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Managing the Moral Accountability of Stereotyping

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Abstract

This paper addresses some ways in which stereotypes and stereotyping are treated as morally accountable by social psychologists, their research participants, and participants in everyday interactions. I focus in particular on closely examining some deployments and responses to stereotypes in everyday interactions by applying conversation analytic and discursive psychological approaches to recorded interactions from radio call-in shows. My analysis considers the different interactional trajectories that follow the production of (possible) racial stereotypes, demonstrating how participants treat their “inaccuracy” as a central basis for the production of challenges and moral sanctioning in response to their deployment. In addition, the analysis demonstrates some cases in which apparent stereotypes are accepted or aligned with, including those grounded in personal experiences, “self-stereotypes” and humorous uses of stereotypes. I conclude by considering the implications of attending to the social-moral contexts in which stereotypes are produced, and the participant-administered accountability associated with these contexts.

Keywords

stereotypes, stereotyping, race, moral accountability, social desirability, talk-in-interaction

Stereotypes have long been treated within social psychological literature as having a moral dimension. This is reflected implicitly in the accumulation of a substantial (albeit contested) literature examining theoretical and empirical links between stereotypes, prejudice and discrimination (for a review, see Dovidio, Brigham, Johnson, & Gaertner, 1996), as well as in longstanding efforts to examine changes in stereotypes and to develop effective stereotype negation or reduction interventions (see, for example, Gawronski, Deutsch, Mbirkou, Seibt, & Strack, 2008; Kawakami, Dovidio, Moll, Hermesen, & Russin, 2000; Lambert, 1992). Thus, by attending to possible links between stereotypes and social problems such as prejudice and discrimination, and by seeking out ways to eliminate or reduce stereotypes, researchers have implicitly treated stereotypes as (at least potentially) morally problematic objects.

This implicit treatment of stereotypes as moral objects has also historically been taken up more explicitly by some authors, who have attempted to specify precisely whether and why stereotypes should be regarded as “wrong.” Brown (1958, p. 366) asked, “Is it possible that the social psychologist has used the word stereotype to stigmatize beliefs of which he disapproves but which he does not know to be false? Has he [sic] perverted his science to achieve a moral purpose?” Similarly, Campbell (1967) suggested that stereotypes are unacceptable because they result in unquestioned and biased assumptions about outgroup members; serve to attribute exaggerated homogeneity to groups and underestimate overlaps between different groups; and result in erroneous causal attributions (for example, based on assumed group characteristics rather than environmental factors).

One of the early debates in the stereotype literature involved the question of whether stereotypes must contain a “kernel of truth” to endure over time, or whether they are necessarily false (e.g., Bernard, 1951; Prothro & Melikian, 1955), with this question of the accuracy of stereotypes subsequently being treated as having implications for whether they

should be seen as objectionable. For example, Myers (2008, p. 303) suggests that “[a]n accurate stereotype may even be desirable. We call it ‘sensitivity to diversity’ or ‘cultural awareness in a multicultural world’...The problem with stereotypes arises when they are *overgeneralized* or just plain wrong” (emphasis in original; also see McGrath & Goldberg, 2006; Terracciano et al., 2005; Terracciano & McCrae, 2006). As I demonstrate in my below analysis of exchanges in which speakers produce possible racial stereotypes, this link between the accuracy and moral status of stereotypes is treated as a relevant consideration not just by social psychologists, but also by ordinary people as they deploy stereotypes and manage their moral accountability in everyday interactions. I turn first, however, to a consideration of how social psychological researchers have recognized and worked to manage the moral dimensions of stereotypes in their research practices.

Managing the Moral Accountability of Stereotypes in Research Practice

There has been longstanding recognition of the potential importance for researchers of their participants’ treatment of stereotypes as morally objectionable (Condor, 2000). This is reflected in researchers’ concerns that participants may be reluctant to openly express stereotypes, as a result of the negative judgments of them that may result from such expressions. For example, Sigall and Page (1971, pp. 247-248) suggested that the apparent “fading” of students’ endorsement of ethnic stereotypes in studies (Gilbert, 1951; Karlins, Coffman, & Walters, 1969) conducted following Katz and Braly’s (1933) original study of this topic may have been a result of emerging social desirability considerations with respect to the expression of such stereotypes. It has since become commonplace for social psychologists to assume that normative constraints that have emerged in recent decades against the open expression of attitudes and stereotypes (particularly those regarding politically sensitive categories such as race, ethnicity and gender) have shaped whether, and

how, research participants might express or endorse them (e.g., Dovidio & Fazio, 1992). This is further reflected in social psychological theories of such as “symbolic racism” (Sears, 1988) and “aversive racism” (Dovidio & Gaertner, 2004), which take modern normative constraints against the open expression of negative attitudes or stereotypes as a point of departure for theorizing the emergence of particular forms of “modern racism” (Durrheim, Mtose, & Brown, 2011).

In light of concerns surrounding socially desirable responses to measures of stereotypes, social psychological researchers have worked to develop approaches to measuring them while avoiding or minimizing social desirability effects. An early approach in this regard was the “matched-guise” technique developed by Lambert and his colleagues (see Lambert, 1992; Lambert, Hodgson, Gardner, & Fillenbaum, 1960) in their pioneering research on language attitudes. This technique involved asking participants to rate the personality characteristics of the speakers of recordings in two different languages, with participants being unaware that the same speaker was the same (perfectly bilingual) individual in both recordings. This was designed to elicit stereotypes associated with particular *languages* by virtue of revealing participants’ “more private reactions” (Lambert, 1992, p. 534) to the language being spoken under the guise of evaluating the *individual speakers* in the recordings.

Another early innovation in this regard was Sigall and Page’s (1971) “bogus pipeline” technique, which involved informing the participants that the experimenter had access (i.e., a “pipeline”) to the precise direction and intensity of their beliefs in the accuracy of particular ethnic stereotypes, via direct physiological measurement using a “machine” to which the participants were connected. Participants were then asked to predict what the physiological measurement would reveal, and it was assumed that they would respond accurately and honestly on the basis of the presumption that the experimenter would know their “real”

beliefs anyway, and in order to avoid being seen as deceptive or insensitive to their own feelings (Sigall & Page, 1971). This approach allowed for continued *direct* measurement of participants' endorsement of stereotypes, while including a mechanism designed to ensure that the measure accurately reflected participants' "true" beliefs rather than socially desirable responses.

While direct self-report measures (with or without the use of mechanisms such as the "bogus pipeline") have remained widely in use, more recent developments have seen the widespread adoption of *indirect* measures as a means to address social desirability. For example, the Implicit Association Test, or IAT (Greenwald, McGhee, & Schwartz, 1998), measures the relative strength of pairs of stereotypic associations, using speed of response as a proxy for strength of association. Thus, it is assumed that measures of the speed with which participants make stereotypic associations (e.g., "male" with "math" or "female" with "arts"), compared to non-stereotypic associations (e.g., "female" with "math" or "male" with "arts") (Nosek, Banaji, & Greenwald, 2000) can indicate the strength of participants' endorsement of stereotypes without the measurement being compromised by socially desirable responding (Greenwald et al., 1998).

As these examples demonstrate, the moral accountability surrounding the expression of stereotypes has tended to be viewed within conventional social psychology as an "empirical inconvenience" (Conдор, 2000, p. 176) – a threat to the validity of measures of stereotypes, rather than as an integral part of the nature of stereotypes. This view is underpinned by, and has developed concurrently with, the dominance of a cognitive approach to social psychology in general, and stereotypes in particular. Within this approach, it is assumed that stereotypes are essentially cognitive objects – generalized *beliefs* about the characteristics of members of a social category – regardless of whether they are seen as operating at a conscious or unconscious level (Greenwald & Banaji, 1995). A consequence of

this social cognitive view is that although the socially shared nature of stereotypes is recognized (Greenwald & Banaji, 1995), they are treated as being effectively located in the cognitive structures and processes of individuals. Similarly, the activity of stereotyping is effectively treated as a cognitive process that takes place in the minds of individuals, rather than being produced in a social arena (Wilkinson & Kitzinger, 2003). The task for researchers wishing to examine stereotypes is thus seen as requiring ways of accessing, in as “uncontaminated” a form as possible, their essential cognitive “core” within individual research participants. When studied in this way, stereotypes are stripped of the social context of their expression, and the moral accountability associated therewith (cf. Durrheim, 2012; Whitehead & Stokoe, 2015). That is, despite the implicit and explicit recognition of the moral character of stereotypes, their moral dimension is treated as something to be controlled or bypassed, rather than being subjected to direct examination.¹

An alternative to the dominant cognitive approach to social psychology has been articulated primarily by discursive psychologists (e.g., Edwards, 1997; Edwards & Potter, 1992; Potter & Wetherell, 1987), drawing on ethnomethodological and conversation analytic approaches and findings (e.g., Garfinkel, 1967; Sacks, 1972a, b, 1992; Schegloff, 2007a). A central feature of this alternative approach is “the respecification of psychological topics in terms of situated discourse practices” (Potter & Edwards, 2003, p. 170). Analytic attention is thus focused on how participants use and manage psychological concepts and concerns in practical ways, to produce particular actions or outcomes in a range of everyday and institutional interactional settings (Potter & Edwards, 2003). This includes attention both to the ways in which concepts developed within professional or academic psychology are taken up or oriented to by speakers in everyday interactions, as well as psychologists’ use of everyday language and concepts (including with respect to stereotypes) in their research and professional practices (Billig, 1991; cf. Sacks, 1992).

The discursive psychological approach has been relatively extensively applied to the study of how matters of “attitudes” and “prejudice” are managed in talk, including in cases where matters of race and racism of the type I examine below are at stake (see, for example, Augoustinos & Every, 2007, 2010; Kirkwood, McKinlay, & McVittie, 2013; Wetherell & Potter, 1992). It has also been used to examine the deployment of stereotypes in interactions, including what they are used to *do* by those producing them, how they are responded to by recipients (see, for example, Condor, 1988, 2000; Durrheim, 2012; Durrheim et al., 2011; Wilkinson & Kitzinger, 2003) and, more basically, what kinds of expressions are (or are not) treated as stereotypes in the first place. In this way, the phenomena that researchers employing the social cognitive approach seek to control or bypass become objects of direct analytic attention, and the social context of stereotyping is recognized as a central focus of investigation, rather than an empirical inconvenience. As far as I am aware, however, no previous research has employed this approach to examine how the relationship between the moral accountability and the “accuracy” of possible expressions of stereotypes is interactionally produced and managed as a participants’ concern, and this is therefore the focus of the analysis that follows.

Data and Method

The excerpts presented below are drawn from a dataset consisting of approximately 120 hours of broadcasts from three South African radio stations, which were recorded as part of a broader study of the use and management of racial categories in everyday talk-in-interaction (for further discussion of the data, and reports of other findings from the broader study, see Whitehead, 2011, 2012; 2013a, b, 2015). It is noteworthy that South Africa is the site of a relatively recent transition from a rigidly legislated racialized social order to an avowedly non-racial democratic dispensation, but one where race nonetheless continues to feature

centrally in public discourse. Thus, as a readily available source of everyday discussions of topical issues that participants recurrently treat as intersecting with race in various ways, radio call-in shows from South African stations provide an ideal setting for the examination of the interactional (re)production and management of racial categories (Whitehead, 2011). The recordings on which this study was based were produced primarily between 2006 and 2008, with supplementary recordings added between 2011 and 2015.

It should be noted that these data come from a particular institutional setting, which is observably relevant and consequential in many of the details of the talk produced by the participants. Although these institutional features are not primary phenomena of interest for the purposes of the analysis reported below (see, for example, Hester & Fitzgerald, 1999; Hutchby, 1991 for analysis that focus on such features of radio talk), and I thus generally address them only as and when they become analytically relevant, one particular feature of this setting makes it a useful site for the examination of the moral accountability of stereotypes. This feature relates to the role of the hosts of the shows, who tend to work both to maintain a “neutralistic” stance (cf. Clayman, 1992), and to moderate callers’ talk and police the expression of particularly extreme utterances – which includes monitoring callers’ talk for utterances that members of the overhearing audience may find objectionable, and acting as a representative of the audience in responding to such talk. This provides a systematic basis for sanctioning callers who objectionably express stereotypes, and thus the relatively ready availability in the data of exchanges in which speakers are held accountable for their production of stereotypes. While the ways in which these processes unfold may in some ways be specific to the talk radio setting, it is likely that the bases upon which participants come to treat possible expressions of stereotypes as objectionable (or not), and the ways in which they respond to them, would potentially be available as resources for participants in a wider range of contexts (also see Whitehead, 2015).

The data set as a whole includes over 620 stretches of interaction in which one or more racial categories was either explicitly mentioned or implicitly oriented to, and the analysis that follows is based on a more specific collection 57 exchanges in which possible instances of racial stereotypes were produced and responded to. I identified these exchanges by searching the data for places in which speakers produced category-based generalizations that served to associate members of a category with a commonly known or typical attribute or set of attributes (cf. Sacks, 1972a, b; Schegloff, 2007b). It is important to note, however, that consistent with this focus on how stereotypes are produced and managed as a participants' category, I based my identification of possible stereotypes on participants' orientations to these kinds of category-attribute links, rather than rigidly applying an *a priori* definition (cf. Schegloff's [2006] discussion of the notion of "a possible X"). As such, this approach to identifying possible stereotypes was applied as an analytic strategy for the purposes of building a collection of stretches of interaction that were potentially relevant for the purposes of the present analysis, rather than as a means of definitively settling whether a stereotype had been produced during any given exchange.

My analysis draws on conversation analytic and discursive psychological approaches to examine the interactional trajectories that follow the deployment of possible racial stereotypes in the production of ordinary actions-in-interaction. In particular, I consider the bases upon which such stereotypes may be challenged or accepted by their recipients, and thus how their moral accountability is oriented to and managed by the participants. As noted above, the participants in the data recurrently treated the accuracy of category-attribute associations as being a primary basis for judgments regarding their moral (or immoral) status. It is important to emphasize, however, that (consistent with the abovementioned focus on participant orientations in identifying possible stereotypes), I use the term "accuracy" here not to refer to an objective sense of whether or not a particular association is empirically

factual (as determined, for example, by social scientific research), but instead as a participants' category. That is, I consider how participants make and contest determinations regarding the accuracy of possible stereotypes in the moment-by-moment unfolding of the interactions, and how they use these determinations as bases for negotiating the moral accountability of stereotyping, independently of whether the stereotype is "objectively" accurate.

The data excerpts shown in the following section were transcribed using the detailed conversation analytic conventions developed primarily by Gail Jefferson, which are described in detail in Jefferson (2004). The excerpts were selected in order to exemplify both the recurrent features of the phenomena of interest and the range of variation in their realization across different cases.

Analysis

In Excerpt 1², a host morally sanctions a caller's expression of a stereotype, explicitly treating its inaccuracy as the basis for this sanctioning. Prior to the transcribed section of the call, the caller has complained about a high-profile political figure who had reportedly made derogatory comments about the proportion of students of Indian descent enrolled at a large South African university, and the host has aligned with the caller's complaints and has sympathized with the outrage he has expressed. As he continues with his complaint, the caller then produces an apparent stereotype of "the African community" (the group with which the political figure being complained about was identified) being "brought up with hate, with no father care" (lines 3-5).

Excerpt 1 [390 - 702 6-19-07]

1 C: You know people:, I don't- don't understand them you see,

2 H: Mmċ

3 C: U:h: especially the (a-) African community:, eh- they-
 4 eh- they are brought up (0.2) with: hate, with no father
 5 [care (or whatever.)]
 6 H: [A::h no I think that's going a little too far, Jay.
 7 U::h with respect, I mean I understand your grievance
 8 but I think when you start generalizing like that you
 9 certainly uh .hhhh you're just incorrect.
 10 (0.4)
 11 H: Basically.
 12 (0.2)
 13 H: pshm ((chuckle)) .hhh You can't \$generalize like that,\$
 14 you can't say an \$entire gro(h)up of people are such and
 15 such, come on.\$.hh We all know that.
 16 (.)
 17 H: And I'm not >even gonna go< into that cause it just ends
 18 up in another caller, and then it becomes a big barney on
 19 the airwaves and then what? Five minutes later we haven't
 20 solved anything.

In response, the host immediately and interruptively disagrees with the caller (line 6), thereby displaying strong disagreement with his utterance (Schegloff, 2007a) and treating it as unequivocally objectionable. After somewhat mitigating the strength of his disagreement (suggesting that the caller has gone just “a little too far”, and acknowledging the grievance on which the caller’s complaint was based; lines 6-7), the host goes on to explicitly identify the caller’s act of “generalizing” as the basis for his objection, stating that such an action is “just incorrect” (lines 8-9). The host thus resists the common-sense category-attribute link the caller has produced (also see Stokoe, 2012; Whitehead, 2012), treating generalizations of this sort as either factually inaccurate, or morally incorrect, or both.

Following two short pauses (lines 10 and 12), separated by the host's addition of the word "Basically" (line 11) to his prior claim, the host further elaborates the basis for his disagreement with the caller in lines 13-15, more explicitly morally sanctioning the caller in the process. Specifically, the host's use of the word "can't" clearly refers to a moral proscription against "generalizing", rather than a literal inability, since the host is referring to something that the caller has just done as opposed something that he would actually be unable to do. It is also noteworthy that, following these statements about what the caller (or perhaps people more generally) "can't" do, the host suggests that "we all know that", thereby proposing that it is common knowledge that the kind of thing the caller has done is morally problematic, and hence should not be done. He thus treats stereotyping of the sort the caller has engaged in as being commonly known to be morally wrong. In addition, the host goes on to describe the conflict that would predictably result from overhearing listeners taking issue with what the caller has said (lines 17-20), thereby further underlining his treatment of the morally problematic nature of stereotypes as widely known-in-common, while orienting to the importance of managing their public expression in order to avoid the kinds of conflicts that could result from it.

In Excerpt 2, a caller produces a complaint that, in the context of the discussion in which it is produced, potentially implies a stereotype of black people, albeit without stating it directly in the way the caller in Excerpt 1 did (cf. Durrheim, 2012). In this case the host more explicitly formulates the stereotype apparently implied in the caller's utterance, which eventually leads to sanctioning with similar features to that produced by the host in Excerpt 1. This excerpt is part of a longer discussion sparked by a controversial newspaper column that was widely condemned on the basis that it perpetuated negative stereotypes of black South Africans, but was defended by others (including the caller in the excerpt). The excerpt is thus situated in a context of contestation over the expression of stereotypes, which the host

apparently uses as a basis for his treatment of the caller as having deployed an inaccurate and hence objectionable racial stereotype.

Excerpt 2 [458 – 702 4-11-08]

1 C: Tonight on Cape Talk [they had two guys arrested .h for raping

2 H: [Ja.

3 C: a three year old [child, .hh for s- for- for the idea that it

4 H: [Ja. Ja.

5 C: would s- (.) prevent them from getting AIDS and the child died
6 yesterday.

7 (0.2)

8 H: Ja. But not [only do-

9 C: [So what are we talking [about?

10 H: [No- not only black people
11 rape children.

12 (0.2)

13 H: Karen.

14 (1.0)

15 H: If that's what you:: (.) aiming at.

16 (1.8)

17 C: N:ot (0.2) I've never heard of a white person raping (a/the) child
18 so that they wouldn't get [AIDS.

19 H: [(Now) but you see Karen if we're gonna
20 start saying, [(if w-)

21 C: [Okay let's- [let's shall we [leave that topic?

22 H: [Ja. [Ja.

23 H: Le[t's lea- let's lea- let's leave the topic because let's not go

24 C: [Thanks. Bye. ((hangs up))

25 H: down that route right now because we can .hh all get into some
26 interesting fisticuffs about that. And we can't say because someone
27 is black they do this or because someone is white they do this.

The caller constructs her complaint by describing an incident reported on the news the same night regarding the arrest of two men who had allegedly raped a three-year-old, apparently based on a belief that doing so would protect them from contracting AIDS, resulting in the death of the child (lines 1-6). While the caller makes no explicit mention of race in her description of the incident, the context of its production (i.e., in response to a debate over whether a newspaper columnist has negatively stereotyped black South Africans) provides for a hearing that she is treating the rapists' actions as "category bound" (Sacks, 1972a, 1972b) to the category "black South Africans", and thus that she is implicitly treating this category as the basis for their actions. Moreover, the caller's question in line 9 ("So what are we talking about?") more explicitly refers back to the racialised discussion of the controversial column, including her own defense (prior to the excerpt) of the columnist and her claims that the column was "not racist." This question thus implements a complaint about the discussion and criticism surrounding the newspaper column, with the report of the rape being mobilized as evidence that this criticism was unfair and, possibly, that the depiction of black South Africans on which the criticism was based was in fact justified.

Consistent with this analysis, the host's response to this complaint by the caller indicates that he has heard it as constituting an implicit expression of a racial stereotype. Following his initial displays of recognition of the story to which the caller was referring (lines 2 and 4), the host first begins to respond in line 8, projecting through his use of the word "but" that he is headed towards a disagreeing response. He then abandons this response after the caller begins talking again in overlap with him (as she produces the question discussed above, shown in line 9), before restarting slightly in overlap with this question in line 10 – with his repetition of the words "not only" from his turn showing this new utterance to be a restarted or "recycled" version of the utterance he abandoned at line 8 (see Schegloff,

1987). In completing this response, the host states that “not only black people rape children” (lines 10-11), thereby treating what the caller has just said as constituting an implicit expression of a stereotypical association between the categories “child rapist” and “black.” In this way, the host disagrees with the caller, while (as in Excerpt 1) resisting the category-attribute association she has apparently produced and treating its inaccuracy as being the basis for his disagreement.

Following this initial response by the host, the caller has a number of opportunities to correct his interpretation of what she said. Specifically, she passes up the chance to respond during a brief pause immediately following this response (line 12), and then similarly passes up further opportunities to respond at lines 14 and 16, even after the host has twice pursued a response from her (see lines 13 and 16). Thus, although each of the host’s utterances between lines 10-11 and line 15 creates a place at which the caller could deny that she was expressing a stereotype, she passes up all of these opportunities to do so, and thereby tacitly confirms the correctness of the host’s hearing of her previous turn. She then explicitly confirms the host’s hearing by defending the accuracy of the stereotype (lines 17-18), although she does modify (and somewhat circumscribe) the host’s articulation of the stereotype by specifying those being stereotyped as people who rape children “so that they wouldn’t get AIDS” (line 18).

The host then quickly responds, starting to speak slightly in overlap with the caller and beginning to describe what will happen “if we’re gonna start saying” things such as she has said (lines 19-20). He thus appears (again, similarly to the host in Excerpt 1) to be headed towards a formulation of the (presumably negative) consequences of claims such as that produced by the caller, which would constitute a rebuke of the caller’s actions. He does not complete this formulation, however, as the caller (apparently recognizing where his utterance is heading) interrupts him to suggest that they “leave that topic” (line 21) before thanking the host and hanging up shortly afterwards (line 24). The caller thereby abandons her pursuit of

her complaint in the face of the apparently imminent moral sanctioning by the host, albeit without explicitly backing away from the stereotype she has deployed in producing it.

After the caller has hung up, the host produces further evidence that he was headed towards sanctioning of her actions. Firstly, he agrees with her request to “leave that topic,” suggesting that they should not “go down that route right now” (lines 23 and 25) as the result would be “some interesting fisticuffs” (lines 25-26), thereby pointing out that her actions would be likely to result in conflict. Moreover, in rejecting the race-based causal attribution that he proposes the caller to have made, the host further treats it as morally problematic by using the word “can’t” in a similar way to that of the host in Excerpt 1 (lines 26-27). Thus, as in the previous case, this excerpt demonstrates the situated production of a link between the accuracy of a stereotype and the moral accountability involved in its expression, particularly with respect to importance of avoiding the conflict that could predictably result from it.

While the speaker who expressed the stereotype in Excerpt 2 eventually abandoned the action she was pursuing when faced with moral sanctioning, Excerpt 3 demonstrates that moral sanctioning of a possible expression of a stereotype may subsequently be withdrawn on the basis of a defense of its legitimacy by the speaker who originally produced it. This excerpt is drawn from a discussion of affirmative action-related “racial quotas” in the selection of South African sports teams, and the caller in this case is arguing in favor of such quotas.

Excerpt 3 [393 – 702 3-26-08]

- 1 C: If there are no quotas, .h then (.) I- my experience with white
- 2 people, unfortunately, my experience with white people, [.hh
- 3 H: [Ja.
- 4 C: if they are not forced to give, [they will not give [you anything.
- 5 H: [Ja- [Now you are
- 6 just as good as Russell who [called in earlier [because now

- 7 C: [No. [>No no no.<
- 8 H: you- y[ou- you- you giving [a blanket statement.
- 9 C: [>No no.< [I will explain. Cause I- I will
- 10 substantiate. I will substantiate. .h[h It's not- it's- i- it's not
- 11 H: [Ja.
- 12 C: a general .hh statement that I'm making. (.h) But (.) my personal
- 13 exper[iences, I'm talking about. [With white people. They don't
- 14 H: [Okay. [The people that you have had.
- 15 C: give you.
- 16 H: O[kay.
- 17 C: [They don't give you. .h Unless they are forced to give or unless
- 18 they [have to give.
- 19 H: [Okay.
- 20 H: Okay.

In making his argument in favor of quotas, the caller suggests that “white people, if they are not forced to give, they will not give you anything” (line 4) – a claim that is potentially hearable as a stereotype of the category “white people.” It is important to note, however, that in producing this claim the caller twice notes that it is based on his experience in particular (see lines 1 and 2), emphasizing the word “my” in each case. In addition, the second time he invokes his own experience, the caller displays regret about his experiences through his use of the word “unfortunately” (line 2). The insertion of this word (which also appears to be the basis for the caller’s repetition of “my experience”) marks the caller’s care in designing his utterance, such that he interrupts its progressivity in order to display the stance the inserted word indicates (also see Wilkinson & Weatherall, 2011). The caller thus circumscribes the degree of generality of his claim about “white people” by displaying that it is based on his own experience, as well as mitigating it by expressing regret, thereby

apparently designing the claim in such a way as to address its potential vulnerability to being treated as a stereotype, and therefore as objectionable.

Despite the caller's careful design of his utterance, however, the host responds by comparing him to a previous caller from the same day ("Russell") who had expressed a stereotype linking black people to criminality, and had been roundly condemned for doing so (see lines 5-6). The host then goes on to specify the basis for his objection and his comparison of this caller to the prior caller, stating that the caller is "giving a blanket statement" (line 8). In this way, the host treats the generality of the caller's statement as the basis for his objection to it, thereby (as in the previous excerpts) producing his sanctioning of the caller as a response to an overgeneralized and therefore inaccurate link between a category and an attribute.

In response to the host's sanctioning, the caller immediately disagrees, initially speaking several times in overlap with the host to negate what he is saying (see lines 7 and 9), and then claiming that he will "explain" (line 9) and "substantiate" (line 10) the claim to which the host has objected. He then goes on to dispute the host's claim that he had made a "general statement" (lines 10 and 12), before reiterating his earlier framing of his claim in terms of his "personal experiences" (lines 12-13). The caller thereby challenges the host's claim that he has in fact produced a blanket or general statement, but at the same time tacitly aligns with the implication that "giving a blanket statement" would be an objectionable thing to do.

At just the point at which the host could recognize the caller's appeal to his own experiences as a basis for his earlier claim (midway through his production of the word "experiences" in line 13), the host speaks in overlap with the caller and marks his acceptance of what the caller is saying ("Okay" – line 14). As the caller goes on to repeat his claim about "white people" (lines 13, 15 and 17-18), the host displays his understanding and acceptance

of the caller's point (line 14), and repeats his display of acceptance several more times (lines 16, 19 and 20). The host thereby aligns with the caller's claim of his personal experience as a basis for the circumscribed accuracy of his claims, and in doing so effectively withdraws his sanctioning of the caller, converting his prior treatment of the caller's claim as morally objectionable to a new treatment of it as acceptable.

This excerpt thus demonstrates that the moral status of possible expressions of stereotypes (including the question of whether an expression can properly be considered a stereotype) is subject to moment-by-moment negotiation and contestation, with personal experience being collaboratively produced as one potential basis for defending the accuracy of a claim. This use of personal experience as a resource in this way is consistent with Sacks' (1984) classic insights on the ways in which speakers are normatively treated as having a privileged entitlement to their experiences, such that disputing the accuracy of a claim grounded in an individual's experiences would involve violating their taken-for-granted "ownership" of the experiences (also see, e.g., Cresswell, Whitehead, & Durrheim, 2014; Raymond & Heritage, 2006).

This combination of participants' orientations both to the accuracy of possible expressions of stereotypes as well as to the privileging of personal experience can also be seen in Excerpt 4, in which the host strongly aligns with a possibly stereotypical claim a caller has made, and has treated as potentially morally problematic in the process of producing. This excerpt is from a discussion of cross-racial adoption, which the host has advocated throughout the show, with this caller contributing to the discussion by describing her experiences of adopting cross-racially. Having been congratulated by the host for "having the chutzpah to go out there and adopt a kid" (lines 1-3), the caller elaborates her description of her experience in this regard, and produces a possible stereotype linking both "white

people” and “coloured people”³ people with “looking at [her] funny” on the basis of her having a child of a different racial category (lines 6 and 8-9).

Excerpt 4 [655 – 702 5-28-08]

- 1 H: Lovely talking to you, and ↑well done there Terry, >I
 2 mean< for:: for actually: .hh having the chutzpah to go
 3 out there and adopt a kid, many South Africans >sit back,
 4 moan, bitch, and they don't< even: they don't even do it.
 5 [.hh f-
 6 C: [And I can tell you one thi[ng, it's- it's not white
 7 H: [Hm?
 8 people looking at me funny i(h)t's mo(h)stly \$the coloured
 9 people\$ uhuh=[I \$can tell you that.\$
 10 H: [(Oh now they- pt.) I am h .h
 11 I [know. Trust me, ugh! .h[h
 12 C: [Uhh huh huh huh [Uheh h[eh .hh
 13 H: [Lotsa ↑work to be
 14 done there still, [don't worry. <Terry, .hh Terry in
 14 C: [↑Ye:s, yes.
 15 H: Durbanville, keep well.

In claiming that it is “not white people” who have responded to her in this way (particularly with emphasis on the word “not”), the caller implies an expectation that people of this category *would* ordinarily (or stereotypically) be expected behave in such a way, thereby providing a basis for their failure to do so being remarkable (see Goffman’s (1961, p. 24) discussion of “rules of irrelevance”). Conversely, by claiming that it is instead “coloured people” who have produced these responses, the caller could be heard as producing a new stereotype linking such behavior with this second racial category. As in Excerpt 3, the caller

produces these claims as reports of her personal experiences, rather than as behavioral attributions applying more generally to all or most members of these categories. However, she nonetheless treats the claims as potentially delicate or problematic (see Lerner, 2013), as shown by the laughter particles and “smile voice” indicated respectively by the “h”s in parentheses and the \$ symbols (lines 8-9). Her cut-off and restart on the word “it’s” (line 6), just prior to her production of the first racial category term, may also indicate an orientation to delicacy associated with mentioning this category, although it may instead have been occasioned by the overlapping talk produced by the host (line 7) just prior to this (Schegloff, 1987).

Despite this orientation to the potential sanctionability of her claims on the part of the caller (and unlike in the previous excerpts above), the host in this case immediately agrees with the caller (lines 10-11), with his emphasized “I know” (line 11) treating the common-sense links she has drawn as being consistent with his own experiences, and therefore accurate. The host then follows up by stating that there is “Lotsa ↑work to be done there still” (lines 13-14), which seems to be a suggestion of the remedial action required to address a problem with the category of people (“coloured people”) that the caller and he have referred to. Despite the generalized and potentially hearably stereotypical nature of this suggestion, neither the host nor the caller (who aligns with the host through her laughter in line 12 and her displays of agreement in line 14) treats it as potentially objectionable.

As well as providing further evidence for participants’ orientations to the privileging of experience-based claims that may otherwise be heard as stereotypical generalizations, it is also potentially noteworthy that in this case the host is widely known to his audience (through his on-air self-identifications) as a member of the same racial category, “coloured”, referred to in this exchange. As such, his claims of knowledge of the behavior of people of this category may be implicitly grounded not just in his experiences with members of the

category, but in his status as a co-member of the category – in contrast to the caller, who began the call by self-identifying as “white”, and whose orientation to the delicacy of the claims she was making was marked in contrast to the absence of any evidence of such an orientation on the host’s part. The host may thus be orienting to a category-based entitlement to produce “self-stereotypes”, i.e., stereotypes in which the producer is a member of the same category implicated in the stereotype⁴.

Excerpt 5 demonstrates a more explicit instance of this type of orientation to self-stereotyping, as a caller works to display his self-identification with the racial category implicated in a possible stereotype he is expressing. This excerpt is from a discussion of a wave of xenophobic violence that was occurring across South Africa at the time, with the caller first complaining about the lack of action to prevent the violence taken by leaders in the country (the “they” referred to in line 1), before criticizing those who he treats as primarily culpable for perpetrating it.

Excerpt 5 [234 – SAfm 5-12-08]

- 1 C: For how long are they going to (dis) while people are b-
- 2 are being (0.2) you know being slaughtered for nothing
- 3 just because they happen to be .hh eh:: (0.4) the
- 4 Ethiopians, (0.2) the Somalis and all that.=
- 5 H: =Mm:.
- 6 C: .hh The- the problem here is, (0.4) I- I don’t think
- 7 there is e- enough is- education especially (.) for-
- 8 for black South Africans.=Us. [.hh Because we seem not
- 9 H: [Mm.
- 10 C: to understand the continent.
- 11 (0.5)
- 12 C: We- we- we seem to: to think that we are the best in the
- 13 continent <and we are no:t.

- 14 H: (pt) Ya, you see .hh we are >n- n- n-< not educated and
 15 are hung- ah=our stomachs are empty.
 16 (1.0)
 17 C: .hh You kno[w-
 18 H: [It's a bad combination.

In shifting the focus of his criticism from leadership to the perpetrators of the violence, the caller specifically blames a lack of education, “especially (.) for- for black South Africans” (lines 7-8) for the problem, thereby producing a possible stereotype of black South Africans as uneducated. Then, after producing this possibly complete formulation of those he is singling out for blame, the caller quickly adds the collective pronoun “us” (line 8) to the formulation, thereby claiming membership in the category “black South Africans”. The caller thus performs additional work to retrospectively include himself in the category about which he has produced a possible stereotype, having not done so initially. Then, as he continues his criticism, the caller uses the pronoun “we” on several further occasions (see lines 8, 12 and 13), thereby continuing his display of co-membership in the category he is criticizing. In response, the host initially minimally aligns with the caller (“Mm”, line 9), before displaying agreement (“Ya”, line 14) followed by an aligning account for the problem the caller has identified (lines 14-15) that implements another possible stereotype linking the category “black South Africans” to the attribute of poverty in his claim that “our stomachs are empty” (line 15). In producing this response, the host uses the pronouns “we” and “our” (lines 14 and 15) in ways that, similarly to the caller’s use of pronouns, display his co-membership in the category “black South Africans”.

It noteworthy that, in producing these possible stereotypes, both the caller and the host treat their actions as potentially delicate. This can be seen in the brief pause and restarts (cf. Lerner, 2013) produced by the caller just prior to his formulation of “black South

Africans” (lines 7-8), and in the host’s numerous restarts prior to agreeing with the caller’s claim that “we” are “not educated” (line 14). This provides further evidence for the possibility that speakers’ self-inclusion in a category about which they are expressing a negative possible stereotype may both display an orientation to, and serve as a way of managing, the potentially objectionable nature of their actions.

The final excerpt⁵ below indicates another way in the relevance of the accuracy, and accompanying moral accountability, of stereotypes can potentially be relaxed or bypassed, namely through their use as a resource for humor or joking. Prior to the exchange shown in the excerpt, the host and caller have discussed the degree of racial inequality in South Africa, leading the caller to question how such inequalities can “after fourteen years of democracy, still exist” (lines 2-3). In response, the host invokes a possible stereotype of white people as wealthy as a resource for a jokingly proposed “short term solution” that the caller could “find a white girlfriend” (lines 9 and 11).

Excerpt 6 [610 – 702 5-9-08]

- 1 C: Ja so now I- I need somebody that is clued up hheh .hh with
 2 eh the labor laws as to: .hh how can that .hh st- still
 3 after fourteen years of democracy, still e[xist, (and-)
 4 H: [.hhh This is the
 5 issue, this is the issue, and this is why we talk about
 6 affirmative action and all the rest of it because if you look
 7 at the reality if you look at where the money is, and who’s
 8 got the power, obviously that need to change, or it needs to
 9 be leveled out at least, .hh but \$I th[ink your short term
 10 C: [Mm.
 11 H: solution Zakele, .hh is to find a white girlfriend.\$
 12 (0.7)
 13 H: hh hu[h huh huh

- 14 C: [Sorry?
 15 H: I said you[r heh heh \$your solution is [to find a white
 16 C: [hhh hhuh huh huh [.hhh
 17 H: g[irlfriend.\$
 18 C: [\$Mm. Mm.\$

This proposed solution by the host is underpinned by his designedly more serious discussion of the importance of affirmative action policies (lines 4-6), and prevailing distributions of money and power (lines 7-9). While he does not explicitly mention race in this discussion, his mention of affirmative action, along with the prior discussion of ongoing racial inequality, provides for a hearing of his claims about money and power as referring specially to racialized distributions. This in turn serves as the basis for the host to imply that the caller (who has earlier self-identified as black) occupies a disadvantaged position that could be improved sharing in the wealth of a “white girlfriend”.

This joking suggestion by the host initially results in some interactional trouble as the caller initiates repair (see, e.g., Schegloff, 1992) in line 14, before (after the host has begun to repeat the joke), displaying his appreciation of the joke by laughing just after the host begins to repeat it (see lines 15 and 16). The interactional trouble can thus be seen as a transient problem in hearing rather than, for example, a result of the caller treating the host’s joking use of a possible stereotype as objectionable. The caller thus (upon resolving the problem in hearing) collaborates with the host in treating the race-wealth link as unproblematically humorous rather than morally accountable.

Discussion and Conclusions

In this paper, I have considered some of the ways in which the moral status of stereotypes and stereotyping has been the subject of implicit and explicit concern within the social

psychological literature, and has shaped the practices adopted in the production of social psychological research. In contrast to dominant social psychological approaches to research on stereotypes, which attempt to access their “core” cognitive essence independently from any interactional context, I have conducted a detailed examination of the interactional trajectories associated with the production of stereotypes in the naturally occurring interactional exchanges in which they occur (cf. Condor, 1988, 2000; Durrheim, 2012; Durrheim et al., 2011; Wilkinson & Kitzinger, 2003). In particular, my analysis has contributed to the literature focusing on the management of the moral accountability of stereotyping in everyday interactions by demonstrating participants’ systematic treatment of the (in)accuracy of possible stereotypes as a primary basis for their status as morally objectionable (or otherwise). I have also demonstrated some apparent bases upon which this centrality of accuracy could be relaxed or set aside by participants, including stereotypes grounded in personal experiences, “self-stereotypes” and humorous uses of stereotypes.

These findings demonstrate some ways in which concepts such as “accuracy” and, indeed, “stereotypes” are participant-administered. That is, it is participants themselves who decide whether a possible instance of stereotyping should be properly treated as such, and whether an expressed stereotype is sufficiently inaccurate or overgeneralized to warrant resistance or sanctioning. The participants can thus be seen to be navigating, *in situ*, the question of whether their own or others’ talk can be considered “prejudicial” – or more specifically in these cases, “racist” – and, if so, whether and how it can or should be challenged (also see Robles, 2015; Stokoe, 2015; Whitehead, 2015). As the data demonstrate, these decisions involve contingent interactional negotiation: Whether a possible instance of stereotyping is treated as morally objectionable is shaped by the details and context of its delivery, and this treatment is subject to negotiation, contestation, and revision, and is sensitive to factors such as the treatment of a stereotype as being grounded in personal

experience, its status as a self- or other-stereotype, and the action that the stereotype is being used to implement (e.g., complaining versus joking). This shows the highly context-sensitive and interactional nature of stereotyping, and the importance of a moment-by-moment examination of how it unfolds interactionally in order to better understand what stereotyping is for the people doing it and responding to it, and how they manage the contingencies associated with it.

This contingent and situated interactional character of stereotypes demonstrated by the analysis also provides further support for the abovementioned discursive psychological critiques of social psychological approaches to stereotypes that strip away the social contexts of their expression. That is, it is evident from the data I have examined that, for the participants who produce and respond to them, stereotypes are not only (or even primarily) cognitive or individually-located phenomena, but are also interactional resources that speakers can deploy in producing everyday social actions. As such, it is evident that stereotyping is not the primary thing that the speakers in these interactions have set out to do – rather, it is something they may do in the service of accomplishing whatever their interactional business at particular moments happens to be, while at the same time being subject to the normative moral constraints associated with everyday actions more generally (cf. Garfinkel, 1967). Thus, in contrast to its treatment in some social psychological research as a “contaminating” factor to be mitigated or circumvented through methodological innovations, the moral accountability associated with stereotypes and stereotyping is observable as a fundamental and constitutive feature of the phenomena at hand.

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Notes

1. For further discussion of potential shortcomings (both psychological and political) of the social cognitive approach, and of implicit measurement techniques in particular see, e.g., Billig (1996, 2002); Durrheim (2012); and Tetlock and Arkes (2004).
2. Also see Whitehead (2015) for further analysis of this excerpt.
3. The term “coloured” was used during the apartheid era to categorize mixed-race people and, also it became highly politically contested during the later years of apartheid and in the post-apartheid period, it remains widely in use in everyday South African talk.

4. This type of orientation to entitlement to action based on “self” versus “other” considerations has been observed in a number of domains, including conversational “repair” (e.g., Schegloff, 2000; Schegloff, Jefferson, & Sacks, 1977), knowledge (“epistemics”) and experience (e.g., Heritage, 2011; Raymond & Heritage, 2006; Sacks, 1984), and intersections between social categories and everyday actions such as complaints (e.g., Sacks, 1992; Whitehead, 2013a).
5. Also see analysis of this excerpt in Whitehead (2013b).

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