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Making a Case for Client Insistence in Social Work Interaction

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It has been argued that the goals of the institution can shape the talk therein. What happens when a client consistently invokes topics and role identities that are outside the parameters of the institution, insisting on his or her own goals and gaining and maintaining a control of the floor usually expected of practitioners? Client power is often characterized as resistance to the practitioner or the institution. However, we argue that at times client power should be viewed rather as “client insistence.” This article seeks to describe client insistence in its own right by analyzing several caseworker–client interactions within a single client case. Using a combination of discourse analysis and ethnographic methods, we examine the features of insistence in caseworker–client interaction, including client topic initiation and control, preference structure, and affiliation. We also describe features of the discourse more broadly, such as the content of the talk and the role-identity categories generated through talk. In so doing, we describe some features of client insistence, heretofore unexamined in these terms; propose a new way to talk about client power in institutional talk; and explain what functions such actions may have in social work interaction. We argue that the client uses insistence to develop a courageous lifestyle that seeks an authentic self-attitude by taking control of the interaction and asserting his role as a father and as an autonomous individual over his role as a homeless client at the shelter.

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INTRODUCTION

Insistence in Institutional Interaction

Much, though not all, institutional talk is characterized by attention to the differences that set it apart from everyday social interactions. Although many scholars have discussed the challenges of separating the institutional from the everyday (Benwell & Stokoe, 2006), there is agreement that institutional interactions may vary from everyday ones in the way the institution, its goals, and its roles are invoked in talk. Drew and Heritage (1992) argue that the goals of the institution can shape the talk therein. What happens when a client consistently invokes topics and role identities that are outside the parameters of the institution, insisting on his or her own goals and gaining and maintaining a control of the floor usually expected of practitioners? Client power is often characterized as resistance to the practitioner or the institution. We argue that at times client power should be viewed rather as “client insistence.” We therefore seek to describe client insistence in its own right. We examine the features of insistence in caseworker–client interaction, including client topic initiation (rather atypical in social work interaction where the right to question predominantly lays with the social worker). We also describe features of the discourse more broadly, such as the content of the talk and the role-identity categories generated through talk. In so doing, we describe some features of client insistence, heretofore unexamined in these terms; propose a new way to talk about client power in institutional talk; and explain what functions such actions may have in social work interaction.

Insistence in Discourse

The meager literature that addresses insistence relates to pragmatics and language learning, a seemingly unrelated field. Scholars in this area examine language learners’ perceptions of insistence after refusing an invitation (Farnia, 2012; Felix-Brasdefer, 2008). Felix-Brasdefer (2008) examined non-native Spanish speakers’ refusals of invitations. Although insisting is considered polite and affiliative in Spanish-speaking contexts, it is often considered rude and imposing in the United States. His study asked participants after role play questions about insistence (familiarity with cross-cultural differences and expectations of insistence). Although the term is not defined in his study, it is characterized by participants feeling “pressed” by someone and as “persisting” to invite. Importantly, repeated series of insistences contributed to more uncomfortable responses from participants. Using Felix-Brasdefer’s study as a launching point, Farnia (2012) used discourse completion tests to ascertain how Chinese and Malaysian university students refused requests to attend a party. Like the former study, through post-test response reports students were asked about their perception of

insistence after refusing their friend or professor's invitations, including whether they thought the friend would insist on their changing plans and whether insisting was rude. Insistence is taken as a given in each of these areas of study and not studied as an accomplishment in its own right. In neither study is the concept of "insisting" defined or unpacked; however, Felix-Brasdefer's (2008) characterization of insistence as a verbal pressing of one's previously stated opinions or preferences, often repeatedly, is a useful starting place for our examination of insistence in social work interaction.

Although not referencing "insistence" directly, we also draw from Haworth (2006), who conducted a study of police interviews and found that although there was strong evidence against the suspect Dr. Harold Shipman, he repeatedly succeeded in taking the floor and determining the course of the communication process. In other words, the suspect demonstrated "his unwillingness to comply with the restrictions imposed upon him by his role as responder, and has also displayed his ability to challenge [P]" (p. 746). Here, we argue that insistence is characterized by a variety of discourse practices. We show how insistence is communicated through a client's persistent departure from caseworker-sanctioned and/or institutionally preferred topics of conversation. We explain how dispreferred responses to practitioner questions, disaffiliation, topic initiation, topic control, and the content of client-initiated topics are used to introduce and maintain new, client-initiated topics. To a lesser extent we describe how a client uses epistemic stance (Heritage, 2013) to provide convincing evidence for his insistent claims. We argue that these discourse practices allow the client to insist, which lends itself to the development of a role identity separate from the institutional one (i.e., "client") created by the caseworker.

Topic initiation and control. Button and Casey (1985) suggest that when someone initiates a topic, there is a presumed belief that the topic is newsworthy and that the recipient has some, albeit potentially minimal, knowledge of the news item beforehand. They suggest that presenting a newsworthy item provides an opportunity for an extended response from the recipient and asks the recipient to orient to that newsworthy item in their future talk. This is important because, as conversation analysts have pointed out, a participant's orientation to an established topic is preferred, and his or her lack of orientation is a dispreferred response, suggesting a lack of affiliation with the originator of the topic.

In institutional interactions, practitioners generally initiate topics, guide or control talk, and provide follow-up questions. In the social work context, which bridges private and institutional discourses (Drew & Heritage, 1992), van de Mierop and van der Haar (2008) argue that client identities (e.g., client as fearful, client as shameful) are established and perpetuated through topic initiation and control. Using Wong's (2006) analysis of the relationship between question formation and power, they assert the social worker has more power given the sheer

number of questions she asked compared with her client; therefore, her questions shaped the content of the talk. However, the client's talk introduces topics (e.g., shame) that function to position her vis-à-vis a particular identity, despite the social worker's efforts to redirect such identity work. Our argument for insistence, following van de Mierop and van der Haar, in part explains the connection between the topics established by and controlled by the client in this social work interaction and his or her caseworker's orientation to those topics and control.

Preference and affiliation. McDermott and Tylbor (1986) suggest that practitioners need clients to collude, or participate, with the goals established in interaction. However, in some situations the client's part of the discourse is not oriented toward the institutional goals or those established by his or her practitioner. In most studies (cf. Juhila, Caswell, & Raitakari, 2014) this is labeled as resistance because the client's interactional contribution is counterproductive to achieving (these) institutional goals. Collaboration therefore becomes difficult, and the institution's goals and the client's remain separate, persisting alongside each other, perhaps only occasionally intersecting.

In conversation analysis, preference structure is used to describe expectations for talk that are established between a first and a second pair part. When the recipient of a statement does not provide an expected or anticipated response, that response is dispreferred. By providing responses that are dispreferred and/or disaffiliative, many scholars suggest that clients are actively or passively resisting (Juhila, Caswell, and Raitakari, 2014).

Disalignment, which Stivers (2008) defines as a situation wherein the agendas of the participants are at odds, and disaffiliation, in which a participant disagrees and/or distances him- or herself from a particular line of questioning, a diagnosis, or an intervention (Makri-Tsilipakou, 1994), manifests through a variety of discursive practices, including verbal challenges (could include joking, sarcasm, downgrading optimism, overt rejections of content presented by the social worker) and (at the extreme) physically leaving the interactional space (walking out) (Juhila et al., 2014). Passive forms of resistance are described by Silverman (1997) and Hutchby (2007) as particularly shown in minimal responses such as "I don't know" or "I don't remember" and silence.

Often, disaffiliative and disaligned contexts in social work interaction are characterized as resistance in which the client actively or passively rejects a caseworker's offer to collaborate on his or her request for information. However, we argue that another possibility exists: client insistence. We argue that client discursive insistence pairs disaffiliative/dispreferred responses (directed at the practitioner) with persistent topic initiation, control, and agenda setting. We see a caseworker who orients to client topic initiation with dispreferred responses and who routinely attempts to reroute conversation toward topics that are, albeit informally, deemed appropriate. Thus, we see, in this study, a client who not only

provides dispreferred responses to his caseworker's questions and requests but who repeatedly initiates divergent topics that assert his own agenda. Particularly given the proclivity toward client-centered practice in social work (Mearns & Thorne, 2007), we must turn our attention to client insistence, unseating the tacit assumption that institutional interactions should always be understood vis-à-vis the institution and its representatives.

METHODS

This study uses a combination of ethnographic methods¹ and discourse analysis to explore caseworker–client interaction in an urban U.S. men's homeless shelter over 9 months. Written observational field notes over 9 months and 52 audio-recordings of each caseworker–client interaction over the 9-month period were collected and analyzed. Although insistent talk occurred in nearly all caseworker–client cases, this article draws data from one particular client case that illustrated such insistence. All data were transcribed. This analysis explores one case that included five separate caseworker–client interactions and over 70 minutes of audio data.

Analytic Approach

This study presents one exemplary case (including four caseworker–client interactions over time) from a linguistic ethnography of caseworker–client interaction in a New York City men's homeless shelter over a 9-month period. While exploring the broader question—how do caseworkers and clients interact—this article specifically describes how insistence is constructed through caseworker–client talk by exploring the talk of one shelter caseworker, Ms. Innis, and her client, Henry,² during their regularly scheduled, one-on-one interactions.

Participants for the larger study from which this draws were chosen through a convenience sample and include 6 caseworkers and 18 clients in the corpus, and participant selection for this study was based on the occurrence of insistent talk across a case set (all meetings between one caseworker and one client). All participants gave informed consent after reading the study's parameters in the language of their choice. Data were collected as part of an institutional ethnography. Each meeting was audio-recorded, and the researcher took field notes and transcribed as the caseworker and client spoke to ensure each meeting was adequately captured. Data are analyzed using discourse analysis informed

¹Ethnography is a longitudinal field method used by anthropology that emphasizes written field notes during participant observation, interviews, and other qualitative data (LeCompte & Preisse, 1993).

²In all cases, pseudonyms were used to protect the identity of all participants.

by applied conversation analysis (Kitzinger, 2008), which combines the microanalytic, less-interpretive approach—conversation analysis (Sacks, 1992)—with an interest in specific interactional and institutional context and an eye toward understanding findings in light of social theory.

Although this study describes one caseworker–client case from the sample, the discourse practices highlighting resistant talk cut across the 52-interaction data set. Still, we do not aim to generalize to all caseworkers at this shelter or to the implementation of city policies shelter-wide. Rather, we seek to make a more theoretical contribution by describing how one client constructs his insistence over the course of his stay in shelter.

Participants

Participants include Ms. Innis and her client Henry, both of whom were chosen by convenience and were two among a sample of 5 female caseworkers and 18 homeless male clients participating. Ms. Innis was an African American woman in her twenties with several years of experience as a case manager. She had between 25 and 40 clients on her caseload. Her talk was consistent across her six long-term, participating clients. Although this article examines her interactions with Henry, the practices described represent her discourse generally.

The stakes at the shelter were high for Henry, a White, middle-aged, long-term shelter stayer whom the shelter administration wanted placed into housing as soon as possible. He has been cited in the past for inappropriate actions, including using drugs in the shelter. Now, he had been asked to secure stable income through public assistance and social security; however, he had been unsuccessful in acquiring the funds because he did not have appropriate identification. He had yet to comply with most shelter requirements when he left the shelter.

Henry was a long-term stayer when this study began, surpassing the 9-month benchmark for leaving the shelter established by homeless services and strictly enforced by shelter staff. He had been in this and other shelters long enough to qualify as a long-term stayer, giving him housing placement priority and more frequent meetings with his caseworker. Henry had a broken hip and was wheelchair bound during data collection. Some caseworkers suggested that he also had a prescription drug addiction, which he repeatedly denied. He began meeting with Ms. Innis in the winter, which was cold and very snowy. Homeless clients were required to leave the shelter during the daytime, and on several occasions Henry claimed to be stranded in the snow far away from the shelter, which prohibited him from signing for his bed at night. As such, he had to sleep in his wheelchair in a communal shelter space. His long-term status, his continued noncompliance with shelter requirements, and his presumed drug use raised the stakes for Henry considerably such that the shelter was eager for him to be placed, particularly in a drug rehabilitation program. He rejected this type of

placement as insufficient and inappropriate, insisting on finding an apartment where he could house his child. Shelter processes, housing, and his reactions to his housing options surface across their meetings. The researcher (R) is also present and referred to occasionally in their discussions.

Having lost his child in a custody battle, Henry wanted to secure housing quickly so he could create a stable living environment for his child. He found the actions at the shelter counterproductive to this end (as revealed in the excerpts), because the shelter wanted to place him in a drug program. The meetings described in this article present demands made by the shelter that contrast with Henry's desires. The gap between these demands and desires seems to widen with each excerpt.

DATA ANALYSIS

Insistence is achieved through a variety of means. Each of the following three excerpts focus on elucidating one of the primary means in which insistence is constructed through talk. These discursive practices do not function in isolation from each other, however. As such, the final excerpt presents how these practices function together, allowing the client to insist.

The first excerpt describes how insistence is constructed, in part, through dispreference. The opening line begins with Ms. Innis, the case worker (CW), looking for and unable to find her business cards. Henry (C) has a different agenda to discuss.

Excerpt 1: Insistence through dispreference

CW: I gave 'em all out.

C: It's a funny thing. You're living in a place, that's supposed to be a disabled shelter, your hands are numb, you can't move, you're stuck it's a very bad situation, and you call and they hang up on you. And that's really something.

CW: Henry XXXX(indistinguishable speech), Henry.

C: XXXX, and they not only hung up on me they hung up on my doctor they hung up on my lawyer they hung up on everybody.

CW: That's XXXX. call me directly.

C: yup.

CW: 163 is the extension--you press 9,

C: the funny thing is in the snow, you know, you're stranded in the wheelchair in the snowstorm and you tell that that you're gonna be late. "YOU KNOW WHAT IT IS" (mimicks being on the phone) "YOU LOST YOUR BED!" Click (hangs up mimed phone).

[extended silence--moving papers around]

CW: So tomorrow before you leave come and let me do a new service plan on you

C: Well tomorrow I'm going to get the TB

CW: You're gonna get the TB but I still need to do a service plan

C: yeah--I have I have to find out what I'm doing tomorrow XXXX

Henry (C) begins by initiating a new topic: a critical commentary on the functioning of the shelter (line 2). He characterizes the actions of the shelter as "funny" (line 2, line 14), mitigating the obviousness of the critique. He describes

an incident (lines 2–4), framing it as a hypothetical scenario that extends beyond him though the avoidance of “I” and using general “you.” He concludes his narrative through a closing remark “and that’s really something,” which supplies an assessment of the story (Hall, 1997) with an upgrade (“really”) that adds emotional tenor to the narrative.

Ms. Innis does not orient to Henry’s trouble-telling narrative but instead tries to cut off the complaint (line 6), which is a dispreferred response. In addition to her lack of orientation, she uses his name, which Clayman (2002) suggests is a form of critique and therefore also dispreferred. Henry, in turn, does not orient to Ms. Innis’ attempt to corral the conversation. Rather, he takes two more lengthy turns to tell his story (lines 7 and 8 and 12–15). These narratives are told from his point of view and close with an extreme case formulation (line 8) that works to defend his claim that the shelter is against everyone who tries to help him (lawyer, doctor, etc.).

In lines 9 and 11, Ms. Innis attempts to provide solutions for Henry, but he does not orient toward her solutions. His acknowledgement in line 10 is a minimal response token (Gardener, 2001) that precedes disagreement (Pomerantz, 1984), the brevity of the utterance perhaps suggesting impatience. He returns in line 12 to his complaint, once again characterizing it as “funny” to mitigate the severity of his critique. The long pause (line 16) signals a dispreferred response to his story, which Ms. Innis neither orients toward nor acknowledges his narrative. Instead, she uses “so” (line 17), a discourse marker that indicates a change of topic as well as possibly a cause–effect relationship; this “so” makes it seem as though she is connecting her talk to prior talk, without doing so: the service plan is a new topic entirely. Ms. Innis has pulled the discursive reins and, interestingly, asks him to “let her” do a service plan, implying that Henry is in control of the interaction.

Henry’s “well” (line 19) offers a dispreferred response that maintains his control and dominance in the conversation by signaling his disaffiliation with his caseworker’s request to do a service plan (Pomerantz, 1984). In describing alternate plans he continues to insist on his own agenda. When Ms. Innis delineates their division of labor (line 20), he provides a qualified agreement, saying “yeah.” Again, this “yeah” preempts content (and an agenda) that directly contrasts with Ms. Innis’ utterance. By explaining to Ms. Innis that he needs to consult his schedule, he asserts an identity that is external to his client identity.

The next excerpt comes from an interaction that begins directly after Henry attended a large case conference meeting involving shelter administrative staff and specialists from the city. The excerpt, again between Henry and Ms. Innis, takes place minutes after the case conference. Although Ms. Innis was unable to attend, she explains that the position of those at the case conference is that Henry be admitted into a drug program for detoxification. Henry rejects the claim that he is (or was) taking drugs. The interaction begins with the caseworker behind her desk and the client sitting, though facing her, in his wheelchair outside of her office. This excerpt illustrates another aspect of client insistence: topic control.

Excerpt 2: Topic control

CW: you're too far away from us.

C: got good hearing

CW: you got good hearing that's nice to \$khhnow. thank you.\$

C: ((coughs))

CW: (Aside to self: nine missed calls gol-ly. Okay, okay, okay, you have to wait. Ug. Nine to twelve, Jesus. Yeah, you feel it? I FELT important this morning.)(.) So Henry, (.) umm (.) that was case conference, I'm sorry it went like that I didn't even know they locked me out of the meetings but (.) [phone rings: WHAT?! picks it up: Ms. Innis, Good Afternoon....Thanks. \$Whew!\$]

C: ((loudly pounds fist on desk: BAM! BAM! BAM! BAM! BAM! BAM!
BAM!BAM!BAM!BAM!)) You look nervous, Innis what's the matter with you?

CW: I'm not nervous I have a headache.

C: I gotta go (starts to wheel away)

CW: Where're you going?

C: I gotta get my money

CW: Oh °ya gotta get money.° Alright so (.) basically what they basi- did you understand what they was telling you this time?

C: No, I didn't even listen to 'em I don't listen to lies.

CW: hhh ((laughter))

C: Smithfield (name of drug rehab center). You know I'm not on methadone like Torres put in my chart I was on methadone all this fucking bullshit, go on what are you saying?

CW: Okay, so basically they're saying that you have to take a drug program, Henry.

C: I'm not taking a drug program. You gotta be a moron! but go on.

CW: Right, (.) well,(.) you gonna make me say things and then you're gonna sahhhhh somethinhhhh a[hhhh come back

C: [No, I'm just telling you I'm not on drugs, I fell and I broke my hip that's what's wrong. but go on.

CW: So=

C: =never been on methadone like Mendez said, never been on the methadone program like Mendez said, never none of this, so what?

CW: so the problem is: (.) basicall[y what they

C: [there is no problem my god!

CW: are you gonna let me talk or,

C: I'm telling you I'm not going to a drug program it's ridiculous. (.) Never been on methadone program never been none of that so I don't wanna talk! I don't even, (.) I haven't even seen my chart.

CW: (Shouting) Well, I know you're not on methadone. And I know that you [phone rings: Oh my God. Ms. Innis Good Afternoon....hangs up. To self: I gotta eat a nasty hot dog and XXXX]

C: XXXX, what's the outcome?

CW: Okay well, the outcome is they're gonna put you out the shelter if you don't take ↑ it.

C: I'm not taking it.

CW: So where you gonna go?

C: I'm going to a lawyer.

CW: Well, besides a lawyer cause the lawyer's gonna take some ↑time with it be ↑lieve me they gonna give you a few ↑days and then you gotta find a place to ↑go if you don't take the ↑treatment!

C: Treatment!? (Grumbles as he rolls his wheelchair away)

CW: Henry, come on we're talking right now!!!

C: XXXX

CW: Henry:!!!

C: Innis, Ain't nothing you can do! XXXX

CW: HENRY [picks up phone and calls....]

Excerpt 1 revealed how Henry used dispreferred responses to derail his caseworker's agenda and insist on his own. Excerpt 2 shows how Henry controls the topic through both talk and physical movement. Henry sets the agenda through a series of physical moves that begin, end, and interrupt talk. Henry's physical movements insert and withdraw him from the interaction. The meeting begins with Henry physically outside the office and ends with him rolling his wheelchair out of her office, with Ms. Innis still trying to communicate, shouting after him. In line 15 he also begins to wheel himself away, initiating a potential physical break in their talk. Moreover, at the beginning of the excerpt, Ms. Innis initiates a discussion about Henry's case conference (line 10), using discourse marker "so" to change the topic (Schiffrin, 1987) and highlighting the delicacy around the introduction of this topic through a hesitation marker "umm" (blinded reference 1). Her agenda setting is, however, disrupted by a phone call. Normally, the caseworker initiates the beginning of the meeting; however, in line 10, when Ms. Innis finishes her phone call, Henry initiates interaction by repeatedly pounding his fist on the table, setting the tone for the meeting.

He controls the interaction thereafter through strategic utterances that signal his chosen concession of the floor ("go on what are you saying," "but go on"). He verbally hands over turns at talk to her, which is a deviant sequential organization in institutional communication (Heritage & Clayman, 2010). Seemingly juxtaposing their roles, Henry takes the lead in the conversation, asking Ms. Innis for her feelings and controlling the topic. In lines 27, 31, and 44 Henry verbally relinquishes the floor to Ms. Innis, telling her that she may "go on" and explain her side. In lines 34 and 44 Henry acts as questioner, prompting his caseworker for answers to his queries, reversing the standard protocol for the question-answer sequences. Henry ends the conversation by physically removing himself and by invoking an extreme case formulation ("ain't nothing you can do!") that neutralizes the impact of her work and profession. Although he allows Ms. Innis her turns at talk, by controlling the conversation he ultimately rejects her suggestions. Ultimately, he rejects her claim to power by controlling the conversation, disaligning with the topics she introduces, and insisting on his own approaches to solving his homelessness.

Henry's talk allows him to construct an identity for himself that he protects through control of the floor and disaffiliation. He positions himself in a moral category: "non drug user, deserving of better treatment." He controls the topic through strategic verbal and physical disalignment with Ms. Innis' talk and the institutional goals she establishes, which allows him to state his own interests. He is not only resisting Ms. Innis' institutional goals but, more importantly perhaps, pursuing his own and insisting upon her acknowledgment of those goals as legitimate and addressable within the institutional frame.

Although the previous excerpts highlight Henry's insistence through dispreference and topic control, the following excerpt highlights a potential feature of client insistence: epistemic stance. In suggesting that his idea for his

path is better than his social worker's, Henry positions himself through his talk as an authority.

Excerpt 3: Insistence through establishment of epistemic authority

CW: can we go over there? (.4) together?

C: yeah.=

CW: =to see what the problem is?

C: hmm-well the problem is, i don't have ID dey say.

CW: so why shelter ID don't work?

C: it don't work.=

CW: =and a residency letter.

C: maybe i don't know. you're gonna hafta find out i went there tree times.

CW: i know that. I know that. Um,

C: i gave you the letter they ga:ve,=

CW: =i know. i know.

(.2)

The conversation here revolves around Henry's difficulty accessing social security funds. He and his caseworker debate the reason for the problem, and although the caseworker is speculative, Henry offers what Pomerantz (1980) calls type 1 (or first hand) knowledge. He suggests to Ms. Innis, before the excerpt begins, that he has been to the office three times and has had no success. He then tells his caseworker she will have to go to figure it out. Ms. Innis rejects his request, offering to visit the social security office together, suggesting they together inquire about why he cannot receive his checks (line 3). Here, Henry uses "hmm," a hesitation marker, and "well," a discourse marker, suggesting an assessment of disagreement (Schiffrin, 1987). This can be interpreted as a powerful move, as he diverges from his caseworker's opinions. He then claims epistemic authority, using indirect reported speech (Coulmas, 1986; Holt, 1996) to support his stance that the problem is his lack of identification, saying "I don't have ID dey say."

Ms. Innis, then, orients to Henry's expertise by asking a follow-up question about identification. Although his first answer is decisive, his second "maybe I don't know" concedes some authority while using "stake inoculation" phrases like "I don't know," which claim innocence and therefore resistance to questioning or accusations (Potter, 1996). He once again assigns his caseworker the task of "finding out" (line 8). However, although stake inoculation may signal resistance, the primary goal in this interaction is insistence: insistence on his agendas, topics, and role identities.

Henry's claim to epistemic authority and his flipping of the traditional caseworker-client relationship power dynamic (particularly by assigning her tasks) makes sense given that insistence is, in part, a discourse practice that involves taking control of the agenda and conversational topic. His insistence, then, demands an alternate role identity for himself and his caseworker. Hall, Sarangi, and Slembrouck (1999) suggest that the role identity includes "the attributes and dispositions expected of those who fill such roles" (p. 294). His "identity-in-interaction"

(Aronsson, 1998), or the identity he develops through his talk, makes claims to authority and task assignment that are more often observed with social workers. Henry's claims to agency and Ms. Innis' orientations to those claims are explored more in subsequent excerpts.

In this final meeting, Ms. Innis and Henry discuss the steps he is taking to leave the shelter, vis-à-vis the institutional goals Ms. Innis has discussed with him in previous meetings. CW2 is a second case manager who shares the office with Ms. Innis. Of all excerpts seen thus far, this one highlights passionate disalignment and a clear and repeated insistence on his strategy for leaving the shelter, which stands in contrast with his caseworker' approach. In some way, this excerpt exhibits everything discussed thus far: topic control, dispreference, and epistemic authority.

Excerpt 4: Identity work

CW: henry=

C: NO! YOU[SAY

CW: [you think I don't know what I'm doing?

C: YOU DON'T EVEN COME ASK ME THAT! KEEP IT GOING=

CW2: =hold on, hold on henry, I'm on the phone Henry.

C: Innis I have custody of my child, right? I have the money, (.) >I have everything<, I broke my hip here NOT NOWHERE ELSE. I can only go one place at a time. I been going for this ID, and I went five times, (.) spent hours downtown and not even change, (.) now I know how generals feel when the administrations get changed from clinton to bush et ce-

CW: hahahahhh((laughs))

C: >no, no, no, no, no, no.< (.) this, this is how it's gonna go.((indi[stinguishable])

CW: [okay, henry, but listen to this=

C: =there is no other way possible! And I wanna know who's doin this! I'm going to Smith (head social worker)! ((Henry wheels himself backward out of her office door))

CW: Wait, lemmie talk to you for a second, =

C: =THERE IS NO TALKING THERE IS NO TALKING! ((wheels himself back to her office)) <This is the big important thing, my ID, get the checks(.) CASHED!> And I'll go stay [((indistinguishable speech))

CW: [did you]go apply for your birth certificate.=

C: =I didn't have to go apply, I just gotta go with \$15 dollars and get it.

CW: YOU have to apply cause they mail it.

C: Innis, I am going.

CW: I'm telling you they have to mail it.

C: I KNOW what they got. we'll worry about that

CW: so bring me back the medical records.

C: what?

CW: bring me the medical records.

C: they're in my locker.

CW: okay listen to me, henry. henry, listen to me now, this is going to be on my personal time. I'm going to come in early on MOnday. listen to me.

C: XXXX listen to me, you work you, you get paid to do this. When I'm gone, you're still gonna be doing it. All I'm saying is, for me, personally, ID, cash the checks, and me and my child are gone whatever hotel: or whatever-

CW: ((indistinguishable))

C: you hear me? <I want to cash the checks. that's the plan, that's what it's been it's only right to continue it.>

There are many ways in which Henry controls the interaction between Ms. Innis and himself. Interruptions and latches can signal high conversational involvement (Tannen, 1984) but can also point to disaffiliation and disagreement. In this case, the latter interpretation is most likely closest given the tenor of the rest of the talk and analysis. Henry latches onto Ms. Innis' utterances three times, securing his floor time through interruption (lines 15–16, 19–20, 23–24). Henry also uses physical movement, which the researcher-as-ethnographer witnessed, to structure turn-taking, again maintaining control of the floor. For example, in lines 16 and 17 Henry threatens to see the head social worker and wheels himself backward out of Ms. Innis' office door, returning soon after, and he threatens to leave in lines 17 and 18. His use of a raised or yelling voice highlights an attempt to further control the interaction. Moreover, through continually offering dispreferred responses to Ms. Innis' questions and appeals for attention, Henry repeatedly threatens her and destabilizes the conversation. Her responses are likewise dispreferred, highlighting her disaffiliative orientation toward his utterances. In short, it is clear that his insistence is shifting the trajectory of talk from what the caseworker would prefer.

Another way Henry controls the floor is through his epistemic stance and by co-opting caseworker (institutionally authoritative) talk. He explains the procedure for acquiring his birth certificate (lines 30–31), which stands in contrast to those Ms. Innis describes. Later he says "I know what they got" (line 28), placing particular emphasis on the word "know." Similarly, in lines 38–42 he explains what he believes his plan should be, morally constructing his plan as the "right" plan, one rooted in historical consistency. The most obvious instance of epistemic authority is when Henry says, "let me explain something to you, okay," mirroring the type of question formation that Ms. Innis often uses and claiming the ability to explain something to her.

He also uses existential and metaphorical language that is considered more typical of a practitioner. For example, in line 20 his use of existential "there," which explains his interactional goals—if she will not listen to him and collude with him in conversation, then there will be no interaction (he will prohibit it, possibly). Henry's use of a metaphor (lines 9–10) allows him to express his frustration over having rules or approaches to his care changed in the middle of his time in shelter. Through this metaphor Henry expresses his frustration by implicitly pointing at the frustration of military employees who radically changed their policy because of the changes of rules in a new administration. Ms. Innis treats his utterance as laughable, which he rejects through repeated use of "no," which Schegloff (2001) suggests turns a humorous tone toward seriousness. In rejecting her invitation to share in laughter, he takes a stand and then adopts a planner's role telling his caseworker "how it's gonna go." His uses of extreme case formulations (Pomerantz, 1986) diminish possibilities, explanations, or alternatives outside of the ones he presents himself (lines 6–7, 16).

Henry rejects her request for the floor by interrupting her with an extreme case formulation, which he uses to account for his interaction goals (line 19). He follows this with a request for administrative names and a threat to seek the administration, also a powerful move. Ms. Innis makes a plea for the floor and through vocal emphasis a plea for “talking,” which Henry rejects, saying “there is no talking THERE IS NO TALKING,” an extreme case formulation achieved through existential “there.” He uses this construction to relate his interactional goals—if she will not listen to him and collude with him in conversation, then there will be no interaction—just two disaligned institutional agendas running parallel and not resolving. In the end, Henry degrades her position at the shelter, suggesting she has no real power (line 83), which she confirms (line 84).

This interaction, perhaps more than the others, highlights the relationship between Henry’s insistence on his individual agenda and the agency that comes with his assertion of power and control in the interaction. In not giving into his caseworker’s power to set the agenda; her control of the timing, opening, and closing of meetings; and her ability to establish the conversational norms for the interaction, Henry fixes himself as an agent in the institutional interaction that in some way stands outside of the broader institutional norms, agenda and interactional norms that are conventional in those spaces. By referring to his child at the beginning and end of the interaction and by describing the steps he is taking to secure her, he characterizes himself as a parent, rejecting the client role identity. Sarangi’s (2010) work on role sets explains Henry’s movement between roles, as he establishes himself as a father and an individual with goals first and as a client second. Henry is not then simply resisting but asserting alternate roles and identities, which function in collaboration with his persistence and disaffiliation, highlighting his continued insistence on autonomy.

Henry takes further control of the conversation by calling Ms. Innis by name and not using an honorific marker (e.g., Ms. or Miss), emphasizing his disagreement and disaffiliation with her (Clayman, 2002). He then sets up a justification sequence to explain his actions, and through the tag question “right,” he seeks confirmation from Ms. Innis. He follows this with an accusation (lines 8 and 9) and a justification, and he concludes with a metaphor, comparing himself to a general when his administration is changed. Ms. Innis treats his utterance as laughable, which he rejects through repeated use of “no,” which Schegloff (2001) suggests turns a humorous tone toward seriousness. In rejecting her invitation to share in laughter, he takes a stand and then adopts a planner’s role telling his caseworker “how it’s gonna go.” When Ms. Innis attempts to interrupt him and redirect his attention toward her through directive “listen,” he once again interrupts her, latching with her utterance and rejecting her suggestion through an extreme case formulation that in effect rejects all possible alternative positions other than his own.

DISCUSSION

Our goals in this article were twofold; we hoped to (1) describe discursive insistence in social work talk and (2) observe that, at least in this case, insistence contributes materially to Henry's construction of identity in those interactional moments. With regard to the first, Henry's case is an exemplary one, because he came in with an agenda that did not align with his caseworker's institutional agenda for him. Insistence entails perseverance, which Henry establishes not only within meetings but also across successive meetings. For example, we see in several excerpts Henry's objections to and criticisms of the bureaucracy of several agencies (the shelter, social security, court). Both in single meetings and across them, he does not give in. He repeatedly initiated topics that diverged from his caseworker's, and often when she initiated one he derailed conversation through dispreferred responses. He used his physical self to begin and end conversation, in addition to controlling talk through the threat to walk out. He even announced the 'end of talking,' showing he is no longer vulnerable to disciplinary institutional bargaining. He positioned himself as having a strong epistemic stance, characterizing himself as knowledgeable, and while a client with a strong epistemic stance does not necessarily point to discursive insistence, his stance allows him to authoritatively insist. In some way his stance provides justification for his continued disalignment and dispreference: Given that he believes himself to be correct, he asserts topics, agenda, and a divergent role identity that is supported by his epistemic stance.

Client-Centered Social Work

As regards the second, it is not surprising that Henry's insistence speaks to the development of an alternate role identity. Henry introduced topics that categorized him in a role identity apart from "homeless shelter client." If the institution said he was a drug user, his claim was that he was clean. If Ms. Innis categorized him as a homeless client needing housing, his claim was that he was first and foremost a father who needed the funds owed to him by the state to get back on his feet. His control over the conversation threw into question presupposed role identities, as he became questioner and agenda-setter. Although his insistence might prohibit Ms. Innis from getting her conversational agenda realized, it also allows him to offer an alternate version of self.

Listening to client narratives and allowing them the interactional and emotional space to develop robust identities has been important to social work for nearly 60 years, possibly more. Rogers (1951, p. 20), a revolutionary American psychologist, made a name for himself by developing client-centered therapy, the ripple effect from which has influenced the development of student-centered teaching in the field of education, among other disciplines. He asks of therapists

[D]o we respect [the client's] capacity and his right to self-direction, or do we basically believe that his life would be best guided by us? . . . Are we willing for the individual to select and choose his own values, or are our actions guided by the conviction (usually unspoken) that he would be happiest if he permitted us to select for him his values and standards and goals?

Client-centered and person-centered therapy and social work have in the last 60 years become increasingly discussed, along with its off-shoots in other academic fields. Even so, professionals are cited as explaining their clients' misbehavior as an unwillingness (being manipulative or stubborn) or lack of capacity (physically or cognitively) (Fineman, 1991). Lutfey (2004) concludes that even the concept of compliance, although less condemnatory, still starts from the idea that this is an objective identifiable feature of service users. Clients are still often viewed as "clients" despite shifts toward person-centering and, as we see from these data, in spite of their own attempts to position themselves as "people" rather than "clients." Divergent or noncompliant client behavior should not necessarily be viewed through the eyes of the institutional practitioner.

Importantly, we do not want to vilify the caseworker here. Although social work theory may trickle down from the few social workers at a homeless shelter to the myriad caseworkers, their jobs are inherently different. Lipsky (1980) suggests that street-level bureaucrats have to navigate between the administration and the clients, and they institute *de facto* policy in their everyday institutional work. Caseworkers, who generally do not have social work degrees and may be working on a Master's degree, are charged with helping clients move from shelter to housing. Given the specificity of their position, using client narratives and developing client identity may be less of a priority than in social work or therapy.

Be that as it may, we have shown how a client may present new elements of identity into the conversation and so create an extra-institutional role. As Parton and O'Byrne state, social work is "constructed in the process of talk and narrative" (2000, p. 183). To learn about what clients and professionals do in social work is to look at their actual interaction. When we look at Henry's contributions to the conversation, we see that he does not stick to his institutional history but rather to his roles as a father, as a man looking for a place for his own. This is exactly what constructive social work is about: opening new horizons (blinded reference 2). In doing so, Henry demonstrates his agency in taking a strong conversational position by not giving in to institutional standards (being at more places at the same time, taking methadone), by not answering questions of the social worker, by interrupting her, and by rejecting Ms. Innis' invitation to laughter (excerpt 4, line 12). Time and again, Henry presents his individual life (his obligations to his child, his struggle to survive as a physically handicapped man), highlighting his noninstitutional role in an institutionalized space. He perseveres in trying to prepare the way for his future life. The most relevant of these is that the client is telling his own story rather than responding to

institutional initiatives. Henry insists on sharing personal narratives and pursues housing in a way that suits his priorities over the course of his stay in shelter. More importantly, however, his insistence may be considered as a demonstration of his agency, apart from the institutional disciplinary efforts. He insists that the institution exists to help him with his agenda.

Usually Foucault's (1979) works on power and knowledge and specifically his theory on the rise of disciplinary society, which deconstructed perceptions of unidirectional power relationships between institutional representatives and clients, highlighting the variable, capillary-like distribution of power, are used to examine power in the relation between institutional representatives and citizens, in our case a social worker and a client. Such a perspective explains Henry's conversational position as *resisting* Ms. Innis' disciplinary efforts. Although clients' resistance adds to further uncovering of their identity, the relevant identity is an institutional one: discipline creating well-adapted institutional individuals. This helps us to understand Ms. Innis' argument approach. Because disciplinary institutions depend on the construction of negotiations in which clients learn to become argumentative (Shotter & Gergen, 1998) and behave as reasonable citizens, Ms. Innis fights several times to get Henry back in her office and tries to get him talking again. If she had succeeded in getting him back in place, the negotiation could have been restarted in an effort to fit Henry into the shelter system, reconstructing him as a disciplined client. This does not happen, however. Henry seemed to bypass Ms. Innis' disciplinary efforts.

Foucault's disciplinary theory helps us to understand the social worker's efforts but less so to recognize Henry's insistent behavior. For this we consider Foucault's later works on sexuality (1986) in which he emphasizes the relevance of the care for the self as a social practice of self-knowledge and self-discipline: the subject constructing his or her own niche. This is not to say that the individual shows oppositional intentions but rather tries to develop a courageous lifestyle that seeks an authentic self-attitude. Now, Henry's performance may be considered as a search for and development of a positive identity rather than being fixed as a disobedient client.

Henry is not merely resisting but taking control of the interaction and asserting his role as a father and as an autonomous individual over his role as a homeless client at the shelter. Insisting on his narratives and his identity, Henry takes care of the elements of his identity that are located outside the disciplinary institution. Although Henry, in his insistence discourse, gives more information about his identity, this cannot just be considered as a counterforce against the institutional efforts to get the client in the reigns. Henry is creating his own niche. He creates new forms of autonomy by asserting his role not as a homeless man but as a father and a man with a physical injury. Henry shows us there is more than getting disciplined or marginalized and that his insistence is the building stones of a new form of autonomy that resist the disciplinary homeless policy. We do not suggest

this assertion of identity ends Henry's dependency on the shelter for care and help but rather that his agency and identity, promoted through his insistent talk, potentially opens up new horizons that may help him to end that dependency. To a lesser extent, we argue that although Henry may insist on both intra-institutional and extra-institutional concerns, in this case study of four interactions between one caseworker and one homeless client, Henry's insistence is used to promote an (primarily) extra-institutional identity. In short, his discursive insistence does identity work.

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