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Managing Self-Other Relations in Complaint Sequences:

The use of Self-Deprecating and Affiliative Racial Categorizations

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Abstract

The production and reception of complaints in talk-in-interaction is shaped by a range of interactional contingencies, including matters of alignment and affiliation between the complainant and complaint recipient(s), and (in cases where the complainee is a person or people) considerations associated the implications of moral failing on the part of complainees. In this report, I describe two complementary practices through which speakers orient to and manage the implications of their racial category membership when acting in the course of complaint sequences. 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). These practices serve as ways in which participants can manage the matters of self-other relations made relevant in the course of complaint sequences.

Keywords: conversation analysis, complaint sequences, membership categorization devices, racial categories, self-deprecation, affiliation.

Introduction

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 report, 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 relations[2] (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, for 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 complainee or complained-about party (Edwards, 2005, pp. 7-8).

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, p. 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, for 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, for 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 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 common-sense 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 co-participants' resistance to common-sense 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 abovementioned 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, for e.g., Augoustinos & Every, 2010; Hanson-Easey & Augoustinos, 2011; van Dijk, 1992) has examined the range of discursive practices 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 above, while contributing to the abovementioned 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. [3] 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 350[4] that involved sequences of complaints and other related actions (note that the issue of distinguishing between these different types of actions is discussed below, in the final paragraph of this section). The analysis in the following sections is based on the sub-set of 26 cases that included the practices of interest for the present paper, 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.

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, for 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. A 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.

A 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).

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.[5] 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 above 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, for 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 towards an object (Edwards, 2005), and the relevance of the above-described interactional contingencies associated 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 abovementioned 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 (cf. Whitehead, 2012).

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

ja: ja:.

C: Bu- but anyway Eric. [Um y- y- you know just a bit of

H: [Ja.

C: tongue in cheek here, I di- I didn't read uh David Bullard's column,

H: Mm hm.

C: um uh b- but to- to see exactly what he said, but I get a gist that he's saying that black people are stupid?

H: [Mmm.

C: [Um, that was the sort of general comment I was hearing on the radio etcet[era etcetera,

H: [Right.

C: Bu- but you know that's not too far different from what Irvin Khoza actually said you know?

(.)

C: .hh Mem- member that ar- that- that- that [( )

H: [Ja, but he got hauled over the coals for it.

C: .h Oo::h well ye- yes I'm not- I'm not saying it- it- it's- it's ri:ght, I'm not trying to defend it I'm just saying that uh, .hh you know ther- ther- there's a very similar situation an- an I think ja you know these white racist bastards when they say something like that .hh u:h you know at least you know where they're coming from. .hh [Uh you expect it from them but when someone

H: [Mm.

C: like Irvin Kobbers- Khoza is saying it then you gotta start wondering you know.

```
50   H:   I think what's good for the goose is good for the gander.
51        We shouldn't say (it) because a guy is rich, .hh he
52        should be punished more. .h If it's wrong it's wrong
53        whether a gardener is doing it or a billionaire is doing
54        it.
```

The caller's reference to "the guys" (line 2) in this script formulation represents an instance of "categorial 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,[6] 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.[7] 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 non-serious, stating that "I just wanna put a bit o:f tongue in cheek 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 common-sense 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 non-seriously. 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 common-sense knowledge the caller has used, and his claims to be acting non-seriously.

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 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.

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))

C: Did you get yourself sorted out?

H: No, hey?

(0.6)

C: Not yet?

H: Not yet.

(0.4)

C: Geez, I find that incredible.

H: Ja I- I- I- I've- I've- I- I've negotiated to have til the end of May.

(1.2)

C: Ja:.

H: But it's not happening. h Everybody, everywhere I call they say it's taken.

(0.4)

H: .hhh [I've- **I've begun to let my white friends call you**

C: [(Ja, I-)

H: **know.**

(0.5)

C: Uh huh huh [huh (huh huh huh) You know I really ( )

H: [Uheh heh heh heh heh heh .hhh So if you know anybody around the parks in Johannesburg .hhh who is keen, .hh uh you kno:w just SMS us heh w(h)e'll- we'll- you know we'll go and look, who knows, you know?

(0.6)

C: °Geez.°

(0.4)

H: Ja.

C: Ja: look (.) I mean for me, **I'm a whitie obviously**, I

35 mean that- that's complete- that- that's really
36 embarrassing I mean I- [I actually wanted to phone you
37 H: [hhh
38 C: that day but I couldn't ge[t through. U[m: (0.8) to say
39 H: [Mm. [Mm.
40 C: to say that you know an- u::h I- yeah I feel-
41 embarrassed and terrible becaus:e I don't think u:h:
42 (1.2) all white people are like that, (.) um uh- well I
43 know they're not.
44 H: Yeah definitely.

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 towards the host by calling to inquire about whether he had solved the problem. On the other hand, the caller is a co-member 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 co-category 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 referring to himself enables the caller to sympathize with the host by 1) displaying his willingness to disparage the very category that he is claiming membership of and, 2) 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 above). 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 co-category 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 common-sense 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 in 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 common-sense basis by which such generalization might occur.

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 above. 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 co-membership 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' [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 over-sensitive 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 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 twentieth 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,

H: [Look- ja:

(.)

H: J[a.

C: [**with respect to all my black compatriots**, at the end of the Boer War they probably thought "well, (.) dammit all we're gonna get (.) down and roll up our sleeves and these (.) guys are still over us but" .hhh I mean get- get through the program get:: [some ( )

H: [But they had a lot of support from their government.

(0.3)

H: You know S[ASOL w[as government seed capital.

C: [Ja. [Your-

(.)

H: Okay? [.hh We gave it away, (0.2) uh eh- eh- this

C: [But if- (if-)

H: government gave it away one of the first things you give away .hh when there's [an or- or- ec- eh- eh- eh-

C: [( )

H: eh- an energy crisis in the world, .hh that's gonna be one of the richest .hh uh: government started companies in the world. .hhh (B-) They started them so if you dug your (0.2) hands deep and you worked, .hh there was a government that was gonna support you, up, .hh pull you fund you.

(0.3)

C: Ja [(and)

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 towards 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 towards 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 War (in the early twentieth century) with those faced by black South Africans in particular in the present time. The caller thus invokes common-sense knowledge of the racialized character of poverty in post-apartheid 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.

Excerpt 4:

[448 – Radio 702, 4-9-08]

H: Because for instance I'll tell you one thing, I used to be a journalist a long time ago, and I must say I always felt superior to white journalists. .hh Simply because at least in the newsrooms that I worked in, .hh as (.) a: black journalist (.) I had the tool .h t- the tools (.) to work in so many: (0.2) environments. (0.3) As a black journalist for instance I would be able to .hh go to (.) a township, (.) do a story, .h a:nd I would not need somebody to translate for me. I would never have issues, I would- (0.3) whatever township I went to. .hh Most of the time I would know (.) a lot of the lang- (.) e- of the languages. .hh Now: because of (.) historical eh:m (pt=)accidents as it we(h)re (h)i(h)n thi(h)s country, .hh a lot of uh (0.5) **our (.) uh=Caucasian, a lot of our pt=.hh (0.3) uh:: (0.3) white brothers and sisters (.) °do not speak° an African language.** (0.5) Let alone to be able to .hh work (.) and interview and uh (.) gather information in that eh .hhh (0.3) in- in- in- 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 15 and 16). In addition, he inserts "a lot of" prior to the first racial reference he produces (line 14), 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 15), 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 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 15-16). In doing so, he settles on a term that is affiliative, again being preceded by the word "our," while proposing his co-membership 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 16) at a markedly lower volume than the surrounding talk, thus further treating what he is doing as delicate (cf. Lerner, in press).

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 common-sense 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 4-12; 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 13) 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 above 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 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-racialised 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 non-racialised topics and interactions come to

be treated as race-relevant (cf. 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 above 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 above, these findings contribute to interactional research on complaints and membership categories in a number of ways. For example, they extend Edwards' (2005) analysis of the "speaker indexicality" of complaints, showing that complainers' concerns with how their complaints may reflect on them 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 post-apartheid South Africa.

Notes

[1] I am indebted to Geoff Raymond for his helpful feedback on earlier drafts of this report. An earlier version of portions of this report was presented at the 10th Conference of the International Institute for Ethnomethodology and Conversation Analysis (IIEMCA) in Fribourg, Switzerland (July 2011).

[2] I use the term "self-other relations" to refer simply to relations between a speaker (self) and recipients (other[s]).

[3] For further discussion of the details of this data, including some of its potential limitations, see [reference removed for blind review].

[4] Although caution is warranted in making distributional claims or generalizations on the basis of a non-representative 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.

[5] 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 below. I examine this phenomenon in more detail in a forthcoming report.

[6] 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).

[7] 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 are 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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