department (LAPD), starting with the case of Rodney King as a perspicuous example.

The beating of King, an African American, in the Spring of 1991 consisted of 56 truncheon blows and seven kicks that crippled him. This kind of treatment, according to black and Hispanic Angelenos, is more or less routine. What wasn't routine was that an onlooker recorded the incident with his video camera and released the tapes.

While LAPD Chief, Daryl Gates, insisted that the incident was an aberration, many people saw it as typical of the tactics of that police force. For many in the black community in Los Angeles, the police are what one author calls "a redneck army of occupation" (quoted in Campbell 1991: A12). Young African Americans complain that they are continually stopped for questioning by the police who assume that they are gang members or drug dealers. Even the black police officers complain of harassment when they are off duty. The tactics which the LAPD uses to fight youth gangs and the so-called crack epidemic include military-style SWAT teams. As we note below, 25 years later, nothing much has changed.

Amnesty International (AI), as part of its ongoing monitoring of ill-treatment by police throughout the United States, investigated brutality in the LAPD and the Los Angeles Sheriff's Department (LASD) in the year following the Rodney King



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beating. Its report, *Police Brutality in Los Angeles*, published in June 1992, substantiates the complaints that had been accumulating. In its examination of cases in which the LAPD was ordered to pay damages in lawsuits brought against it, AI finds that

the police and Sheriff's deputies have used excessive force in a disturbing number of cases in recent years, often resulting in serious injury or death . . . In many of the cases police accounts of what happened were inconsistent with independent witness testimony or medical evidence.

(Amnesty International 1992a: 21)

The type of force used includes hitting people on the head with heavy metal flashlights or lead-filled straps known as "saps," even though hitting suspects on the head is generally prohibited. It involves police dogs attacking people who have surrendered or pose no threat, and not calling the dogs off when they should. And sometimes it means using "tasers" [a gun that fires two darts which give an electric charge on contact], described as having the stopping power of a small gun.

(Amnesty International 1992a: 21)

The description of weaponry in this account repeats Hunt's (1985) observations reported in Chapter 5 in relation to police conceptions of "normal force." Campbell (1991:A12) quotes Daryl Gates in 1982, defending the number of "choke-hold" deaths of black men in police custody: "We may be finding that in some Blacks, when the hold is applied, the veins or arteries do not open up as fast as they do on normal people." Campbell assumes that any trust African Americans placed in Gates up to the time of that utterance probably evaporated. When the four police officers charged in the beating of Rodney King were acquitted on 29 April 1992, there was an outbreak of riots, which Campbell writes about as the "largest civil disturbance in modern US history" (Campbell 1992:A11). They were echoed by the riots in Toronto referred to above.

Campbell's article reports on the conclusions of the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) about the way that law-enforcement officials handled the disturbances – that the need to process an unprecedented number of arrests (12,500) and a climate of "political vindictiveness" meant a wholesale stripping of civil rights. The study by the ACLU refers to the uneven application of the dawn-to-dusk curfew which resulted in arrests of homeless people, people on their



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own property and on their way to or from work; the round-up of suspected illegal immigrants, often arrested on the basis of their looks; and the hundreds of people who pleaded guilty and received criminal records because of the broad discretion on arrests given to police and the resulting overloaded court system.

Such policing of African Americans has been repeatedly studied and commented on. For example, in the first three quarters of 2009, of over 450,000 people stopped by officers of the New York City Police Department, “an overwhelming 84 percent of the stops . . . were of black or Hispanic New Yorkers” (Herbert 2010: para. 3). Nevertheless,

Street stops by Chicago police far surpass New York, ACLU finds [headline] . . . The analysis of the department’s own data shows that Chicago police stopped African-Americans at a disproportionately higher rate than Hispanics and whites, especially in predominantly white neighborhoods.

(Gorner 2015: para. 2)

One vehicle for such policing has been the so-called War on Drugs which was discussed in Chapter 7 in relation to class. In his study of the “ghetto underclass,” William Chambliss describes the consequences of the War on Drugs in terms of the relationship between race and criminalization in the United States in the 1990s. See Box 9.

BOX 9 Chambliss on race and the War on Drugs

The War on Drugs in the United States has produced another war as well: It is a war between the police and minority youth from the ghetto . . . The chasm between black and white in the United States grows deeper by the day, and the police, prosecutors, courts, and prisons are the steam shovel digging it wider.

Young black men make up about 6 percent of the population but 40 percent of those arrested for drug possession and trafficking and more than 50 percent of those convicted of violating drug laws . . . The white male population, which is five times as large as the black male population, accounts for only 37 percent of those convicted of drug offences, despite the fact that, as national household surveys show, whites are more likely to use illegal drugs than either blacks or Latinos . . .



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African American women and juveniles are particularly hard hit by the racially inequitable enforcement of drug laws. The number of women in state and federal prisons increased fourfold in the last twenty years of the twentieth century. The majority of female inmates are in prison for drugs, and the impact of this on black families is staggering, since 75 percent of the black female inmates are mothers. Discrimination in sentencing for black juveniles is incomprehensible by any standard. The number of white juveniles in locked detention for drugs has declined since 1985, whereas the number of non-white juveniles (mostly black) in locked detention has increased by 259 percent.

Source: William Chambliss (1999: 88–90): *Power, Politics, and Crime*.

The United States has held the record for the world's highest known rate of incarceration for many years. Martin Walker, writing in the *Guardian Weekly* (30 June 1991: 10), calls the US prison system "the American Gulag." The criminologist Nils Christie adopts the term for the sub-title of his book *Crime Control as Industry* (1994, 2000). In 1990, with one million prisoners in federal, state and county jails, the United States had a rate of 426 prisoners per 100,000 population, compared with South Africa at 33 per 100,000, the former Soviet Union at 268 per 100,000, and Great Britain at 97 per 100,000. By 1993, the US rate had climbed to 532 prisoners per 100,000 population (Christie 1994: 191). From 2002 to at least 2013, the United States had the highest rate of incarceration in the world. According to the tenth edition of the World Prison Population List compiled by the International Centre for Prison Studies at the University of Essex, in October 2013, the incarceration rate of the United States was 716 per 100,000 population. With about 4.4 per cent of the world's population, the United States housed about 22 per cent of the world's prisoners. The Centre's data for the United States are drawn from the US Bureau of Justice Statistics. The UK rate at that time was 148, Canada's 118 (Walmsley 2013). According to the eleventh edition of the List, by October 2015, the US rate had dropped slightly. Its incarceration rate was then second to the Seychelles (Walmsley 2015).

The United States imposes longer sentences than any other industrialized country. In 1990, one quarter of the inmates of the federal prison system were serving sentences of more than 15 years, one half were serving sentences of more than seven years.



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The US criminal justice system is devastating for African Americans. In 1990, “one in four black men aged 20–29 is either in prison, on probation, or on parole (compared to one in 16 for whites)” (Walker 1991: 10).

Walker explains that he uses the term “Gulag” because he sees parallels between Stalin’s imprisoning people because of their social class and perceived threat to his system and the US treatment of African Americans. “And there is an uncomfortable sense, even within the American establishment, that the criminal justice system is racist in practice, even when it claims to be neutral in principle” (1991: 10).

The point is that the criminal justice system has increasingly been used as the main vehicle through which the United States handles its social problems, a catch-all device which scoops up drug users, the mentally ill, the homeless and other social “failures,” and puts them out of sight and out of mind into the prison system. “Although we ignore those at the top, the corporations and the privileged, the state ‘is intrusive and disciplinary at the bottom, when it comes to dealing with the consequences of social divestment and economic deregulation for the lower class’” (Leonard 2015: 33, quoting Wacquant 2009 [2004]: 83). Referring to Wacquant, Leonard continues:

He contends that race plays a central role here. Just as the criminal is racialized in our imaginations, Wacquant points to three prominent images found in the media and policy debates . . . the “welfare queen,” the “teenage mother,” and the “deadbeat dad” (89). He notes that, “All three were stereotypically portrayed as African-American residents of the dilapidated inner city.”

(Leonard 2015: 33–34)

Sociology’s explanations

With the official facts of racial discrimination in the criminal justice system broadly established as above, what does professional sociology have to say about such criminalization based on race? How do sociologists go about trying to account, for example, for the criminalizing of African Americans and the relative de-criminalizing of whites? Some appreciation of the scope of theorizing about race can be gained from, for example, Back and Solomos (2009), *Theories of Race*



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and Racism: A Reader. Two broad positions can be identified within the structural or critical conflict approach to the theoretical understanding of race. The Marxist position treats race as an epiphenomenon of class, whereas the *neocolonial* position treats race as its own analytically separate structure of dominance. The difference between the two positions, that is, turns on the definition of the groups seen by the perspective to be in conflict. Under the first interpretation, racialized groups like blacks or aboriginals are seen to be members of the working class or proletariat. Under the second interpretation, they are seen to constitute their own, separate conflict group marked by their racial identity difference from other groups identified by race. Transcending both these positions is the postcolonial perspective based not on class or race, but on the notion of surplus population that we encountered in Chapter 7. We present these positions in turn, including some representative studies. In addition, from legal studies has arisen a perspective known as “critical race theory” that takes as its mandate “to identify the overt and covert ways in which race affects the identification, interpretation, and resolution of socio-legal problems” (Russell 2000: 47; see Aylward 1999; Delgado and Stefancic 2012). We address it briefly in the Conclusion to this chapter.

Marxist accounts

Oliver Cox: caste, class and race

In his useful review, Watson (1984) cites the work of Oliver Cox (1948) as an example of the Marxist position:

Cox, an eminent black American sociologist, has argued that the situation of the vast majority of black Americans can best be understood if we conceive them as being part of the propertyless American proletariat in a capitalist economy . . . To understand the problem of black Americans is to understand their position as proletarians . . . Broadly speaking, says Cox, the black proletariat shared many of the economic experiences of the white working class, owing to their being in a similar overall social and economic position; both white and black workers had to respond to changes in the capitalist labour market. Revolts and protests of black people against their exploitation both before and after slavery were very similar to the revolts, protests and similar expressions of alienation of white people.

(Watson 1984: 54)



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Thus, “the racial tensions between white and black proletarians were part and parcel of an attempt by the dominant classes to divide the proletariat against themselves in order to prevent a revolution or some other form of class-based collective action” (Watson 1984: 55). Recall from Chapter 7 that Comack (1985) deploys more or less the same argument in her account of the racial tensions between white and Chinese workers in British Columbia in the early twentieth century. In his representation of the two positions arising from within a structural conflict perspective on race, Watson does not address the topic of crime or criminalization. This is done, however, in *Reading Racism and the Criminal Justice System* (Baker 1994), a collection of 17 separately authored chapters published by Canadian Scholars’ Press in Toronto. In “Capitalism without racism: Science or fantasy?,” William Sales, Jr (1994 [1978]) argues the more or less orthodox, Marxist, class-conflict position that capitalism needs racism by first proletarianizing blacks so as to exploit their labour power, then separating them from the white proletariat in a separate labour market for the more despised blue-collar jobs. The more that blacks resist these “nigger” jobs, the more they sink into the reserve army of unemployed labour, to be replaced in the dirty jobs by immigrant third-world workers. White workers attach themselves to the “centre,” while blacks are forced to the “periphery.” Theoretically, race remains subordinated to class in this analysis. This position has been used to explain the Los Angeles riots described above in “The African-American experience.”

Mike Davis: explaining the Los Angeles riots

Mike Davis, co-author of a study of the Los Angeles Police Department (LAPD; Davis with Ruddick 1988), was interviewed for an article in the Summer 1992 edition of *Covert Action Information Bulletin*, on the events in Los Angeles in April 1992. Davis’s first point is that the majority of those who participated in the events, particularly the youths who started them, saw those events as a rebellion (some referred to it as a slave rebellion), not a riot. Davis explains that the revolt had three major dimensions:

It was a revolutionary democratic protest characteristic of African-American history when demands for equal rights have been thwarted by the major institutions. It was also a major post-modern bread riot – an uprising of not just poor people but particularly of those strata of poor in



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southern California who've been most savagely affected by the recession.
(Davis 1992: 12)

Third, it was an inter-ethnic conflict – particularly the systematic destroying and uprooting of Korean stores in the black community.

Davis compares the April 1992 rebellion to the Watts rebellion of August 1965. Martin Luther King described what happened in Watts as a class rebellion: “a rebellion of the underprivileged against the privileged” (1992: 12). In both cases, law-and-order politicians and officials attempted to blame the actions on a criminal fringe, but surveys in the community after the Watts rebellion showed it to be extremely popular (22,000 people involved actively and another 50,000 to 60,000 people standing by “cheering them on” [1992: 13]). Davis estimates that the 1992 rebellion involved twice as many people, with probably the same ratio of active participants to passive supporters. Of those arrested in the early stages in 1992, 52 per cent were Latino and 39 per cent were black. Davis concludes it was as much a Latino as a black rebellion and the trigger was the current economic condition – “the worst recession southern California has seen since the '30s” (1992: 13).

Its effects were disastrous for recent immigrants from Mexico and Central America in areas like Hollywood and MacArthur Park. The driving force behind the looting, Davis notes, was the need for basics like food and diapers, in those neighbourhoods where the stores were shut down for three or four days and power outages caused food to spoil. Davis reveals that the repression that resulted from the uprising was, from a very early point, federalized and federally driven. In response to a request from Latino store-owners for protection, the government sent in 1,000 personnel from the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) and Border Patrol, and within a month, nearly 700 people, most of whom had had no charges laid against them, were deported. The LAPD, in contravention of city policy, assisted the INS and the Border Patrol in rounding up people who were then deported. The backlash that developed because of the looting was very hard on Central Americans, particularly Guatemalans hoping to achieve protected status and Salvadorans trying to retain protected status in the United States. Davis points out that there is, however, some positive effect for the Central American community: “Because they sense that they've become the most vulnerable scapegoats, the Central American community is rushing to register voters, to



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encourage people to become active in local politics and to make alliances” (1992: 15).

Another positive outcome to the rebellion, according to Davis, is the politicizing of the gangs. Instead of continuing the endless cycle of destructive gang warfare, Crips and Bloods were holding meetings and gatherings, hundreds of them coming together as liberation fighters instead of gang bangers. These meetings were violently broken up by the police who, Davis asserts, “seem to fear gang unity above all else” (1992: 17). Davis talks about the information-processing capabilities of the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) and local police forces. The mass arrests following the rebellion depended upon the databases on black and Latino youth that the LAPD and LASD had put together over the previous decade, and also the FBI’s expertise in analyzing video and photographic evidence. The FBI joined with the police in demanding that the media and private individuals surrender every negative and all videotape taken during the rebellion. Davis sees the real danger with massive databases and information technologies as being their application in the management of criminalized populations.

In Los Angeles I think we are beginning to see a repressive context that is literally comparable to Belfast or the West Bank, where policing has been transformed into full-scale counterinsurgency (or “low-intensity warfare,” as the military likes to call it), against an entire social stratum or ethnic group. (Davis 1992: 18)

Davis makes the point that Landsat satellites, linked to Geographical Information Systems (GIS) software offer the possibility of monitoring complex urban systems so minutely that the movements of individual automobiles and people may soon be distinguishable. This will revolutionize the policing of inner-city areas, experts predict. Davis sees the possibility of everyone on probation or entered into one of the criminal databases having to submit to some form of 24-hour electronic surveillance. Davis points to the features that make the aftermath of the rebellion “the biggest domestic repression since the Nixon era” (1992: 19). The city attorney and District Attorney in Los Angeles suspended plea-bargaining and went for the maximum possible indictments, bail amounts and sentences. Looters, who would normally have been fined, were sentenced to two or three years in prison. Curfew violators were held on \$8,000 bail. Davis points out that the curfew, nominally citywide, seems to have been enforced only in communities of colour.



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The technological features of policing that Davis comments on which were relatively new at the time are now, of course, standard.

Center for Research on Criminal Justice: policing the slave economy

Perhaps the most notable characteristic of the criminalization of African Americans is its stubborn persistence. The violent and discriminatory modes of treatment of blacks by the predominantly white criminal justice system – above all, by the police in the South – that in 2016 are visible on computer, cell phone and television screens, that are complained of by Black Lives Matter, and that are substantiated by any number of official and academic reports are the same as those observed and reported on each decade going back into the past. According to the Center for Research on Criminal Justice (1977: 20), that continuity is no accident. Its roots, they argue, are in the policing of the American slave economy that began with the Southern slave patrols in the late 1700s.

Black slavery was the dominant mode of production in the antebellum South, and the largest 2-3 per cent of the planters ruled the legislatures of each of the Southern states. These legislatures established slave codes, starting with South Carolina's 1712 copy of the Barbados statute. The slave codes which provided for the brutal slave patrols, both protected the planters' property rights in human beings and held the slaves, despite their chattel status, legally responsible for misdemeanours and felonies.

The plantation slave patrols, often consisting of three armed men on horseback covering a "beat" of 15 square miles, were charged with maintaining discipline, catching runaway slaves and preventing slave insurrection. In pursuing this duty, they routinely invaded slave quarters and whipped and terrorized Blacks caught without passes after curfew. They also helped enforce the laws against slave literacy, trade and gambling. Although the law called on all White males to perform patrol service, the large planters usually paid fines or hired substitutes, leaving patrolling to the landless or small landholding Whites. These Whites hated the planters, who controlled the best land and access to markets, almost as much as the slaves, but whatever the object of their anger, the slaves were its most frequent target. The slaves in turn resisted the patrollers with warning systems and ambushes ...



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Policing, then, in its earliest years, developed as a planter class strategy of race and class control, designed both to keep the Black slaves in subjugation and to exacerbate the contradictions between Black slaves and poor Whites. The patrols did not operate with bureaucratic routine and tended to lapse between outbreaks of slave revolt. They lasted, however, until the Civil War. In many respects, the post-Reconstruction Black laws re-established the police practices of the slave codes, while nominally changing “slave patrols” to “police departments.”

(Center for Research on Criminal Justice 1977: 20–21)

In Marxist terms, slavery is a particular mode of production. In this mode of production, the principal forces of production are land and labour applied mainly to agricultural production; in the American South, the principal crop was cotton, typically grown on plantations. The crucial relation of production was that between (a) the plantation owners who owned both the land and the labour, namely African or African-American slaves, and (b) the slaves themselves. The plantation owners both depended upon and exploited the slaves, much as feudal landlords were dependent upon and exploitative of their serfs. The political super-structure was in turn dominated by the landowners and their representatives in the legislatures of state governments. Accordingly, the criminal and civil laws established by these bodies were designed to preserve and enhance the slave mode of production. In this system, then, the slave patrols were an instrument of class domination and discipline. When the slaves resisted their exploitation, the slave police were used to crush their resistance in the name of the slave codes, the rule of law that embodied and reproduced the social relations pertaining to the slave economy. For a more structural Marxist account of race and class, though not focused on criminalization, readers may wish to consult the brief, but useful, discussion by economist Richard Wolff (2016) which emphasizes the role that racism plays in legitimating inequality produced by capitalism.

Neocolonial accounts

Critics of the Marxist class model of racial subordination deny that “the socio-economic position, experiences, or vested interests of black people can be equated with those of members of the white working class” (Watson 1984: 56). They argue that societies like those of Canada, the United States or the United Kingdom are characterized by an “institutional” or “systemic” racism so profound that it



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separates blacks from whites. In effect, blacks form an “internal colony” within white society. This theoretical position is called accordingly *neocolonialist*. It has been applied to the understanding of the nature of black exploitation in the ghettos of urban America in Carmichael and Hamilton (1967). It is also the position of Wotherspoon and Satzewich (2000 [1993]: chapter 7) in their systematic analysis of the race, class and gender relations of First Nations people in Canada.

It may be used to explain what would otherwise be an anomaly in the official picture of racial criminalization. The apparent anomaly is that the overall result of many sentencing studies, particularly in the United States, is that in aggregate there is no appreciable disparity between blacks and whites in sentencing outcomes. However, the aggregate result conceals two contrasting patterns of differential sentencing. For the same offence, with legal factors held constant, blacks may receive either more severe or more lenient sentences than whites (Gibson 1978). Again, both differences can be explained as the outcome of the same structure of subordination. Thus, for example, when blacks kill blacks, they are treated more leniently than when whites or blacks kill whites. Since blacks are not regarded as quite fully human or quite fully civilized, their loss does not count as highly as that of whites, and self-predation is after all only an expectable reversion to type. In his study of judicial treatment of intra- and interracial homicide in ten counties in North Carolina throughout the 1930s, Garfinkel (1949: 380) reports “the paradigmatic formulation of one informant, ‘No Guilford County jury would give a nigger the chair for killing another nigger. It just doesn’t seem worth it.’” Accordingly, it is not murder, but manslaughter that is “peculiarly a Negro’s offence” (1949: 380). Garfinkel concludes:

Crudely put, it is as if the white court will not allow that the Negro as a person is of sufficient complexity and worth to make a conviction of [first degree murder] . . . reasonably representative of the moral precepts that have been violated.

(Garfinkel 1949: 380)

Racism similarly may be said to account for the scandalous infant mortality rates among blacks in the United States. On the other hand, when black males were suspected of raping white women, only lynching and castration were really good enough. According to Amnesty International (2003), reviewing studies reported since the 1990 comprehensive study by the US General Accounting Office, the race of the victim continues to be a factor in the imposition of the death penalty in the



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United States. Those who murder whites are more often executed by the state, whether the offender is white or black.

The case of the treatment of the aboriginal peoples in Canada is not dissimilar, if not so dramatic. It is not unusual for judges and magistrates practising in the North to treat aboriginal offenders more leniently than they would whites. But in the South, the poverty of indigenous offenders sentenced to pay a fine for minor offences like being drunk and disorderly results in their supplying a vastly greater proportion of the inmates of prisons than their numbers in the general population would predict (Hagan 1991: 180–181). It is not necessary for the judiciary to be racist. In a racist society, just by doing their job, they keep the bothersome “natives” off the streets.

Postcolonial accounts

Sidney Willhelm: prelude to genocide?

Sidney Willhelm (1994 [1986]) reviews both the class and neocolonial models, and finds them both wanting. Both, he argues, rely on the economic proposition that capitalism requires and exploits black labour, whereas the goal of post-industrial capitalism is to eliminate the need for labour altogether. “Instead of a transformation of work, work is itself being destroyed; while the labour that is drawn from the market is transformed, the need for labour is simultaneously being curtailed” (Willhelm 1994 [1986]: 42). Only the assumption that capitalism has moved into a new post-industrial, technological phase, relying on automation to replace human labour, can explain the extraordinarily bleak economic facts about blacks in the United States at all class levels.

The most important of these facts, he writes, is the permanent joblessness among black men. For example, “the college-educated black male is four times more likely to be unemployed than his white male peer” (Staples 1994 [1987]: 66, citing a 1982 study). Anticipated in reports from the 1960s, which spoke of two separate societies emerging in the United States, “Black removal from the economy” (Willhelm 1994 [1986]) is being realized in the decades since then.

When ... automation is considered as a production technique that is no longer labour dependent, then the affected blacks lose not only their jobs but their class standing as well; they become not members of an



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underclass but declassed people.

(Willhelm 1994 [1986]: 42)

Such a precarious position, ventures Willhelm, is a possible prelude to genocide. From being useful commodities under slavery, to useful wage labour under industrial capitalism, they have become a *surplus population* of useless people under post-industrial capitalism, as we saw in Chapter 7. Susan Searls Giroux draws our attention to the *racialized* – if culturally coded as *raceless* – character of the question of:

how to dispose of . . . those populations whose culture or character is alien and alienating, whose patterns of work and consumption are neither required nor adequate, whose presence takes up too much valuable space, whose movement remains the source of too much unease, whose settlement threatens to drain once abundant and now dwindling economic and ecological resources.

(Giroux 2010: 4)

As such a surplus population, blacks await their “Indian” fate of “conditional genocide” (Sartre 1968, cited in Willhelm 1994 [1986]: 49). Christie (1994: 173–174) entertains the same stark proposition, though in relation to “the lower classes, easily transformed into the dangerous classes.” This combination of race and class, embodied in the idea of a surplus population derived from Marx, is captured well in the following words of Chris Hedges. Speaking of Cleveland and Philadelphia, the sites of the 2016 Republican and Democratic national conventions, he says:

These are Potemkin villages, where the downtowns are Disneyed, and three and four blocks away people are living in appalling poverty. We have responded to surplus labor, as Karl Marx says, in our deindustrialized internal colonies, to quote Malcolm X, by putting poor people of color in cages all across the country. Why? It’s because [of] surplus labor—corporate entities cannot make money off of surplus or redundant labor. But when you lock them in a cage, they make \$40,000 or \$50,000 a year. This is the system we live in.

(Hedges 2016a: n. p.)

Finally, to return to Canada, where increased use of imprisonment is also a prevalent way of handling the surplus population, the immigrant portion of the



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racially defined dangerous classes may also face removal in the form of deportation. As Reiman and Leighton (2013) and others have often pointed out, and as we noted in the Introduction to Part III, official crime statistics reveal a typical “criminal” who is male, young, poor, urban and black. Thanks to media depictions, this typification becomes a stereotype in the public mind (Leonard 2015: 1), with the racial component often, it seems, emphasized. Crime, especially violent crime, comes to be associated with race, thus with “coloured” immigrants, and thus with calls for their deportation when convicted of crime. See also our discussion of Henry and Tator (2002) in Chapter 10.

Although we devote Chapter 11 to postcolonialist theorizing, we include Willhelm’s study here both because his concern is with the fate of African Americans in the United States, and because his analysis is not poststructuralist in character. When we consider studies of postcolonialism in Chapter 11, it is in an imperial context and is taken up with the writings of authors coming from a poststructuralist perspective.

The grammar of race

It was an attack on Rinelle Harper, but to her loved ones, it was an assault on her community.

(Carlson 2014: front page)

As we saw in Chapters 7 and 8, checking the dictionary for the meaning of a word can be a useful reminder of the fact that words quite typically have more than one meaning and even more possible uses. This is true of “race.” The online Oxford *Living Dictionaries* (2016) of English give three definitions of race, the one to do with competing, one meaning ginger root and the one relevant here to do with divisions of humankind: “each of the major divisions of humankind, having distinct physical characteristics.” But this third meaning has itself seven variants. “Race” can mean the following:

1. the fact of belonging to such a group (“people of mixed race”);
2. a group of people sharing the same culture;
3. a group of people with a common feature;
4. each of the major divisions of living creatures;
5. a distinct population within a species of animals;



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6. a group of people descended from a common ancestor;
7. ancestry itself (archaic).

That is, “race” can be used to distinguish human beings from birds (the human race), sub-species of a species of animal, men from women (“some male firefighters still regarded women as a race apart”), or to refer to a multi-generational family, an ethnic group like the Scots or a major division of humankind based on physical characteristics. The dictionary gives the expression “people of all races, colours and creeds” as a prime example of the use of the term “race.” But even here, it is utterly commonplace to observe races being distinguished on the basis of colour and creed. We have already referred to the different “colours” above, and one can hear discrimination against Muslims being referred to as racism. Moreover, the phrase “a race apart” also occurs in the quote from Radzinowicz (1966: 38) in Chapter 7. It does not, however, refer to a gender, but to a group resembling a class.

The lesson to be derived from this brief visit to the dictionary is that these meanings do not share a single feature in common, not even “division of a group.” But they do share an overlapping set of family resemblances that provide a resource, or set of resources, a set of linguistic tools, with which members of society can produce and recognize meaningful utterances containing the word “race.” And members of society clearly have uses for the language of race, and though these uses include making racist discriminations, they are certainly not confined to that alone. Being endearing, joking, calling out a rival, making political statements, collecting census data or employment equity figures, carrying out professional sociological analysis, telling stories, constructing historical accounts, denouncing, putting down, lifting up, swearing, justifying and excusing actions, seeing criminality, etc. – all can all be done with racial terms. And it clearly matters who is using the racial term in question. Context is crucial, as always.

It is crucial in the following regard. As with gender (recall Wowk’s [1984] study from Chapter 8) and sexual orientation, racial terms carry ranked connotations; namely, positive, neutral and derogatory (Watson 1983: 34). Thus, in that order, we have “lady,” “woman” and “slut”; “gay,” “homosexual” and “queer/faggot”; “African American/Canadian/etc.,” “black” and “nigger”; and the correlative, if shifting, terms “aboriginal/indigenous,” “native,” “Indian,” . . . In each case, rights activists for the groups concerned have successfully defanged the hateful insult contained in the negative term by adopting it for exclusive use among group members. In other words, it makes a difference whether the



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membership category is being used by one to whom it applies or not. The need for such radical identity politics hardly needs detailing here, but Watson considers a case that is starkly illustrative. The following are data extracts from his study of police (P) interrogations of suspects (S) in a large US city. In this case, a white male is accused of killing a black male.

Example A1

P: Why did you shoot at this G{...}?

S: He's a nigger.

Example A2

P: Well then did you know that you were shooting at G... or did you shoot at him just because he was colored, period?

S: He's a nigger.

P: And that's why you shot him and er.

S: That's why I shot him.

(Watson 1997 [1983]: 92)

In this case, a single membership category is sufficient to give a hearable reason for murder. Similarly, in a news report of the trial of two young white men – Steven Tyler Kummerfeld and Alexander Dennis Ternowetsky – convicted of murdering Pamela Jean George, a young aboriginal woman, it is reported:

[I]n trial evidence, a friend testified that he asked Mr. Kummerfeld the next day what the accused had done the night of the slaying. According to his friend, Mr. Kummerfeld replied: "Not much. We drove around, got drunk and killed this chick." Mr. Ternowetsky also was quoted as telling a friend, "She deserved it. She was an Indian."

(Roberts 1997: A9)

The judge in the same case is reported to have "told jurors it would be 'dangerous' to convict the young man of first-degree murder . . . because Ms. George 'was indeed a prostitute'" (Roberts 1997:A9). Just as stark is the parallel case from the Montreal Massacre in which the killer is reported as saying to his victims before shooting them, "You are all a bunch of feminists. I hate feminists" (Eglin and Hester 2003: 3).

Subordination can be carried out, however, without the use of a racially marked category at all. Thus, Alvin Toussaint, an African-American psychiatrist,



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reports how on the streets of Jackson, Mississippi in 1966 he was approached by a white police officer and the following exchange ensued.

P: What's your name, boy?

D:Dr. Poussaint. I'm a physician.

P: What's your first name, boy?

D:Alvin.⁵

Here is a classic example of racial subordination without explicit reference to racial categories or descriptors. Notice that it apparently consists of nothing more than the employment of a single word (“boy,” twice) and an apparently innocent question (“what’s your first name?”). It is achieved through the use of the “stage-of-life device,” a membership categorization device consisting of a positioned set of categories for referring to persons according to their stage of life – baby, toddler, infant, child, adolescent, teenager, adult, girl/woman, boy/man and so on. The device is commonly used to praise or belittle persons by referring to or addressing them with a higher or lower positioned category respectively than would normatively apply to them (Sacks 1972b: 336). It is demeaning to refer to a man as a boy without qualification. It is worse, perhaps, to address him as such because one is doing it to his face. Doing so from a position of authority over the recipient is especially humiliating. And doing so by invoking the standardized relational pair of categories of white–black (Watson 1983), and thereby the whole history of US anti-black, racist oppression including the infantilizing of men is downright cruel. The victim responds with the one interactional resource available to him for peaceful resistance in defence of his dignity – namely, the occupational status hierarchy invoked by P acting as a police officer. “Dr. Poussaint. I’m a physician,” he says. But to no avail.

As the Preamble to the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* (United Nations 1948a), says: “Whereas it is essential, if man is not to be compelled to have recourse, as a last resort, to rebellion against tyranny and oppression, that human rights should be protected by the rule of law.”

Nothing is more controversial in the politics of race than the treatment of blacks, particularly young black men, by the criminal justice system in general and by white police officers in particular. Although matters have been changing rapidly in the 2000s, thanks to the photographic and videographic capabilities of cell phones and the increasing use of body cameras by police officers, traditionally the



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putatively discriminatory actions of CJS personnel have been conducted outside the public's ken. Consequently, it has been difficult to obtain hard data on the actual way race is taken into account by CJS personnel. The findings of the Commission on Systemic Racism in the Ontario Criminal Justice System reported above suggest an avenue of inquiry. To repeat, the Commission finds that "racialized characteristics, especially those of black people, in combination with other factors, arouse police suspicion," the other factors mentioned including "sex (male), youth, make and condition of car (if any), location, dress, perceived socio-economic status and lifestyle" (Commission on Systemic Racism in the Ontario Criminal Justice System 1995: 92). Just how, then, do CJS personnel in the course of their decision-making use race *in combination with other factors*?

It is more or less a sociological commonplace that police orient to the relevance of place. *Where* a report is coming from is treated as indicative of *what* it amounts to as police business (Sudnow 1965; Bittner 1967a, 1970; Sacks 1972c). Police treat the streets in terms of an ecology of relevances. This is a particular form of a more general use of location as an interactional device by members of society (Eglin 1980). Meehan and Ponder's (2002) mixed-methodology study of police stopping and interrogation practices in a US city confirms the relevance of place to patrol officers' attention to race: "The practice of racial profiling is inextricably tied not only to race, but to officers' conceptions of place, of what *should* typically occur in an area and *who belongs*, as well as *where they belong*" (Meehan and Ponder 2002: 402, emphasis in original). Thus, "African Americans are subject to disproportionate *surveillance* and *stopping* by the police when they drive through white areas of the community under study" (2002: 401, emphasis in original). Moreover, it's not just that such patterns of action by police reflect attitudes which they share with the predominantly white community they serve, but they arise too from the occupational necessity to indeed serve that community: "It is those citizens they must satisfy" (2002: 401; see also Bittner 1970: 9–10). Police actions reflect and reinforce residential segregation in US urban and suburban areas. They serve to protect and preserve place. Furthermore, the authors report that

various court rulings have supported the legal justification of using race as a proxy of criminality and dangerousness by creating legal precedents in which race can be used as the *sole* consideration or in combination with



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other contextual factors to trigger ‘suspicion,’ thus justifying police intervention.

(Meehan and Ponder 2002: 424)

For a more ethnomethodological answer to the question posed above, we may turn again to Maynard’s (1984) study of plea-bargaining in a California municipal court.

Maynard: a case of the use of race in plea-bargaining

Like the cases treated in Chapters 7 and 8, that involving race considered by Maynard is one of a series negotiated by the attorneys at a “pre-trial and settlement conference” with or without the presence of a judge (J). “Although judges contributed to the discussion in a few cases, essentially they ‘rubber stamped’ decisions made by the attorneys” (Maynard 1982a: 349). Discussion includes naming the defendant, the charge (by title or penal code section) and any prior convictions.

J1: And now that brings us to Frank Bryan. Is he the poor chap sitting out there all by himself?

PD2: Yeah he’s the sweet man with the nice smile. And this is a six forty seven “f” and a one forty eight.

(Maynard 1984: 144)

Bryan is charged with disorderly conduct (647f) and resisting arrest (148).

The usual manner of handling such cases is to drop one of the charges in exchange for a guilty plea to the other. Because in this case the 148 charge carried a maximum penalty of one year in jail and a \$1000 fine, while the 647 offence had a maximum of six months and a \$500 fine, the 148 offence was considered the more serious of the two. And it is over which charge is appropriate that the DA and the PD contend.

(Maynard 1984: 67–68)

While the attorneys do maintain different positions on the significance of certain facts of the case, they do arrive at an agreement on the charge: the 148 will be dropped and the defendant will plead guilty to the 647f. Then they discuss the matter of the sentence. The DA reports that Bryan has a prior conviction for striking a police officer and disturbing the peace. He formulates this by saying that



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“it’s not uh this happy go lucky chap’s uh frst encounter with uh (the law),” to which the PD responds as follows: “PD2: Statistically if you got black skin you are highly likely to contact the police, uh substantially more likely than if you’re white, now c’mon, what do you want from him” (Maynard 1984: 112).

After some further consideration of the length of time the defendant has already spent in jail, the attorneys briefly haggle over the amount of the fine before agreeing to one of \$50. Maynard summarizes the plea negotiation in this case in terms of the issues raised, which include the “moral character of the defendant, the ‘facts of the case,’ and the significance of ‘prior record’” (1984: 113).

For the public defender, Frank Bryan is a nice guy whose only offence was being drunk, fighting with his family, and cursing in his own home. He was intruded upon there by police officers who may have roughed him up during the arrest. He has a prior record by virtue of being black and statistically more likely to encounter the police. For the district attorney, the defendant is one who gave the police much difficulty in making an arrest and who has a prior conviction for the same kind of conduct. These different interpretations buttress or provide the “reasonableness” of the original positions that DA3 and PD2 take up, and their disparateness is preserved as the negotiators, through bargaining sequences, reach agreement on both charge and sentence.

(Maynard 1984: 113)

The race of the defendant is explicitly invoked in this case, but in such a way as to mitigate the seriousness of the offence. The very argument that professional sociologists doing critical studies of the CJS use to point to racialized criminalization of blacks is here used by parties to the setting itself to press for a light sentence. Race is a members’ concept. The deeper point is that while *stereotyping* is harmful, it is hard to imagine how society could be possible without *typification*. For this argument by Schutz, taken up by Sacks, see Kim and Berard (2009: 268–270) and recall the quotations from Schutz in Chapter 1 of this book (“Members’ knowledge of crime”).

To repeat what was said in Chapter 7 and repeated in Chapter 8, Maynard’s study confirms again what many studies before his have attested; namely, that defendant attributes (typifications) are used in prosecuting, defending and sentencing offenders. But what his ethnomethodological approach reveals that



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other approaches do not is the *selective* and *contextual* use of such attributes by members of society themselves, as this consideration of the role of race in Frank Bryan's conviction and sentencing shows.

Conclusion

Racial (or ethnic) emancipation is a political project. It responds to discrimination that has been formally enshrined in laws, civil and criminal, which themselves expressed and were embedded in widespread and persistent, though arguably diminishing, racist public sentiment and practice. As politics, it is understood as political. That is, its expression in speech and writing is designed to persuade, to educate, to agitate and organize or mobilize a constituency towards taking action to advance a cause, to right wrongs, to gain rights and representation, to achieve justice. The political speech or tract is not the scientific paper or scholarly treatise which seeks to advance knowledge of a subject. For this reason, professors do not always make good politicians. Yet critical race theory (CRT), as a species of emancipatory sociology, defines itself as both political and scientific. "The goal of the CRT approach is to meld theory and practice, thereby narrowing the gap between what theory is and how theory operates in the real world" (Russell 2000: 47). It conducts studies (science), but for a political cause (emancipation of the racialized group). It is no different in this respect than correctional criminology seeking through scientific inquiry to "do something about crime." And though it speaks in scientific vein of "criminalization" and "racialization," rather than crime and race, its political motivation requires falling back on the pre-scientific, "two-set class" (Sacks 1992a: 47–48) of racial categories in which it traffics; namely, for the principal case, black and white. This distinction then affords the conceptual possibility of "white racism" and "internalized racial oppression" characteristic of "critical" sociological studies of race generally; for example, Pyke (2010). There is here a further case of the ontological gerrymandering that Woolgar and Pawluch (1985) identify as afflicting constructionist studies generally. Preserved within the overall perspective, whether inclusionist, separationist or transgressive, is "the Durkheimian theme of the relations between dominant, morally affirmed identities and subordinate, morally denied ones" (Cuff et al. 2016: 362), expressed in the terms of Harvey Sacks (1992a: 40–48) as an inference-rich pair of membership categories with asymmetric predicates available as a reasoning device for all practical purposes. Once again, a characteristic trope of a professional sociology is



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seen to rest on a practice of reasoning arising out of the ordinary linguistic practices constituting members' methods of sociological inquiry.

In just this way can it be seen how members of Rinelle Harper's family could find that the brutal attack on her constituted an "assault on her community," where "community" here stands for aboriginal people; how Iranian Canadians could be struck by a "sense of sadness" and "betrayal" with "the widening allegations against [Jian Ghomeshi] of sexual violence and his firing as host of CBC radio's Q . . . 'We wanted his success to be our success'" (Yew 2014: paras 2, 4; Ghomeshi was subsequently acquitted of all charges); and how, in the wake of a presidential assassination (that of US President J. F. Kennedy), African Americans could wait in trepidation to find out if they had done it. In all instances, the parties involved can be seen to be using what Sacks called the MIR categorization device (Sacks 1992a: 42–43; 1989: 274–275). Readers intrigued by this line of inquiry may wish to take up the collection of studies titled *Language, Interaction and National Identity* edited by Hester and Housley (2002).

Grand Chief Harper likened Ms. Harper's defiance – she would not die of her injuries – to that of her great-uncle Elijah Harper, the late Manitoba politician who stood up in the legislature and said "no" to the Meech Lake Accord. "This is the same thing Rinelle did in the frigid waters [of Winnipeg's Assiniboine River]. She was attacked, beaten, left for dead," he said. "She got back up from the waters and she said, 'No. This is not going to happen anymore.'"

(Carlson 2014: front page)

Exercises

1. Attempt to discover through official sources who is currently being held in solitary confinement in the prisons of your province, state or country. Compile a list of their names. Attempt to discover their "racial" background as officially recorded. Nations' prison systems are overseen by official inspection bodies. In Canada it is the Office of the Correctional Investigator. In the UK, it's Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Prisons. The United States appears not to have a single national inspection body. Inspections appear to be handled by each state. Possibly useful institutions at the national (that is, federal) level include the Federal Bureau of Prisons and the



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National Institute of Corrections. Amnesty International USA and prisoners' rights organizations may be helpful sources. The idea is to see which "racial group" is currently most subjected to this most "cruel and unusual punishment." Keep detailed notes in your notebook of the steps you took in this inquiry, the obstacles you faced and any solutions that worked or didn't work.

2. Note any instances of the everyday use of the language of race you observe during your course of study, particularly if they arise in the context of talk about crime. Consider them in light of the grammar section of the chapter.

Review questions

1. What are the similarities and differences between Marxist and neocolonial accounts of race? How could they be used to explain the differential stopping and carding of black and white people by police? Which approach do you favour, and why?
2. How does the postcolonial account of race differ from the Marxist and neocolonial accounts? What aspects of the experience of racialized minorities with the criminal justice system does it explain better than the other two theoretical approaches?
3. Including his cases from Chapters 7 and 8, say what you take it Maynard (1984) means when he says that lawyers' use of defendant attributes such as class, gender and race is *selective and contextual*. If this analysis is correct, what sociological significance does it have?

Further reading

- Back, Les and John Solomos. Eds. 2009. *Theories of Race and Racism: A Reader*. Second edition. Routledge Student Readers. London, UK and New York: Routledge. For more extensive coverage of the range of theories than is provided in this chapter.
- Chan, Wendy and Dorothy E. Chunn. 2014. *Racialization, Crime, and Criminal Justice in Canada*. Toronto, ON: University of Toronto Press. The book also includes consideration of immigration, poverty and mental illness, and inter-sectionality.
- Hester, Stephen and William Housley. Eds. 2002. *Language, Interaction and National Identity: Studies in the Social Organisation of National Identity in*



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Talk-in-Interaction. Aldershot, UK: Ashgate. Although focused neither on race nor crime, the book presents detailed investigations of how persons actually use national identity in their talk, the interactional uses to which such expressions are put, and the interactional consequences of such identity talk.

Notes

- 1 For example, Jeff Outhit, “Racism entrenched in university campuses, forum told,” *Waterloo Region Record*, 21 March 2016: www.therecord.com/news-story/6400143-racism-entrenched-in-university-campusesforum-told/ (Accessed 22 March 2016).
- 2 See El Jones, “You have to fight for your right to party: A brief history of Halifax bars and racism.” *Halifax Examiner*, 7 May 2016: www.halifaxexaminer.ca/featured/you-have-to-fight-for-your-right-to-party/ (Accessed 8 May 2016).
- 3 Stephen Lewis was a former leader of the Ontario New Democratic Party. He was later appointed Canada’s Ambassador to the United Nations, after which he became an inveterate campaigner on behalf of those suffering from AIDS in Africa.
- 4 *Kitchener-Waterloo Record*, 2 November 1990, B2.
- 5 The transcript is taken from Watson (1984: 63), who simplifies it from Speier (1973: 188), who cites Ervin-Tripp ([published as] 1972: 218), who cites the original by Poussaint (1967). Speier and Watson both provide brief analyses of the interaction, while Poussaint himself describes the episode more fully. The analysis presented here is drawn from Eglin (2013c).

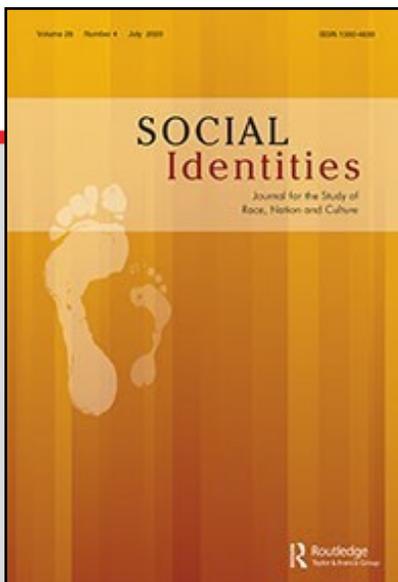


CHAPTER

4

"ASIAN FAIL"

CHINESE CANADIAN MEN TALK ABOUT RACE, MASCULINITY, AND THE NERD STEREOTYPE



This article by Kenneth Huynh and Benjamin Woo was published in

Social Identities: Journal for the Study of Race, Nation and Culture, 20(4-5):363-378

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"ASIAN FAIL"

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Introduction

Gedde Watanabe as Long Duk Dong in *Sixteen Candles*.

Ke Huy Quan as Data in *The Goonies*.

Brian Tochi as Toshiro in *Revenge of the Nerds*.

When we were growing up, these were the prevailing images of Asian¹ masculinity in popular media. Notwithstanding the occasional karate master or Fu Manchu-like underworld boss, most were bookish, awkward, and either asexual or pathetically lascivious. They were, in a word, nerds. We are hardly the first to notice this stereotype (Eglash, 2002; Goto, 1997; Nguyen & Tu, 2007), but this is a fruitful moment to re-examine it. On the one hand, the increasing cachet of information technology and sci-fi/fantasy/comic-book blockbusters has prompted many to claim nerds are no longer uncool deviants. On the other hand, after decades of multiculturalism – whether in its official, state-sanctioned form (i.e., Canada and Australia) or as a rhetoric (i.e., the US or UK) – there are those who would have us believe we now live in a ‘post-racial’ era. At best, these are both gross exaggerations, yet they are powerful narratives that influence how we interpret our experiences.

In this article, we want to explore the perceived nerdiness of Asians, comparing two accounts of what it means to be a man of Chinese ancestry living in a country like Canada, one which is dominated by people of European descent but has adopted an official stance of multiculturalism. It emerges from conversations we have had, identifying points of overlap between our respective research projects. Taken together, our research on Chinese Canadian identity (Huynh) and the cultural practices composing ‘nerd culture’ (Woo) suggests how complicated the everyday construction of identity can be. Identity is not a matter of a ticking off checkboxes. The various ways we label our lived, embodied experience intersect. Indeed, they may be played against one another in order to solve practical problems, but individuals do this in contexts where there are consequences to how they identify themselves.

To take one such context in particular, Canada’s ideologies and policies of multiculturalism influence Canadians’ conversations about race and ethnicity. Our analysis follows those of race scholars such as Li (2001) and Bannerji (2000) who have criticized official multiculturalism for constraining public discourse about



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race and ethnicity. Ordinary people and state institutions alike must speak about the unavoidable facts of visible difference in a coded language. Because this language is meant to be inoffensive to all groups, it is obfuscatory, and yet it is also the only mode in which respectable Canadians have conversations about 'controversial' issues such as race, ethnicity, and immigration (Li, 2001). As a result, according to Bannerji (2000), people cannot reasonably assess how race/ethnicity continues to structure the varying quality of people's lives. 'Race' and 'racist attitudes' alike become the properties of individuals, rather than outcomes of a nation-state's history of immigration, labour and civil rights legislation (among others). The nation is thus imagined as a community of basically equal citizens that nonetheless invariably manifests inequality, the distribution of which is significantly racialized (Helmes-Hayes & Curtis, 1998; Porter, 1965).

Recent popular discourses about Asians in Canada, which have reiterated historical racial stereotypes and ambivalently framed the group as educated and economically successful – but ultimately foreign – workaholics and nerds, make this clear. Asians' cultural peculiarities are blamed for changing and unbalancing social spaces and moods (Findlay & Köhler, 2010; Park, 2010). They may be the 'Model Minority', but Asians – and Asian men, in particular – are also framed as socially and sexually impotent (Chou & Feagin, 2008; Eng, 2001). These stereotypes about Asian men align closely with those surrounding so-called nerds and geeks.

For our purposes, 'nerdiness' is a particular performance of gendered identity, one of several possible (and empirically observable) 'patterns of [masculine] practice' (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005, p. 853) available for use in everyday social interaction. Nerds are perceived as infantile, effeminate, or just plain inept in comparison with the masculinity considered hegemonic in contemporary Anglo-American culture (Connell, 2005, p. 79; see also Anderegg, 2007; Kendall, 1999a, 1999b, 2000, 2011; Quail, 2011).² Indeed, the nerd is, in almost every respect, the inverse of the popular images of coolness, which are part and parcel of the hegemonic masculine ideal. It is precisely in their givenness that dominant forms of masculinity reproduce a reductive and constraining gender binarism, policing or outright precluding alternative masculinities (Halberstam, 1998), to say nothing of gender performances that further deviate from this norm (Butler, 1993). Given the proverbial struggle between nerds and 'jocks' in popular culture, it is not difficult to conceptualize this particular subcultural identity in gendered terms.



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Nerd culture is by no means inherently progressive, but learning to value a subordinate masculinity in its own terms is, in some small way, a radical gesture. However, coolness is not only gendered but also racialized – the hipster as, in Norman Mailer's unforgettable turn of phrase, 'the white negro.' Although scholars have documented the experiences of 'nerds of colour' (Brown, 2001; Bucholtz, 2001; Eglash, 2002; Kendall, 2011), a theoretical framework for understanding these empirically observable conjunctions of categories has not been provided.

Analyzing how some members negotiate categories like *Asian*, *nerd* and *man/masculine* in order to speak about race, gender and belonging in the multicultural nation-state, we want to take up the complex interactions between identity practices and social power and provide an explanatory account based in Membership Categorization Analysis (MCA; Sacks, 1972, 1979). In contemporary North America, individuals categorized as Asian often find themselves excluded *a priori* from certain ways of performing masculinity. Asian men effectively suffer from a form of 'racial castration' (Eng, 2001) as a result of representations that frame their bodily hexis as 'feminine' or suggest they are incapable of properly 'masculine' virility (Fung, 1991). Conversely, African Americans are frequently boxed into a form of hypermasculine performance (Pountain & Robins, 2000). Eglash (2002) describes these as 'orientalist' and 'primitivist' racisms, respectively: 'Thus exists the racist stereotype of Africans as oversexual and Asians as undersexual, with "whiteness" portrayed as the perfect balance between these two extremes' (p. 52). These conjunctures, while not all-powerful, pervasively influence what ways of being are understood as 'masculine' – and therefore appropriate or even necessary for someone laying claim to the category. Africa and men of African descent are thus conflated with oversexual primitiveness, while Asia and men of Asian descent are conflated with undersexual nerdiness.

Individual embodied experience – whether of race, gender, or any other kind – is intimately personal, and we recognize that our use of particular conceptualizations of masculinity or 'Asianness' runs the risk of representing these experiences as more simple, static, and universal than they are. Yet, as social beings who use language as part of our interaction with the world, we must inevitably describe and label our experiences, fitting them into concepts as best we can – though always leaving a 'remainder' behind (Adorno, 1990, p. 5). Everyday linguistic practice is thus powerfully performative (Butler, 1993), evoking, shaping and articulating identities as much as indexing them. In understanding how they work not only to describe



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but also to prescribe our social being, we hope to contribute to the deconstruction of the essentialisms standing behind them in order to develop more empowering articulations of individual and collective identity (see Hall, 1992).

Methodological note

As alluded to above, data employed in this article are drawn from two separate qualitative research projects.

The first, conducted by Huynh, examined understandings of identity amongst young, urban Chinese Canadians. It was based in Toronto, Canada, and employed in-depth interviews, focus groups, and ethnographic observation over a period of four months between 2008 and 2009. Twenty-five participants ranging from 20 to 34 years of age, and of equal gender distribution, were recruited from Huynh's immediate and secondary personal networks through snowball sampling. All participants were interviewed twice, and a third of these participants were shadowed in social contexts of their own choosing, ranging from a formal service at a Daoist temple to lunch at a popular dim sum restaurant. This project examined how discourses about race, ethnicity and language proficiency were negotiated by those who could be categorized as 'Chinese Canadian youth,' and how this influenced their perceptions and articulations of 'authentic' Chinese Canadian identity.

Woo's qualitative field study of one city's 'nerd-culture scene' was divided into two phases. In the first (2009–2010), he studied a series of subcultural institutions (e.g., specialty retailers, conventions, and fan clubs) through passive and participant observation and qualitative interviews with owners/managers and organizers. In the second (2011), a sample of six informants, balanced evenly between genders and representing three age cohorts and a range of geeky cultural practices, were selected, and a series of in-depth qualitative interviews were conducted. This research demonstrated how the stereotypical figure of the nerd in fact disguises a social world where people orient themselves to media and cultural goods through robust social practices.

Both studies used standard methods of qualitative data analysis on interview transcripts and fieldnotes. Here, our arguments and conclusions are principally grounded in discourse- and conversation-analytical readings of particular enunciations and exchanges in interview. However, we have also borrowed



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strategies associated with narrative inquiry in the italicized ‘interludes’ that follow. These passages re-present empirical materials generated through participant observation in a narrative form, taking their ‘storyline’ and dialogue from fieldnotes but supplementing them with necessary background information. We have made this choice for two main reasons.

First, we hope that using these narrative strategies to introduce our key informants, ‘Will’ and ‘Dan,’ provides a more holistic picture of these two individuals. As Silverman (2013, p. x) notes, ‘We live in an age when qualitative research is often identified with open-ended interviews which aim to peer into people’s inner experiences,’ but even the best interview is an artificial interaction. Moreover, when naturalistic observation is conducted, there is a tendency to relegate it to contextual background and focus on interview responses in research reports. Yet our conception of identity is embodied and interactive – features that are difficult (though certainly not impossible) to capture in short interview extracts. In these narrative interludes, we can see people negotiating identity in a context that more adequately approximates naturally occurring interaction, as we meaningfully orient to one another in mutual co-presence and duration (Schutz, 1967).

Secondly, as examples of self-reflexive storytelling, these interludes explicitly locate us in the knowledge-making process (Coloma, 2008; Sika Akoto, 2010; Trahar, 2013). In both cases, we were ‘insider researchers’ (Hodkinson, 2005), not only in terms of having some personal experience with the communities we were investigating but also, as racialized and gendered identities became salient, in terms of being visibly categorizable as fellow Asian Canadian men.

Fieldwork-based qualitative inquiry is unavoidably shaped by the particular relationships between researcher and researched – in Simpson’s (2006, p. 126) terms, it involves a tension between subjectivation and objectivation, but the ‘complicity’ is even tighter in cases like these.

This pushes us in the direction of narrative ethnography, which, according to Susan E. Chase (2005, p. 660), emphasizes the ‘intersubjectivity of the researcher and the researched as they work to understand each other’s voice, life, and culture.’ In these encounters, both parties are doing identity work on themselves and one another. In acting and speaking from their own ‘autobiographical understanding’ (Freeman, 2007), informants harmonize and clash with our experiences in various ways, and we inevitably interpret what they do and say in light of these situated understandings. We are trying to produce generalizable insights into the operation



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of racialized and gendered categories in multicultural societies, but along the way we must also confront our own voice – '[our] subject positions, social locations, interpretations, and personal experiences – through the refracted medium of narrator's voices' (Chase, 2005, p. 666). In this way, we seek to bring to light the strategies of 'subjection' (Cheng, 2000) or marginalization that are intertwined with the use of identity categories in everyday life, something we have not only seen and understood as social researchers but have experienced in our own lives.

Interlude: my dinner with anime

The Alternate Universe Club (AUC) was founded in the late 1970s as a gaming society at a mid-sized Canadian university. Anime fandom has become increasingly central to the group's activities, which now include game nights, weekly screenings, and cosplay workshops. People often assume that North American anime fans are Japanese or other Asian 'sojourners.' In fact, this club's membership was racially mixed, with sizeable white and Asian Canadian constituencies. Judging by their accents, however, very few of the Asian members were international students or recent immigrants.

I am at the AUC's first screening of the year, and we decamp to a sushi restaurant for dinner afterwards. The atmosphere is bubbly, as friends re-connect and new members are brought up to speed. Shortly after being seated, people sitting near me recognize the restaurant's ambient music as the soundtrack from an anime. They wonder aloud if it's a coincidence, or if the staff knew that they are 'total weeaboos.' This term is a substitute for the earlier 'wapanese,' which designated white anime and manga fans who are overly obsessed with Japanese culture and believe that their fandom gives them special access to it.

Partway through the meal, a member sitting across from me reaches for a deep-fried dumpling. As he picks it up, he fumbles with his chopsticks, dropping the dumpling on the table. In a quiet, matter-of-fact voice, he says, 'Asian fail,' before scooping it back onto his plate.

After dinner, we walk back to public transit. I'm talking with two guys about manga we've read. They tell me about a series about an anime club that reminds them of the AUC, and I mention Evan Dorkin's *Eltingville* comics, which sound kind of similar to me. 'Wait,' one of them says, stopping in his tracks, 'manga or comics?' It turns out they don't read Western comic books. 'Racists,' I quip. Both Asian, they ask



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if I'm 'allowed' to play the race card this way. When I say I'm half-white, they accept my right – 'well, half' – to call their practice discriminatory. We laugh and go our separate ways home.

Managing multicultural identities

In everyday discourse, people often treat racial and gender identities as if they were objective – they are just what you 'are.' But, as this episode from Woo's field notes demonstrates, they are also used in unpredictable ways. How, for example, is it that a diverse group of students that included several Asian Canadians identify themselves using a word that mocks white people who 'think they're Japanese'? How did Woo, as a biracial person, invoke race to make sense of the distinctions between different kinds of comic books? And what could it mean for someone to 'fail' at being Asian? Membership Categorization Analysis offers a framework to explain how race is discursively constructed in response to problems posed by everyday life in a multicultural society.

Membership Categorization Analysis developed from ethnomethodological conversation analysis and the work of Harvey Sacks. It is concerned with the forms of practical reasoning people accomplish using 'membership categories,' words that divide the world of experience up into discrete blocks with more or less predictable characteristics. Key to this analytical method is what Sacks calls 'membership categorization devices,' each of which comprises a collection of categories and rules for applying them (Sacks, 1972, p. 219). However, the same word can function as a category in different collections, so hearers' interpretations depend on contextual information. Thus, any given category's practical adequacy involves weighing a range of factors salient to the collection in question. Once a category has been applied, people can draw inferences about the 'category-bound activities' or 'predicates' associated with it.

The enunciation 'Asian fail,' for example, shows that its speaker recognized (1) that he was likely to be categorized as Asian based on how he looked, and (2) that proficiency with chopsticks is a predicate of that category. Dropping the dumpling on the table, he appeared to lack a characteristic bound to the category *Asian*. Whether just or not, this threatened his performance of 'Asianness' – a performance from which he could not opt out, given his appearance and the specific context (a sushi restaurant with someone who could also be categorized as Asian sitting



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across from him). Thus, the comment is an attempt to limit its impact by turning it into a joke, making a recognizable reference that suddenly made nerdiness a more salient category.³

Without diminishing the pernicious uses to which racialized and gendered categories have historically been put, we contend that a key strength of Membership Categorization Analysis is that it renders these categories mundane. They are neither sacred nor taboo but only one way among others that people organize their beliefs about the world, beliefs which can be more or less accurate and more or less fair. Our task, then, is to investigate – and critique – how they are actually used in real life. The continuity of categorization practices also means that categories conventionally recognized as important and weighty, which are salient in many social situations precisely because of the stakes involved, also interact with other ways of categorizing people and situations, as in the conjunctures of race and gender represented by the conflation of Asian people and nerds. The results of such intersections are radically context-dependent.

As previously mentioned, our context is Canada, a nation-state that developed an official policy of multiculturalism beginning in the 1960s to accommodate claims for recognition made, first, by Quebec separatists and, increasingly, by racial minorities who were finally being granted long-denied civil rights. Since then, ‘multiculturalism,’ ‘tolerance,’ and ‘diversity’ have become watchwords for majority and minority Canadians alike, often used to contrast their virtuous liberality with others’ intolerance (Bannerji, 2000). As an ideology, multiculturalism reinforces the belief that Canadians are a pleasant and accommodating people. According to 2006 census data (Statistics Canada, 2009a, 2009b), just over 16% of the Canadian population belongs to a ‘visible minority,’ though the proportion is much higher in cities like Toronto (42.86%) and Vancouver (41.72%). On first glance, then, it seems that official multiculturalism worked, allowing Canadians – and especially urbanites – not only to avoid racial strife but also to enjoy the cultural and economic benefits of cosmopolitanism. But the situation is more complicated than that.

In *On Not Speaking Chinese*, Ien Ang (2001, p. 105) argues that multiculturalism amounts to the repression of race:

In other words, logically speaking there is no reason why multiculturalism should be race-blind. The fact that it was tacitly assumed to be the case –



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i.e. that multiculturalism was synonymous to an overcoming of racism – is a key element in the repression of the discourse of ‘race’ from official and dominant rhetoric.

Official multiculturalism manages racial difference (and the potential for conflict it poses) by discursively transmuting it into ‘cultural diversity’ (p. 143). Although she is writing about Australia, Ang’s comments could just as easily apply to Canada and its ‘3-D’ (‘dance, dress, and dining’) approach to multiculturalism (Srivastava, 2007, p. 291). In a manner of speaking, then, Canada is a post-racial society, and yet, as the euphemism ‘visible minority’ suggests, race does not go away.

This situation poses a special problem for those who possess a body that is likely to be racialized but lack the cultural capital that is ‘supposed’ to go with it. In the language of Membership Categorization Analysis, they are presumed representatives of categories belonging simultaneously to the collection we might call *ethnicities* or *cultural backgrounds* as well as the ‘repressed’ collection *races*. While the predicates of racial categories are outwardly apparent physical differences and gross stereotypes about moral character, ethnic categories’ predicates are cultural: speaking the language, eating the food, listening to the music, and so on. Of course, it is precisely in diverse societies with long histories of immigration (and long-standing pressures from dominant populations towards assimilation) that the transferability of category-bound features between these collections breaks down. Multiculturalism thus produces systematic errors in people’s practical reasoning – ‘category mistakes,’ if you will.

The fate of the categorical word *Asian* is a case in point. It belongs to both collections simultaneously, *both* a racial descriptor based on the physical features believed to identify people whose ancestry can be traced to certain parts of Asia *and* an ‘ethnic’ category, albeit one that indiscriminately subsumes distinct Asian cultures *sub specie orientis*. Asian Canadians’ status as perpetual foreigners can thus be seen as an inaccurate inference of cultural features from physical appearance (as well as evidence of the persistent binding of the racial category *white* with the national category *Canadian*), and their perceived nerdiness involves associating stereotypes about Asian cultures (e.g., hard-working, intellectual, socially inept, and sexually repressed) with a subculture that shares those same predicates. Categorization practices are structured in part by the categories and rules of application furnished by larger social discourses, and the devices that can and can’t be used in polite conversation set up this trap for racialized Canadians.



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But, as our analysis of data from Huynh's study of Chinese Canadians' ambivalence towards their racialized identity will demonstrate, individuals enact and speak about how they are categorized in contrasting but interlinked ways. Although the informants we are calling Will and Dan produce different orientations to their presumptive categorization as Chinese, these 'position-takings' only make sense in the context of a field of identity, a structured 'space of possibles' where different race, gender, and class positions/performances define one another (Bourdieu, 1993, p. 30, 1996, p. 168; see also Coles, 2007; Kim, 1999).

Will and Dan: similarities in difference, differences in similarity

Will

Will has decided to join me and a group of my friends for an impromptu dinner. One of them wants udon, a Japanese noodle soup dish, so we go to a casual Japanese restaurant in the downtown core. Aside from Will and me, there's another man and woman. All of us are ethnic Chinese. Will and I were born in Toronto; the others were born in Southeast Asia.

Upon first arriving at the restaurant, it is apparent that Will is slightly anxious and out of place. While he was friendly and affable earlier in the evening, there is a tangible mood shift on his part. His eyes start darting around, and it seems as if he is trying to find his bearings. After we get our menus, my friends and I order quickly. Will, however, scrutinizes each item on the menu. As we wait for Will to order, we all laugh to deal with our collective discomfort. Eventually, he orders the first dish on the menu, niku udon, noodles in soup with slices of marinated beef. He seems to calm down after this, and a relaxed conversation ensues between the four of us.

But when our waitress arrives with our dishes, Will becomes visibly uncomfortable again and starts laughing. While the rest of us have already picked up our chopsticks and started eating, Will takes a moment to assess his utensils. I remember something that Will told me earlier: he doesn't really know how to use chopsticks. A few seconds later, my friends have noticed that Will isn't eating. There is a collective pause at the table. Will smiles, grits his teeth, and picks up his chopsticks. I feel this pinch in my shoulders as I realize he simply does not know to hold them. His efforts to get his food are clumsy and awkward. My male friend has a slight smile and looks downward. I grimace a similar expression. My female



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friend, she stifles a pained laugh. My male friend says something in an attempt to shift the attention away from Will. As we're leaving the restaurant after dinner, I notice that the majority of Will's meal is still unfinished. A few days later, recalling the incident, my male friend laughs and says, 'What kind of Chinese person doesn't know how to use chopsticks?'

Dan

Dan has invited to me a birthday party at his friend's condominium building's party room. When I arrive at the party, I notice that everyone is impeccably well dressed and also – with the lone exception of Dan's girlfriend, who is white – East Asian. Upon introducing myself to everyone in the room, about 30 people in all, I find out everyone in fact identifies as Chinese Canadian. I also find out that the majority of the people, if their occupations are any indication, are solidly upper-middle class. It's a room of Asian bankers, engineers and accountants.

There is a spread of food, alcohol and lively music, and everyone seems to be having a good time. The room is dimly lit, and the common room feels like an intimate bar or nightclub. People are at ease, and conversation seems to be easy-going. I speak to Dan and his friends throughout the evening. I tell his friends about the aims of my research project, tell them that I am interested in how ideas about race and the ability to speak Chinese influence those who can identify as Chinese Canadian. Some feign interest, while others offer anecdotes. Dan is friendly with everyone and is clearly in his element. He tells jokes, catches up with his friends and introduces me, this unknown social researcher. He kisses his girlfriend on the cheek every 15 minutes or so, checking in on her.

In the centre of the room is a television set. People have been taking turns at playing Rock Band, a video game that, as the title suggests, lets people pretend they're in a rock band. It comes with a set of peripherals shaped like little plastic instruments, including guitars, a drum set, and a microphone. Dan used to be in a punk band, and one of the partygoers asks him to play in order to get more people to join in. Without hesitation, Dan obliges. He takes the microphone and, without missing a beat, announces the name of his fictional rock band: 'Hardcore Yellow Fever.' The room shares a collective laugh, recognizing the fetish that some white men – both straight and queer – have for Orientalized, feminized Asian women and men. Dan proceeds to provide a rendition of 'London Calling' by The Clash.



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Analysis

At the time of data collection, Will and Dan were both in their late 20s. They were well educated, holding two university degrees apiece, and were both in the beginning of what promised to be a long-term and stable profession: Will was a software programmer; Dan, a sound engineer. Like the vast majority of the study's participants, then, both men fit the profile of successful representatives of the Model Minority. They had many surface similarities, but, however much they seemed to affirm some dominant stereotypes of what the North American public expects an Asian man to be, their orientations towards their racialized identity varied considerably. Feelings of inadequacy in relation to cultural – and especially linguistic – expectations were a constant refrain among study participants, and many of them, both male and female, communicated concerns about representations of Asian gender and sexuality. Will and Dan, however, expressed these general feelings in the most extreme ways. Their distinctive articulations of the problems they faced are illustrative of a larger, socially informed pattern typical of young Chinese Canadians in the study. In this section, we will illustrate how Will and Dan negotiated the salience of their categorical membership in interview, comparing how they worked with and through their categorization as Asians, nerds, and men.

Will self-identified as a nerd and engaged in activities commonly thought of as 'nerdy.' He was a video game enthusiast, read comic books and was avid consumer of esoteric, non-mainstream music. However, he struggled with the feeling that he did not have the requisite traits to be properly Chinese or Asian. One of these traits, as mentioned in the above episode, was the ability to use chopsticks. As this interview excerpt makes evident, he was able to speak to these feelings at length:

Will:

Well, I guess I identify myself as Canadian by default. 'Cause I live in Canada and haven't ever really known anything else. That's kind of my identity as default, okay, yeah, fine. I'm Canadian, but I don't really know what that means really, right? If I think about it, I guess I mean, I share what have been traditionally Canadian characteristics, like I value universal healthcare, right? [laughs] You know? I value multiculturalism but probably to the extent that most Canadians value multiculturalism, which is to say we really like it when we see people of other colours in our cities, and they don't really think about it beyond that, right? I don't really think about it



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beyond that either. And actually, in so far as there is a racial driving force in my identity, I guess it's the compulsion not to feel like I'm so fucking white.

Kenneth:

To not feel like you're so fucking white?

Will:

Yes.

Kenneth:

What does that mean?

Will:

In that, I don't feel that really feel that Chinese. I mean, I am Chinese, but, I mean, the joke that I usually tell people when I meet them for the first time or whatever, and the issue of race or whatever comes up? Not that it does but like, even as something as simple as, oh, we're in a Chinese restaurant, we're about to eat Chinese food. Well, I don't eat Chinese food because I'm the worst Chinese person ever. This is actually a line I actually use. I don't eat Chinese food, I can't speak or read Chinese, I barely understand it from my parents, yeah, I can't speak or read it all. And I barely understand it in the sense that I can get an impression of what my parents are talking about but I could not tell you a single specific word. Except for 'excrement,' maybe.

Will here makes two distinct articulations of self-categorization, but the question is not simply about category membership but *legitimate* membership. Hence, he qualifies the applicability of each category with a list of predicates that amount to his practical definition of an 'authentic' member.

In his first turn, Will categorizes himself as Canadian. For him, this is not simply a matter of place of birth or naturalization; those aren't the predicates he mentions. But neither does he list more explicitly national-cultural characteristics, such as playing hockey or being polite. Rather, his understanding of the category and the predicates 'traditionally' bound to it is defined entirely in relation to government policies and institutions. He invokes Canada's single-payer public healthcare system and multiculturalism as sources of pride. Moreover, he is like other Canadians in that he takes these things for granted: he 'values' multiculturalism but he does not 'really think about it' beyond a vague sense that it's nice to live in a



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diverse city.

Will is certainly cognizant that he is a racialized citizen. However, having assented to Canadian values of multicultural citizenship, this does not, in itself, pose a problem. Rather, Will states that ‘the driving racial force’ behind his identity is ‘not to feel . . . so fucking white,’ but this is an outcome of his ambivalence and not its cause. Rather, his conflicted feelings arise from his inability to act ‘authentically’ as a racialized minority, from the mismatch between his embodiment as a Chinese man and the predicates he and others think are bound to the category *Chinese*. He lacks the knowledge and skills to perform ‘Chineseness’ in the expected ways but cannot excuse himself from the category, so he can only articulate his categorical membership in terms of what he perceived as inadequacies. If he must be Chinese, then Will is the ‘worst Chinese person ever’ because he does not eat Chinese food, cannot use chopsticks, and neither speaks nor reads Chinese. Without an ‘authentic’ ethno-cultural identity as a frame, Will’s bodily hexis – which is at least partially a product of his upbringing in a Chinese Canadian home – means he will generally be perceived as nerdy, and this, combined with his leisure choices, means he will be categorized as a nerd.

For Dan, on the other hand, the problem was instead being perceived as too Chinese. He had no anxiety about his capacity to perform Chinese practices and did not fear picking up chopsticks, but he was bothered by the passivity and social ineptitude that are predicated to Chinese and other Asians in Canada. In his accounts, he actively negotiated and struggled with the dominant framing of Chinese/Asian masculinity as lacking or subordinate to the hegemonic standard, attempting to distance himself from the stereotype of the nerdy Asian. Much of his performance at the birthday party can be understood as part of a strategy of self-presentation. Indeed, when introducing himself to Huynh, Dan made a point of his difference from the typical Asian man. When pressed to explain what he meant, he replied that he was more ‘outgoing’ and ‘less quiet’ than the public’s perception of Asians, which he expanded upon with this anecdote:

Public’s perception? . . . I’ll give you an example. I used to work in a recording studio . . . So this studio is run by – this studio has produced for Joss Stone and Emma Bunton, so they’re pretty well known. And this kid is, uh, this kid’s name is Bob Roberts,⁴ so I think he has a video out right now, and it’s on MuchMusic, so. You watch enough MuchMusic, so. But I remember one of his first conversations with me was first, ‘Are you good at



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math?’ It was one of the first things he said to me. We all had a big laugh about it, and I am good at math, so I was like, ‘Yeah, I am good at math.’ The other was, ‘Do you play ping pong?’ [laughs] And we had another good laugh – and, yes, I do play ping pong. [laughs]

In the design of this story, Dan negotiates the inferences that might be drawn about him from his categorization as an Asian male. He uses it to speak about his identity as both categorically Asian and atypical of the category. The anecdote turns on Bob Roberts meeting Dan for the first time and immediately attempting to predicate him with features considered typical of Asians, such as mathematics and table tennis. In the anecdote, Dan accepts these predicates, but the situation is framed as humorous. It was not only understood as funny by its participants at the time (‘we all had a good laugh’), but the present-tense account is also constructed as a joke. The set-up is that this story is about the public perception of Asians, and the punch line is that they are true: he is good at math and he *does* play ping pong. What Dan leaves only implicit here, but which is absolutely necessary for the joke to come off, is that the ‘public’ (a presumptively non-Asian public) would not ordinarily perceive Dan as one of the ‘typical,’ equation-solving, ping pong-playing nerdy Asian men. The fact that he is outgoing and jocular, even in the face of these questionable racial stereotypes, attests to his self-presentation, one that distances him from a stereotyped Asian masculinity that is shy and deferential.

However, Dan was ambivalent about his own strategies of negotiating these stereotypes. While he was quick and enthusiastic to assert his atypical Asian identity and to defuse racially charged situations by playing them as a joke, as above, he also recognized that humour driven by racial stereotypes can have unfavourable consequences. Scholars have pointed out that humour based on stereotypes about marginalized groups can accomplish contradictory objectives (Chun, 2009; Hirji, 2009). It can subvert particular stereotypes and racializing ideologies by holding them up to ridicule, but those who engage in this type of humour may reproduce the very stereotypes and ideologies they mean to critique. Dan talked about the ‘danger’ that using humour in this way could lead some people to think it is permissible to laugh at Asians, perpetuating notions of nerdiness and, more broadly, racializing and gendering ‘social ineptitude’:

And, um, do I have anger towards these stereotypes? Not really because, as you get older, you realize, you know, that – I think that the healthiest thing to do is to laugh with each other, and I think someone like Russell Peters⁵



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is very, very good at that, right? He can make fun of his own, you know, and laugh about his own race, right? And laugh about his interactions with other races, right? And I think that that's really interesting, right? But it's also dangerous in that, you know, like in an all-white community, 'Oh, like now I can make fun. Oh, that Indian guy is making fun of Indian people, now I can make fun of Indian people.' So there's a certain in danger in that, too. But does it make me angry now? Like, I think, if people say the same racist shit to me now that they did when I was nineteen, I don't get pissed off about it. I, um, if I know the person has respect for me? Then I'll laugh at it and maybe I'll throw something back at them, you know, like that. If I see clearly that maybe they don't understand or maybe they're ignorant, or they're not very bright, then I'll laugh at them because I'll feel sorry for them. Then that's my reaction to it.

Dan makes a multiply layered attempt to reconcile the problematic consequences of race-driven humour. He recognizes that it can unintentionally communicate to those who are not racialized ('an all-white community') that it is permissible to laugh at others who they categorize as racially or culturally different. At the same time, however, Dan extends a modicum of sympathy to those who might employ racially driven humour in a problematic fashion, saying that he 'feels sorry' for their ignorance. In this nuanced evaluation of racial humour, Dan again makes evident his desire to belong in and navigate multiple groups. With his statement, Dan affirms his (or at least, his *desired*) position in four groups:

- racialized subjects who are the target of jokes based on stereotypes and other 'racist shit';
- people with a sense of humour who can joke because of a foundation of shared 'respect';
- people who are, in contrast to the 'ignorant' and 'not very bright,' enlightened enough to know which jokes are appropriate and which aren't;
- and, ultimately, with his attempt at sympathy for a less-than-kind interlocutor, people mature and secure enough to take the moral high ground and not retaliate.

As Chinese in Canada, Will and Dan both face similar problems of identity management. Because of their physical appearance, other people (including other Asian people) will draw inferences about them. They might assume that they speak Chinese, can order off the menu at Chinese restaurants, or spent their childhoods



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enrolled in music lessons by disciplinarian parents; that they are quiet and shy; or that they are studious and diligent but not particularly creative thinkers. Both of them anticipate these inferences, and they design their self-presentations to manage them. Dan performs an easy-going jocularly in order to avoid being categorized as a 'typical Asian.' Will confronts his perceived inadequacies, joking that he is the worst Chinese person ever and instead presenting himself as a Canadian and a nerd. As we have shown, although they can negotiate or frame their relationships to these categories, their racialized bodies and the context of multiculturalism constrain and, to some extent, even determine their understandings, articulations and performances in significant ways. Will believes he cannot live up to what others expect of someone who embodies racial difference, while Dan works against how his body is framed as insufficiently masculine. These beliefs, and the behaviours that follow from them, should not be understood as natural but as byproducts of a social context that can be explained historically, theoretically, and empirically.

Conclusion: Asian, nerd?

We began with the nerdy Asians of 1980s movies. Similar images are still with us today in characters like television's *The Big Bang Theory's* Raj (Kunal Nayyar), an astrophysicist who is literally incapable of talking to women, or the pathetic, creepy Ben Chang (Ken Jeong) and socially awkward Abed Nadir (Danny Pudi) on *Community*. We've tried to show how, in the face of these media representations (and the dearth of counter-examples), some Chinese Canadian men negotiate their belonging to multiple categories, including *Asian* and *nerd*, in complex ways. But the question remains, does membership in one group necessarily entail the other?

From the foregoing, it would seem that Will and Dan's answer would be no: these categories can be claimed, refused, and articulated separately. Will finds the racial/ethnic element of his identity prescriptive and unattainable; Will is a nerd, but he doesn't feel Asian. Dan, on the other hand, refuses the nerd stereotype and self-consciously performs his difference from the 'typical' Asian man. Dan is Asian, but he's no nerd. As expressions of their individual experiences, these claims are subjectively valid, but returning to the initial premises of our analysis, it becomes clear that they are also fallible and only partially penetrate the ideological construction of race and gender (Willis, 1977).



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While individuals may be able to separately articulate the categories Asian and nerd, they do so – at least in Canada – against a larger backdrop that persistently links them together. Indeed, the very fact that Will, Dan and members of the Alternate Universe Club worked to anticipate, undercut and manage the conflation of Asians and nerds proves its persistence. In these instances, at least, Eglash's (2002) assertion that that the two categories are conflated holds true. Their social and cultural context makes it a basically inevitable fact of life that must be dealt with. But we must also note that these categories are not congruent: all Asian men risk being perceived as nerdy, but not all nerds are Asian. Indeed, as much as it is a version of masculinity, nerdiness is also frequently understood as a kind of whiteness. Mary Bucholtz's (2001) study of language use in a multi-racial high school, for example, identified a discursive community of nerds that spoke 'Superstandard English,' a form of hyper-correct usage that explicitly eschewed slang and phonology associated with African-American Vernacular English. Ironically, 'cool' white students freely borrowed from AAVE, and so the nerds' speech marked them as 'white,' even though they were not all Caucasian (see Bucholtz, 2009).

The 'whiteness of nerds' (Bucholtz, 2001) is thus an alibi for the continued attribution of predicates that may constrain members' life projects and single them out for discrimination. Li (2001, pp. 77–78) defines a racial subtext as the insertion of a racial signification into a seemingly benign discourse, and nerdiness functions in precisely this way for Asians. Because *nerd* belongs to a different collection entirely, it is – to borrow a term from Iwabuchi (2002) – a culturally and racially 'odorless' category, and so nerds can be the object of much more direct and derogatory talk than 'Asians' can. Moreover, nerdiness is associated with particular communities of practice (e.g., comic-book collectors, gamers, and fans), so membership also seems voluntary. It may take 'a little dating advice' (Kendall, 2011, p. 511), but one can choose to stop being a nerd and so the fault for any disadvantage suffered is one's own. Its association with high-school popularity contests also trivializes the challenges people categorized as nerds face.

Notwithstanding efforts to recuperate Asian masculinities (e.g., Louie's [2002] account of *wen-wu* masculinity), people in Western societies tend to judge men of all cultural backgrounds by the standards of hegemonic (unmarked and, therefore, 'white') masculinity. In business, for example, executives and senior managers are often evaluated in terms of attributes like charisma, vision and creativity that are



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still largely the predicates of white men. As a result, Asian workers are rarely promoted to key, decision-making roles (Varma, 2002; Woo, 2000), even in technical fields where nerd-identification is arguably an asset (Eglash, 2002) and even as white technology workers blame them for undermining their livelihoods (Rodino-Colocino, 2012).

Our goal in this article has been to demonstrate the analytical insight offered by treating race and gender as socially situated categorization practices, rather than as discrete or essential 'identities.' We have shown how they intersect in a category generally seen as unrelated: that is, the subculture of nerds and geeks. When examined in light of larger discursive formations, such as official multiculturalism, we see that their mutual imbrication creates real problems for people. Obviously, granting Asians access to hegemonic masculinity and an equal share of male privilege is not our objective. Instead, aligned with critical race and gender theorists (Chuh, 2003; Connell, 2005; Crenshaw, 1989), we have attempted to highlight how strategies for managing self-presentation and coping with undesired categorization by others can inadvertently perpetuate the very contexts that generate those problems in the first place. Much as Bannerji (2000) noted of multiculturalism in general, the repression of race and ensuing errors in categorization make it difficult for people – individually and collectively – to challenge the reproduction of racialized and gendered inequality. Will and Dan, for example, are able to speak quite lucidly about their own struggles to negotiate belonging in the categories *Asian* and *man*, but they speak of them as individualized problems and not the result of a political and cultural system that exerts a determining influence on the kinds of identities that will be recognized by others. The relationship between these categories, as assessed by Will and Dan, remains a problem in itself and, therefore, one that cannot be solved. It is this inability to recognize this situation as it is and act accordingly – and not anything specific to their experience as nerds or Asians or both – that should be understood as their fail.

Notes

1. 'Asian' is a term that belies its many, diverse and heterogenous referents (Lowe, 1996) and that is necessarily continually deconstructed in use (Chuh, 2003). This analysis addresses the experiences of specific individuals who, in Canada, would likely be categorized as Asian and does not seek to represent a reified concept of



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Asian identity. We are describing a particular set of conditions faced by some Asians in a particular context, and their experience is not reflective of all who could be categorized with the term.

2. The nerd stereotype also hounds women of Asian descent, though it contests with other powerful ideas of how Asian women 'are' in distinct ways. While racial stereotypes exclude Asian men from hegemonic masculinity, Asian women are often positioned at the extreme of 'emphasized femininity' (Connell, 1987, p. 187). Similarly, the distinctive experiences of female participants in nerd cultures are beyond the scope of this article (see, e.g., Busse, 2013).

3. According to the collaboratively edited guide to Internet culture, Know Your Meme, 'FAIL is turn-of-the-century internet slang that came to popularity through image macros and short videos depicting situations with unfortunate outcomes.' It is 'commonly used as an interjection to point out a person's mistake or shortcoming,' and, as in the example of 'Asian fail,' often qualified with a particular domain of failure (2009, About section).

4. A pseudonym.

5. Peters is a successful Canadian stand-up comedian who uses his own South Asian background and other ethnic stereotypes as material in his act.

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ASIAN FAIL

CHINESE CANADIAN MEN TALK ABOUT RACE, MASCULINITY, AND THE NERD STEREOTYPE

By Kenneth Huynh and Benjamin Woo

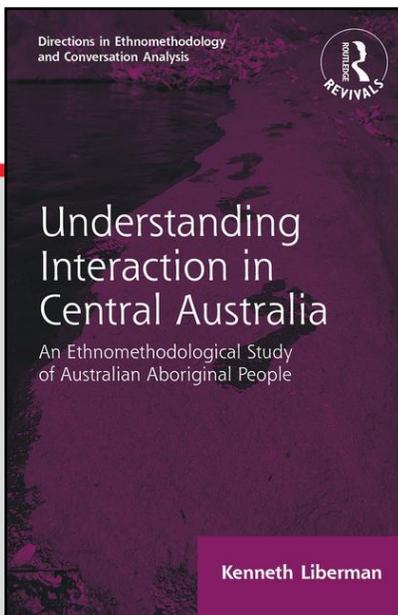
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CHAPTER

5

CULTURAL POLITICS



This chapter is excerpted from

Understanding Interaction in Central Australia: An Ethnomethodological Study of Australian Aboriginal People

by Kenneth Liberman.

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CULTURAL POLITICS

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The 'curtain' which shields the private lives of Aboriginal people is only one aspect of a long-term cultural struggle between Aboriginals and Anglo-Australians in the central desert. The struggle is remarkable in that the two sides' munitions are in no way commensurate, and each side concentrates its efforts upon different battlegrounds. The ultimate objective - cultural hegemony for the whites and secured cultural survival for the blacks - has escaped both parties; and it may be said that this struggle, where the issues, resources and consequences are cultural, has so far been a stalemate.

The members of one culture tend to be extroverted in their social personalities, search ceaselessly for ways to overcome nature and are not opposed to dominating their fellows in the process. Jung (1975: xlvii) has described the typical 'White Man's mental equilibrium' as 'the sort of extroversion that is always seeking security by dominating its surroundings.' The members of the other culture are more introverted, uninterested in domination, and, rather than being concerned to invent new ways to transform their world, have developed the more passive ability to adapt to the world in which they find themselves. The critical battles of the struggle do not take place in the open. Because all major public combat is won by the Anglo-Australians, their Aboriginal contestants have sought less conspicuous arenas in which to wage quiet campaigns.

One advantage the Aboriginal people have in the struggle is that they have no interest in dominating the whites, personally or politically; they strive only to free themselves from the whites' dominance and to lead their own Aboriginal lives. While their very disinterest in struggling to dominate has been partly responsible for their being casually dismissed as members of a civilization of no consequence, such moderate aspirations have had the surprising result that major Anglo-Australian political conquests have made little difference to the fundamental allegiance of Aboriginal people to their own reality. Somehow, their lack of interest has rendered them less vulnerable to European power in that the emotional and cognitive coherence of their lives has never depended upon the outcome of their cultural struggle with whites. Just as the Aboriginals showed little fascination with the Europeans who first landed in Australia, today's Aboriginal people are content to mind their own affairs, at least when Anglo-Australians are willing to leave them alone. For Aboriginal people cultural superiority is not a function of a struggle for recognition, and without the recognition of the Aboriginals - as Hegel has told us regarding the slave and the master - the cultural



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victory of the Anglo-Australians can never be consummated.

But the white population of central Australia will not leave the Aboriginal people alone. It is not enough that Aboriginals have offered them the appearance of submission: the whites require and demand that recognition which is essential to the security of their cultural victory. Accordingly, members of Anglo-Australian society are engaged in what amounts to a moral reeducation of Aboriginal people. Welfare workers, shopkeepers, court officials, pastoralists, teachers and missionaries provide constant instruction as part of their everyday contact with Aboriginal people.

The value of work, the importance of economic progress, the need for discipline, the virtues of ambition and other Protestant-European values are impressed upon Aboriginals by Anglo-Australians in the most bizarre contexts. The cultural-political struggle in central Australia has taken the form of an attempt to make the formal domination of Aboriginal people meaningful on a subjective level, and it is here where the European advance has been stalled.

The Aboriginal people have a second advantage in this struggle of cultures: the desert of central Australia is their ancestral home. The very presence of its salt lakes, sandhills, waterholes and breakways reaffirms the truth of their life because they are living evidence of the reality of their Dreaming. The Aboriginals roam their countryside freely, while this same desert is a foreign and sometimes threatening wilderness to Anglo-Australians who spend most of their life indoors where they can avoid the 120°F summer temperatures and the desert's overpowering sun (skin cancer in the region is widespread among whites). While the whites are dedicated to the care of ten by thirty meter plots of green lawn (reminiscent of England), every bush and tree reaffirms the Aboriginal person's reality in providing not only his food and fire but by having a sacred relationship to the totality of which the Aboriginal is also a part. The central Australian deserts confirm the truth and adequacy of the Aboriginals' cognitive life, and throughout the cultural-political struggle the Anglo-Australians are cognizant of this pervasive ally which nurtures Aboriginal people while being for the whites a vacant and formidable antagonist.

Work-and-wages

One of the outstanding characteristics of Anglo-Australian civilization is the



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separation of one's occupational work from the household and its concentration into well-defined and obligatory units of time. Much of the cultural-political struggle in central Australia has been over the attempt of whites to force Aboriginal people to conform to this Protestant-European notion of work, yet their efforts during nearly a century have not been successful. In the regions of central Australia where temperatures and rainfall permitted the European settlers to establish sheep and cattle stations, the Aboriginal residents were incorporated (as indentured laborers) into the workforce which established the Australian pastoral industry; however, the ideology of work, with some exceptions, never won the acceptance its white proponents desired. In the regions beyond the limits of European settlement, where Aboriginal people continued to live a traditionally oriented life, the ethic of work has made even fewer inroads. Today, many of the policies of the Australian government, and the informal policies of whites in the region, are designed to implant this ethic among Aboriginal people. As a governmental commission in Western Australia (Laverton Joint Study Group) once summarized, 'The Study Group believes that a positive approach has to be adopted to motivate the Aboriginal people to embrace a new work ethic.'

To this end the Australian government has devised all sorts of strategies. In the central reserves of the two States and the Northern Territory, Aboriginal people have for millennia fetched water, collected wood for their fires and cooked meals for their children and elderly. Removed from some of their tribal lands by government officers in order to allow atomic testing in the desert by the British after World War II and forbidden by the State government in Western Australia to resettle their homelands outside the reserve boundaries, the central reserves Aboriginal people today survive on government welfare. In 1977 the government reorganized their payment procedures and in some areas now require (on a 'voluntary' basis, the details of which are too extensive to enter into here) that work be performed on an hourly basis before subsidies are given. So today water is fetched, firewood collected and meals for the children and elderly cooked by Aboriginals 'employed' to do so; and for such services these employees receive a 'paycheck,' which they must then cash at a proto-bank which is next door to a one-room store where they can purchase the material goods they require. For those outside the local money economy the same tasks are performed without compensation, and they are forced to draw upon kinship associations or gamble for the cash to provide the flour, sugar, tea, tobacco and refrigerated soft drinks which supplement their daily needs.



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It is a very baroque and expensive exercise, but it is perpetuated in the belief that Aboriginal people are learning how to handle money, an ability without which a capitalist ideology cannot take root. As Weber (1958: 72) has observed: 'The capitalist system needs this devotion to the calling of making money.' Along with this education, customary Aboriginal enterprises are being bureaucratized to some extent (e.g., the rationalization of wood collecting, the feeding of children en masse) which may make European inroads into their traditional life. But for the most part the Aboriginal people consider the exercise a game they must play as in former years they attended church services as a necessary prerequisite to being given their weekly allotment of flour and sugar. The effect of the contemporary system is hardly greater than that of former years because in both cases the European world is a finite province of activity divorced from the Aboriginals' essential social reality.

Along with this system of wages and monetary exchange, the government sends films to these communities which glamorize work and portray acculturated Aboriginal people as mechanical engineers and clerk/typists busy-at-work in a European fashion. Wherever these films have been shown, they have been greeted by central Australian Aboriginals with squealing whoops and raucous laughter: there is nothing more unlikely nor less desired by these Aboriginals than working nine-to-five five days a week. The incongruence of expectations produces a levity in which the Aboriginal aspirations are very plainly revealed.

Aboriginal people do not reject work-and-wages because they are lazy, although their desert-adapted industry has conditioned them to exert themselves only when its immediate necessity becomes apparent. When motivated, Aboriginals can perform physical tasks which are awesome; for example, any of them is capable of walking several hundred miles across the desert without complaint. Aboriginal people resist the ideology of work because it interferes with the spontaneity of their lives and, above all, with the natural sociability of their ordinary personal relations. Aboriginal people are unwilling to sacrifice the spontaneous and egalitarian character of their social relations for the material benefits of work-and-wages. Marx (1967: 297f.) has described the distortion of human relationships which the relations of production of capitalism bring about. Aboriginal people, without any ideologizing, are unwilling to abandon their customary human relations. What is more, their entire social life militates against their participation in a capitalist economy. Success in a capitalist economy depends



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upon accumulating capital. In Aboriginal society it is an embarrassment to have excess wealth: one must share what one has with friends and relatives; indeed, there are formal rules of exchange which require that one's goods pass into the hands of specific relatives. Accordingly, an Aboriginal person must share his food, his home, his car, his clothes, etc., with his people if he is not to lose the respect they have for him. In addition, it is the binding custom of Aboriginal society to destroy by fire or breakage all the worldly possessions of a person upon his death. Many of the new houses built for Aboriginals by the government in the last decade are uninhabitable because of the death of a member of the household (a consequence hardly considered by government planners), and eventually all will be so. If it becomes impossible to accumulate capital, it is senseless to attempt to do so, and it is certain that one will never attain success in capitalist terms.

Similarly, Aboriginal laborers avoid promotion to positions which have a supervisory responsibility because they have no aspiration to issue orders to other Aboriginals. It is not so much the absence of a desire for social power as it is a fear of the social consequences of their appearing to presume that they are better than their fellows. Such a person is likely to be universally rejected as one who is overly conceited, a reputation Aboriginal people take pains to avoid. In response to political pressure to improve the 'economic condition' of Aboriginal people, the government has sought to increase the number of Aboriginal people in roles of authority; however, many Aboriginals involved in work-and-wages activity prefer to have European supervisors because such an arrangement will leave the egalitarian basis of their ordinary relations undisturbed. This response has confounded Anglo-Australians, who are moved to deliver long lectures on ambition and self-improvement to promising Aboriginal laborers. There are few provisions in a capitalist economy for the more egalitarian social inclinations of the Aboriginal people. Given the opportunity, Aboriginals might evolve a modern economic praxis for themselves which would be more compatible with their structures of social interaction.

A good deal of Aboriginal reluctance to adopt a work-and-wages economic orientation is that they do not see the relevance of European projects for their own lives. Sympathetic Anglo-Australians have devised all sorts of economic programs, but they have failed to first determine whether Aboriginal people wish to be so 'developed.' A missionary (Perez 1977: 143) recorded a typical complaint about the lack of Aboriginal enthusiasm for an economic scheme developed by the mission:



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'Much to the missionaries' regret, none of the able-bodied Aborigines had shown the interest, capability, constancy and responsibility necessary for them to be relied on exclusively to carry out the comprehensive plan.' For these missionaries, the value of the 'comprehensive plan' was accepted as a given, and there was little effort to determine the Aborigines' motivations - all that was necessary on the part of the Aborigines was that they be 'able-bodied.' This is only another occasion of the Anglo-Australians' practice of turning Aboriginal people into objects which are merely some variant of being European, and it is no wonder that their programs have failed:

The Aborigines have not shown interest in anything connected with the enterprise. More recently, as an experiment, fifteen acres of land was given them with the use of machinery. It failed to produce any results, and they gave up all efforts to prove their capability to look after even a small concern which would gradually form the basis for their desired independence. (*Ibid.* 149)

The Aboriginal people were already independent in their own terms and saw no need to acquire European skills. As one Aboriginal lady told R.M. and C.H. Berndt (1964: 93), why should she bother about growing food when the wild plants provide it for her in abundance without any cultivation. Instead, the Aboriginal people have become skilled at taking advantage of Europeans as an additional source of material support, and this ability is one which whites have found very disconcerting:

It cannot be said that the enterprise gave new inspiration to the Aborigines, most of whom took long holidays, up to five months in the bush, where they would not be engaged in handling stones, mortar, or heavy timber. They gradually made their appearance again, to coincide with another arrival of cargo in Pago and in good time for their Christmas at Kalumburu. (Perez 1977: 98)

What for Aboriginal people is their natural life is conceived by whites to be 'holidays.' In this instance the Aborigines have won the cultural-political skirmish on two counts - they have reaped material benefits while adopting nothing of the whites' work ethic.

In a quiet and unassuming fashion Aboriginal people have repeated this victory throughout the desert. At some isolated reserves, European missionaries or



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government workers carry the Aboriginals' firewood, run electric generators, provide transport, cook meals, repair automobiles, refrigerate soft drinks and carry out most of the functions that lie within the European economic domain. In local interaction, the very strength of the whites' work ethic occasionally results in their being exploited by Aboriginals. For example, when a car containing a number of whites and blacks received a tire puncture (a frequent occurrence in the desert), the whites attended to fixing the tire directly, as the responsible thing to do; they even competed with each other in demonstrating their responsibility and reliability regarding the matter. Meanwhile, some of the Aboriginal passengers happily observed the whites' efforts while others wandered off to spend some time hunting goannas. The irony here is that the self-assertive personality of the whites resulted in their performing work from which the less assertive Aboriginals benefited. Aboriginal people participate in such tasks when they see there is a need for it or if they are forced to do so by Europeans (the latter usually being accompanied by an invocation of the ideology of the work ethic). In another context, some Aboriginal people, under my supervision and engaged in European sorts of tasks for which they were being paid, showed enthusiasm for work only when I told them, '*We must work*' ('*Wuuku palyalkitja*'). Their praxis was one of pandering to the European work ethic without any sincerity of purpose. They responded because they recognize the moment when whites will become self-righteous about work.

The success Aboriginal people have had in avoiding work-and-wages has prompted most outback Anglo-Australians to advocate a policy of forced labor for wages. To their way of thinking the government is making it 'too easy' for Aboriginal people and causing them to become convinced that their praxis of exploiting the white economy while participating only minimally in work-and-wages is a winning strategy. The whites' concern is not so economic (the economic costs are paid mostly by the coastal urban regions) but motivated by their concern about the perpetuation of the Aboriginal culture and social structure the success of the Aboriginals' strategy allows. This aspect of the struggle has to do with cultural rivalry.

Legalism

Anglo-Australians have long prevailed in the contest for control over land in central Australia, although the struggle is not yet over. The basic strategy of the



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whites from the very beginning of settlement has been to rule Aboriginal people out of contention by legal fiat. Such a strategy has provided the European expropriation with a moral propriety which it otherwise would have lacked. The dispossession of Aboriginal people has always been legal, and, so the logic goes, therefore justifiable. This began with the initial royal proclamation which made British subjects of all Australia's Aboriginal inhabitants. This excluded the possibility of the Aboriginal people pressing for treaties as sovereign nations, as some of the American Indians were able to do; instead, all of the Aboriginal homelands became Crown Land, which the Crown dispensed to leading English and Scottish aristocratic families.

In 1971 an Australian court ruled that Aboriginal claims to lands (on which they had been residing for as long as 40,000 years) were invalid because they were unable to show the court formal written title to it. At the same time, Anglo-Australian law has provided whites with the proper legal instruments for lands they have expropriated in the last two centuries. As Friedenbergl (1980: 22) has observed with regard to the case of the Canadian Indians, 'Law and order, Canadian schoolbooks say, preceded the settlement of the frontier, begging the question of whose law and order it was.'

Since 1971, the national government of Australia has attempted to grant traditional Aboriginal people in the Northern Territory some degree of land rights (the national government's jurisdiction over Western Australia and South Australia is limited). But its effort is presently being emasculated by the northern territory assembly, which is adding a variety of local regulations to minimize the degree of self-determination available to blacks. For example, a section of the Northern Territory Land Rights Act of 1976 provides that no land claims may be made for any portions of towns. The provisional assembly responded by redrawing the boundaries of Darwin, the territorial capital, declaring a new city having a size four times that of London though only 120,000 people reside there (Howard 1980: 2).

In Western Australia, where no lands rights legislation has passed (as of this printing), the only method by which Aboriginal people can gain control over their traditional homelands is to secure a pastoral lease; however, since 1977 the State government has refused to lease any land to Aboriginal people under the regulation that no more than a million acres may fall under the domain of a single corporation. Since the State government requires that all Aboriginal land be held by the Aboriginal Lands Trust, a body which is largely controlled by the State



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cabinet, and because the Lands Trust has reached its million-acre limit, registration of all new Aboriginal leases has been frozen.

Similar legal strategies have served Anglo-Australian interests in other ways. In 1974 a Warden's Court in Western Australia took away a mining lease from an Aboriginal person who went by the name of 'Munding' because the original paper was written out to 'Moonding' twenty years earlier. Despite the fact that the Aboriginal person lived in an oral culture, his claim was invalidated on the technicality and awarded to a friend of the justice. When the Aurukun Aboriginal people in the Northern Territory were opposed to the use of their name in the title of an Anglo-Australian firm, 'Aurukun Associates,' the consortium informed them that it had the legal right to the name because it had duly registered it (*Aboriginal Identity* 1976: 8).

Mathews (1977: 67) tells about the case of one Aboriginal settlement where the Aboriginal residents were prohibited from having a garden. Her Aboriginal informant reports: 'We were not allowed to grow any vegetables. This seemed peculiar, but it was impressed on us that we could not grow them because it was a government station and not our land.' Similarly, a Western Australian pastoralist scolded an Aboriginal worker-resident who had taken me to a sacred site on the station which merited protection under Aboriginal sites' legislation. She told the Aboriginal elder, 'You have no right giving anybody information about places on our station. All the places on this station belong to [her husband]'. The domination of Aboriginal people is thus reinforced with the rhetoric of legal ideology. Even more extraordinary is the report of one of the Liberal Party lawyers who conspired to prevent Aboriginal people in Western Australia from voting (*West Australian*, September 17, 1977): 'Dixon said that it was not his duty to question the legislation [regarding questioning voters]. It was his right to exercise it.' In other words, morality rests not in what is just but in what is legal.

This is consistent with the 'contractual-legalistic orientation' which Habermas (1979: 90) claims results in an individualization of social interaction. The customary obligations of corporate groups are individualized and competition among individual members is encouraged. The constraints of such a rationalized order of interaction are obvious when in outback towns Aboriginal people face legal charges for allowing too many friends and relatives to dwell in one house. While the resocialization of Aboriginal people is for the most part an unintended byproduct of the legal system, it has at times been more deliberate. A case in point



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is the Citizenship Rights Act of 1944 (W.A.), which made the emancipation of Aboriginal people contingent upon certain conditions, one of which was that a 'citizen' (with the privileges of voting, drinking, freedom of travel, etc.) must not associate with Aboriginal natives other than his kin of the first degree.

Anglo-Australian legal rights promote individualism. Along with imposing a system of interaction which produces competing and autonomous participants, the Australian legal system requires Aboriginal people to reconceptualize their world in the same utilitarian and objective terms as the whites if they wish to take advantage of any of the legal prerequisites the law provides them. Aboriginal people are concerned to protect their sacred sites from destruction by mining developers (who are generally unaware of the existence of sacred sites). Legislation has been passed in Western Australia providing protection for any 'Aboriginal site' which can be shown to be of legitimate sacred importance; however, the Western Australian government considers the Act to be a token gesture which is not meant seriously to deter in any way mineral development in the Western Desert. Consequently, the government has interpreted the Act, which placed no limit on the size of the 'protected areas,' to refer only to individual 'sites' a few acres in size and not to large domains of land which Aboriginals may claim on the basis of sacred associations. On two occasions when an area including a number of sacred sites was proposed for protection, the government ordered it to be divided up into the 'individual' sites and be proposed as separate reserves. In one case the Aboriginals were requested to modify their presentation of the sacred area involved. The area was one wherein the same world-creative beings encountered each other in a number of locations, so the locations are not experienced as separate units but as one and the same event. The area is experienced in its Dreaming essence as a single totality, not divisible into separate objects without distorting the Aboriginal cognition. Should the protected areas be approved on the basis of individual objectivated sites which satisfy the unique perspective of the Western Australian government, subsequent mining development could ensue which would translate the European objectivated conception of the landscape into concrete reality. In the meantime, the government has succeeded in instructing Aboriginal people how to interpret the land in a European fashion, a cognitive innovation which may one day have profound implications.



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Moralism

The system of legalistic legitimation employed by Anglo-Australians to justify their domination of Aboriginal people is not merely political - it is the basis of a self-righteousness which provides Anglo-Australians with a sense of moral superiority at the very moments they are dispossessing Aboriginal people. Weber (1958: 142 and 165-6) has spoken of the self-confidence, self-righteousness and sober legality peculiar to the men of the heroic age of capitalism, and it is this personality which Anglo-Australians have brought into their relations with Aboriginals. This self-righteous tone is apparent in many of the public remarks of Australian leaders about Aboriginal policies. In 1971 the then Australian Minister of the Interior announced the position of his government on Aboriginal land rights:

The government believes that it is wholly wrong to encourage Aborigines to think that because their ancestors have had a long association with a particular piece of land, Aborigines of the present day have their right to demand ownership of it. (Aboriginal *Identity*, January, 1977)

In 1980 the Western Australian Minister for Community Welfare summarized his government's land rights policy in a similar tone: 'Calls for compensation in a generalized sense for the past wrongs against former generations are misguided, unrealistic and would be totally unjust to many Australians - black and white.' Essentially, the dispossession of central Australian Aboriginal people is a *fait accompli*, and it would be 'wholly wrong' and 'totally unjust' to grant legal title to Aboriginal people who have occupied their land for some 40,000 years.

Such self-righteousness was a component of the effort to prevent Aboriginals from voting in Western Australia which I discussed above. A polling officer (the wife of a local pastoralist) refused to assist six elderly Aboriginals who swam across a 30-meter-wide river 4-5 feet deep in full flood - 'She said that the old people were not supposed to be helped' (*West Australian*, July 15, 1977). Two of the potential Aboriginal voters asked the polling officer for assistance, without success: 'a couple of Aborigines had approached her inside the polling area but because of instructions to all scrutineers she had put her hand to her lips to indicate she was not allowed to speak' (*West Australian*, July 27, 1977). Not only wouldn't the polling officer assist Aboriginals, but she was 'not allowed' and 'not supposed to,' an Anglo-Australian attitude with which Aboriginal people are familiar. The *West Australian* (July 22, 1979) reported that the interrogation of one



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of the Aboriginal voters was continued despite the fact that tears were pouring down the Aboriginal person's face - 'She would not answer and did not seem to know what she had to do,' a typical Aboriginal response to the exercise of Anglo-Australian moralism.

In recent years the national government of Australia (with an urban mandate) has been paying attention to some of the moral consequences of the treatment of Aboriginal people, and this has led to certain legal and social reforms designed to improve the conditions of Aboriginals in the Northern Territory, give them some rights to limit the access of multinational corporations to their tribal lands, provide some economic assistance and promote Aboriginal self-determination. These reforms have been strongly opposed by the Anglo-Australian residents of central Australia, but in their opposition the force of the ideology of racial equality (borrowed from the civil rights struggles in America) has not been lost on them. Today, these whites of Australia's desert regions oppose the reforms on the grounds that such legislation is unfairly prejudiced in favor of Aboriginal people. Before the Aboriginal people have even come to understand these contemporary notions of racial justice, the white people of central Australia have mastered its rhetoric in detail and are using it to add a moral force to their defense of their dominant status. The chairman of the Northern Territory branch of the Progress Party sent a telegram to the Prime Minister of Australia asking him to give landholders 'the same rights' as Aboriginal people in land rights reforms which recognized traditional occupancy as a basis for limited title; the Young Liberal (Party) Movement of Western Australia has called on the government to treat all Australians 'equally under the law' (*West Australian*, June 3, 1980); the Western Australian Chamber of Mines president issued a statement asserting: 'We believe territorial and mineral rights should be equal for all Australians' (*West Australian*, May 22, 1980), meaning that the government and corporations should have access to all minerals on land owned by Aboriginals and Anglo-Australians alike; and a South Australian pastoralist sent this letter to the Adelaide Advertiser (August 2, 1978):

As an owner of freehold land in south Australia, I have no control over mining or prospecting other than in small areas around houses, and would receive no royalties for any minerals found.

Why are the Aborigines such a favoured race? They have, either individually or collectively, done little towards Australia's development. If



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the white man had not colonized the country when he did, some other race would have, and the Aboriginal would have received far worse treatment than he has ever received from us.

Perhaps if we all painted our faces black we would get equal rights.

The utility of such a self-righteous pseudoegalitarianism has not been lost upon Anglo-Australian school children in central Australia. A class of 15-year-olds in one Western Australian outback town heard a lecture on Aboriginal culture: 'In a question and answer session after the lecture the children contended strongly that there was discrimination against white people in their town and that race relations could be improved by giving whites more' (*West Australian*, July 6, 1979).

Throughout the history of Aboriginal/Anglo-Australian relations, white people have utilized morality to their every advantage.

Aboriginal strategies

The Aboriginal people's chosen response to such moral righteousness has been to provide whites with a formal acquiescence which amounts to very little in substance. Gratuitous concurrence - that universal and incomprehensible 'Yes' - is the common chord of Aboriginal/Anglo-Australian interaction in central Australia. Aboriginal people know how to leave a white person satisfied without really coming to comprehend what it is he wanted in the first place or what led him to depart satisfied. Assisted by the whites' own skills at rendering Aboriginal people as mere objects of their own projection, Aboriginal people are able to employ the Anglo-Australian's self-confidence to prevent their own interior life from being witnessed.

Anglo-Australians may become so occupied with their own prejudices that these prejudicial views fill up the world, restricting perception. That is, one of the consequences of an assertive personality is that there is less opportunity for observation: the imposition of one's own world upon events is too successful. Aboriginal people exploit such prejudices as a smokescreen behind which they are able to preserve their privacy. While such a praxis has unfavorable consequences for Aboriginals, in the long run it has made it possible for them to perpetuate their Aboriginal life with a minimum of interference.

I have examined some occasions of this praxis of acquiescence in contexts



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(such as courtrooms and schools) which are threatening to Aboriginal people, but this praxis has become so routinized that it amounts to a systematic distortion of communication even in contexts which are harmless. Witness this friendly conversation between an Anglo-Australian and an Aboriginal friend of mine who was being employed in a sites protection training program sponsored by the Western Australian Museum:

EA What are you doing here?

AP Working in a training program for the Museum.

EA Doing what, learning how to recognize fossils and things?

AP Yeah.

(102)

In this case AP didn't know what a fossil was. Although the Anglo-Australian was only being friendly, Aboriginal people have learned to minimize their communication as a structural feature of their communication with whites. The gratuitous concurrence of another Aboriginal friend of mine is typical of conversations where an English-speaking person asks an Aboriginal to choose between alternative answers:

KL *Is that good or bad?*

AP Ø

KL *Is that good or bad?*

AP *Good.*

KL Mm.

AP Or bad.

In such instances, the participation of the Aboriginal partner is so plastic that Anglo-Australian efforts to communicate are frustrated entirely. But this is the intention. Aboriginal people know how to exploit that 'natural' indeterminacy available in intercultural conversation in order to force their Anglo-Australian partners to remove themselves from conversation which is too personal and intense for an Aboriginal person's comfort. While such discourse may be standard in European societies, Aboriginals consider that persons who do not know each



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other well should be more withdrawn.

Aboriginal people occasionally prefer a conversation not to become intelligible. At a remote settlement I have witnessed Aboriginal people who speak English well feign ignorance when Anglo-Australian tourists who seem to them too smug asked where gasoline could be purchased. Similarly, Aboriginal people will force government officials to work through the confusions which exist 'naturally' in intercultural communication in order to force them to make some adjustments to the Aboriginals' world. If the official appears too conceited or if the Aboriginals are uninterested in what he has to offer (e.g., an anthropologist), the factual presence of confusion will loom (naturally) as a major communicative obstacle. Aboriginal people may 'talk to rule' in providing police officers the names of Aboriginal persons by employing the actual Aboriginal pronunciation of the European names, a pronunciation which is capable of rendering a name like 'Friday Finley' as 'Bridee Benelli'. Such clever strategies offer Aboriginals a degree of protection, but at the price of reaffirming the Anglo-Australian (mistaken) conviction that Aboriginal people are stupid.

No cheek

The Aboriginal praxis of acquiescence fits well the interactional demands which white people place upon Aboriginals. Aboriginal people have explained to me that Anglo-Australians want 'no cheek' from blackfellows; such an attitude succeeds in limiting the amount of argument an Aboriginal person will offer. As one Aboriginal person tells it, 'I suffered less than the others from ill-treatment by managers. My attitude was that they were in charge, and if they told me I was wrong or had incurred their disapproval I did not argue' (Mathews 1977: 160). A favorite story of Aboriginal people in the Wiluna era (cf. Parker 1978) tells of a white station-manager who attempted to punish an Aboriginal person for insolence. The Aboriginal's wife counsels him:

Jimmy Missus tells him, 'See that now? He's tryin' you out with every bloke. You got to watch yourself now and no cheek. When they tell, don't say nothin', don't give them answer. Just say, "Yes boss, you good man alright."'

This acquiescence appears to be identical to the deference behavior of oppressed people throughout the world, and there is evidence to support such an interpretation. The response of an Aboriginal lady my wife and I took to a drive-in



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theater in an outback town is illustrative. During the movie *Hello Dolly*, a subservient Negro opened the door of a prestigious New York night club for Ms Streisand and assisted her with her coat and hat, engaging in some friendly small talk, to which our Aboriginal companion remarked, 'He's talking *wangkayi* [Aboriginal]'. At an outdoor showing of a Bill Cosby movie to Aboriginal people at a remote settlement, Cosby spoke to his white boss over the short-wave radio, 'Ye-e-s-s Missuh Harry, I wi-il-ill - you son of a bitch', to which the Aboriginal audience responded with tremendous enthusiasm indicative of their having experienced similar feelings.

But the explanation of Aboriginal acquiescence as standard deference behavior is too facile. While there surely are structural consequences of domination which produce certain kinds of interaction, such consequences are not exclusive, and perhaps not even primary, in determining the components of local interaction in individual cases. It is fashionable for sociologists to explain such 'shyness' as a function of political domination, but this is a universalization of Western interactional prejudices to the extent that there is the assumption that a vigorous and aggressive self-defense would be the immediate response of all parties; Aboriginal interaction differs from European interaction in some major ways which are for the most part unrecognized by Europeans. These differences have resulted in some of the unique and specific characteristics of Aboriginal/Australian intercourse.

The Aboriginal practices of acquiescence, secrecy and limiting the intelligibility of conversation are overdetermined; they are strategies Aboriginals are well suited to carry out and also ones that are appropriate to the political realities they face. The fact that shyness was the response of Aboriginal people when the first Europeans arrived, before any structure of domination was established, demonstrates that the 'withdrawn' social personality of Aboriginal people preceded the establishment of a European regime. That most Aboriginal people fail to admire the self-confident personality of those who dominate them and instead consider the character of their own social relationships to be evidence of their cultural superiority is proof enough that such introverted social characteristics are indeed Aboriginal and cannot be accounted for exclusively by a sociology which fails to master the interactional detail of the local relationships of domination.



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Conclusion

The outcome of this cultural-political struggle is still uncertain. Where Europeans have been able to settle permanently, the traditional Aboriginal civilization is suffering a decay from which it may not be able to recover; however, in the remote regions where the heat and aridity have protected Aboriginal people from European settlement, a traditionally oriented Aboriginal life is being perpetuated and appears to be full of vitality. The preservation of an orthodoxy of traditional ritual in the remote regions serves to slow the acculturation of Aboriginal people in the regions of European settlement, and even in these latter areas traditional Aboriginal values may exist long after the formal ritual life has disappeared. Hiatt (1965: 151) has observed that Aboriginal people who for years had observed the hierarchical structure of Anglo-Australian social relations remained unaffected by it. It is not likely that such modes of interaction will impress Aboriginal people, and only where the Aboriginal people were killed or removed from the region has their culture disappeared altogether.

Those who have survived continue to lead an Aboriginal lifestyle, only much of the Aboriginality is unavailable for the witness of whites. In the long run, the Aboriginals' passive strategy has succeeded to a surprising degree. Offering little opposition to whites, Aboriginal people have adapted to new situations without relinquishing what is most dear to them. The words of one missionary, offered at the end of his career, report the Aboriginal people's success:

Had I been posted to a parish in South America it would probably have been peopled by ten thousand, and inside of six months I could have converted half of them. Instead I came here to Kalumburu where there are some two hundred Aborigines, and after 37 years only a handful have become Christians, even though most are baptized.

When I die and proceed through the gates of heaven, there - just inside the gates - will be seated the departed souls of people from Kalumburu, because we may have pushed them through the gates but it is unlikely that on their own they will have gone in any further.

The persistence of Aboriginal people in the regions where Anglo-Australian people have settled is evident in these two observations about the contemporary Aboriginal relationship to the sacred Law of their Dreaming. The first remark is that of an acculturated Aboriginal lady and the second that of an elderly



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Aboriginal man:

They still hangin' on to the Law. Young people they chasin' the Law. Drop everything for the Law, put Law before work, before wife even. Law been goin' on for years. Lots of people reckon in this modern age there no place for Law, but it's still goin' on. I don't think it's going to stop. Too strong.

It'll still be in the History [his translation for '*tjukurpa*' or 'Dreaming'], *brother*. Never change. They still carry on what the people did. They carry on that, young people . . . That *tjukurpa* still stop. Still we remember it. We like to see all the young people to remember what's been happened. We got to follow it, *tjukurpa*, we have to follow 'em and we have to fall back on it; otherwise, they'll let go like Europeans. They've got no *tjukurpa*, nothing.

Whether the growing international consensus on human rights will be able to secure the cultural survival of Aboriginal people before multinational mineral consortia overrun their traditional homelands for precious minerals is uncertain, but international opinion is indeed redefining the Aboriginals' worth. The Australian Commissioner for Community Relations reported to the Australian people the impression that Aboriginal delegates to the United Nations Subcommittee on Human Rights made in Geneva: 'Europe was fascinated because here was 40,000 years of continuous tradition suddenly appearing formally for the first time' (*West Australian*, October 13, 1980). While international opinion may increase the reputation of Aboriginals in urban Australia, it is unlikely that contemporary outback Anglo-Australians - who have yet truly to know Aboriginal people - will ever question the morality of their regime. For whites in central Australia, Aboriginal people are useless, slovenly people of no account, and it is unlikely that any guilt will be experienced about the treatment of people who are not respected.

In the remote Aboriginal reserves, Aboriginal people are determined to preserve their relative independence from Anglo-Australians. In both these areas and in the regions of central Australia occupied by Anglo-Australians the cultural-political struggle continues unabated. Aboriginal people who are partly acculturated to European life in these latter areas have expressed concern about their future: 'All us old people are gonna die one day, and we gotta put something together to leave for the young people in the time we got left. We can't leave them with nothing!' And so they hope to make something of the opportunity which the



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new ideas of social justice have given them. But less acculturated Aboriginal people in the European-occupied regions are not as concerned, and for all that they have suffered they show remarkably little bitterness.

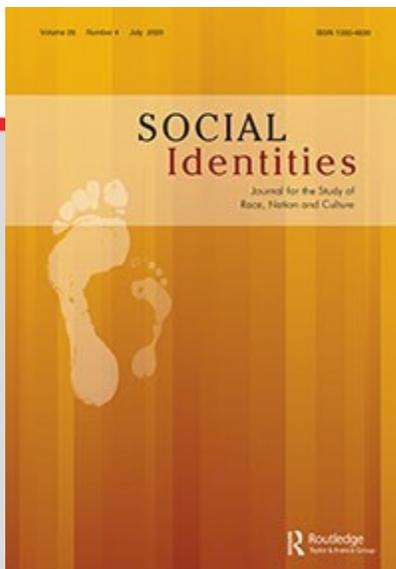
One day I spent an afternoon with three very elderly Aboriginal ladies who were the last survivors of an Aboriginal dialect group which had occupied some 30,000 square miles in Western Australia and which today consists of sheep stations owned exclusively by Anglo-Australians. The ladies were telling me about life 'in the early days,' about areas where nutritious plants were located, about places formerly very sacred to Aboriginal people and the like. In the middle of their conversation, they reflected upon the fact that their people had almost entirely died out. To my surprise, they began to laugh, and one of them announced, 'There's no more old people. All finished. Only three now!' to which they fell into a hysterical fit of laughter. One has to admire these ladies for whom their friendship was fulfilling enough to allow them to live without hatred. It was as if the burden of resentment was too heavy for them to bother about and would destroy that lightness and spontaneity Aboriginal people value in their social relations. While these ladies were living in a hovel made of apple-crates and unwanted bits of corrugated iron, they were satisfied with each other and their lives, and had remained Aboriginal in the most characteristic sense of the term.



CHAPTER

6

"KILLERS" AND "FRIENDLIES" NAMES CAN HURT ME



This article by Alec McHoul

was published in

Journal for the Study of Race, Nation and Culture,
13(4):459–469

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1. The Situation

In March 2003 in Iraq, an American A-10 Thunderbolt fighter plane fired into a convoy of trucks and armoured vehicles belonging to the British Household Cavalry. It was, if anything could be, a classic case of 'friendly fire' or, as the current military euphemism has it, a 'blue-on-blue situation'. The result was not only damage to allied transport, but also the death of Lance Corporal Matty Hull. This was common knowledge for some time. But it was not until almost four years later, when *The Sun* newspaper published the air-to-ground tapes, that the moment-to-moment details became available to a larger (British and international) public. What motivates this analysis has to do with both the newspaper report, as such, and also the events reproduced in the transcript.

2. The Report

Let's turn to the first of these, the news item and its intro. *The Sun's* defence editor, Tom Newton Dunn, under the banner 'The tape they wanted to hide', gives us the details of the relevant call signs, the planes in the vicinity, the timing (hours, minutes and seconds) of the exchanges, and so forth. But there is one particular feature of this report that interests me, at least for now. So here is the prelim to the complete news report with the relevant part underlined:¹

The tape they wanted to hide

By Tom Newton Dunn, Defence Editor

6 February 2007

This is the full transcript of the cockpit video from call sign POPOV36 during the disastrous friendly fire attack on the Household Cavalry patrol.

Lasting just over 15 minutes, it begins just before the A-10 Thunderbolt pilot spots the four British vehicles.

The local time is 4.36pm, or 1.36pm Greenwich Mean Time which is what the military use.

The killer pilot's wingman, hunting targets with him in a second A-10, had the call sign POPOV35.



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...

The other main call signs on the radio net are MANILA HOTEL, MANILA34, and LIGHTNING34—three US Marine Corps Forward Air Controllers on the ground attached to British units.

Later on, other call signs come on the net to relay emergency ceasefire messages.

They are SKY CHIEF, an American AWAC {{airborne warning and control}} jet controlling the overall air battle and COSTA58, a British pilot nearby.

The time code in hours, minutes and seconds is from the digital clock on the pilot's display. {{Transcript follows}} (Dunn, 2007)

3. Membership Categorisation and Social Identity

What are we to make of this designation: 'killer pilot'? One way of dealing with it would be to take a contrast case. One of my favourite magazine headlines—though I'm not sure where this comes from—is 'Killer Nuns'. The nuns in question were learning karate: hence they were (potential) killers. But 'killer' and 'nuns' are rarely co-located. And this is how headlines routinely announce news: by deliberately mismatching membership categories (designations of types of persons) with their expectable actions (predicates)—hence the famous 'man bites dog' (see Cuff & Payne, 1984, p. 188).

What I am rehearsing here is a perspective known as membership categorisation analysis (MCA) as pioneered by Harvey Sacks (1972a; 1972b; see also Silverman, 1998, pp. 74–97, 128–52) and my argument will be that this can give us an insight into expressions like 'killer pilot' in particular and, more importantly perhaps, a very useful analytic perspective for dealing with the broader question of social identities as such. But before running this through the category 'killer pilot', we need to explicate the basic vocabulary of MCA or, if you like, its terms and conditions.

Sacks's innovation was to note that when we refer to members in the society we do so via clusters of possible terms.² This is not 'stereotyping' or anything of the sort. It is a logical consequence of the sheer fact that any given member can be referred to in an indefinite number of ways. The 'pilot' in question here (noting that



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this is our first way of designating his membership) might also be 'the boy next door', 'a Californian', 'a boxing champion', 'a heavy smoker' and so on through a long list of possible membership designations. How we solve this problem of sheer multiplicity in a practical way is, as noted, to cluster such membership designations into what Sacks calls membership categorisation devices (MCDs). These are things like FAMILY, OCCUPATION, NATIONALITY and so forth; note here that I will use capitals for MCD names and quotation marks for the *categories* relevant to those devices. Hence we get sets of devices and categories like the following (see Table 1):

Table 1: Devices and their categories.

Devices	Categories
FAMILY:	'mother', 'father', 'brother', etc.
OCCUPATION:	'postman', 'butcher', 'professor', etc.
NATIONALITY:	'Australian', 'Albanian', 'Afghan', etc.

So, when we're referring to a person via a particular category, it will always be by using a particular category *from a particular device*. And this is important for, as Sacks shows (1972b), some categories (membership terms) can belong to more than a single device. In his example, the designation 'baby' can belong to the device FAMILY or else to that of STAGE OF LIFE; and the difference is crucial given that the 'baby' of the FAMILY may be quite well advanced in years but still the youngest, while the 'baby' from the STAGE OF LIFE device has to be a neonate.³ In ordinary talk and texts, we use such membership sets to make that talk and those texts consistent. If, in one turn at talk, I refer to someone as 'a postman', it is not as consistent in the next turn for my interlocutor to add a reference to another as 'a blonde' as it is for them to designate them as, say, 'a police officer' or 'a plumber'. Hence Sacks's consistency rule:

If some population of persons is being categorized and if some category from a device's collection has been used to categorize a first Member of the population, then that category or other categories of the same collection may be used to categorize further members of the population. (1972a, p. 33; original italics)



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This, I believe, gives us enormous insight into how societies (a) cope with the problem of having available indefinitely many ways of referring to any given person; and (b) form specifically social identities for persons within them. That is, the membership devices are collections, perhaps even collectivities, not of individuals but of *types of person* in the society. They are, in short, social identities. Hence an MCD analysis can, at least potentially, show us how social collections (not just any particular individuals) do actual, accountable, on the ground, here-and-now, identity *work*.

What is of further importance for the analysis of social identities is the moral (sometimes even judgmental) work that the selection of particular categories from particular devices can accomplish.⁴ Above, I referred to the *predicates* that category selections carry with them. These are sometimes also called 'category-bound activities'. Hence the expectable predicates for 'nuns' would be *praying, helping the needy and sick, abstaining*, and so forth; noting that I will henceforth mark predicates with italics. *Killing*, then, is not on the list of expectables for this category of person—which is not to say that it cannot be used for a deliberately disjunctive (or 'newsy') effect.

One of the more elegant aspects of this triplet (device+category+predicate) is that it frequently accomplishes its moral work by inference and implication, rather than by direct mention.⁵ In fact, direct mention can be a signal of a certain kind of social incompetence. We don't say (unless when perhaps writing a reading primer for kids) 'Bill's the postman, he comes to our house each day and leaves mail in the mailbox'. Bill's being designated as the postman is sufficient for competent members to hear (infer) just what it is he expectably does. And this cuts both ways. So if I offer you a well-chosen predicate about some person I'm talking about, you can hear which category from which device I'm implying. In Wowk's (1984) example, a man is being interrogated by police about a woman he has allegedly killed. He refers to her prior conduct in the bar where they met as, *inter alia*, 'getting kind of prickly'. From the predicate, I take it that readers will not need to have it spelled out what category of person is being implied here and the moral work that that could be attempting in a police interrogation.

4. Who Goes There ...?

Given this brief outline of how membership categorisation works in a rather



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general way, can we now say anything along these lines about the particular category of 'killer pilot' from our news article? A first thing we might like to notice here is that the category 'pilot' is *explicitly* collocated with a predicate, *killing* via the adjectival use of 'killer'. What kind of work could this be accomplishing in just this locale? I take it, from the plethora of available contextual cues (for example, that this is a 'friendly fire attack', that the pilot is flying an A-10 Thunderbolt, and so on), that the category 'pilot', in this case, is taken from the device MILITARY PERSONNEL (perhaps even COMBATANTS) and not, for example, from the broader device of PROFESSIONS or OCCUPATIONS, where these latter devices could include civilian and commercial pilots, hobbyists, naval helmsmen, and the like. So, more specifically, we can very easily hear 'pilot' as glossing something more specific, like 'fighter pilot'. Now surely that category from just this device already carries with it—by ordinary implication, for any competent member of the society—the predicate *killing*. Fighter pilots do, unless they are inept, expectably, routinely and accountably *kill*. This is one predicate of which we can, from a list of candidates, be extremely sure. Fighter pilots may protect bomber fleets, strafe runways, escort convoys, and a whole range of similar military functions but, in and as part of these duties, their engagement in *killing* is beyond doubt. We might even say that they have the proverbial licence to kill, in the sense that their engagement in that activity is, as for most categories from the device COMBATANTS, exempted from the usual social-moral sanctions against killing, if the killing is done within the 'rules of war'. What then is the effect, in this particular news context, of Dunn's explicit mention of *killing* (via 'killer')?

If pilots kill legitimately, my suspicion is that actually mentioning the *killing* is designed to reverse that legitimacy. That suspicion goes along the following lines: while, in a strictly literal sense, *killing* is a routine predicate for the category '(fighter) pilots', the very legitimacy of their being ones who kill means that several alternative ways of formulating that predicate can, especially in intra-military contexts, be brought into play. To be sure, fighter pilots, since the early days of World War 1, have boasted of 'kills' though this has rarely referred to the taking of human life but rather to the more anonymous matter of the number of enemy planes shot down in combat. Outside this restricted usage, various (could we say?) euphemisms are brought into play.⁶ Those belonging to the various categories from the device COMBATANTS should, on this account, explicitly not be 'killers'. Rather they do their duty *taking out* enemy command posts, *eliminating* obstacles to the 'progress of the war', *defending* crucial personnel and matériel, *advancing* into



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enemy territory ... the alternatives to *killing* are legion while, at the same time, all concerned are fully aware that these activities themselves can, and frequently do, involve the taking of enemy lives. Taking an extreme case, in *The Pentagon Papers*, Noam Chomsky refers to a military report in which it was said that, during the Vietnam War, the villagers of My Lai 'showed a 100% mortality response', nicely shifting the focus away from what was *done* to the villagers and towards how they acted (Chomsky & Zinn, 1972).⁷

So, if as we have seen, predicates commonly imply categories of persons (or social identities as types), what are the predicates the pilots and their ground controllers use to refer to their (the pilots') actions and, hence, what are the social identities implied by those predicates? A number of formulations of possibly fatal activities are worked up in the transcript following the news report (above). For example, at the very start of the published transcript and video, the ground controller (Manila Hotel, MH) and one of the pilots (Popov35, P35) engage in the following exchange:⁸

Extract 1

1336.30 MH: Popov from Manila Hotel. Can you confirm you engaged that tube and those vehicles?

1336.36 P35: affirm sir.=and looks like I have multiple vehicles in (revert:ts) ah (*) ah:: (*) eight hundred metres to the north of your arty rounds. c'n you ah switch fire, and ah (*) (shift/shoot) fire, try and get some arty rounds on those,

1336.47 MH: roger,=I >understand< that those are the impacts that ah you observed earlier on my timing?

1336.51 P35: affirmative.

1336.52 MH: >roger,<standby.=>let me make sure they're not on another mission.<

Referring to a strafing run on enemy vehicles just prior to the start of the 'friendly fire' incident itself, MH doesn't mention anything that might connote hostilities, let alone killing.⁹ He asks P35 if he has 'engaged' the convoy, an altogether more benign prospect. At the next turn (1336.36) during which P35 notices the British convoy (though he does not yet know that that's just what it is), he doesn't ask MH



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to *kill* the *personnel* on the ground, merely to train the artillery that he controls on their *vehicles*. Coming back then to the earlier run, MH again prefers a downgraded formulation: in this case 'impacts'. And we can see parallels peppered throughout the video and its transcript. Some relevant examples:

Extract 2

1337.36 MH: roger. that matches our intel up there. ah and under- understand you also have the other fixed wing up this push? ah:: (.) for terminal control, if you can.

1337.44 P35: I'd love to:: I didn't talk to him yet.

Extract 3

1339.23 P35: okay, copy. >like I said<, multiple (revetted) vehicles.=they look like flatbed tru:cks. ah (*) are those your targets?

1339.30 MH: that's affirm.

Extract 4

1341.37 P36: Popov Three Six ah:: is rolling in.

1341.40 MH: tell you what.

1341.41 P35: I'm comin' off west. you roll in. (*) it (*) it looks like they are: exactly what we're talking about.

1341.49 P36: we got visual.

1341.50 P36: okay. I want to get that first one >before he gets into town then.<

1341.53 P35: yeah, go get 'im.

1341.55 P36: awright, we got ah ro:cket launchers, it looks like. um number two is rolling in: (0.2) from the south to the north, (*) and ah two's in.

1342.04 P35: get it.

((P36, 'rolls in' for an attack i.e. turns his A-10 aircraft into a vertical dive to



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fire on the vehicles))

1342.09 ((sound of gunfire))

1342.18 P35: I'm off your west.

1342.22 P35: good hits.

This last extract particularly interests me as it involves the first of the two runs on the British convoy, the major incident that this *Sun* report takes as its main news. Firstly the strike is formulated as 'rolling in'; the aviatational manoeuvre, as it were, standing proxy for the actual strafing and eventual 'killing' of a British soldier on the ground. Popov³⁶ then (1341.50) softens his intentions from anything like wanting to kill persons to wanting to 'get' the first vehicle, a formulation immediately echoed by P36. Following this first run, again, there are no 'kills'; only 'hits'—and good ones. It may be important also to consider here the timing of the 'runs' on the convoy: the first takes, from the tape timings, somewhere in the vicinity of 13 seconds; the second closer to seven seconds—such that the sheer speed of current technologies of combat effectively rules out intense ethical discussion about, say, the exact nature of the targets.¹⁰

So, if nothing else, we have to conclude that at least the pilots themselves continually formulated their actions as markedly distinct from anything like killing and, hence, themselves as anything but killers as such. What is *ascribed* to them by Dunn is quite the reverse of what they *avow* of themselves (see Coulter, 1979, on the social consequences of the distinction between ascription and avowal). And they have, as it turns out, very good reason not to avow what Dunn ascribes; at least until after the second run on the convoy when the Popovs realise their mistake. That is, a pilot becomes ascribably a 'killer pilot' when he fires on what all parties to the talk refer to as 'friendlies': allied troops and vehicles. And we should bear in mind that the tape itself became public only as a consequence of the 2007 inquest on the victim, Matty Hull, and so the determination of 'killing' friendlies rather than 'rolling in' on foe has potentially major consequences for the Popovs; as P35 confirms at 1348.12: 'we're in jail dude'.¹¹

There is, though backgrounded by many reports in the UK press, ample evidence that P35 and P36 had every good reason to believe that they were well clear of any allied forces. In fact, near the start of the tape, immediately following Extract 1 (where the convoy is first spotted), we get the following:



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Extract 5

1336.52 MH: >roger,< standby.=>let me make sure they're not on another mission.<

1336.57 P36: hey, I got a four ship. looks like looks like we got orange panels on them though.=do we have any- any ah (.) friendlies up in this area?

Orange panels are the official signal to allied forces that vehicles on the ground are friendly. They are a specific convention to that effect. And before the actual attack, P35 raises the question with the ground controller as to any possibility of 'friendlies' being in the area only to have the possibility denied:

Extract 6

1337.16 P35: confirm, north eight hundred metres. (0.2) confirm no friendlies this far north ah: on the ground.

1337.21 MH: That is 'n affirm.=you are well clear of friendlies.

Having received this definite call, the pilots still do not attack immediately. They go in for a closer look to see if they can find a reason as to why there might be orange markings on enemy trucks. P36, that is, is still not convinced that the panels do not mark 'friendlies' but P35 assures him of ground control's assessment:

Extract 7

1338.49 P36: they look like they have orange panels on though.

1338.51 P35: he tol- (*) he told me there's nobody north of here.=no friendlies.

So, going in to investigate, this is what they (still cautiously) conclude:

Extract 8

1340.13 P36: okay, well they got orange ro:ckets on them.

1340.17 P35: o:range ro:ckets?

1340.17 P36: yeah, I think so:



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1340.18 P35: let me look.

In the device COMBATANTS, then, we can see that there are contrast pairs, one of which is 'friend'/'foe' and such things work asymmetrically with regard to predication. The former, if shot, is 'killed' while the latter is 'rolled in on'; the former carries 'orange panels' and the latter may carry 'orange rockets', and so forth. Shooting the former, then, makes one a killer; the latter makes one a hero (or at least a dutiful member of the military). The somewhat oxymoronic phrase 'friendly fire' is in the local-cultural vocabulary precisely to mark this asymmetry. And so, it's no surprise that the term 'kill' isn't used of the strafing runs until after the 'blue-on-blue' ('friendly fire') situation has come to light and the mistake (as much that of ground intelligence as that of the pilots) is realised.¹²

Extract 9

1347.01 P35: go.

1347.02 M34: roger we are getting an initial ah brief that there w's ah one killed and one wounded, over.

1347.09 P35: Popov three::: fi:::ve (*) copy. R T B ((return to base))

1347.18 P35: I'm going to be sick.

1347.24 P36: ah:::: fu:::ck.

1347.48 P35: >did you hear?<

1347.51 P36: yeah, this sucks.

1347.52 P35: we're in jail dude.

1347.59 P36: AH:::::

Membership categorisation analysis, then, tells us—via its central concepts and their relations—how societies generate social identities and how crucial it is that the 'right type of person' be identified given the situational particulars. The category 'friend' works symmetrically with its co-category to produce the pair 'friend/friend'. One cannot just be a friend in isolation; another is required to avow the reciprocal descriptor. 'Avowing the reciprocal descriptor'—through such predicates as *eating together*, *exchanging birthday cards* or, indeed, *observing orange*



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panels—may sound like a slice of merely technical sociological language in its own right; but it can be, very literally, a matter of life and death.

Notes

1. A link to the video is deleted at the ellipsis. My interpolations are shown {{thus}}.
2. It should be noted that, while the area has not been extensively researched, there is some evidence that it is not just persons-in-the-society that are organised in a 'membershopping' way. One further instance may be buildings, places, geographical locations and the like (see McHoul & Watson, 1984).
3. For an applied and legally/politically consequential use of Sacks's analysis of the device FAMILY, see Summerfield & McHoul (2005).
4. I use the term 'moral' in the traditional sense of what were once called the moral sciences; studies of the 'doctrine or practices of the duties of life' (as *Chambers* has it). By saying that category selections are 'moral' I mean to say that they carry with them common senses of what any person-so-categorised 'ought' to do.
5. See Watson (1978) and Wowk (1984) for perspicuous and socially-consequential examples. See Rapley, McCarthy & McHoul (2003) for another case involving news reportage and killing. See Eglin & Hester (1999a,b) for a similar case.
6. Naturally, the other way of putting this would be to class 'kill' (let alone 'murder') as a dysphemism.
7. As best as I can tell, the reference is right. However I am unable to find the original and cannot be re-quoted on this with any veracity.
8. My citations from the transcript are not exactly as published in *The Sun* (and later in other newspapers). Maurice Nevile (University of Canberra) has kindly lent his expertise in air-to-ground communications by working from the video footage to provide a transcript closer to the usual conversation-analytic conventions. See Appendix 1 (below) for a brief summary and Schegloff (2007, pp. 265–69) for a complete description. In later extracts, there is a fourth speaker, Manila34 (M34), also a ground controller.
9. The term 'connote' here is weak. The literature on connotation is legion and a great deal of it, especially in literary studies, takes connotation to be emotional,



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associative, figurative and variable from individual to individual. Even the more formal semiotic conception of connotation—where first-level signs are used as signifiers at a second level to generate further meanings (Barthes, 1967, pp. 89–94)—by no means evades such psychologism. For a snapshot, see the range of definitions at: <http://www.google.com.au/search?hl=en&q=define%3Aconnotation&btnG=Search&meta=>

One promise of MCA for the sociology of identity formation is a displacement of any such version of connotation by a semi-formal, yet situationally responsive, socio-logic of implication and inference. For such an argument drawing on Sacks and Wittgenstein *inter alia*, see McHoul & Rapley (2003).

10. My thanks here to the editorial referee for *Social Identities* who put the matter succinctly: 'the velocity eliminates the space for "friendlies" to be a viable identity within the killing zone.'

11. This was the single most broadcast line from the tape on TV news bulletins on and around 7 February. On radio, at least one talkback caller condemned P35 not so much for his actions as for thinking, having taken a life, only of his own skin. The various other comments ('I'm going to be sick' and several expletives that have definite tones of deep regret) did not make it to air; but see Extract 9.

12. In a quite different context, at 1340.35, P36 says: 'I think killing these damn rocket launchers would be great'. Again, note the reference to matériel, not persons, as the object of 'killing'.

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CHAPTER

7

"FRACTURED REFLECTIONS" OF HIGH STATUS BLACK PRESENTATIONS OF SELF

NON-RECOGNITION OF IDENTITY AS A "TACIT" FORM OF INSTITUTIONAL RACISM



This article by Anne Rawls and Waverly Duck
was published in

Sociological Focus, 50(1):35-51

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As processes of racialization in the United States have become more “tacit,” obscured by what Eduardo Bonilla-Silva (2006) calls “color blind racism,” barriers to equality and the exercise of legitimate power and authority that remain deeply embedded in everyday life have become increasingly problematic. Although conscious racism remains the focus of popular legal and political concern, unequal treatment by race does not require conscious intent, and conceiving of racism this way has made it difficult to argue that the demonstrable racial biases in American life—even the stark realities involved in “mass incarceration”—are the result of racism (Alexander 2011). Racial inequalities are produced any time the “definition of the situation”¹ that participants use to make sense together incorporates cultural norms about race.² That these tacit interactional processes are forms of institutional racism is not a new idea; they are evident already in Everett Hughes’s (1945) observations on how racial expectations limit the identities that African Americans are expected to hold. But in the current context, in which racism is defined as conscious intent, understanding how unconscious forms of racism work has become essential.

The tacit nature of the problem makes ethnographic and qualitative studies that focus on interactional processes (and the cultural framings they embed) essential to the contemporary study of racial inequality. Using different definitions of the situation, participants in interaction will achieve different social facts: They may literally “see” things differently, and in doing so (re)produce racial inequality. Black and white participants quite literally do not confront the same social facts. Joe Feagin (2013) referred to the prevalence of a “White Racial Frame” that works implicitly to ratify a definition of the situation that favors whites. The many “definitions of the situation” that compose the foundation of everyday sense-making and the various “framings” of identity and meaning they contain have deep histories. They are the result of centuries of slavery and segregated living, carrying old ideas and institutionalized frames of reference about racial differences into contemporary interaction (Rawls 2000).

In this article we use narratives collected from high-status black men to illustrate the problems they confront in getting their identities ratified by others in interaction. Stories about this problem circulate among them and are not a research artifact but rather evidence in their own right of a widespread problem. Participants operating with definitions of the situation that do not include black men in high-status positions have difficulty recognizing them in those identities.



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On the flip side, participants operating with definitions of the situation in which black men occupy low-status service positions (often in uniform or evening dress) tend to identify black men in general with such positions. Thus, Feagin (2013) reported that black airline pilots standing in a hotel lobby were asked repeatedly to get taxis for people. Recently, President Barack Obama told a reporter, "There is no black male my age, who's a professional, who hasn't come out of a restaurant and is waiting for their car and somebody didn't hand them their car keys," adding that this had happened to him. According to the report, "Mrs. Obama recounted another incident at a gala dinner when someone asked Mr. Obama, who was dressed in a tuxedo, to get him coffee" (Westfall 2014). Comments on the article, which refer to the Obamas as "whining" about race, make it clear that although people are aware that this happens, most don't recognize it as racism: constant, unconscious, and insidious.

We argue not only that significant racial injustice is produced by such interactions but also that they violate basic interactional processes in a way that threatens the safety of both self and mutual reciprocity, thus negating the very possibility of open and equal democratic public spaces for everyone. It was Emile Durkheim's (1893) premise in *The Division of Labor* that without open and equal access to what he called "constitutive practices" in modern life democratic society would fail (Rawls 2012). The presentation of self is a fragile process that requires a great deal of mutual attention. As theorized by Erving Goffman (1959), it requires participants to cooperate in maintaining a social contract, or "working consensus." Harold Garfinkel (1963) proposed that mutual "Trust" and commitment to a shared set of "background expectations" are also required. These conditions compose an Interaction Order with shared expectations, common communicative resources,³ and a shared definition (or framing) of the situation. These are used cooperatively to achieve social self and mutual understanding, an interactional process that depends on these interactional commitments being met, at each next point, obligating each participant to the implicit social contract in every interaction.

Not only is the process fragile, but, as Garfinkel and Goffman have argued, it depends on a cooperative sharing of information. Everyone depends on others for information—feedback—about their interactional performance. Feedback on performance, in turn, depends on information about which identity a person is performing. Accordingly, there is a shared need for information about the identities of other participants, on the basis of which an interpretation of interactional



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moves can be made. Next-moves are made based on how prior moves are interpreted—and can reflect back new meaning onto them. Goffman (1959:1) opened his argument in *The Presentation of Self* with an emphasis on this shared need for information:

When an individual enters the presence of others, they commonly seek to acquire information about him. [...] They will be interested in his general socio-economic status, his conception of self, his attitude toward them, his competence, his trustworthiness, etc. [...] Information about the individual helps to define the situation, enabling others to know in advance what he will expect of them and what they may expect of him. Informed in these ways, the others will know how best to act in order to call forth a desired response from him.

Goffman's point is that identifying "Who" a person is—which identity they enact—helps to determine what definition of the situation is in play. Stereotypes and racially framed assumptions about identity are intrinsic to this information gathering process. "If unacquainted with the individual," Goffman (1959:1) said, "observers can glean clues from his conduct and appearance which allow them to apply their previous experience with individuals roughly similar to the one before them or, more important, to apply untested stereotypes to him."

Because recognition of performed identity often depends, as Goffman said, on "stereotypes" and "previous experience with individuals roughly similar," inconsistencies between stereotyped expectations and performed identities are barriers to recognition. A failure to recognize an identity as presented can, in turn, call the definition of the situation itself into question and lead not only to momentary embarrassment but also to enduring failures of meaning and trust. We argue that failures by others to recognize presentations of self by high-status black men are such events. We refer to this process of nonrecognition as a "fracturing"—not of the self but of the reflection of that self, back from the Other (what C. H. Cooley [1902] called the "Looking Glass Self"): a "Fractured Reflection" as if from a broken mirror with consequences not only for the performing self but also for the social interaction and all its participants.

It is our position that such "Fractured Reflections" of identity work involve a broken interactional process in which multiple definitions of the situation stand in fundamental conflict, making it impossible to achieve mutual understanding.⁴



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There are consequences at many levels. The exercise of legitimate authority by black men is certainly compromised. But, at a deeper level, the involvement obligations that constitute the basic social contract facilitating mutual cooperation for all participants is violated. As a consequence, the situation can be confusing to everyone, and because trust conditions are not met, shared resources for achieving resolution are not available. Furthermore, because self and meaning are fragile achievements, a broken interactional process is dangerous to everyone, threatening the coherence of modern public spaces. Whites can avoid the problem by avoiding interracial interaction, which is a distinct pattern in American life. But high-status black men, who must wield authority in predominantly white environments, cannot do so.

It is a matter of both theoretical and ethnographic significance that the high-status black men we talked with report adopting defensive strategies that protect them from such fractured reflections. They perform what we call a "null-response" in the face of nonrecognition of their identity. These null-responses range from refusal to acknowledge or ratify the other's response to them to complete withdrawal from interactional reciprocity. These men do not take fractured responses as reflections of their own competence but rather as distortions for which the other is responsible. Remaining committed to the constitutive requirements of interaction would require taking responsibility for the distorted reflection, and thereby result in damage to self.

This process of nonrecognition and null-response has the virtue for the researcher of exhibiting points of violation, or breach. These can be seen by all parties, although they will make different sense of them according to their different framings of the situation. Operating without benefit of trust conditions and shared background expectations, the problems at these points cannot be resolved by participants. In the narratives we collected they are subjected to repeated analysis that further underscores their irresolvable character. Breached expectations are a common theme in these narratives; we argue that these points of breach, where things do not make sense, are essential for understanding how processes of racialization work in interactions and how they can do so without conscious intent. Moreover, the narratives we collected represent only the tip of an iceberg—a widespread sharing of narratives about identity problems among high-status black men who confront a common problem.

Conventional ethnographic and qualitative methods are likely to overlook these



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points—of breach and violation—treating meaningful social objects as if they just existed (as “shared concepts”), instead of treating them as needing to be accomplished through cooperative action (in observable empirical details). An approach like ethnomethodology, which regards violations as clues to the underlying expectations and definitions of the situation people are using to make meaningful social objects together—to make sense together—treats the existence of a corpus of such narratives in a community as important information. Indeed, the existence of the narratives suggests a recurrent problem that is serious enough to be repeatedly talked about.

The injustices that black men experience in interaction are not apparent to those participants who employ a white racial frame and thus cannot “see” them in the identities they perform. Having not “seen” the problem in the first place, those working with different definitions of the situation may consider the practice of “null-response” uncalled for—even rude. We argue that the practice of null-response is the main resource that these men are using to achieve high self-esteem, maintain personal dignity, and wield power in spite of persistent nonrecognition. So, it is important. However, in a context of general misunderstanding, there are consequences. Beyond the incomprehension it produces for others, research shows that withdrawal from reciprocity relations in interracial interaction can escalate interactional troubles related to race/ethnicity (Rawls and David 2006).⁵ There may be damage to the Interaction Order itself and to mutual understanding, accompanied by a reluctance to trust participants of other races (Rawls 2000). Thus, although a null-response offers protection, it also causes problems, and the constant need to employ such strategies can result in what we call “racial fatigue.”

Our objective is to articulate the empirical contours of “Fractured Reflections” as a type of interactional event and elaborate its theoretical and research relevance in the context of an interactionist theory of the Presentation of Self as an achieved social fact. As with the shared experiences W. E. B. Du Bois (1903) drew on to illustrate his famous conception of “Double Consciousness,” the phenomenon of “Fractured Reflection” and null-response we analyze is currently known primarily as an “experience” about which high-status black men tell each other stories. Little consideration has been given to what it is as an interactional event, or to what its theoretical and methodological implications might be.

We argue that this interactional event illustrates the consequences of not using



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the same “definition of the situation” and/or meeting the “involvement obligations” implicit in interaction, and we propose that the essential back-and-forth process of mutual reciprocity necessary for achieving Self and Identity can become racialized, and sense-making damaged, by nonrecognition of Self by Other(s) in interaction.⁶ We take the position that both self and sense-making must be continually achieved through mutual recognition and commitment to the constitutive reciprocity conditions of an Interaction Order (Garfinkel 1963; Goffman 1983; Rawls 1987) but that race, gender, and other “categories” can become embedded in expectations about identity. When a person enacts an identity that Other(s) are unable or unwilling to “see” them in, the failure to confirm identity constitutes negative feedback. When this is due to an unequal distribution of expected identities by race, it is a form of institutionalized racism. Although everyone may experience some disconfirming reflections of Self, too much threatens the integrity of the self. We propose a threshold of frequency beyond which Trust conditions cannot be maintained, such that defensive strategies of null-response become likely, particular interactions are broken, and the possibility of future interactions may be jeopardized.⁷

Combining Ethnography and Ethnomethodology with a Narrative Approach

The narrative data in this article come from interviews with black men who are salaried employees with high-status corporate careers. We made a strategic selection of interviewees based on our theoretical concerns relative to race and high status. Poor black men are also perceived in negative identities they do not claim for themselves—seen as “out of place,” told to go back where “they belong,” and mistaken for identities they do not claim. Kathryn Russell-Brown’s (2008) conception of the “criminalblackman” as an omnipresent framing device is a case in point. But in spite of earlier research documenting the problems faced by the black middle class (Bell 1973; Delgado and Stefancic 2001; Feagin and Sikes 1994), there is a widespread perception today that successful black middle-class professionals are able to escape from such racializing experiences at least at their professional worksites. Our own experience with fracturing suggested the reverse: that, in fact, high-status black men are very likely to experience such fracturing with some frequency—maybe even greater frequency because of the mixed race environments in which they work. This is a problem. The question Hughes



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(1945:359) raised about black professionals is still relevant: "In what circumstances can the person who is accepted formally into a new status, and then informally kept within the limits of the kind mentioned, step out of these limits and become simply a lawyer, foreman, or whatever?" The answer is: with extreme difficulty and at great cost to both Self and Other.

Following an initial experience in the field with a Fractured Reflection witnessed by both authors, we initiated discussions with nine high-status black men to explore the phenomenon. When all nine indicated that they recognized and were familiar with the problem, we increased the sample, identifying and talking to more than three dozen high-status black men about the problem of fracturing and nonrecognition. It was happening to all of them.

The participants we interviewed were recruited using a snowball sampling method. High-status black men who were known to us were interviewed first and then asked to recommend other men who should be interviewed for the study. Participants were selected based on their executive or professional status and positions of authority. We relied on the networks of participants to identify potential interviewees. All were from the Midwest and northeast United States. Most were in their mid- to late forties: the youngest was 28, the oldest 61.

In soliciting their narratives, we used a method whereby an initial narrative becomes what Garfinkel (2002) called a "coat hanger" for collecting similar stories from an informant. It is a method for use in exploratory fieldwork when situated practices and definition of the situation are not shared. An initial story is presented, and if the person recognizes it, they tell a similar story. Thus, the method avoids the problem of assuming a shared set of social facts where there are none. Garfinkel used it to study problems in laboratory science that are beyond the scientific understanding of the researcher. Employing the method successfully gives the researcher access to the social practices through which relevant social objects and understandings are achieved, adding empirical contour to matters otherwise inexplicable.

We used this method in earlier research (Rawls 2000) on interracial interaction to turn up a rich vein of narrative about race issues in interaction that were otherwise invisible from a "white" perspective. If people don't recognize the coat hanger story, they say nothing, ask for clarification, look puzzled, and so on. The men we talked with all launched immediately into similar stories, thus indicating their recognition



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of the phenomenon.

Two stages of interviewing took place. The initial goal was to confirm our sense that the problem is well known and widespread among high-status black professionals. Every one of the high-status black men we approached recognized the phenomenon and told us stories about similar experiences of their own—sometimes taking the experience so much for granted that they immediately begin talking about “it” and how they deal with “it.” In response to our narrative about fracturing, we found they could talk for hours. There was no contradictory information.

The first stage of interviewing also involved a “getting to know you” process during which the interviewer and participant informally discussed details of the participant’s job and daily life. This was a rapport-building process. They wanted to know as much about us as we did about them. The interviews focused on the men’s experiences as authority figures in predominantly white workplaces. The men participated with the intent of discussing their experiences as white-collar professionals and shared extended personal narratives about being leaders/supervisors in their various occupations. Most of the participants were affluent and well educated; they included corporate vice-presidents, physicians, attorneys, architects, engineers, and school principals. Although exceptional by any standards, these men, nonetheless, tended to downplay their accomplishments.

We followed up with a second stage of more extensive interviewing with nine men to deepen our ethnographic understanding of what fracturing looks like across a collection of their narrative accounts of various situations. These interviews took from 1 to two hours, were recorded, and consisted of an extended reexamination of issues raised in the first interview about workplace dynamics. Telephone interviews were used in some cases to follow-up on missing details. The process of doing multiple interviews with the same person took from one to six hours. All of the initial recorded interviews were done face-to-face, usually in the participant’s home and/or office. Our initial interviews had established that all the men were familiar with the phenomenon of fracturing. The extended interviews collected detailed accounts from the highest status subset of men with whom we had established the rapport necessary to get them to spend the many hours involved.

Their narratives all describe problems with identity recognition, differing mainly in situational detail. The length and depth of the discussions afforded opportunities



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to cross-check, evaluate, and validate the narratives against each other. We followed up extensively with additional questions. The narratives were powerful, consistent, and repetitive. We did not distill a theme from the data or select one theme from many. Rather, we told a story about fracturing, and the high-status black men we interviewed responded with their own narratives about fracturing.

The narratives selected for this article are intended to exhibit the empirical contours of the fracturing process, which both authors, in the course of prior fieldwork, had witnessed. Elijah Anderson (2011) also described a similar phenomenon in "The Social Situation of the Black Executive" (Anderson, 2001). Because the narratives are extensive, each involving essential contextual detail, keeping the narratives somewhat intact and in sequence was a priority. This has resulted in lengthy narrative sections. These are necessary because the context and sequence of events offer insights into exactly what expectations were violated and how—and how a sequence of such events led the men to expect additional instances and develop defensive practices over time. In the interest of preserving contextual and interactional detail, and considering the high degree of consistency and redundancy across narratives, we settled on an extended discussion of narratives from three interviews that seemed to us to contain the most detail in an extended sequence of narrative.

Empirical Contours of Fractured Reflections

The narratives tell stories about situations in which our high-status black male informants had trouble getting their identities recognized: Employees did not recognize their status as the boss, did not do the work they were asked to do (or checked with others first to see whether they should do it), and/or would not follow instructions. Various accounts of why this might be happening also appear in the narratives—highlighting the inability to make sense of the events in the normal way. These attempts at interpretation reveal how failures to achieve shared meaning can force interpretation back to group narratives that reinforce stereotypes about race. Some parts of the narratives relate the black executive's own interpretation of why it happens. Other parts report accounts they were given by employees for why it happened. The latter exhibit the employees' uncertainty as to whether the black executive is the person who should be telling them what to do. The narratives all involve situations in which an employee's definition of the situation does not include the black executive as an identity with the authority to



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give them instructions. By contrast, the definition of the situation the black executives are working with (and the one *their* bosses are working with) requires them to manage their own employees.

These high-status black executives describe unexpected and inappropriate responses to their identities which they learn to “ignore” and “brush off”: white people confusing them with other black people, something they learn to “expect”; various ways in which they are treated as incompetent; and learning the importance of vigilantly “not trusting” those whose responses confront them in ways they consider unfair and disconfirming. They describe being constantly “on guard” in interaction. Although they are successful and do not detach from the organizations they work for, they express some feelings of alienation and might be said to suffer from what we call “racial fatigue”: The constant need to monitor both sides of the “veil” is tiring, especially when, as Du Bois pointed out, the white majority do not recognize the existence of the problem and consequently cannot cooperate with them to solve it.

Although we argue that fracturing is a racialized experience, initially the men did not talk explicitly about race. Once they began discussing challenges in the workplace, however, they began to talk about how race shaped their interactions. But they made it clear that this was a topic they avoided discussing with coworkers. Furthermore, the men provided racialized accounts of how their authority was questioned by both whites and blacks. In other words, they discussed their troubles in a way that downplayed race as the cause while offering race as a contributing factor. They were certain that something was amiss in their interactions and described disengaging from those interactions, which we call a “null-response.”⁸

First Narrative: Robert, Corporate Vice President

The black, male vice president (mid-forties) of a large corporation, whom we call Robert,⁹ described problems he has at the office with people who do not recognize his identity and status as a competent vice president. To deal with this, he developed what he calls “strategies” for getting his job done. These involve expecting the sort of troubles he describes, not treating the nonrecognition he gets as a reflection on himself, and not trusting those who respond to him in ways he considers inappropriate.



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Second-Guessing His Instructions

Robert has a white, female office assistant whom he says will not do what he asks without “second-guessing” and “checking” to see whether his instructions should be followed. The person she checks with is his boss—the president of the company. Robert expresses his belief that his assistant wants him to succeed, but when he gives her an instruction and she checks with the president of the company, she is implicitly refusing to recognize his identity and authority, which creates problems for him. Robert has already talked to the president and knows what the latter expects. Thus, if his assistant checks with the president, this makes Robert look incompetent.

Data Excerpt 1: Robert – WS310124–Transcription #3:

Robert: Ok, the most frequent interactions that I have are with persons who report to me and I have given them either an assignment or I have been given an assignment from my superior and I ask for them to do certain kinds of things where that assignment is concerned, and they have a habit of going around me and asking my, actually asking, the president of the company, if this is something that he really wants done, or is this the way that he wants it done. And it is couched in, “Well I wanted to make certain that I was protecting you by asking how the president wants this accomplished.” Now I’ve already been told how the president wants it accomplished, and I’ve already shared that with the person who reports to me, but it is not good enough. She, for instance, in many instances, needs to get it from the president. And I have not witnessed her doing that to anybody else. And then she gets patronizing and says, “I was just doing it to protect you.” I don’t need her protection, you understand what I’m saying, and so what she does is, she tries to couch her, in my mind insurrection and insubordination, she tries to couch it in being responsible for me.

His assistant’s nonresponsive behavior indicates to him that she doesn’t recognize his identity as company vice president. He considers her behavior patronizing, because she acts as if she needs to protect him—and as if she knows more than he does. Further, he considers it insubordination because her response denies his identity as her boss and refuses to acknowledge the legitimacy of his instructions. Because Robert rejects the relevance of her response for his own identity and



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competence, her nonresponsiveness does not damage his self-esteem. It does, however, make it difficult for him to perform competently in his role. His own boss may wonder what is going on, and it will make achieving mutual understanding with the assistant increasingly problematic.

Not Trusting as a Defensive Strategy

When asked what effect this nonresponsive behavior on the part of a subordinate might have on Robert's willingness to trust the subordinate, he responded vehemently, and with many repetitions (for emphasis) that it leads him not to trust them:

Data Excerpt 2: Robert – WS310124–Transcription #3:

Robert: I never trust you. I never trust you. I never ever trust you. I always second guess your motives. This person, one of these people who reports to me does an outstanding job, outstanding, every "i" is dotted; every "t" is crossed, it's outstanding. But the process by which she has gone to do it, she causes me not to trust her, not to trust her. So it becomes exceptionally convoluted, you know, the relationship becomes one of somebody where I need somebody whom I need to be trusting but I can't, but someone who gets her job done and does it exceptionally well, but I still have to question the motivation and all of that. So no, I don't ever trust her.

Robert is describing a broken interactional process. He has responded to his assistant's nonrecognition of his identity by withdrawing from trust relations with her. When he asks her to do something for him, he does not trust that she will do it, or that she will respond to him as a competent vice president. He withdraws trust, even though he believes her motivation is to help and protect him. Refusing to ratify a person's presentation of self has negative consequences, no matter what the motivation.

Unfortunately, withdrawing from trust relations, although a useful protective strategy, interferes with the ability to deal with these issues directly. Repair work requires trust and mutual commitment. His assistant, who probably can see clearly that he is not happy with her, is likely as a consequence to do more and more to "help" him. Her increased efforts to help, in turn, will again tell Robert that she does not think he is competent, and the cycle will continue. The inability to effect a within-interaction repair because trust is lacking will perpetuate the cycle.



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White People Refuse to Accept That a Black Man Is Competent

Although initially telling us that his problem was not racial, Robert went on to formulate the problems he experiences in terms of the unwillingness of white people to recognize a black man in a competent identity. He told us that at least he had not had to resort to negative sanctions for the nonresponsiveness of employees. If that became necessary, he said, he would have to be meting out negative sanctions to “all kinds of people.”

Data Excerpt 4: Robert – WS310124–Transcription #3:

Robert: Because one of the things that I have come to realize is that particularly white folk, white people, and I don't know if I'm being too graphic here, but white people simply refuse to accept that a Black man could possibly have the kind of intellectual acumen to get things done without their striving to do those things for us. You know, there's the sense that they are superior.

Like the other men we talked to, Robert is reluctant to express things in terms of race. Nevertheless, he states explicitly that in his experience “white people simply refuse” to accept that a black man could have the “intellectual acumen to get things done” without help. He says he feels “that white people feel they are superior.”

Second Narrative: George, Corporate Newspaper Executive

George is a young (midthirties) up-and-coming executive with a major newspaper. He told us about a number of what he called “strange experiences” of nonrecognition with his white coworkers. He was for years one of only two black executives working for the company and was often mistaken for the other man, his mentor, who was 25 years his senior (a frequent complaint from the men we spoke to). After five years, a third black executive was hired, and many people congratulated George for his new job. Of course, it was not his job. People he had worked with for five years could not tell George and the new black executive apart.

In addition to such literal recognition problems, George told stories about trouble getting people to recognize his role/identity and do as he requested. He said he realized early on that his white coworkers considered him to have not earned his



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position through merit. Following a temporary promotion to acting director of his department (to replace his vacationing boss), he experienced a combination of face-to-face challenges and employees refusing to do what he asked. Although George said he had expected trouble, he was still surprised by the extent of it.

Problems as Acting Manager

George's narrative of his two weeks as acting manager of a team of 12 employees includes people in other departments refusing to do the work requested by his department—"not processing paperwork, not processing the client's ads, pushing back on us things that should have been produced to make things stressful for me."

Data Excerpt 1: George – WS310111

George: And I had a manager who was going on vacation for two weeks. [...] He chose me to be his Acting Manager because I was doing such a great job and he felt I could handle the job and the team always really respected me. It was a team of twelve of us. So he put me as the Acting Manager in his absence for two weeks, which was again, unprecedented, because I was the young black kid. What happened is, after, you know, while I was in my Acting Manager's position for those two weeks a lot of people in the company were not happy with that and they had no problem making it known by messing with all of the people who worked out of my department, not processing paperwork, not processing the clients ads, pushing back on us things that should have been produced to make things stressful for me, to make me think that, "Oh it's so stressful, I shouldn't wanna do this." So they kept making it harder.

Although members of his own department (mostly African American) were working hard for him, his directions were being ignored by employees in other departments. When they didn't run ads as requested, they said things like, "Well, we didn't know if they were supposed to run."

We asked George how he found out that people in other departments were not doing the work he had asked for and placing the ads he sent over. The following excerpt provides his explanation.

Data Excerpt 2: George – WS310111

George: Oh, it got back to me because the employees who I was over at the



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time were telling me that things weren't getting processed, their ads weren't getting—some people's ads didn't appear in the paper, some people's online advertising didn't start and they were confused as to why it didn't happen. And then with me being the acting leader, I had to call and check into it, and then as I started calling and checking with people, like, "Ok, what happened with these clients' digital programs?" And they were like, "Well, we didn't know if they were supposed to run." You know, they gave me explanations that did not justify not putting them in, and then I explained to them that, you know, I let them know that I could tell that their reasoning wasn't appropriate for not taking the actions that they should have. So they was really trying to stir up problems, you know, missing ads, which cost the department money, which made me look bad under my leadership.

According to George, employees said they "didn't know if they [the ads] were supposed to run." He considered that their "explanations didn't justify their actions." This made him think "that this was something against me personally."

Data Excerpt 3: George – WS310111

George: I was finding these things out as I made calls to see what was going on, because I didn't delegate it, I stood—because it was on my name I made sure I got in front of the people who were doing these things. I handled the problem ... and then as I would talk to these different departments and people I could hear that they were messing my stuff up, or messing stuff up in my department on purpose, with no justifiable reason. And then that's when I realized that they were, you know, that this was something against me personally. Because then, as I said, the explanations didn't justify their actions. Any other time they would have processed everything or put this through or billed something correctly, but within the time frame that I was—they wouldn't process it, they wouldn't bill it correctly. They wouldn't design the ads for my salespeople—everything, everything was just like, "No, no, no, no, no. We can't do it." Or, "We didn't wanna do it." Or "We didn't know what to do, so we just didn't do anything."

"Most People Like George Are in Jail"

An explicit face-to-face challenge to his identity occurred when a white worker



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from another department walked into his department. George's immediate subordinates told the man what a good job George was doing and said they would like to be more like him. The man's response to their enthusiasm was, "I don't know if you wanna be like George, because most people like George are in jail." Race is not mentioned directly, but the invocation of the "criminalblackman" stereotype is obvious. George describes initiating a complete interactional break at this point.

Data Excerpt 4: George – WS310111

George: The guy, he was about 55, 56, and he had been there for like thirty years doing the same job and now I was the Acting Manager and he was mad because he just didn't believe that I was—because I wasn't part of the good-old-boy system, he didn't believe I should have had that opportunity. And so he came into the department and with a very comedic type of attitude was talking to me about, "Oh, so I hear you're in charge over here. Oh wow." So when he said that, my subordinates were like, "Oh, yeah, yeah, George is in charge. We're trying to be more like George. He's making goals, he knows his processes, he's sharp, he's all of this." And then that's when he tells the group, "I don't know if you wanna be like George, because most people like George are in jail." And that's how he worded it on the floor, in front of everybody. And then, I just, I just turned from him and just walked away. Well, actually, he was at my desk, so I really turned from him and just went back to my work. So it would be like you standing over me and then I just stop looking at you, I don't give you my attention anymore, and then I went back to my desk and just started working.

George said he turned away and refused to acknowledge the man's presence. In our terms, this is a total null-response. He backed out of reciprocity relations and removed himself from the interaction. It is this removal from interactional reciprocity that we want to highlight. We came across it repeatedly in the narratives. The way the situation played out is that George's staff (primarily African American women) "spoke up" for him while he ignored the situation.

Data Excerpt 5: George – WS310111

George: And then my staff, who part of them were, mostly they were African American women, some were African American women, some were white women, some were white men—they just all started, you know, well, actually the African American women really spoke up. And they were older



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than me. So they really like, I mean, they were more, I would put them in their 40s, and they were more boisterous to him for that attack on me, than anyone else in the group because they know that I was doing good things, and so they were pretty much defending me. And I just asked the ladies to let it be, "It's ok, don't worry about it, we don't need to, we have other things we have to do. He said it, please let's move on." And so, that's kind of how I ended it. And then I went back to my work and he left with pretty much, egg on his face that this came out. And I did a good job, and I did a good job and I ended up being promoted a couple of months quicker.

In George's view, his null-response was effective and he came out of this interaction the winner. The man who insulted him "left with pretty much, egg on his face" and George got a promotion.

Knowing Your Enemies and Not Trusting Them

George explained that it is important to know who is in your corner, know who is against you, and not trust the enemy. He is clear in his view that there are enemies in the workplace and he needs to figure out who they are so that he can discount their responses: "They was really just trying to frustrate me by just telling me that what I was doing was wrong but wouldn't give me any answers as to how or what."

Data Excerpt 6: George – WS310111

George: I, um, I could tell. I could tell when I felt my enemies would always speak to me in very abstract terms. You know, not giving me any, well you know, my enemies would say that I did something wrong but wouldn't tell me exactly what I did wrong. For example, just saying that, "You know what, all of this is wrong." And then, just don't wanna give me any specifics as to what components of it is wrong. Those are the people who I immediately just looked at as my enemies, because they didn't, weren't trying to help me do something better, they was really just trying to frustrate me by just telling me that what I was doing was wrong but wouldn't give me any answers as to how or what. So those people who would say things and then, yeah, usually the people who I didn't trust, the little ones who would try to make things—I just—if their actions or their words were to make things harder for me then I didn't trust them.

George refers to "the people who I didn't trust" as "the little ones who would try to



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make things ... harder for me” and considers it important to identify such people. Then he would “either put processes in place where they had to do whatever I asked them to do” or figure out how to work around them. The prospect of working amidst enemies and people who can’t be trusted because they are hoping to make things so hard for you that you give up is staggering. Nonetheless, George treats it as what he expects and what he needs to deal with.

Third Narrative: Simon, Corporate Advertising Account Executive

Simon is an account executive selling advertising space for a major newspaper. When we told our initial “coat hanger” story, he indicated immediately that he was familiar with what we described by taking “it” for granted and immediately beginning to tell us how he dealt with “it.” According to Simon, he is at a point in his career (early forties) where he has had a number of different positions and sufficient experience to “learn to deal with it.” He said, “I think experience teaches you how to deal with it and act maturely.”

“I Don’t Know if It’s Necessarily Race Related”

Simon began by offering the disclaimer that he did not know whether any of his experiences with “it” were race related. Nevertheless, he explicitly formulated his problems getting subordinates to do as he asked in terms of what he called a race and gender “double standard.” The question of whether problems were race related he called “a gnawing feeling in the back of my head.” Ultimately, though, he said it didn’t matter because there was nothing he could do to change it.

Data Excerpt 1: Simon – WS310127

Simon: I don’t know if it’s necessarily race related. I mean, I don’t ever wanna say something is definitely race related unless someone says it for sure, but it’s always a gnawing feeling in the back of my head, and it gets to the point of what are you gonna do about it? You know what I mean, and it’s almost a rhetorical question.

Subordinates Challenge His Authority and Will Not Do as He Asks

Simon went on to tell us about subordinates who do not do as he asks. It has apparently become necessary on many occasions for Simon to “assert his authority” to get things done. Assistants tell him they are busy with other projects. He is not recognized as an authority figure.



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Data Excerpt 2: Simon - WS310127

Simon: But I've had situations where I've had to tell subordinates, remind them of who the authority figure was, namely myself. I had an assistant once who I asked to do something and, you know, she told me she was working on something else and it was a priority and to me that was just, that was mind-blowing and I had to remind her that I set her priorities and that what I asked her to do, which was something that was coming from my own boss, was urgent and needed to be done and that just, that was mind-boggling.

The need to assert authority to get things done is not only an indication of a problem, but Simon recognizes that it can in and of itself be a problem. If he needs to deal with too many situations forcefully Simon worries that he may come off as "arrogant."

A Double Standard

Although he is reluctant to say that his experiences have anything to do with race, Simon refers to a "double standard" and says his own situation is analogous to when "men who are aggressive are applauded in the workforce and women who are aggressive are called a very derogatory term."

Data Excerpt 3: Simon - WS310127

Simon: I had other situations where you hear feedback from people and some of the words that come up, you know, whether someone is saying that you're perceived by your coworkers or colleagues or subordinates as being arrogant or not approachable or something like that, which again, I think that was kind of mind boggling, it's a double standard where I can see, you know, white males in a similar position and maybe exhibit the same behavior I did or do and they don't have that same kind of feedback. It's almost like the situation where men who are aggressive are applauded in the workforce and women who are aggressive are called a very derogatory term, and it's kind of like that double standard, and again, I think just with experience you just kind of learn to deal with it or brush it off and figure out a way to approach the situation that's not going to negatively impact my own career.



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Feeling he is being forced to be aggressive by employees who do not recognize his identity worries Simon. It is the same double standard that keeps them from recognizing his identity, which also forces him to be aggressive. At the same time, he recognizes the likelihood that others will not applaud aggression on his part. He may find himself in the position of an aggressive woman being “called a very derogatory term.” So he prefers to “brush it off” and deal with “it” in a nonconfrontational way.

Discussion: Protective Responses to Fractured Reflections

Because high-status black men often don't get back a reflection of the Self they have actually presented, they learn not to treat such “Fractured Reflections” as true assessments of themselves. In order to maintain high status and self-esteem, they deny the validity of such responses—by giving a null-response—sometimes completely withdrawing from conversational reciprocity. The state of invisibility and nonrecognition reported in our narratives is reminiscent of the problem Ralph Ellison (1952) called attention to in *The Invisible Man*. You know you are participating and talking, but the feedback you expect is missing altogether, or not (in any sense you can make out) a response to, or affirmation of, the identity you are presenting. Such failures of mutual intelligibility and recognition of self would “normally” be corrected or repaired within the interaction. Correcting presentations of self in the face of the Other(s)' responses is an essential and ongoing part of achieving and maintaining self.

But “correction” cannot occur without cooperation from others. Furthermore, continued attempts at repair could create a sense that the problem is due to a personal failing. Although these men may be doing something wrong in the context of the Other(s)' definition of the situation, they are not doing anything wrong in the context of their own. The men we talked with report breaking off reciprocity and falling back on stereotypes and motivated accounts as a way of making sense for themselves of troubled interactions while refusing to acknowledge the relevance of the Other's response. A good attitude doesn't lessen the effect, as Robert's discussion of his assistant illustrates. She has (in his view) a good attitude and wants to help him. The problem is that in trying to help him, she is not recognizing (and ratifying) the legitimacy of his identity. It is not attitudes that lead to these interactional failures—although they may lurk within the racial frames that render people unable to “see” black men in high-status positions.



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We propose that those who experience frequent and unpredictable failures by others to affirm the self they are trying to present will at some point cross a threshold where they must either begin refusing to make corrections and repairs or be damaged themselves. We see this with Robert, who has stopped treating his assistant's responses as having anything to do with the competence of his own performance. We see it also in the narratives of Simon and George, who talk about the need to "ignore" and "brush off" responses they do not recognize as relevant to their own conception of themselves. The effect of continuing to make a full commitment to interactional reciprocity requirements would be a damaged conception of self.

In spite of the problems they describe, the men we talked with are all achieving a high degree of success. That success, however, comes at a price: It requires skilled use of adaptive strategies not required of "normal" others, and requires them to succeed without access to interactional tools available to their white competitors. They must do extra work to manage their employees, which they worry carries the danger that they will be seen as arrogant or bossy. Operating without the benefit of information conveyed by feedback about the self they are presenting is problematic. Fractured reflections come from participants who should be competent to reflect an accurate assessment. Rejecting the distorted reflections they return leaves black actors without reliable feedback for assessing self-presentation. Ultimately, their need to frequently break off reciprocity relations undermines "Trust" relations constitutive of self and sense-making. Instead, they are forced to fall back on guessing and imputing motives (often using stereotypes and shared narratives like the ones we collected) as a way of gaining some purchase on how Others are interpreting them.

When black men are forced to resort to such self-protective measures, they lose access to essential interactional resources. Others, in turn, lose access to mutually meaningful interaction with them, and we all lose the possibility of democratic public spaces.

Conclusion

The past decade has seen a renaissance in scholarship documenting a growing race problem in the United States today. Research has exposed the unconscious working of racism in terms of a "white racial frame" (Feagin 2013), "colorblind



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racism" (Bonilla-Silva 2006), and the prevalent conception of a "criminalblackman" (Russell-Brown 2008). In this era of mass incarceration (Alexander 2011) in which the stigma and fear of the black man as "criminal" and "thug" serves as justification to many Americans for the multiple daily shootings of unarmed citizens by the police, and the incarceration of young children for misbehaving in elementary schools, it is time for a new understanding of where racism lives and how it operates. When category inequalities (such as race or gender) become embedded in the tacit expectations about who can legitimately hold certain social identities, discrimination has become institutionalized in interactional practices.

Although it may well be true that the designers of the "War on Drugs" had the conscious intention of controlling and subjugating black men as Alexander asserts, conscious intent is not the big problem today. But that does not explain why the vast majority of Americans—who have no such intention—cannot see the racism in the current social arrangements and are content to do nothing about them. They can't see the racism at work in American life, because when they examine their own attitudes and intentions they do not find racism there. We can question to what extent this apparent colorblindness is wishful thinking; in his interviews with people who claim to be colorblind, Bonilla-Silva found a great deal of thinly coded racism. But in the big picture, that is not the problem. We propose that vast amounts of racism are reproduced every day in almost every interaction in which any American participates—and that conscious intention is rarely involved. Racist ways of "seeing" and "doing" are embedded in the very interactional practices through which we make sense and self in everyday life. This is not surprising given the racial history of this country; in fact, it is a bit surprising that we should not be more aware of it. But it means that until we change our tacit expectations we are all—black and white—reproducing racism everyday as a matter of course.

This in itself is a huge problem. And yet we argue that there is an even bigger problem: The interactional processes we depend on to make stable sense and self together require trust, reciprocity, and cooperation while the inequalities embedded in tacit expectations about identity contradict those requirements. When interactional expectations embed structural injustices, the assumptions institutionalized in the shared means of conducting daily life directly contradict the basic requirements for achieving meaningful social interaction: equality and reciprocity as implicit conditions for cooperation.

The problem is not solved by challenges to unfair arrangements. As Goffman



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(1983:12) noted, "... in recent times blacks and women have concertedly breached segregated public spaces, in many cases with lasting consequence for access arrangements, but, all in all, without much change in the place of blacks and women in the social structure." Breaching interactional expectations, as Garfinkel repeatedly demonstrated, can cast those expectations in high relief, making them visible to researchers, but it does not change them. That requires changing the fundamental assumptions and presuppositions that have been embedded in identity work. It is interesting that in discussing how to do this, Goffman (1983:12) cited only negative cases, referring to "regimes" that were able to stigmatize a group by marking them in some way: [O]ne can appreciate the purpose of a new regime in introducing and enforcing a practice that strikes at the manner in which broad categories of person will appear in public, as, for example, when the National Socialists in Germany required Jews to wear identifying arm bands when in public places.

We need to figure out how to make such changes in a positive direction. How do we disentangle the identities "black" and "criminal"? As a matter of daily interactional practice? How do we change professional identity expectations so that they include black men and women? The practices for reproducing these inequalities are embedded in our daily identity work as much as negative stereotypes about Jewish identity were embedded in the daily interactions of the German people under the Nazi regime.

A first step would be to adopt a definition of racism as an institutionalized phenomenon that has become deeply embedded in the tacit interactional expectations of daily life: a definition that acknowledges the facts of contemporary American life, rather than blaming the victim. There are legal and political implications of adopting this definition as well as practical and moral ones. Courts would be able to consider cases of discrimination on entirely new terms. Putting the myth of colorblindness aside could enable a much needed national conversation about race.

There are also implications for ethnographic research across groups with conflicting definitions of the situation. Because social facts vary with the definition of the situation, observations must be kept in the context of the definition of the situation that produced them. Approaches like ethnomethodology, which treats troubles as indicators of underlying expectations, are invaluable when a research site contains conflicting definitions of the situation—or when the researcher does



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not share the definition of the situation that participants are acting on.

As Elijah Anderson (2011) explained in *The Cosmopolitan Canopy*, black Americans all too often learn that it is dangerous to adopt an egalitarian approach to interaction: an approach that Anderson calls “Cosmopolitan” or “Cosmo.” Such an approach leaves them open to damaging racialized moments that are impossible to anticipate. In other words, although a “Cosmo” approach, which treats everyone as equal, is highly desirable and even essential to public civility in modern democratic publics, black Americans (and others who experience persistent fractured responses to their identity work) may find an approach embedded in their own ethnicity or community of values less risky. As a consequence, a protective ethnic and cultural stance is frequently adopted. The big problem is that trust and reciprocity are necessary for anyone to achieve the identities to which they are entitled. Thus, when inequalities built into the social distribution of identity expectations make trust and mutual reciprocity dangerous, modern democratic publics are not achieved.

The problem of “fractured reflection” that we identify supports Durkheim’s (1893) argument (echoed by Goffman and Garfinkel) that unfairness in the distribution of opportunities disrupts the very fabric of mutuality, cohesion, and mutual intelligibility in modernity (Rawls 2012). Some have objected that the actual unfairness so obvious in modern life negates the claim that justice is a constitutive necessity in interaction. But the fragile processes of interaction do not produce mutually intelligible sense and self when the trust requirement is not met. In the narratives we consider, the unfairness built into definitions of the situation and the framings of identity they incorporate—durable structures with deep histories—make both face-to-face self and sense-making impossible, just as Durkheim and Garfinkel predicted.

The persistence in modernity of definitions of the situation that include inherent race, gender, and cultural inequalities threatens the mutual commitment to open and equal Interaction Orders, and thus constitutes an injustice at both the structural and interactional levels.

Notes

1 “Definition of the Situation” is a foundational theoretical idea of interactionism.



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Originating with W. I. Thomas, it was picked up by Garfinkel in the 1940s and then by Goffman in 1959. In addition, Goffman (1974) did an extended analysis of the relevance of frames and framing to sense-making in *Frame Analysis*.

2 Although race is a social category and not a biological classification, the cultural norms about race that frame the ways of "seeing" race that produce the racialized interactions we analyze often incorporate outmoded conceptions of race as a genetic or biological category. All of these meanings are implicated in our data.

3 Conversation Analysis documents a set of conversational resources used across many situations and cultures. For a good summary discussion, see Suchman (2007). See Rawls (2015) for an application to designing digital information systems.

4 Such Fractured Reflections constitute a natural occurrence of the violation of Trust conditions—and the ensuing meaninglessness—that Garfinkel (1963) tried to produce experimentally for the Trust paper. No trust—no shared meaning—no resources for resolving problems.

5 It was suggested by one of the reviewers that null-responses may be playing a role in interactions between black men and the police. This may be the case. Having viewed some of these data, it seems that the police often begin by being nonresponsive to black men: ignoring whatever they say. But, then yes. Null-response to nonrecognition would describe much of what comes next. It is engaging to all participants as shown by Rawls and David (2006).

6 In cases where the nonrecognition is occasioned by gender or stigma, the effects can be similar. But the problem would be definitions of the situation involving gender and stigma, and the recipient will belong to a different community of shared narrative about the event, which will have adopted its own type of response. See Goffman (1961) for an extended discussion with reference to stigma.

7 Two reviewers suggested that this may also happen with gender. The men we talked with made the analogy to gender themselves. But, although one of the authors is female and has experienced gender bias, the descriptions these men give of how they understand the problem are not familiar to me, and even though I might agree that I sometimes give a null-response, I would not have described either the response or the problem in the same way. One reviewer suggested that the difference might have something to do with colorblindness. It might. As a woman, I am free to dismiss the responses of others that I believe are sexist. It can



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be openly said. The men we talked with were not dismissing the nonresponses to their self-presentations as racist. They were even reluctant to mention race. So—yes—the colorblind taboo character of race was likely hampering their efforts to sustain self in the face of nonrecognition. They could not name the problem. I can. Earlier generations of black men could.

8 If we had asked them simply whether they had experienced racism on the job (as in a conventional survey), they might have said “no.” With a large sample, this might have led to the conclusion that high-status black men are not experiencing racism on the job. We are certain that this sort of false result occurs.

9 All names have been changed to protect the identities of the informants.

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CHAPTER

8

THE INTERACTIONAL CONTEXT OF HUMOR IN STAND-UP COMEDY



This article by Fabiola Scarpetta and Anna Spagnolli was published in

Research on Language and Social Interaction,
42(3):210–230.

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Introduction

Humor is aimed primarily at creating/producing hilarity or amusement (Attardo, 2001; Beeman, 2000), both in the privacy of everyday conversation and in the oiled machinery of a comic performance. The use of humor also allows speakers to approach sensitive issues (Douglas, 1968; Emerson, 1969) without sounding inappropriate, offensive, or politically too incorrect. If humans try to maintain a positive identity relative to meaningful others (Tajfel, 1978; Tedeschi, 1981; Goffman, 1971; Bourdieu, 1977), then humor offers several opportunities to do so. Assessments conveyed humorously are less face threatening than direct confrontation for both the speaker and the audience (e.g., Dews, Kaplan, & Winner, 2007; Brown & Levinson, 1978), and personal problems are reported with laughter to depict an alternative discursive identity to the speaker in addition to the identity connected to the issue (e.g., Glenn, 2003; Spagnolli, Gamberini, Scarpetta, & Colognesi, 2004). If the humor gets problematic, the speaker can deny any implicit humorous meaning and remain on the literal one. This is why a speaker resorts to humor to prevent selected parts of the audience from understanding a specific meaning (Attardo, 2001) and to circumvent censorship (Morgan, 2002). If a serious action gets problematic, it can be claimed postfactually as humorous and nonliteral (Gibbs & Colston, 2001; the “tinge effect,” Dews & Winner, 1995).

Humor is also a hazard, as it can appear as being either flattering or aggressive to different audiences (Dews et al., 2007). Humorous communication can be recognized or not recognized according to the ongoing relationship that exists between the speaker and the interlocutor (Slugoski & Turnbull, 1988) and responded to humorously or seriously according to the private/public nature of that context (Kotthoff, 2003). Humor can be resorted to differently based on the gender of the speaker and the interlocutor (Lampert & Ervin-Tripp, 2006). What is satire for some is libel for others, as recounted by Simpson in her analysis of Alan Clark's action against the *Evening Standard* in Great Britain (2003). (Alan Clark was a member of the Parliament and the *Evening Standard* was a newspaper that published a mocked version of Clark's *Diaries* [1993].) The interactional context in which humor is delivered is thus crucial in order to define the precise action it is performing and reduce the failures in recognizing or accepting it. Professional comedians use several verbal and paraverbal cues and other devices to make a response relevant to the audience. These cues are not typical of all forms of irony (of which humor is one example); thus their very usage highlights the importance



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of recognizability in humor (Kotthoff, 2002; Clift, 1999; Attardo, 2001).

While the interactional practices that make humor recognizable (mentioned later on in this article) have been deeply investigated, less attention has been paid to the interactional practices that make humor acceptable. The issue of acceptability concerns the possibility that certain subjects are not considered as acceptable humor material. Jacobs-Huey (2006) mentions jokes on the tragic events of September 11th that did not balance humor and respect and were thus badly received by the audience. The stance taken on that topic might have been unacceptable as well. Improprieties and teasing are “risky laughables” that may lead to “hurt feelings or offense” (Glenn, 2003, p. 131) and be responded to with disaffiliation and resistance. Finally, the audience can consider themselves as excessively challenged since, as Sherzer (1985) suggests, a joke perpetrates two kinds of aggression: one for the group or individual being made fun of and the other for the audience, who are “tested” about their knowledge of the topics being covered humorously.

Acceptability and recognizability both rely on the local context that is created ad hoc in the humorous conversation. This context does not just consist of “relevant background knowledge for the audience” (Glick, 2007, p. 293) in terms of news, facts, or beliefs that the audience share with the comedian, but also of the specific relation established between speaker and recipient. In this article, we focus on the practices deployed by a group of stand-up comedians to build the interactional context of their performance. We argue that comedians constantly orient to this interactional context during the show and that the way in which this context is shaped facilitates the acceptability of the specific jokes presented.

In the following paragraphs, we first describe the role of context in the conceptualization of humor and humor uptake, as defined by different research traditions. This overview provides further support for the claim that recognizability and acceptability are crucial issues in joke telling, and only the former has been emphasized so far in the literature. The rest of the article narrows the focus to consider joke telling in stand-up comedy and the practices identified in our data collection to create the interactional context of the joke.

THE ROLE OF CONTEXT IN DELIVERING SUCCESSFUL HUMOR

Drew observed that a person can respond to a tease by simultaneously defending



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herself/himself and laughing at it (Drew, 1987, p. 222). Historically, explanations for this lamination of literal and nonliteral actions in humor (and responses to humor) are deeply elaborated within studies of ironic speech, of which humor is one form; we will therefore start here.

The explanations of irony rely on the notion of meaning incongruence and gradually emphasize the role of the context where ironic expression is produced. Grice first defined incongruence in terms of the maxim of quality (Attardo, 2000) according to which the speaker is expected to provide a truthful contribution, saying things s/he believes to be true, and for which evidence is adequate (Levinson, 1983). When the literal meaning of an utterance seems to violate the maxim of quality, the recipient looks at a more implicit level for a different meaning that preserves the compliance with the maxim.¹

Subsequent elaborations have led scholars increasingly to acknowledge the role of context in the detection and definition of ironic meaning (Attardo, 2000). These post-Gricean models point directly to the local environment where the utterance is produced. They testify to the need for including extralinguistic aspects (habits, roles, background) in the conceptualization, for instance by considering irony as a quotation of something familiar to the audience, but relocated in a different context (“irony as echoic mention” in Sperber & Wilson, 1986); or by hypothesizing the interplay between two kinds of audiences, one buying the literal meaning and the other grasping the implicit meaning (H. H. Clark & Gerrig, 1984).

A first development in this direction was the suggestion by post-Gricean pragmatists that irony derives from a detected violation of any of the four maxims, not just quality. An implicit meaning is looked for when an utterance sounds false, poorly informative, irrelevant, or obscure: The utterance sounds inappropriate to the communicative context. A second development of the original Gricean explanation of irony as the search for an implicit meaning was represented by the specification that implicit meaning is not necessarily the opposite of the literal one, but rather the result of an inferential process limited only by context (Attardo, 2000, 2001). Finally, authors stressed that the literal meaning is not dismissed once an appropriate implicit meaning is found; to the contrary, irony resides in the simultaneous juxtaposition of literal and implicit meaning, which never resolves one into the other (Clift, 1999). This idea of a juxtaposition between two incongruent meanings in irony and humor has been embraced outside the field of pragmatics as well. Kotthoff (2002) considers irony to be a “double perspectivation”



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of a contrastive type, to distinguish it from a convergent double perspectivation that does not give rise to irony; Clift (1999) also considers irony as an activation of two “frames,” a literal and an implicit one, the latter being the superordinate frame.

Moving one step further toward recognizing the role of context in irony means embracing a conversation analytic perspective and treating irony (and humor) as an intersubjective achievement, rising “out of the expectations built up across a sequence” (Clift, 1999, p. 536).² Laughs are crucial contributions to joke telling instead of being just “non-speech sound” (Jefferson, Sacks, & Schegloff, 1987, p. 152), and are produced according to systematic practices. Speakers invite responses from the audience (e.g., Clayman, 1992, 1993; Atkinson, 1984; Heritage & Greatbatch, 1986), and the audience inspect the ongoing production of the joke to locate a point where response becomes relevant or to recognize the seriousness/nonseriousness of the utterance (e.g., Sacks, 1974; Schegloff, 2001; Jefferson et al., 1987; Glenn, 2003; Jefferson, 1979).

The concern about successfully telling a joke is supposed to intensify when the whole social event gravitates around that joke, as in professional comedy performances. Affiliation responses in these situations include laughter, applause, cheers, whoops, or whistles, while disaffiliation responses include jeers, boos, and verbal heckling (McIlvenny, Mettovaara, & Tapio, 1993). The audience is given cues regarding the right moment to respond (“laugh-traps” in McIlvenny et al., 1993, p. 230), thus preserving all attendants from the embarrassment of missing the point, by using devices, such as “puzzle-solution,” “headline-punchline,” “position taking,” and “pursuit” (Atkinson, 1984; Heritage & Greatbatch, 1986). Other devices, such as “intonation,” “adoption of voices,” “alliteration,” and “assonance” during delivery of a punch line, or thematic reappearance of a line, idea, or comment (“reincorporation”) have been found specifically in stand-up comedy performances (Rutter, 1997). McIlvenny et al. (1993) found “comments,” “catchphrases,” “disclaimers,” and “fillers.” They also found the practice of “working the room,” when the speaker mentions a category, pauses, and on the basis of audience response then weighs the chance of a joke about that category to succeed. Wells and Bull (2007) analyzed qualitatively and quantitatively certain rhetorical devices used to induce a response from the audience in televised stand-up shows (“simple questions,” “complex questions,” and “stepping out of character”). They found that a great percentage of audience response (81.3%) is produced after use of one of these devices, thereby indicating that professional humor relies on recognizable recurrent practices as much as it



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relies on surprise and incongruence.

While the literature has focused on the way in which the joke is made recognizable and the response invited, less work has been devoted to the interactional practices through which humor is made acceptable. The categorization of the responses to humor as either affiliative or disaffiliative to the speaker's view (Clayman, 1993; Jefferson et al., 1987) makes it apparent that a joke involves the expression of a stance and then makes relevant an alignment to that stance (see Steensig & Drew, 2008). Glenn (2003) underscores that a laugh may sound like a coimplication and appreciation of the joke, and as such, the recipient may want to resist the joke by withholding an affiliative response or reducing that response to a minimum. Before analyzing how the interactional environment of joke telling can provide resources to make jokes acceptable, we want to describe briefly the context of stand-up comedy and the characteristics of our own collection of shows.

STAND-UP COMEDY AS INSTITUTIONAL TALK-IN-INTERACTION

Mintz (1985) identifies stand-up comedy as “an encounter between a single, standing performer behaving comically and or saying funny things directly to an audience, unsupported by very much in the way of costume, prop, setting, or dramatic vehicle” (p. 71). Until 1920, physical characterizations, such as black-painted faces or funny postures, were the main traits of comedians (minstrels), and comedy was seen as a form of “family entertainment” (Koziski, 1988, p. 114). The subsequent period (until 1980) was characterized by an informal tone, bringing hard topics such as politics and sex, onto the scene. The more recent stand-up comedy, from the 1980s onward, has included female comedians and new practices, such as ridiculing stereotypes of the entertainment industry. Ever since the beginning, performers adopted a perspective on social habits and made fun of its paradoxical aspects (Koziski, 1984), often behaving on the stage—as Lenny Bruce did in the 1950s—as though “talking to a room full of friends or just a single bosom buddy” (Prussing-Hollowell, 2007, p. 9).

In the kind of stand-up comedy considered in this study, the audience can eat and drink; the stage, although separated, is brighter and slightly higher than the rest of the room and is not as far away from the audience as can happen in theatre shows. Laughter is not encouraged by signs or by any monetary compensation, nor is a laugh track added in postproduction as done in television shows. Many clubs in Los



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Angeles offer this kind of show, and the audience on a given evening is characterized as a “Black room” or as a “White room” according to its prevailing ethnicity.

Several comedians performing in these kinds of shows were contacted, and four were kind enough to offer their collaboration (Suly McCullough, Dwayne Perkins, Yury & Eric).³ Eric gave us a commercial audio recording of his show; Dwayne Perkins let us use an uncut, noncommercial show; Suly McCullough and Yury allowed us to record their shows directly. All were African American and male; some performed in front of “Black rooms” (Yury and Eric), where the audience was the same ethnicity as the comedian, others performed in “White rooms” (Suly McCullough and Dwayne Perkins), where the audience ethnicity was different from the comedian’s. The inclusion of these different audiences in the collection allowed us to extend the variety of possible practices that we could capture.

All comedy performances took place in different clubs. The video recording was made by one of the authors, located in the audience on the right side of the stage during the whole performance and using a camcorder (SHARP, VL-WD250). Considering that the rooms were not big, from that position it was possible to capture the individual contributions of the members of the audience. All performers were also interviewed, but the interview transcripts were not analyzed; the answers are quoted here occasionally to integrate the discussion. The comedians signed an informed consent form, giving them the right to have a copy of the transcript and advance notice of any work made from them.

The audio recordings were transcribed using Jefferson’s code (Ochs, Schegloff, & Thompson, 1996) and with the supervision of an African American to disambiguate pronunciation. The result was 3026 lines of transcript obtained from 105 min of audio recording. The transcripts cover the entire performance from the comedian’s entrance on stage to his exit, and contain the contributions of both the comedian and the audience.

Stand-up comedy performances are examples of an institutional form of talk-in-interaction (Heritage & Sorjonen, 1994), for several reasons. First, they have a specific goal tied to the participants’ institution-relevant identities; the comedian and the audience gather together to have fun by laughing at the performer’s punch lines. Second, there are constraints on what can be considered a permitted contribution; the audience can contribute by producing affiliative or disaffiliative



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responses, but cannot reciprocate the performers' jokes as would likely occur in ordinary conversations (Sacks, 1974). The response formats “have as a design feature that they can readily be done together” (Atkinson, 1984, p. 371); occasions when “an individual in the audience makes him/herself audible are often remarked upon by the comedians” (Rutter, 1997, pp. 118–119). Finally, these interactions are recurrently carried out and made recognizable through specific practices, indicative of the kind of business/activity that the participants are engaged in together. Among these practices are those pertaining to “the coherent, orderly, and meaningful succession of sequences of actions or ‘moves’” (Schegloff, 2007, p. 2) that allow the ongoing progression of the whole activity.

The sequential organization of stand-up comedy relies both on the structure of the joke sequence and the structure of the whole event with its different sections. By section we mean a series of sequence(s) carrying out the same course of action, where the transition from one section to the next is agreed upon, recognizable, and achieved in routine ways (Heritage & Sorjonen, 1994, pp. 166–168). Rutter (1997, 2000) has identified a progression that occurs through the following sections in 1990s British stand-up comedy:

- Introduction, where the presenter announces the comedian, evaluates him/her, and warms up the audience, whose responses to the presenter accompany the entrance of the comedian on stage.
- The comedian's entrance, which overlaps with the audience applause; s/he starts an opening in which s/he greets, comments, and trains the audience in the way to respond. These exchanges are used to set the register for the rest of the encounter, as well as to attract audience attention away from drinks and chats.
- The body of the show, constituting several joke-telling sequences.
- The closure, constituting a series of not necessarily funny utterances, such as the evaluation of the audience, a reintroduction of the comedian, and thanks that accompany her/his departure from the stage. At this point, the audience no longer has the comedian to relate to and may undertake different activities until the next performer arrives.

The relevant sections in our collection are the opening of the comedian's show, the series of expanded joke sequences, and the closure. Since the focus of the study is the preparation of the interactional context of the joke, the closures are not considered here.



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The remainder of the article discusses the practices used by the comedians to build an interactional context; these practices are placed in the different sections of the social encounter in which they were found, starting with the opening of the encounter.

STARTING THE INTERACTION

The opening of an encounter is the start of the interaction, namely the place where mutual attention, availability, and willingness to engage in a specific kind of interaction are established. In Schegloff's words, "a person who seeks to engage in an activity that requires the collaborative work of two parties, must first establish, via some interactional procedure, that another party is available to collaborate" (Schegloff, 1968, p. 1089). As highlighted by Rutter (1997, 2000), the opening sets the interactional style for the entire encounter. Both aspects are apparent in our collection and have implications for the construction of the interactional context of the comedy.

Extract 1 reports Dwayne's opening and follows the presenter's introduction and overlapping with audience applause. The clapping and the comedian's first words show the orientation to the other party's presence, namely the audience.

Extract 1

- 1 AUDIENCE: ((clapping [hands]))wow wow]
- 2 DWAYNE: [°how are you° doing thank you very much
- 3 thank you thank you
- 4 AUDIENCE: ((clapping hands))

The audience accompany the comedian's entrance by clapping and wowing, without interruption, as the comedian appears and talks ("((clapping hands))wow wow," Line 1). The applause seems to be not just a response to the presenter's announcement of the comedian's arrival on stage, but also a response to the comedian's entrance itself. On the comedian's part, his very first words are a "how-are-you"; the comedian does not orient to the applause as an expression of appreciation, but as a way for the audience to simultaneously become present to him and show its orientation to him. Only afterwards does he deal with the applause as an expression of appreciation ("thank you very much thank you thank you," Lines 2–3), repeated as the applause continues. This opening produces a



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reciprocal, positive acknowledgment of presence from the two parties in the encounter.

Another comedian's opening, Suly's, shows the same orientation to establishing mutual attention by producing applause at the presenter's introduction on the one side, and by addressing that applause as an exhibition of participation on the other. In addition, through his request for increasing the intensity in the applause, Suly directly deals with the appropriate way for the audience to participate, thereby working to establish a certain interaction style (Extract 2).

Extract 2

- 1 AUDIENCE: ((clapping [hands]))
- 2 SULY: [come on let me hear you]
- 3 AUDIENCE: ((CLAPPING HANDS))
- 4 SULY: all right

Suly enters after the presenter's introduction and while the audience are clapping. The applause precedes and accompanies the comedian's entrance, acknowledging it as remarkable and appreciable. Suly immediately refers to the applause with a request to intensify it ("come on let me hear you," Line 2). As in Dwayne's initial turn, Suly does not treat the applause as an expression of appreciation: The request to increase its intensity is explicitly related to the volume at which the audience's presence would satisfactorily manifest itself. This request also establishes a direct relation between comedian and audience, where the former directly addresses the latter, and the reciprocal involvement becomes part of the show. Informality in the relation between audience and comedian characterized all shows in our collection and is already hinted at in the openings of the shows.

The third opening to consider is Eric's (Extract 3). It also sets the appropriate way to organize the relation with the parties at the beginning of the encounter, through the commitment to "talk about what is real," which is often repeated during the entire event.

Extract 3

- 1 AUDIENCE: YEAH ((clapping [hands]))
- 2 ERIC: [WHAT'S UP WHAT'S UP]
- 3 AUDIENCE: yeah



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- 4 ERIC: glad to see all of ya'll thank ↓you (.)for coming
 5 out (.) and support and i thank Go:d for
 6 bringign all ya'll here safely in ()
 7 AUDIENCE: [yeah UUUUUU]
 8 [((clapping hand[s]))
 9 ERIC: [can we talk about what's real up in
 10 here tonight?
 11 AUDIENCE: yes
 12 ERIC: [do we have a real ass audience] in here=
 13 AUDIENCE: [((clapping hands))]
 14 ERIC: =[↓don't do we have.] (.)
 15 AUDIENCE: [((clapping hands))]
 16 [((woooow))]
 17 ERIC: [we got real people, where ya'll at MAKE SOME NOISES]
 18 AUDIENCE: [woooow]
 19 clapping [hands
 20 ERIC: [cool (.) we can talk about what's real

In Line 2, Eric addresses the audience like the other comedians examined so far, namely with “how-are-you” actions (“WHAT’S UP WHAT’S UP”) and expressions of gratefulness to the audience (“glad to see all of ya’ll thank ↓you (.)for coming out (.) and support,” Lines 4–5). The audience affiliates verbally (“yeah UUUUUU,” line 7) and nonverbally to him (“((clapping hands)),” Line 8). Reference to the nature of the encounter follows (“and i thank Go:d for bringing all ya’ll here safely in,” Lines 5–6), including a repeated request for orienting the encounter toward topics that are “real” (“can we talk about what’s real up in here tonight?,” Lines 9–10; “do we have a real ass audience in here,” Line 12). Eric receives an affiliative answer both times, thereby obtaining the audience acceptance of this program for the show, and for the connected interactional style (“ass audience”). Then, in a move similar to Suly’s, he asks for a stronger response (“where ya’ll at MAKE SOME NOISES,” Line 17) with success. His closing statement repeats the reciprocal commitment to talk about what’s real (Line 20).

In sum, Eric’s opening establishes mutual attention with the audience and sets the encounter on an informal register by using expressions, such as “WHAT’S UP WHAT’S UP” (Line 2) and “ass audience” (Line 12). It also obtains a commitment to address realistic topics during the show.



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Establishing mutual orientation is not always as smooth as in the previous extracts, and yet it remains a necessary result to achieve. Yury's opening is a case in point (Extract 4). He has the role of entertaining the audience, who are entering the room and taking their seats and do not benefit from the presenter's introduction. Therefore, while the opening from the other comedians could rely on a prior display of attention from the audience, Yury's opening needs to obtain this attention actively.

Extract 4

- 1 YURY: [°what's up, what's up?° HEY YA'LL HOW YA'LL DOING?
- 2 AUDIENCE: [((noise))
- 3 YURY: Hey alrigh↓teejay ↓cut that bull]shit
- 4 ((noise))]
- 5 (1.2)
- 6 you ↓got guests in ↓here don't ↓be playing on bullshit
- 7 YURY: hey how ya'll do↓ing
- 8 AUDIENCE: alright alright
- 9 YURY: (a)re you ready to la:ugh?
- 10 AUDIENCE: ah ah ah ah

Yury addresses the audience in Line 1 (“°what up, what up?° HEY YA'LL HOW YA'LL DOING?”) with a “how-are-you” action, recognizing its presence as a party in the encounter, and using an informal register. No answer comes from the audience, who are still chatting or taking their seats. Also, the comedian's utterance overlaps the music. That this lack of response is a problem is made evident by Yury's subsequent summons and repetition with increased volume (“HEY YA'LL HOW YA'LL DOING?,” Line 1) in his “how-are-you” action. After one last summons (“Hey”) and no distinguishable answer from the audience, he produces an acknowledgment token (“alright”), and pursues another strategy to deal with the problem, namely addressing the deejay with the request to lower the volume (“dee↓jay ↓cut that bullshit”). As the music stops, Yury resumes the previous course of action (“hey how ya'll do↓ing,” Line 7), and is finally replied to by the audience (“alright alright,” Line 8). This extract shows the importance of displaying a reciprocal orientation and making prominent each other's presence against possible interference. As in the other openings analyzed, this extract also contains some action to set the interactional style on an informal register via colloquial language and direct requests to staff members.



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This section has examined the very beginning of each stand-up comedy performance in our collection, which is a time where the comedian and the audience can start working together at defining the interactional context in which all the subsequent jokes will be located. This is in fact the point at which mutual attention is established and reciprocal presence is acknowledged as the prominent aspect in an otherwise noisy environment, where people eat, drink, and listen to music. It has been shown that while doing so, some interactional aspects of the encounter are already mobilized, such as the informal and direct way that the comedian addresses the audience by making requests of them and using a colloquial register. These elements occur in the openings and will recur in the rest of the encounter, and they are received by the audience with affiliative responses.

TRANSITION TO A NEW JOKE SEQUENCE

After the opening, a different section starts, where the course of action and then the interactional business pursued is no longer the establishment of mutual attention and the reciprocal acknowledgment of presence. The comedian now needs to organize the encounter so as to deal with joke telling, which is the “institutional” reason for the encounter (borrowing that expression from the “reason for the call” in Schegloff, 1979). Similarly, during the rest of the show, the comedian needs to organize the movement from one joke sequence to the next. Two devices to achieve this transition are considered here—fillers and surveys. The former completes the previous joke sequence, while the latter prepares the punch line for the next sequence. Both devices also represent an environment where some work is done to prepare the interactional context of the new joke.

Fillers

According to McIlvenny et al. (1993), fillers consist of chunks of talk with no meaning by themselves, but which postpone the delivery of a punch line. In our collection, fillers are signature utterances of various lengths, from exclamations to catchphrases, that are positioned after a punch line, but do not yet introduce the premise of a new joke. They close the previous joke sequence as a postmortem (Schegloff, 2007) in a place where the resumption of the comedian’s talk would risk an overlap with the remaining laughter from the audience. The expressions used in fillers also appear in other moments of the show, similar to slogans or popular assertions aimed at eliciting affiliation (McIlvenny et al., 1993), except that here



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they become recognizable only because of the repeated usage within a specific show (e.g., Rodney Dangerfield's "I'll tell you" or "I've got no respect"). Thanks to the use of these recurrent expressions, the transitional space between jokes is connected to a brand that characterizes the whole encounter.

Suly recurrently uses the expression "Oh Man" in this way, as in Line 4 of Extract 5 after laughter in response to a long TV cable joke and before the preface to another joke.

Extract 5

- 1 SULY: (.)'cause then you just got to talk to your wife [a:ll day
- 2 AUDIENCE: [ah ah ah AH
- 3 SULY: (1.0)ah ah ah ah]ah(h)(.)
- 4 oh: ma_:n they-a-↑they-↑the it's
- 5 AUDIENCE: AH AH AH AH ah ah]
- 6 SULY: ↑wrong ma_:n when your cable goes out cause you've got to
- 7 ↑call (h)em right? and then they give you the who:le sa:d
- 8 story like ↓we'll send somebody out right? (.) but you've
- 9 go to be ho:me from the hours of one'o fi:ve
- 10 AUDIENCE: ah ah
- 11 SULY: they just fuck up your who:le Saturday.
- 12 AUDIENCE: ah ah ah

As the audience stop laughing at the previous joke, Suly stops laughing as well, and after a micropause, uses the expression "oh man" in line 4 as a generic postmortem to the sequence that just finished. He then goes on with the serious preface to the next joke ("they-a-↑they-↑the it's wrong ma_:n when your cable goes out"), developing the premises of the old joke in a new direction ("cause you've got to ↑call (h)em right?," Line 6–7). "Oh man" is placed between the laughter to the previous joke and the preface to another joke, separating these two different sequences in the progression of the show.

While Suly uses "oh man" in this position, Dwayne uses "so" and "now." Eric uses a longer expression, based on his motto, "let's talk about what's real," which in Extract 6 runs from Line 3 to Line 16. The extract starts with the comment ("real sh↑it," line 1) at the conclusion of a joke sequence. Since the preface to the new joke starts at line 17, then the filler occupies 16 lines.



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Extract 6

- 1 ERIC: real sh↑it
 2 AUDIENCE: ah ah
 3 ERIC: >that's< what i talk about real ↑shit ↓i'll be messing
 4 with ya'll ↑all ↓night
 5 AUDIENCE: ah ah [ah]
 6 ERIC: [ah] ah you ↑too Me↓gan
 7 AUDIENCE: ah ah ah
 8 ERIC: cause i got ↑love for ya'll (,)↑ that's why see ↑ya'll
 9 believe in yourself that's why ya'll came out and support it
 10 and that's what i'm looking at=this is doctor king's dream
 11 right ↓here
 12 AUDIENCE: ((clapping hands))[wow ((clapping hands))]
 13 ERIC: [this is what he ↑died for(,)you dig
 14 what i'm s↑tay↓ing this
 15 AUDIENCE: ((clapping hands))
 16 ERIC: is why he died so that can all live and laugh] together(h)
 17 and have a good time
 18 ↑where my mexican people=at where ↑ya'll at¿
 19 AUDIENCE: ah
 20 ERIC: VIVA LA RAS↑SA
 21 AUDIENCE: AH AH AH AH AH AH AH

The first comment (“real sh↑it”) is reformulated into a longer statement “>that's< what i talk about real ↑shit” at Line 3, justifying also the previous fun made of one woman in the audience (“↓i'll be messing with ya'll ↑all ↓night you ↑two Me↓gan,” Line 6) and connected with Martin Luther King's legacy at Lines 8–17. This whole series of statements is received with affiliative answers by the audience. The end of the filler is defined by the sudden production of a microsurvey (“↑where my mexican people=at where ↑ya'll at¿”), thus preparing a punch line. Incidentally, it is also noticeable that the interaction maintains its informal register that is already noticed several times in our small collection, with the use of language, such as “shit,” or “messing,” and the habit of directly addressing the audience with questions.

The exception in our collection is again Yury, as in Extract 7. He shares with the other comedians the informal register (“give a fuck,” “fucking”), but not the use of



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Surveys

The preparation of the new joke occurs through a preface (Sacks, 1974). It is constituted of some utterances that do not make laughter relevant, but rather set the condition for the upcoming punch line of the joke, so it will be understood and appreciated. For instance, Extract 8 reports a joke sequence where the preface extends from Line 1 to Line 3, and the punch line is delivered at Lines 4–5, followed by the affiliative response from the audience.

Extract 8

- 1 SULY: all right i-i'm feeling good ye: †ah, i'm-i'm good you know (.)
 2 i-a had to stay in (my) house today thought (0.1) a dick (.)
 3 my cable wen' out.(0.9) it's fucked up when your cable go:es
 4 o:ut (.) 'cause then you just got to talk
 5 to your wife [a:ll day
 6 AUDIENCE: [ah ah ah AH ah [ah ah ah ah(h)]
 7 SULY: [AH AH AH AH]

After acknowledging (“all right”) that the audience granted his request for increasing the intensity of the applause, Suly reports some personal information, repeating it twice with different terms (“i-i'm feeling good ye:†ah, i'm-i'm good you know”). This announcement, followed by a micropause, is not reacted to by the audience and is then treated as an action for which a response is not relevant. Suly then continues narrating his activity of that day (“i-a had to stay in (my) house today”), framed as contrasting (“though”) with his initial announcement about feeling good. Again, no audible reaction is produced from the audience in the pause after the announcement. As Suly continues with the narration, he makes progressively clear what event threatened his well-being that day. The event is recounted once (“my cable wen' out.,” Lines 2–3) and then repeated with an additional negative assessment (“it's fucked up when your cable go:es o:ut,” Line 3). The absence of any reaction at the completion of all the turn units testifies that the turn is treated as being still in development. Then Suly modifies the situation described up to that point, and adds an unexpected explanation (“(.)'cause then you just got to talk to your wife a:ll day,” Lines 4–5) with the object of the punch line, his wife, placed almost at the turn completion. After the word “wife,” and in the overlap with the completion of the turn, the audience delivers its affiliative laughter, joined by the performer (Line 7). As usual, by directly involving the



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audience in the narration (“you know,” Line 1), using colloquial terms (“a dick,” line 2; “fucked up,” Line 3), and disclosing an episode of his personal life, the whole sequence keeps the relationship with the audience on an informal, almost intimate basis.

Surveys are devices used in the preface. For instance, Dwayne starts a survey in the second line of Extract 9, preparing a joke about radio programs.

Extract 9

- 1 DWAYNE: now i <drove across the country> from New York
- 2 to LA, anybody ever done that?
- 3 AUDIENCE: yes
- 4 DWAYNE: like just drove-°drive° across the country yeah it'↑s-↑you
- 5 know-↓ we live in a great↓country (.)you know? but ↑me
- 6 p[erson↑ally ↑i like the edg↓es(.)the edg↓es
- 7 AUDIENCE: ah ah

In the first line, Dwayne recounts an episode from his personal life, (“i <drove across the country> from New York to LA,” Line 1), and then addresses the audience with a question to check their familiarity with this kind of experience (“anybody ever done that?,” Line 2). He receives a positive reply (“yes,” Line 3), and continues to prepare the punch line that is then delivered at Line 6 (“but ↑me person↑ally ↑i like the edg↓es(.)the edg↓es”).

With the use of this microsurvey, the comedian directly involves the audience in the construction of the shared premise for the upcoming punch line, and, according to the response obtained, he understands whether some work is needed to better prepare its delivery. The use of questions to explore the conditions for receiving an affiliative or preferred response has already been highlighted by Maynard (1989). He underscored that speakers can use questions to check the interlocutor's familiarity with the specific topic on which an opinion is going to be expressed. In the context of comedy, Wells and Bull (2007) have observed the use of questions to assess in advance the audience position. The effectiveness of this practice is shown in Extract 10; there Suly uses a question, but the response does not display a large alignment in the audience to his stance on hip-hop music (“i'm a big hip-hop fan,” Line 1). Thanks to the survey and to the actions following it, he is able to modify the environment of the upcoming joke from one where shared premises seem to be lacking to one where positions are shared.



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Extract 10

- 1 SULY: ah ah ah ah <oh man> i'm a big hip-hop fan †hip-hop fans
 2 in the house? [Where are you. †(clap) †hip-hop fans? (0.9)
 3 AUDIENCE: [((hands clapping))
 4 SULY: †all right] we got about nine hip-hop fans
 5 AUDIENCE: ah ah ah]
 6 SULY: †anyone else (h) [I don't really care for that]
 7 [((mimicking a female voice))]
 8 AUDIENCE: ah ah
 9 SULY: i like †country, ((mimicking a female voice))
 10 AUDIENCE: ah ah ah
 11 SULY: it makes me feel †saf:e ((still mimicking a female voice))
 12 AUDIENCE: ah
 13 SULY: and †SAD]
 14 ((voice))]

After laughing at a previous joke, Suly makes a statement (“i'm a big hip-hop fan,” Line 1), and asks a related question to the audience (“† hip-hop fans in the house? Where are you,” Lines 1–2). Then he reports the audience response, stressing the number of respondents (“we got about nine hip-hop fans,” Line 4), and solicits more responses (“† anyone else,” Line 6); the amount of people sharing the premise he is going to make (appreciation of a music genre) is treated as low. Suly continues by voicing some possible accounts on behalf of the audience (“i don't really care for that,” Line 6; “i like † country,” Line 9; “it makes me feel † saf:e,” Line 11), and obtains laughter from the audience.

In this section, we have seen two devices that comedians use to work the interactional context of the punch line in the transition to a new joke sequence. Surveys involve the audience directly in the preface construction and also test their reactions. Fillers provide continuity to the show, facilitating the transition from one joke sequence to the next and exploiting expressions that can be used repeatedly by the comedian as a brand.

EXPANDING SUCCESSFUL JOKES

Once a punch line has been delivered, it is usually not dismissed immediately to start the preparation for a new joke sequence, but it is further exploited in a series



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of turns that expand the sequence and are responded to with laughter. These expansions represent a cascade of punch lines that rely on the premises of the first one, and they are called “pags” by professionals. In Extract 11, for instance, Suly starts a joke sequence on his skinny appearance, which contains a punch line at Line 6 that is subsequently expanded into several pags until the end of the extract.

Extract 11

- 1 AUDIENCE: AH AH AH AH AH AH [ah ah ah ah ah ah]
- 2 SULY: [ah ah ah ah i ↓should] just move
- 3 that's what i should ↓do. (.) you know what i mean? it's
- 4 i-i'm not just buff ↓HE:re in La: you know? i change my
- 5 location i can make it happen.
- 6 like say i move to like ethiopi[a_] (0.8) or [soMA:LIA one of =
- 7 AUDIENCE: [AH] AH ah ah [ah ah ah ah]
- 8 SULY: =the third world countries hell ye_ah]
- 9 AUDIENCE: ah ah] ah ah ah
- 10 SULY: i'd be the biggest brother they've never see:n.
- 11 AUDIENCE: AH AH AH AH
- 12 SULY: i wouldn't have to ↓juice it=up a:s l:z
- 13 AUDIENCE: ah [ah ah ah ah ah]
- 14 SULY: [Just getting off] the plane they'd be like OH ↓MY
- 15 GOD LOOK AT HIM
- 16 AUDIENCE: ah ah ah
- 17 SULY: HE IS MAGNIFICENT
- 18 AUDIENCE: ah ah ah
- 19 SULY: HE MUST WEIGH A HUNDRED AND EIGHTEEN POUNDS
- 20 AUDIENCE: ah ah ah
- 21 SULY: °WHA°T IS HIS SECR[E:T]
- 22 AUDIENCE: [ah] ah ah
- 23 SULY: zzzzzzzzzzzzzzzzz
- 24 ((slapping the air))
- 25 AUDIENCE: ë ah ah ah AH AH AH
- 26 SULY: [THESE DAMN FLIES WE CAN'T SEE HIM]
- 27 AUDIENCE: [ah ah ah] AH AH AH AH
- 28 SULY: in our country you will be king chicken arms
- 29 AUDIENCE: AH AH AH



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- 30 SULY: That shit would be incr↑edible]
 31 AUDIENCE: ah] ah ah ah fiu fiu fiu ah ah
 32 SULY: i'd be like the ↑Roc over there
 33 AUDIENCE: ah ah [ah ah ah ah ah ah ah ah ah ah]
 34 SULY: [AH AH AH AH AH AH AH AH (.) i] like the ↓Roc the ↑Roc

The comedian's move after the laughter, and in an overlap with it, consists of a statement ("i ↓should just move that's what i should ↓do."), which would represent a solution to his previously mentioned slimness. Suly explains the statement more specifically, providing the name of the location from which he would move (Los Angeles), and then the name of the location to which he would head (Ethiopia). The initial statement has now been fully clarified, and the punch line has arrived, received with laughter in an overlap with the last part of the word "Ethiopia."

From this punch line onward, Suly produces a series of turns that exploit the fictitious scene in its various implications, and is responded to with laughter: "i'd be the biggest brother they've never see:n" (Line 10); "i wouldn't have to ↓juice it=up a:s l:z" (Line 12), naming a famous singer, who has an opposite appearance as him; "Just getting off the plane they'd be like OH ↓MY GOD LOOK AT HIM" (Lines 14–15), "HE IS MAGNIFICENT" (Line 17), "HE MUST WEIGH A HUNDRED AND EIGHTEEN POUNDS" (Line 19) and "°WHA°T IS HIS SECRE:T" (Line 21), where he observes the perspective of the people welcoming him in the imagined scene. Then the comedian turns the target of humor from himself to the natives ("zzzzzz," Line 23, and "THESE DAMN FLIES WE CAN'T SEE HIM," Line 26) obtaining an increase in laughter volume, and then goes back to targeting himself ("in our country you will be king chicken arms," Line 28) and "i'd be like the ↑Roc over there," Line 32). In addition to this series of sequentially connected punch lines, this extract also provides another instance of the informal register of these encounters through such expressions as "brother," "be like," "juice up," "damn," and by directly addressing the audience and using personal events as humor material.

The expanded joke sequence can contain an interesting element with implications for the interactional context, namely post-punch line accounts. Accounts represent one strategy in the broader class of "comments" (McIlvenny et al., 1993) and are "statements made by a social actor to explain unanticipated or untoward behavior—whether that behavior is his own or that of others, and whether the proximate cause for the statement arises from the actor himself or from someone else" (Scott & Lyman, 1968, p. 46). Accounts expand the joke sequence to take care



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of aspects that might be questionable in the joke, even in the presence of expressions of affiliation from the audience, as in Extract 12. Dwayne has just made fun of two long-married spectators, Bryan and Nancy, and their sexual habits. In particular, Dwayne has just mimicked Bryan's sexual performance, and the audience are laughing. After this successful punch line, he apologizes to Nancy and uses an account in the form of an excuse 'and i-and i don't mean to embarrass you' in Line 6.

Extract 12

- 1 AUDIENCE: ah ah
- 2 DWAYNE: no but you know (.) i'm sure thirty years ma_n
- 3 you probably put in some work you know what i mean?
- 4 put in some wo:rk
- 5 AUDIENCE: ah ah ah ah
- 6 DWAYNE: and i-and i don't mean to embarass you i'm sorry
- 7 nancy mrs nancy
- 8 AUDIENCE: ah ah ah

After the laughter and an expansion of the punch line directed again toward Bryan (Lines 2–4), Dwayne expands the joke sequence further with an account and an apology directed to the woman in the couple, calling her by name and then by the title reserved for married women (“and I-and I don't mean to embarrass you I'm sorry nancy mrs nancy,” Lines 6–7). This account declines responsibility for the possible negative consequences of the behavior (Scott & Lyman, 1968). Curiously, it also mends the possible negative aftermath of the sexual joke, namely the embarrassment of one specific person in the audience, but also constructs Bryan and the audience as not worthy of any of it, thereby treating the sexual subject as not potentially embarrassing per se. This account is interesting because it unveils a concern for the acceptability of the joke, but shows how tolerant the situation is of other potential embarrassments.

Accounts can exploit the same recurrent expressions that otherwise are used as fillers. When used as accounts, these expressions expand the previous sequence and address some specific components of the joke delivered, to explicitly mend possible undesired interactional implications. This is especially possible with a signature expression, such as Eric's “let's talk about what is real,” which is actually an argument in favor of a specific commitment to the audience. In Extract 13 he is



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saying that it is possible to detect if a woman is employed from her physical appearance; she would spend more money on her hair. At first, the joke is not affiliated to, and commented on with disgust; but Eric accounts for it by using the “let’s talk about what’s real” argument.

Extract 13

- 1 ERIC: your hair get puffy on the side,
- 2 AUDIENCE: ah ah
- 3 ERIC: it has expired.
- 4 AUDIENCE: ah ah ah
- 5 ERIC: your scalp start smelling spoiled
- 6 AUDIENCE: ohoh ah [ah ah ah ah]
- 7 ERIC: [oh we can’t talk] about
- 8 AUDIENCE:
- 9 ERIC: motherfucker huh,
- 10 AUDIENCE: ah ah ah ah ah ah

The interesting lines here are those following an expansion of the punch line “your scalp start smelling spoiled” (Line 5), which is received by the audience with an instantaneous expression of disgust (“ohoh,” Line 6), followed by laughter. This response is not fully affiliative, displaying a negative stance against the image depicted by the comedian, before even considering it as humorous. Eric expands the joke sequence as soon as the disaffiliative response is produced, in an overlap to the laughter following it. He deals with the disaffiliation with his signature motto, “we can’t talk about what’s real in this motherfucker huh” (Lines 7–9), challenging the audience to be able to accept real subjects. The audience immediately affiliate with him (Line 8).

The expansion of the joke sequence is another interesting environment to examine for how the interactional context of the joke is built. In this environment, pags and accounts can be produced. The former build on the acceptance of a previous punch line and produce other punch lines on the same preface. Along with previously analyzed devices, such as fillers, they contribute to the continuity of the whole talk. Although the show is based to a great extent on jokes prepared in advance, the effect is that of a naturally developing humorous interaction, which additionally is set on a very informal register through use of colloquial terms and idiomatic expressions. Accounts show the comedians’ concern for possible unacceptability of



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some jokes, and do mend them post hoc even when affiliation has been provided. Another display of this concern is represented by the last finding described in the next section and related to the way in which the comedian chooses the punch line format.

REFERRING TO THE AUDIENCE IN THE PUNCH LINE

The stand-up performances analyzed here exploit the comedian or the audience as the main material for the humor: Of the 508 punch lines observed, counting both the first punch line in a joke sequence and the subsequent expansions of it, 363 (71.5%) are directed either to the comedian or to the audience. This contributes to making the register of the encounter personal; yet—we would argue—it also opens it to possible offenses or impoliteness. Using the comedian or the audience as a topic is not equivalent in terms of acceptability; obviously, making fun of the audience is more risky than making fun of the comedian. In fact, the two options are often alternated in the series of punch lines; in Extract 14, for instance, Suly alternates self-referred and audience-referred humor, and all punch lines are received with affiliative responses.

Extract 14

- 1 AUDIENCE: ah ah ah [ah ah ah ah]
- 2 SULY: [°ah ah ah° i] don't like going to the gym ↓though
- 3 do ya'll work out a-clap if you work
- 4 out let me [hear you.
- 5 AUDIENCE: (((clap))
- 6 SULY: alright, about] fifteen people [work out.
- 7 AUDIENCE:] [AH AH AH AH AH AH
- 8 SULY: (0.7)↓the rest of ya'll]
- 9 AUDIENCE: AH AH AH AH
- 10 SULY: are like [fu:ck ↓that]
- 11 (((with a different voice))
- 12 AUDIENCE: ah ah ah
- 13 SULY: i'm already in a <relation[ship
- 14 AUDIENCE: [AH AH AH AH an clap
- 15 [AH AH]
- 16 SULY: [what] i gotta look goo:d fo:r?



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- 17 AUDIENCE: ah ah ah
 18 Suly: i pay a RENT.
 19 AUDIENCE: ah ah ah
 20 Suly: i don't like going to the gym ↓ i don't know they
 21 are rare i <do NOT like> going to the gym. (.) you
 22 know cause i feel like people are looking at me
 23 and laughing when i go to the ↓ gym.
 24 AUDIENCE: ah ah ah

Suly prepares a punch line (Lines 2–4) with a survey (“do ya’ll work out a-clap if you work out let me hear you”), then adds a series of punch lines commenting and explaining the results of the survey, and resumes the joke preparation at Line 20. He starts by focusing on himself (after a previous joke on the audience) and then passes immediately to the audience, voicing their accounts for the response (“i’m already in a <relationship>,” Line 13; “what i gotta look goo:d fo:r?,” Lines 13–16; “i pay a RENT,” Line 18). He then goes back to himself (“i <do NOT like> going to the gym.(.) you know cause i feel like people are looking at me and laughing when i go to the ↓ gym,” Lines 21–23).

In addition to alternating the two formats, comedians also resort to them differently according to the audience composition. The awareness of the difference in the way in which the audience accept humor is clear in some of the interview passages. Dwayne says: “Some jokes don’t work for mixed crowds, you know? Say ... I used to have a joke like when I talked about the slavery world: It works with Black people, it works with all-White people, but when they are together it’s uncomfortable, ‘cause Black people think you don’t say that before Whites and White people are like, can you laugh at that? You know what I mean. So, sometimes some jokes will work all-Black/all-White but not all together” (Frame 19:00).

Eric explains this difficulty with an example: “There are a lot of Black households who grow up with just a mother, no father. That’s a large part of this country, unfortunately, where women are there alone, and their men are nowhere. A lot of Black audiences, when I talk about that experience, they understand and they relate. While when I do those jokes in front of a White audience ... they get it, but they feel sad about it, they don’t think it’s funny, they go ‘ohh,’ cause they got a dad, they grow up in a stable family” (Frame 3:50).

As a matter of fact, in Black rooms, audience-referred punch lines amounted to



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36.8% (84 out of 228 punch lines), and self-referred punch lines to 32.5% (74 out of 228 punch lines). In White rooms, audience-referred punch lines amounted to 12.5% (35 out of 280 punch lines), and 60.7% were self-referred (170 out of 280 punch lines). A criterion based on audience composition is also used in alternating punch line format in expanded joke sequences. In White rooms, comedians use the self-referred format for 69.70% of the first punch lines (23 out of 33 punch lines starting a punch line series), and in Black rooms only for 5.5% of the first punch lines (1 out of 18 punch lines starting a punch line series).

The practices through which self-referred and audience-referred humor is alternated in the joke-expanded sequence and for different kinds of audiences is compatible with the general habit of focusing humor on the present parties in the comedy show and signals that performers are constantly orienting to the possibility of producing a risky joke, not so much because of the lack of wit in the humorous frame, but because of its acceptability with that specific audience.

CONCLUSION

The question originating the study was to understand the reasons why jokes that make use of swear words, target the audience, and are likely in other circumstances to be considered sexist or racist, can overcome that risk of unacceptability and be received with affiliative responses. The attempt was made to answer this question by focusing on the preparation of a favorable environment for the joke, and in particular, on the construction of the interactional context in which a joke is finally delivered. Relying on previous findings for the organization of stand-up comedy performances and joke-telling sequences, the shows were considered as institutional forms of talk-in-interaction. This means that the individual joke sequence, as well as the general structure of the event and the passage between its sections, have been considered. Resources recurrently deployed and taken up by the parties involved, consistent with their roles and goals and with the physical environment in which the events took place, were investigated.

It seems that the shortened physical distance between stage and audience in the clubs hosting the shows epitomizes a distinctive feature of the whole social encounter, namely its informality. First, informality is nurtured by the recourse to personal facts as topics of the joke and by colloquial language. Personal facts are used very carefully. The African American comedians we observed used



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audience-referred jokes frequently, but more often in Black rooms. In White rooms they seemed to resort more frequently to self-referred jokes or to audience-referred jokes positioned in the joke expansion, after a first, self-referred punch line already obtained the audience affiliation. Second, regardless of the prepared nature of the joke program and of its repetition in different venues, the event resembles a conversation about the comedian and the audience. The comedian orients to the audience through greetings, requests, questions, tag questions, and the audience contribute with answers, laughter, and applause provided at relevant places. The sequential structure of the event contributes to a natural unfolding of its different sections and jokes: The transition from one joke sequence to the next is operated through fillers, which rejoin each sequence with a brand that characterizes the whole show, and punch lines that do receive affiliative responses are expanded into long series of punch lines.

The license that humor benefits from and that has already been widely discussed with respect to the intrinsic nature of humor (i.e., the implicit nature of its meaning) is here tracked back to the nature of the interactional environment where jokes are actually delivered: If these stand-up comedy performances develop as an informal conversation on personal matters, then humor based on everyday life, corporeal needs, etc., is acceptable and actually adequate. In a circular process, laughing makes the audience not only coconstructors of the situation, but also coresponsible for it.

Being fun and obtaining affiliation, as happens with other actions performed when talking, does not just depend on the specific subject selected for the joke, nor on the way in which the joke is articulated per se. It also depends on the relation of the punch lines to the interactional context in which the joke is progressively constructed and delivered. It would be interesting to study other situations where the limits of what seems acceptable are manipulated and reshaped, and analyze how local practices recurrently deployed by participants to build interactional context actually contribute to that result. These practices might be verbal or nonverbal, and might also exploit among their resources the physical arrangement of the natural and mediated environment in which they emerge.

Notes

The authors would like to thank the comedians who agreed to participate in this



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study, Wendy Kamenoff for her help in contacting them, Alessandro Duranti for his support in the early phases of the study, and Tanika Shirley for her supervision of the transcripts. The authors also express their gratitude to Kristine Fitch and the three anonymous reviewers for providing precise comments and well-directed suggestions. The authors declare that they contributed to this article equally.

¹ Occasions in which laughter follows an action that is also treated in the same sequence as problematic to understand are analyzed in Schegloff (2000, p. 220). They can be seen as providing empirical evidence, although from a totally different perspective than Grice's, of the role of incongruity as a source of humor.

² Focusing on the interactional environment allows the conversation analytic perspective to explain occasions in which an audience is laughing at the speaker's serious remarks (Schegloff, 2007, p. 218). Clayman (1992) shows that when an utterance is attributed a humorous meaning and laughed at in political interviews, the journalist's prior question created the background against which the politician's answer sounded false and ridiculous or "vulnerable to subversive counter-interpretations" (p. 49).

³ The authors used the comedians' names only after permission, but permission was only obtained from Suly McCullough and Dwayne Perkins, so the names of the other two comedians are fictitious.

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CHAPTER

9

"THERE'S NO SUCH THING AS ASIAN"

A MEMBERSHIP CATEGORIZATION
ANALYSIS OF CROSS-CULTURAL
ADAPTATION IN AN ASIAN AMERICAN
BUSINESS COMMUNITY



This article by Natasha Shrikant

was published in

the *Journal of International and Intercultural
Communication*, 11(4)

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This paper examines the relationship between communication and cross-cultural adaptation through analyzing how Asian American immigrants orient to United States’ notions of race when constructing Asian American identities in institutional interactions. Communication theories of cross-cultural adaptation address the role communication plays in how immigrants adjust from their country of origin to the country to which they immigrated (Croucher & Kramer, 2017; De La Garza & Ono, 2015; Kim, 1988, 2001; Kramer, 2000; Sandel & Liang, 2010). A prominent debate is whether cultural adaptation is more a product of structural constraints on immigrants’ adaptation or of agency immigrants have in making choices about how to adapt. For example, Kim’s (1988, 2001) theory of cross-cultural adaptation, which posits that adaptation is a universal process where immigrants abandon their home culture practices in favor of assimilation to a new culture, highlights the structural constraints of a new culture’s norms and expectations on immigrants’ adaptation. Critiques of Kim’s theory, however, highlight immigrants’ agency through conceptualizing adaptation as a creative process where immigrants use resources from multiple cultures, languages, and contexts to assimilate to, resist, and/or influence the new cultures of which they are a part (Croucher & Kramer, 2017; De La Garza & Ono, 2015; Kramer, 2000; Sandel & Liang, 2010). De La Garza and Ono’s (2015) theory of differential adaptation calls for examining how cross-cultural adaptation is a product of tensions between structural constraints that “produce and constrain social adaptation” and immigrants’ agency in making choices about how to adapt (p. 270).

This paper explores tensions between the structural forces that constrain cross-cultural adaptation and how participants creatively navigate adaptation in situated ways through analyzing how members of an Asian American Chamber of Commerce (AACC) orient to the US racial category “Asian American” in their daily institutional interactions. This paper highlights how participants use everyday talk to navigate tensions between structure and agency inherent in cross-cultural adaptation through analyzing audio and video-recorded interactions gathered during eight months of ethnographic fieldwork. In doing so, this paper illustrates how cross-cultural adaptation is a dynamic, interactional phenomenon routinely negotiated by participants in their daily lives.

Analyzing how participants orient to the “Asian American” identity category provides insight into cross-cultural adaptation because – similar to other racial categories – “Asian American” is not a natural, biologically based category, but



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rather a culturally specific category developed throughout US history based on sociopolitical circumstances (Bailey, 2010; Omi & Winant, 2014; Shrikant, 2016). “Asian American” immigrants in the 1800s were from East Asian countries (e.g., China, Japan, Korea) and were labeled as “Orientals” by the United States government despite their linguistic, cultural, and ethnic differences (Espiritu, 1992; Lippi-Green, 1997; Lowe, 2005; Ono & Pham, 2009). During the 1960s US Civil Rights movement “Orientals” rejected this label, adopted the “Asian American” identity category, and formed “Asian American” organizations to resist shared forms of discrimination faced by Asian American communities. While “Asian American” originally officially included people from East Asian countries, in the 1990s the US government added South Asians (people from India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh), who previously were classified as “ambiguous non-whites” (Kibria, 1996), to the US Census Asian American category (Lee, 1993).

Thus, even though “Asian American” is treated as a common-sense racial category in the United States today, this history indicates that both the category itself and the people included in it are culturally specific to US contexts. This history also illustrates how the “Asian American” category is a product of structural constraints of institutions delegating immigrants’ racial status and of choices made by Asian American communities to adopt this category. Similarly, AACC members are recent immigrants from twenty-two different countries, all of which currently fall under the category “Asian American.” Although participants do not orient to “Asian American” as a common-sense category and instead prefer identifying according to their nations of origin, they do participate in an Asian American organization and, at times, attempt to take advantage of identifying as “Asian American.” Thus, one challenge that participants face in cross-cultural adaptation is navigating US notions of race in ways that benefit their community.

This paper analyzes how participants manage challenges inherent in adapting to notions of race, particularly in institutional contexts, through conducting a membership categorization analysis (MCA) (Sacks, 1974) of participants’ interactions. The analysis illustrates how participants use multiple racial, ethnic, professional, and other interactional identity categories when adapting to their racialized, professional US contexts. Below, I explain how I use MCA to analyze how participants’ identity negotiation provides insight into cultural adaptation. Then I discuss my ethnographic and discourse analytic methods for analyzing the data. An analysis of five examples illustrates ways participants take up, negotiate,



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characterize, and/or resist the “Asian American” identity category and discusses the relationship between participants’ identity negotiation and cross-cultural adaptation. I conclude by discussing the implications of using MCA to study tensions between structure and agency during cross-cultural adaptation in institutional contexts.

Communication, cross-cultural adaptation, and Asian American identity

Following De La Garza and Ono’s (2015) theory of differential adaptation, this paper conceptualizes adaptation not as a “unidirectional relationship of power in which a society pressures an individual to conform to cultural expectations” (p. 275) but rather acknowledges how “immigrants perform a complex array of tactical negotiations that influence how and to what extent they adapt to their new culture” (p. 276). Through analyzing AACC member interactions, this paper highlights the “unique, challenging, and sometimes counterintuitive strategies and identities immigrants adopt” (p. 278) when adapting to a new cultural environment.

While intercultural communication studies analyzing adaptation and/or identity negotiation among immigrants highlight some of these strategies through interview or survey data where participants report about their experiences (Baig, Ting-Toomey, & Dorjee, 2014; Chen & Lawless, 2018; Jun, 2002; Kvam, 2017; Pande & Drzewiecka, 2017), this paper analyzes naturally occurring interactions among institutional members (Hansen & Milburn, 2015) to illustrate ways AACC members participate in cross-cultural adaptation. Similar to studies in the ethnography of communication (Boromisza-Habashi, Hughes, & Malkowski, 2016; Carbaugh, 2005; Carbaugh, Nuciforo, Saito, & Shin, 2011; Lie, 2018; Philipsen, 2002), this paper illustrates how culture and communication are embedded in one another through showing how AACC members’ interactions reflect their shared understandings of if/how they should adapt to US norms for race.

To study the specific ways that participants’ practices reflect and constitute orientations to US norms about race, I use MCA (Sacks, 1974). Originating in the work of Sacks (1974) and developed by multiple scholars (Fitzgerald & Housley, 2002, 2015; Fitzgerald, Housley, & Butler, 2009; Hester & Eglin, 1997; Housley & Fitzgerald, 2002, 2009; Jayyusi, 1984; Stokoe, 2012), MCA focuses on how participants make identity categories relevant in interaction and in doing so,



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display their understandings of their social worlds. Through analyzing how participants name and organize different identity categories, MCA provides insight into “culture in action,” or how participants play a role in actively constructing and maintaining cultural norms that shape their social life (Hester & Eglin, 1997; Housley & Fitzgerald, 2009).

This paper analyzes how participants display their understandings about how racial and ethnic identity categories should be made relevant to interactional contexts (Hansen, 2005; Whitehead & Lerner, 2009) and how participants orient to institutional contexts and roles (Dori-Hacohen, 2012, 2013; Ferencík, 2007; Hansen & Milburn, 2015; Milburn, 2009; Shrikant, 2015a) when using membership categories. In doing so, this paper adds to findings of other studies analyzing how participants discursively construct racial identities in situated contexts (Bailey, 2000; Shrikant, 2015b; Stokoe & Edwards, 2007; West & Fenstermaker, 2002; Whitehead, 2009, 2012; Wilkinson, 2011).

This paper analyzes the membership categories participants name (e.g., “Asian”) as well as the ways participants index membership categories through using pronouns that are understood as pointing to a particular membership category (e.g., “we” = “Asians”) (Dori-Hacohen, 2014; Silverstein, 1976). Participants display their understandings about membership categories through using category-bound and category-tied activities (Reynolds & Fitzgerald, 2015). While both category-bound and category-tied activities link particular activities to membership categories (e.g., “the politicians challenged us”), category-bound activities are oriented to as taken for granted links that go unchallenged by participants and category-tied activities are “treated by participants as not taken for granted and needing to be made explicit” (p. 99). Thus, differentiating between category bound and tied activities illustrates the kinds of knowledge about categories and activities that are taken for granted in a community (bound) and the ones that are not (tied). Participants also display understandings about categories through using category-tied predicates (Stokoe, 2012), or characteristics participants construct as belonging to categories (e.g., “The Asian Chamber is *culturally diverse*”). Members display their understandings about relationships between different identities through positioning categories as belonging to a larger collective of identities, or membership categorization device (e.g., “Thai” and “Cambodian” belong under “Asian”) and positioning categories in relation to one another (e.g., our “multi-ethnic foundation” has mostly “Hispanics”).



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Through highlighting the identities participants make relevant in different contexts, this analysis illustrates participants’ agency in choosing how to identify, and therefore how to participate in cross-cultural adaptation. This paper also acknowledges constraints that might shape participants choices. First, this paper examines how participants’ interactions are shaped by the institutional contexts through analyzing how participants negotiate identities in ways that are acceptable in a given context and that meet the goals of their professional roles (Chen & Collier, 2012; Chen & Lawless, 2018; Chen, Lawless, & González, 2015; Hansen & Milburn, 2015; Heritage, 2005; Shrikant, 2015a).

This paper also examines how participants orient to racial ideologies in their talk, which are shared systems of beliefs about qualities of different racial groups that organize practices in ways that privilege White racial groups over minority racial groups (van Dijk, 1987). This paper shows how participants orient to essentialist racial ideology (Bailey, 2010; Omi & Winant, 2014) – which posits that race is a natural, biologically based category and that each racial group is homogenous and has certain inherent traits – and to the related ideology of racial markedness (Bucholtz, 2011) – where white is an unmarked, invisible normal identity against which other, marked racial categories are evaluated. AACC members often talk about US racial minority categories as marked categories containing particular, race-based qualities and evaluate them in relation to an unmarked, White racial category that has normative qualities. At other times, however, participants’ choice of identity categories functions to explicitly recognize and purposefully resist racial ideologies. Overall, through analyzing how participants make choices among different identity categories while still acknowledging ways these choices are shaped by institutional norms and racial ideologies, this paper provides insights into how participants navigate tensions between agency and structure during cross-cultural adaptation in their everyday interactions (De La Garza & Ono, 2015).

Ethnographic and discourse analytic methods

I collected data during eight months of ethnographic fieldwork with an Asian American Chamber of Commerce located in Texas (Shrikant, 2016). Chambers of commerce support local businesses through holding networking events and lobbying the local and state governments to pass pro-business policies. Small businesses and large corporations pay a yearly fee – based on their business size – to attend chamber events. The AACC supports Asian American-owned businesses in



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the local community. The majority of their members are immigrants from twenty-two countries that count as “Asian” according to US racial classification. These include countries in East Asia (China, Japan, and Korea), South Asia (India, Pakistan), and Southeast Asia (Vietnam, Thailand, Philippines). There was no significant majority nationality among AACC members and the AACC leadership made explicit efforts to include people from a diversity of nationalities on the AACC board. Thus, while “Asians” might be popularly associated with East Asia in the USA or South Asia in the UK, the AACC includes members from most US federally defined “Asian” countries. While the AACC does support Asian American-owned businesses, they also position themselves as contributing to the broader local economy and as open to non-Asian professionals. Therefore, while the majority of AACC members are “Asian,” they do maintain relationships with people and businesses who do not share an “Asian” identity.

I received approval from the university review board and from members for this project and spent three days per week at the AACC observing and audio/video-recording their meetings and informal workplace interactions. Chamber members oriented to me as sharing an “Asian” racial identity (I am Indian-American) and as an “intern” who was studying the chamber. At the beginning of my fieldwork, I conducted an interview with the AACC president, which provided context about the organization and preliminary insight into how AACC members navigate an Asian professional identity. The rest of my data primarily consists of audio (and sometimes video) recorded naturally occurring interactions that took place during meetings and informal interactions.

I audio- and video-recorded one hundred hours of data; I took field notes identifying places where participants invoked racial or ethnic identities, and observed that AACC members routinely explicitly discussed their own and others’ racial and ethnic identities. I also observed that chamber members discussed race and ethnicity in conflicting ways. They, at times, identified as “Asian,” at other times identified according to ethnic identities such as “Filipino,” and at other times denied the relevance of race and ethnicity to their identities altogether.

Drawing from ethnographic observations, I use discourse analytic methods to investigate when and how members invoke different racial and ethnic professional identities. I roughly transcribed 40 hours of data that I marked as relevant in my field notes. I then formally transcribed data presented in this paper according to conversation analytic conventions (Jefferson, 2004). Analysis of the five presented



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examples illustrates the various ways members switch among identity categories and the purposes served by this routine switching. The detailed transcription highlights the way that word choice, pauses, laughter, and turn taking contribute to the ways participants negotiate racial and ethnic identity categories.

Analysis of Asian American chamber interactions

Analysis of the first three examples highlights how AACC members adapt to US notions of race and use the common-sense “Asian” category to position themselves as common-sense members in institutional devices such as politics, business, and communication. Analysis of the next two examples illustrates how AACC members negotiate adapting to US notions of race through orienting to “Asian” as a device constituted by ethnic categories and to ethnic categories as devices constituted by still more categories.

Example 1: “There’s no such thing as Asian”

Below, Alf, the AACC president, narrates tensions between the racial identity politicians use to categorize AACC members and the multiple ethnic identities AACC members use to categorize themselves. This audio-recorded excerpt is from the preliminary, open-ended interview I conducted with Alf at the beginning of my fieldwork with the AACC. Prior to the following excerpt of talk, Alf was discussing the multiple Asian organizations started by the AACC. Then, Alf explained how the AACC was started:

Example 1:

1 2	Alf	We started as ah: you know (.) u::m (1.0) Asian Asian American Voters Coalition.
3	Natasha	Oh okay
4 5 6	Alf	There was nothing (.) It’s chaos (.) on their own (1.0) The politics (.) the politicians challenged us (.) Hey what are you doing Asians? (.) What Asians? There’s no such (.) strictly speaking there’s no such thing as Asian
7	Natasha	Yeah
8 9	Alf	There’s only Indian, Chinese, Pakistan, Korea (.) But those are different! You cannot!



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10	Natasha	(hhh) So
11	Alf	The language eh-
12	Natasha	The politicians were who? The mayor or
13	Alf	Senators
14	Natasha	Senators
15 16	Alf	Yeah. Hey guys (.) why don't you form themselves-yourselves? We need your votes (hhh)
17	Natasha	Oh okay (.) so these were White senators [and they wanted. Okay.
18 19 20	Alf	[Yeah, yeah. Well (.) it-there is somehow (.) a connection because one White-White senator, (name), the w-w- the wife is Asian.
21	Natasha	Oh
22	Alf	It started there
23	Natasha	((laughs))
24 25 26 27 28	Alf	So it spring to (names two other senators) and a:ll the different (.) yeah, so they challenged us. Hey (.) we need your votes. Can you (.) fund my (.) my campaign? (1.0) How do you do that? Well why don't you form yourself among yourselves? That was the beginning and I was the first. I was one of the many who sat down (.) to form the group.
<i>Lines 29–45 omitted. Alf discussed details of how the Voters Coalition was started and the purpose of the organization (registering voters).</i>		
46 47 48 49	Alf	So they were thinking how to get that vote. The Asian vote. So we formed the voters' coalition. It was successful. So they said, Now it's time. You have the politics. You need business. Why don't you form (.) chamber of commerce? So they formed the chamber of commerce.

After explaining how the Asians were previously an unorganized group, Alf discusses how local politicians asked the Asian community to form a voters' coalition (lines 1–5). Alf voices the “politicians,” as doing the category tied action of



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“challenging us [Asians]” (line 5) and in doing so positions “us” and “politicians” as two separate, non-overlapping identity categories. In tying the category “politicians” to “challenging” Asians, Alf makes clear that “Asian” is not a natural category AACC members chose for themselves. Alf constructs the politicians’ identities through voicing (Bakhtin, 1981) the politicians as ascribing the category Asian to the group (line 5). Alf voices himself as questioning the Asian identity category (“what Asians?” line 5) and then explains that “Asians” are immigrants from different countries in Asia and therefore often identify according to their countries of origin (line 8). “Asian” is a US racial category that does not make sense to immigrants from different countries in Asia.

Alf voices the politicians’ reaction to Alf’s concern about the singular “Asian” category: multiple different, national identities (“but those are different!”) are not possible (“you cannot!,” lines 8–9). Alf later makes it clear that politicians prefer Asians to identify under one category, using the taken for granted category bound activity of politicians “needing votes” (lines 15–16). Here, Alf voices the politicians as positioning Asians as potential voters and encouraging constituents to adopt a single racialized identity category to make it easier for politicians to have one organization that they can approach to gather votes. Thus, through using category-tied activities (“the politicians challenged us”), Alf questions broader essentialist ideologies of race through making explicit that Asian is not a natural, biological category, but rather one chosen by the politicians. Through using category-bound activities (“we need your votes”), Alf indexes taken for granted institutional knowledge when explaining politicians’ specific reasoning for ignoring diversity among Asians when encouraging AACC members to form an Asian organization.

I then characterize the politicians using the category-predicate “White” (line 17). Although Alf created a separation between “Asians” and “politicians,” he has not overtly marked the racial identity of the politicians. Alf’s talk reflects dominant ideologies that position the “White” racial identity as an unmarked, invisible racial category and minority racial identities as marked and “other” (Bucholtz, 2011). Alf confirms that the politicians are White (“yeah, yeah,” line 18), treating this fact as not noteworthy. Alf’s response suggests that White is the assumed, obvious, racial category for Texas politicians. What Alf does treat as noteworthy, however, is that there is a “connection” (line 19) between White politicians and Asian constituents. Thus, Alf’s talk orients to the racialized nature of the business community.



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After discussing details about how the Asian American Voters Coalition started (omitted lines), Alf returns to narrating how the chamber started. Alf reviews the politicians’ reasoning for challenging Asians to form an organization: they wanted “the Asian vote” (line 46). Alf’s use of political jargon further reifies the positioning of Asians as a single racial constituency and implicitly positions Asians alongside other racial groups (e.g., the Black vote, the Hispanic vote) in a racialized political membership categorization device. Alf then voices the politicians, “they,” as encouraging Asians to form a chamber of commerce so Asians can participate in a cohesive “business” community because Asians already successfully formed a political one (lines 47–48). The suggestion to form a chamber of commerce stems from the context of the local racialized business community, where two other racialized groups had already formed chambers of commerce: The Black Chamber and The Hispanic Chamber. These chambers of commerce, along with the Asian Chamber, sometimes host political debates where individual members can choose to contribute to political campaigns (the organizations themselves do not contribute to campaigns). Therefore, politicians are using US systems of racial classification to encourage Asians to form a voting coalition and a chamber of commerce – both of which help politicians meet goals of earning votes and earning money. AACC members, on the other hand, are using the taken-for-granted “Asian” racial category to position themselves as taken-for-granted members of both political and business categorization devices.

This analysis illustrates how one member narrates the way that AACC members adapted to US notions of race when forming their organization. While Alf does narrate tensions between Asians’ and politicians’ preferences, Asians ultimately decided to adopt the “Asian” identity category. Analysis of this example highlights the prevalence of racial ideologies in shaping how new immigrants become racialized in a community. However, this analysis also highlights how AACC members are able to use their racialized position to their advantage. Through adapting to identifying as “Asian,” a racial category that is common-sense and recognizable in the United States, Asian immigrants are able to gain recognition as common sense, recognizable political constituents and business community members.

Example 2: “We continue to support initiatives”

Analysis of the following example illustrates how Alf constructs “Asian” as a homogenous racial category and as a diverse, internationally based category. This



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video-recorded excerpt is from the AACC’s annual meeting, held once a year, and attended by large corporations, local government officials, AACC members, and potential new members the AACC would like to recruit. Alf, as president of the chamber, gave a speech outlining the chamber’s accomplishments.

1	Alf	We continue to support the initiatives and projects in the Asian trade district. This
2		is our-part of our community development work.
3		(referring to PowerPoint) There you go, there’s the Asian trade district there. We
4		also support initiatives on international work by hosting delegations. We had
5		several delegations last year from Vietnam (.) from China (.) Russia (.) from Mexico (.) and of course (.) from Korea.

Alf characterizes the AACC (“we”) with the category-bound activity of “supporting” the “Asian trade district” (line 1). The “Asian trade district” is a local community of mostly Korean-owned businesses that was designated as the Asian Trade District by the city in 1999. Alf’s utterances construct different Asian organizations as a team of identity categories (Stokoe, 2012), where the AACC’s role is to “support” other Asian-owned businesses. Alf’s use of this category bound activity also reflects and reproduces the essentialist ideology of race that positions Asians as a natural racial category and as a group that feels naturally connected to one another because of inherent, shared qualities. Furthermore, Alf characterizes the activity of “supporting” the “Asian trade district” using the category predicate “community development work” (line 2). Thus, Alf takes advantage of common-sense assumptions about race to construct his chamber as utilizing its Asian identity to fulfill its institutional goals as a chamber of commerce that serves to support Asian businesses and in doing so, to develop the local community.

Alf then uses the pronoun “we,” again indexing the AACC, and this time constructs “we” as an identity that does “international work” (line 4) through the category-tied activity of “hosting delegations” (line 4). A “delegation” is a group of business people who visit the city with the purpose of seeing whether they would like to start a business in the city or invest in existing business projects. Therefore, by hosting delegations, the AACC fulfills its institutional goal to support local economic development. Alf uses multiple identity categories when naming the delegations. Some delegations are from countries included in the federally defined Asian identity category (e.g., China, Vietnam, and Korea), while other countries are not (e.g., Russian – located in Asia but Russians are classified and popularly thought of as “White” and not “Asian” – and Mexico). Thus, Alf’s use of the



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category-tied activity, “hosting delegations” and the following elaboration expand the definition of the “Asian” identity category as one that not only is a homogenous, local racial category but also as one that is constituted by multiple national identities and therefore provides access to doing “international work” with both “Asian” and non-Asian countries.

Analysis of this excerpt illustrates how at times, Alf orients to “Asian” as a locally based homogenous racial category, yet at other times, takes advantage of intra-Asian diversity through orienting to the Asian category as being constituted by multiple international categories. Through switching among these categories, and their category bound and tied activities, Alf is able to adapt to being “Asian” in ways that position the AACC as a prestigious professional organization.

Example 3: “We’ll probably mess it all up”

Analysis of this example illustrates how AACC members creatively define “Asian” in a way that creates a coherent identity for their culturally diverse membership. Participants in this conversation included Clara, the marketing and events director from Indonesia, and Grace, the Vietnamese-American college student who worked part time as the membership assistant, and me. This audio-recorded excerpt is from one of my first conversations with Grace and Clara in the AACC office where they asked me about the focus of my study.

1	Natasha	I’m looking at (.) organizations and how (.) everyday
2		communication at a workplace establishes a unique organizational
3		culture [(.)and so I’m looking at
4	Clara	[Oh yeah, it’s it’s very (h)interesting here he he he
5	All	((laughter))
6	Grace	We’ll probably mess it all up just s(h)(h)o you=
7	Natasha	=O:h, n o
8	Clara	Well (.) with the Asian (.) Chamber of Commerce (.) it’s very
9		culturally diverse
10	Natasha	Mhmm
11	Clara	So:: (.) um (.) all rules just goes out the door
12	Grace and Clara	((laughter))



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Grace and Clara orient to my research project as deserving comment or explanation. Clara displays her understanding of my project (“oh yeah,” line 4), and marks the communication and culture in her workplace as out of the ordinary (“very interesting”) (line 4). Clara, Grace, and I laugh as Clara characterizes the chamber’s communication as “interesting,” (line 4). Grace explains Clara’s joke through explaining that the AACC (“we”) will do what the participants orient to as the category bound (common sense) activity of messing up my study (line 6). Grace’s response to my explanation of my research project reproduces popular US cultural meanings associated with the cultural term for talk, “communication.” In everyday US American talk the term “communication” is oriented to as being done “well” or “badly,” and there are “good” and “bad” consequences for “good” and “bad” communication (Katriel & Philipsen, 1981). In this context, Grace’s utterance indicates that there are standards for “good” business communication (and subsequently culture), which the AACC does not meet and therefore will “mess up” my study.

Clara adds an explanation through characterizing the “Asian chamber of commerce” (line 8) using the category-predicate “culturally diverse” (line 9). Clara defines Asian as one, local culturally diverse group co-existing in one organization. The way Clara defines Asians reflects and reproduces the tenet of the ideology of racial markedness that White people do not have a culture and other marked identity categories do (Bucholtz, 2011). Similar to other minority groups, Clara is using White identity as an “ideological pivot” (Trechter & Bucholtz, 2001, p. 4), or as a normal, neutral, identity against which she defines a culturally diverse Asian identity.

Clara then positions a culturally diverse identity as negatively affecting professional communication practices, stating “all rules just goes out the door” (line 11), which is an idiom meaning that because the AACC is culturally diverse, they do not have a shared set of rules for communicating and therefore constantly communicate in ways that do not follow any set of rules. These utterances reflect the ideology of racial markedness in that, in addition to minorities having a marked culture and white people having an unmarked (absent) culture, minority communication practices are often positioned as marked in relation to communication practices of upper class White people.

Later in this conversation, Clara and Grace provide some examples of “interesting” communication. Clara states that, “Asians say things that can be perceived as rude



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just because we’re very efficient.” Clara is speaking about sending emails and how she learned that her emails sound “rude” – yet she still positively evaluates her practices using the descriptor “efficient.” Grace and Clara also collaborate in evaluating board members as asking them what they characterize as inappropriate questions (e.g., “How old are you? How come you look like a kid? How come you’re not married?”) and behaving in informal ways (“They’ll come to your desk and be like what you are eating and they’ll just start eating your food”). While Grace and Clara acknowledge that these practices are out of the ordinary, they still evaluate them positively through stating that the practices make the chamber feel like a “family.” Through joking about these communication practices, Grace and Clara mark these practices as out of the ordinary yet still take pride in these practices, and in doing so build solidarity among culturally diverse Asians (Bailey, 2010; Fought, 2006; Shrikant, 2015b).

Analysis of this excerpt illustrates how, in addition to race, politics, and business, “Asian” is also constructed as a common-sense category within the device of “communication.” This analysis illustrates how participants use the Asian category to position themselves in opposition to others (White people) in the communication device and therefore build solidarity among Asians. In relation to cross-cultural adaptation, Grace and Clara’s interactions function to construct “Asians” not as an immigrant group but rather as a US racial category, one that has the marked, inherent qualities of being “culturally diverse” with “efficient, family-like” communication practices. In other words, these interactions reflect and reproduce essentialist racial ideology, thus illustrating how racial ideology shapes the way that immigrant groups navigate adapting their identities to fit US norms about race.

Example 4: “We are not Asian ... primarily”

While analysis of the previous examples illustrates how AACC members foreground and define the AACC’s “Asian” identity, analysis of the following excerpts illustrate how AACC members negotiate or resist identifying as “Asian.” Analysis of the following excerpt shows how AACC members minimize the relevance of being “Asian” to their business practices in an effort to build relationships with the Spanish language broadcasting organization, Univisión. In the audio-recorded excerpt from a meeting between the AACC and Univisión, the AACC wanted to partner with Univisión so Univisión could advertise for the AACC’s main event, the Asian Festival, on their Spanish-language radio stations. Participants in the



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interaction included Alf, Clara, the AACC marketing director, and Cesar, the head of radio broadcasting for Univisión.

1	Alf	We’re basically: (.) we’re not Asian (1.0) um (.) primarily=
2	Cesar	=exclusively
3	Alf	Yeah (.) because we have our foundation the ____ center
4	Cesar	Mhmm
5	Alf	the-they have mostly Hispanics
6	Cesar	Oh really
7	Alf	[Yeah that’s why Univision
8	Clara	[See like if you see me and Alf (2.0) we’re [also with the foundation (.) so
9	Cesar	[mmm
10	Alf	And in mult-they call it multi-ethnic because instead of [call
11	Cesar	[[((inaudible))
12	Alf	Instead of calling little Asia
13	Cesar	which would make (.) my day now
14	Alf	We would call it multi-ethnic because we have more Hispanics
15	Cesar	Mhmm
16	Clara	Mhmm
17	Alf	And African-American, an:d what Asian and then Russians an:d hehe
18	Clara	Eastern Europeans=
19	Alf	=Eastern Europeans
20	Clara	And Africans yup

Alf uses the pronoun “we” to index the AACC and states that “we” are “not Asian” followed by a pause after which Alf and Cesar co-construct the Asian Chamber as not being “Asian” “primarily” and “exclusively.” This can be characterized as a collaborative turn sequence (Lerner, 2003), one where the recipient, Cesar, completes the speaker’s, Alf’s, turn. Alf pauses after saying the word, “Asian,” and



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Cesar collaborates with Alf by helping Alf complete his turn. Alf and Cesar think of words to complete the turn almost simultaneously: “primarily” and “exclusively.” The use of “primarily” emphasizes that “Asian” is not the main identity affiliated with the chamber. The use of “exclusively” on the other hand, clarifies that although the Asian Chamber might be primarily “Asian,” this does not mean that their organization “excludes” others. Alf’s “yeah” following “exclusively” indicates that Alf accepts Cesar’s characterization of the chamber as “not Asian exclusively.”

Here, both Alf and Cesar display their shared knowledge about relationships among different racial groups – organizations that identify as one race mostly work with members of that race – and then question and reconstruct this relationship. The assumption about the exclusivity reflects essentialist racial ideology that each racial minority group is biologically based with different traits and therefore is exclusive towards other groups. It is true that the Asian Chamber has mostly Asian members and that Univisión works with Latino populations. However, the Asian chamber does work with the Black and Hispanic chambers at times, invoking their shared “racial minority” status. Furthermore, all businesses in this community, despite racial identification, want to expand networks and thus have to navigate tensions between preserving their raced professional identity and expanding this identity for purposes of networking in the broader business community. Both Cesar and Alf work with racially-identified organizations and are familiar with this balance, which is why they are able to collaborate on positioning the Asian chamber as not primarily, nor exclusively, Asian. In doing so, Alf and Cesar collaborate in questioning essentialist racial ideology and reconstructing “Asian” *not* as a potentially exclusive racial category but rather an institutional category that works with other categories in the business membership categorization device.

By positioning the chamber as not exclusively Asian, both Alf and Cesar are orienting to their goal of wanting to establish a partnership between Univisión and the AACC. Alf provides clarification about why the Asian chamber is not exclusively Asian by citing “our foundation” (line 3). The AACC is a non-profit organization that started a multi-ethnic foundation which focuses on helping members of minority groups to start a business and provides resources for small, low income businesses to grow and expand. Although the multi-ethnic foundation and the chamber are two separate organizations on paper, they do share staff members.



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Alf states that “our foundation” (not the Chamber of Commerce) has “mostly Hispanics” (line 5). Here, Alf is using the pronoun “our” to connect the “Asian” chamber, the “foundation,” and the “Hispanic” identity categories. Alf uses the “Hispanic” identity to connect to Univisión, a Hispanic identified company. Clara then creates a personal connection between the foundation and the AACC through informing Cesar that both she and Alf work with the foundation and the Chamber (line 8). Since the foundation and the AACC share staff members, Alf and Clara promote the foundation as a connection between Asians and Hispanics so the AACC can partner with Univisión.

Alf re-emphasizes that the foundation is purposefully categorized as “multi-ethnic” and opposes this identity category to “little Asia” (lines 10–12). “Little Asia” is a term popularly used to characterize parts of town populated by mostly Asian people that have Asian grocery stores and sell Asian souvenirs. Alf is stating that the chamber *chose* a multiethnic identity, using the category-tied activity “they *call it* because,” for their foundation to emphasize that the chamber and foundation are not organizations that resemble a “little Asia” full of Asians and disconnected from the rest of the community. Alf and Clara then collaborate in listing multiple identities that constitute a multiethnic membership categorization device, foregrounding “Hispanic” again to connect to Univisión and then listing other ethnicities (lines 17–20).

In addition to positioning Asian as a non-exclusive category in the business categorization device, Alf and Clara collaborate in constructing a new professional identity category: multi-ethnic. They simultaneously position multi-ethnic as an inclusive category in the business categorization device and as a device in itself, one that includes multiple ethnicities (including Hispanic). Thus, this analysis illustrates how AACC members switch among different race-based professional identities to position themselves as professionals who work with other businesses and provides a glimpse into how AACC members, at times, orient to categories as devices that include multiple sub-categories. Switching among these categories allows AACC members to acknowledge, yet resist, dominant US racial ideologies and do so in ways that meet institutional goals.

Example 5: “Filipino,” “Cambodian,” and “Thai”

Analysis of the following audio-recorded example illustrates how Clara switches between orienting to the Asian category, to multiple ethnic categories that constitute Asian, and to multiple subcategories that constitute the ethnic



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categories. The following is a conversation I had with Clara in her office, where Clara talked about her plans for an upcoming event:

1	Clara	The Filipino dancers are old they’re like (.) they don’t have the young
2		generation dancing anymore. Alf always complains there’s (hh) old
3		peo(h(h)ple on stage [((laughter))
4	Natasha	[he he he
5	Clara	And then (.) Cambodian and Thai is too slow.
6	Natasha	Mmmm
7	Clara	But (8.0) the slow might now be a good idea for (.) dinner time.

Clara characterizes “Filipino dancers” as “old” and “don’t have the young generation dancing,” (lines 1–2). Clara uses her knowledge about *local* Filipino dancer identities. Filipino dancing is not evaluated negatively because it is Filipino, but rather because locally, only old people do Filipino dances. Clara then voices her boss Alf as “always complaining” that “there’s old people on stage,” (lines 2–3). Through joking about Alf’s complaint, Clara is voicing what is common knowledge around the chamber: Alf is Filipino and views young Filipino dancers as more positively representing his ethnic group. Clara dismisses hiring the Filipino dancers for her event for this reason. Clara then states two other identity categories as potential options for her event: Cambodian and Thai (line 5). Clara first evaluates these identities negatively because they are “too slow” (line 5) but then re-evaluates “slow” dancers as a good choice for a dinner event (line 7).

Analysis of this excerpt highlights the multiple levels of identity categories AACC members routinely use in their interactions. Clara orients to “Asian” as a commonsense category through her participation in the AACC and her choice of what people popularly think of as “Asian” dances. Clara also orients to “Asians” as a device constituted by multiple ethnicities: Filipino, Cambodian, and Thai. These ethnicities also constitute a device of “dancers,” and “dancers” can include “slow” and “fast” dances. Thus, Clara moves between different levels of devices and categories when organizing an event to meet her institutional goals.

Switching among these categories also shows how participants negotiate essentialist racial ideology through foregrounding diversity among Asians, thus negotiating the way that Asians adapt to US norms about race. At this and other



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AACC events, a host introduces the dance through providing information about the ethnicity of the dancers and cultural background of the dance. In other conversations, Alf explained to me that this meets one of the AACC’s institutional goals: to educate people about “Asian culture.” Therefore, the AACC adapts to the Asian category to position them as recognizable in the business categorization device and then uses their institutional status to challenge the notion that Asians are a homogenous racial group.

Conclusions

Through conducting MCA of participants’ everyday interactions, this paper illustrates participants’ agency in navigating constraints that shape cross-cultural adaptation (De La Garza & Ono, 2015). MCA highlights how participants orient to not only ethnic differences, but also the intersections between race, ethnicity, politics, business, and other institutional categories while participating in cross-cultural adaptation. Thus, using MCA extends previous conceptualizations of cross-cultural adaptation (Croucher & Kramer, 2017; De La Garza & Ono, 2015; Kim, 1988; Sandel & Liang, 2010) through showing how cross-cultural adaptation – and “culture” in itself – is an interactional accomplishment where participants routinely and creatively play with different situationally relevant expectations and conventions to meet a variety of goals.

This paper also illustrates the utility of combining MCA with the ethnography of communication (EC) for analyzing culture in institutional contexts (Milburn, 2009). MCA highlights how participants navigate challenges with cross-cultural adaptation through routinely folding and unfolding multiple devices and categories in ways that allow them to meet institutional goals. Using an EC approach highlights how this routine switching constitutes a culturally valued way of communicating in this institution, and through participating in this culturally valued form of talk, members provide themselves freedom to identify in different, seemingly conflicting ways to meet their professional goals.

Through adapting to the Asian category, members construct themselves as recognizable in both the political and business categorization devices. Members also construct Asian as a culturally diverse category within the device of communication and in doing so are able to acknowledge cultural difference within their community in a way that builds solidarity and ultimately maintains their organization and the benefits their Asian institutional status provides. While



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members recognize the general utility of the Asian category, they also, at times, use other ethnic and professional identity categories to achieve situated professional goals. Last, members switch among different category bound (taken for granted) and category tied (not taken for granted) activities associated with the same category (e.g., Asians support Asians (bound); Asians host delegations (tied)), to both take advantage of common-sense category-activity associations and create new category-activity associations that help meet institutional goals (Reynolds & Fitzgerald, 2015). Using MCA and EC, this paper offers a glimpse of how occasioned racial categorization work is produced in relation to and for the purpose of participation in various interrelated institutions (e.g., politics, business, communication, culture, race).

This paper also illustrates how an orientation to racial ideologies shapes participants’ choices of identity categories (van Dijk, 1987, 1998). While ideologies do constrain participants’ communicative choices, this study illustrates how participants display an awareness of racial ideologies in ways that, according to the participants, are empowering. Participants take advantage of racial ideologies of essentialism and markedness when positioning themselves as a homogenous, recognizable institution that participates in “Asian” institutional activities (e.g., supporting other Asian communities, voting as Asians, communicating like Asians). While members do reproduce these ideologies, an orientation to these ideologies does not fully constrain members’ identities. Participants’ display a situated awareness of the potential constraints of these ideologies and make explicit efforts to redefine the Asian category in ways that help them meet institutional goals (e.g., Asians are not exclusive, Asians are culturally diverse and that is a valuable quality that builds solidarity). Moreover, through their public events, AACC members attempt to educate the public about intra-Asian diversity through foregrounding ethnic categories. Thus, members use their recognizable “Asian” status to deconstruct the “Asian” category through their everyday practices. Although members do participate in their own racialization, they do so in a way that meets professional goals and positions them as a successful racial minority group. Through analyzing the discursive manifestation (van Dijk, 1998) of ideology, this paper highlights how ideology is not a static concept with singular effects but rather appears in interactionally specific ways and can be negotiated by participants’ use of identity categories.

Overall, this paper illustrates the importance of studying everyday talk, and the use of identity categories in particular, to address questions of cross-cultural



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adaptation. While the AACC is still a marked, racialized organization (which has its disadvantages), this paper highlights how the routine switching among devices and categories in everyday talk navigates racialization in ways that can empower immigrant groups in new cultural contexts.

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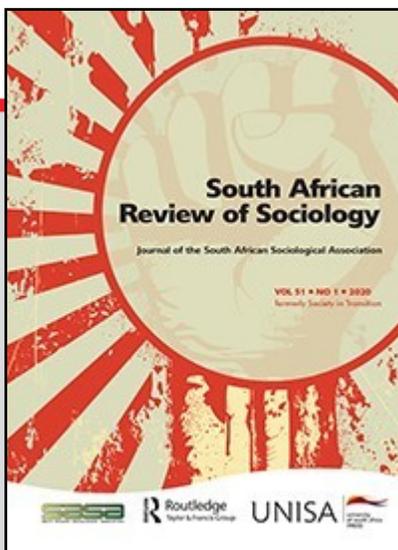
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CHAPTER

10

AN ETHNOMETHODOLOGICAL, CONVERSATION ANALYTIC APPROACH TO INVESTIGATING RACE IN SOUTH AFRICA



This article by Kevin Al. Whitehead
was published in

Research on Language and Social Interaction, 46(2).

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INTRODUCTION

Contemporary sociological research on race, both in South Africa and elsewhere, has examined the ways in which race is socially constructed. For example, Omi and Winant's (1994) influential theory of 'racial formation' focuses on the ways in which racial categories are 'created, inhabited, transformed and destroyed' (Omi & Winant 1994: 55). Racial category systems are thus constantly revised over time through 'racial projects', which occur both at the 'macro-level' of social structural forces and at the 'micro' level of everyday experience and interaction (Omi & Winant 1994). The 'macro' level of racial formation can be thought of as 'context free' in the sense of resulting from an accumulation of historical conditions and operating across society as a whole. Conversely, the 'micro-level' is 'context sensitive', with the relevance of race in any particular circumstance being contingent and subject to moment-by-moment negotiation. It is important to note, however, that although the distinction between these two levels is often made for analytic convenience, these sets of practices operate in constant mutually reinforcing interaction with one another. That is, common-sense or aggregate patterns can create and reinforce common-sense ideas and ordinary interactional practices with respect to race.

South Africa represents an important site for the study of racial formations, particularly in light of its recent transition from the rigidly legislated racialisation of virtually every facet of life under the apartheid system (Posel 2001) to a new avowedly non-racial dispensation. A substantial body of research has examined post-apartheid racial projects and the continuing centrality of race in South African society, both at the 'macro' level of government policies and political formations (see, for example, Louw 2004; MacDonald 2006; Maré 2001; Winant 2001) and at the 'micro' level of everyday life. It is noteworthy, however, that these studies of race in everyday life have generally utilised observational (e.g., Durrheim & Dixon 2005; Pattman 2007) textual (see, Goga 2010; Nuttall 2001) or interview or focus-group methodologies (e.g., Duncan 2003; Walker 2005). Few studies have examined the situated use of racial categories in naturally occurring interactions¹ (although Barnes, Palmary & Durrheim 2001 is a notable exception). This points to the importance of investigating the ways in which race becomes relevant in locally situated, everyday interactions that are not conducted primarily in the service of particular pre-specified research questions and agendas (see Erwin 2010). That is, investigations based on data in which researchers introduce race as a topic, in accordance with their own research interests, will not be well positioned to



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examine how race becomes consequential for ordinary people as they engage in ordinary actions-in-interaction (see Stokoe 2009; Wilkinson & Kitzinger 2003).

One possible reason for this gap in the literature, both in South Africa and elsewhere, is methodological, relating to the 'capturability' of suitable data in naturally occurring interactions. Van Dijk, for example, argues that talk about topics such as race and ethnicity occurs relatively rarely in everyday conversations, such that it would be 'a very inefficient way of collecting data when we would record hundreds of hours of talk in order to get perhaps a few hours of talk about ethnic groups' (1987: 18), and finding data by recording naturally occurring interactions would thus 'amount to a search for the proverbial needle in the haystack' (ibid: 119). As a result, researchers' elicitation of talk about such topics by research participants has often been seen as the only feasible way to efficiently collect data. However, recent research by Stokoe has shown that 'seemingly elusive phenomena [such as the emergence of identity categories] do occur, predictably, in the same kinds of sequential environments, doing the same kinds of actions' (2009: 81). This suggests emerging possibilities for the development of approaches to studying how social categories, including racial categories, may become recurrently and systematically relevant in naturally occurring interactions.

In this article, I describe how one such approach, informed by ethnomethodological and conversation analytic perspectives, offers potentially valuable resources for investigating the ways in which racial categories become relevant in ordinary interactions. While the focus of the current article is primarily methodological, I use descriptions of the data and procedures generated in the course of a broader study² in which the methodology was employed in order to illustrate the important features of such an approach to studying race and other social category systems. In addition, I present some brief empirical examples³ from the broader study in order to illustrate some of the analytic payoffs of this methodological approach with respect to investigating the ongoing significance of race in post-apartheid South Africa and beyond.

AN ETHNOMETHODOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE The term 'ethnomethodology' was coined in the mid-1950s by Harold Garfinkel, who used it to describe the sense-making procedures (hence 'methodology') employed by a given group of people (hence 'ethno') (Heritage 1984). As such, a hallmark of the ethnomethodological tradition is a preoccupation with the perspectives and



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actions of ordinary members of society, with its aim being to investigate 'the body of common sense knowledge and the range of procedures and considerations by means of which ordinary members of society make sense of, find their way about in, and act on the circumstances in which they find themselves' (ibid: 4. Garfinkel describes this common-sense knowledge as consisting of 'the socially sanctioned grounds of inference and action that people use in their everyday affairs and which they assume that others use in the same way' (1967: 76).

Ethnomethodological investigations involve a focus on the locally situated self-administration of social order by actors in any given setting, as shown by Garfinkel's proposal that the investigation of social phenomena should proceed

according to the policy that every feature of sense, of fact, of method, for every particular case of inquiry without exception, is the managed accomplishment of organized settings of practical actions, and that particular determinations in members' practices of consistency, planfulness, relevance, or reproducibility of their practices and results ... are acquired and assured only through particular, located organizations of artful practices. (ibid: 32)

When applied to matters of race in South Africa, this approach to studying social order focuses analytic attention on the way in which race as a social structure is constituted by members' locally situated uses of common-sense knowledge about race, and their practices for making sense of and managing the contingencies of everyday action with respect to race. In this way, the problems posed by race in post-apartheid South Africa, and addressed by the abovementioned research literature, could be examined as 'members' problems', with the ways in which ordinary members of society manage them becoming a central matter of concern for a sociological account of the post-apartheid racial order (see Garfinkel 1967).

One particular branch of ethnomethodological inquiry has focused on commonsense knowledge and everyday actions, particularly with respect to social categories. This work owes much to Harvey Sacks, who used the term 'membership categorization devices' (MCDs) to describe systems of social categories, and the normative ways in which they are used and administered by members of society (see Sacks 1972a and b, 1995; also see Schegloff 2007a). Sacks' work showed the way in which categories serve as repositories for, and organise, bodies of common-sense cultural knowledge. This common-sense knowledge is knowledge



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about what people of particular categories are like, how they behave, and so on (Schegloff 2007a). Although this knowledge may not be scientifically or factually accurate when applied to any particular member of a category, and (especially in the case of some sets of categories, including race) it may be morally or politically contested, it has 'the working status of "knowledge"' for the ordinary people who treat it as such (ibid: 469). Thus, categories are 'inference-rich', meaning that once a person is taken to be a member of a category, anything known about that category is presumed to be so about them (ibid.). In addition, categories are associated (again, through common-sense knowledge) with particular kinds of activities or conduct, which Sacks termed 'category-bound activities' (1972a: 335).

This line of inquiry provides an important set of resources to bring to bear on investigations of race in contemporary South Africa, and elsewhere. That is, paying explicit analytic attention to the situated deployment of racial categories (and hence the common sense associated with them) offers insights into the mechanisms through which racial structures are reproduced at the level of everyday interactions. Moreover, such an approach complements the abovementioned research at the 'macro' level, offering a means to examine the consequentiality of the broader racial dynamics and policies identified in this research for the everyday conduct and sense-making of ordinary South Africans.

ANALYTIC APPROACH: CONVERSATION ANALYSIS

Schegloff has described interaction as 'the primary, fundamental embodiment of sociality', pointing out that 'talk-in-interaction'⁴ figures centrally in the concrete activities of all of the 'abstractly named institutions – the economy, the polity, and the institutions for the reproduction of the society (courtship, marriage, family, socialization, and education), the law, religion, and so forth' that make up the macrostructure of societies (2006: 70). As a consequence, one way of studying social order at its point of production is to examine talk-in-interaction in various settings. Conversation analysis (see, for example, Sacks 1995; Sacks, Schegloff & Jefferson 1974; Schegloff 2007b), which grew in conjunction with the ethnomethodological theoretical tradition described above, provides an approach to studying social order in this way, using audio- and video-recorded interactions as data.

Although conversation analysis (as the name suggests) was originally developed as



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an approach to studying informal conversational interactions, it has since been expanded to include the study of interactions in a wide range of formal institutional settings, including courtroom proceedings, debates, various types of interviews, classroom interactions, psychotherapy, calls to institutional lines (e.g., emergency services, advice hotlines, etc.) and interactions in medical settings, among others (see, for example, Drew & Heritage 1992). Conversation analytic research conducted over the past several decades has revealed much about the importance of interactional mechanisms in the production of social order and social institutions, and has resulted in the development of a rigorous and systematic approach for examining individual episodes of interaction at a fine-grained level of detail, and for developing accounts of interactional practices that operate across multiple episodes. The overall aim of this approach is to examine how, through talking, people live their lives, build and maintain relationships, and establish 'who [they] are to one another' (Drew 2005: 74).

In addition to allowing for the study of social order at its point of production, a focus on recorded interactional data offers a number of other important advantages. First, interactional data provide a means to ground analytic claims in the orientations of the participants themselves, as a result of the way in which participants in interactions display their understandings (or analyses) of what has just happened through the way(s) in which they respond to it (Heritage 1984). In this way, consistent with the ethnomethodological preoccupation with privileging participants' categories over those of analysts, researchers' analysis of the data can be 'checked' against the analysis provided by participants, internal to the data, by virtue of the interactional nature of the data (Sacks et al. 1974; Schegloff 1992, 1997). Second, the use of recorded data allows for repeated viewing and/or listening that can reveal the importance of seemingly insignificant details that might be overlooked on the first viewing/hearing. This is consistent with the conversation analytic assumption that 'no order of detail can be dismissed, *a priori*, as disorderly, accidental, or irrelevant' (Heritage 1984: 241) – an assumption that is supported by the vast body of conversation analytic research that has accumulated over the past few decades. Third, recorded data allow for detailed transcripts of the data excerpts on which the analysis is based to be included in the write-up of the analysis, and for the data to be played at oral presentations of the findings. This provides readers and audience members with an independent empirical basis for judging whether they find the analysis persuasive.



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It is important to emphasise that the conversation analytic approach is centrally concerned with explicating actors' practices (i.e., what they do and how they do things), rather than with their motivations (i.e., why they do things). Moreover, this approach focuses on analysing utterances as public actions rather than, for example, treating them as indicators of underlying psychological processes. Talk is thus treated as a form of public social action, analysing it primarily for its social and interactional import, rather than for what it reveals about any particular individual (Clayman & Gill 2004). This analytic orientation was famously summed up by Erving Goffman as follows:

I assume that the proper study of interaction is not the individual and his (sic) psychology, but rather the syntactical relations among the acts of different persons mutually present to one another ... Not, then men (sic) and their moments. Rather, moments and their men (sic). (1967: 2–3)

Thus, rather than speculating about why particular individuals might be motivated to act in particular ways at particular moments, this approach considers some of the structural, interactional contingencies that might provide systematic warrants for producing particular actions at particular types of moments. To the extent that motivations do enter into an analysis, they are treated as *displays* rather than as psychological objects. That is, analysis is concerned with what motivations actors display or make available to their co-participants (either explicitly or implicitly), rather than with whether these displays reflect a particular 'inner' psychological state on the part of an actor.

While there can be no doubt that individuals do have psychological motives which may lead them to act in particular ways at particular moments, there are a number of compelling reasons for examining interaction independently of the inner motivations of individuals. First, there are virtually infinite possible motives for acting in particular ways at particular moments, making any attempt to produce an account of the range of motives possibly operating in particular cases potentially extendable *ad infinitum*. Second, motives can only be directly accessed by the individuals who hold them (and, according to some schools of psychological thought, not even by them), making analysts' uses of motives as explanatory tools unavoidably speculative and unfalsifiable. Even when individuals claim (explicitly or implicitly) to be acting in accordance with particular motives, these claims cannot be separated from the interactional role they play (e.g., as accounts for actions that are being treated as accountable – see Heritage 1984), and such



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claims can therefore not be unproblematically taken at face value as reflections of the actual psychological states they purport to describe. Third, members of society use motives as resources for explaining the actions of other members of society – making analysts' use of motives to account for the actions of members of society essentially no different (i.e., no more 'analytic') a project than that undertaken by the speculative, informal accounts produced in everyday life. Finally, the interactional practices that conversation analysis focuses on do not depend on the motives of individuals for their production – instead, the consequentiality of recurrent contingencies of interaction is what provides for such motives, and what makes them observable in particular interactional moments.

An ethnomethodological, conversation analytic focus thus provides a set of tools for a detailed examination of the ways in which South Africans orient to, use, and self-administer racial categories, and the common-sense knowledge associated with them, in individual episodes of interaction. In this way, the continuing role of race in South Africa can be studied by examining what race is for ordinary people, and how it matters for the way they act in everyday situations, even when they are engaged in activities that are not necessarily about race per se, but for which race comes to be treated as relevant or consequential (see Whitehead & Lerner 2009; Wilkinson & Kitzinger 2003). Although ethnomethodology and conversation analysis have not been widely employed as an approach for studying race, my previous research (Whitehead 2009; Whitehead & Lerner 2009) has demonstrated their utility for examining such matters. The focus of such an approach on the role of race not just in everyday life, but specifically in everyday interactions, could add new and valuable findings to those already produced by studies such as those mentioned above, that have utilised observational, textual, or interview-type methodologies. As I show later in this report, this type of research offers insights into some of the mundane ways in which race is constituted as part of the fibre of everyday life (Durrheim & Dixon 2004) in post-apartheid South Africa.

I turn now to a description of the data corpus collected for the broader study to which the methodological approach described above was applied. Although these data are not subjected to a detailed analysis in the present article, describing the data (and in particular identifying and addressing their limitations) enables further explication of the methodological orientation I have described, and the insights it potentially offers.



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THE DATA CORPUS: RADIO INTERACTIONS

The data corpus for the study consisted of audio recordings of shows broadcast on three different South African radio stations, namely SAfm, 702 Talk Radio (often known simply as 702), and Kaya FM. These stations were selected on the basis of at least some of their broadcasts having a high degree of interactivity (with a substantial proportion of time allocated to interviews and calls from listeners), as well as being available through live streaming radio online, which made it possible to use software to capture the audio in .mp3 format as it was broadcast. A total of approximately 115 hours of broadcasts was recorded, consisting of several hours of pilot data that were recorded in May 2006 and May to June 2007, in order to assess the feasibility of using radio broadcasts as a data source, with the remainder of the data recorded over a three-month period from March to June 2008. The data sources were selected so as to include 1) both government-operated (SAfm) and independent (Kaya FM and 702) radio stations; 2) stations that broadcast to a wide audience, either through conventional radio⁵ or streaming online; and 3) shows broadcast at various times throughout the day, from early morning to late night. On this basis, and based on geographical and other self-identifications provided by callers in the data, it is likely that the recordings that make up the data corpus were heard or participated in by people from a broad cross-section of South African society.

The data corpus yielded a total of more than 600 stretches of interaction in which race was observably made relevant. This demonstrates the degree to which instances of the visible surfacing of race may be plentiful even in sources of data not expressly produced for the purpose of studying race.

ADDRESSING LIMITATIONS OF THE DATA

Although, as noted above, data collection was conducted so as to include materials from as wide a range of speakers as possible, it is important to emphasise that a data corpus such as this can by no means be claimed, and nor was it intended, to constitute a random or nationally representative sample, either of South African speakers or of interactions in post-apartheid South Africa. In light of this, it is worth pointing out several limitations of the data corpus. First, as a consequence of my own limited language skills I included only English-language data. This suggests the value, particularly in linguistically diverse societies such as South Africa, of researchers with linguistic skills that enable them to examine



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interactions produced in a wider range of languages. Second, the data only include those speakers who have access to a radio and a telephone,⁶ thus excluding a substantial number of South Africans. Third, the data were collected from one particular institutional context (radio broadcasts and listener call-ins), and it is likely that certain features of the data are products of the unique interactional organisation of this context, rather than occurring similarly in South African society more broadly. For example, the host, callers and guests (except in the case of in-studio guests) do not have visual access to each other, may not know things about each other that co-participants in other contexts might know, and may be producing their conduct as much for the overhearing audience as for each other. Moreover, opportunities to participate, particularly for the potential callers in the overhearing audience, are limited by structural features of the context – that is, audience members who wish to respond to something that a speaker has said on air can do so only if they are successful in calling in and having their call taken, and only after at least a short delay following the production of the utterances of the speaker to which they wish to respond. Clearly, factors such as these may affect the ways in which interactions in this context unfold, compared to those in other contexts (for a more thorough description of the interactional organisation of radio call-in shows, and the relevance of speakers' categorical identities in such interactions, see Fitzgerald & Housley 2002).

While these limitations should be borne in mind in evaluating findings based on the data, it is also important to point out that a central concern for conversation analysts (and for many other qualitative researchers) is not in determining whether the interactional practices under study are used widely or frequently within a population, but rather to demonstrate the *possibility* that these practices can be used in some kind of interactional context. That is, if an interactional resource or practice is used even by a limited number of speakers in only one type of context, then it could *at least potentially* be used by other speakers in other contexts (see Silverman 2000: 108–109). In addition, a certain generic set of interactional contingencies, and a range of resources and competencies through which they can be managed, are available to all members of a society regardless of the particular context in which their interactions are taking place (Peräkylä 1997, 2004). Thus, in producing their conduct in publicly broadcast interactions, speakers implicitly propose that their utterances are intelligible to a wide range of listeners, who should be able to recognise and make sense of them as social actions, independently of the context in which they were produced. Consequently, while



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many of these contingencies and resources may be specially adapted to the demands of particular institutional environments (Drew & Heritage 1992), they are all built on a basic set of materials that have many features in common across speakers and contexts. As Sacks observes, many of these basic materials are omnipresent in all interactional contexts, such that we can 'tap into whomsoever, wheresoever and we get much the same things' (1984: 22).

The contingencies faced by participants of South African radio broadcasts (or, indeed, participants in virtually any other type of interaction) as a result of the ongoing significance of race in everyday life, and the practices that can be used to manage these contingencies, may thus be similar in many ways to those faced by speakers in other interactional contexts. In short, to the extent that race matters for the actions of South Africans, it probably does not only matter when people are speaking on radio broadcasts, and it probably does not only matter for people who speak on radio broadcasts. However, the constrained range of conversational topics covered on such radio shows may make such broadcasts a particularly rich site for the emergence and relevance of societally institutionalised categorical identities. That is, given that discussions on these shows are generally restricted to matters that may be relevant or of interest to a broad overhearing audience, the category memberships (including race) that tend to be virtually omnirelevant in society as a whole are likely to surface recurrently in these interactions. This is particularly likely given that the majority of interactions in the data are between people who have little or no prior knowledge of each other as individuals, which may lend an increased weight to racial (and other society-wide) categories as resources for producing and interpreting actions. As a result, these broadcasts provide a perspicuous setting (Garfinkel 2002) in which to investigate the ways in which categorical identities with a generic, society-wide significance (including, among others, racial category membership) become relevant and are managed in interaction.

The aim of the study for which this data were collected, was thus to develop detailed descriptions of some interactional contingencies and practices, rather than to make distributional claims about their operation or frequency of occurrence. However, once these descriptions have been adequately developed, they can be tested against additional data sets in order to assess the degree to which they are prevalent in other interactional contexts, or among particular categories of people (racial or otherwise) (Schegloff 1993). Moreover, even if the



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interactional practices identified through this approach occur relatively rarely, or are completely absent in some contexts, their operation in any given context may still reflect the operation of a broad racial common sense. That is, a minority of cases in which such common sense becomes explicit or clearly observable, even if it does so primarily as a result of the interactional contingencies associated with a particular institutional context, may represent simply the tip of an iceberg of cases and contexts in which it is shaping participants' conduct without ever becoming explicit or visible.

ANALYTIC PROCEDURE: WORKING WITH COLLECTIONS

An important feature of the conversation analytic approach is the building and use of collections of target phenomena. While the phenomena of interest to conversation analysts are frequently arrived at through the examination of single cases, the examination of a collection of related instances of a phenomenon can serve as a means of enriching an analysis by elucidating the scope of the phenomenon and the degree to which its features are common across multiple cases (Clayman & Gill 2004). Once such a collection has been assembled, a comprehensive analysis is conducted. This involves constructing an account that can accommodate the unique features of each case in the collection, while at the same time describing the generic features of the phenomenon that apply to all instances in the collection (ibid.). This analysis is typically aided by detailed transcripts of data, with the important proviso that the recordings themselves, rather than the transcripts produced to represent them, remain the data source (see Psathas 1995).

The application of this approach to the present data corpus proceeded by initially listening to all the recordings, and collecting and producing rough transcripts of all stretches of interaction in which race was treated as relevant, either explicitly or allusively (see Whitehead 2009). This overall collection of race-relevant stretches of interaction was then divided into sub-collections that shared common features in terms of the practices employed by speakers, or speakers' orientations to the contingencies through which race came to be treated as consequential. Careful transcription and analysis, using conversation analytic techniques (see, for example, Sacks et al. 1974; Schegloff 2007b), of all of the instances in each sub-collection were conducted as the sub-collections were developed, with emerging hypotheses about the sub-collections being iteratively refined and tested against each new



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data instance identified as a candidate for inclusion.

AN EMPIRICAL ILLUSTRATION: RACIAL 'GENERALISING PRACTICES'

In this section I present two examples of a phenomenon identified in the broader analysis of the data, namely generalising practices through which speakers can claim that what they are saying does not apply to any particular racial category. Although they are not intended to constitute a comprehensive analysis of the practices they exemplify, these brief illustrations demonstrate the utility of the approach I have described for investigating how race may become relevant and may be reproduced in the course of everyday interactions in South Africa.

Previous research (Whitehead 2009) has examined speakers' use of list construction practices to formulate *race in general*, thereby claiming that what they are saying does not apply to any specific racial category. In Excerpt 1⁷ below, a speaker produces a similar generalising practice in the course of complaining about crime in South Africa. Just prior to this excerpt, the host asked his guest about the murder of her father some years earlier, and expressed his condolences for her loss. He then follows up this question by asking the guest whether this experience ever provoked her to consider leaving South Africa (lines 1-6). In the course of an extended response (lines 8-26), the guest reflects on how 'difficult' it is to make such a decision (line 20), before stating, 'I don't think any South African: (.) um: (.) mm: doesn't matter which colour they are or which race they are' (lines 21-22) should be placed in such a position. The guest thus interrupts her utterance to parenthetically insert 'doesn't matter which colour they are or which race they are' into it (see Mazeland 2007; Whitehead 2009). This serves as a generalising practice by virtue of explicitly claiming that her utterance should be heard as applying to people of all possible racial categories, rather than as alluding only to a particular racial category or set of categories.

Excerpt 1:

[213 - SAfm 5-7-08]

- 1 H: And u:m, (0.2) some people would say 'well, that's a good
- 2 reason to leave.'
- 3 (0.4)
- 4 H: .hhh Go live in Australia or somewhere.



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- 5 (1.5)
- 6 H: Did it ever occur to you?
- 7 (0.2)
- 8 G: Ja, um I mean ye- I must be honest and say ja, I've thought
9 about it.
- 10 (.)
- 11 G: Um: (.) I think everybody thinks about it.
- 12 (.)
- 13 H: M[m.
- 14 G: [Um: (.) .hhh (0.2) ja, so it- it is a- (.) it is always
15 an option to leave, (.) and I don't blame people who leave
16 because (.) especially if y- if you have young children you
17 are always (0.2) always fearful of: (0.7) of them (u-) (0.2)
18 their their future ja=hh
19 (0.2)
- 20 G: °Ja.° But it's- it's a difficult decision to make an:d (0.7)
21 um:: (0.8) I don't think any South African: (.) um: (0.2) mm:
22 **doesn't matter which colour they are or which race they are**
23 .h um: (.) should actually be put in a d- (.) in a position
24 to: (.) (n-) (.) to have to make that. °W::° we should all
25 feel safe at home an- an- and feel (we-) (0.2) feel safe
26 here.
27 (0.3)
- 28 H: Mm.
- 29 (1.0)
- 30 H: And it's hard to do that, you know I was in uh .hhh in



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- 31 Paris walking around late at night, and women walking
 32 alone, (0.2) at night, safe. .hhh And I remember thinking
 33 ‘God I wish I could walk this much back home.’ You know?
 34 Just walk.

By using a generalising practice in the course of producing this utterance, the guest treats her utterance (and the complaint about crime it implements) as being vulnerable to being heard as racialised. That is, since the use of such a practice is designed to discount any possible implication that an utterance was tacitly racialised, its use displays the speaker’s orientation to the possibility that the utterance *may* be heard as racialised unless such a hearing is discounted. As a result, the use of this practice serves to explicitly introduce race in a context in which it was previously only (potentially) implicitly present, or not present at all. Thus, in this case, the guest’s reference to ‘any South African’ (line 21) is, through the subsequent production of the generalising practice, retrospectively treated as a potential allusion to particular, race-specific South Africans.

The basis for the possibility of a racial hearing in this case appears to rest on, and reproduce, common-sense knowledge regarding connections between emigration, (particularly following the host’s reference to Australia in line 4) may serve to invoke the phenomenon of the large numbers of white South Africans in particular who have emigrated to countries such as Australia, Canada and the United Kingdom in recent decades (see, for example, Adepoju 2003). In addition, the discussion of violent crime, and the fear of falling victim to it, may be heard as echoing common-sense associations between blackness and criminality. These associations have long held currency among white South Africans in particular, with discourses of *die swaart gevaar* (‘the black danger’) being used to justify segregation before and during apartheid, and being recapitulated in euphemistic links between race and crime in the post-apartheid era (see, for example, Lemanski 2004).

It thus appears that the guest’s use of a generalising practice in this case is designed to pre-empt a possible hearing of her complaint as implicating black crime in particular, and as being produced on behalf of white victims in particular. This apparent use of the practice for managing the production of a potentially delicate action (see Whitehead 2009) is further supported by evidence of the guest’s orientation to the fraught nature of answering the host’s question. This can



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be seen in the pauses at several places at which she could have begun a response to the host, but passed up the opportunity to do so (see lines 3, 5 and 7). It is also evident in her numerous hesitations in the course of producing her answer, particularly just prior to and following her production of the generalising practice (see lines 21 and 23). In deploying this practice, however, she makes this potential racialised hearing more explicit, and makes the common-sense knowledge underpinning it more readily available for subsequent speakers to take up. In this case, the host does not pursue the racialisation introduced by the guest, instead displaying agreement (line 28) and treating the guest's complaint as consistent with his own experiences of South Africa (lines 30–34). In Excerpt 2, however, the deployment of a similar practice (using the formulation 'regardless of their colour') results in trouble for the speaker, as one of his recipients responds by sanctioning him. This excerpt is drawn from a discussion of the issue of inflation in food prices and potential ways of curbing this inflation, involving the host of the show and two expert guests.⁸ Prior to the excerpt, the first guest proposed that 'land should be given to the people' to enable them to participate in supplying food to the population. While his mention of 'the people' is a possible allusion to race (see Whitehead 2009), it is not explicitly racialised, and there have been no other overt mentions of race in the discussion prior to the excerpt. In the course of responding to the first guest's proposal, the second guest expresses a concern that 'if you put unexperienced farmers on the farm regardless of their colour they will even suffer more from the consequences of high inflation' (lines 10–11). Similarly to Excerpt 1, the parenthetical insertion of 'regardless of their colour' into this formulation serves to treat the category 'unexperienced farmers' as vulnerable to being heard as a euphemism for a particular racial category, and proposes that instead it should be understood as applying across all racial categories. Despite this, the first guest responds by sanctioning the second guest, claiming that he has impugned 'the competency and eh skills of black people, .hh in relation to farming' (lines 27–28).

Excerpt 2:

[10 - Kaya 4-23-08]

1 H: Doctor Laubscher what were you gonna [say?

2 G2: [(Ja) the point I

3 wanna make is um with what- what has been said you know w-



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4 we appreciate that- that (there's on the- standing on the)

5 farmers' side you know but .hhh but giving land to p-

6 (.) to any person regardless, ownership of land (.) you

7 know doesn't entitle you to any thing that you can do in

8 terms of fighting inflation. .hh[h Uh: uh- uh- it's a huge

9 H: [(Uh huh).

10 G2: concern that if you put (.) unexperienced farmers on the

11 farm **regardless of their colour** they- they will even suffer

12 more from the consequences of high inflati[on you know and

13 G1: [John I think

14 G2: [so .hh

15 G1: [(that this is-) I think doctor is going [(off to)

16 H: [Si- ja. Ja but-

17 but- b- but Mister Tseki you- you- you (.) are- are

18 correcting his point before he's even made it cad you-

19 could you let him finish if you wouldn't mind?

20 G2: So a- all I wanna say is you know that- that's not the issue

21 right now. I mean I w- w- fully subscribe to that that you

22 know (.) u- p- making land available so .hhh South African

23 farmers are very very efficient regarding cost production

24 ((continues))

((3:55 omitted while second guest continues his point and host breaks for advertisements))

25 H: Now Mister Tseki you wanted to respond to something?



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- 26 G1: .hh Yes eh: eh John. I think eh: Doctor Laubscher should not
 27 bring the issue of competency and eh skills of black people,
 28 .hh in relation to farming. .hh All what we are saying is
 29 that .hh there- we are (.) [able.
 30 G2: [Ag no John I comple-
 31 [I (completely I just-) not- I haven't said something like
 32 G1: [And we do have (the skills.)
 33 G2: that. Let's [keep this out please.
 34 (H): [I'll
 35 G1: I think we- we want to- to- to- (shift) [that outside
 36 G2: [Ja no. I object
 37 [to that sir. [I didn't say ()
 38 G1: [([)
 39 H: [S- sorry, sorry can I- can I can I ask
 40 you both to pause for one second and let's clarify this. .hh
 41 Doctor Laubscher did not directly refer to black people.
 42 Mister Tseki are you saying he implied that, cause he
 43 certainly didn't say it.
 44 ((exchange continues))

The second guest's treatment of 'unexperienced farmers' as potentially hearable as a racial euphemism suggests that he has interpreted the first guest's prior mention of 'the people' as a possible allusion to race. Further evidence for this can be seen earlier in his response, as he displays caution in formulating the people to whom land would hypothetically be given. That is, in lines 5–6 he initially says 'giving land to p²' (which is apparently headed towards 'giving land to people'), before



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cutting himself off, pausing slightly, and reformulating it as 'to any person regardless' (line 6). This formulation explicitly anticipates and resists the possibility that the referred-to people might be treated as members of a particular category. Although the specific membership categorisation device to which such a category might belong is not specified at this point, it is possible that 'regardless' (line 6) may be a contraction of 'regardless of their colour,' and hence an allusion to race that picks up on the first guest's earlier reference to 'the people.' This is subsequently confirmed by the second guest's repetition of the word 'regardless' in the parenthetical formulation 'regardless of their colour' in line 11.

In addition, this treatment of 'unexperienced farmers' as potentially hearably racialised reflects an orientation on the speaker's part to possible intersections between race and other social categories, in this case level of experience ('unexperienced') and occupation ('farmers'). This orientation may be based on common-sense knowledge regarding the racial demographics of 'experienced' farmers resulting from the apartheid-era restriction of land ownership (and therefore farm ownership) to white people. While these common-sense links between the apartheid past and its present legacies are left unspoken, they are consistent both with the first guest's earlier call for land to be given to 'the people,' and to his subsequent sanctioning of the second guest following his use of the generalising practice.⁹ That is, by claiming that the second guest has said something implicating 'the competency and eh skills of black people, .hh in relation to farming,' treats the generalising formulation 'regardless of their colour' as having specifically linked 'unexperienced farmers' with the racial category 'black,' even though it explicitly resists specific links of this sort – and this further reflects the vulnerability that the second guest was oriented to in producing the generalising practice. As a result (and somewhat paradoxically) the first guest's sanctioning response effectively reinforces and makes more explicit the previously unspoken common-sense knowledge apparently operating in this interaction, even as it registers an objection to the racialisation introduced by the second guest.

Thus, in this case (as in Excerpt 1), a speaker orients to an utterance as potentially hearable as implicitly racialised, and uses a generalising practice as a means for preempting such a hearing. This practice, in turn, is responded to with explicit sanctioning of the speaker on the basis of his having introduced race into an ostensibly non-racialised discussion. That is, a practice designed to avoid a racial hearing of an utterance becomes the source of a racial hearing, resulting in a more



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explicit surfacing of previously unspoken common-sense racial knowledge. As a result, the discussion shifts from one that was not directly (and perhaps not even indirectly) about race, to one in which race is central, as the two guests abandon the discussion of inflation in food prices to dispute whether the second guest did what the first guest claimed he did, and the host intervenes to question the alleged racial basis for the dispute (lines 30–43).

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

The brief empirical illustrations presented above demonstrate the utility of the approach I have described for identifying and examining interactional practices through which race surfaces in everyday interactions in South Africa. This reveals several respects in which the methodological approach I have described in this article offers ways to advance an understanding of the continuing centrality of race for everyday life in South Africa. I discuss these contributions of the approach in the paragraphs that follow.

First, as the data excerpts presented above demonstrate, this approach offers a means to investigate how race surfaces in the course of interactions in which race has not been pre-specified as a topic, and in which race has not yet explicitly been raised. In Excerpt 1, race is treated as potentially relevant through a speaker's production of a generalising practice in the course of complaining about crime in South Africa and reflecting on decisions about emigration. In Excerpt 2, a similar practice is deployed by a speaker in the course of disagreeing with a previous speaker in a discussion about food price inflation. Race is thus introduced in these interactions in the course of the production of actions that are ostensibly not racialised, but come to be produced as racialised as a result of these practices. In contrast to methodologies through which race is pre-specified as central to the topical agenda of the talk that participants produce, the approach I have described demonstrates how racial categories, and the common-sense knowledge associated with them, can become contingently relevant in everyday interactions. This demonstrates how race as a form of social organisation can be reproduced as a 'byproduct' of what people are otherwise engaged in doing, even when it is not centrally *about* race (cf. Durrheim, Mtose & Brown 2011: 115, 162; also see Kitzinger 2005a and b). Thus, by tracking when and how practices such as these are used, through which race is introduced into everyday interactions, we can gain insights into the mechanisms through which particular topics and people are produced and reproduced as racialised. The use of naturally occurring data is



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crucial for producing such findings, which would not be possible without the kind of close examination of ordinary interactions that this approach offers. This suggests that studies of racial formation, both in South Africa and elsewhere, could benefit from this type of data and approach.

Second, this approach offers a way of identifying and analysing the uses of interactional practices through which common-sense knowledge of South Africa's (racialised) past and present is observably treated as shaping people's conduct at particular moments (cf. Erwin 2010: 23). When these practices are deployed by speakers and unproblematically recognised by recipients, the common-sense knowledge underpinning them is renewed and thereby reproduced. The examination of these practices thus provides a way of investigating how the consequentiality of commonsense knowledge about 'macro' structures (such as those relating to race) becomes visible at the 'micro' level of ordinary interactions. Moreover, it appears likely from the examination of the data that instances in which race becomes overtly relevant may represent just a small 'tip of the iceberg' of cases in which race is shaping people's conduct without becoming visible in the process. That is, based on the instances shown above, as well as other data collected for the study, it appears that the cases in which race surfaces overtly are recurrently those in which something at the margins of possible interpretations of action is happening – for example, cases in which a speaker treats an utterance as *potentially* hearably racialised, while resisting such a hearing (as in the data shown above). Such cases stand in contrast to the likely considerable majority of cases in which participants take for granted that others can recognise what they are doing, what type of person they are, and so on, without the need to make it explicit (Raymond 2010). In this way, the close examination of cases in which race becomes visibly relevant in ordinary interactions, using a methodology such as the one described above, may provide insights into the potentially pervasive role of race in shaping participants' conduct without always surfacing overtly.

Finally, it is important to emphasise that the interactional practices that could be examined using an approach such as the one described above are not specific to race, but could conceivably be employed in studying any other category system. Moreover, they are produced as constitutive features of speakers' methods for producing ordinary actions-in-interaction (cf. Stokoe 2009), such as disagreements and complaints, that do not rely on race but instead can be produced in the service of a wide range of interactional outcomes. As such, these practices also rely on the



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same generic 'building blocks' (e.g., turn-taking, sequencing, action formation, person reference, and so on) that all interactions are made up of, and that have been primary concerns of conversation analysts for several decades (see, for example, Schegloff 2006). As a result, understanding how race or other category systems surface in ordinary interactions, is bound up with understanding how the generic features of talk-in-interaction serve as resources through which people produce and negotiate their everyday social lives.

NOTES

- 1 By 'naturally occurring interaction' I mean interaction that was not produced for research purposes, and hence was not driven by researchers' particular interests, but instead would have occurred even if researchers were not observing or recording it (see Clayman & Gill 2004).
- 2 While the substantive focus of this study was on racial categories in the South African context in particular, broadly similar approaches have been used by researchers examining a range of other sets of categories in other countries (see, for example, Kitziinger 2005a and b; Raymond & Heritage 2006; Sacks 1972a and b, 1995; Schegloff 2002, 2005; Stokoe 2009, 2010).
- 3 A report of some of the main substantive findings of this study can be found in Whitehead (2010). Additional findings are also described in further forthcoming reports, including Whitehead (2011, forthcoming).
- 4 Schegloff uses the term 'talk-in-interaction' to describe 'exactly what the term names – talk in interaction' (see footnote 1 in Schegloff 1991).
- 5 SAfm broadcasts throughout South Africa; Kaya FM broadcasts primarily in Gauteng Province, which is approximately level with KwaZulu-Natal as the most populous province in the country, and contains the largest city in the country (Johannesburg, which is also the financial centre of South Africa) and the administrative capital of South Africa (Pretoria); and 702 broadcasts in both Gauteng Province and (through its sister station, 567 Cape Talk) in the Western Cape Province, in which the legislative capital of South Africa (Cape Town) is located.
- 6 Statistics South Africa's (2007) Community Survey estimates that 76.6 per



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cent of South African households have a radio, 72.9 per cent have a mobile phone, and 18.6 per cent have a landline telephone. By comparison, the same report estimates that 65.6 per cent of South African households have a television.

- 7 A list of transcription symbols used in the transcripts below is shown in Jefferson (2004), and can be accessed at www.liso.ucsb.edu/Jefferson/Transcript.pdf. In addition, a 'Transcription Module' on conversation analytic transcription, which includes links to sound files exemplifying the features of speech production that the various transcription symbols are used to represent, is available at www.sscnet.ucla.edu/soc/faculty/schegloff/TranscriptionProject/index.html
- 8 Prior to the stretch of interaction shown in the transcript, the host of the show identified the first guest (G1 on the transcript) as a representative of the trade union COSATU, and the second (G2) as a representative of Grain South Africa, an independent organisation that seeks to promote the interests of South African grain producers. As one reviewer pointed out, these descriptions of the guests may serve to tacitly invoke common-sense knowledge with respect to race and class that could subsequently serve as an interpretive resource for listeners, and for the guests themselves.
- 9 Note that the first guest attempted to intervene just after the second guest's production of the generalising practice (see lines 13 and 15), before being asked by the host to allow the second guest to finish his point, and then eventually being given the opportunity to respond some time later (line 25).

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CHAPTER

11

MANAGING SELF/OTHER RELATIONS IN COMPLAINT SEQUENCES

THE USE OF SELF-DEPRECATING AND AFFILIATIVE RACIAL CATEGORIZATIONS



This article by Kevin A. Whitehead
was published in

Research on Language and Social Interaction, 46(2).

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As Emerson and Messinger's (1977) classic article on the “micro-politics of trouble” noted, the formulation and reception of complaints in interaction is shaped by a range of interactional contingencies (also see Drew & Holt, 1988). These considerations are even more prominent when complaints are produced in a public arena (i.e., involving as a recipient a third party other than those initially implicated in the trouble being complained about), since “relational assumptions, claims, and expectations previously taken for granted will have to be openly proclaimed and justified” as “troubled individuals try to have their claims validated by the newly involved third party” (Emerson & Messinger, 1977, p. 128).

Subsequent studies of complaints in talk-in-interaction have produced detailed accounts of these interactional contingencies and the practices that participants may employ in managing them. In this article, I contribute to this body of research by describing two complementary practices through which speakers orient to, and manage, the implications of their racial category membership for self/other relations¹ (cf. Dickerson, 2000; Rawls & David, 2006) when acting in the course of complaint sequences in which race is treated as relevant. The first of these practices involves speakers' use of self-deprecating self-categorizations, and the second involves affiliative ways of categorizing or referring to “racial others” (i.e., members of racial categories other than the speaker's own category). I begin with a brief review of previous research on complaint sequences in talk-in-interaction, focusing in particular on how self/other relations are implicated in the unfolding of such sequences, and on the intersections between complaints and participants' membership in particular membership categorization devices, or MCDs (see, e.g., Sacks, 1992; Schegloff, 2007a).

COMPLAINT SEQUENCES IN TALK-IN-INTERACTION

Schegloff (2005, p. 465) describes complaint sequences as occurring in a canonical three-part trajectory consisting of “a complaint or a mention-of-a-complainable by the ‘aggrieved party,’ followed by some second pair part that is responsive to it—apology, reply (remedy or offer of remedy, denial, rejection, account, excuse, etc.), and ordinarily some uptake of that response.” This sequential structure implicates a set of situated participant identities: There is a complainer (the participant who produces the complaint); an object (which may include events, people, organizations, and so on); and a complaint recipient or recipients, who may or may not also be the complainees or complained-about party (Edwards, 2005, pp. 7–8).



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A number of studies have demonstrated various practices through which complainers can produce a complaint as having arisen from a “legitimate complainable” (Pomerantz, 1986), particularly by describing the object in such a way as to display its “factual” character (see Edwards, 2005, for a brief review). While these practices demonstrate complainers’ concern with the *objective* features of the object of their complaint, Edwards (2005) demonstrates a complementary *subjective* side of complaining, which concerns the way in which complaints may also index the complainer. Thus, in addition to the objects of complaints being morally implicated when complaints are produced, the way in which complaints are formulated is itself a moral matter, subject to evaluation of “the propriety or fairness or justice or accuracy with which we have reported some (external) events, or our motives in doing so” (Drew, 1998, pp. 295–296). As a result, complaints may give rise to responding actions that implicate the actions of the complainer as objectionable in their own right and implicate particular dispositions on the part of the complainer (see Sacks, 1992, vol. 1, pp. 637–638). Thus, speakers may employ a range of practices to manage the potential of being treated as “dispositional moaners” when producing complaints (Edwards, 2005) and to shape the ways in which their complaints may be responded to, particularly with respect to pursuing affiliation (see, e.g., Drew & Holt, 1988; Drew & Walker, 2009; Heinemann, 2009; Laforest, 2009; Traverso, 2009).

The concerns of complaint recipients, on the other hand, relate to matters around producing appropriate responses to complaints and in particular formulating displays of affiliation or disaffiliation (see, e.g., Dersley & Wootton, 2000; Drew & Walker, 2009; Heinemann, 2009; Laforest, 2009; Monzoni, 2009; Traverso, 2009). As a result (and in light of the foregoing discussion), complaints have clear implications for relationships between complainers and complaint recipients. These relational matters are heightened in cases in which a complainee is implicated in the complaint—that is, when the object of the complaint is a person or group of people (see Edwards, 2005). In such cases, complaints implicate a moral failing or blameworthiness on the part of the complainee (Drew, 1998), which results in further considerations regarding affiliation and disaffiliation between the complainer, complaint recipient, and complainee (who may also be the complaint recipient).

A number of studies of complaints in talk-in-interaction have examined the relationship between membership categories and complaint sequences. For



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example, in his early work on MCDs, Sacks (1992, vol. 1, pp. 599–600) observed the role of membership categories in distinguishing between “safe” and “unsafe” complaints, where unsafe complaints are those that may have negative implications for other people who could be categorized under the same membership category implicated by the complaint. Sacks (1992, vol. 1, p. 417) also observed the way in which “intentional misidentification” (i.e., identifying someone using a category that they cannot properly be claimed to be a member of) could be used as a way of producing complaints, by implicitly comparing someone’s conduct with that of a member of the category they have been misidentified as a member of. More recently, Schegloff has noted that the “complainability of some form of conduct can be contingent on the identity of the agents and the recipients of the conduct—identities often grounded in category memberships” (2005, p. 452). That is, the degree to which someone’s conduct is treated as complainable may depend on what category they are seen to be a member of in producing the conduct and what category those observing the conduct are members of. In a related analysis, Laforest (2009) examines the way in which members of different categories (children versus parents) are treated as having differential rights to complain about one another.

Other authors have demonstrated how membership categories can be deployed and resisted in the course of complaint sequences. Grancea (2010) demonstrates how the commonsense knowledge associated with ethnic categories serves as a basis for achieving ethnic solidarity through the collaborative production of complaints about members of other ethnic groups, and how such solidarity can be threatened by coparticipants’ resistance to commonsense connections between ethnic categories and complainable actions. Stokoe (2009) also makes important contributions, showing how membership categories can be employed in producing complaints and denials and thus demonstrating some recurrent connections between categories and particular sequential environments, including complaint sequences.

Also noteworthy is the heightened nature of the aforementioned delicacy and moral implications associated with complaints in cases where particular categories of people are made relevant, especially when the categories at hand are politically sensitive ones, as is the case with racial categories (Whitehead, 2009). A substantial body of research (see, e.g., Augoustinos & Every, 2010; Hanson-Easey & Augoustinos, 2011; Van Dijk, 1992) has examined the range of discursive practices



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that speakers may employ in such cases in order to avoid appearing prejudiced or racist in the course of complaining about people of particular racial (or other) categories.

The practices I describe in the following sections serve as ways of managing the implications of complaints for self/other relations discussed previously, while contributing to the aforementioned literature on intersections between membership categories and complaint sequences. These practices demonstrate speakers' orientations to their own or their recipients' membership in a particular (racial) category as consequential for what they do, and how they do it, in the course of complaint sequences. Thus, the analysis shows some ways in which speakers treat racial category membership as relevant for what they are doing in producing or responding to complaints and shape their conduct in ways that serve to manage the implications of race for their actions.

DATA

The data set upon which the analysis is based consists of approximately 115 hours of audio-recorded interactions from call-in shows on three South African radio stations. Although the shows recorded were not intended to provide a sample of speakers or interactions that is statistically representative of South African society as a whole, they were selected in order to include shows broadcast in a range of time slots, both government- and independently operated stations, and stations that broadcast to a large proportion of the population. As a result, and based on self-identifications provided by callers in the data, it is likely that the recordings in the data corpus were heard or participated in by a diverse range of people in the country.² No other selection procedures were applied in order to increase the likelihood of capturing interactions in which race became observably relevant, but despite this the data yielded more than 600 stretches of interaction in which this was the case, including over 350³ that involved sequences of complaints and other related actions (note that the issue of distinguishing between these different types of actions is discussed in the final paragraph of this section). The analysis in the following sections is based on the subset of 26 cases that included the practices of interest for the present article, with the data excerpts discussed in the analysis being selected in order to exemplify the main and recurrent features of the practices, while demonstrating the range of variation in their production.



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Although these data are drawn from a particular institutional context, and the interactions thus differ in observable ways both from other types of institutional interactions and from ordinary conversation (see Drew & Heritage, 1992), my analysis is not centrally focused on the ways in which these interactions are organized as institutional interactions (see, e.g., Fitzgerald & Housley, 2002; Hester & Fitzgerald, 1999; Hutchby, 1991, for detailed accounts in this regard). However, some features of the interactional organization of radio call-in shows contribute to them being a perspicuous site (Garfinkel, 2002) for the examination of the particular features of complaint sequences on which my analysis focuses. The first of these features is that these radio shows provide callers with opportunities to express their opinions on matters of current public interest (Hester & Fitzgerald, 1999). Given such opportunities, one of the things that callers can do (and, as noted above, recurrently do in my data) is to complain about particular events, groups, individuals, etc., that they treat as being blameworthy for some state of affairs under discussion. This made the data set a rich source of naturally occurring sequences of complaints.

The second potentially significant feature of these interactions is that complaints produced on air, and in which a complainee is implicated, always involve the (at least) “virtual” presence of both a complaint recipient and complainee(s). That is, while complainees may not be on the line when a complaint is produced, they are always, at least potentially, in a position to hear (as audience members) the production of the complaint. Moreover, complainees recurrently have the opportunity to call in to the show themselves to respond to complaints against them (albeit that they may be able to do so only following a substantial delay and when the complainer is no longer on-air). Callers may also complain (or respond to complaints) on behalf of other people, making various types of “footing” (Goffman, 1981) available to the overhearing audience, including being listeners, addressees, (potential) callers, and so on. These features of the interactional organization of these radio shows have consequences for complainers, in that when producing complaints they can assume that complainees (or others who could respond on their behalf) *may* be listening, resulting in their complaint formulations being shaped in accordance with the contingencies for self/other relations associated with complaining directly to (or in the presence of) the complainee. It should be noted that, in this respect, the complaints I examine differ from those in which the complainee is an absent third party, as is the case in many of the studies discussed in the foregoing section (see Laforest [2009] for further discussion in this regard).



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It is also noteworthy that the way in which many of the speakers (particularly members of the public calling the shows) in this type of data are largely unknown to both their immediate recipient(s) and the overhearing audience, and are not visually available to each other, may result in membership categories such as race surfacing more explicitly than they might in other interactional contexts. That is, when participants cannot be visually (and thereby inexplicitly) identified as members of a particular category, the relevance of membership in the category may surface in more explicit ways.⁴ Moreover, when participants do not have personal knowledge of each other as individuals to draw upon as a resource for producing and interpreting actions, an increased weight may be attached to racial (and other society-wide) categories as resources in this regard. While these factors may result in certain features of the interactions being more prevalent or prominent in this type of interactional context than in others, it also provides for an increased explicitness (and therefore observability) of aspects of the operation of MCDs that may otherwise remain implicit and thus difficult to pin down analytically (cf. Stokoe, 2012a, 2012b).

Although features of institutional contexts such as those mentioned previously can shape the way in which complaints are produced and responded to, it is important to note that complaints are not constitutive of such settings: They can occur in many settings, including ordinary conversational interactions, and share many common features across settings (Edwards, 2005; Stokoe, 2009). Thus, although further studies may be required to investigate whether and how these practices are produced in interactional settings other than radio shows, the present data present a useful starting point for an explication of these practices.

The analysis was conducted using a conversation analytic approach (see, e.g., Sacks, 1992; Sacks, Schegloff, & Jefferson, 1974; Schegloff, 2007b), aided by detailed transcripts produced using the conventions developed primarily by Gail Jefferson (Jefferson, 2004). With respect to identifying complaint sequences for inclusion in the analysis, it is important to note (following Edwards, 2005, pp. 7–8) that it can be very difficult to establish a formal definition of what constitutes a complaint and to distinguish complaining from related actions, such as criticizing, denigrating, accusing, and so on (also see Heinemann & Traverso, 2009). However, these related actions share important features with complaints, including the display by a participant of a negative stance toward an object (Edwards, 2005) and the relevance of the previously described interactional contingencies associated



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with producing or responding to such actions. As such, the distinctions between complaints and other related actions are not crucial for the purposes of the analysis that follows, and I was inclusive in collecting instances of possible complaints for the purposes of the analysis.

SELF-DEPRECATING SELF-CATEGORIZATION

Self-deprecating racial self-categorization involves a speaker's production of a self-reference that identifies him or herself as a member of a particular racial category, while simultaneously using a category term that serves to deprecate the category in question. This practice provides a way in which speakers can refer to themselves in terms that (they propose) members of other racial categories may refer to them, thereby managing the implications of their racial category membership for the actions they are engaged in during the course of a complaint sequence. An instance of this kind of self-categorization is shown in Excerpt 1, in which a caller contributes to a discussion of a controversial newspaper columnist, who has been heavily criticized for a recently published column that was widely condemned as racist. Here, the caller produces a "script formulation" (Edwards, 1994) predicting that "the guys are gonna: gonna say 'ja there's is the white (.) racist bastard'" on the basis of what he is about to do, before going on to complain about the differential public responses to the statements made by the (White) columnist, compared to what he claims were similar statements made some months prior by a prominent (Black) businessman and football administrator. In doing so, he could also be treated as defending the columnist, which would make him vulnerable to being criticized by those who have condemned the columnist's writings. Thus, by producing a self-deprecating reference in combination with the aforementioned script formulation just prior to this complaint, the caller orients to and works to "inoculate" himself (cf. Potter's [1996] account of "stake inoculation") against the possibility that recipients may take offense to his actions specifically on the basis of his racial category membership and may use his racial category membership as a resource for sanctioning him in response to his actions (see Whitehead, 2012).



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Excerpt 1:

[102 - SAfm, 4-18-08]

- 1 C: Uh: uh:: I- I just wanna put a bit o:f tongue in cheek
 2 here be[cause **I'm sure from my accent the guys are**
 3 H: [Sure.
 4 C: **gonna: gonna say "ja there's is the white (.) racist**
 5 **bastard" you [know?**
 6 H: [No, please [no.
 7 C: [U::h bu- but (.) you know
 8 especially coming from uh: Pofadder there by
 9 (Karn[afel.)
 10 H: [Uhuh huh huh huh [huh huh
 11 C: [() .hh whe- whe- you know
 12 (the- the) only thing there is two bottle stores in a
 13 three house [town here wheh heh heh .hh
 14 H: [Uhuh huh huh huh
 15 H: What's [your p- what's your view? What's your view?
 16 C: [()
 17 C: F- full of Klipdrift and coke [uheh heh heh
 18 H: [Uhuh huh hu:::[h::
 19 C: [()
 20 There's a magic potion from Asterix days you [know?
 21 H: [Mad- eish
 22 ja: ja:.
 23 C: Bu- but anyway Eric. [Um y- y- you know just a bit of
 24 H: [Ja.
 25 C: tongue in cheek here, I di- I didn't read uh David
 26 Bullard's column,
 27 H: Mm hm.
 28 C: um uh b- but to- to see exactly what he said, but I get



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The caller's reference to "the guys" (line 2) in this script formulation represents an instance of "categorical ambiguity" (see Stokoe, 2012b), since the caller does not make explicit which (if any) specific category he is referring to. However, there is evidence that this is an allusive reference to Black people in the caller's subsequent proposal that these referents would call him a "white racist bastard"—this being an accusation that may be heard as reflecting on the racial category of the accuser as a result of recipients engaging in "categorizing the categorizer" (Whitehead, 2009). The caller thus appears to be adopting the perspective of members of a racial category other than that which he has concurrently self-identified as a member of, thereby using this self-deprecating racial reference to manage the delicacy of the action that he has projected he is about to produce. In doing so, the caller displays that he is self-aware about how his actions, particularly as a White person, may be responded to, thus displaying that he is not simply a "judgmental dope" (Garfinkel, 1967, p. 67), acting unthinkingly in compliance with the expectations associated with his category membership.

In response to this projection by the caller, the host immediately disagrees, coming in slightly early in overlap with the end of the caller's utterance to unequivocally reject his proposal (line 6). In doing so, the host rules out the possibility of such a response to the caller,⁵ even before the caller has given any specific indication of the action that he is about to produce, which he has projected will be met with such a response.⁶ In this way, the host collaborates with the preemptive work performed by the caller's use of a self-deprecating racial reference by effectively giving him the go-ahead to say whatever it is that he has suggested would result in him being labeled a "white racist bastard." That is, having rejected outright the possibility of such a response, it would be more difficult for the host (and possibly even for other recipients) to subsequently produce a response that could be treated as in any way similar to the one the caller has projected, since doing so would require retracting the go-ahead that the host has provided for the caller to "safely" produce the potentially contentious action he has foreshadowed. Moreover, any kind of sanctioning response subsequent to this would serve to confirm the accuracy of the script the caller has previously formulated, thereby supporting his suggestion that "the guys" are predisposed to respond to him in such a way.

A number of further features of the caller's actions prior to his eventual production of a complaint are also noteworthy. Firstly, the caller claims in line 1 that what he is about to do is nonserious, stating that "I just wanna put a bit o:f tongue in cheek



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here,” and repeats this claim in lines 23 and 25. This contributes to his orientation to inoculating himself against potential sanctioning responses, providing him with a basis for denying the seriousness of any subsequent action that might be treated as offensive (cf. Edwards, 2005). Secondly, just prior to his production of the self-deprecating reference, the caller specifies the basis upon which his recipients would make such an assessment, namely “from my accent” (line 2). Then, after the host has already issued his rejection, the caller claims that such a response on the basis of his accent is especially likely given his geographical location (which the host has stated, as he routinely does, upon introducing the caller)—“Pofadder, there by Karnafel” (lines 8–9). The caller then launches an extended series of descriptions of characteristics that he proposes will be called to recipients’ minds upon hearing his accent and learning where he is calling from (lines 11–13, 16–17, and 19–20), thereby treating these characteristics as being associated with people of his accent, racial category membership, and geographical location. It appears that the caller here is alluding to his identity not just as a White person, but particularly as an Afrikaner, as he calls attention to his accent (which is hearably Afrikaans), his location in an area characterized by a high proportion of Afrikaans speakers, and the drink (“Klipdrift [a type of brandy] and coke”—a popular drink, particularly among Afrikaans-speaking South Africans) associated with people in this area. The caller thus uses complex commonsense associations between racial category membership and a range of other categories and characteristics as a basis for proposing that recipients who recognize his connections to these characteristics, and observe him producing a particular action, would be likely to sanction him as a “white racist bastard.” Moreover, the caller’s laughter in his production of this series of utterances further emphasizes his claim to be acting nonseriously. In his responses to these utterances, the host’s consistent laughter (produced despite his evident eagerness to have the caller move on to what he called in to do—see line 15), displays his recognition of, and collaboration with, both the commonsense knowledge the caller has used and his claims to be acting nonseriously.

The caller then moves on to his complaint, checking and receiving confirmation of the accuracy of his understanding of the substance of what the columnist wrote in his recent controversial column (lines 25–33), before claiming that “that’s not too far different from what Irvin Khoza actually said” (lines 34–35). He thus suggests that there is an inconsistency between the responses to the actions of a White columnist, compared to responses to similar actions produced by a Black public



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figure. The host's response shows his analysis that this is indeed what the caller is claiming, as he disputes the basis for such an inconsistency by claiming that "he got hauled over the coals for it" (lines 38–39)—and thus that the responses were similar in both cases. As the disagreement between the caller and host unfolds, the caller remains observably oriented to the possibility of being treated as defending the actions of the columnist, as shown by his claim that "I'm not saying it- it- it's- it's ri:ght, I'm not trying to defend it" (lines 40–41). In light of this, it is noteworthy that the host, although disagreeing with the caller, does so on the basis of the "facts"—of what the precise nature of the public response in each of the comparison cases was—rather than treating the caller's actions as in any way objectionable on the basis of their racial character or his racial identity.

While the caller's use of a self-deprecating racial reference in Excerpt 1 was designed to preempt potential sanctioning on the basis of a complaint he was about to produce, Excerpt 2 demonstrates a speaker's use of this practice in managing what he treats as an obstacle, posed by his racial category membership, to alignment with a previous speaker's complaint. In this case, a caller responds to the host's complaint about difficulties finding accommodation, which he claims are a result of racial discrimination. In responding to this complaint, the caller refers to himself as "a whitie," using this self-deprecating categorization to manage his display of alignment with the host's complaint.



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Excerpt 2:

[97 - SAfm, 4-18-08]

- 1 C: Listen hi- ja I- I'm an uh infrequent um:: (0.5) listener
 2 to you but I- I um: (0.3) I was driving between
 3 Grahamstown and Port Elizabeth u:h: about two weeks ago
 4 and you were: (0.2) bemoaning your um: (1.2) uh you were
 5 tryna get accommodation,
 6 H: Yes. ((clears throat))
 7 C: Did you get yourself sorted out?
 8 H: No, hey?
 9 (0.6)
 10 C: Not yet?
 11 H: Not yet.
 12 (0.4)
 13 C: Geez, I find that incredible.
 14 H: Ja I- I- I- I've- I've- I- I've negotiated to have til the
 15 end of May.
 16 (1.2)
 17 C: Ja:.
 18 H: But it's not happening. h Everybody, everywhere I call
 19 they say it's taken.
 20 (0.4)
 21 H: .hhh [I've- **I've begun to let my white friends call you**
 22 C: [(Ja, I-)
 23 H: **know**.
 24 (0.5)
 25 C: Uh huh huh [huh (huh huh huh) You know I really ()
 26 H: [Uheh heh heh heh heh heh .hhh So if you
 27 know anybody around the parks in Johannesburg .hhh who
 28 is keen, .hh uh you kno:w just SMS us heh w(h)e'll-



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The host produces his complaint in response to the caller's question about a complaint he had made "about two weeks ago" (lines 3–4) regarding his difficulties in securing accommodation (see lines 4–5 and 7). After the host reveals that he has not yet succeeded in solving this problem (lines 8 and 11), and the caller expresses disbelief about this (line 13), the host describes the nature of his complaint (lines 14–15 and 18–19) before producing a claim of its racial basis (line 21). That is, by suggesting that "I've begun to let my white friends call," the host tacitly proposes that hearably White people would not be met with the same claims that "it's taken" (line 19) that he has encountered—and thus that the reason he is experiencing these difficulties is not that the places he has been calling about really are taken, but instead that he is hearably Black and those he has called are White people who are refusing to rent to a Black person. In this way, the host treats his racial membership as the account for the way others have behaved toward him, while avoiding directly attributing the behavior of those who have discriminated against him to their racial category membership (cf. Whitehead, 2009). In addition, by laughing in response to this claim (line 25), the caller displays his recognition of, and collaborates with, the racial common sense the host invoked in producing it.

This laughter by the caller may also be evidence for an orientation to the delicacy of the position in which the host's complaint places him, and this orientation is confirmed by his subsequent identification of himself as "a whitie" (line 34). This delicacy arises from a combination of the complaint sequence the host has initiated and the consequentiality of the caller's racial category membership for his positioning with respect to the complaint. On the one hand, the host's complaint makes relevant some kind of aligning or disaligning response, and the caller has already displayed a sympathetic orientation toward the host by calling to inquire about whether he had solved the problem. On the other hand, the caller is a comember of the racial category the host has tacitly ascribed to the objects of his complaint. As a result, alignment with the host by the caller may be vulnerable to being treated as incongruent with the blame that could be attributed to him as a result of his cocategory membership with the culpable parties. In addition to demonstrating his awareness of this obstacle to alignment resulting from his racial identity, the caller's use of the term "whitie" serves as a way of managing this problem. This term is self-deprecating by virtue of being a diminutive, belittling form of the category "White," as well as by being a term that people of color can use to refer to Whites in a derogatory manner. As a result, the use of this term in



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referring to himself enables the caller to sympathize with the host by (a) displaying his willingness to disparage the very category that he is claiming membership of and, (b) in doing so, to adopt the host's perspective by using a term that he might use should he directly and openly disparage people of this category (cf. Excerpt 1). It is also worth noting the caller's use of the word "obviously" just after identifying himself as a "whitie" (see line 34). In using this word, the caller claims that he has only revealed about himself what recipients should already have recognized (by virtue of it being "obvious") and thereby further shows the special work, beyond mere self-description, that his self-categorization is designed to perform.

As he continues his response to the host following this self-deprecating reference, the caller further orients to the difficulties posed by his racial category membership in the context of the host's complaint. This is visible in his expression of embarrassment about what the host has reported happening to him (see lines 35–36 and 40–41). By claiming to be "embarrassed," the caller orients to in some way sharing responsibility for the actions of those that have reportedly discriminated against the host, with the caller's cocategory membership with the people in question serving as the only apparent basis for any such responsibility. In this way, the caller orients to and reproduces a commonsense conception of shared category membership being associated with a type of connection that implies shared responsibility for the transgressions of other members of one's category, even when one has no direct involvement in the transgressions (cf. Harré's [1990, p. 192] discussion of the possibility of being embarrassed as a result of being associated with one who has acted in an embarrassing manner).

The caller subsequently confirms the racial basis of his embarrassment in stating that he doesn't "think u:h (.) all white people are like that" (lines 41–42). In doing so, the caller orients to the idea that the behavior of those who discriminated against the host was vulnerable to being attributed to their racial category membership and thereby was vulnerable to being treated as representative of the behavior of White people in general. Thus, even in resisting the application of such common sense, the caller reproduces its relevance for cases such as this. Moreover, in aligning with this claim by the caller (see line 44), the host also collaborates in the reproduction of this common sense. That is, although he agrees with the caller's efforts to resist the generalizing the actions of those involved to the entire racial category of which they are members, he does not question or challenge the commonsense basis by which such generalization might occur.



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AFFILIATIVE OTHER-CATEGORIZATION

The data examined in the previous section show how speakers can use displays of their racial category membership to manage the implications of who (racially) *they* are relative to what they are doing in the context of sequences of complaints. In this section, I show how speakers can use affiliative categorizations to manage the implications of their racial category membership for what they are doing through their practices for referring to *others*, particularly to members of racial categories other than that of the speaker.

Affiliative categorizations can be produced by packaging a racial category along with an affiliative term. In this sense, categorizations of this sort are the converse of the self-deprecating categorizations described previously. That is, while self-deprecating self-categorizations provide a way for speakers to manage their actions by referring to themselves in the (derogatory) categorical terms that others might use in referring to them, affiliative categorizations serve as a way of managing actions by claiming comembership in a common (favorable) category with those being categorized. Thus, by producing categorizations of this sort in the course of complaining about those being categorized, complainers can display not only that their complaints are not motivated by antipathy toward the complainees (as is the case in the careful choice of category terms described in the previous section), but that they have an otherwise *positive* disposition toward them (cf. Edwards's [2007] discussion of practices for managing subjectivity in talk; also see Potter's [1996] account of stake inoculation). As a result, recipients who object to these kinds of categorizations risk appearing oversensitive by virtue of sanctioning speakers who, although they have just produced a complaint, have simultaneously displayed a positive disposition toward the complainees.

While a range of different affiliative terms can be used in the production of these types of categorizations, I describe the use of two MCDs in this regard, namely national citizenship and kinship, in the discussion that follows. An instance of the use of national citizenship categorization is shown in Excerpt 3, in which a caller who has (prior to the excerpt) tacitly identified himself as a White person is contributing to a discussion on approaches to economic development and addressing poverty. In proposing what contemporary South Africans can do in order to improve their material circumstances, the caller praises the “work ethic” (lines 1–2) that “the Afrikaners” (line 3) adopted “at the end of the Boer War” (lines 7–8). This praise, however, implicates a complaint against those currently



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experiencing poverty, by virtue of implicitly suggesting that they lack the kind of work ethic that the caller is praising “Afrikaners” for having developed in the early 20th century. The caller orients to and manages this implicit criticism by parenthetically inserting (following his reference to “Afrikaners”) a claim of respect for his “black compatriots” (line 7), which serves as a disclaimer (Van Dijk, 1992) oriented to the possibility that what he is saying could be heard as indicating a lack of respect toward this category of people.

Excerpt 3:

[161 - SAfm, 4-25-08]

- 1 C: I think: (.) ja we need to jus:: somehow get: a work ethic
 2 back I think. And a pride .hhh uh: in th- in the country,
 3 th- I mean I think the Afrikan[ers,
 4 H: [Look- ja:
 5 (.)
 6 H: J[a.
 7 C: [**with respect to all my black compatriots**, at the end of
 8 the Boer War they probably thought “well, (.) dammit all
 9 we’re gonna get (.) down and roll up our sleeves and
 10 these (.) guys are still over us but” .hhh I mean get-
 11 get through the program get:: [some ()
 12 H: [But they had a lot of
 13 support from their government.
 14 (0.3)
 15 H: You know S[ASOL w[as government seed capital.
 16 C: [Ja. [Your-
 17 (.)
 18 H: Okay? [.hh We gave it away, (0.2) uh eh- eh- this
 19 C: [But if- (if-)



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- 20 H: government gave it away one of the first things you
 21 give away .hh when there's [an or- or- ec- eh- eh- eh-
 22 C: [()
 23 H: eh- an energy crisis in the world, .hh that's gonna be
 24 one of the richest .hh uh: government started companies
 25 in the world. .hhh (B-) They started them so if you dug
 26 your (0.2) hands deep and you worked, .hh there was a
 27 government that was gonna support you, up, .hh pull you
 28 fund you.
 29 (0.3)
 30 C: Ja [(and)
 31 H: [But right now Africans are just- African blacks .h
 32 are eh coloured pe- you name everybody who's not white,
 33 .hh they dig deep, they work hard, there's no support.

The caller's reference to his "black compatriots" is an affiliative racial categorization by virtue of combining the racial category "Black" with the category "compatriots," which marks the caller's common national citizenship with those he is referring to. The caller thus uses a claim of his common citizenship with those he is referring to as a means for claiming affiliation with them. By producing this categorization following his reference to "Afrikaners," which is precisely at the point in his utterance at which there appears an implicit contrast between those he is praising and those of whom his praise implicates criticism, the caller deals in the course of his utterance with the possibility that he will be heard as producing such criticism. Through his use of this affiliative categorization, the caller shows that he has a positive disposition toward those he is implicitly criticizing, by claiming membership in a common citizenship category with them, as well as explicitly proposing that he has "respect" for them. In this way, he mitigates the possibility that his criticism will be treated as evidence of a generalized negative orientation toward those it implicates.

At the same time, by racializing this reference in the way he does, the caller implicitly connects the problems of poverty faced by Afrikaners following the Boer



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War (in the early 20th century) with those faced by Black South Africans in particular in the present time. The caller thus invokes commonsense knowledge of the racialized character of poverty in postapartheid South Africa, treating it as a problem primarily faced by Black people, while proposing a work ethic of the sort historically adopted by (White) Afrikaners as a necessary approach for addressing the problem.

In his response, the host orients to what the caller has done as having indeed implicated criticism of Black people's work ethic, as he defends them by pointing out differences in the level of support provided by the governments at the two periods in question (see lines 12–28). In doing so, he resists the caller's suggestion that a lack of "work ethic" is responsible for the current problem of poverty, attributing it instead to a lack of government intervention on behalf of those in need. Thus, despite disagreeing with the caller's proposed solution to poverty, the host does not take issue with the caller's racialization of the problem and does not respond to the caller's actions as being objectionable by virtue of constituting a criticism of Black people in particular *by a White person*. Instead, he aligns with the caller's implicit connection of race and poverty, as he explicitly proposes that (in contrast to the support Afrikaners received from their government following the Boer War), "African blacks .h are eh coloured pe- you name everybody who's not white, .hh they dig deep, they work hard, there's no support" (lines 31–33).

In Excerpt 4, an affiliative categorization is produced using a kinship category (cf. Kitzinger, 2005; Watson, 2009, Chapter 2). In this case, a host is discussing the controversy surrounding a decision by the Federation of Black Journalists to exclude White journalists from one of their gatherings. In discussing this incident, and the question of whether such organizations are necessary, the host describes his experience of (when he was a journalist) feeling that he had an advantage over his White colleagues as a result of his linguistic skills. This could implicate a criticism of his White colleagues for failing to learn African languages, and the host orients to and manages this possibility by using a number of practices in referring to them, before finally settling on a racialized kinship categorization.



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Excerpt 4:

[448 - Radio 702, 4-9-08]

1 H: Because for instance I'll tell you one thing, I used to
 2 be a journalist a long time ago, and I must say I always
 3 felt superior to white journalists. .hh Simply because at
 4 least in the newsrooms that I worked in, .hh as (.) a:
 5 black journalist (.) I had the tool .h t- the tools (.) to
 6 work in so many: (0.2) environments. (0.3) As a black
 7 journalist for instance I would be able to .hh go to (.) a
 8 township, (.) do a story, .h a:nd I would not need somebody
 9 to translate for me. I would never have issues, I would-
 10 (0.3) whatever township I went to. .hh Most of the time I
 12 would know (.) a lot of the lang- (.) e- of the languages.
 13 .hh Now: because of (.) historical eh:m (pt=)accidents as it
 14 we(h)re (h)i(h)n thi(h)s country, .hh a lot of uh (0.5) our
 15 (.) uh=Caucasian, a lot of our pt=.hh (0.3) uh:: (0.3) white
 16 brothers and sisters (.) °do not speak an African language.
 17 (0.5) Let alone to be able to .hh work (.) and interview and
 18 uh (.) gather information in that eh .hhh (0.3) in- in- in-
 19 in- in- in- in- in African languages.

In this case, the host delays his production of a racial categorization by pausing and restarting several times (see, in particular, lines 14 and 15). In addition, he inserts “a lot of” prior to the first racial reference he produces (line 13), thus allowing for exceptions to the generalization he is making. Then, in producing the initial racial categorization in this stretch of talk, he uses the category term “Caucasian” (line 14), even though he has previously (both prior to the excerpt and in line 3) used the term “White” several times in referring to “white journalists,” thus displaying care in his selection of a category term at this particular moment. It is also noteworthy that this reference to “Caucasian” is produced affiliatively, as shown by the word “our” prior to it, which serves to tacitly include the host in a



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common category (possibly a common citizenship category, as in Excerpt 3) with those he is about to refer to. Following several further hitches, the host repairs from “Caucasian” to “white brothers and sisters” (lines 14–15). In doing so, he settles on a term that is affiliative, again being preceded by the word “our,” while proposing his comembership in a common kinship category with those he is referring to. Finally, he produces the part of his utterance that implicates a complaint (“do not speak,” line 15) at a markedly lower volume than the surrounding talk, thus further treating what he is doing as delicate (cf. Lerner, 2013).

It is important to note that (similarly to the caller in Excerpt 3) the host begins to produce these practices at just the point where what he is doing implies criticism of those he is categorizing, in contrast to his unproblematic production of several racial categorizations earlier in the excerpt. Thus, the host's production of these categorization practices serve to display his orientation to, and to mitigate, the potential trouble that could result if what he is doing is heard as a complaint about the linguistic abilities of White South Africans.

The host also uses what he treats as commonsense racial knowledge in a number of ways through the racial categorizations he produces in the course of this stretch of talk. Firstly, he produces associations between race and language in contrasting his linguistic skills “as a black journalist” (see lines 4–11; emphasis added) with those of White journalists. In this way, he treats racial category membership as implying the ability, or lack thereof, to speak certain languages. Secondly, he uses implicit associations between racial categories and geographical locations through his reference to “township[s]” (lines 8 and 10) in the course of producing this contrast between his own language skills and those of White journalists. Finally, he formulates an historical account (“because of historical accidents,” line 12) for how many White South Africans came to be lacking the ability to speak African languages. In doing so, he alludes to knowledge of the racialized history of the country, and in particular the apartheid policy of teaching only English and Afrikaans in schools.

CONCLUSIONS

The data I have examined demonstrate some ways in which the racial category memberships of complainers, complainees, and complaint recipients come to be treated as relevant in the course of complaint sequences. This shows the



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observable relevance, in a particular domain of action, of who (racially) an actor is for what they do, how they do it, and what they will be understood by others to have done. As a result, these practices serve as a vehicle for the reproduction of racial category membership as a nexus of the organization of everyday actions-in-interaction.

It is important to note that all the cases of these practices I have examined, and indeed all the cases I have thus far located in my data, are produced in already-racialized sequential contexts—that is, race or racism is either the explicit topic of discussion or has been treated as somehow bound up with whatever is being discussed at the point at which the practices are deployed. Further investigation may thus be required to determine whether these practices (and, possibly, similar practices relating to MCDs other than race) are also produced in interactional environments in which a particular MCD has not yet been made relevant—in which case they would serve as practices through which ostensibly nonracialized topics and interactions come to be treated as race-relevant (also see Whitehead, 2011, 2012). However, in many cases the racial category of the speaker using the practice, or of a specific recipient or recipients, has not been revealed or treated as relevant prior to the use of one of the practices. As a result, the practices serve as a way of introducing the specific relevance of the racial category membership of the speaker and/or recipients.

The topics of these complaints (i.e., what is being complained about) also provide for the production and reproduction of associations between various issues and forms of social organization and particular racial categories. The excerpts examined involve racialized complaints about a range of matters including government policies and actions of government officials and other public figures (Excerpt 1); everyday difficulties such as finding accommodation (Excerpt 2); poverty (Excerpt 3); and linguistic abilities (Excerpt 4). Thus, speakers' treatment of people of particular racial categories as objects of such complaints, and of their own racial category memberships as consequential for how they produced these complaints, serve as a vehicle through which associations between race and these other matters are produced and reproduced in ordinary episodes of interaction.

As noted previously, these findings contribute to interactional research on complaints and membership categories in a number of ways. For example, they extend Edwards's (2005) analysis of the "speaker indexicality" of complaints, showing that complainers' concerns with how their complaints may reflect on them



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relate not only to the potential for being treated as habitual, frivolous complainers, but can also implicate their racial (or other) category membership. Moreover, they demonstrate that membership categories recurrently, and in systematic ways, find a home in sequences of particular actions, such as complaints. In this way, they contribute to studies of the relationships between categories and social action, supporting Stokoe's (2009) contention that, although they may appear to be too "elusive" to systematically capture in naturally occurring interactions, categories "do occur, predictably, in the same kinds of sequential environments, doing the same kinds of actions" (p. 81). In doing so, they contribute to efforts to develop a sequentially sensitive approach to the study of membership categorization devices (cf. Schegloff, 2007a; Stokoe, 2012a), while revealing some ways in which racial categories in particular continue to be bound up in the everyday conduct of people in postapartheid South Africa.

Notes

¹ I use the term *self/other relations* to refer simply to relations between a speaker (self) and recipients (other[s]).

² For further discussion of the details of these data, including some of its potential limitations, see Whitehead (2011)

³ Although caution is warranted in making distributional claims or generalizations on the basis of a nonrepresentative sample of interactions, these figures are suggestive of the prevalence of complaining and related actions on radio call-in interactions, the regularity with which such actions are racialized even when the topic of discussion on the shows is not race per se, and thus the pervasive relevance of race across a range of aspects of everyday life in South Africa.

⁴ One of the ways in which this recurrently occurs in my data is through participants orienting to a voice sample as an adequate basis for recognition of a speaker's racial category membership, as is the case in Excerpts 1 and 2. I examine this phenomenon in more detail in a forthcoming report.

⁵ In doing this (and particularly if "the guys" is indeed being treated as an allusion to Black people), the host may be indexing his own racial category membership by virtue of claiming the authority to reject the possibility that people of this category would respond in the way the caller has projected (cf. Whitehead, 2012).



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⁶ It is possible that the host may here be objecting to the caller's use of profanity rather than rejecting the possibility of this type of response. However, evidence against this possibility is shown in the host's lack of response to the same caller's use of similar profanity later in the call (see line 44), which also suggests that the caller himself has not heard the host's prior response as an objection to his use of profanity. Moreover, although the broader data set contains a number of instances of use of profanity by callers, none of them is met with objections by a host, which suggests that hosts are generally not oriented to being responsible for policing callers' language use in this way.

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