

## Public Prejudice as Collaborative Accomplishment: Towards a Dialogic Social Psychology of Racism

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### ABSTRACT

Existing social psychological perspectives tend to overlook the fact that public expressions of racial, ethnic or national prejudice normally constitute collaborative accomplishments, the product of joint action between a number of individuals. Awareness of the inherently dialogical character of prejudiced talk affords appreciation of the ways in which expressions of ethnic or racial antipathy need not simply be used to display a speaker's private attitudes or to defend a group position, but may also be oriented to the local context of talk in action. Recognizably prejudiced talk may be used to claim the floor, to bully, to amuse, to shock, to display intimacy and solidarity, to mark a variety of personal and social identities or to key the informal, backstage, character of a social encounter. The fact that prejudiced talk can be intricately woven through the delicate choreography of everyday sociability may greatly complicate any attempts to challenge it. Copyright © 2006 John Wiley & Sons, Ltd.

*Key words:* racism; prejudice; discourse; dialogue

### INTRODUCTION

'It is a fact of our human condition that, for most of us, our daily life is spent in the immediate presence of others; in other words, that whatever they are, our doings are likely to be, in a narrow sense, *socially situated*' (Goffman, 1983, p. 2).

'The purpose of most conversations is not to express opinions or change the opinions of others . . . Many conversations, ones that are not focus groups, public inquiries, classes or interviews, take place so that the participants can be with people, enjoy the play of similarity and difference, pass the time' (Myers, 2004, p. 234).

#### *The discursive turn in the social psychology of racism*

Since its inception in the 1920s, social psychological work on national, 'race' (or later 'ethnic') prejudice has been characterized by continual contestation over matters of conceptualization, operationalisation and theorization (see, Augoustinos & Reynolds, 2001; Brown, 1995). In recent years it has become increasingly common for researchers

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to advocate the use of discursive methods as a supplement to or substitute for other social psychological approaches to prejudice and to racism (e.g. Billig, 2001; Durrheim & Dixon, 2000; Green & Sonn, in press; Kirkwood, Liu, & Weatherall, in press; LeCouteur, Rapley, & Augoustinos, 2001; Rapley, 2001; Riggs & Augoustinos, in press; Verkuyten, 1998, 2001; Verkuyten, de Jong, & Masson, 1994; van den Berg, Wetherell, & Houtkoop-Steenstra, 2003; Wetherell & Potter, 1992).

In this article I shall focus on situations in which people present recognizably pejorative representations of nationally, ethnically, or racially defined others in the course of conversation. The kinds of situation I shall be considering hence represent an example of what social psychologists currently term 'public prejudice' (e.g. Fazio & Olson, 2003). Although the perspective I shall be adopting relies heavily on existing perspectives on racist discourse, it differs in emphasizing the locally situated and essentially dialogic character of prejudiced talk. In a previous article my colleagues and I considered how the suppression and mitigation of racist discourse—what Wetherell and Potter (1992) describe as 'dodging the identity of prejudice'—might in practice often represent a collaborative discursive accomplishment (Condor, Figgou, Abell, Gibson, & Stevenson, in press). In this article, I develop this argument to consider how the public expression of racial, national or ethnic prejudice may also represent the outcome of joint action in situated social encounters.

### *The missing micro-social context*

Despite their numerous differences in perspective, both cognitive and discursive psychologists have tended in practice to overlook the fact that the public expressions of prejudice normally involve socially situated activity: that is, actions that occur *between* individuals. For example the domain of the micro-social was not included in Allport's (1954) otherwise encyclopaedic social psychological account of 'the nature of prejudice'. In the course of presenting a range of possible perspectives which might be adopted in the study of prejudice—from macrosocial through to intra-individual—Allport referred to approaches which adopt a 'situational emphasis' (p. 213). However, further consideration of Allport's account reveals that in this case 'situational emphasis' does not pertain to the specific local encounters in which prejudice is publicly displayed or enacted, but rather to relatively enduring life conditions or events impacting upon individual social actors, such as contexts of socialization, employment status and so forth. Contemporary social cognitive approaches likewise tend to assume that prejudice fundamentally involves cognitions and emotions located in the heads of distinct individuals, and that the presence of others is significant simply in so far as it provides a 'stimulus context' (Wittenbrink, Judd, & Park, 2001) facilitating or impeding their open expression.

To charge discourse analytic perspectives with similarly neglecting the locally situated and collaborative character of prejudiced talk might, at first sight, appear rather curious, particularly given the dominant anti-individualist epistemological perspective of this work. In practice, however, most discourse analytic work has focused on the rhetorical rather than the strictly dialogical character of racist talk (e.g. Billig et al., 1988; Reisigl & Wodak, 2001). It is common for social psychologists to treat rhetoric and dialogue as quasi-synonymous terms, often tracing this to Bakhtinian perspectives (e.g. Billig, 1987). However, in so far as Bakhtin focused on dialogue as communicative *interaction and collaboration*, his work poses a fundamental challenge to approaches which treat rhetoric as the act of strategic persuasion undertaken by one sovereign individual in relation to

another (Kent, 1998). The kind of approach that I am advocating consequently draws less on current perspectives on racist rhetoric than on Shotter's (1993) account of dialogic behaviour as a form of 'joint action' which is 'unattributable to an individual agent' (p. 4).

Research that adopts conversation analytic principles may facilitate the conceptualization of prejudiced discourse as a form of collaborative accomplishment (cf. Speer & Potter, 2000; Speer, 2002). However, existing discourse analytic studies of racism, anti-Semitism or ethnocentrism tend to use data sources that do not easily lend themselves to this kind of approach. Textual materials and transcripts of political speeches are often subjected to sophisticated rhetorical or other forms of linguistic analysis. However these analyses of the 'finished product' tend to elide the extended and distributed process through which news copy is circulated between journalists and editors, or the text of a political speech is crafted over a period of time by a politician in conjunction with a small army of researchers, speechwriters and party officers.

The other kind of data source generally used in social psychological studies of 'racist discourse' involves one to one interviews.<sup>1</sup> Of course, interviews may be treated as collaborative conversational encounters, and indeed many discourse analysts advocate this as a standard matter of good practice (e.g. Hester & Francis, 1994; Houtkoop-Steenstra, 2000). However, the particular character of one to one interviews on race and ethnicity may militate against the co-constructive role of the interviewer being fully apparent in the transcript. As Koole (2003) has noted, in interviews designed to harvest racist discourse, the interviewer is typically faced with an 'interactional conflict' that arises from the fact that they 'want to establish rapport with the interviewee without identifying at the same time with the views the interviewee expresses' (p. 178). Consequently, although subsequent analysis may consider how the interviewer frames questions concerning race and ethnicity (Pomerantz & Zemel, 2003) and their use of minimal (Koole, 2003) or backchannel responses (Hak, 2003), it is unlikely that transcripts would ever reveal instances in which the interviewer for example agreed with her respondents' racist accounts, or supplemented their respondents' 'stories about minorities' (van Dijk, 1984) with 'second stories' designed to display a sense of shared values (Sacks, 1992).

## ILLUSTRATIVE EXAMPLES

In the following pages I shall adopt an approach to prejudiced talk—by which I mean verbal behaviour which the respondents themselves orient to as containing actually or potentially derogatory accounts of other ethnic, national or racial groups—based on Goffman's accounts of behaviour in situations of copresence (Goffman, 1963) and interaction ritual (Goffman, 1967). Goffman emphasized the need to distinguish between 'the merely situated' that is, 'what is incidentally located in social situations (and could without great change be located outside them)', and 'the situational', that which 'could only occur in face-to-face-assemblies' (p. 3). I shall argue that prejudiced talk should be treated as situated rather than merely situational activity. My aim is not in any way to displace social psychological concern with macro-processes of discrimination and structural inequality (see Green & Sonn, in press), nor, for reasons that will become apparent later, do I regard this as a substitute for the study of subjective beliefs or attitudes. Rather, I am

<sup>1</sup>Although conversational or focus group data has occasionally been used in linguistic approaches to racist discourse (e.g. Reisigl & Wodak, 2001) such methods have not generally been adopted by social psychologists.

suggesting merely that social psychologists would do well to pay more attention to the interaction order as a ‘relatively autonomous’ (Goffman, 1983, p. 9) sphere in which racial, national and ethnic hostility may be publicly manifested.

For purposes of illustration I shall consider extracts from two group interviews in which the speakers can be seen to be collaborating in the production of prejudiced talk. These examples were selected from a larger data corpus<sup>2</sup> to exemplify one case in which a ‘subtle’ form of racist discourse is constructed collaboratively, and one in which a more explicit form of racist discourse is worked up dialogically. It should be emphasized that my current objective is limited to exemplifying the dialogic character of public displays of prejudice. Consequently, I shall not attempt exhaustive analyses of individual extracts, nor shall I be offering a general theory concerning how, when and under what circumstances particular types of behaviour are liable to occur.

### THE COLLABORATIVE ACCOMPLISHMENT OF SUBTLE PREJUDICE

Our first example involves an exchange between a group of neighbours. Elsewhere, my colleagues and I have used this extract as a exemplary case of ‘subtle’ prejudice, and have considered the processes by which the speakers collaborate in defending themselves and each other against possible charges of prejudice (Condor et al., in press). For present purposes, I shall consider the other side of the rhetorical coin, and consider how this transcript extract also reveals evidence of the collaborative production of hearably prejudiced talk.

The speakers in the exchange reported in Extract 1 are the Abbotts (a couple in their 80s), the Bishops (a couple in their 70s) and Clifford Stevenson (the interviewer, in his late 20s). The Abbotts and the Bishops live on a working-class housing estate on the outskirts of a small market town in the South of England. Clifford identified himself as living in the North of England and speaks with an Irish accent, which it later transpired that the Abbotts and Bishops mis-recognized as Scottish.

Clifford had initiated the encounter by approaching the Abbotts and the Bishops as they were chatting over their front garden fence on a sunny afternoon, and requesting their assistance in a study about ‘people’s attitudes to where they live’. Extract 1 starts at a point in the conversation where the Clifford is responding to Mrs Abbott having mentioned that she had previously lived in London:

#### Extract 1: ‘I’m not prejudiced’

- |    |       |  |
|----|-------|--|
| 1  | Cliff | That’s—one thing people say, I mean I-I haven’t um b-been much to  |
| 2  |       | London, I’ve only been, you know down to stay for a couple of      |
| 3  |       | weekends and so forth. People were saying that London’s changed    |
| 4  |       | an awful lot over the past-  |
| 5  | Mrs A | Don’t go there.  |
| 6  | Mrs B | Don’t go back. Don’t go back. We just don’t go back.               |
| 7  | Cliff | Yeah? Why not, what’s- what’s- (.) people say it’s changed, but in |
| 8  |       | what- what- what way?  |
| 9  | Mrs A | I’m not- I’m not prejudiced, a- about [coloured] people =          |
| 10 | Mrs B | [No, no]   |

<sup>2</sup>Collected for the project: ‘Migrants and Nationals’, funded within the Leverhulme Trust *Constitutional Change and Identity* programme (Grant number: 35113).

- 11 Cliff Uhuh?
- 12 Mrs A = But, when you've been living in a house, we lived in a house for  
13 nearly 50 years, and you had neighbours, Pakistani neighbours =
- 14 Cliff Uhuh?
- 15 Mrs A = Frying all their stuff-
- 16 Mr B What's wrong with the Pakis?
- 17 Mrs A No-
- 18 Mrs B No, [listen to her!]
- 19 Mrs A [Nothing wrong with them]
- 20 Mrs B Wait, wait, wait.
- 21 Mrs A They were very friendly
- 22 Mrs B Yes
- 23 Cliff [Uhuh?]
- 24 Mrs A [But], they weren't *us*.
- 25 Cliff Uhuh?
- 26 Mrs A You know what I mean, they're a different =
- 27 Mr A They've got their own-
- 28 Mrs A = *race*.
- 29 Mr A Yeah, They've got their own side, yeah.
- 30 Mrs A As I say, I'm not prejudiced against them, um-
- 31 Mr B Yes you are!
- 32 Mrs A No I'm [not].
- 33 Mrs B [No] she's not actually.
- 34 Mr B You're not allowed to shoot them anymore, you realise that  
35 don't you?  
36 ((all laugh))
- 37 Mrs B [((laughing)) Shut up!]
- 38 Mrs A [((inaudible))] I gave my gun up!
- 39 Mrs B Can I take him away?  
40 ((all laugh))
- 41 Mrs A I said I gave my gun up!
- 42 Mrs B Yes
- 43 Mr A I'll tell you something-
- 44 Mrs A It's the same with people that are not even black people. [I've got  
45 a grandchild who's married] =
- 46 Mr A [We're the only ones to be married in a submarine.]
- 47 Mrs A = to a Jamaican boy.
- 48 Cliff ((to Mr A)) Really?
- 49 Mrs B We're not even married.
- 50 Mr A During war time
- 51 Cliff ((inaudible)) That's fantastic
- 52 Mr A And that's true.

There are clearly many interesting things going on in this short stretch of talk. However, for present purposes I shall start out simply by discussing this extract in relation to three questions: To whom do we attribute the agency for the production of the *Pakistani neighbours* story? What is the point of the conversation? What functions is this story serving in the specific context in which it is produced? I shall then go on to consider

some of the ways in which a thoroughgoing dialogical approach might worry some of the conventional presumptions adopted by current rhetorical and discourse analytic accounts of 'racist discourse'.

*Questions of agency: Prejudiced talk as joint action*

Had the Pakistani neighbours story been voiced in the context of a one-to-one interview, the transcribed record of the encounter would almost certainly have represented this in the form of a monologue, in such a manner as to attribute Mrs Abbott with sole agency for its production. The transcript would probably have depicted Mrs Abbott telling her story uninterrupted, save perhaps for the occasional 'uhuh?' backchannel response from Clifford. In this case, however, we can see how 'Mrs Abbott's' story is in fact sustained and worked up through the effective support of others. As Sacks (1992, p. 222) noted, 'stories routinely take more than one turn to tell', and we can see how the unfolding of the *Pakistani neighbours* story is contingent not only upon Mrs Abbott's own discursive efforts, but also upon the other interlocutors who allow her to take and to retain the floor, and who provide reinforcement through markers of agreement (in the case of Mrs Bishop) co-operative completion and echoing (from her husband) and heckling banter (from Mr Bishop). Characteristically, Clifford as interviewer appears to be limiting his contribution to backchannel responses indicating attention. In contrast, when Mr Abbott introduces his submarine wedding story, Clifford starts employing the kinds of explicit prompts ('really?', line 48) and assessment tokens ('that's fantastic', line 51), which are notably absent during the telling of the *Pakistani neighbours* story. 'What is going on here?'

Goffman (1986) emphasized how the meaning of an act will depend crucially on the framing of the situation in which it occurs. Whereas most social psychologists currently understand a 'context' to involve some form of prior setting 'in' which action takes place (cf. Condor, 2003), Goffman drew attention to the inevitably relational dimension of meaning, and of ways in which social actors construct shared understandings of 'what is going on'. Similarly, ethnomethodologists often approach context as a participants' concern, and emphasize how, 'What a participant treats as relevant context is shaped by the specific activities being performed at that moment' (Goodwin & Duranti, 1992, p. 4).

Most social scientific approaches to public prejudice, whether conducted under the metatheoretical auspices of cognitive psychology or discourse analysis, tend to assume that talk about racially or ethnically defined others takes place in circumscribed contexts, and is consequently associated with a limited range of interactional goals. For example Crandall and Eshleman (2003, p. 415) depicted the currently popular two-factor theories of prejudice as suggesting that, 'people are trying to simultaneously satisfy two competing motivations, based on (a) racial prejudice and (b) motivation to suppress prejudice'. Similarly, van Dijk (1987, p. 86) has noted that, 'prejudiced talk about minorities... has the overall goal of negative other-presentation, while at the same time preserving a positive self-presentation'.

Despite their different methodological preferences, these approaches share two basic presumptions. First, that displays of prejudice necessarily occur in situations in which people are thinking or talking 'about' race. Second, that what is going on in these situations is something to do with the expression or suppression of subjective beliefs. In fact, the possibility that anything else could be going on when people produce pejorative representations of racially or ethnically defined others may be explicitly denied. For example van Dijk (1992, p. 98) suggested that in everyday talk about ethnic affairs 'story-telling is

designed to warrant or illustrate negative claims concerning ethnic others', and 'not, as would be usual, focused on entertaining'.

*What is the topic of the talk in progress?*

The stretch of talk reported in Extract 1 might lead us to question the first of these presumptions: that, as it occurs in situated conversational encounters, prejudiced talk is necessarily 'about' race. In the standard interview encounter, of course, the conversation would have been explicitly framed as having 'to do' with race or racism and talk on these topics would be elicited by the interviewer posing direct questions. Similarly, when researchers harvest more naturalistic examples of racist discourse from political speeches or newspaper text, these are almost always taken from contexts in which the primary frame to which the social actors are oriented is effectively to do with race, ethnicity or xenophobia.

In the case of the stretch of talk reported in Extract 1, however, there is nothing to suggest that the topic of race, ethnicity or prejudice had been in play until Mrs Abbott apparently spontaneously introduced talk about '*coloured people*' (line 9), in response to Clifford's question concerning how London had 'changed'. In addition, attention to the organization of talk indicates a shared understanding that this part of the conversation represents a period of by-play, a temporary diversion from the main matter in hand. First, as we have noted, Clifford ceases to offer explicit positive assessment tokens for the duration of the talk about ethnicity and prejudice but resumes explicit encouragement at the point at which the talk shifts back to a general autobiographical narrative. Second, the fact that the 'respondents' do not regard the *Pakistani neighbours* story as being essentially about race or ethnicity is apparent from the character of the second story (Sacks, 1992, lecture 4) which follows on from it. Although Mrs Abbott attempts to build on her *Pakistani neighbours* story with a second story relating to her '*grandchild who's married to a Jamaican boy*' (lines 44–47), this loses out to the bid from her husband, who offers a story concerning their own marriage '*in a submarine*' (lines 46–52). In addition, we may also note the failed bid by Mrs Bishop, who also picks up on the topic of marriage rather than that of ethnicity (line 49). The absence of any markers of topic shift indicates agreement among the parties that the essential thread of the ongoing conversation is less concerned with reporting information concerning attitudes towards race and ethnicity, than with the production of amusing anecdotes of personal experience.

*What are the functions of the Pakistani neighbours story?*

The stretch of talk reported in Extract 1 might also allow us to question the second common presumption adopted in psychological and discursive accounts of public prejudice: that prejudiced talk in general, and 'stories about minorities' in particular, are necessarily designed to relay information, to express authentic beliefs or to convince an audience of a particular point of view.

Conventionally, social psychologists have tended to assume that racial or ethnic prejudice (whether manifested in the form of conscious attitudes, implicit beliefs or public actions) will serve individual psychological and macro-social functions (see Ruscher, 2001). Discourse analytic work tends to be more divided over questions of functionality, with some authors treating racist discourse as a mechanism by which individuals express private attitudes (e.g. van Dijk, 1984) or attempt strategically to convince others of a particular point of view (e.g. Billig et al., 1988), whereas others treat the functions of racist

discourse as a matter of macrosocial consequences which may be unintended by the speakers themselves (e.g. Wetherell & Potter, 1992).

What all of these perspectives tend to overlook is the possibility that as it occurs relatively spontaneously in the course of everyday social life, negative talk about ethnically- or racially-defined others may be designed with a view to more mundane matters relating to the specific local contexts in which it occurs. As Myers notes in the quotation at the start of this article, in 'normal' conversations, people may not be particularly concerned about convincing others of their vision of the social world. Rather than being motivated by a need for simplification, during the course of social interaction people collaborate in the production of entertainment and mutual stimulation precisely through the generation of ambiguity and complexity. Similarly, in the normal run of mundane social interaction, people do not generally cast themselves as political agents, orienting their micro-actions to the distal sphere of macro-social structures and processes.

In Extract 1, the *Pakistani neighbours* story clearly enables Mrs Abbott to claim entitlement to express ideas about ethnicity (Sacks, 1992, lecture 4), and provides an evidential basis for her complaint concerning the changing ethnic composition of the population of London (cf. van Dijk, 1992). However, given that the previous conversation had not concerned ethnicity or prejudice, and given that the interactants go on to frame these issues as of tangential relevance to the primary topic in hand, we might reasonably pose the ethnomethodological question, 'why that now?' (Schegloff & Sacks, 1973).

At this point we can begin to appreciate how the articulation of pejorative representations of ethnically or racially defined others may serve local micro-social, as well as distal macro-social, functions. In the context of a fast-moving conversation the *Pakistani neighbours* story constitutes a reportable topic affording a claim to the floor. Consequently, Mrs Abbott's statement, '*I'm not prejudiced about coloured people*' (line 9) not only serves as a disclaimer, but also as a pre-announcement concerning the nature (a complaint) and hence the reportability of the narrative to follow (cf. Jefferson, 1978). Similarly, Mr Bishop's interjections, in which he accuses Mrs Abbott of prejudice, are interpreted by his wife not as literal complaints, but rather as attempts to seize the floor ('*No, listen to her*', line 18; '*shut up!*' line 37). In addition, we may note how the side-sequence exchanges concerning whether or not the *Pakistani neighbours* story can be taken as evidence of 'prejudice' on Mrs Abbott's part, are oriented to by all parties as playful banter (Bateson, 1978), serving as a marker of intimacy (Brown & Levinson, 1987) and association (Radcliffe-Brown, 1940) between the four main conversationalists, and combining to work up collectively what Billig (2002) has termed the 'pleasures of bigotry'.

#### *From clarity to ambivalence: Where is the action? Who are the actors?*

From its inception, the social psychology of prejudice embraced modernist fantasies that the systematic application of scientific method could offer utopian solutions to societal problems of social inequality and conflict (Figgou & Condor, in press). Consequently, social psychological science has routinely subjected the prejudice problematic to control through classification, quantification and disambiguation (cf. Bauman, 1991). Prejudice is, according to social cognitive perspectives, unambiguously located in the minds and bodies of sovereign individuals such that it is possible to classify persons as prejudiced or tolerant, or as inhabiting some identifiable space between these two categorical extremes. The evaluative quality of a form of representation (whether it is indicative of 'prejudice' or

'tolerance', of 'modern' or 'redneck' racism etc.) remains constant, and can be determined independent of context.

Although discursive approaches to racism and prejudice often criticize these kinds of approaches from postmodernist perspectives, they also generally fail to confront matters of ambivalence or complexity (cf. Billig et al., 1988). Accounts of discourse analytic studies often present social actors as singularly and unambiguously positioned within any social encounter (for example as a 'white majority group member'). The authors often engage in heated debates concerning what racism 'is' and 'is not', the underlying presumption nevertheless being that it is ultimately possible to find some grounds on which to classify events or actions definitively and unambiguously as 'racist', 'non-racist' or 'anti-racist'. Even the most critical of social psychologists typically assume that it is possible to determine 'the' outcome of any action or event (e.g. whether or not it 'contributes to racism').

One consequence of the adoption of a dialogical approach would be to challenge any such clear-cut categorical distinctions. By way of illustration, let us return to Extract 1, this time considering how an appreciation of the dialogic status of the *Pakistani neighbours* story might radically unsettle any presumptions concerning analytic closure.

*What is the action?* First, we may note that the written transcript of a recorded conversation restricts the number of channels of communication available to our analytic gaze. Most obviously, perhaps, we are not privy to the non-verbal channels of communication, and hence of the collaborative work performed by gaze, facial expression and body posturing (Goodwin, 1979, 2000). My earlier representation of Clifford as semi-detached from the ongoing talk in Extract 1 is almost certainly a product of this informational lacuna. There is no evidence that any of the other participants are orienting to Clifford's non-engrossed status (cf. Goodwin, 1986), but without a visual record we are unable to appreciate how Clifford may be aligning himself with the talk, and the other speakers orienting what they say in relation to Clifford, through eye-contact, smiling, nodding and so forth.

*What is the local context?* Second, we need to appreciate that the recorded episode of talk does not simply constitute an isolated, disconnected moment. Cicourel (1992) notes how even brief exchanges can 'carry considerable cultural and interpersonal 'baggage' for participants because of long-term social relationships unknown to or unattended by the investigator' (p. 295). Clearly a good deal of the action taking place in the interview episode is oriented to the past relationships and prospective future relationships of the individuals concerned. In addition, the multiple concerns and projects to which people are attending are likely to differ for each of the individual social actors. As Goffman (1986) has noted,

'It is obvious that in most "situations" many different things are happening simultaneously—things that are likely to have begun at different moments and may terminate dissynchronously. To ask the question "what is *it* that's going on here?" biases matters in the direct of unitary exposition and simplicity' (p. 9).

We shall return to consider the potential significance of this observation shortly.

*Who is speaking?* Third, and relatedly, we might note how a dialogic approach would treat communication as a mechanism through which local contexts may become imbedded and serially interconnected, in such a manner as to radically unsettle any definitive claims

to knowledge concerning who is involved in the production or reception of the talk in question. For example, it is quite possible that Mrs Abbott did not simply formulate her Pakistani neighbours story on line, but that an earlier version of this narrative had originally been worked up in conjunction with (or even borrowed from) her other white neighbours in London. The precise wording Mrs Abbott uses may have been adopted from something she read in a newspaper, which may, in turn, have been formulated collaboratively by a whole team of journalists. This observation, of course, puts into question the easy assurance that the *Pakistani neighbours* story essentially belongs in, and is confined to, 'a' distinctive interactive episode, which can be neatly and unambiguously placed in a particular place and time.

*From consequentiality to undetermined trajectories.* An awareness of the functional interconnectedness of microsocal episodes in turn prompts us to recognize the impossibility not only of pin-pointing once and for all 'where' and 'when' the action is taking place, and of 'who' is involved, but also what 'the' consequences of any instance of discourse (whether designated as 'racist' or 'tolerant') might be.

Rather than engage in idle metaphysical speculation concerning how the effects (if any) of any discursive act may be carried over time and across space along multiple trajectories, we can illustrate this by drawing on privileged insider-knowledge (cf. Wetherell, 2003). One thing we know as a matter of fact is that 'Clifford' is not acting as sovereign individual in the interview context. Behind the person of Clifford is a team of invisible collaborators, including myself as project director. The second thing we know is that Clifford (like all of the participants) is bringing to the conversation a range of interests and objectives that are not necessarily shared by the other participants. In particular, part of Clifford's remit as interviewer on a project concerned with everyday understandings of citizenship and civil society is, where possible, to harvest a serviceable corpus of nationalist and ethnocentric talk.

Consequently, insider-knowledge concerning Clifford's particular objectives allows us to appreciate how Mrs Abbott's original introduction of the *Pakistani neighbours* story is in fact less unambiguously off-topic (whose topic?) than might appear from the written record of the conversation. In addition, the apparent spontaneity of Clifford's actions during the talk reported in Extract 1 masks a large element of stage-managing and scripting. In particular, Clifford's question about London having '*changed*' in fact represented what the research team termed a 'trigger question', designed precisely to afford a conversational opening for talk about delicate subjects. On the basis of pilot work we had learned that white people who had moved from urban to rural areas often had 'white flight' explanations available, but were often reluctant to voice these in response to direct questions. Clifford's question about London having changed was in fact strategically designed to provoke precisely the kind of talk that followed.

Tracing Clifford's actions backwards and forwards beyond the moment of conversation reported in Extract 1 illustrates not only the ambiguity of who is speaking at any particular time (to what extent can Clifford be attributed with sole authorship for his intervention, '*people were saying that London's changed . . . ?*'), but also the indeterminate nature of the audience (see Goffman, 1980). Clifford is not only importing particular interests and discourses into the encounter in which the Pakistani neighbours story is told, but he (like the other participants in the conversation) also subsequently exports the *Pakistani neighbours* story (or its discursive effects) into other encounters and contexts. This consideration allows us to appreciate how an incidental stretch of talk designed to perform particular

local functions in relation to the ongoing local action may contribute to trajectories of effect that extend far beyond the particular time and place in which the words were originally uttered.

Conventionally, of course, social psychologists would be included to simply presume that the kind of prejudiced talk exemplified by the *Pakistani neighbours* story, will somehow contribute (by what, following Bourdieu, we might term a 'magical' process) to macrosocial systems of inequality and conflict. Less ambitiously, we might reasonably surmise that in exercising this kind of talk the speakers rehearse, and thereby keep alive, their tolerance for various forms of practical discrimination. (Although we might also note, following Billig et al. (1988), how the speakers' simultaneous orientation to the stigma of prejudice also keeps alive some limited possibility for tolerance). At the very least, in the very telling and comprehension, the *Pakistani neighbours* story reinforces a series of shared premises according to which the social world is understood to be decomposable into a series of racialized and ethicized 'us' and 'them' distinctions.

However, once we begin to appreciate the ways in which dialogic episodes may become functionally imbedded and serially interconnected, we can begin to appreciate the radical indeterminacy of social action. Employing, once again, our insider knowledge, we can begin to trace one set of consequences of the *Pakistani neighbours* story through Clifford's subsequent activity, including his passing of a record of the conversation to me, and my subsequent transmission of this talk to multiple, distal, audiences by including a transcribed version of the encounter in two academic articles. Some of the consequences to which this action contributes will doubtless have little directly to do with racism at all. In some respects, this chain of actions may contribute indirectly to macro-systems of social inequality (publishing articles keeps me in work, for which I earn money, which I then inadvertently spend on clothes produced by Indian women and children for minimal wages). Conversely, of course, in so far as the articles I write contribute to liberal academic debate concerning anti-racism, the *Pakistani neighbours* story may, indirectly and paradoxically, contribute in a small way to anti-racist outcomes.

We shall return to consider some of the practical implications of these considerations at the end of the article.

## **DOING BEING RACIST: THE COLLABORATIVE PRODUCTION OF EXPLICITLY PREJUDICED TALK**

The stretch of talk reported in Extract 1 represents an example of relatively 'polite' talk about race and ethnicity, and it is clear that the participants themselves are orienting to a normative requirement to 'dodge the identity of prejudice'. Our second extract has been selected to illustrate a different style of prejudiced talk, in which the speakers make explicitly abusive remarks about nationally, ethnically and racially defined others.

Extract 2 has been taken from a pilot interview that I conducted with Chloe, Katie and Gemma, who were aged between 15 and 16 and living in a small town on the South Coast of England. I joined the young women who were sitting on the beach, and invited them to tell me something about their 'feelings about where they live'. The extract starts at the point in the conversation at which, having moved the conversation towards talk about England and Scotland, I ask a direct question concerning recent changes to the British constitution.

Extract 2: 'I hate 'em all'

- 1 Susan So wh- what do do you think about Scotland having their own  
 2 parliament?  
 3 Chloe What?  
 4 Susan You know, eh Scottish people, they've recently got got their own  
 5 parliament uh and Wales have got an Assembly  
 6 Gem I hate the Welsh  
 7 ((laughter))  
 8 Katie Yeah. Sheep-shaggers.  
 9 ((laughter))  
 10 Chloe They're not as as bad as the French though (1.5)  
 11 Susan What's wrong with the French?  
 12 Chloe [I dunno]  
 13 Katie [They eat] horses  
 14 Gem An' frogs. An' they are frogs so that makes them cannibals  
 15 ((laughter))  
 16 Chloe Yeah. And the Chinese, they eat dogs [and stuff]  
 17 Katie [Yeah]  
 18 ((laughter))  
 19 Chloe Sweet and sour Doberman  
 20 Gem Tastes like dog shit anyway  
 21 ((laughter))  
 22 Katie Yeah. They're terrible, the Chinkies  
 23 Gem Not as bad as the Pakis though. [I hate Pakis].  
 24 Katie [No. Yeah] They're the worst. Cos the  
 25 Chinkies they just stay in in their house and places, but the Pakis  
 26 they're everywhere you go fucking harassing you an' an' =  
 27 Gem = them fucking Pakis is well outa order  
 28 Katie Perverts. An' they smell [an' all]  
 29 Gem [An' they] smell an' all. Y'know that boy,  
 30 Naheed, I sat next to in maths. He smelt like piss an' that  
 31 ((laughter))  
 32 Chloe Poo vindaloo  
 33 ((laughter))  
 34 Gem I dunno [I hate em all]  
 35 Katie [An' they got] little dicks  
 36 Gem Well you'd know you slag  
 37 ((laughter))

*Explicit prejudice as joint action*

Following from my observation concerning the role of the interviewer in Extract 1, we may start out by noting that although in this case I had not consciously provoked the racist talk, I do in fact prompt it (line 11). The fact that the transcript records no further verbal intervention from me for the rest of the extract should not, of course, be interpreted as evidence that the talk was not being oriented towards me, or that I was not in some way noticeably engaging with it.

Although we have seen how the production of the *Pakistani neighbours* narrative in Extract 1 represented a collaborative achievement, it is nevertheless possible that it also represented a stock, 'transportable', story that Mrs Abbott could offer on other occasions. In contrast, it is less likely that any of the young women who collaborated in building up the stretch of conversation recorded in Extract 2 would have been inclined, or indeed able, to produce more than a fraction of this account by themselves. In this sense, the conversation represents a genuine example of joint action, the quality of the eventual conversation being irreducible to the input or intentions of any of the single individuals who contributed to its eventual unfolding.

Moreover, in the conversation reported in Extract 2, the speakers do not only collaborate in working up a stream of prejudiced talk, but also the very act of collaboration is itself part of the display, as the young women engage in a delicate verbal choreography, whereby each utterance is trumped in the next turn. Hence we find an escalation of ethnohauric reference (Mullen, Rozell, & Johnson, 2001): Chloe's '*the Welsh*' (line 6) is upgraded by Katie into '*sheep-shaggers*' (line 8), '*the Chinese*' (line 16) upgraded into '*the Chinkies*' (line 22) and so forth. Similarly, the speakers progress in incremental steps up an imaginary hierarchy of disparaged outgroups, with '*the Welsh*' (line 6), being displaced by '*the French*' on the grounds of their not being as '*bad*' (line 10). Discussion of '*the French*' in turn gives way to discussion of '*the Chinese*' (line 16), which, is in turn displaced by reference to '*the Pakis*' (line 23), with the topic shift again being warranted by allusion to the group's place on an imaginary hierarchy of social distance, '*they're the worst*' (line 24). Similarly, the category-related features of each of these negatively defined outgroups are characterized by a serial escalation: frog eating gives way to dog-eating, gives way to smelling and sexual threat.

#### *Prejudiced talk 'in' and 'as' social context*

I noted earlier how a dialogical approach could unsettle the conventional analytic presumption of the singularity of context. The stretch of talk reported in Extract 2 allows us to go one step further, and appreciate how the very act of using taboo prejudiced language can be used to key a particular understanding of the speech situation (cf. Goffman, 1986; Hymes, 1972). In this case, Chloe and her friends use racist banter involving 'profanity, open sexual remark . . . sub-standard speech, mumbling and shouting and playful aggressiveness' (Goffman, 1959, p. 128) to project an understanding of the informal, backstage framing of the social encounter, and thereby to ironize, and temporarily displace, the interview frame.

Once again, the occasioning of this episode of what, to use a rather euphemistic term, we might call 'talk about minorities' is instructive. Note that this talk is immediately preceded by my asking a question on a matter concerning which the respondents evidently have little knowledge. In this context, the flip into xenophobic banter serves as a collective face-saving strategy, and also temporarily wrests control not only of the conversation, but also of the very meaning of the encounter. As I noted earlier, however informal an interview setting might be, the active engagement on the part of the interviewer in racist talk is beyond any permissible bottom-line. In this case, the young women play on this, by using racist talk not only to symbolize their solidarity through participation in a shared community of racist practice (cf. Wenger, 1999), but also temporally to exclude me from the closed circle of 'ratified participants' Goffman (1983, p. 7).

Finally, of course, a consideration of the kinds of local actions that are being performed through the public display of racism draws our attention to the functional interconnectedness of various forms of identity within single interactive encounters. In this case, it appears that the young women are employing xenophobic talk to symbolize a range of social and personal identities (cf. Klein, 2003). A gendered dimension to the young women's talk is clearly apparent. Similarly, it is not unreasonable to assume that in the course of using xenophobic banter to display intimacy and cohesiveness, Chloe, Katie and Gemma are also marking a generational, educational and social class distance between themselves and the interviewer who was attempting to engage them in talk about British constitutional politics.

*The pleasures of bigotry and strategic incivility*

Even the most casual observer is likely to have noted that the stretch of talk reported in Extract 2 differs rather markedly from the 'modern', 'subtle', 'implicit' or 'symbolic' forms of racism which represent the subject of a good deal of contemporary social psychological theory and research. In fact, the talk reported in Extract 2 even differs from the kinds of 'old fashioned' 'red-neck' or 'explicit' racism which social psychologists tend in practice to study, in so far as items used to measure these constructs on attitude scales do not, for obvious reasons, generally include overtly offensive statements.<sup>3</sup> At the same time, however, there is no evidence that Chloe and her friends are concerned to excuse, justify, soften or mitigate their talk, or to adopt any of the rhetorical strategies that discourse analysts have documented as means by which speakers may attempt strategically to avoid the identity of prejudice. In fact, it would appear that 'doing being prejudiced' represents precisely the objective of the talk. The fact that the young women are aware of the status of their utterances as 'rude'<sup>4</sup> is indicated for example by the collocation of scatalogical and taboo sexual references. Far from proclaiming their non-prejudiced intent or character ('I'm not racist . . .'), Chloe and her friends openly advertise their prejudice in categorical terms: '*I hate the Welsh*' (line 6), '*I hate Pakis*' (line 23), '*I hate them all*' (line 34). Consequently, this stretch of talk again provides a good illustration of what Billig (2002) has termed the 'pleasures of bigotry', and of its status as a shared rather than merely private source of enjoyment.

To the extent that the talk reported in Extract 2 may be seen to constitute the result of collaborative and deliberative effort towards prejudice, it illustrates problems with the presumption, commonly shared by social cognition and discourse analytic approaches, that displays of tolerant character represent strategic action designed to repress free expression of the speaker's 'genuine' prejudice, and that explicit articulation of pejorative representations of outgroups attests to a simple lack of normative constraint or self-monitoring. This kind of reasoning reflects a more general impulse-and-restraint model

<sup>3</sup>Of course, it might be argued that since Extract 2 has been taken from an (albeit informal) interview encounter, we cannot necessarily use this to make claims concerning the way in which racist discourse may be manifested in more mundane social encounters. However, as part of my research I have had occasion to record racist banter taking place spontaneously in backstage regions such as local pubs and unsupervised school playgrounds. In these cases, the level of obscenity and expressed antipathy towards ethnically—and racially—defined others (on the part of both white and black speakers) can be so extreme as to effectively preclude the use of the transcripts for purposes of publication in academic journals.

<sup>4</sup>It is interesting to note the relative absence of work on rudeness in social psychology and, indeed, the social sciences (see Culpepper, 1996). A search of the PsycINFO data base revealed a total of 35 references to 'rudeness' (of which only one—significantly by Michael Billig—treated rudeness as central problematic), 46 entries for 'incivility' and 14 entries for 'impoliteness', as compared to 419 entries for 'politeness'.

of civility in everyday life. In social psychology, and indeed in the social sciences more generally, it is usual to treat civility as a form of reflexively controlled public performance, and rudeness as a form of behavioural leakage, reflecting a failure of normal repressive restraint (cf. Billig, 1997; Johnson & Indivik, 2001).

The problem with these sorts of accounts is that they are essentially non-symmetrical (Bloor, 1976): the display of civility and *denials* of racism are treated as recipient designed social actions, whereas *claims to* prejudice and displays of incivility are assumed *a priori* to necessarily constitute honest and unfettered reflections of subjective attitude or mental states. However, Extract 2 illustrates how, in some circumstances, explicit displays of racial prejudice may also represent forms of strategic social action, oriented towards self-presentational concerns within local interactive contexts. There is, then, no *a priori* reason why we should necessarily assume that the Chloe and her friends' claims to racial antipathy reflect their 'genuine' or 'private' beliefs and attitudes, any more than we are inclined to assume that Mrs Abbott's protestations of tolerance can be treated as testimony to her unprejudiced character.

## GENERAL DISCUSSION

In this article I have been arguing that social psychologists might do well to consider the domain of the micro-social, or what Goffman calls the 'interaction order', as significant arena within which racialized, and often explicitly racially pejorative, discourses circulate and operate. Employing illustrative examples, I have considered two distinctive features of prejudiced talk as manifested in the course of ongoing micro-social encounters. First, that the inherently dialogical property of communication may render it impossible to attribute discriminatory or even openly racist talk to single individuals. Second, that the social actors participating in the encounter are likely, at least in part, to be monitoring and orienting their behaviour in relation to the local context of talk in action. Discriminatory forms of representation may sometimes be used to save cognitive resources, and may sometimes be used to argue seriously for or against particular political policies. However, in the course of ongoing conversational interaction racially or ethnically prejudiced talk may also be used to perform a wide range of communicative functions: to amuse, to seize the floor, to exclude, to shock, to mark intimacy, to key informality, to display freedom from normative constraint or simply to pass the time.

To point to the fact that racialized and on occasions explicitly racist talk may be woven through and anchored in the delicate choreography of everyday sociability is not to normalize or exonerate this activity, any more than analyses of the ways in which racial discourses saturate cultural (Goldberg, 1993) and political (Goldberg, 2002) systems constitute apologias for racist macro-structural forms.

Similarly, to argue that explicitly prejudiced talk might be conceived as a form of collaborative accomplishment is not to evade attribution of responsibility. On the contrary, a dialogic perspective may alert us to the way in which the responsibility for public expressions of ethnic and racial antipathy may be shared jointly between the person of the speaker and those other co-present individuals who occasion, reinforce or simply fail to suppress it. The fact that prejudiced talk tends, in practice, to be articulated in the context of ongoing, mundane social encounters between people who share past and prospective future relationships means that people often do take joint responsibility for policing and suppressing open expressions of prejudiced attitudes (Condor et al., in press).

On the other hand, these very same factors may also militate against racist talk being challenged or seriously resisted by any of the co-present parties in the particular local contexts in which it takes place. The ability of social actors to function efficiently in complex social environments often depends crucially on their willingness to bracket a good deal of what goes on, and on their willingness to abide by contractual relationships of mutual face work. Goffman (1967, p. 205) has pointed to situations, which he significantly terms 'scenes', in which social actors disrupt the flow of social interaction by 'acting in such a way as to destroy or seriously threaten the polite appearance of consensus'. In practice, for ordinary social actors to openly challenge prejudiced talk as it arises incidentally in the flow of mundane conversation might seriously jeopardize their relationships with others, which might in turn have ramifications well beyond the particular local context in which the 'scene' takes place.

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