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AN ETHNOMETHODOLOGICAL, CONVERSATION ANALYTIC APPROACH TO INVESTIGATING RACE IN SOUTH AFRICA

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ABSTRACT

This primarily methodologically-oriented article describes how an ethnomethodologically informed, conversation analytic approach can be used to investigate the ways in which racial categories become relevant in ordinary interactions in post-apartheid South Africa. Drawing on descriptions of the data and procedures employed in a broader study of the continuing centrality of race for everyday life in South Africa, the article explicates the central features and assumptions of the approach and its utility in studying the operation of social category systems (or 'membership categorization devices') such as race in recorded interactions. This methodological discussion is illustrated by presenting some excerpts from the data upon which the broader study was based, thereby demonstrating some of the analytic payoffs of employing this type of approach. Specifically, I briefly describe a *generalising practice* through which speakers can treat race as relevant, or potentially relevant, for what they are doing. This empirical illustration demonstrates the utility of this approach in exploring how racial categories (and other social categories) may surface in interactions in which they have not been pre-specified as a topic of interest. The approach I describe thus offers insights into the deployment, and hence reproduction, of common-sense knowledge associated with social categories, and racial categories in particular, in ordinary episodes of interaction.

Keywords: race, social categories, interaction, ethnomethodology, conversation analysis

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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 ideas and ordinary interactional practices with respect to race can come to be codified in official racial policies and observed in aggregate racialised patterns, and official policies 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 e.g., 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 (e.g., 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 interactions[2] (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 (cf. 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 examine how race becomes consequential for ordinary people as they engage in ordinary actions-in-interaction (cf. 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

[2] 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).

the haystack' (1987: 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 paper, 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 paper is primarily methodological, I use descriptions of the data and procedures generated in the course of a broader study[3] 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 examples[4] 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.

[3] 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 e.g., Kitzinger 2005a; 2005b; Raymond & Heritage 2006; Sacks 1972a; 1972b; 1995; Schegloff 2002; 2005; Stokoe 2009; 2010).

[4] 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 (forthcoming).

AN ETHNOMETHODOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE

The term ‘ethnomethodology’ was coined in the mid-1950’s 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 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’ (Heritage 1984: 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’ (Garfinkel 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. (Garfinkel 1967: 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 (cf. Garfinkel 1967).

One particular branch of ethnomethodological inquiry has focused on common-sense 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; 1972b; 1995; also see Schegloff 2007a). Sacks' work showed the way in which categories serve as repositories for, and organize, bodies of common-sense cultural knowledge. This common-sense knowledge is knowledge 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 (Schegloff 2007a: 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 (Schegloff 2007a: 469). In addition, categories are associated (again, through common-sense knowledge) with particular kinds of activities or conduct, which Sacks termed 'category-bound activities' (Sacks 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'[5] 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 (Schegloff 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 e.g., 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 an approach to studying informal conversational interactions, it has since been expanded to

[5] Schegloff uses the term 'talk-in-interaction' to describe 'exactly what the term names – talk in interaction' (see footnote 1 in Schegloff 1991).

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 e.g., 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. Firstly, interactional data provides 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). Secondly, 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**.** Thirdly, recorded data allows 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 itself 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.

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 analyzing 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, analyzing 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)*. (Goffman 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. Firstly, 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*. Secondly, 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 – cf. Heritage 1984), and such claims can therefore not be unproblematically taken at face value as reflections of the actual psychological states they purport to describe. Thirdly, 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 (cf. 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 this data is not subjected to a detailed analysis in the present article, describing the data (and in particular identifying and addressing its limitations) enables further explication of the methodological orientation I have described, and the insights it potentially offers.

THE DATA CORPUS: RADIO INTERACTIONS

The data corpus for the study consisted of audio recordings of shows broadcasted 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 broadcasted. A total of approximately 115 hours of broadcasts were 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 radio[6] or streaming online, and 3) shows broadcasted at various times throughout the day, from early morning to late night. On this basis, and based on the 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.

[6] SAfm broadcasts throughout South Africa; Kaya FM broadcasts primarily in the 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 the 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.

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. Firstly, as a consequence of my own limited language skills, I included 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 interactions produced in a wider range of languages. Secondly, the data only includes those speakers who have access to a radio and a telephone,[7] thus excluding a substantial number of South Africans. Thirdly, the majority of the data was 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 organization 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

[7] Statistics South Africa's (2007) Community Survey estimates that 76.6% of South African households have a radio, 72.9% have a mobile telephone, and 18.6% have a landline telephone. By comparison, the same report estimates that 65.6% of South African households have a television.

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 organization 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 with 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 (cf. 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 broadcasted 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 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 omni-present in all interactional contexts, such that we can 'tap into whomsoever, wheresoever and we get much the same things' (Sacks 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 omni-relevant 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 was 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 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 examination of single cases, the examination of a collection of related instances of a phenomena 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 (Clayman & Gill 2004). 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 (cf. 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 e.g., 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 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 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 1[8] below, a speaker produces a similar generalising

[8] 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

practice in the course of complaining about crime in South Africa. Just prior to this excerpt, the host has asked his guest about the murder of her father some years earlier, and has expressed his condolences for her loss. He then follows this question up 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 (cf. 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.
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.
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www.sscnet.ucla.edu/soc/faculty/schegloff/TranscriptionProject/index.html

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
31 Paris walking arou:nd late at ni:ght, 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, crime, and particular racial categories. Specifically, the discussion of 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 e.g., 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 e.g., 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 (cf. Whitehead 2009) is further supported by evidence of the guest's orientation to the fraught nature of answering the host's question. This can 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.[9] Prior to the excerpt, the first guest has 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

[9] Prior to the stretch of interaction shown in the transcript, the host of the show has 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.

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]

H: Doctor Laubscher what were you gonna [say?
G2: [(Ja) the point I wanna make is um with what- what has been said you know w- we appreciate that- that (there's on the- standing on the) farmers' side you know but .hhh but giving land to p- (.) to any person regardless, ownership of land (.) you know doesn't entitle you to any thing that you can do in terms of f:ighting inflation. .hh[h Uh: uh- uh- it's a huge
H: [(Uh huh).
G2: concern that if you put (.) unexperienced farmers on the farm **regardless of their colour** they- they will even suffer more from the consequences of high inflati[on you know and
G1: [John I think
G2: [so .hh
G1: [(that this is-) I think doctor is going [(off to)
H: [Si- ja. Ja but- but- b- but Mister Tseki you- you- you (.) are- are correcting his point before he's even made it cad you- could you let him finish if you wouldn't mind?
G2: So a- all I wanna say is you know that- that's not the issue right now. I mean I w- w- fully subscribe to that that you 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?
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 p-’ (which is apparently headed towards ‘giving land to people’), before 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.[10] 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

[10] 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).

'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 pre-empting 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 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 contributions of the approach in the paragraphs that follow.

Firstly, 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 be 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 organization, can be reproduced as a 'by-product' 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; 2005b). Thus, by tracking when and how practices such as these, 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 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.

Secondly, 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 common-sense 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 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 e.g., 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.

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