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What is This?

Membership categorization, culture and norms in action

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ABSTRACT   In this article, we examine the extent to which membership categorization analysis (MCA) can inform an understanding of reasoning within the public domain where morality, policy and cultural politics are visible (Smith and Tatalovich, 2003). Through the examination of three examples, we demonstrate how specific types of category device(s) are a ubiquitous feature of accountable practice in the public domain where morality matters and public policy intersect. Furthermore, we argue that MCA provides a method for analysing the mundane mechanics associated with everyday cultural politics and democratic accountability assembled and presented within news media and broadcast settings.

KEY WORDS: *categorization sequence, membership categorization analysis, mundane morality, norms-in-action, politics*

What is it that constitutes the moral space of everyday life? In many respects, this question has a connection with the classic issue of the very possibility of social order and organization. In one sense, the issue can be understood to centre around the normative features of action where 'social' norms can be understood to be the product of prior socialization, ideological transmission or discursive imprinting. Talcott Parsons (1964: 30) states:

> Not only is action normatively oriented in the sense of pursuing ends, it is also subject to certain normative conditions, to rules which guide it. For instance, in pursuing the end of closing a profitable deal, a businessman may consider himself subject to the condition that it shall be done 'honestly'. From some points of view, such rules may consider themselves as ends of the course of action under analysis. They appear rather as considerations limiting the acceptable range of alternative means . . .

This notion of normative regulation of social action and behaviour also finds resonance within Foucauldian thinking. Foucault, with reference to 18th-century ideas, notes that the study of the 'healthy man' became the model for early modern medicine. This discursive positioning of medicine and the 'healthy man', Foucault (1989: 40) argues, assumes:

> . . . a normative posture, which authorises it not only to distribute advice as to a healthy life, but also to dictate the standards for physical and moral relations of the individual and of the society in which he lives.

However, whilst the notion of norms is a central feature of modern sociological theorizing, the everyday practice or invocation of norms as an everyday part of social life, or 'norms-in-action', are less so. In this article, we want to explore issues surrounding normativity in everyday life and, more specifically, norms-in-action (Housley and Fitzgerald, 2002), before linking the analysis of norms-in-action with current issues and debates concerning the analysis of 'cultural politics'. In doing so, we take our lead from Sacks (1974: 224) in relation to his work on social interaction. Sacks states:

> I shall focus next on the fact that an activity can be category bound and then on the import of there being a norm that provides for some second activity, given the occurrence of the first, considering both of these with regard to the 'correctness', for members, of 'possible descriptions'.

Deriving from Sacks' early work, 'Membership Categorization Analysis' (MCA) is now a well-established ethnomethodological approach that examines the practical methods of categorization work in relation to the local accomplishment of social and moral organization and order (Garfinkel, 2002). It involves examining the practices that display 'culture-in-action' in relation to the accomplishment, negotiation and repair of social and moral organization. The development of the methodology of MCA in recent years has also drawn attention to the relationship between sequential and categorical methods within talk-in-interaction (Baker, 1984; Eglin and Hester, 1992; Fitzgerald and Housley, 2002; Hester and Eglin, 1997; Hester and Francis, 1994; Housley, 2000, 2003; Housley and Fitzgerald, 2002; Watson, 1978, 1997). Whilst this methodology has developed a fine-grained analytic sensitivity to the locally organized display of categories and devices as situated events, this methodology has also explored members' moral work and normative assessments as a practical and occasioned matter (Jayyusi, 1991). Deployed within a range of settings, this includes moral-political work and the reflexive rendering of accountability as an accomplished social fact. The methods and configurations through which such normative regulation is interactionally accomplished include specific forms of category configuration that are recognizable resources for members in their attempts to constitute opinion, make evaluations, promote specific world views, assess practices and thereby constitute local configurations of moral organization and sense. It is to an analytic and empirical consideration of these practical configurations that we now turn.

Membership categorization analysis and norms-in-action

Jayyusi's (1984, 1991) classic investigation into the moral organization of categorization draws from Sacks' work on membership categorization and subsequent studies (Coulter, 1979, 1983; Drew, 1978; Pomerantz, 1978; Sharrock, 1974; Watson, 1983) that identified and explicated the moral inferential logic (Jayyusi, 1991: 240) of everyday social practice. Jayyusi (1991: 240) states:

> Sacks' notion of category bound actions, rights and obligations not only points out the moral features of our category concepts, but also provides thus for the very moral accountability of certain actions or omissions. His elucidation of the notion of certain categories as standardised relational pairs . . . not only uncovers features of the organisation of members' conventional knowledge of the social world, but clearly demonstrates via empirical analysis, how that knowledge is both morally constituted and constitutive of moral praxis – it provides for a variety of ascriptions, discoveries, imputations, conclusions, judgements etc. on the part of mundane reasoners.

Jayyusi goes on to note how ethnomethodological analysis has illustrated how practical activities (e.g. asking questions, providing descriptions and making 'sense') are also inexorably moral. Jayyusi (1991: 241) continues by stating:

> I have elsewhere, building on Sacks' work, tried to show in some detail how moral reasoning is practically organised, and how, at the same time, and perhaps more significantly, practical reasoning is morally organised . . . Very clearly, the use of even mundanely descriptive categories, such as 'mother', 'doctor', 'policeman', for example, makes available a variety of possible inferential trajectories *in situ,* that are grounded in the various 'features' bound up with, or constitutive of, these categories as organisations of practical mundane social knowledge. These features might be 'moral' features in the first place (such as the kinds of 'rights' and 'obligations' that are bound up with one's being a 'mother', or a 'doctor' or 'policeman'), or they might be otherwise – such as the 'knowledge' that is, for example, taken to be bound up with a category such as 'doctor', or the kind of 'work' that is taken to be constitutive of, or tied to, a category such as a policeman. But even in the latter case, it turns out that as evidenced in our actual practices, for example, 'knowledge' has its responsibilities – even these features provide grounds for the attribution of all kinds of moral properties, for finding that certain kinds of events or actions may or may not have taken place, for determining culpability, even for defeating the applicability of the category or description in the first place.

Thus, Jayyusi points to and identifies the mutually constitutive and reflexive relationship between practical action and normativity. Furthermore, the process of categorization in both its personal and non-personal forms within talk-in-interaction are realized within various forms of preference organization within adjacency pair formats identified by more sequential analyses of talk-in-interaction (Pomerantz, 1978). These sequential features of members' talk can be understood in terms of the practical-moral inferential work of members. Furthermore, in terms of the developments in MCA and EM, reported and explored recently in this journal, a concern for categorization and sequential work in talk-in-interaction is prominent. Indeed, the issue of adjacency pairs, preference organization and so forth provides an excellent site with which to observe the

intertwining character of normativity, category and sequence in members' talk, for example, where the fulfilment of a second part within an adjacency pair is both a categorial and sequential phenomenon (Watson, 1997). Indeed, the reciprocity of perspectives and Garfinkel's (1967) notion of trust (a necessary lubricant for all interaction as his breaching experiments illustrated) are orientations within which the moral-practical work of categorization and sequential organization forms an important part.

Whilst the analysis of members' category work within and as part of the flow of interaction continues to prove a fruitful analytic approach, in this article, our attention turns to the way members orient towards a taken-for-granted, 'internal' logic of categorization where, flowing from some initial categorization, further category/predicate work is seen to logically or *normatively* follow. In many respects, our discussion and analysis picks up from Sacks' observation that 'the mother picked her baby up *because* her baby was crying' in that the action of the 'mother' is observably done in response to 'her' baby crying as that is what 'mothers (are expected to and expectedly seen to) do'. It is not then simply a matter of one action following the other but that the actions as categories are morally ordered, such that if her baby cries then she *should* then pick it up.[1] In the discussion below, we explore two forms of what we term 'categorization sequence' work in relation to moral assessments, evaluation and accountability. In the first part of the discussion, we examine the use of 'contrast devices' before then examining the use and assembly of a particular type of 'moral relational pairing'. In both cases, this will involve a consideration of empirical examples.

Examples 1 and 2 below involve the deployment of contrast devices and classes as a means of providing morally contrastive resources that can be used to generate debate or position government agencies within well-documented tropes of untrustworthiness and ineptitude. They can be understood as categorization sequences in the sense that one device follows the other as a method for assembling difference (e.g. fact–falsehood, right–wrong and us–them). In the second example, we consider how contrast devices can also be mobilized as a means of generating banal forms of prejudice, underpinned by the invocation of specific normative expectancies and group membership in relation to behaviour in public space.

The second form of 'categorization sequence' that we explore (Example 3) is something we have elsewhere described as a 'moral discrepancy device' (Housley, 2002; Housley and Fitzgerald, 2003a, 2003b). Sacks noted how certain membership categories seemed to 'go together' in 'standardized relational pairs', for example 'father–son', 'husband–wife', 'shopkeeper–customer' and that actions associated with or observed through such category pairing involve a level of routine 'relationship' predicates that serve to render accountable interaction between the category pair and the actions observed of the category pair. Indeed, as suggested earlier, Sacks' classic analysis of the child's story *The Baby Cried. The Mommy Picked it Up* (1974, 1995) contains a moral underpinning that we hear the mommy picking up the baby because it was crying, i.e. that there are moral predicates available in making sense of the story where the mother *should* pick up

her baby *if* it is crying. Whilst the debate around how such relational pairings could be both occasioned matters but also a product of commonsense knowledge continues (Fitzgerald and Housley, 2002; Hester and Francis, 2000; McHoul et al., 2008), we turn our attention to examining how certain moral pairings or devices are utilized through personal or non-personal forms of categorization and/or predication (Hester and Eglin, 1997; Housley, 2000; Housley and Fitzgerald, 2002; McHoul and Watson, 1984). We approach these forms of category pairs and associated predicates (i.e. moral relational devices) as *relational* in the sense that one may be expected to follow the next within accountable action as a moral-procedural requirement. The moral expectancies built in to relational devices configure the character of what comes next: X *then* Y. Breaches between these relational devices, within occasioned settings, may generate interactional repair or the allocation of moral uncertainty and judgement to certain 'membership categories or devices of agency' implicated in any such breach. Relational pairings, then, have certain situated properties and moral logic that form a normative resource through which accountable action and description can be reflexively realized and regulated. In the next section of the article, we explore the two 'categorization sequence' devices in the context of empirical materials gathered from different media settings where views and beliefs are displayed, debated and opined.

Categorization, contrast and normative action

REASON, REFUSAL AND MORALITY IN LETTERS TO THE EDITOR: TRANSPARENCY AND INVISIBILITY

Letters-to-the-editor are understood as a means through which citizens are able to air opinions within the public sphere and connect and add voice to current affairs within liberal democratic social forms (Wahl-Jorgensen, 2001). As a form of communication, letters-to-the-editor often contain accounts within which different types of categorization and predication are ascribed to agencies or persons within some sort of temporal framing and sense-making 'grammar'.

In terms of the accounts displayed in the letter-to-the-editor that we discuss below, there is a discernible interplay between account, reason and experience/perceptions. In this instance, the argument is formulated within the frame of devolution in Wales where a complex method of ascribing moral and normative characteristics to a newly established democratic forum is evident (Housley and Wahl-Jorgensen, 2008). In one sense, the example constitutes a fragment and resource that represents and displays the distributed and situated accountable character of the public sphere. It is a sphere within which members, institutions and organizations are practically occasioned through text and categorization.

Example One

1. When devolution was first 'sold to us' in 1997, we were assured that it would bring
2. 'Welsh solutions to Welsh problems' and allow us to at last take responsibility for
3. our own affairs.

4. It therefore seems remarkable that the most significant aspect of the current
5. Assembly has been the total refusal of anyone at a ministerial level to take
6. responsibility for anything.
7. Transparency equals invisibility.

In this example, moral forms of predication are ascribed to an object, namely the devolved Assembly in Wales and, more specifically, those who inhabit the higher levels of Welsh Assembly government: in this case, refusal at 'ministerial level' to 'take responsibility for anything'. This 'refusal' can be understood as a moral matter, as the refusal to take responsibility positions elected representatives as non-accountable in relation to the citizens of Wales.

In constructing the argument, the letter makes use of and displays forms of membership categorization and predication that can be tied to discourses of government and governance. The letter initially provides a form of attribution, 'responsibility', to the citizens of Wales, that '*we*' would be responsible for '*our*' own affairs. The 'we' is then used as a device within which 'government' and 'voters' are separated into categories and the predicate of non-responsibility attributed to the category of 'government'. Here then, the predicate of 'responsibility' is thus placed in a morally organized contrast pair through which the government has not taken 'responsibility', whilst previously promising to give responsibility for self-determination to the people of Wales. From the contrast generated around the notion of 'responsibility', and the notion that the government is *not taking* responsibility, a related predicate of the government is then offered, that of 'transparency . . .' paired with '. . . equals invisibility'. Through the device set up within the first part of the letter, contrasting the notion of responsibility and the lack of it, the further predicate of 'transparency' is heard as ironic when paired with 'invisibility'. That is to say, the political-moral rhetoric of predicated accountability mobilized through 'responsibility for decisions taken' and 'transparency' in those decisions is turned into ironic predicates that in turn generate a form of ludic ambiguity. Responsibility *really means* irresponsibility, as transparency *really means* invisibility.

The contrasts displayed in the account serve to apply a form of moral categorization work where the normative position of the Welsh government is framed in terms of established routine anxieties that are to be found in accounts concerning the citizen's view of government more generally. However, the contrast between responsibility and irresponsibility, transparency and invisibility also serve as resources through which the generation of debate amongst the newspaper readership can be placed and sustained. Moral contrasts are routinely selected and deployed as a means of generating political debates in media settings (Housley, 2002; Housley and Fitzgerald, 2003a, 2003b). This is necessary in order to achieve the clarity and 'sense' of a public discourse object (in this case of a 'letter-to-the-editor' and having 'your say') and the editorial requirements and concern with 'generating debate' (Fitzgerald and Housley, 2002). In the example above, this can be seen to involve the moral and political characteristics of the situated production of the citizen's moral reasoning that concern the wider flow of events within the political landscape of post-devolution Wales.

Contrastive devices: people and acceptable behaviour

In the next example, taken from a radio phone-in programme, a caller creates a personal membership device that includes the host and other categories whilst excluding specified others, a situated production of an 'us and them' contrast device which is organized around the evaluation of public behaviour. In this sense, the caller proffers a form of status degradation account (Garfinkel, 1956) that makes use of the 'us' and 'them' device through which to classify the public behaviour of some through a contrast membership of heterosexuality and homosexuality: where the latter is tied to public behaviour that is seen as morally problematic.

Example Two

```
 1. Host:    why does (.) why does homosexuality appal you so so much
 2. Caller:  well think of it use one's imagination you know you
 3.          perhaps unwittingly go into a pub or bar and you find out
 4.          err to your err that that it is habited by these people
 5.          and they're appalling to watch (.) I'm I'm not a great..you
 6.          know I'm not a member of the Roman Catholic erh
 7.          following but I I do admire the Pope's description of
 8.          homosexuality in that it is an abomination its absolutely
 9.          dreadful
10. Caller:  [and  when  you  start  talking ]
11. Host:    [but I'm I'm not quite sure wha ] what you see when you
12.          go into these pubs or clubs what it is you see that
13.          appalls you
14. Caller:  their general act (.) it way [ you  see ]
15. Host:                                 [showing ] affection for one
16.          another
17. Caller:  urrh yes the way they carry on [I    mean ]
18. Host:                                   [but what ] what do they
19.          carry on Ray.. [what's what's so upsetting]
20. Host:                   [ but ] what is the sort of thing you see Ray
21. Caller:  well they act towards one [another,  I  mean  it  ] absolutely
22. Host:                             [how how do they act ]
23. Caller:  appals me. You see them perhaps perhaps putting an arm
24.          around one another and kissing and things like that it it
25.          is really quite dreadful=
26. Host:    =Ray Ray forgive me, why is somebody kissing somebody else
27.          dreadful isn't that is[n't that an expression of  ] love
28. Caller:                        [there is nothing dreadful ] about
29.          it in its true sense of the word (.) there is uh um and uhh
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At line 5, the caller alludes to unacceptable behaviour that might be observed if someone strayed inadvertently into a gay bar, '*that they're appalling to watch*'. The '*you*' at Line 2 can be heard as a weak inclusive device collecting together at least the caller and host. Whilst 'you' may include the host (and probably listeners), the 'you' does not, however, include 'anyone', as it presumably does not

include homosexuals as it is 'their' behaviour that is 'appalling'. As Sacks (1995: 166) suggests:

> [I]f you use 'you', it at least includes the one you're speaking to, and on the option or on your intention, insofar as those coincide, it can refer to anybody else, or to some category which includes everybody else.

With the construction of '*you know you perhaps unwittingly go into a pub or bar*' (l. 2, 3), the caller moves to include the host as having something in common with him. The description of the public behaviour of homosexuals as 'appalling', produced through the use of 'you know', may on the one hand be seen to include an unstated predicated mutual knowledge of 'their' behaviour (*everyone* knows what *they* do), but also a predicated negative evaluation of such behaviour within the device 'you and me'. Thus, the status of a certain membership group perceived from within the device is negatively constituted without *need of* explication as it is presented as 'common sense' to members of the device. The use of unstated knowledge assumed between members as a way of indicating membership is discussed by Sacks (1995: 163) when he suggests:

> [T]he routine use of these things may operate to provide a great deal of information for the one who uses them; for example, that on some occasion the other does in fact understand what one is talking about, by virtue of the fact that he can continue to put in terms where, quote, nothing explicit has been said – or not much explicit has been said.

In this example, the caller uses an assumed category membership of the host (heterosexuality) to create a device of 'us' (caller and host) predicated with a similar attitude to homosexual activity, that it is 'appalling to watch' (l. 5). In one sense, this form of categorization work provides an example of a contrast device associated with the mundane mechanics of prejudice; namely 'us' and 'them' where a discrepancy between 'these people' and 'acceptable public behaviour' is accounted for through a prejudicial account of difference. This device is then elaborated and expanded upon through further category and predicate work. At line 5, the caller states that although he is not a member of the Roman Catholic Church, he nonetheless admires the supposed teachings of the Pope on this topic. This contrast class, then, is organized around an assumed normative and moral attitude whereby heterosexuals (us) and Catholics (now included with 'us') share a *predicate in common*, namely abhorrence of homosexuality, i.e. it is the predicate that organizes category membership of the device.

However, in this case, the host works to reject/deny membership of this device (namely 'us') and thence the contrast class ('us' and 'them') and the move to generate morally predicated difference between specific categories of members of the general public and acceptable behaviour. By working to undermine the assumed tacit knowledge the caller alludes to, the host, as evidenced in the extracts below, claims ignorance not only of the activities to which the caller implicitly refers but also of the interpretation of these activities.

Transcript Examples

a.   Host: [but I'm I'm not quite sure what] what you see when you
             go into these pubs or clubs what it is you see that appals you
                     . . .

b.   Host: [showing] affection for one another
                     . . .

c.   Host: [but what] what do they carry on Ray.. [what's what's so upsetting]
                     . . .

d.   Host: [but] what is the sort of thing you see Ray
                     . . .

e.   Host: [how how do they act]
                     . . .

f.   Host: = Ray Ray forgive me, why is somebody kissing
             somebody else dreadful isn't
             that is[n't that an expression of] love

That is, the host can be seen to 'play dumb' (Sacks, 1995: 163) as a way of avoid-
ing inclusion in the contrastive device. This can be understood as a strategy
for reducing the generation of predicates that might recognizably infer moral
censure towards a certain group of people's behaviour in public space.

    What is analytically interesting in these examples is the way the device
'people' and the predicates of 'acceptable behaviour in public' are reformulated
and transformed through further membership categorization work that involves
mapping the category-bound attitudes/predicates onto a specific identity group
category's behaviour as part and parcel of an 'us' and 'them' formulation. In other
words, the predicate work invokes variations of predicate display as a situated
frame for categorical sense making and the invocation of an unstated but avail-
able normative inference. Furthermore, in this instance, heterosexuals and Catholics
are conflated through a form of moral predication where anti-homosexual senti-
ments are presented as a position associated with both population categories.

    To challenge the caller's normative and moral predicates, the host plays
dumb about 'what everyone knows' as a way of attempting to avoid inclusion in
the device by making problematic the assumed as 'known in common' predic-
ates of the categories within the device. By continually questioning the caller on
the predicates assumed by the invoked category heterosexual, the host actively
resists inclusion in the device. To be a member of this particular device as it is
being *produced here* would assume common knowledge of, and acceptance of, the
predicates the caller is using to accomplish banal homophobia and the negative
moral assessment of a particular social group.

    Thus, in terms of our preceding analysis in relation to morality and cat-
egorization, some of the properties of contrast devices can be said to include the
following:

1. They form a contrastive resource that can be used to formulate next-turn
    activities such as generating debate or morally positioning objects or persons
    on particular sides of the category bifurcation (e.g. 'them' and 'us').

2. They occur within, are embedded within and are a consequential part of sequential organization.
3. They provide a praxiological resource for generating difference as an accomplished normative inference and resource which can then be used to make further characterizations of persons, groups or collectivities.
4. They generate accountability in terms of binary normative contrast that reduces the complexity of witnessable or reported activity, events, occurrences or claims.
5. They provide the categorical means through which the degradation of status and the transformation of total identities to downgraded positions of identity are mobilized in stories and accounts where degradation matters are being attended to.

Moral relational pairings and normative action

As indicated in previous studies, talk is suffused with descriptions and forms of categorization and categorically ordered accounts that are moral in character (Housley and Fitzgerald, 2002; Jayyusi, 1984, 1991). The terrain of political discourse within media settings is certainly no exception. The use of categories and forms of categorization form part of the mundane methods used to generate debate, represent public views and feelings and bring elected representatives and decision-makers to account. As we have demonstrated in previous work (Fitzgerald and Housley, 2002, 2006; Housley, 2002; Housley and Fitzgerald, 2001, 2003a, 2003b, 2007,), this accounting work within the interactional machinery of interviews makes use of specific moral devices. These devices are configured in terms of a procedural–relational pairing outlined earlier in this article, in the sense that two categories are not only normatively tied, but also that one follows the other; examples of such moral devices often used within political interviews include 'blameworthiness → punishment' and 'intention-avowal → action'. These devices are common features of much political discourse in which senses of accountability are being pursued; they can be understood as readily available, widely understood and sanctioned normative principles. As such, they are resources through which actions can be made normatively accountable. Thus, in the context of political news interviews, they are used as cultural resources for generating senses of 'public' accountability. This takes the form of introducing such devices as necessarily relevant and applicable moral concerns and attempting to characterize members of decision-making collectivities (e.g. the government or a political party) as those whose actions are predicated upon a discrepancy between the categories of such moral device-based pairings. A discrepancy between such pairings (i.e. that in a specific case or set of cases, one part of the pairing has not or is not following the other) constitutes a normative breach. The display or occasioned production of such a breach can invoke interactional and moral repair; repair and its orienting sensibilities is the font from which accountability flows.

In the case of the normative pairing of 'intention-avowal → action', we can see how in the case of political manifesto commitments, an apparent discrepancy between such policy intentions and government actions over a period of elected office could potentially constitute such a normative breach, although the routine display or attribution of such breaches could give rise to an account where unfulfilled election promises suggest there was never any 'real' intention to carry out the promises. Indeed, this separation of 'intention-avowal' and 'action' within the context of election promises and government actions has given rise to the remedial notions of 'core' and 'non-core' election promises in Australia, which serve to maintain the original *intention* of the promise yet allow 'circumstances' to intervene to thwart the fulfilment of the election promise when in government. These 'breaches' can be used as normatively generated features for further accountability work in political interviews and similar settings as a means of attempting to ascribe further relevant categories to such breaches, e.g. untrustworthiness, incompetence or lack of political skill. Therefore, a successful ascription of such a moral discrepancy to a collective or an individual member of that collective, for example a government or minister, is to be (interactively) avoided. An ascription of moral discrepancy to such collectives may be normatively damaging and, once invoked, provides further discursive resources through which such collectives may be questioned, disbelieved or undermined. Consequently, within the context of political discourse in general, and news interviews in particular, methods are employed in order to avoid such descriptions. These methods may take the form of simple answer management or rhetorical and practical means through which such lines of questioning and forms of moral predication are fudged or resisted (Clayman and Heritage, 2002; Housley, 2002). However, in addition to the specific moral discrepancy device (i.e. intention-avowal → action) discussed above and explored in previous work (Housley, 2002; Housley and Fitzgerald, 2003b), further moral discrepancy devices can be observed in accountability work within political news media sites and settings. Of particular interest here is the moral discrepancy device blame-worthiness → punishment. In the following example, we explore the use of this device in a political news interview, both in terms of accountability work and the management of the topic by the interviewer and guest. The materials examined here concern the BSE[2] enquiry and the Phillips report in the UK as displayed within a broadcast political interview. The Phillips report had suggested that individual blame was not appropriate in the case of the BSE crisis, whilst a culture of secrecy had provided a source of problems in dealing with the crisis at an organizational level.

The following extracts are gathered from the programme 'On the Record', a TV news and current affairs programme broadcast by the BBC on 11 February 2001. In the following extract, the interviewer begins to question the guest on the public enquiry into the BSE crisis in the UK. The interviewer suggests that the government will be using the previous government's handling of the BSE crisis as an electoral resource during the upcoming election campaign.

Example Three

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 1. I:    You're going to be using, as I understand it (.) the BSE crisis and the way
 2.        the Tories handled it (.) to attack them during the election campaign when
 3.        it arrives, but you have a problem here don't you, because you don't
 4.        seem to think anybody is to blame (.) that is to say, nobody is being
 5.        punished for it, therefore we can assume can we not, that nobody is to
 6.        blame (.) Why isn't anybody being punished? It's a question an awful lot of
 7.        people want answered.
 8. G:    Look (.) firstly I think the electorate made their mind up on the
 1.        Conservatives' handling of the BSE tragedy at the last general election,
 2.        The nineteen-ninety-seven general election. The whole purpose of the
 3.        government's interim response to Phillips is to look forward, not to look
 4.        backwards, and to make sure we put arrangements in place so that
 5.        something like this never happens again, or at least we've taken every
 6.        step we possibly can to avoid it.
14. I:    But I think if I were a farmer whose livelihood had been destroyed (.) or
15.        even more (.) much more (.) if I were the parent of a child who had died (.) I
16.        would say fine (.) that's a perfectly good politician's answer (.) but I want
17.        somebody's neck on the block for this (.) I want somebody to be punished
18.        for it (.) it's a completely human response isn't it?
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The interviewer notes that the potential (suggested) strategy presents a problem for the government in the context of the recent findings of the BSE enquiry and the government response to it. The interviewer suggests that in fact the response represents a 'problem' (l. 3) – namely, that the response does not constitute a clear allocation of blame. This is qualified through the elicitation of a form of predication tied to the category of 'blame-worthiness' (l. 3–4). The categories of blame-worthiness and punishment can be understood to form a moral device which can be heard to constitute a relational and procedural normative pairing, between the category of moral accountability found in blame-worthiness and the expected next activity of punishment. This moral sequence of categorization is reiterated through the way in which the interviewer affirms the moral device that is being introduced in the opening account; 'nobody is being punished for it, *therefore we can assume can we not, that nobody is to blame*', that nobody is taking responsibility for the problem (l. 4–5). The suggestion is then closed with an affirmation of the second part of the pairing (l. 6), 'Why isn't anybody being punished'. The introduction of the moral device is characterized by an elicitation of the first (l. 4). The interviewer asks why no one is being blamed, why nobody is being thought to be responsible, highlighting the issue that there is no procedure for allocating responsibility, located in the fact that no one is being punished. He continues by characterizing such a question as one that is of interest to a 'lot of people' (l. 6–7). As this commentary suggests, the introduction of the moral device is organized in a specific way. It begins with the first part of the moral equation, namely blame-worthiness, relates the second half of the equation in terms of a relational and procedural pair (blame-worthiness and punishment) and ends with a question that affirms and displays the second half of the moral equation, namely why no one in government is being punished for the BSE crisis. It is in this way that the moral device of blame-worthiness $\rightarrow$ punishment,

within the context of the BSE debate, is introduced by the interviewer within the question/answer format of the political interview. Furthermore, the closing question provides the ground for establishing a procedure for ascribing a *discrepancy* between blame and punishment within the context of the BSE crisis. In this case, a *possible* discrepancy being ascribed to government, i.e. between the allocation of blame not resulting in some form of punishment, is one that can be used as a resource for generating potentially damaging characterizations of the government to which the guest belongs. However, in this instance, whilst the option for dealing with such moral device-oriented questioning remains a possible strategy, the option of not even recognizing the device remains a possibility for the guest. This is a morally dangerous strategy, as non-recognition of the moral principle can provide a further resource for the interviewer in pursuit of the generation of accountable responses or characterizing government policy and action in an unfavourable manner (Housley, 2002).

The guest's response exhibits a standard method for dealing with questions that generate potential spaces within which moral discrepancy or a moral vacuum may be ascribed to the collective that the guest represents. In terms of 'answer management', the guest utilizes some methods associated with providing a fudged response to morally searching question formats. The guest does respond to the category-bound topic of 'people' by pointing toward the 'electorate' that can be understood to be a relevant co-category of the device 'population'. However, the issue of the allocation of blame and punishment is not referred to. The guest refers to the previous government's handling of the BSE crisis, reflected, it is suggested, by the election result in 1997. This is then followed by a description of the government's 'interim' response to the Phillips report which is characterized as looking forward, holding a concern 'not to look backwards' (l. 11–12) and ensuring that policies or 'arrangements' are put in place in order that 'something like this never happens again' (l. 13). This category display represents a form of fudged response that utilizes topical complexity as a means of responding to the moral device introduced by the interviewer in the account/question format. As stated previously (Housley, 2002: 17), topical complexity can be understood as a:

> . . . manoeuvre [that] facilitates multiple local rationalities, hearings and histories of the exchange. After all, it is a design feature of such [broadcast] settings and talk that it is recorded and segments may be replayed and discussed and different claims about what has been meant voiced within different news contexts.

Whilst topical complexity may be used to generate topical coherence in political news interviews, such topical complexity serves to generate incoherence by providing the materials for fudging the response in terms of a number of alternate category connections that are not directly (although they may represent preferred topics for those being questioned or providing answers in political news interviews) related to the question – in this case, questions concerning the allocation of blame and punishment.

The interviewer responds to this fudged response to the question *and* moral device that is, from the interviewer's perspective and category display, being pursued. The response takes the form of two condensed stories that ground the

moral configuration of blame-worthiness → punishment in terms of specific membership categories – namely, a farmer whose livelihood had been destroyed (l. 15) and a parent 'of a child who had died' (l. 16). The interviewer suggests that members of the same categories would be inclined to allocate blame and deliver punishment (l. 18), i.e. they would be oriented to the moral device set up, described and initiated at the beginning of the interview which the guest has, so far, not recognized or chosen to refer to. The device, in this instance, is expressed in terms of wanting 'somebody's neck on the block for this'. The account is, again, closed with a question, namely that orientation to the moral device of blame-worthiness → punishment is a 'human response'. The duplicative organization of categorization and devices (Watson, 1997) enables a framing of the moral device blame-worthiness → punishment within the context of the BSE crisis as one that is both personally realized and topically relevant (the 'farmer', the 'parent') and universally recognizable and understandable ('human response'). This pitches the device not merely as one that is locally specific or particular but as one that is also universal or 'normative'. This is, in one sense, a reversal of synecdoche, in which particular circumstances (as represented in the condensed stories of the farmer and the parent) are mapped on to normative categories – in this case, typical human responses. Finally, in terms of this analytic discussion, we argue that moral relational devices can be understood to display certain properties that can be summarized as follows:

1. They form a normative pairing that make praxiological sense within a given cultural field or form of life.
2. They occur, are embedded within and are a consequential part of sequential organization.
3. They are produced as a product of situated action and categorization work.
4. They are used to generate accountability on behalf of actors, agencies or institutions or indeed particular versions of events or 'social reality'. As such, they form a categorical resource through which motive, as vocabulary, is ascribed.
5. They are recognizable signatures of norms-in-action. As normative particles, they are central to our understanding of 'ontological politics'.
6. They have a temporal-moral relation so that one is expected to follow the other.
7. As normative pairings, they bifurcate the possibility of polymorphous versions of events and therefore reduce complexity.
8. Their display is recognizable and therefore open to observational and empirical scrutiny as a dimension of members' practical methods.

Conclusion

In this article, we have attempted to examine how specific forms of categorization work are utilized in various forms of accountable interaction and published texts – in this case, a letter-to-the-editor of a national newspaper, a public access phone-in and a broadcast political interview. We note that these practices constitute

forms of action that generate and position groups, agencies, institutions and individuals in relation to types of accountable world views. In doing so, they accomplish not only a discursive ordering but also establish various situated moral logics that underpin the constitution of social relations (Latimer, 2004). The examination of situated categorization work and the analysis of specific moral-relational pairings and contrastive devices provide a means of exploring normative regulation as situated practice. The analysis of such 'regulative practice' as a situated activity within the mediated public sphere (Fitzgerald and Housley, 2007; Housley and Fitzgerald, 2007), and within other settings, is central to an understanding of how contemporary 'cultural politics' is played out in practice in public domains. Indeed, Membership Categorization Analysis may offer an analytical method for describing and understanding the mundane mechanics of the politics of recognition (Smith and Tatalovich, 2003: 30) in future avenues of analysis and research. MCA serves to reveal the ways in which populations and constituent identity groups are categorized, morally constituted and accounted for in practice which in turn can inform questions about the sociological understanding of normative regulation and norms-in-action in relation to the current state of cultural and morality politics where questions of 'recognition' have become paramount. In doing so, MCA (as a component of EM) may provide an analytic frame with which to explore cultural politics and its close cousin identity politics as mundane but ubiquitous interactional matters. In this sense, the various ceremonies of truth and 'fact finding' that pervade social, political and democratic practices (Lynch and Bogen, 1996) can be explicated in terms of practical moral reasoning and categorical regulation of membership, i.e. who belongs where, and when and how they should or should not act. It is these practices that constitute norms-in-action.

The contribution of such an approach is a programme of research that unravels the precise processes and contextual arrangements associated with mundane civility, prejudice, communicative rationality, understanding and moral conflict that suffuse the mediated (and non-mediated) public sphere. In this way, the analysis presented in this article serves to demonstrate how the normative character of certain category formulations has a strong association with onto-logical politics and how the mundane reproduction of contested culture(s) and politics is a situated social organizational practice.

NOTES

1. See also Kitzinger's (2008) discussion of the 'if/then' sequence (as part of her response to Wowk's critique) in her identification and analysis of 'heteronormativity' as a social norm. Whilst acknowledging the sequential organization of 'if/then' as a way of exploring social norms, however, she neglects the possible categorial

organization which, we argue here, provides a valuable component to the analysis of norms-in-action.

2. The findings of the public enquiry into the UK government handling of the BSE (also known as 'mad cow disease' which was passed to cattle through tainted feedstock and humans through infected meat products) crisis was published in the form of the Phillips report. The report was widely understood to avoid issues of individual blame and suggested that a 'culture of secrecy' and the structures of government were the principle sources of problems in relation to the management and handling of the crisis.

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APPENDIX

Transcript notation

I = interviewer
Host/Caller = as in transcript
G = guest

The following conventions, developed by Gail Jefferson, were used for my transcripts. These conventions denote lapses in time, overlapping talk, pace and, in some instances, pitch, pronunciation and stress. I have only included those symbols used in my transcriptions.

Numbers in parentheses: e.g. (1.0) denotes the approximate duration pauses or gaps between utterances in seconds or tenths of seconds
Point in parentheses: (.) indicates a 'micro-pause' of less than two tenths of a second
Letters, words or activities in parentheses: (cough) sounds, words or activities that are distinct or difficult to locate to a particular interlocutor(s)
Square brackets: [ ] mark the points where talk overlaps
Full colons: (::) denote an extension in the vowel or consonant sound in the utterance of a word
Emphasis: (CAPITALS) indicates specific emphasis and change in volume
Underlined word: (as we said) indicates pitch change
Equals sign: = identifies a 'latching' between utterances, whereby utterances follow each other rapidly after a preceding utterance.

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