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Suggestive chats: Discursive strategies of sexual harassment

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Abstract

In recent years, critical evidence in a number of legal cases has rested on mobile phone and social media records. This paper analyses the WhatsApp chats between a prominent political leader in South Africa and a young woman he employed as a personal assistant, who later accused him of sexual harassment. The politician denied the charges, accusing the young woman of being a ‘honey trap’. The data for this paper are their chats from the two days prior to her beginning work for him. They were published in an online newspaper with the permission of the young woman. Using Goffman’s (1967, 1974) seminal theories of face and frame, and Scollon and Scollon’s (2001) concepts of independence and involvement strategies, this paper offers a discourse analysis of the unfolding interaction. It traces how the politician uses his greater power to persistently shift the frame of the chat from ‘professional employment’ to ‘sexual intimacy’ by employing a range of involvement strategies, while the young woman performs a delicate negotiation of trying to maintain her new employer’s positive face without acceding to his advances.

Introduction

Scholarship on language and gender has an extensive and wide-ranging history, covering a variety of topics (see Ehrlich, Meyerhoff and Holmes [2014] for a recent overview). Research has explored the shaping impact of gender norms on social encounters, and how, in situations of unequal status, less powerful participants are frequently coerced into adopting the discursive norms of their more powerful interlocutors (Eades 2016). Feminist scholars have repeatedly demonstrated how social inequalities shape and restrict the ways in which victims of sexual abuse may respond, and how claims of sexual assault are frequently undermined by institutional responses. For example, when faced with a situation of rape, a victim may not resist out of fear or to avoid further harm. Ehrlich (2003) shows how, in a court of law, the dominant ideological standard of ‘utmost resistance’ is used to evaluate claims of rape, and consequently, to reframe the complainant’s strategic response to the perpetrator’s behaviour as ‘ineffective’ and therefore equivalent to consent.

These studies often rely on court records and police evidence, not on transcripts of actual interactions between the alleged perpetrators and victims, presumably due to the difficulty of recording the latter, which frequently occur in private domains and spontaneous face to face encounters. However, the advent of smartphones and their associated multimedia applications, such as WhatsApp and Snapchat, is changing this. For example, in recent years, a number of high profile public figures and politicians have been exposed sexting with underage girls or young women, the case of Democratic politician, Anthony Weiner, in the run up to the United States elections in 2016, being one recent example. While the data in this paper do not contain sexually explicit messages of a sexting nature, they can be construed as sexual harassment or grooming by a more powerful participant in an attempt to obtain a sexual favour.

This paper analyses the WhatsApp chats between a prominent political leader in South Africa and a young woman he employed as a personal assistant, who later accused him of sexual harassment. The politician denied the charges, accusing the woman of being a ‘honey trap’. The data for this paper are their chats from a two day period prior to her beginning work for him. They were published in an online newspaper with the permission of the woman. Using Goffman’s (1967, 1974) theories of face and frame, and Scollon and Scollon’s (2001) concepts of independence and involvement strategies, this paper offers a discourse analysis of their unfolding interaction. It traces how the politician uses his greater power to persistently shift the frame of the chat from ‘professional employment’ to ‘sexual intimacy’ by employing a range of involvement strategies, while the young woman performs a delicate negotiation of trying to maintain her new employer’s positive face without acceding to his advances.

Context

The WhatsApp chats in question were published in an article in the *Daily Maverick* (DM) online on the 13 June 2016. The author, Marianne Thamm (2016), has a distinguished record as an investigative journalist with a special interest in gender issues. The back story to the data, as summarised below, is based on Thamm’s article, and is corroborated by subsequent media reports (Underhill 2016). The data are the chats exchanged between the two people in question, just prior to the young woman (LW) beginning work for the politician (MF) on 4 January 2016. Although their identities are in the public domain, I have chosen to use only their initials. I would not like to further associate the young woman’s name with that of the politician. Rather, I hope that this analysis may offer linguistic evidence to support her version of events.

In January 2016, LW was working as a hostess in a restaurant on a wine farm near Cape Town. She was 20 years old and an aspirant singer. While at work, she was approached by MF, who was dining at the restaurant, and asked if she would consider working for him as his personal assistant at a small boutique hotel he was setting up in Cape Town. He indicated that this new position could also create opportunities for her to develop her career as a performer. According to Thamm, LW did not realise at that point that MF was the leader of the African National Congress (ANC) in the Western Cape, a province of South Africa. She claims she only found this out when he sent his driver to fetch her for an interview – and that this news caused her to ‘freak out’ because of the importance of the man.

Subsequently, MF offered her the job and asked her to begin working for him immediately, which meant she would need to pack and leave the staff accommodation on the farm where she was working, and move to Cape Town within a few days. He also asked her to accompany him as personal assistant to the ANC’s 104th birthday anniversary at Sun City, a prestigious hotel about 2000 kilometres away near the town of Rustenberg. She was very excited and agreed. And so, almost immediately on accepting the job offer, she set off for Rustenberg with MF and two colleagues.

The first indication that things were not going well was when MF, who had been sitting in the front of the car, switched places with his colleague in the back seat, and proceeded to fondle LW’s knee. But worse was to come: when they reached the hotel in a small town *en route*, she discovered that only two rooms had been booked and that she was to spend the night with MF in a double bed. Because they had arrived at around 02:00 and because the hotel was in a small remote town, she was forced to spend the night with him. What exactly happened is not

clear, but her subsequent reactions suggest that he attempted to impose himself on her inappropriately.

By the time they set off the next day for the second and last leg of their journey, LW was in a state of distress but unable to escape as she had no money and feared for her safety. When they arrived at Sun City and went to eat dinner at the restaurant (with MF still fondling her and kissing her neck) she managed to slip away and contact hotel security to ask for help. She eventually made it to the Sun City police station where she tried to lay a charge of sexual assault but the police were not interested. Fortunately, a concerned police clerk took pity on her and called a van from a neighbouring police station to collect her, where she was able to lay a charge. Thereafter, she caught a plane – which her frantic parents had booked for her – back to Cape Town.

However, since then, she claims, she and her family have been subjected to all kinds of intimidation and police inaction. She was later informed that the charges against MF had been withdrawn due to a lack of evidence. Given that the police had never even contacted her for any evidence, including these WhatsApp chats, she decided, at that point (June 2016), to approach the media. In November, the National Disciplinary Committee of the ANC (2016) found MF guilty of ‘abusing his office for the purpose of attempting to obtain a sexual favour’ and suspended his ANC membership for five years. The police case – which was reopened when these chats became public – remains unresolved.

Analytical framework

The framework for the analysis of these chats draws on interactional and sociolinguistic scholarship, particularly Erving Goffman’s (1967, 1974) notions of frame and face, Brown and Levinson’s (1978, 1987) theory of positive and negative face, and Scollon and Scollon’s (1995) involvement and independence face strategies. While these concepts were developed in relation to ‘face to face’ interactions, they have continued to prove valuable to the study of technologically mediated communication, as research shows how the latter compensates for the lack of facial expression or tone with informal registers and a range of innovative features which signal phatic meanings. These features include abbreviations (e.g. lol, for ‘laugh out loud’), expressive punctuation (‘!!!’), and a range of emoticons as signals of affect (Thurlow and Poff, 2013).

Interactional approaches to communication recognise the inseparability of ‘propositional’ and ‘indexical’ meanings. They explore how communicative acts simultaneously communicate information about content as well as participants’ identities, intentions and social relations (Rampton 2017). The work of Goffman (1959, 1967, 1974) has been foundational in this field, and his theories of face, frame and footing provide a toolkit for exploring the delicate negotiation of interpersonal meanings that take place in any interaction. Brown and Levinson’s (1978, 1987) highly influential work on politeness builds on Goffman’s face theory, as does Scollon and Scollon’s (1995) framework for the analysis of intercultural communication.

In Goffman’s seminal essay, ‘On face-work: An analysis of ritual elements in social interaction’ (1955, reprinted in 1967), he argues that in every encounter, participants tend ‘to act out what is sometimes called a *line* – that is, a pattern of verbal and non-verbal acts by which he expresses his view of the situation and through this his evaluation of participants, especially himself (sic)’ (Goffman 1967, 5). He then introduces the term, face, to refer to the

‘positive social value a person effectively claims for himself by the line others assume he has taken during a particular contact’ (5). That is, in conversation, participants continuously read (and signal) to each other their self-presentation, communicative intent and relative social status. In this way, they project a particular line or version of who they are (or how they want to be perceived), and how they read the situation. For a person to ‘*have, or be in, or maintain face*’, their line needs to be ‘internally consistent’ (6) with their desired self-presentation and ‘taken up’ or ‘granted’ by the other participants. Similarly, a person may be said to ‘*be in wrong face*’ when information is brought forth in some way about his social worth which cannot be integrated, even with effort, into the line that is being sustained for him (sic)’ (8). Thus, for communication to be successful, all participants need to negotiate a common or shared line, or run the risk of one of them ‘losing face’. To this end, Goffman proposes two basic kinds of face-work: a ‘defensive orientation’, towards saving one’s own face, and a ‘protective orientation’ towards saving the face the other (14). While some interactions may be primarily defensive or protective, it is more usual for both perspectives to be taken into account in any encounter: ‘in trying to save the face of the others, the person must choose a tack that will not lead to loss of his own’ (14), and vice versa.

Goffman’s concept of frame is similarly foundational. He defines frame as referring to the ‘one or more frameworks or schemata of interpretations’ which individuals use to decide what is going on in any interaction (Goffman 1974, 21). He argues that ‘the type of framework we employ provides a way of describing the event to which it is applied’ (24) and that all frames ‘involve expectations of a normative kind as to how deeply and fully the individual is to be carried into the activity organized by the frames’ (345). For example, whether we view a statement as a joke or insult will affect the way we understand and respond to it. Similarly, whether we view a job offer as an employment contract or a sexual advance will be fraught with implications for our involvement. In other words, frames are negotiated in conversation, and determine how a participant understands and responds to a particular communicative act. We thus project frames onto particular interactions to help us make sense of and respond appropriately to the kind of situation we think it is, and our awareness of the social context and its norms of politeness and appropriate behaviour are an essential component of this.

Goffman’s face theory underpins the highly influential study of politeness (as a form of face-work) developed by Brown and Levinson (1978, 1987). They argue that the preservation of face is important in all cultures, although the norms to which participants orient themselves will be context (or, in their terms, ‘culture’) specific. The preservation of face, they argue, is therefore a primary constraint on what can be achieved in social interaction, and communicative acts, like commands or complaints which could be construed as face-threatening, require ‘softening’ so as to minimise the threat to the participants’ positive and negative face (Brown and Levinson 1978, 24). By ‘positive face’, they refer to ‘the positive self-image or “personality” (crucially including the desire that this self-image be appreciated and approved of) claimed by interactants’, while ‘negative face’ expresses the basic need of participants for ‘freedom of action and freedom from imposition’ (Brown and Levinson 1987, in Jaworski and Coupland 1999, 321.) In other words, positive face refers to the need to be liked, while negative face refers to the need to be respected and not imposed upon. Like Goffman, they underscore that, in general, ‘people co-operate ... in maintaining face in interaction, such cooperation being based on the mutual vulnerability of face’ (322). Thus, in order to attend to a hearer’s positive face, the speaker will indicate that he or she shares some of the hearer’s concerns and needs, and may treat him or her as important or as a member of the ‘in-group’. However, the speaker may also attend to the hearer’s negative face by

practising 'self-effacement, formality and restraint' (328), by making minimal assumptions about what (the speaker thinks) the hearer wants, and by avoiding imposing, leaving the hearer free to act independently of the speaker's wants.

Scollon et al (2012, first published as Scollon and Scollon, 1995) rework Goffman, and Brown and Levinson's theories for the face component of their 'discourse systems' framework. They introduce the terms, 'involvement' and 'independence', to refer to the two sides of face (positive and negative, respectively), citing as reason their concern that the contrast between positive and negative face/politeness 'can easily be forgotten and readers can too easily begin to think of "positive politeness" as good and "negative politeness" as bad' (Scollon et al 2012: 49). Like their predecessors, they argue that in general, interactions include the expression of both involvement and interdependence in varying degrees: '(i)t is always a matter of more or less, not absolute expression of just one or the other' as '(w)e have to carefully project a face for ourselves and to respect the face rights and claims of other participants' (49). They also propose three face systems, which they term 'deference', 'solidarity' and 'hierarchical'. While 'deference' and 'solidarity' systems are characterised by equal power, the hierarchical system is based on power differences, such that 'the participants recognize and respect the social differences which place one in a super-ordinate position and the other in a subordinate position' (55). This system, they argue is common in business, government and educational contexts, and participants generally use *different* face strategies to manage the power differential: 'involvement strategies are used "downward" and independence strategies are used "upward"' (56). After all, it is the prerogative of the more powerful participant to assume a more familiar tone (e.g. first names) to his or her subordinate, but the latter is, in most situations, still required to show the requisite respect through, for example, using formal terms of address.

Scollon et al (2012) explore in some detail the discursive realisations of involvement (positive face) and independence (negative face). They list a number of strategies which, they argue, reflect involvement, such as: 'Notice or attend to H'; 'Exaggerate (interest, approval, sympathy with H); 'Claim in-group membership with H'; 'Claim common point of view, opinions, attitudes, knowledge, empathy' and 'Use given names and nicknames' (51). These are all strategies which stress the speaker's connection with the hearer and emphasise their commonality. Independence strategies, on the other hand, emphasise the individuality of participants, and their right to be free from imposition. A selection of these include: 'Make minimal assumptions about H's wants'; 'Give H the option not to do the act'; 'Apologise'; 'Use family names and titles' and 'Be taciturn' (51-52). In fact, they argue that the most extreme form of independence is silence, in the sense of 'non-communication', although they stress that the meanings of all strategies are context-dependent: in a different context, silence can signal intimacy and high involvement (50). (For a similar list of strategies, see 'Editor's appendix: list of politeness strategies' in Jaworski and Coupland 1999, 334-335).

This paper will use Goffman's theories of face and frame, Brown and Levinson's notions of negative and positive face, and Scollon *et al*'s independence and involvement strategies as a framework for the data analysis. In particular, it traces how the politician uses his greater power to 'set the tone' by persistently using involvement strategies and shifting the frame from 'professional employment' to 'sexual intimacy', while the young woman uses a range of involvement and independence strategies to try and save her own face as well as maintain his.

Methodology

The data are the WhatsApp chats that took place between LW and MF on Sunday 3 Jan, the day after her job interview, and Monday 4 January, her first day of work when she left home to accompany MF to the ANC birthday celebration. Because the data are recontextualised in an online article, we do not know the extent to which they have been edited and reconfigured for this particular purpose. However, their presentation online suggests that minimal editing has taken place (see Figure 1). As it is not possible to access the original chats, the analysis in this paper is based on this mediated version of the interaction (Thamm 2016). The opening section gives a representative sense of the data:

Figure 1: Extract from Thamm (2016), *Daily Maverick* online.

On January 3 – a Sunday, at 00:21 – MF sent LW a WhatsApp from his personal cell number.
“Yesday. Start Monday. Remember 1st week of workweek in jan!!! Leap of faith” followed at 00:22 by “also don’t indicate where u gona work. I know the owner.”
To which LW replied at 06:58:
“Good morning. I just sent the e-mail but it is not going through can you please send it through again maybe theres something missing” followed at 07:01 by “okay it went through now let me know if you got it.”
MF replies at 09:23:
“Before 7am-impressed! Will check”, and at 9:27:
“Read it. As M*** said CVs don’t tell much- its rather my 3 interactions with u that convince me”.

For the analysis, I copied each turn into a table, with an indication of the speaker and timing. If no timing was given, the column was left blank. I deleted reporting clauses where these occurred (e.g. ‘to which LW replied at 06:58’), but included all reported (as opposed to transcribed) turns in the table as published online (see turns 13, 27, 39-42). These reported turns are italicised. I then analysed *what* each participant said, as well as *how* they said it, in order to decide whether a turn should be coded as signalling independence or involvement, or both, and what this might say about the intended discursive frame. I used this to explore the shifts in face and power as participants attempted to negotiate a common line. The entire data set is reproduced in Tables 1, 3 – 8, with each table representing a new stage – usually initiated by a turn by MF – in the interaction.

Analysis

The asymmetrical power relations in this interaction are clearly obvious from a straightforward turn taking analysis. Out of a total of 47, 19 turns (40%) belong to LW and 28 (60%) to MF. In addition, MF plays the dominant role in initiating and maintaining contact, from his first early morning WhatsApp (turn 1), to his request for a selfie (turn 37). With the exception of the first text on the morning of January 4, in which LW asks him about the transport arrangements to Rustenberg, all stages of the chat are initiated by him, with her contributions almost entirely consisting of responses to his questions, suggestions, offers or ‘suggestive’ remarks. (See examples of MF-initiated turns in 1, 7, 10, 15, 18, 21, 28, 31, 34, 37, 43).

The first table includes the opening turns. The immediate context for this extract is that MF had met with LW on Saturday 2 January and offered her the job as personal assistant; here he is following up on their conversation. The fact that he is texting her at the inappropriate time of 00:21 on a Sunday morning is also an index of his greater power and his prerogative to blur the boundary between their private and professional spaces.

Table 1: Turns 1-6.

1	Jan 3 (Sun) 00:21	MF	Yesday.Start Monday. Remember 1st week of workweek in jan!!! Leap of faith	Involvement (showing 'exaggerated' interest and excitement)
2	00:22	MF	also don't indicate where u gona work. I know the owner	Involvement (asserting a common/shared intimacy – keeping secrets)
3	06:58	LW	Good morning. I just sent the e- mail but it is not going through can you please send it through again maybe theres something missing	Independence (formal greeting, politeness terms, focus on informational content – employment negotiations)
4	07:01	LW	okay it went through now let me know if you got it.	Independence (focus on information – employment negotiations)
5	09:23	MF	Before 7am-impressed! Will check	Involvement (showing approval)
6	09:27	MF	Read it. As M*** said CVs don't tell much- its rather my 3 interactions with u that convince me	Involvement (showing approval and appreciation, indexing shared history)

It is immediately apparent that there is a marked contrast in both texting style and face strategies in these turns. While MF uses an informal shorthand register typical of texting, LW uses a more formal, standard one. Research on social media shows that chats are generally written in informal 'textese', and that this is characterised by features such as abbreviations (e.g. 'jan'), non-standard and creative spellings (e.g. 'gona' for 'going to' and 'u' for 'you') and excessive punctuation to indicate affect or emotion (Bock 2013, Deumert 2015). When communicating on platforms like WhatsApp, the norm is to use a more informal register, the features of which are constantly changing as new styles and technologies come into fashion (Bock *et al.* *etc.*).

However, in this case, the platform is being used to facilitate contact between an employer and his very much younger employee, a relationship which would normally require a greater show of deference, certainly on her part. In line with these expectations, LW responds to his informal tone by maintaining standard norms of spelling and interaction. For example, she uses a formal greeting ('good morning'), politeness markers such as 'please' and full sentences and spellings e.g. 'you' not 'u'. Note also that her communication includes no overt evaluation like his (e.g. the excitement indicated by the positive meaning of 'yesday', the excessive punctuation and the exhortation, 'leap of faith'.) Thus, while MF has opened this interaction with informal and emotive language, LW maintains a style which signals 'formal distance and respect' appropriate to an employer-employee relationship. One could argue that MF is exploiting the informal WhatsApp norms as a way of normalising his choice of an involvement register.

This contrast is also reflected by the face analysis of the full data set, which overwhelming codes LW’s contributions as expressing independence (66% of her codings), and MF’s as signalling involvement (83%):

Table 2: Face analysis

Codings	MF	LW
Involvement	24 (83%)	11 (34%)
Independence	5 (17%)	21 (66%)
Total	29	32

However, as I will show below, when the interaction becomes fraught with sexual innuendo, LW shifts into using more involvement strategies, perhaps to save MF’s positive face, with the double codings reflecting her ambivalence and discomfort at the conversational line he is working to establish. These shifts are also mirrored in the stylistic choices that the participants make: while MF persists with an informal textese, LW shifts into a more informal register at points where, I will argue, she feels most compromised in terms of her own negative face (turns 26, 29 and 38).

In the next few turns (7-9), MF checks that she is indeed willing to take on the job and LW explains that she cannot tell her current manager yet otherwise he will evict her from the staff housing on the farm. In response, MF assures her that he can offer her accommodation, presumably in Cape Town, close to her new place of employment. However, in turn 10, he unexpectedly shifts the conversational key with a very personal remark: ‘I am listening to Imagine of John Lennon’, a song which is known for its soulful melody and romantic lyrics. LW does not respond immediately to this comment, but returns to the topic of her notice period and when she can begin work. It is possible that the messages ‘crossed’ in real time, as she does respond later (‘Hahahah that’s not too hard I sure I can learn that’), although the timing of turn 14 is unclear. This is the first time she slips into using features of textese (by beginning her turn with ‘hahaha’) and also the first time that she adopts an involvement strategy (‘showing willingness to please’).

Table 3: Turns 7 – 14.

7	12.15	MF	In any case did u sleep over our discussion? If so what u think?	Involvement (showing interest, inviting her opinion, repeating offer of employment)
8	12.17	LW	I spoke to **** this morning, told him im resigning he said he cant tell the gm today because hes going to let security evict me off the property effective immediately if I want to leave to start working for you tomorrow.	Independence (responding to previous comment, focus on information – employment negotiations)
9	12.18	MF	so that’s fine. U can so long have accommodation	Involvement (supporting her point of view, offering employment/ accommodation)
10	12.19	MF	I am listening to Imagine of John Lennon	Involvement (introducing a personal topic, inviting shared interests/intimacy)

11	12.19	LW	So I am going to have to work out a notice period but I don't know how long. L*** states that I have to at least do two weeks tho.	Independence (informational content – employment negotiations)
12	12.19	MF	Hope u will learn to sing that	Involvement (showing interest and desire)
13		MF	<i>MF discusses logistics of the move also telling LW that he is leaving for Rustenberg the following day.</i>	Employment negotiations
14		LW	Hahahah that's not too hard I sure I can learn that.	Involvement (showing willingness to please)

The intrusion of the John Lennon comment is what Goffman (1974, 347) would call a 'frame break' as there are now two competing frames in operation. On the one hand, there is the employer-employee frame established in the first nine turns, and then there is the second which signals 'close friends who share intimacies'. As these two are not easily compatible at this stage in a hierarchical face system, LW is likely to feel that her negative face is threatened. However, if she chooses to ignore the comment, she risks threatening the positive face of MF, her new employer. As the less powerful participant, she is caught between maintaining an appropriately respectful distance, but, at the same time, not affronting him by ignoring or rejecting his offer of 'intimacy'. So, I would argue, what we see in LW's response to the John Lennon comment, is an attempt to shift towards MF's chosen register (i.e. informal textese and involvement strategies) in order to attend to his positive face needs and signal her alignment with him, at the same time that she closes down the chat – by not making any further comments – to protect her own negative face.

Although we do not know how much time elapsed between turns 14 and 15, it is MF who again initiates contact in turn 15 with an offer to help her move to her new accommodation. Once again, he uses the pretext of his role as employer to initiate contact, only to follow this up with two more highly inappropriate comments which have explicitly sexual overtones. In turn 18, he suggests she wear 'sensual' clothing on their upcoming trip to Rustenberg, and in turn 21, he asks that she does not tell her boyfriend about her new employer lest he (the boyfriend) becomes jealous – a classic sexual predator strategy of 'let's keep this a secret'.

Table 4: Turns 15 – 22.

15	13.39	MF	so you will sort out getting stuff to ur parents or must I still get ballot ... I mean baklie ... Bakkie	Independence (employment/relocation negotiations, giving options) Involvement (showing concern for her needs, offering help)
16	13.41	LW	For cape town yes but my parents will sort one fir taking my stuff to their house, thanx anyway.	Independence (employment/relocation negotiations, thanking)
17	13.49	MF	Kewl.then c tomrw	Independence (acknowledging relocation arrangements) Involvement (asserting future connection/relationship)

18	13.50	MF	Also its hot that side. Informal gear and sensual	Involvement (suggesting intimacy, desire)
19	13.51	LW	Okay got it!!	Involvement (exaggerated expression of agreement)
20	13.52	MF	(smiley face)	Involvement (expressing approval/appreciation)
21	14.02	MF	Forgot to ask. Pl don't tell your bf you working fr me. Don't need jealous guys around.	Involvement (asserting a common/shared intimacy – keeping secrets)
22	14.13	LW	hes not that type and ill handle my personal life very discreetly, I dont mix business with pleasure either, so don't worry I know how to handle it.	Independence (asserting individuality, freedom from imposition)

The sexual innuendo in both turns 18 and 21 are likely to have caused LW considerable discomfort: she now has to manage the conversational line that MF has inserted into their interaction at considerable risk to herself. After all, she has just given up her regular job to work for him, for what she hopes will be a breakthrough in her career. Her responses in turns 19 and 22 show how she tries to manage this conflict. She replies to his advice to wear 'informal gear and sensual' with the comment, 'Okay, got it!!'. The brevity of her remark, as well as the excessive punctuation, suggest that she is once again, simultaneously trying to attend to his positive face by adopting his emotive, informal texting register, but at the same time, protecting her negative face by closing down the interaction. MF replies approvingly, with a smiley face. Then, when he re-opens the chat ten minutes later with the comment about her boyfriend, she replies, after an eleven minute pause, 'hes not that type and ill handle my personal life very discreetly'. Thus we see in turn 22 how she unambiguously reasserts a professional frame by reverting to independence strategies and clearly affirming that neither she nor her boyfriend 'mix business with pleasure' and that she knows 'how to handle' this potentially blurry distinction.

In the exchange which follows minutes after the former, we see how she continues to try and assert her frame of professional interaction:

Table 5: Turns 23 – 26.

23	14.21	MF	Good..but hey there will be pleasure in business?	Involvement (expressing appreciation, blurring boundaries between personal and business)
24	14.29	LW	I know yes!!	Involvement (exaggerated expression of agreement)
25	14.31	MF	Why u say that?	Involvement (showing interest in her views, inviting intimacy/sharing)
26	14.37	LW	Because im not going to be working on ur political level u hired me for the hospitality level and thats considered fun for me cos I love what I do.	Independence (asserting individuality, freedom from imposition) Involvement (shifting to informal texting register)

In turn 23, MF picks up the business-pleasure theme, once again trying to blur the boundary. Once again, LW's response displays the same pattern as for turns 21 and 22 above: she allows a longer pause (eight minutes), and then acknowledges his comment with only a brief expression of involvement ('I know yes!!') which, as I have argued before, simultaneously signals alignment and closure. When he persists with his line by questioning, 'why u say that?', she again allows six minutes to elapse before re-asserting not only their status differences ('im not going to be working on ur political level') but also her commitment to her professional role ('u hired me for the hospitality level and thats considered fun for me cos I love what I do.'). As with turn 22, she asserts the boundary between business and pleasure, but this time, for the first time, she shifts into a more informal texting register for the duration of the turn. This is reflected in her choice of the non-conventional spelling, 'u' and 'ur' for 'you' and 'your', and her spoken realisation of 'because' as 'cos'. As argued above, these shifts into textese signal her attempt to negotiate the delicate balance of protecting her own negative face (and closing down a very uncomfortable line) while simultaneously attending to his positive face by showing empathy and alignment.

This pattern is repeated again in turns 28 and 29 in Table 6 below. The context for turn 28 is not entirely clear, but the reference to the need to 'be open minded' could, once again, be sexually suggestive. Note too how MF has shifted to using the inclusive pronoun 'our' in turn 28 and 'we' in turn 30: his choice of pronoun emphasises their commonality. I would argue that this is another moment when LW feels very uncomfortable, and this is reflected in her trying, once again, to distance herself from his line, by firstly questioning what he means ('what do you mean re your point') and then by reverting to a professional topic, his requested restaurant booking. What is most significant about this turn, however, is that this is the first time that she shifts into a local variety of Afrikaans, Kaaps, a linguistic variety they share. Using this code signals solidarity and common ethnicity (McCormick, 2002), and is, I would argue, a face saving strategy: it is a strong bid for involvement at a point when she is increasingly having to side step his persistent innuendo. Once again, she lets the chat close, only for him to re-open it eight minutes later with a further bid for contact, 'Still at work?', and then yet further encouragement to forgo the boundary between work and pleasure in turn 33.

Table 6: Turns 27 – 33.

27			<i>There is some discussion about getting LW to talk to M*** at the Kings in Cape to book a restaurant venue for the following Saturday.</i>	
28	14.49	MF	re your point re our space – just be open minded	Involvement (showing interest in her views, inviting intimacy/sharing)
29	14.49	LW	Okay will do, what do you mean re your point. Ekt di booking gmaak hy vra of dt mointlik is om hom more te kom sien? [I have made the booking he asks if it is possible to see him tomorrow].	Independence (acknowledging previous remark, seeking clarity wrt ambiguous comment in turn 28, clarifying work plans) Involvement (switching to shared language variety)

30	14.57	MF	We can let him know tomrwr after we discussed it.	Involvement (asserting shared/common point of view)
31	15.03	MF	Still at work?	Involvement (showing interest, inviting intimacy/sharing)
32	15.04	LW	Yep just finishing up them im off to start packing.	Independence (responding to previous comment)
33	15.06	MF	Kewl. Leave that conservatism also there and embrace to be and work hard but play hard also.	Involvement (expressing appreciation, inviting intimacy, blurring boundaries between personal and business)

One could argue that by this point, LW should have ‘seen the writing on the wall’ and pulled out of the interaction. However, considering the risks at stake (losing her new job), and given that South Africa is still a society shaped by strongly patriarchal norms in which it is expected that young women will not willingly affront or displease an older powerful man, the choices are complex and conflicted.

As we will see, MF is not only powerful, but also persistent. After a further almost three hour break, he begins a new chat (Table 7) with another comment about the weather, ‘Sjoe its hot’ (turn 34). Given that he has already made inappropriate remarks about the heat and how she should dress, this could also be read as suggestive. LW replies (almost an hour later) with an informal throwaway line, ‘Tell me about it at least you’re not packing boxes’ (turn 35) and the globally recognised textese abbreviation, ‘lol’ for ‘laugh out loud’. Once again, I would argue, she is trying to use involvement strategies (in this case, humour) to show alignment, but also trying to close down his line by not making any further contributions.

Table 7: Turns 34 – 38.

34	17.54	MF	Sjoe its hot	Involvement (expression of feeling, inviting sharing)
35	18.42	LW	Tell me about it at least your not packing boxes. lol	Involvement (informal register, humour)
36	18.52	MF	Eish!!!	Involvement (exclamation, feeling)
37	18.53	MF	Take a selfie let me see	Involvement (inviting intimacy/sharing)
38	19.00	LW	lmk noit my kamer is te demekaar nou [Laughing out loud never my room is too untidy now]	Independence (refusing request) Involvement (shifting to shared variety with humour)

After a further ten minute pause, MF reopens the conversation with an exclamation, ‘Eish’, a colloquial expression like, ‘Wow’, and a request for a selfie (turns 36 and 37). This is, once again, a very personal move for a 52 year old man who is old enough to be her father, a political leader in the ANC, and her new boss. She does not immediately respond to this request but after a seven minute pause, during which one could imagine she was either too busy packing boxes, or else feeling very uncomfortable and wondering how to respond, she replies for a second time in Kaaps. These shifts into a shared linguistic variety are, I would

argue, a clear signal that these are moments when she feels most compromised. The shift can be interpreted as an attempt to save his face while simultaneously refusing his request or sexual advance. Thus she acknowledges the intimacy of the interaction in her choice of code, but refuses to accede to his request. Her code switching, I have argued, is a strategy to manage this difficult interpersonal situation. Note that MF does not reciprocate and shift codes. Perhaps this is a way for him to retain the upper hand, given that a shift into her selected code might be interpreted as relinquishing some of his power; by remaining in English, he keeps the interaction on his own terms.

The last few turns of the chat – from the following day, Monday January 4 – represent the remainder of publicly available chats, given that all further interactions are the subject of sworn statements in the original police docket (Thamm 2016). These last turns focus on their travel arrangements. However, they also suggest that LW has adopted a stance more characterized by involvement, as discussed below:

Table 8: Turns 39 – 47.

39	Jan 4 (Mon) 07.30	LW	<i>LW asks MF what time the driver will be collecting her.</i>	Independence (making travel arrangements)
40	07.30	MF	<i>He replies around 7:30 and asks how she slept.</i>	Independence (travel arrangements) Involvement (expressing concern for her wellbeing)
41		LW	<i>She replies “well” and that she has not done so for a long time due to her work hours.</i>	Independence/involvement (responding to previous question, sharing her personal wellbeing)
42	08.02	LW	<i>At 8:02 she tells MF that she is going to shower and wash her hair.</i>	Involvement (sharing intimate/personal details)
43	08.03	MF	Make urself hot for trip!!	Involvement (expressing appreciation and desire)
44		LW	Just finihsed my hair. Im in pniel at my brothers house figured I should let you know its just outside stellenbosch on ur way to franschoek	Involvement (sharing personal details) Independence (making travel arrangements)
45	09.01	MF	ok. Not possible to get to stellenbosch?	Independence (making travel arrangements)
46	09.02	LW	My parents are already gone for work. we spent the night here for braai.”	Independence (making travel arrangements) Involvement (imposing on MF to collect her)
47	09.03	MF	Ok. D*** getting u	Independence (making travel arrangements, minimizing threat to face set up by turn 46.)

This time it is LW who initiates the contact, but this can be explained by her need to be ready for the driver. MF then enquires as to how well she slept, an involvement question which reflects ‘concern for her wellbeing’. However, in turn 42, LW breaks with the discourse patterns she has used to date, and volunteers a personal detail: ‘she tells MF that she is going

to shower and wash her hair'. Her motive for doing so is not clear, and it is a risky move, as it reinforces the 'intimate' line that MF has been pushing throughout. MF picks up on this immediately and replies with yet another very suggestive remark, 'Make urself hot for trip!!', to which she responds by updating him on her progress: 'Just finihsed my hair'. By now her texting style is informal (e.g. 'ur' for 'your'), with more typing errors and less attention to correct spelling and punctuation, and she is using more involvement strategies. She appears to have 'let down her guard', and to have adopted a conversational line and discourse style much closer to his.

Given her previous reluctance to enter into MF's informal, intimate frame, it seems anomalous that LW now shares private information that she is about to have a shower and wash her hair. But this shift in her stance needs to be understood against the backdrop of research which shows how less powerful participants may take on the discursive norms of their more powerful interlocutors (Eades 2016) or make strategic responses to sexual coercion in an attempt to manage the situation (Erhlich 2003). In a similar vein, Scollon et al (2012) argue that people in a position of lesser power often work to maintain 'the face' of the more powerful participant so as not to make them feel 'bad' or 'lose face'. And as Goffman (1967, 41) so aptly expresses, participants (like LW) are usually at pains to manage the conversational line without casting their interlocutor 'in an undesirable light' and 'without disrupting the relationships' or 'altering the expected course of development'. As the above analysis has repeatedly demonstrated, MF has persistently used his prerogative as the more powerful participant to assert a frame of 'sexual intimacy', while LW has consistently tried to re-assert the frame of 'employer-employee' without acquiescing or offending. The risk of causing offence is great: not only would she threaten the broadly accepted patriarchal norms which give him, as an older, more powerful male, authority over her, but she may also lose her new job. Too much is at stake, and so, I would argue, her adoption of more involvement strategies on Monday morning is her attempt to manage this conflict.

Conclusion

With the publication of these chats, MF's political career has suffered a major setback, although he has repeatedly asserted his innocence and has attempted to reclaim his former position. There has also to date not been any progress in the legal process that was triggered by LW's formal complaint. In the public sphere, the matter therefore remains unresolved. But regardless of these ongoing political and legal processes, the above detailed analysis of the chat between MF and LW tells a story and gives detailed (and potentially incriminating) insight into the shifting and coercive dynamics.

The analysis has shown how MF exploits the texting medium to adopt an informal style and use a combination of frame shifts and involvement strategies to pressurize LW into adopting a particular line. For example, he typically initiates contact by referring to practical (employer-employee) matters, then shifts to the personal, and then outright suggestive. In addition, he consistently uses a range of involvement strategies to signal closeness and intimacy, with the intention of blurring the work-pleasure distinction. For her part, LW initially uses only independence strategies, but then, as I have argued, in an effort to maintain his positive face, shifts styles and codes to signal involvement. In response to his advances, she initially replies with short emphatic expressions of agreement, as though to try and close down the conversation. But then, as he persists, she attempts, on three occasions, to reassert the employer-employee frame, first by adopting more features of textese (his preferred style of interaction) and twice, by shifting into a linguistic variety which signals solidarity and

shared ethnic identity. It is when she feels most compromised and wishes to signal either an unwillingness to take up his line, or actually reject his request (i.e. to take a selfie), that she makes these shifts. In line with Erhlich (2003, 2014) and other feminist scholars, I have argued that these are a strategic response by LW to a situation of sexual coercion in an attempt to save both MF's face as well as her own, in a context of socially structured inequalities and hierarchical power relations.

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