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Invoking the Specter of Racism: Category Membership as Speaker Topic and Resource

Abstract This paper explores how category membership features in talk where speakers address the issue of racial discrimination. In particular, it examines how category membership gets invoked to furnish speaker entitlement in the course of destabilizing and reworking the category-bound inferences that inform membership attribution. I begin with the analysis of two relatively short extracts of talk in which speakers invoke ethnic and racial group identity as a preliminary to an examination of the paradoxical uses for which category membership is made relevant, moving on to consider an extended episode of *The 700 Club*. In contrast to analytic approaches which seek to reveal the denial of racism in speaker claims that mitigate the pernicious implications of category attribution, I consider how category attribution serves as a speaker resource in efforts to identify and critique racism. This participant work is then considered in relation to ethnomethodology's efforts to re-specify the foundational postulates that inform the investigation of social order production and the place that the examination of participant meaning-making has in the pursuit of that endeavor.

Keywords Category Entitlement; Category Membership; Ethnomethodology; Identity; Membership Categorization Device; Racism; Reflexivity

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Racism remains one of the most contentious and divisive of issues within the public dialogue. While a great deal of scholarly work has been carried out to explore how talk about race has been transformed from direct expressions of denigratory, reductionist formulations of the racial (black) Other to more nuanced and sophisticated portrayals that attend to various mitigating concerns in accounts of racial identity and social exclusion, little work has been done to explore how speakers themselves address the conceptual resources by which racism is rendered accountable in talk where category reductionism is at issue. Investigations of talk involving the *denial of racism* and related work on *new racism* accounts which approach the topic of racism within the context of how speakers provide for the relevance of moral demands for equality on the basis of individual merit and the like stress the mitigating effect that such formulations have in obscuring otherwise direct expressions of racist stereotyping. Speaking to this development in the scholarly treatment of race talk, Condor and colleagues (2006) note:

In addition to developing innovative methodological procedures, social psychologists have attempted to deal with the phenomenon of prejudice denial by re-conceiving the construct of prejudice. It is now common for social psychologists to treat consciously held and/or explicitly articulated forms of racial, national, or ethnic antipathy as indicative of one type of attitude, and unconscious, implicit, and/or discursively coded forms of antipathy as indicative of another (e.g., Brauer, Wasel, & Niedenthal, 2000; Devine, 1989; Devine, Montheith, Zuwerink, & Elliot, 1991; Kinder & Sears, 1981; Locke, MacLeod, & Walker, 1994; McConahay et al., 1981; Tetlock & Arkes, 2004). Once identified and named as a separate phenomenon, the suppression of prejudiced or stereotyped representations has

subsequently come to be treated as a topic of empirical and theoretical concern in its own right (e.g., Bodenhausen & Macrae, 1996; Crandall & Eshleman, 2003; Hausmann & Ryan, 2004; Monteith, Sherman, & Devine, 1998; Moskowitz, Salomon, & Taylor, 2000). [p. 442]

A great deal of the analytic work referred to in the distinction that Condor and colleagues make here is that which is concerned to examine the different formulations of racial identity ascription and category attribution across a wide range of domains, from everyday conversation to mass media representation and governmental policy formulation. A principal assertion of such research is that attribution is covert, being employed to legitimate a particular order of affairs in which powerful and advantaged groups (Whites) benefit from societal arrangements from which other, racially defined groups (primarily Blacks) are routinely excluded. The related "denials of racism" are said to obscure the conceptual underpinnings crucial to speakers' covert work of legitimating social inequality. Research that considers the details of how such denials get deployed in everyday talk is concerned to elucidate the relationship such duplicitous formulations have in reproducing the societal arrangements they are said to obscure.

What is particularly interesting about such efforts to disclose the spurious character of racism denial is that they invoke the very category-relevant designations whose incentivized contrivance they seek to expose in and as a condition of their own intelligibility and efficacy. That is, they employ the very concept of group membership whose categorical formulation is at play in mundane descriptions as a way to render their own critique of reductionist attribution visible in the first place. They reify the very structures whose concocted

nature they seek to explore as a condition of that exploratory effort itself. This is not to find fault with such research for engaging in the same sort of reductionism it seeks to hold others accountable for, but rather to point out that it shares with the talk of those whose formulations it examines a contradictory or paradoxical feature by which critical interrogation necessarily involves the reflexive granting of analytic asylum from the very terms of scrutiny it seeks to develop in respect to its own objects of investigation (Woolgar and Pawluch 1985; Pollner 1987). It is that reflexive feature of critique's formulation with which I will be concerned in this paper. More specifically, I will be concerned with the way that the situated production of critique is reflexively oriented to how it potentially implicates speakers in the moral imperatives it articulates, both as a warrant for and as a demand of the incriminations it designates.

This concern with the reflexive implications of category formulation should be seen in the context of recent scholarly efforts to address the legacy of Harvey Sacks' early work to examine mundane practices of membership categorization (or the use of so-called Membership Categorization Devices [MCDs], see: Special Issue of *Discourse Studies* 14:277-354 [2012]). At issue in these efforts to revisit the significance of that early work is a concern to avoid the sort of reification that characterizes second-order, social psychological modeling of cognitive processes. In other words, if (in social psychology) category attribution and the like are regarded as manifestations of underlying cognitive processes, then the analytic glossing of the situated activity by which such categorization is carried out in everyday conversation runs the risk of similarly reifying such participant work within an idiom that projects its op-

eration onto a set of formal properties. Put differently, reference to mind can be replaced by reference to the structural autonomy of descriptive practices (i.e., as the manifestation of a membership categorization *device*). Talk in which speakers work to make category membership relevant would thus be seen to instantiate the (membership categorization) device's glosses upon that work, rather than the analytic use of those glosses being seen as a heuristic shorthand to reference that work. Where the use of an MCD involves the making relevant of presumptive suppositions concerning the distribution of particular rights, obligations, and/or knowledge within some sort of relational configuration which that device invokes, such formulations can be used to warrant speaker claims of privileged knowledge in virtue of the imputed entitlements invoked with the category reference in question (Sharrock 1974; Heritage and Raymond 2005; Raymond and Heritage 2006; Heritage 2012a; 2012b).¹ Put differently, speakers

¹ For example, one type of MCD referred to as a Standardized Relational (S-R) pair involves the supposition of rights and knowledge as distributed between referents in a pair-part association, typically glossed with dyads like *husband-wife*, *boss-worker*, *teacher-student*, etc. (see: Sacks 1972; 1974; 1992; Schegloff 1991a). Similarly, references to group membership that invoke category-bound features are typically involved in the use of terms like *team*, *family*, etc., or more pertinently (for the topic of racism) in terms that reference national, ethnic, and/or group identity. Stokoe expands these analytic heuristics, distinguishing at least eight such descriptive practices, including category-bound activities, category-tied predicates (relating category-bound characteristics: *mommy loves baby*, "Of course I love you; you're my *son*"), duplicative organization (*goalkeeper* and *defender* in a football team), and category-activity puzzles (involving anomalous collocation: *killer nuns*, *male nurse*, *women drivers*). As we shall see in the sections that follow, a major difficulty in the use of these analytic heuristics is with regarding the glosses they furnish as mutually restrictive, given that the range of their descriptive ambit might be made inclusively applicable to singular cases. Another difficulty is in stipulating the sort of relation, if any, that some one term is employed to invoke independently of any explicit reference to its presumably matching term(s) in a relational configuration (Gardner 2012). In what follows, I will examine how these methodological conundrums are addressed with reference not only to interlocutor uptake (Antaki 1998; Widdicombe 1998), but also in view of how referential ambiguity features as a member resource (Edwards 1997:96-100).

warrant situated claims owing to the inferential deductions entailed by assertions concerning their own and/or someone else's category membership, including deductions relating to asymmetrical power or distinctions in social status (Jayussi 1984; 1991; Edwards 1991). The potential misunderstanding to be avoided here, however, is that of regarding such speaker efforts as the outward manifestation either of some pre-existing cognitive model or else of some structural properties inherent to language use. Instead, the significance of category reference is ultimately determined in next-turn efforts by which speakers retrospectively furnish the procedural consequentiality of related category terms in and for the circumstances where they are made to operate (Schegloff 1992:109-110; Hutchby and Wooffitt 1998:15). Put differently, categories are invoked for the situated purposes their relevance furnishes to the then-pertinent business of the interaction, and that relevance is occasioned in and through interlocutor efforts to read back into some category term the significance it holds. The analytic danger to be avoided here, however, is not simply that of reification, but also the failure to see how reification is itself a constitutive feature of situated meaning-making. The trick is to regard the activity (of categorization) as immanently realizing the work it furnishes rather than as the manifestation of something that lies beyond the circumstances of its use (Hilbert 2009).

What I want to do in this paper is to explore how these concerns to preclude the analytic reification of category-bound meaning are opened up with an examination of talk in which speakers take up categorization as the topic of their own discussion. In particular, this paper will investigate how speakers work to contest and destabilize the categorical assumptions in virtue of which

the racial identity they address as a topic of their own talk is itself formulated. This involves exploring how category entitlement is furnished in particular settings where category inclusion is invoked on the part of speakers who are otherwise implicated as targets of racially reductionist stereotyping. As we shall see, the back-and-forth, referentially self-implicative gesture of addressing category membership also implicates those categories' meanings as resources in the activity in which they are made to feature. In other words, in discussing the significance of particular categories, the very categories whose relevance speakers invoke in the pursuit of that situated work are also made to bear on the undertaking as reflexively related to its own conduct. It is simply not possible to interrogate category formulation without the related discussion having a reflexive bearing upon the circumstances of activity where it takes place. Talk is always caught up in the indexical implications that its uses pose as an inherent feature of its reflexive character. In what follows, I will explore how that occurs in examples of talk surrounding the contentious matter of racial identity, with a view to considering how the potential for category reductionism is taken up as morally problematic. As we shall see, this involves making category membership relevant in particularly creative ways that warrant specific claims relating to racial prejudice, many (but not all) of which involve destabilizing the affordances that category membership might otherwise furnish. Providing speaker entitlement for claims regarding the reprehensible nature of racial reductionism paradoxically involves the variable and selective ratification of category features in order to warrant that entitlement. This becomes particularly evident where those uses themselves involve the effort to destabilize the membership criteria in question. Taken together, these features

demonstrate the ambivalent nature of category warrant: speakers invoke category membership to the extent that it entitles their claims about the accountably reductionist nature of the categories in question, but not to the extent that they can thereby be seen to endorse the formulations whose reductionist portrayal is at issue.

Purposing Racist Exclusion

As a way to begin exploring what all of this involves, let me take as an initial point of departure an example of the way category membership gets invoked to provide the warrant for specific moral claims about the legitimacy of professional activities. The transcript below is a record of talk that took place in a research interview involving two participants (Clark and Les) who work as the CEO and senior administrative assistant (respectively) of a U.S.-based, non-governmental organization dedicated to providing medical relief aid to Palestinian refugees in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. The interview from which this extract is taken was carried out as part of a project to investigate the mundane accounting practices with which humanitarian aid operatives

make sense of their professional activities in settings of armed conflict (see: McKenzie 2009; 2012). The transcript here begins at a point in the interview where Clark elaborates on the moral and political justifications for providing humanitarian assistance to the target population of Palestinian aid recipients. Drawing an analogy between the Palestinian resistance to Israeli subjugation of the Occupied Territories and the colonial struggle against British rule in the American Revolutionary War (1775-1783), Clark sets out to describe the terms of reference that financial donors in the United States are said to make in conceptualizing the work of the organization he and Les represent. Following this extended turn-at-talk, his colleague Les goes on to corroborate the analogy Clark initially builds by warranting related claims furnished in virtue of his own entitlement as the member of an oppressed minority (interviewer contributions here are indicated with “Int”; the use of pseudonyms and similar devices have been employed in this transcript to ensure the anonymity of the research participants; for a detailed description of transcription conventions employed throughout this paper, see: Appendix).

Extract 1

1 **Clark** Look (.) what are American values (.) we believe in ↑freedom
 2 (0.9) the right for each individual to have protection
 3 under:=the rule of ↑la↓w. (0.6) The right- (.) no: state has the
 4 power to: (0.6) °ih-° to usurp the rights: of- (.) of (.) in- the
 5 indi↑vi↓dual. In this country here, under occupation, >the
 6 individuals have no rights whatsoever<=
 7 **Int** =Mm hm=
 8 **Clark** =a foreign entity (0.6) is controlling (0.2) the daily life (.)
 9 of (.) three and a half million people (.) [against] their will

10 **Int** [Mm hm,]
 11 (.)
 12 Mm hm
 13 (0.3)
 14 **Clark** and our struggle- our historical struggle in the United ↑Sta:tes
 15 (0.2) for freedom from colonial rule (0.3) is no less- (0.3) is
 16 no different from what the Palestinians are struggling for
 17 ↑he↓re.
 18 (0.5)
 19 **Int** Mm hm mm hm
 20 (.)
 21 **Clark** Foreign domi↑na↓tion. (0.4) Everybody can >understand that.
 22 Every< A↑merican can understand that.
 23 (...) ((some lines omitted))
 24 **Clark** ih the most basic issue (0.9) f:reedom from (.) foreign rule (.)
 25 foreign tyranny (0.9) is what I'm- (.) I believe in very strongly
 26 (.) [and that's] why I'm- one of the reasons I'm here ↑wor↓king
 27 **Int** [Mm]
 28 (.)
 29 Mm: hm,
 30 (0.6)
 31 .hh what about you Les
 32 (...) ((some lines omitted))
 33 **Les** I mean it's the ↑same for me and I- I think that you can tell a
 34 lot by (.) °y'know° (0.5) a lot of the people that support (.)
 35 Palestine in general (0.3) is that >y'know< being a minority
 36 (0.6) a::n:d
 37 (1.0)
 38 seeing first ha:nd (.) >y'know< (0.3) discrimination and (.)
 39 °y'know°
 40 (1.0)
 41 a history of:
 42 (1.0)
 43 >y'know< people ha- not having freedom and (0.3) things like
 44 that, I mean you can identify with (.) the struggle that (.)
 45 >y'know< the people in Palestine go through every day.

There is, of course, a great deal of interactional work that takes place in this encounter. For present purposes, though, let us focus here on the way that Les provides for his own status as “a minority” (line 35) in order both to corroborate Clark’s account, as well as to extend the claims made there in virtue of the detailed specifics that his (Les’) own first-person entitlement furnishes. Unlike work in other settings where identity is construed within a set of category distinctions designed to head off the negative inferences that membership in some contrastive group entails (e.g., in a distinction between men-who-hit-women and men-who-do-not, see: Sacks 1992; Edwards 1997:96-100; Stokoe 2010), here, category membership is made to function in a more or less uncomplicated fashion both to warrant assertions about the shared experience that inclusion is said to entail (“discrimination and a history of people not having freedom and things like that,” lines 38-44), and to furnish entitlement for the making of related claims (“being a minority and seeing first hand,” lines 35-38; “you can identify with the struggle,” line 44). Category inclusion thus features here as a way of making the category membership relevant as a way to provide for the speaker’s entitlement to corroborate his colleague’s prior explanation.

While there is a great deal more that could be said about what takes place in this brief encounter (for a more detailed discussion of which, including especially the way that laughter features in the related talk, see: McKenzie forthcoming), the point here is relatively straightforward: that category membership can be made to work in different ways and to accomplish different purposes depending on how

its relevance is provided for in the settings where it is furnished (Edwards 1991; 1997:202-262). At the most elementary level, this involves invoking membership as a warrant for first-person entitlement for the category-bound inferences it entails. As we shall see, the provision for category entitlement becomes quite a bit more complicated in talk where speakers attend to category reductionism as a morally accountable issue. This is especially so where those speakers are potentially implicated in the negative inferences whose category exclusivity they seek to contest.

Identity as a Resource in the Subversion of Category-Restrictive Claims

Where category membership is invoked in ways that are not contested or otherwise treated as problematic in the course of talk’s unfolding development, the relevance of category-bound features can, in a fairly unambiguous way, be made to underwrite speaker entitlement for ancillary claims. Thus, in the analysis of Extract 1 above, we saw how Les provides for his category membership in order to corroborate the analogy that his colleague Clark develops in his immediately prior talk. In the same way that the conspicuous provision for first-person experience can be employed to realize the credibility of a storied account (Clifford and Marcus 1986; Geertz 1988), so, too, the provision for category membership can be treated as unequivocally furnishing the warrant for speaker claims.

Furnishing such warrant, however, becomes more complicated the moment the inferential premises that category membership entails are dealt with as

ambiguous or morally troublesome. For instance, this can occur where the determinacy of category inclusion is opened up to interrogation, or where the universal relevance of category-bound attributes is undermined for its significance in some particular case. More significantly, this can occur where the ambiguity of a category’s use by and for those who invoke its relevance can be made to bear reflexively on the circumstances of that use. Put more generally, the invocation of category membership is potentially troublesome where category reductionism itself gets taken up as speaker business. Precisely because the invocation of category membership involves the making relevant of particular attributes as a warrant for speaker claims, where those claims are made to bear on the legitimacy of category formulation itself, there is an inherent ambiguity to its use. As we shall see in what follows, a particularly interesting feature of the way that category inclusion gets invoked relates to how membership ambivalently furnishes the warrant for resistance to and management of inferences that category inclusion otherwise entails. In other words, category membership can be made relevant in order to furnish a range of negative inferences that the attribution of group identity otherwise insinuates. Paradoxically, such identity can simultaneously be invoked to disrupt the category features it otherwise puts into play. Here, category membership functions in an ambivalent fashion where a speaker’s warrant potentially implicates him or her in the selfsame negative inferences whose pertinence he or she otherwise seeks to discredit.

To see what this involves, consider the following segment of a notoriously controversial stand-up

comedy routine in which the popular entertainer Chris Rock develops a category distinction with his use of the terms “black people” and “niggas.”² Of particular interest for my purpose here is the way that Rock’s use of these category terms is oriented to disrupting the interpretative parameters that their deployment might otherwise delineate in some other setting. Specifically, Rock’s treatment of the offending gloss in his routine both draws upon and plays off on the different ways that category-bound formulations of racial identity furnish multiple and competing understandings distinctive to their situated uses. Thus, the lexical pair relating “black people” and “niggas” works simultaneously both to invoke and to disrupt the category-based identity ascriptions otherwise made available in the relational pair distinction *black-white*.³ In a paradoxical way, the *black-white* pair is thus made to serve as a vehicle to carry out the work of disassembling the very relational distinction it otherwise puts into play.

To get an idea of the rather complicated work that is involved in all of this, consider the following extract from the transcript of the audio segment of Rock’s act that appears on the popular website *YouTube* (Rock n.d.).

² I refer to this stand-up routine as notoriously controversial because it has occasioned a great deal of criticism, with many objecting to the potential that Rock’s formulations hold for warranting the use of racist stereotypes. Chris Rock himself is reported to have stopped using this particular routine in his act because “some people who were racist thought they had license to say ‘nigger,’” see: *Wikipedia* entry “Niggas vs. Black People.”

³ A poignant example of such a conventional operation can be seen in the anecdotal description in the American civil rights activist Malcolm X’s (X and Haley 1999) autobiographical account relating how his mentor in the Nation of Islam compares dictionary definitions of the words *black* and *white* (also portrayed in the filmic rendition of that work by the director Spike Lee).

Extract 2

1 Now we got a lot of things- >°we got° a lot of< racism going on in the
 2 world right now, ↑who's more ra↓cist (0.3) ↑BLACK people or white
 3 peo↓ple. (1.1) ↑BLACK people. You know why? Cuz we hate black people
 4 TOO. (Audience laughter and applause) Everything white people don't
 5 like about black people, black people <rea::ly don't like about black
 6 people>. (Audience laughter) There's some shit going on with black
 7 people right now. (0.2) There's like a civil ↑war goin' on with black
 8 people. And there's ↑two ↓sides. There's black people, (0.2) an'
 9 there's niggas. (Audience laughter) The niggas have got to go!
 10 (Audience laughter and applause) Every time black people want to have a
 11 good ti↓me, some ignorant-ass niggas fuck it up. (Audience laughter
 12 and applause) ↑Can't ↓do ↑shi↓:t! ↑Can't ↓do ↑SHI↓:T without some
 13 ignorant-ass niggas fuckin' it up.
 14 (...) ((some lines omitted))
 15 ↑Da↓mn °I'm° TIRED of niggas. °I'm° tired tired tired tired tired a'
 16 niggas man, [damn] man, you know what the worst thing (is) about
 17 niggas? Niggas always want some credit for some shit they 'supposed to
 18 do.' (Audience laughter) For some shit they just 'supposed to do.' A
 19 nigga will brag about some shit a normal man just >does.< A nigga'll
 20 say some shit like tsk 'I take care o' my kids.' 'You su↑pposed to ya
 21 dumb muthafucka,' (audience laughter and applause) whaddya talkin'
 22 about. Whaddya talkin' about. What kinda ignorant shit is that. 'I ain'
 23 never been to jail.' 'Whaddya want, a coo↑kie?' (Audience laughter)
 24 'You're not supposed to go to jail low expectation xx mutherfucker'
 25 (Audience laughter and applause)
 26 (...) ((some lines omitted))
 27 Nigga just ignorant, ↑love bein' ign- ↑singin' about ignorance. I heard
 28 some song the other day ((sings)) 'It's the first of the mo:::n:th'
 29 (audience laughter) niggas are singin' welfare carols. (Audience
 30 laughter) ((sings)) 'On the first day of welfare my true love gave to
 31 me, I wish you a merry welfare and a happy food sta:::m:p.' (Audience
 32 laughter and applause) What the fuck is goin' ↑o:↓n. What the fuck is
 33 goin' on. Now they got some shit they're tryin' to get rid of welfare.
 34 They're alway- every time >you see welfare on the news< they always

35 show black people. ↑BLACK people don't give a fuck a↑bout wel↓fare
 36 (audience chortles) niggas a' shakin' in their boots. (Audience
 37 laughter) '(Oh) they gonna take our shit:'
 38 (...) ((some lines omitted))
 39 It ai- it ain't all ↑black peo↓ple on welfare, shit. White ↑people on
 40 welfare ↓too (audience chortles) >(there are) white people on welfare<
 41 but we can't give a fuck a↑bout them we just gotta do our ↑town thing
 42 °we° can't go 'Oh they fucked up we could be fucked up' that's ignorant.

Let us begin with an analysis of this talk by considering the rhetorical work involved in Chris Rock's elaboration of category relevant details with which he distinguishes "black people" from "niggas." The category distinction itself is chiefly deployed to manage the relevance of demands for accountability specific to activities that are said to characterize the latter group. Thus, in contrast to "black people," it is "niggas" who are said to brag or take credit "for some shit they just supposed to do" (lines 15-21) and who are also said to engage routinely in welfare opportunism (lines 27-35). Here, moral accountability for specific actions is invoked to render the "niggas" versus "black people" distinction available in a way that does not equate the two groups (as might otherwise take place with black-white, racially designated formulations).

Notice also that throughout Rock's routine, no contrastive attention is given to elaborating the features specific to the category "black people." That is, while Rock details the characteristics he attributes to "niggas," he makes no category specific attribution in referring to "black people." Elsewhere, work has been done to show how the formulation

of white racial identity involves a sort of negative ontology, so that Whites are contrastively regarded to be what Blacks are not. That is, with the routine use of a black-white relational pair, an asymmetry of description occurs, so that Whites are regarded as definitively devoid of the category-bound features that are said to characterize Blacks (Lipsitz 1995; 2006; Whitehead 2009; but see: Whitehead and Lerner 2009 on ways that whiteness is made explicit). Here, Rock similarly employs this asymmetry in his own descriptions, so that "black people" are implicitly regarded as what "niggas"-are-not (just as Whites are regarded as what Blacks-are-not in a *black-white* pair formulation). What is particularly interesting here is that Rock employs the same kind of descriptive asymmetry entailed in a *black-white* relational pair as a resource to disrupt the sense such a pair otherwise affords.⁴ In other words, the very category terms that Rock seeks to disrupt are themselves employed in an anomalous fashion to pursue the objective of undermining their racially

⁴ This contrasts with the relatively straightforward way that category-relevant features can be invoked to attend exclusively to their significance for other, non-race attributional purposes, as we saw in the analysis of Extract 1.

reductionist use. Here, Rock's deployment of relational pair terms for their category disruptive purposes implicitly appeals to racially reductionist assumptions for its effectiveness. This involves not only the selective warranting of related claims furnished with his descriptions (i.e., the stereotypes of unwarranted boastfulness and welfare opportunism), but it also invokes the assumption that racism operates uni-directionally since black racism is not said to be aimed at Whites, but rather only at other Blacks ("Who's more racist, black people or white people? Black people. You know why? Because we hate black people too" [lines 2-4]). The semantic transformation is rendered intelligible in virtue of the asymmetrical operation of relational pair attribution that Rock implicitly invokes, with the rhetorical trade off here furnished by the homologous deployment of *black-white* and "niggas"-*black people* pair formulations whose meaning eventually comes to be worked out over the course of the monologue (see: Liberman 2012).⁵

A distinguishing feature of Rock's use of category-bound inferences here is the subversive purpose

⁵ In reference to this clarification of previously undetermined meaning, Liberman (2012:345) notes: "Ethnomethodological inquiries are oriented to how people make a word intelligible, and especially the work of locating a context that can reflexively make the components of an utterance intelligible (Liberman 2011). Garfinkel and Sacks (1970) once described it this way: 'Talk extends and elaborates indefinitely the circumstances it glosses and in this way contributes to its own accountably sensible character. The thing that is said assures to speaking's accountably sensible character its variable fortunes.' These are local skills: people witness the drift of meaning over the course of their conversing, and when they spot opportunities for taming the equivocality of the words, they can seize them. Frequently, their solutions are serendipitous and applied retrospectively." Here, in Chris Rock's stand-up routine, we see that the working out of prior lexical meaning involves not only the semantic operation of words in the context of their solitary use, but also as informed by their relational significance within a set of category-bound attributes.

that they are made to serve, and the humorous effect he achieves by this is related, in no small part, to the status that his own category membership furnishes relative to the variable distinctions that he brings into play. Thus, speaker entitlement accrues to him by dint of his own ambivalent category membership, initially broached in remarks that align with explicitly racist understandings ("Everything white people don't like about black people, black people *really* don't like about black people" [lines 4-6]), as invoking a set of terms informing their subsequent respecification within an alternative relational pair (i.e., from black-white to "niggas"-*black people*). The rhetorical effect here is achieved with the inferential potential in the racist category formulation used to warrant claims about the detailed specifics Rock describes, which simultaneously allows him to respecify the category terms that render them intelligible.⁶ In addition, this also allows Rock to disrupt the category-bound inferences that a disparaging formulation of welfare reciprocity might otherwise furnish (lines 27-37), and to argue for Black community solidarity and self-sufficiency (lines 39-40). He is able to do this precisely because of the attributes that reductionist category formulations supply as a way to invoke the inferential basis for that deduction. This is especially the case where the indigent status of welfare recipients is made relevant to disrupt the category inferences it otherwise furnishes ("It ain't all black people on welfare, shit. White people on welfare too, there are white people on welfare" [lines 39-40]).

⁶ Elsewhere, I have discussed how that same sort of rhetorical strategy is employed to warrant claims about racism in virtue of the entitlement that speakers work to furnish as victims of racist social contagion (McKenzie 2003:473-477).

To summarize, Chris Rock appropriates reductionist formulations of category membership in order to manage the negative inferences that related category attributions otherwise make available within a reworked relational pair. His own category entitlement functions here not merely in the rather straightforward way that as a member of the African-American community, he is entitled to speak on behalf of his fellow community members ("but we can't give a fuck a[↑]bout them we just gotta do our [↑]town thing" [line 41]), but also in the more subtle fashion by which someone who is potentially implicated in the accountable inferences that category-inclusion entails (within a *black-white* relational pair) is able to warrant the reworked contrastive distinction.

"Is That a Black Thing?": Interrogating Racism on *The 700 Club*

Up to this point in my discussion, I have considered examples of talk in which category-relevant inferences are invoked by speakers for different situated purposes, all of which entail attending, in some fashion or other, to the moral accountability of racial identity attribution. My purpose in examining these examples of talk has been to demonstrate how providing for race-relevant category-bound inferences can feature as a speaker resource to pursue the morally accountable business involved in attending to the critique of racism itself. The particular instances of talk I examined in the previous section were chosen because they realize those purposes in ways that trade off on the potential for category ascription to be employed in a denigratory fashion in order

to be effective in disrupting their reductionist potential.

One point to be drawn from all of this is that there is nothing intrinsic to identity ascription that necessitates its situated uses being regarded as morally objectionable. The attribution of category membership is not axiomatically taken in a morally denigratory sense—that is, as unavoidably involving a disparaging evaluative stance. This is because the potential assumptions that category ascriptions are used to invoke *themselves* feature in how those categories' meaning gets worked up in particular settings.⁷ Any independently principled objection to category attribution—including attributions that invoke racially reductionist assumptions—cannot therefore be based on the discovery of a *mistaken* application of category terms, since it is only in virtue of those categories' specific uses that their situated purposes are realized. Put differently, the relevant analytic concern in an examination of how category formulations are rendered meaningful *for the participants who deploy them* is not whether the formulation of category-bound features is accurate to concerns formulated in some remote setting, but rather of how the detailed specifics of category membership are formulated in pursuit of the interactional business at hand in the setting under

⁷ Thus, we have already seen that just as category formulations can be used for derogatory purposes, conspicuously derogatory formulations can (paradoxically) also be deployed to disrupt such purposes. In Chris Rock's stand-up routine, he treats the terms of reference that invoke a *black-white* category distinction as accountable precisely in and through the way it is destabilized. That is, Rock treats the category distinction as intrinsically racist, as morally accountable. However, that treatment itself is specific to the situated purposes he pursues there.

investigation. Any extrinsic assumptions about the relevance or adequacy of a given category formulation that do not reside in the empirical investigation of its uses by speakers are therefore used to furnish the grounds upon which such investigations are founded, in a way that essentially “determine[s] how the results of any inquiry will be permissibly understood” (Hutchinson, Read, and Sharrock 2008:21). Needless to say, pursuing the investigation of talk on the basis of analytic presumptions concerning descriptive adequacy does little to contribute to understanding how category attribution—or, indeed, the resolution of any sort of meaning—is achieved by participants themselves.⁸

Another thing that makes identity ascription particularly interesting is the reflexive dimension of category invocation that furnishes the entitlement attending to a given category use. This, of course, relates to the main theme of this paper in exploring how category membership features as speaker resource. In this section, I want to explore this particular aspect of category use by examining a protracted example of talk in which efforts are made to sequester the morally troublesome potential that identity ascription involves from the

affiliative uses that category membership otherwise furnishes. The set of encounters I examine here is taken from an episode of the Christian Broadcasting Network’s news and current issues talk show *The 700 Club*, hosted by the television evangelist and sometimes political activist Pat Robertson.⁹ The episode in question was aired on November 23, 2011 in a special edition of the program dedicated to celebrating the then approaching Thanksgiving Day holiday (a festival unique to North American countries of British colonial origin). This particular episode of the program occasioned a great deal of opprobrium on entertainment and news websites (like *YouTube* and *The Huffington Post*) in response to a question that the show’s host posed to his co-host, Kristi Watts, following their joint presentation and discussion of an edited video clip of segments taken from an interview that Watts had conducted the previous week with the former U.S. Secretary of State, Condoleezza Rice. The concern in various circles is with Robertson’s motivation for his working up of racial identity in the category attributive terms documented in the following extract (the transcript below is a written record of the encounter in the video clip presented in *The Huffington Post* news story, see: Johnson 2011).

⁹ Marion Gordon “Pat” Robertson is one of the most significant figures in the historically recent formation of a fundamentalist evangelical Christian political constituency in the U.S. political arena. As founder and director of the Christian Broadcasting Network (with a daily viewing audience estimated to be one million), president and chancellor of the affiliated Regent University, founder and president of the American Center for Law and Justice, along with other related endeavors, Robertson has been involved in efforts to influence U.S. electoral process and government policy formation since at least the 1960s (see: <http://patrobertson.com/Biography/index.asp>; https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pat_Robertson [Retrieved May 02, 2016]).

⁸ On the other hand, it *does* frequently get employed to furnish the warrant for analytic investigation as a critical undertaking. Here, the proponents of such work seek to provide for the legitimacy of their research endeavors in virtue of the instrumental significance it is assumed to have in effecting therapeutic social intervention (Wetherell 2001). My point here is that analysis need not—indeed, cannot—proceed on these grounds in order to render its findings significant for an investigation of how participants render social order visible to and for one another in the course of their situated doings (Sharrock and Anderson 1986; 1987).

Extract 3.1

- 1 **Watts** what’s that o:ne thing at Thanksgiving you just hafta have.
 2 (0.8)
 3 **Rice** It’s mac and cheese.
 4 (0.2)
 5 **Watts** (*slaps hands together, cocks head back, and raises hands palms forward*) (.) Sister that is my dish! [That is the] o:ne thing
 6
 7 **Rice** [Ye(h)s]
 8 **Watts** that [[I can]] ro:ck!=
 9 **Rice** [[Yes]]
 10 **Rice** =But only o:nce:- (0.4) once a year.
 11 (*cut to studio*)
 12 **Robt** Good interview (.) Kristi, (.) [congradula]tions=
 13 **Watts** [↑Thank ↓you Pat]
 14 =####[[#]] (#hand claps#)
 15 **Robt** [[What-]] what is this (.) mac and cheese, is that a black
 16 thing?=
 17 **Watts** =tsk *It is a black thing Pa:t, (.)
 18 [it is] a bla-* .hh listen and you:: (.) [[guys-]] other
 19 **Robt** [It is-] [[(clears throat)]]
 20 **Watts** people:- oth- the world >needs to get on board with macaroni and
 21 cheese.< (0.5) *Seriously I just-* (.) ih- o↓kay ↑Christmas (0.2)
 22 and Thanksgiving (0.3) we have to have macaroni and ↑cheese and
 23 it just- it trips me out that you::=don’t
 24 (0.3)
 25 **Robt** ah(h) I rea[lly do(h)n’t uh(h)]
 26 **Watts** [hhh heh heh huh hah] hah hah hah
 27 [[hah hah hah .hh]]
 28 **Robt** [[£I don’t and I have]] never£ .hh hah hah

This particular segment of *The 700 Club* episode is described in the related *Huffington Post* story as demonstrating confusion on the part of Pat Robertson (“Robertson appeared confused about macaro-

ni and cheese” [Johnson 2011]). Further in that article, the hyperlinks to news items elsewhere related to the topic of Alzheimer’s disease furnish the basis to infer that Robertson’s remarks manifest evidence

of the progressive dementia symptomatic of that affliction. The story seems to suggest that Robertson's remarks are accountably racist, if not pathologically precipitated (one can imagine the story's author, upon first seeing *The 700 Club* footage, asking: "Is Robertson crazy?! Doesn't he realize how racist that question sounds?"). What I want to suggest here, however, is that there is something rather different going on in the encounter between Robertson and Watts than a straightforward and simple use of a racist formulation as implied in *The Huffington Post* article. Instead, I want to suggest that just as we saw in the analysis of the Chris Rock routine above, the relevance of racial identity is reflexively being made available in this talk as a way to pursue a different order of business. This is not to say that Robertson does not employ a category formulation, nor that the formulation he actually does employ is immaterial to the attribution of black racial identity. Rather, it is to say that Robertson's question features as part of a more inclusive trajectory that renders that question with a different significance than it might otherwise be taken to have if considered in isolation from the extended conversation of which it is a part. As we shall see, the potential that category attribution holds for reductionist use is a concern that both Robertson and Watts take up in their own talk, and it is in relation to their pursuit of that business that Robertson's "black thing" question has its significance.

We can start to appreciate what this involves by first noting how Watts collaborates with Robertson in his efforts to render noticeable the attributive significance of her own prior remarks (lines 1-10), substantiating the category relevance that he broaches

in his "black thing" question with an elaborated description of its detailed specifics (lines 17-24). Here, Watts not only agrees with Robertson that a shared taste for macaroni and cheese is category relevant (lines 17-18), but she goes on to describe the inclusion of the dish as mandatory to the family rituals of holiday dining in order thereby to shore up that claim (lines 21-22). One possible way of approaching this talk might be to regard these exchanges as determined by the asymmetrical power dynamics at play between Robertson and Watts in their respective roles as host and junior co-host (as well as paid employee). That is, Robertson and Watts could be seen as mutually oriented to providing for their respective power positions in and through their responsive uptake to one another's contributions in the ongoing encounter (see: Riggs and Due 2010). A perfunctory analysis here would possibly conclude that Watts is constrained by the protocols of the show's format to collude with Robertson, and that in this way her affiliation is coerced by Robertson's manipulative efforts to elicit her agreement. In other words, Robertson could be seen as essentially compelling Watts to furnish the warrant for a reductionist formulation in virtue of his own dominant power position.

Observing that Robertson and Watts are mutually oriented to the relevance of their respective roles in directing their talk towards the realization of its outcomes, however, is not the same thing as regarding that orientation to be the manifestation of a pre-existing relationship that determines how that interaction proceeds. Indeed, to do the latter would overlook the way in which that relationship is immanently accomplished in and through the situated work that takes

place in that setting (Rawls 1989:162-163; McKenzie 2005). By way of comparison, consider how, in courtroom interaction, different parties to the production of witness testimony employ the interactional protocols of the question-and-answer format for their own respective purposes in laying the grounds for diverse and incommensurable judicial outcomes (Atkinson and Drew 1979; Komter 1995; Lynch and Bogen 1996:122-153). The protocols of witness examination and cross-examination do not control the outcome of interrogations, but rather constitute resources that participants deploy in guiding the argumentative trajectories of testimony. Similarly, the fact that Watts, in her role as co-host, collaborates with Robertson in the formulation of "black thing" identity does not mean that she could not have done otherwise, nor even that her doing so could not have been accomplished in a way that successfully manages whatever potential threat might have been posed to their respective roles in the encounter at hand.¹⁰ Rather, what it means is that the significance of "black thing" attribution is emergent in and as the situated uses for which it is purposed by Watts and Robertson as a jointly accomplished undertaking.

Beyond these preliminary observations (to which I will return), I want to consider additional details of the show's entire episode in order to further make

¹⁰ As I will go on to show, what is at issue here is related to a distinction that Harvey Sacks (1992 [lecture 11]) makes between speaker sensitivity to the sequential organization of utterance contributions and the formulation of a shared vocabulary of motives relative to which that situated work can be rendered accountable. Addressing this difference, Anne Warfield Rawls (1989:69) notes that: "the more a situation is responsive to 'framing' considerations, the greater the degree of strategic action [is] possible." As we will see, Watts treats the meaning Robertson poses (within the order of her response's sequential placement) as a resource to negotiate the relevance of its precise content in and for the situation at hand.

sense of the encounter documented in the short extract above. Just as we already noted how speakers invoke category membership as a way of attending to the argumentatively consequential implications of different assumptions in their talk, so too, in what follows, we shall see that Watts similarly invokes racial identity to furnish the inferential basis for an assumption of shared experience in her interview with the former U.S. Secretary of State, Condoleezza Rice. Moreover, racial identity is a topic of discussion that gets carried over from the talk in the Watts-Rice interview to the very different setting where Robertson and Watts subsequently discuss that prior encounter.¹¹ It is against the background of the extended talk in that prior encounter that Robertson's subsequent "black thing" question has the more nuanced significance than its presentation within the isolated context of Extract 3.1 above would otherwise suggest. In that prior encounter, racial identity is an issue that Watts and Rice jointly attend to in the course of their discussion, and it is against the background of Watts' own contribution there that Robertson's subsequent comments derive their significance.

Let me go on, then, to consider the details of talk in the Watts-Rice interview. The encounter represented in Extract 3.2 below was aired in the same episode of *The 700 Club* from which the talk in Extract 3.1 above was taken (though at a sequentially prior point in program's overall presentation). At

¹¹ The point in calling attention to this here is not to make the independent (if otherwise banal) suggestion that where Watts is entitled to do this in her encounter with Rice, then Robertson is entitled to do something similar in his encounter with Watts. Rather, the point is simply to make the preliminary observation that over the course of her more extensive discussion with Rice, Watts invokes shared identity as a part of her own efforts to establish interlocutor affiliation.

various junctures throughout that prior encounter, Watts pursues issues relating to racial identity, both explicitly in questions addressed to Rice, as well as in a separate line of questioning she develops in the closing segment of the interview. The transcript below begins at a point in *The 700 Club* episode immediately following Watts' introduction (to the viewing audience) of the video footage taken from her interview with Rice, and starts here with her initial question to the former Secretary of State.

Extract 3.2

- 1 **Watts** You are known not just as a woman of poise, not >just a-< as a
 2 woman o:f u:h (0.2) ↑brilliance .hh but also the first. (.)
 3 >You're the first< National Security Advisor female- the first
 4 (.) bla:ck (0.2) female Secretary of Sta:te, but when you are the
 5 first you're also the first one to encounter wa::lls and
 6 mi:ndsets and ↑obstacles so how did you ↑deal with that. How ↑do:
 7 you deal with that
 8 (0.4)
 9 **Rice** Well (.) the: first thing is that when you: u:h (0.2) are a first
 10 (.) uh (.) you: (.) need to (.) forget that you're the first
 11 (0.4)
 12 **Watts** Hm mm[m]
 13 **Rice** [a:]nd u:h give other people the benefit of the doubt (0.5)
 14 so (.) it's all too easy (.) to: (.) look around and think
 15 'They're reacting to (it-) (.) because I'm a woman (.) they're
 16 reacting that way because I'm black' .hh and uh (.) generally you
 17 just (.) end up (0.4) uh driving up your own blood pressure. (.)
 18 If you let someone treat you badly, because you're a woman, or
 19 because you're (.) black, it's (.) your fault not ↑the↓ir's
 20 (0.2)
 21 **Watts** Mmmmmm[mmmm]
 22 **Rice** [you have plent]y (0.2) of uh ammunition (0.4) in your
 23 arsenal (0.2) to back someone do:↓wn who's treating you ↑bad↓ly
 24 (0.4) so:: u:m I'm not (.) much given to victimhood, (.) u[:m:] I
 25 **Watts** [Mmm]
 26 **Rice** really do think that- my ↑parents taught me .hh that you may not
 27 be able to:: uh control your circumstances but you can control

- 28 your response to your circumstances and if you always keep that
 29 in mind (0.4) u:h you'll let (.) people's prejudices be (.) their
 30 (.) problem not yours
 31 (0.4)
 32 **Watts** You are ↑teachin' ↓me
 33 (0.2)
 34 **Rice** uh=hhhhh=[heh heh huh]
 35 **Watts** [I com↑pletely forgot] the next que↓stion (.) cuz I'm
 36 sittin' here like 'ih- g-=I gotta get that note i(h)n' heh hah
 37 [hah hah] hah
 38 **Rice** [huh huh huh]

The first thing to observe about the talk in this encounter is that the response Rice formulates poses the relevance of racial and gender identity in terms that are reflexively oriented to managing her own accountability for the use of related descriptions, glossing the anticipatory orientation to the pernicious assumptions identity ascription potentially furnishes with the word "victimhood" (lines 14-30). Here, Rice can be seen to work against the possible accusation of expediency that the making-relevant of identity might otherwise occasion, doing so in a way that concurs with the assumptions about racial and gender discrimination furnished in Watts' question (though without invoking their relevance for an account of her own professional success). This poses the issues of racism and sexism in terms that ground an argument for the responsive (rather than anticipatory) management of relevancies that category ascription might otherwise involve.¹²

¹² Elsewhere, Buttny (2004) examines talk in which black speakers attend to potential accusations that their own formulations of reluctance on the part of Whites to occasion just the sort of anticipatory inclinations that Rice describes here (lines 15-16) themselves realize racist motives on the part of those Whites (see: McKenzie 2011).

With regard to the details of talk by which Watts and Rice advance their discussion here, we might also note how Rice's scrutiny of the suppositions informing Watts' question is responded to as potentially disruptive of the shared assumption of a common worldview upon which interactional affiliation is grounded (Lieberman 2007; McKenzie 2011). That is, Watts' broaching of racial identity in her question is treated by Rice as contentious (lines 9-30), and this poses troubles to the assumption of reciprocity in perspective on the basis of which their discussion proceeds.¹³ Here, Watts identifies as a potential source of disaffiliation the position that Rice develops in her extended explanation, and this poses a source of interactional troubles to which they both attend. This occurs, for instance, in Watts' remark registering surprise at Rice's

¹³ In saying this, I do not mean to imply that speakers must agree in their opinions in order to carry on a conversation, but rather refer to the phenomenological principle concerning mutual reciprocity of perspective—i.e., that interlocutors proceed in their joint endeavors on the assumption that they inhabit a common world in relation to which, for example, differences in opinions and the like might be rendered intelligible (Schütz 1967; Garfinkel 1977; Pollner 1987; Schegloff 1991a; Billig 1996).

response (line 32), as well as in subsequent comments reflecting upon her own (Watts') immediately prior reaction (lines 35-36). Note, too, that simultaneously, and *with these same interactional turns*, Watts also works to repair the potential threat to the assumption of shared orientation by invoking a standard relational pair—that of *teacher-student* (“You are teaching me” [line 32]).¹⁴ This attends to the interactional troubles involved in Watts' earlier efforts to invoke racial and gender identity as the basis for mutual affiliation (lines 1-7) in the face of a dissenting opinion on the part of Rice. This occurs precisely where that dissent would otherwise undermine those prior efforts (since it diverges from the suppositions that would make them efficacious). Put differently, Rice's previously stated opposition to making racial and gender identity relevant in interpersonal relations (lines 13-24) potentially undercuts Watts' efforts to establish mutual affiliation on those same grounds. Here, the affiliative outcomes that shared identity otherwise serves work at cross purposes to the joint project that Watts and Rice pursue in carrying out the interview.¹⁵

In response to Watts' contributions at this juncture, Rice's initial laughter (line 34) can thus be seen as corroborating the affiliation repair work in Watts' immediately prior turn-at-talk (line 32)—even if it does not, strictly speaking, endorse the assumptions of superior knowledgeability proffered there

¹⁴ As we shall see, this relationship is also invoked by Watts in her subsequent conversation with Robertson about her interaction with Rice, see below: Extract 3.3, lines 69-83.

¹⁵ These joint efforts assemble the talk's characteristics as features constitutive of the sort of encounter that it is (an interview) by furnishing Rice's entitlement to the claims she makes in that setting (see: Schegloff 1991b, 1992; Wowk and Carlin 2004; McKenzie 2005).

by Watts. Rice's response to Watts here—involving the prefatory particle of dissent, the hearable out-breath, and the light laughter (line 34)—registers the potential threat to speaker affiliation that Watts' immediately prior turn-at-talk identifies. Following on immediately from Rice's contribution here (line 34), the potentially troublesome aspect of Watts' prior contribution (line 32) is itself then delicately managed in Watts' own subsequent, responsive laughter (lines 36-37)—which, in turn, is itself also responsive to the potential ambivalence that Rice's own previous turn (line 34) initially registers. All of these conversational back-and-forths are both complex and mutually precipitous, but with these references to both their own and one another's prior conversational turns, Watts and Rice work together to manage the potentially troublesome consequences posed by Rice's disaffiliation with the assumptions that Watts initially broaches (lines 1-7). Note also that throughout the ensuing talk, Watts continues to invoke the category relational pair (*student-teacher*) that she employed in her prior contribution, thus preserving the collaborative grounds she established there while managing the potentially threatening aspect that it otherwise attends to in her laughter with Rice (which turn on Watts' part Rice then responds to corroboratively with her own affiliative laughter [line 38]). These joint efforts to manage whatever trouble might arise from Watts' initial efforts to establish the basis of affiliation with Rice effectively sustain the collaborative impetus of Watts' prior contribution, while also curtailing its disruptive potential, and effectively moving the collaborative project of the two speakers forward in the face of looming disaffiliation.

The repair work Watts and Rice jointly undertake here establishes the basis for mutual affiliation in the shared task of rendering Rice's contributions instructive (thereby also endowing Watts and Rice with their respective positions as interviewer and interviewee in the encounter). This is not, however, the last of Watts' efforts to align with Rice on the basis of shared identity. In a line of questioning that she poses to Rice at a later point in the same interview, Watts continues to invoke the category relevancies that featured as topic in her opening remarks (Extract 3.2, lines 1-30); and, as we shall see, it is the inferential significance of those efforts that Robertson later addresses with his “black thing” question (Extract 3.1, lines 15-16). More specifically, we shall see that Robertson's own effort

to provide for the relevance of racial identity in his “black thing” question is *itself* reflexively oriented to making visible that selfsame potential in Watts' prior talk (with Rice), as a part of his own then-continuing effort to evaluate Watts' interview technique.

To see what this involves, consider the details of Watts' interview with Rice aired on the same episode of *The 700 Club* in the minutes leading up to the encounter documented in Extract 3.1 above (note that the talk there, recorded in lines 46-56 and in lines 105-121 below, is the same as that which appears in the edited version of *The 700 Club* episode presented in the video clip from *The Huffington Post* story cited above).

Extract 3.3

- 1 **Watts** We have about five minutes left and I thought I'd have some fun,
2 (0.2) are you [ga:me]
3 **Rice** [Yes,] I'm ready=
4 **Watts** =Okay (.) t=.hh (.) what's your favorite cereal
5 (0.4)
6 **Rice** Cheerios
7 (0.2)
8 **Watts** Wh:at is: your favorite (.) sixty- nineteen sixties or
9 nineteen seventies sitcom
10 (0.4)
11 **Rice** Mary Tyler Moore Show,
12 (0.2)
13 **Watts** heh heh .hh=What's your=bigggest pef- (.) pet peeve the thing
14 that drives you batty
15 (0.2)

16 **Rice** That I am such a procrastinator (0.6) [heh heh .hh]
 17 **Watts** [heh heh heh] Never woulda
 18 thought [[it cuz you came here on time]]
 19 **Rice** [[.hh Yeah, what?]] Right heh heh=
 20 **Watts** =What is uh *your guilty \uparrow plea \downarrow sure* (*falsetto voice*)
 21 (0.8)
 22 **Rice** Anything that's a vehicle for salt (0.2) potato
 23 [chips pop]corn pre*tzels* (*flooding out*)
 24 **Watts** [hm(h) hm(h) $\>$ \uparrow hm(h) hm(h) hm(h) $\<$]
 25 (0.2)
 26 Can you cook,
 27 (0.2)
 28 **Rice** I lo:ve to cook (.) I'm a \uparrow good \downarrow cook
 29 (.)
 30 **Watts** Favorite meal (.) of all time
 31 (0.4)
 32 **Rice** Fried chicken
 33 (.)
 34 **Watts** (*leans forward*) Hot sauce or no hot sauce
 35 (.)
 36 **Rice** Hot sauce.
 37 (.)
 38 **Watts** \uparrow Come on (*rises from seat and high-fives Rice*)
 39 (.)
 40 Craziest thing you've ever done
 41 (0.8)
 42 **Rice** You think I'd \uparrow tell you that?=
 43 **Watts** =I- heh [heh hah hah hah hah] hah hah hah .hh I(h) thou(h)ght
 44 **Rice** [heh heh heh heh heh]
 45 **Watts** I(h) wou(h)ld tr(h)y huh huh *I thought I would try* (*animated,
 46 *ironic voicing**) .hh alright (.) wh-=what's that o:ne thing at
 47 Thanksgiving you just hafta have.
 48 (0.8)
 49 **Rice** It's mac and cheese.
 50 (0.2)
 51 **Watts** (*slaps hands together, cocks head back, and holds hands up, palms*

52 *forward*) (.) Sister that is my dish! [That is the] o:ne thing
 53 **Rice** [Ye(h)s]
 54 **Watts** that [[I can]] ro:ck!=
 55 **Rice** [[Yes]]
 56 =But only o:nce:- (0.4) once a year.
 57 (.)
 58 **Watts** *Why do you deprive yourself (.) [xx (it)] six days
 59 **Rice** [Becau::se:]
 60 **Watts** [[a wee:k*]] (*ironic voicing*)
 61 **Rice** [[it- we::ll]] yes but t- you kno:w (.) you- you have to worry
 62 [about *those calorie(h)s* huh heh huh] (*ironic voicing*)
 63 **Watts** [.hh huh huh heh heh heh hah] hah hah hah [[hah hah]] (*clasps*
 64 **Rice** [[.hh heh heh]]
 65 **Watts** *hands together*) .hh that works thank [you so: much] .hh=
 66 **Rice** [(I-/ih-) .hh]
 67 =it's a pleasure
 68 (*cut to studio*)
 69 **Watts** That was so much fun and I have to tell you there's one question
 70 that I di:d ask Pat=
 71 **Robt** =What's that=
 72 **Watts** =I said huh=m $\>$ a(h)t the very end of th interview< I said 'Y'know
 73 (what)- you are a professor at Stanford (.) um=
 74 **Robt** =x=
 75 **Watts** =>so< .hh if you were to grade this \uparrow inter \downarrow view what grade would
 76 you give it' .hh a:(h)n- hah hah [huh] huh huh .hh and she goes
 77 **Robt** [£Yeah?£]
 78 **Watts** 'I would give it an A' I said (.) 'Why not a A plus' hhhh
 79 [heh hah hah hah hah hah] .hh and she goes 'cuz you asked me what
 80 **Robt** [hah hah hah]
 81 **Watts** the craziest thing I've ever \uparrow do \downarrow ne' huh
 82 [huh hah hah .h]
 83 **Robt** [£Yeah.£ huh huh]
 84 **Watts** £listen Condoleezzas (*sic*) Rice it is£ called No Higher Honor,
 85 (*holds up book copy*) it's available wherever books are sold, .hh
 86 and I \uparrow do have to say \downarrow this \uparrow seriou \downarrow sly .hh it could look very
 87 intimidating and daunting because it's almost eight hundred pages

88 but (0.3) ↑I↓: (0.2) l:oved it I think any- any- (.) y'know
 89 (0.2) child who wants to [know] about history and foreign
 90 **Robt** [x]
 91 **Watts** [[po]]licy and what's goin' on in the government .hh >would love
 92 **Robt** [[°Yeah°]]
 93 **Watts** it,< but at the same ↑ti↓:me .hh just um (.) tsk the normal
 94 person who *kinda wants that* (**ironic voicing**) 'behind the
 95 sce:nes'=
 96 **Robt** =Oh yeah=
 97 **Watts** =little twist, she te:lls some interesting stories [that we]
 98 **Robt** [°Yeah°]
 99 **Watts** never ↑he:↓ar]]
 100 **Robt** [[And]] the name of the book i:s?
 101 (.)
 102 **Watts** tsk Once again No Higher Honor, (0.2) by (.) *Doctor* (**ironic*
 103 *voicing**) Condoleezza Rice [hh] so=
 104 **Robt** [Well]
 105 =Good interview (.) Kristi, (.) [congradula]tions=
 106 **Watts** [↑Thank ↓you Pat]
 107 =####[#] (*claps hands*)
 108 **Robt** [[What-]] what is this (.) mac and cheese, is that a black
 109 thing?=
 110 **Watts** =tsk *It is a black thing Pa:t, (.)
 111 [it is] a bla-* .hh listen and you:: (.) [[guys-]] other
 112 **Robt** [It is-] [[(clears throat)]]
 113 **Watts** people:- oth- the world >needs to get on board with macaroni and
 114 cheese<. (0.5) *Seriously I just-* (.) ih- o↓kay ↑Christmas (0.2)
 115 and Thanksgiving (0.3) we have to have macaroni and ↑cheese and
 116 it just- it trips me out that you::=don't
 117 (0.3)
 118 **Robt** ah(h) I rea[lly do(h)n't uh(h)]
 119 **Watts** [hhh heh heh huh hah] hah hah hah
 120 [[hah hah hah .hh]]
 121 **Robt** [[£I don't and I have]] never£ .hh [hah hah]
 123 **Watts** [Y'know what] the problem is?=
 124 **Robt** =What's that=

125 **Watts** =I don't think you've had goo:d macaroni and chee:se. Because we
 126 don't do Kra:ft ((*product brand name*)) we don't do the whole
 127 little (.) stuff in a bo:x=
 128 **Robt** =You don't
 129 (0.2)
 130 **Watts** we do the goo:d ol' kind that our m- grandmamas (0.2) made
 131 (.)
 132 **Robt** Well my grandmama didn't £make£ ma(h)c
 133 [a(h)nd chee(h)se (.) (ei(h)the(h)r)]
 134 **Watts** [Your grandma- huh hah hah]
 135 [[.hh hh]]
 136 **Robt** [[£Alright.]] What's [next. Go a]head£=
 137 **Watts** [£Alright.£]
 138 =>This might be the year I make you some Pat<

Let us start here by noting that the entire line of questioning in this latter part of the interview is initiated with Watts' prefatory remarks enlisting Rice in carrying out the ensuing talk in an informal register (lines 1-2). Here, such remarks function to key the affiliative work that a shared engagement in playful, jocular interaction displays on the part of interlocutors (Glenn 1995; 2003:127-141). In addition, the line of questioning that Watts then goes on to develop occasions mutual affiliation on the basis of shared interests and common tastes, the latter of which are reflexively attended to for their significance as just so directed. So, for instance, immediately following the interview question relating to Rice's preference for fried chicken with hot sauce (lines 30-38), Watts rises from her chair to engage Rice in a shared interactional gesture of mutual affiliation (the high five she exchanges with Watts [lines 30-38]). Similarly, in response to Rice's remarks concerning her taste for macaroni and cheese, Watts conspicuously

treats Rice's answer as referencing a shared preference ("Sister that is my dish! That is the one thing that I can rock!" [lines 52-54]). Together with the accompanying bodily orientation exhibiting surprise on her part (the head movement and hand gestures referenced in lines 51-52), Watts attends to the affiliative significance of a shared taste for macaroni and cheese in a way that situates her contributions as responsive to Rice's prior turns-at-talk—turns that her own prior questions occasioned.

A particularly interesting feature of this affiliative work here is that it is potentially hearable in race-relevant, category-bound terms (a potential that Robertson later goes on to develop with his "black thing" question). Just as we saw in the analysis of Extract 3.2, this represents a possible source of trouble to the proceedings since it countermands Rice's own previously stated position to steer clear of making racial identity relevant in interaction (lines 9-24). Unlike in

that prior talk, however, Watts does not set out here to address racial prejudice, but rather to make shared food preference the basis for affiliation between herself and Rice. This is particularly tricky because to the extent that those preferences *can* be seen to invoke category-bound inferences, then they can also be said to invoke racial identity. Here, however, the sequential organization of speaker contributions functions to manage the availability of just such potential (Rawls 1989:162-163; Sacks 1992 [lecture 1:2]). This is because the second-turn, responsive positioning of Rice's various contributions has the effect of implicating her in the very demands for accountability that she might broach were she to object to the race-relevant inferences potentially made available in Watts' line of questioning (see: Hutchby and Wooffitt 1998:15; McKenzie 2005). Put differently, if Rice were to raise the possibility that Watt's line of questioning was race-relevant, then it would be Rice herself who invoked racial identity in just such a way as she had previously argued against doing. Watts' contributions here thus have something of a preemptive character in that pursuing that potential meaning would necessarily implicate Rice in the very moral demands for which such objections might be raised. Watts could simply respond that her questions about food were not in any way related to category membership (that is, to racial identity). The sequential placement of Watts' contributions thus functions to preclude the eventuality of such an inferential trajectory being articulated given that her interlocutor (Rice) would then be implicated in furnishing the race-relevant inferences they would otherwise bode.

Note carefully what is being suggested in all of this. The point here is not that Watts and/or Rice some-

how *really* or *genuinely* intend to invoke shared racial identity in the latter part of the interview, and that in the process of so doing, they *surreptitiously* obscure its relevance. Rather, the claim is that the encounter's trajectory is managed in ways that have no regard for the incriminating potential shared category membership might otherwise pose. The inferences relating to what is potentially hearable in category-relevant terms are simply not traversed. This is not the same thing as saying that they are reversed or obscured, since that would imply that conversational work is undertaken to identify and then eliminate some specific set of inferences. Instead, Watts and Rice provide for the relevance of shared taste as the basis for affiliation without pursuing whatever other category-bound significance it could potentially be taken to have. Watts' line of questioning constitutes a resource with which both she and Rice are able to manage the interpretative parameters of their talk by delineating the extent to which particular features of their shared experience are relevant in furnishing the grounds for interlocutor affiliation. That those features *could* be construed as category-bound, and that their relevance is *potentially* available for the formulation of shared racial identity remains irrelevant to their talk (as, of course, are any number of other possibilities).¹⁶

¹⁶ In a detailed study of debating practices among Buddhist monks of Tibet, Kenneth Liberman (2007:140) addresses this same feature of meaning's unrealized potentiality, relating this to the preference for semantic determinacy within the Western tradition of scholarly inquiry: "According to the philosophical rationality we have known since the Enlightenment, meanings are best when they are made clear, stable, and distinct; however, what is most fecund about meanings may be what they are yet to suggest and which they bear only silently within themselves as their potential. If meanings naturally have some indeterminacy, an indeterminacy that is based in part upon the semiotic relations that signs have with each other, which are always ready to unfold upon something new as the context to which

This being the case, then why even mention those possibilities here? That is, if Watts and Rice do not attend to the category-bound significance potentially made available in their talk, then of what significance is it to the analysis of their conversation? The answer to this question is that such relevance gets furnished in subsequent formulations of that talk's significance in the conversation between Watts and Robertson. The category-bound, race-relevant potential of Watts' prior line of questioning (in her interview with Rice) is retrospectively furnished in the subsequent discussion (between herself and Robertson) about that prior encounter (Extract 3.3, lines 69-137). Robertson brings that potential to realization in an explicit formulation of a category-relevant relationship ("What is this mac and cheese, is that a black thing?," lines 108-109). The potential of that category relevance does not pre-exist Robertson's formulation. Instead, that formulation involves the claim of pre-existence as a condition of its intelligibility. As already noted above, Watts goes on to ratify Robertson's formulation in immediate uptake to his question (lines 110-111), corroborating the pair-relational formulation whose category-bound features were not attended to in the prior encounter (lines 111-116). In this way, the potentially troublesome inferences

they are applied changes, then a penchant for the clear and distinct may be nothing more than an artifice that places thinking in a straightjacket. According to the Buddhist notion of thatness, a more philosophically instructive course of inquiry would present the flux of a course of thinking just-as-it-is, in its quiddity, without foreclosing it. According to Buddhists, it would be incorrect even to say that resolving a problem would be 'premature,' since the best reason may be one that never reaches maturity." In the talk between Watts and Rice, the potential for mention of their shared tastes to be construed in category-relevant terms is "one that never reaches maturity" in the setting where it occurs, being confined instead to the exclusive provision it furnishes for interlocutor affiliation.

that are undeveloped in the Watts-Rice interview (lines 1-67) are realized in the later setting of the Robertson-Watts appraisal. While this rendering attributes a given significance to that prior talk, it accomplishes its effect precisely in and through efforts to make the meaning distinction between the two settings inconspicuous. In other words, the inferential trajectory made available in Watts' line of questioning is only available as such on reflection (Mehan and Wood 1975:18-19).

One might be tempted here to regard Robertson's "black thing" question (lines 108-109) as disruptive of, if not inimical to, the purposes that Watts and Rice undertake in their own prior talk (lines 1-67). Note, though, that this would involve conflating the somewhat different order of business that Robertson and Watts undertake there (to evaluate Watts' performance in her interview with Rice). Put differently, the business that Robertson and Watts pursue, though carried out with reference to the prior occasion of talk between Watts and Rice, differs from it in having the evaluation of Watts' interview skills as its objective. This distinction is crucial to an appreciation of how the inferential potential in that prior talk is furnished by Robertson for its relevance to the business he and Watts pursue.¹⁷ Against this background, the point for Robertson in elaborating the inferential potential of the descriptions that Watts and Rice employ would not be to warrant the reductionism that it

¹⁷ Note that this evaluative project is also the topic of explicit reference, both as reported by Watts of Rice (lines 69-82), as well as in the prefatory transition with which Robertson steers the direction of conversation from the summary remarks in Watts' contribution towards a more reflexively-oriented discussion (lines 84-106).

might furnish, but to display the significance that Watts' prior line of questioning could otherwise be taken to have. In other words, while Robertson's contribution here *could* be taken as reductionist—and, indeed, is oriented to as such in Watts' subsequent efforts to manage the category exclusive significance of the formulation it broaches—it is the explication of that potential (rather than the warranting of its meaning) that contributes to the overall business of evaluating Watts' performance in the prior encounter. In this sense, the question of whether Robertson *really* or *genuinely* harbors racist motivations is of no more relevance to the work he pursues in his encounter with Watts than is that of whether Watts and Rice *really* or *genuinely* work to obscure the significance of racial identity in their talk about shared tastes.

This point can be difficult to see because it involves differentiating between what the speakers make of their talk in the specific setting of their conversation as it is happening and the business that takes place in subsequent talk where speakers refer to those prior settings. The situated work by Robertson of attending to the potential for meaning to be made of prior talk does not necessarily entail a claim on his part that such potential is what had been realized on those prior occasions. Robertson shows what *could* have been made of Watts' prior talk without necessarily endorsing the view that that is what she had actually intended. Indeed, the critical, evaluative significance of his reflective comments arises precisely in virtue of the distinction between Watts' intentions and the interpretative trajectories potentially made available through her prior line of questioning at issue.

The specific details of how all of this is achieved in the conversation between Watts and Robertson are themselves quite complicated. To begin with, we have already seen that Watts initially corroborates the category formulation broached in Robertson's "black thing" question (line 110). Immediately thereafter, however, she works to close off the category-bound inferences that the related ascription might furnish in a recycling of Robertson's prior turn (Schegloff 1987). Watts thus undercuts the reductionist potential in Robertson's use of the "black thing" ascription through her efforts to argue for the universal (versus category specific) appeal of mac and cheese (lines 113-138). Note also that Watts appeals to Robertson to collaborate with her in those efforts in a variety of ways: with her remarks invoking such universal appeal (lines 111-114), with a display of surprise at the category exclusive terms "black thing" ascription potentially furnishes (line 116), and with her proffering of an alternative account for why Robertson might not share her tastes (lines 123-127). In this way, she acts to confine the relevance of the category formulation in Robertson's question to the same kind of inferential parameters that she and Rice established previously by means of demonstrating her assumption that a taste for macaroni and cheese is not category-exclusive. At stake in their discussion here is the distinction between category applicability and the exclusivity of the description those category terms furnish. Watts does not impeach Robertson's effort as a straightforward case of reductionist stereotyping, but instead works to establish the extent to which its reductionist potential is made relevant by working to undercut its category-exclusive significance.

Note that Watts also draws upon the category-relevance of the "black thing" formulation in order, paradoxically, to warrant her efforts to destabilize its category-exclusive significance (much in the way that Chris Rock does in his stand-up routine). This is particularly subtle work that trades off on the category ascription at issue by employing the entitlement it furnishes to subvert its potentially reductionist conclusions. So, for instance, in remarks about the universal appeal of mac and cheese (lines 111-114), Watts describes a taste for that dish in ambivalent terms, where their potential claimants are unspecified as to their category status ("you guys," "other people," "the world," lines 111-113). Here, Watts employs non-category-specific terms that contrast with the category-relevant formulation potentially invoked in Robertson's question. Note, too, how Watts moves on to address her concerns directly to Robertson in a way that disregards the category terms whose use is otherwise at issue (lines 123-137). Through her deployment of non-category relevant descriptors, she invokes terms of reference that reflexively provide for the intelligibility of racial category ascription as an object of scrutiny, but does so in a way where neither she nor Robertson are necessarily implicated as members. Watts thus manages the rather tricky task of attending to the inferential potential that her own category entitlement furnishes, while at the same time disrupting the very category-bound inferences in which she would otherwise be implicated by so doing. Just as in her prior encounter with Rice, she manages some delicate interactional business here in virtue of the fecund nature of the category-bound inferences under discussion. A significant difference between the two encoun-

ters is that where previously Watts manages the interpretative parameters that shared taste potentially holds, in her encounter with Robertson, she provides for that category-relevance in order to entitle her own efforts at undercutting its reductionist implications. The two kinds of work are related, but in mirror opposites arising from the different situated purposes that the provision for category membership realizes in each of the respective encounters.

Now, consider how Robertson resists Watts' efforts at foreclosing the category-reductionist potential of his "black thing" formulation. Robertson claims not to share a taste for macaroni and cheese (lines 118), intensifying that claim with an upgraded assertion (line 121). He also repudiates Watts' suggestion that they share a common family heritage relating to the preparation of the dish (lines 132-133). Robertson's resistance here is formulated in a similar way to the efforts that Watts herself makes (in her talk with Robertson) in that it does not attend to what is otherwise hearable in her talk as furnishing the basis for interlocutor affiliation. Where Watts works to steer the trajectory of meaning away from the reductionist potential in Robertson's question, posing her contributions in category-disruptive ways that block development of the inferences category attribution otherwise furnishes, so, too, Robertson works to impair Watts' efforts by withholding agreement about the shared experience that would ground her claims regarding the universal appeal of macaroni and cheese. By resisting her efforts to recruit him in undermining the reductionist implications of the "black thing" formulation, he displays the

open-ended potential for the affiliative work she undertakes (both here and in her talk with Rice) to be construed along multiple trajectories of meaning. Moreover, he does so in a manner that similarly involves suspending the relevance of category inclusion (within the group that shares a taste for mac and cheese). Category attribution is differentially made to bear on the accountability of category attribution itself; category membership is brought into play where the bringing-into-play of category membership is itself attended to as potentially blameworthy. Here, Robertson's resistance to the disruption of category inclusion is reflexively oriented to furnishing a display of the multivalent potential of group inclusion in a way that Watts' own attempts to invoke shared identity (in her talk with Rice) do not.

Finally, note how all of this talk is conducted in a somewhat playful fashion not unlike what takes place in the latter part of Watts-Rice interview. Robertson and Watts engage in a bit of fatuous banter in which he calls her out on the potentially troublesome aspects furnished in the lines of questioning she poses, with Watts working to manage that potential in the development of her answer to Robertson's "black thing" question. In frustrating Watts' efforts, Robertson demonstrates how the potential meaning of a given formulation remains available for subsequent interpretation, despite the efforts one may make to foreclose that eventuality. Here, such efforts attend to the business of evaluating Watts' prior performance in her interview with Rice (with the upshot being, of course, that Robertson essentially ratifies the arguments developed in Rice's own prior contribu-

tion—i.e., it is better to avoid making racial identity relevant altogether). The overall effect is one in which participants attend to the vagaries of category ascription in virtue of the entitlements that their own related category membership furnishes, with reflexive orientations directed towards managing the potential significance of their respective contributions throughout.¹⁸

Whatever disagreement arises in the encounter here is thus related to the questions of: (1) whether the provision for category attribution is accountable to the meanings that are *potential* in its uses, or (2) whether it is only accountable to the uses for which it is *actually* deployed in some given situation. In resisting Watts' efforts to undermine the category-exclusive meaning of "black thing" identity ascription, Robertson bolsters arguments for the former position by demonstrating that Watts' efforts involve the same strategy to forego the determinacy of meaning which are in effect in her own talk. In contrast, the scope of Watts' efforts here is limited to managing the potential to be seen as endorsing the reductionist potential available with the category invoked by Robertson (in and through her unsuccessful efforts to recruit him in disrupting the category-exclusive attribution of a taste for mac and cheese). Throughout, Robertson and Watts are concerned with the legitimate uses of racial identity ascription, with Robertson working to demonstrate, in and through

¹⁸ One might also note of this encounter that the potential threat to speaker alignment is managed in a similar fashion to the way that Watts and Rice proceed in their prior talk, namely, with the sharing of laughter (lines 118-121, 132-135; see: Glenn 2003:53-85).

his invocation of category terms, the potential that category attribution holds for reductionist exclusion, and with Watts working to mitigate the potential for reductionism otherwise available in a non-demonstrative (straightforward, uncomplicated) reading of Robertson's "black thing" formulation. While these different efforts might seem antithetical, they turn out to be complimentary: the two speakers are able to address the relevance of category attribution in a way that demonstrates the open-ended potential it furnishes while simultaneously working to curtail that potential in the immediate setting. That feat is a jointly produced, emergent property of interaction that exceeds the work or intentions (whatever that might mean in this context) of either individual speaker.¹⁹ My own analytic observations about this do not mitigate the demands for accountability that the use of category ascription might otherwise entail, but rather point out how the potential entrapments pertaining to those demands feature as both topic and reflexively available resource in the work that both Robertson and Watts pursue in attending to the business of their talk.

¹⁹ Attention to the disputatious, seemingly inimical stance of interlocutors in dialogue can easily distract from an appreciation of the collaborative nature of their efforts in providing for the rhetorical robustness of their joint undertaking. Addressing this feature of talk in her discussion of Harold Garfinkel's conception of time, Anne Warfield Rawls (2005:174) notes: "Everything—what all speakers say and do—goes into making up what the communication will finally have meant." She goes on to elaborate: "The way Garfinkel handles interpretation sequentially avoids the whole problem of how two people get the same idea. They don't need to. The speaker says something. Then it is up to the hearer/observer to make what they can of it. They construct an action that responds to what they have made of what the other did. The other can tell a good bit from this about how they have understood what they did. Sometimes they even learn something they did not know about what they did" (Rawls 2005:181-182).

Conclusion

The analyses above have explored different examples of talk in which category membership features as both speaker topic and resource. The point of considering how category membership is made relevant in these different settings is to highlight the way that speakers work both to furnish and circumscribe the inferential potential of their descriptive formulations. Whatever meaning is to emerge from interaction—be it racist or anti-racist—is immanent to the encounters where it is made to realize the situated purposes of the participants. Meaning is thus not the inevitable outcome of the various resources participants employ, rather those resources function as a vehicle for the mutually oriented-to projects that speakers pursue on any given occasion, with the success of any resource ultimately being a matter of interlocutor agreement in use (Benwell and Stokoe 2006). This is very much a feature of the reflexive work that speakers undertake to manage the implications of their own situated involvement in the then-present circumstances of their talk.

All of these considerations highlight a crucial distinction between reduction to category terms and the reflexive engagement with category attribution as a participant concern. That is, there is an important analytic distinction to be made between the ascription of category membership and attention to that activity itself as a potentially accountable activity. Taking this distinction seriously means giving analytic attention to the reflexive work that speakers routinely undertake to exceed or suspend the categorical terms of reference in their own and

each others' contributions. In his discussion of national identity, Slavoj Žižek (1993) develops a similar point in remarks about what he refers to as the "Nation-Thing" (*italics in original*):

This Nation-Thing is determined by a series of contradictory properties. It appears as "our Thing" (perhaps we could say *cosa nostra*), as something accessible only to us, as something "they," the others, cannot grasp; nonetheless, it is something constantly menaced by "them." It appears as what gives plentitude and vivacity to our life, and yet the only way we can determine it is by resorting to different versions of the same empty tautology. All we can ultimately say about it is that the Thing is "itself," "the real Thing," "what it is really about," etc. If we ask how we can recognize the presence of this Thing, the only consistent answer is that the Thing is present in that elusive entity called "our way of life." All we can do is enumerate disconnected fragments of the way our community organizes its feasts, its rituals of mating, its initiations ceremonies...It would, however, be erroneous simply to reduce the national Thing to the features composing a specific "way of life." The Thing is not directly a collection of these features; there is "something more" in it, something that *is present* in these features, that *appears* through them. Members of a community who partake in a given "way of life" *believe in their Thing*, where this belief has a reflexive structure proper to the intersubjective space: "I believe in the (national) Thing" equals "I believe that others (members of my community) believe in the Thing." The tautological character of the Thing—its semantic void which limits what we can say about the Thing to "It is the real Thing," etc.—is founded precisely in this paradoxical

cal reflexive structure. The national Thing exists as long as members of the community believe in it; it is literally an effect of this belief in itself. [pp. 201-202]

The "reflexive structure" that Žižek mentions here is glossed by Garfinkel (1967) with the term *documentary method of interpretation*, and refers to the way that particulars are related to an organizing category of interpretation, while that organizing category itself is said to be derived from the particulars that it renders intelligible. Žižek himself refers to this relationship by invoking shared cognition (belief). Despite the distinction between this and ethnomethodology's own approach to meaning as an emergent property of interaction, what is of interest in this passage is the noumenal reference that identity is made to have vis-à-vis the phenomenal specifics that are taken to manifest it (i.e., the "disconnected fragments of the way our community organizes its feasts, its rituals of mating, its initiations ceremonies," etc.). Here, what would render a particular formulation reductionist in view of these reflexive structures would be the sense that community is *exclusively and only ever* those specifics—that is, that community members are devoid, in some crucial sense, not of the noumenal character which those specifics are said to manifest, but rather of the capacity to manage the documentary methods in virtue of which their shared identity is formulated. Thus, reductionism is not description within a set of specifics, but the closing of interpretative capabilities within the structure those specifics are said to describe such that community members are taken to lack the reflexive capacity to formulate their own collective identity, and instead are regarded as exclusively that (Thing) which

the semantic exercise of category formulation invokes.²⁰ What renders the reflexive structuring of identity paradoxical is that its deployment be seen as essentially removed from (or autonomous of) the meaning that its hermeneutic circuit describes. It is the repudiation of that ability for social actors to distinguish between identity and the act of its assertion that thus constitutes reductionism.

In examining the talk between Watts and Robertson, I considered how Watts resists such reductionism *both* in asserting the identity that the structuring of phenomenal specifics to noumenal character achieves (the "black thing" that a shared taste for mac and cheese is said to manifest) *and* in her efforts to disrupt the exclusivity of category relevance that those specifics describe. Thus, she paradoxically ratifies the formulation that Robertson initially offers, while also displaying her reflexive capability in disassembling the meaning that it furnishes. For his part, Robertson's resistance to that display is oriented to highlighting the reductionist potential that the documentary formulation of identity represents. This is somewhat analogous to the work that Watts herself undertakes since the subversive orientation of her reflexive efforts to disassemble the semantic structuring of identity necessitates the same sort of externalization from the parameters which that identity describes in order to be effective. In oth-

²⁰ This is what Garfinkel (1967:67) refers to in remarks concerning the analytic portrayal of the social actor as a "judgmental dope, of a cultural or psychological kind." Mikhail Bakhtin (1984) also addresses this reductionist potential in his discussion of *dialogism* (see related discussion in: Clark and Holquist 1984; Holquist 1990; Morson and Emerson 1990; McKenzie and van Teeffelen 1993).

er words, Watts appeals here to the same capacity on the part of Robertson that she herself works to display as a condition of that very display's effectiveness. Her demonstration of the capacity to exceed the terms of reference in the descriptive formulation cedes the same capacity on Robertson's part as a condition of its effectiveness. Such mutual reciprocity requires that Robertson's situated resistance to Watts' efforts itself be regarded as reflexively oriented to displaying the same capacity to disassemble meaning on her part.²¹ Again, this sort of work on the part of these speakers arises precisely as a result of the reflexivity pervasive to interaction.

Relating this again to Žižek's remarks above, one could say that reductionism is what takes place when there is a failure to recognize the reflexive capacity of some interlocutor(s). My analysis here is dependent upon the recognition of that same capacity for an appreciation of what speakers are doing when they deploy identity attributions in the pursuit of their own business. As we have seen, that business is complex and paradoxical in the way it simultaneously deploys the very resources whose use it seeks to interrogate as a condition of its own efficacy. This is not to say that such uses are self-refuting. Rather, it is to point out that they are furnished by virtue of the reflexivity that is pervasive to social interaction. Put conversely, such paradox appears as contradictory only on the assumption that the situated uses to which

²¹ Such paradoxical work also features in Chris Rock's stand-up routine where he displays the capacity to deploy the category assumptions afforded by the related attributions while simultaneously disrupting their meaning.

categorizing formulations (or generalizations imposed on the details that are said to manifest some underlying pattern) necessarily fall within are the domain of their own terms of reference. Reflexivity necessitates a cut or disjunction between pattern and its particulars that is *constitutive* of the sense by which social action is rendered intelligible (Žižek 2003; 2009). It is that disjunction that makes possible the documentary method by which instance and pattern are related to furnish the accountability that renders social order witnessable by its members.

This point holds significant implications for the analysis of how racism features in talk—implications that speak to the assumptions often brought to bear in efforts to analyze the denial of racism (van Dijk 1992; Augoustinos and Every 2007; 2010), as well as the constructive (or reifying) assumptions that inform a cognitivist approach to racism in talk (see quotation from Condor et al. 2006:442 in the introduction above). Specifically, where racism research invokes suppressed societal and/or cognitive-perceptual structures in the production of its findings, such efforts stipulate an order of affairs in relation to which members' methods of documentary interpretation are evaluated for their descriptive adequacy (see: McKenzie 2011). That is, speaker formulations are judged for how they measure up against the assumptions that researchers bring to bear concerning what the *real* or *genuine* order of affairs being described consists in. What such research fails to consider is the significance that reflexivity has in the production of social order as a situated accomplishment of members' own documentary practices.

This failure relates to a matter of longstanding sociological concern regarding the fundamental question of social order production (Hilbert 1992; 1995; Garfinkel 2002). Central to ethnomethodology's contribution in addressing that concern is its stance of analytic indifference to the truth conditions of the documentary formulations by which members routinely stipulate some transcendent or overarching pattern to render their explanations with the sense they are made to have (Lynch 1993:190). Reference to (racist) social institutions and/or underlying cognitive structures here feature as member resources, and ethnomethodology's principled refusal either to endorse or oppose the meanings they furnish has its rationale in an understanding of social order as immanently accomplished in members' own documentary practices (Sharrock and Anderson 1986).²² The question for such an analysis is thus not that of whether or to what extent speaker formulations are racist in nature, but of what it might mean to broach such a question in the first place: how are assumptions about what either does or does not constitute racism made available by social actors themselves in the conduct of their affairs, as realized in the specif-

²² Don Zimmerman and Lawrence Wiedner (1970:288-289 as cited in Hilbert 1992:112) describe the principled grounds of such indifference for respecifying sociology's fundamental question: "The first step is to suspend the assumption that social conduct is rule governed, or based in and mounted from shared meanings or systems of symbols shared in common. The second step is to observe that regular, coherent, connected patterns of social life are *described* and *explained* in just such terms, or close relatives of them, by laymen and professional sociologists alike. The third step is to treat the appearances of described and explained patterns of orderly social activities as *appearances* produced, for example, by and through such procedures as analyzing an event as an instance of compliance (or noncompliance) with a rule. To take these three 'steps' is to leave the problem of order altogether as the analyst's problem." Note that this programmatic approach to the investigation of meaning-making is one that also eschews a perceptual-cognitive model of thinking (Edwards and Potter 1992; Edwards 1997; Coulter 1999; 2008; Lynch 2006; Coulter and Sharrock 2007).

ic circumstances under analysis? Such meaning is immanent to the circumstances where the immortality of social order that social actors invoke is carried out.

Speaking to this point, Richard Hilbert (1992:80-81) notes that "ethnomethodologists recommended suspending belief in the very existence of society as an orderly phenomenon and examining instead the artful practices whereby people make order appear familiar and obvious on an ongoing basis." Further in the same discussion, Hilbert (1992) explains the stance of such an approach vis-à-vis the questions of social order that speakers take up as a concern animating their own mundane analytic formulations:

Social structure conceived and experienced by societal members, as recognizable because of its repetitive, patterned, standardized quality, simply does not exist for empirical science. No two restaurants are identical, for example, nor are any two events or behavioral displays occurring within a restaurant empirically identical. The structure can be experienced and recognized only "from within" by members of the presumed order. This is to say that they make it happen, they make it be seen that way, through mobilization of common-sense assumptions and categories for classifying this or that as instances of presumed underlying structure. Through these kinds of practices members can see at a glance what is happening in a restaurant as typical restaurant behavior, as something they have witnessed before, as something they "were already" familiar with prior to its occurrence. Even the simple casting of the setting as "after all,

a restaurant" may be sufficient work for constituting recognizable stability. [p. 110]

Here, the point is that sense-making (in which some event or activity is regarded as a manifestation of some autonomous and transcendent noumenal order) involves the assertion, negotiation, and situated agreement by participants of what some case is or is not an instance of. That negotiation and agreement involve discursive work by which speakers attend reflexively to the significance of their contributions in realizing the purposes for which they are deployed. I have attempted to touch upon some of the complicated features by which such work is undertaken, and a particularly interesting aspect of that work is how category-furnished assumptions about racial identity are invoked to underwrite efforts at rendering the use of racial category formulations morally objectionable. Conversely, if we were to approach talk by simply assuming that the invocation of racial identity constitutes a censurable instance of racism, or that the reductionist uses of same constitute morally objectionable activities, then we would not be in a position to analyze the work that someone like Chris Rock does to subvert racial category attribution, or the work that speakers like Robertson and Watts do to implicate one another in the inferences they seek to make accountable in their respective formulations. More significantly, such an approach would preclude the possibility that the remaking of documentary formulations features as a part of members' own documentary practices. My purpose here has been to explore how such reworking is integral to the efforts that participants undertake in the conduct of their own situated business.

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Appendix: Transcription Conventions

The transcription of talk that appears above is based on the well-known set of conventions initially developed by Gail Jefferson (1985; see also: Sacks, Schegloff, and Jefferson 1974), and extended by John Du Bois (1991) and his colleagues (Du Bois et al. 1993). Included among these conventions in the extracts above are the following:

| | |
|---|--|
| full stop indicates completion intonation | It's mac and cheese. |
| comma indicates continuing intonation | mac and cheese, |
| question mark indicates rising intonation | You know why? |
| exclamation mark indicates exclamatory intonation | Sister that is my dish! |
| underlining indicates additional stress | can control <u>your</u> response |
| prolongation of sound indicated with colon | so:: u:m |
| false starts indicated with a dash followed by a single space | oth- the world |
| talk delivered with an increase in speed indicated with inward pointing arrows | >needs to get on board with macaroni and cheese< |
| talk delivered with a decrease in speed indicated with outward pointing arrows | black people <rea:ly don't like about black people> |
| up and down arrows precede marked rise or fall in intonation | And there's ↑two ↓sides |
| all caps indicate increase in volume | ↑BLACK people or white peo↓ple. |
| quotation as a presentational feature indicated with single quote | For some shit they just 'supposed to do' |
| equal sign indicates no space between two speaker turns at talk or in single speaker articulation | Clark political values= Int =Mm hm trips me out that you::=don't |
| untimed pause indicated by a full stop enclosed in parentheses | need (.) to forget |
| timed pause in talk indicated to tenth of a second | benefit of the doubt (0.5) so |
| speaker overlap indicated with square brackets (or double square brackets to disambiguate between contingent lines) | Watts [That is the] o:ne thing Rice [Ye(h)s] Watts that [[I can]] ro:ck! Rice [[Yes]] |

| | |
|---|--|
| voiceless articulation (whisper) indicated with raised diacritic | °I'm° tired tired tired tired |
| talk spoken between clenched teeth surrounded by inward square brackets |]damn[man |
| animated delivery of talk indicated | *It <u>is</u> a black thing Pa:t,* |
| details of delivery or related sound indicated with accompanying gloss | ##### (#claps hands#) pre*tzels* (*flooding out*) |
| audible in-breath of varying length | .hh .hhh |
| audible out-breath of varying length | hh hhhh |
| inaudible speech indicated with "x" for each syllable of such talk | low expectation xx |
| uncertain transcription indicated in single parentheses | worst thing (is) about |
| description of articulatory details or gesture italicized in single parentheses | (clears throat) (leans forward) |
| editorial comment italicized within double parentheses | we don't do Kra:ft ((product brand name)) |
| syllables of laughter indicating degrees of openness | heh hah |
| out-breath co-articulated with laughter | hhheh |
| interpolated particles of aspiration inserted into words, indicated with (h) | ma(h)c a(h)nd chee(h)se |
| smiley voice over stretch of talk, indicated with £ | £I don't and I have <u>never</u> £ |

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