



'They're not racist . . .' Prejudice denial, mitigation and suppression in dialogue

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Social scientific work on the suppression, mitigation or denial of prejudiced attitudes has tended to focus on the strategic self-presentation and self-monitoring undertaken by individual social actors on their own behalf. In this paper, we argue that existing perspectives might usefully be extended to incorporate three additional considerations. First, that social actors may, on some occasions, act to defend not only themselves, but also others from charges of prejudice. Second, that over the course of any social encounter, interactants may take joint responsibility for policing conversation and for correcting and suppressing the articulation of prejudiced talk. Third, that a focus on the dialogic character of conversation affords an appreciation of the ways in which the status of any particular utterance, action or event as 'racist' or 'prejudiced' may constitute a social accomplishment. Finally, we note the logical corollary of these observations – that in everyday life, the occurrence of 'racist discourse' is likely to represent a collaborative accomplishment, the responsibility for which is shared jointly between the person of the speaker and those other co-present individuals who occasion, reinforce or simply fail to suppress it.

One of the crucial properties of contemporary racism is its denial (van Dijk, 1992, p. 87).

Since the end of the Second World War, social psychologists have become increasingly aware of a widespread cultural opprobrium against the overt expression of ethnic, national or racial prejudice. This initially posed difficulties for research using self-report techniques that were managed, in part, by the development of a variety of alternative procedures by which to render negative ethnic, racial, national and, more recently, gender-related attitudes visible and quantifiable. These included techniques designed to disguise the nature of the attitude-object (Adorno, Frenkel-Brunswick,

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Levinson, & Sanford, 1950; McConahay, Hardee, & Batts, 1981), to override the impact of cultural norms on self-reports (Sigall & Page, 1971) or to measure attitudes using non-verbal behavioural indices (e.g. Campbell, Kruskal, & Wallace, 1966; Cooper & Seigel, 1956; Donnerstein & Donnerstein, 1973; Hendricks & Bootzin, 1976; Proshansky, 1943; Rankin & Campbell, 1955; Westie & DeFleur, 1959; Wispe & Freshley, 1971). Contemporary researchers similarly experiment with non-reactive procedures, with the past decade witnessing the growing popularity of response latency techniques as a supplement to, or a substitute for, direct self-report measures of nationalism, racism or other forms of prejudice (e.g. Brendl, Markman, & Messner, 2001; Dovidio, Brigham, Johnson, & Gaertner, 1996; Fazio, Jackson, Dunton, & Williams, 1995; Gaertner & Dovidio, 1986; Saucier, Miller & Doucet, 2005; Wittenbrink, Judd, & Park, 1997; see Dovidio & Fazio, 1992; Maass, Castelli, & Arcuri, 2000).

In addition to developing innovative methodological procedures, social psychologists have attempted to deal with the phenomenon of prejudice denial by re-conceiving the construct of prejudice. It is now common for social psychologists to treat consciously held and/or explicitly articulated forms of racial, national or ethnic antipathy as indicative of one type of attitude, and unconscious, implicit and/or discursively coded forms of antipathy as indicative of another (e.g. Brauer, Wasel, & Niedenthal, 2000; Devine, 1989; Devine, Monteith, Zuwerink, & Elliot, 1991; Kinder & Sears, 1981; Locke, MacLeod, & Walker, 1994; McConahay *et al.*, 1981; Tetlock & Arkes, 2004). Once identified and named as a separate phenomenon, the suppression of prejudiced or stereotyped representations has subsequently come to be treated as a topic of empirical and theoretical concern in its own right (e.g. Bodenhausen & Macrae, 1996; Crandall & Eshleman, 2003; Hausmann & Ryan, 2004; Monteith, Sherman, & Devine, 1998; Moskowitz, Salomon, & Taylor, 2000).

Although most social psychological work on prejudice suppression adopts perspectives drawn from attitude or social cognition theory, alternative perspectives that treat the denial of prejudice as a form of discursive action have gained popularity since the 1980s (e.g. Barnes, Palmary, & Durrheim, 2001; Billig, 1988, 2001; Billig *et al.*, 1988; Bonilla-Silva & Forman, 2000; Condor, 2000; LeCouteur & Augoustinos, 2002; LeCouteur, Rapley, & Augoustinos, 2001; Rapley, 1998, 2002; van den Berg, Wetherell & Houtkoop-Steenstra, 2003; Verkuyten, de Jong, & Masson, 1994; Wetherell & Potter, 1992).

Notwithstanding evident differences in focus, attitudinal, cognitive and discursive approaches to the topic of prejudice denial tend to share one thing in common - a tendency to focus on the suppression and mitigation of prejudiced thought or talk as an action undertaken by individual social actors on their own behalf. As far as attitude researchers are concerned, it is individuals *qua* individuals who are motivated either to manage the impression that they convey to others or else to police - either consciously or unconsciously - their own cognitions and actions. Similarly, as far as discourse analysts are concerned, it is individual speakers, albeit possibly acting as exemplars of a particular culture, who attempt to 'dodge the identity of prejudice' (Wetherell & Potter, 1992), often precisely by emphasizing their unique capacity for rationality and tolerance compared with others. In this article, we advocate the development of an alternative, dialogic perspective to complement extant social psychological approaches to the expression, mitigation and denial of hearably prejudiced talk.

Prejudice denial: Questions of personal and social reputation

The individualistic focus of extant social psychological literature on prejudice denial is ironic in view of the fact that the sorts of topics under discussion when charges of

prejudice are likely to be at stake (e.g. race, ethnicity, nationality, gender, sexuality) generally pertain to social rather than to personal identities (cf. Tajfel, 1978; Turner, 1987). Occasionally, authors adopting a discourse analytic perspective have considered the possibility that, when discussing matters relating to race and ethnicity, speakers may act to protect the reputation of in-groups as well as themselves as individuals. For example, summarizing findings from a series of studies on interview and media discourse in the USA and The Netherlands, van Dijk (1992) noted, 'Not only do most white speakers individually resent being perceived as racists, also, and even more importantly, such strategies may at the same time aim at defending the ingroup as a whole: "We are not racists . . ." (p. 89).

The observation that social actors may, on occasion, attempt to deny prejudice on behalf of the groups to which they belong raises some interesting questions for further research. However, at present, this topic stands in need of theoretical and empirical development. For example, existing work has rarely specifically addressed the question of which, or whose, identity is actually being treated as vulnerable to charges of racism or prejudice in any particular social encounter. Hence, although van Dijk provides his readers with a general gloss to the effect that respondents in his studies were often speaking on behalf of an in-group of 'white nationals', it is not always self-evident from the extracts provided that the speakers are actually positioning themselves precisely in these terms. It would seem reasonable to suggest that insofar as discursive acts of mitigation and denial are to be interpreted as attempts on the part of a speaker to 'dodge the identity of prejudice', analysis of this strategic rhetoric might usefully be supplemented by some analytic consideration of whose (or which) identity is actually being defended.

In this article, we shall be adopting an approach to prejudice mitigation and denial that is informed largely by Goffman's work on identity display and face management. This perspective raises three considerations relating to the ways in which social actors may strategically attempt to 'dodge the identity of prejudice' on behalf of in-groups that differ in some notable respects from canonical accounts of the process of social identification.

First, following Goffman's (1974, 1981) work on framing and footing, we would not presume that a singular identity (e.g. self-as-individual, self as 'white national') will necessarily be held over a stretch of talk (see also Antaki, Condor, & Levine, 1996, for a similar argument informed by a conversation analytic perspective). Rather than assume that particular types of identity may be mapped on to 'contexts', which, in turn, may be identified with entire social episodes (cf. Condor, 1996), we need to allow for the possibility that the way in which interactants position themselves as individuals, or as category members, and the particular categories which are treated as relevant to the matter in hand, may shift over the course of a social encounter.

Second, Goffman's (1974, 1981) account of the ways in which identity may be managed in and through time would suggest that the identities at stake in any particular social encounter will not necessarily be evidenced in serial form, with a singular aspect of identity being salient or 'in play' at any particular moment in time. Rather, any specific social encounter is likely to be characterizable in terms of a variety of embedded (Goffman, 1981) or interpenetrating (Cicourel, 1992) contexts, with social actors being faced with the task of managing a range of extant and prospective personal and social identities effectively simultaneously.

Third, Goffman's (1981) account of participant footing alerts us to the ways that, in any situation in which a speaker presents an account in which they also figure as protagonist, some measure of identity lamination will necessarily be evident. This

consideration imparts an additional layer of complexity to the analysis of strategic attempts to 'dodge the identity of prejudice', insofar as it alerts us to the potentially complex aspects of situations in which prejudice denial is effected through disclaimers or other forms of explicit self-presentation (Hewitt & Stokes, 1975). For example, overt assertions of non-racist character, whether presented on one's own personal behalf or voiced as a defence of an in-group as a whole ('I'm/we're not racist . . .') may display a negative identity on the part of the speaker (e.g. as one who is displaying a 'typically racist' rhetorical tactic). Conversely, negative self-presentation ('we white nationals are racists') may paradoxically function to display a speaker's reflexivity and anti-racist credentials (cf. van Dijk, 1992).

Identity management in dialogue: Prejudice avoidance as a matter of 'face'

Goffman (e.g. 1955, 1959, 1967) often discussed the delicate choreography of impression management in social encounters as a matter of *face-work*, a perspective that has since been extended in the form of politeness theory (e.g. Brown & Levinson, 1987). For present purposes, we may note how a conceptualization of prejudice denial as a matter of face management draws attention to four further phenomena that have hitherto been overlooked in the social psychological literature.

First, Goffman's notion of *face* treats impression management as an inherently dialogical process. Applied to the question of prejudice denial, this perspective would suggest that over the course of situated social interaction, social actors may act strategically to protect not only their face as individuals, or even the reputation of groups with which they personally identify, but also the identity of their dialogic partners (Goffman, 1955; see also Brown & Levinson, 1987). Although little existing work has considered this process directly, there is some evidence to suggest that the act of charging another with prejudice or racism may itself be subject to normative constraints (van Dijk, 1992). This being the case, it may be reasonable to suppose that social actors may not simply avoid being heard personally to levy accusations of prejudice at each other, but may more generally act in such a manner as to protect other co-present individuals from potential charges of prejudice.

Second, a consideration of the dialogic processes of face management alerts us to the fact that the success even of an individual's attempt to protect their own personal face may effectively depend upon the ways in which others receive their 'strategic' rhetoric. Discourse analytic research on prejudice denial and mitigation often refers to Hewitt and Stokes's (1975) seminal work on disclaimers, but typically overlook one significant aspect of this work. Hewitt and Stokes's original exposition did not only provide a catalogue of verbal devices which may be used to ward off potential identity challenges, but also included a consideration of the way in which the success of a speaker's own defensive identity claims would necessarily be contingent upon their acceptance on the part of an audience.

This consideration leads to our third observation. Once we accept that the success of strategies employed to 'dodge the identity of prejudice' depends ultimately upon their subsequent reception by others, this in turn opens up a range of further issues concerning the collaborative accomplishment of prejudiced or non-prejudiced talk (see also Speer, 2002; Speer & Potter, 2000). Specifically, it allows us to treat the discursive event, rather than the individual speaker, as the analytic 'case'. For example, this allows us to consider how the strategies used to manage hearably prejudiced (or other forms of potentially problematic) talk may themselves be effected dialogically. Jefferson (1987)

has provided a detailed analysis of situations in which one speaker effects repair-work on the utterances of another. With respect to our own, more specific, concerns, it is notable that one of Jefferson's exemplary extracts involved a situation in which one speaker corrected their dialogic partner's use of the term *nigger*. Although the particular subject matter of the ongoing conversation was irrelevant for Jefferson's own analytic project, from our perspective, this example is interesting precisely insofar as it indicates how social actors may, on occasion, take joint responsibility for policing conversations, for correcting, managing and for suppressing the articulation of particular forms of representation when charges of racism or prejudice are at stake.

Finally, a consideration of the dialogic character of 'racist discourse' might also prompt a reconsideration of the research object itself. A good deal of work on racist discourse proceeds from a position in which the 'racist' or 'prejudiced' status of any stretch of talk is taken to be self-evident. For example, Wodak and Reisigl (2003) open a chapter entitled *Discourse and racism* with an account of 'racism' as a 'stigmatizing headword', the meaning of which has become 'extraordinarily expanded and evasive' (p. 373). However, in the following paragraph, and for the remainder of the chapter, this representation of 'racism' as a category which itself stands in need of analytic scrutiny is abandoned in favour of a perspective in which 'racism' is treated as an *a priori* object for research: '[t]he starting point of a discourse analytical approach to the complex phenomenon of racism is to realize that racism . . . manifests itself discursively' (Wodak & Reisigl, 2003, p. 373). In contrast, a consideration of the process by which charges of racism are made, accepted, challenged, denied or ignored in the course of social interaction might afford a perspective in which the status of any particular utterance, action or event as 'racist' or 'prejudiced' may itself be treated as a social accomplishment.

Empirical examples

In the following pages, we consider some examples of cases in which people are acting to defend the reputation of, or to correct or to suppress expressions of prejudice on behalf of, people other than themselves. Our objective is not to provide a comprehensive account, but rather to illustrate the potential utility of expanding the empirical and conceptual remit of studies of the denial of racism and prejudice in social encounters.

The fact that existing research on the suppression, mitigation or denial of prejudice has tended to overlook the possibility that social actors may collaborate to protect their dialogic partners from potential charges of prejudice may, in part, reflect the types of data normally available for analysis. Although a variety of data sources have been used (self-report questionnaires, newspaper reports, political speeches, etc.), very few of these have afforded particular consideration of *interactive* processes. Moreover, although interview data is clearly dialogic in character (Houtkoop-Steenstra, 2000; Myers, 2004), the standardized one-to-one interview setting does not easily afford consideration of the ways in which individuals may conduct face-work on behalf of other co-present individuals.

The examples that we are using here have all been selected from pre-existing data corpuses collected by our colleagues or ourselves. An overview revealed that, unsurprisingly, examples of people managing their own accountability as individuals, and sometimes as members of social groups, could often be found in the transcripts of standardized one-to-one interviews. However, examples of cases in which people collaborated to protect the face of other co-present individuals were generally found in data collected through other types of procedure. Of the particular examples we shall be

using, one comes from a one-to-one interview setting, and four have been taken from interviews conducted with couples or groups of people who were related to, or already acquainted with, each other. Two extracts come from recordings of relatively spontaneous talk – a TV chat show, and a recorded conversation between the researcher and two acquaintances. In all cases, the names of all participants other than the interviewer (or, in the case of Extract 1, the chat show host) have been changed.

For purposes of presentation, we have grouped our examples into two general categories: cases in which an individual speaks up in defence of an absent group of others; and cases in which a speaker attempts to protect the character, or to repair or suppress the utterances, of another co-present individual. In the final section, we shall consider some more general issues relating to racist discourse as situated social activity.

Speaking (up) on behalf of absent others

As already noted, most existing discourse analytic work on prejudice denial has focused either on documenting the strategies that speakers use to distance themselves from prejudiced ‘others’, or, more rarely, on identifying situations in which an individual speaker attempts to mitigate discriminatory action on behalf of ‘the in-group as a whole’. In this section, we consider two cases in which a speaker defends a group of absent others from charges of prejudice. In both cases, the nature of the groups concerned, and the speaker’s relationship to them, is not in any way given. Rather, the nature of the relevant categories is itself subject to negotiation, and over the course of conversation the speakers position themselves in various ways *vis-à-vis* these categories. These extracts also highlight how the use of a particular frame of reference – for example, treating an issue as a matter of interpersonal or intergroup relations – may be used by speakers as a rhetorical resource through which to levy charges of prejudice, or to work up defences against them.

Our first example has been taken from an audience chat-show programme on BBC television. The extracted segment is part of a programme entitled, *Should Minorities be More British?*¹ In the reported exchange, Sally (an audience member) is charging some unnamed people with discrimination against her mother, a situation that she is presenting as an emblematic example of white racism in Britain. In response, the host (Kilroy) is adopting the role of devil’s advocate, defending these anonymous perpetrators and questioning whether the events in question can properly be treated as complainable matters.

Extract 1: ‘you’ve got to give the benefit of the doubt’

- 1 Sally: [people] don’t talk to my mother because she speaks with an
- 2 accent, and they’ve told me this, they’ve said I don’t understand your
- 3 mum because she speaks with an accent=
- 4 Kilroy:people-
- 5 Sally: =how can she be accepted then if somebody says that to my mum
- 6 Kilroy:I know but that- no no no no no no no yeh y- yeh
- 7 Sally: yeh but th- th- i- i-
- 8 Kilroy:I might have said that to you, no no, I might have said to you-

¹ Broadcast 9 to 10 am 14/12/01 on BBC1. Permission to quote granted by the BBC.

- 9 Sally: yeh a a a white person
 10 Kilroy:I might have said-
 11 Sally: yeh
 12 Kilroy:yeh I might have said to you you've got to you've got to give the benefit
 13 of the doubt to somebody, I might have said I love your mum, but I can't
 14 understand your mum because of her accent. That's a fact, it's not a it's
 15 not a judgment on her=
 16 Sally: yeh but [((inaudible))]=
 17 Kilroy:=[or a reflection]
 18 Sally: yeh yes but when you're of of a different nationality i- it hurts.
 19 [((inaudible))]
 20 Kilroy:[but are] but are you being paranoid?
 21 Sally: [no-]
 22 Kilroy:[are] you being oversensitive?
 23 [((sounds from audience))]
 24 Sally: =[not paranoid] when you've lived with this from day one=
 25 Kilroy:okay
 26 Sally: =i- an- i- it's very difficult because it [hurts]
 27 Kilroy: [but any]body might have said [that=
 28 Sally: [yeh but- no but- because] of who I am it hurts.
 29 Kilroy:=[particular remark about your mum with no offence okay but you o- but
 30 they don't know who you are, I wouldn't have known your ori=
 31 Sally: no
 32 Kilroy:=[I wouldn't have known your origins unless you had told me.
 33 Sally: yeh but it's cos I-
 34 Kilroy:I'd have thought you're from Luton like her ((points at Amanda)).

For present purposes, we shall draw attention to four particular features of this exchange. First, this extract illustrates how accusations and denials of discrimination need not constitute one-off actions, but may involve extended debates concerning what reasonably qualifies as a complainable matter. In this case, the two speakers can be seen to be orienting to different concerns in their assessments of whether a particular instance 'counts as' an example of racism. Specifically, Sally is holding (white) 'people' accountable for the effects of their actions on her mother including both the immediate emotional consequences ('it hurts', Lines 18, 26), and the more distal and cumulative effects of these actions ('how can she be accepted', Line 5). Kilroy, in contrast, is attending to the question of the intent of the perpetrators: unless it can be established that the particular actions of which Sally complains were ill intentioned (meant to offend), and based on a prior knowledge of her mother's racial or ethnic minority status, then there is no case to answer.²

Second, this exchange illustrates how the act of levying charges of discrimination against another may itself be treated as an accountable matter (van Dijk, 1987, 1992). Kilroy's defence of the anonymous 'people' involves a standard reversal move, as he

² This example relates to a more general issue pertaining to a lack of correspondence between the criteria necessary to satisfy legal definitions of categories such as 'racial abuse', 'sexual harassment' and so on (which typically require individuals to be identified as defendant and complainant, and often emphasize the immediate harm done or offence caused to a particular individual) and 'political' understandings (which often focus on the cumulative or distal consequences of acts for a group of people; Mott & Condor, 1997).

holds Sally answerable for her complaint against them. In Kilroy's response, the 'people' who, according to Sally, would not talk to her mother, are positioned as defendants who are entitled to the 'benefit of the doubt' (Lines 12 to 13). His assertion that their behaviour may be regarded as a rational response to the given circumstances ('That's a fact. . .', Line 14) is set against the implication that, in treating this as a complainable matter, Sally's own rationality and psychological stability may be at stake: 'are you being paranoid?' (Line 20); 'are you being oversensitive?' (Line 22).³

Third, this extract illustrates how framing a social encounter in interpersonal or intergroup terms represents not so much an *a priori* 'context' within which the recorded action takes place, as a site of struggle between the two speakers. In this case, Sally is promoting a representational scheme (which elides the categorization devices of race and nationality), according to which Kilroy is positioned as a member of one category ('a white person', Line 9) and her mother and herself as members of another ('a different nationality', Line 18). Kilroy, in contrast, adopts an interpersonal frame of reference, translating Sally's generic complaint into the intimate language of 'you' and 'I', and referring to Sally's mother with colloquial familiarity as 'your mum' (Line 29). Consequently, whereas Sally uses the story of her mother's experiences as an exemplary instance of white prejudice in general, Kilroy responds to her account as a specific charge concerning a specific set of acts by a specific group of unnamed individuals towards another specific individual.

Kilroy also explicitly challenges Sally's intergroup version of events. He questions the relevance of the national identity frame to the particular situation of which she is complaining ('they don't know who you are', Line 30). He also questions the general relevance of nationality to social encounters involving Sally or her mother. Kilroy nests his defence of the individuals of whose behaviour Sally is complaining within a three-part list that also includes the generic case ('anybody might have said that', Line 27), and the universal-anyone 'I' ('I wouldn't have known your origins unless you had told me', Lines 30 to 31). In this way, Kilroy subtly reverses the rhetorical tables. In Sally's version, white people are held accountable for discriminating against her mother on the basis of 'nationality'. In Kilroy's version, it is Sally who should be held solely accountable for invoking a discourse of 'national' difference, since anybody else would not have thought to do so.

Fourth, we may note some of the complexities of the identity work that Kilroy is performing as he attempts to defend the unnamed 'people' from Sally's charge of discrimination. Whilst Kilroy speaks up on behalf of these 'people', he does not directly identify himself with them. Certainly, he does not adopt Sally's frame of reference and present himself as speaking on behalf of 'we white nationals' (cf. van Dijk, 1992). Rather, he adopts the voice of fair-minded, universal reason, and presents his defence of the 'people' as a display of objectivity and empathetic capacity to imagine himself in the position of the other ('I might have said that to you . . .', Lines 8, 10, 12).

At this stage, we may consider the laminated identities in play as Kilroy, the physically present, hearable and visible animator, mobilizes the narrative figure of himself as imaginary protagonist (the self-under-other-circumstances: 'I might have said

³ Note the double-edged implications of claims of personal experience evident in this exchange. Sally uses an explicit identity claim to establish entitlement to emotional experience, and thereby entitlement to voice a complaint ('because of who I am it hurts', Line 28; 'when you've lived with this from day one', Line 24). Kilroy, in contrast, re-casts Sally's personal experience as (mere) subjectivity, against which he counter poses his own objective appraisal of the 'facts'.

that to you . . .'). The assertion that he *might* have acted in the manner of which Sally is complaining does two things. First, it constitutes a vehicle by which Kilroy, as currently speaking subject, displays a capacity for reflexivity and empathy. Second, it is designed to undermine Sally's assessment of the acts concerned as reprehensible. However, the effectiveness of this 'even-I' device relies crucially upon the hearer importing a bridging assumption concerning Kilroy's status as exemplar of rational disinterest. And, like any strategic rhetoric, the success of this intervention depends ultimately upon its reception. In this case, far from accepting the unstated inference concerning Kilroy's rational disinterest, Sally substitutes Kilroy's personal 'I' with 'a white person', thereby casting his account precisely as an exemplary instance of the racial partiality of which she is complaining.

If we wished to complicate the picture further, we could point to the fact that, as an experienced TV host and ex-politician, Kilroy is likely to be orienting his action to multiple (distal as well as proximal) possible audiences and interpenetrating contexts. Aspects of his response to Sally's intervention are therefore likely to have been designed not only with Sally and the other studio participants in mind, but also with a view to the BBC authorities, the TV audience and a host of other indeterminate ratified overhearers. In addition, the fact that this particular exchange takes place within an over-arching frame of the broadcast audience chat show imparts a sense of irony to Kilroy's entire 'performance', and an extra layer of lamination to the set of identities in play.

It is, of course, possible that the kind of exchange considered in Extract 1 may be somewhat unusual by virtue of the specific context from which it was drawn. At the very least, the genre of the audience participation television debate may grant unusual licence to the presenter - and the audience - to provoke explicit argument (Livingstone & Lunt, 1994). However, similar complexities of respondent footing and dialogic negotiation of what 'counts as' racism are also in evidence in other forms of social encounter.

Our second example has been taken from an interview study of everyday understandings of 'racism' and 'prejudice' in Greece (Figgou, 2002; Figgou & Condor, 2006).⁴ The respondent, Ilektra, is resident in an area where Albanian refugees have recently been settled. The interview (translated from the original Greek into English) is conducted by Lia Figgou, who herself comes from the same local area. This extract has been selected to illustrate the ways in which a speaker may effectively shift allegiances even within a short stretch of conversation. In this case, the respondent starts out by attempting to manage charges of racism on behalf of an 'in-group as a whole', shifts to defending a group defined as other-than-self, and finally abandons this group to defend her own position as an individual.

Extract 2: 'I don't know what I would do under those conditions'

- 1 Ilektra: [. . .] I have the feeling however that our racism is less organized (.) I
- 2 have in mind, for example, the racist organizations against the Turks (.)
- 3 against the foreigners in Germany (.) still things are different here
- 4 Lia: I see (.) hmm (.) during the last year however (.) I'm not sure if this is the
- 5 case (1.5) I heard, for example, about this association of people who have
- 6 been robbed by Albanians (.) I think they were on the telly last week

⁴ Interview conducted as part of project: *Lay and Scientific Representations of Prejudice* funded by the European Commission (No. ERBFMBICT972236).

- 7 Ilektra: Yes (.) they have elected a president [laughs] I heard about it (.) It's quite
 8 extreme (.) indeed (.) you know what I'm thinking though (1.5) some
 9 people in remote villages may feel threatened (.) they may have to live
 10 with this feeling of lack of safety that you and I don't have to face (.) I'm
 11 not sure (.) but I feel that I don't know what I would do if I had to live
 12 under these conditions
 13 Lia: So you say that some people are reacting because they are in danger?
 14 They live under conditions of insecurity
 15 Ilektra: Not necessarily (.) I mean they may just think that they are in danger (.)
 16 they may just be afraid that they are in danger (.) I'm sure it is not true
 17 (.) not in all cases.

Up to the end of Line 3, Ilektra's account provides us with a fairly straightforward example of a situation in which a speaker is defending a national 'in-group as a whole'. Specifically, she is minimizing the significance of 'our' collective (Greek) 'racism' through extreme contrast with 'racist organizations' elsewhere (cf. van Dijk, 1984, 1992). However, if we follow the extract through, we can see how Ilektra's attempt to present (indigenous, national) in-group racism as relatively benign effectively fails. Far from accepting Ilektra's assessment, Lia contradicts it, arguing that some racist 'associations of people' (Line 5) do in fact exist in Greece. The delicate nature of this contradiction, which needs to be managed against general conversational norms of politeness as well as the specific normative opprobrium against levying charges of racism against others, is marked by Lia's hedging, vague language and by her externalizing the grounds for her assertion: 'I think they were on the telly last week' (Line 6).

In response, Ilektra downgrades Lia's example of the 'association of people' who have been 'robbed by Albanians'. Using a 'yes . . . but' formulation (Pomerantz, 1986), she provides a token agreement that such organizations exist, but mitigates the significance of this instance with laughter. Ilektra then proceeds to cast this 'association of people' as irrelevant to the matter in hand. First, she presents this particular instance as an exceptional case ('it's quite extreme', Lines 7 to 8), which, rather than exemplifying the character of 'our racism' 'here', pertains only to a few marginalized individuals ('some people in remote villages', Lines 8 to 9). Second, she suggests that this 'association' is not relevant to the question of 'racism', but that its existence rather reflects a 'feeling of lack of safety' (Line 10) on the part of the membership (Figgou & Condor, 2006).

Note how, by Line 8, there has been a shift in the group being defended. Specifically, Ilektra has moved from defending an in-group ('us' here) to speaking up on behalf of an out-group ('they') from which both herself and Lia are excluded: 'they may have to live with this feeling of lack of safety that you and I don't have to face' (Lines 9 to 10).

The shift from defending the in-group to defending an out-group has a number of consequences for Ilektra's account. First, as we have seen, it undermines Lia's use of this group as an exemplary instance of generic Greek organized racism. Second, it allows Ilektra to work up a mitigating-circumstances defence, hinging upon assertions concerning 'their' especial vulnerability and representing 'their' actions as a response to particular circumstances ('those conditions', Line 12) rather than as reflecting discriminatory intent or character. Third, and similarly, this move is associated with a particular character display on the part of Ilektra as enunciator. The shift from defending an in-group as a whole to defending a group of other people potentially deflects charges of stake and interest (Edwards & Potter, 1992) and simultaneously displays a capacity for reflexivity and empathetic understanding. Like Kilroy, Ilektra mobilizes the narrative

figure of self as imaginary protagonist (the I-under-other-circumstances), which is displayed conjointly with the 'I' of the animator: 'I feel that I don't know what I would do if I had to live under these conditions' (Lines 11 to 12).

In this case, Ilektra's use of the imaginary self-under-other-circumstances has at least three consequences for her account. First, the use of the anyone-I, presents the actions of the members of the anti-Albanian association as potentially universal (and as such unaccountable) reactions under the circumstances. Second, by forging a distinction between her identity as extant speaker and an imaginary-possible self, Ilektra's account imports an implicit assumption to the effect that the currently speaking self (I, here, now) is not in fact (already, under present circumstances) inclined to 'do' these things. Third, the 'there but for the grace of God go I' formulation casts the act of criticizing the members of the anti-Albanian organization as itself potentially accountable. This formulation hence allows Ilektra to cast Lia's implied criticism of the anti-Albanian association as a reflection of an *un-thinking*, egocentric position of privilege.

By Line 12, then, Ilektra has effectively turned the rhetorical tables, such that it is Lia's character that is now in question. Once again, however, we may note that this strategic move does not in fact prove interactionally successful. Lia does not apparently accept Ilektra's re-evaluation of her emblematic example, nor Ilektra's act of altercasting whereby Lia is positioned as unsympathetic towards others less fortunate than herself, nor Ilektra's self-presentation as one who is not currently inclined to demonstrate antipathy towards Albanians. Rather, in Lines 13 to 14, Lia responds by provocatively glossing Ilektra's preceding account as a suggestion that Albanians do in fact pose a danger to 'people in remote villages'. This intervention involves tacit allusion to a form of understanding, commonplace in Greece, that popular stereotypes of Albanian criminality constitute exemplary instances of racism (Figgou & Condor, 2006). In this way, Lia shifts the accountability stakes back again, effectively pitting Ilektra's defence of the 'association' against her own personal character as a non-racist individual. In the light of this dilemmatic choice - of continuing to defend a group of other people or to protect her own individual character - Ilektra backs down. At this stage, Ilektra's attention to her personal status as speaker is marked by reflexive meta-discursive reference ('I mean . . .'), and a repair move reformulating her previous account as a reference to fears rather than to real threat. She softens her previous account further with a repeated use of the term 'just' (Lines 15 to 16).

Acting on behalf of another individual

Our first two examples both involved situations of explicit argumentation. The extracts in this section represent less overtly confrontational exchanges. These have been selected to provide examples of situations in which speakers may be seen to be taking joint responsibility for the character of the ongoing conversation, and in which one speaker takes responsibility for the behaviour or reputation of a dialogic partner.

Although the collaborative nature of prejudice claims and denials may be obscured in one-to-one interview settings, it may not be necessary to go to the sites of everyday social action to find examples of people attending to the potential accountability of each other's actions. In our experiences of interviews with groups or with couples who have an established relationship with each other, it is common to find respondents managing aspects of each other's talk. This general observation may be broken down in terms of two distinguishable phenomena. The first involves *post hoc* impression-management strategies and repair-work undertaken after a dialogic partner has uttered a problematic statement. The second involves acts of suppression, whereby one respondent

intervenes to prevent another from making a potentially problematic remark. Although our examples have all been taken from the body of the interview, it is relatively common to find this process starting before the interview begins, with one respondent instructing another, in front of the interviewer, to 'mind what you say'.⁵

Extract 3 provides an example of *post hoc* repair-work. In this case, the speakers, an elderly couple, are being interviewed by Susan Condor in their home about services in their local area. In the quoted extract, Hilda attempts to defend her husband against a potential charge of xenophobia. The fact that, in this case, speakers can construct themselves variously as individuals or as a married couple adds an additional layer of complexity to the question of what identities are implicated in acts of prejudice denial. This example also provides us with a fairly straightforward case of a phenomenon, which Jefferson (1987) terms *exposed correction*. This involves a situation in which the act of correction itself becomes part of the explicit interactional business, and is accompanied by forms of accounting in which the utterance, its correction and the character of the interactants may all be subject to apology, explanation and so forth.

Extract 3: 'He's not xenophobic'

- 1 Jack: [. . .] let's face it, it's not as if they're wanted here. We have enough low-
 2 life here already without importing [other people's].
 3 Hilda: [Jack! ((to Susan)) I'm sorry about
 4 that. He's not xenophobic. It's it's not=
 5 Jack: =it's not racist, no. We've never been racist, have we Hilda?
 6 Hilda: No. We've got nothing against=
 7 Jack: =nothing against the refugees. I have every sympathy for them. But you'd
 8 be mad not to ask, why are they all coming here?

The extract starts at the point at which Jack is completing an exemplary narrative concerning 'illegal immigrants'. In Line 1, Jack produces a hearably xenophobic comment, the problematic nature of which is evidenced by Hilda's admonishment and her apology to Susan: 'I'm sorry about that' (Line 3). Hilda then intervenes to defend her husband from a negative character inference: 'He's not xenophobic' (Line 3). Jack responds both by denying that his preceding utterance had been 'racist' (Line 5), and then by disclaiming racist character. Interestingly, at this stage, he shifts the possible charge of xenophobia or racism away from himself as the individual who had made the potentially problematic utterance, and adopts the collective footing of 'we', to enlist his wife in the category of people whose identity might be at stake: 'We've never been racist, have we Hilda?' (Line 5). In response, Hilda accepts the collective footing 'We've nothing against' (Line 6). However, Jack then shifts his footing to attend to his position as an individual: 'I have every sympathy for them' (Line 7), and constructs his earlier comments as normative, shifting the footing once more on to a generic 'you', 'you'd be mad not to ask why are they all coming here?' (Lines 7 to 8).

⁵ It is worth noting that none of these exchanges takes the form of the imaginary canonical speech situation of one speaker and one listener often assumed by linguists (cf. Goffman, 1981). Even in the one-to-one interview, the presence of the tape-recorder is likely to mean that both interactants are orienting in part to some other prospective audience. In interviews with couples and groups, the respondents may position themselves in multiple, flexible ways vis-à-vis the interviewer. Consequently, 'face saving' interventions on behalf of another may simultaneously help out a dialogic partner, expose them in front of the interviewer and display the speaker's identification with the researcher. It was notable that in most identified instances, the 'repairer' oriented to some identity shared in common with the interviewer – gender, age, social class – which differentiated them both from the 'repairee'.

In this extract, then, we can see how possible charges of prejudice can be dealt with dialogically, as one partner may attempt to deflect accusations of xenophobia on behalf of another. Moreover, these shifts in footing become noticeable as charges of prejudice can be dealt with collectively ('we'), tolerant identities reconstructed singly ('I') and the potential xenophobic comments justified generically ('you').

The next extract illustrates how one respondent may attempt repair work on behalf of another. This extract has been taken from an interview with a group of teenage women friends in Jersey. The interview is conducted by Jessica Hounsome, a woman in her early 20s who also comes from Jersey (Hounsome, 2001). In the reported sequence, the friends are discussing the 'problem' of Portuguese migrant workers, and Melanie is presenting a narrative concerning the inequities of positive discrimination. This extract provides an example of a case in which correction of one speaker's utterance by another takes what Jefferson (1987) describes as an *embedded* form, in which the act or correction does not effectively interrupt the talk-in-progress, but is simply taken on board by the first speaker.

Extract 4: 'The Porko . . .'

- 1 Mel: I think I lost my job because of the Porko
- 2 [Gasps]
- 3 Helen: Portuguese person Melanie, Portuguese person=
- 4 Mel: =because the chef was Portuguese.

This exchange provides another example of how the problematic status of an utterance may be marked by the manner of its reception rather than its delivery. In this case, Melanie's comment concerning 'the Porko' in Line 1 is not initially presented in such a way as to indicate that the speaker herself is treating this as delicate (cf. van Dijk, 1984). Nevertheless, the gasps produced by the other interactants indicate its reception as problematic. Since Melanie herself does not take the opportunity for self-correction, Helen steps in to correct the account, 'Portuguese person, Melanie' (Line 3). Melanie implicitly accepts the suggested correction and continues her narrative.

In addition, we may note how this exchange does not simply represent a situation in which a correction is formulated dialogically, but one in which a particular *version* of the problematic aspect of the utterance is jointly accomplished. The gasps following Melanie's initial statement indicate the reception of her account as in some way problematic. The nature of this problem is then specified by Helen, who casts it as a matter of Melanie's choice of category label (rather than, for example, a reaction to the argument concerning the inequities of positive discrimination). This gloss is apparently accepted by the rest of the group, and is subsequently taken on board by Melanie herself, who proceeds to work up her (by implication, acceptable) narrative line, but this time without using the offending word.

In Extract 5, we see an example of a situation in which an attempt on the part of one speaker to correct the account of another initially meets with less success, and an embedded correction consequently comes to be rendered explicit. This interview was conducted as part of a local health authority survey, and took place in a teaching hospital. The extracted segment has been taken from an exchange in which Marcia (a working-class woman in her late 60s) is recounting to the interviewer (Susan Condor) a story concerning her recent hip operation. In the reported exchange, Marcia's daughter (Julie, a middle-class woman in her mid 30s), intervenes to correct her mother.

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Extract 5: 'You can't say that!'

- 1 Marcia [. . .] and the doctor was this coloured man, a nice man [and-
2 Julie [Black, Mum,
3 black. Not coloured
4 Marcia Yes, he was this big black man, [and I-
5 Julie [Oh Mum you can't say that!

In Extract 5, we again see a situation in which the potentially problematic nature of an utterance is displayed not through its initial presentation, but through the manner of its reception. In this case, Julie takes issue with her mother's description of the nice doctor as 'coloured' and corrects it to 'black' (Lines 2 to 3). Marcia accepts this correction, but proceeds to produce what is heard by Julie as another problematic category, 'big black man' (Line 3). Julie responds with explicit admonishment, and shifts from an attempt at correction to an attempt at account suppression: 'Oh Mum you can't say that!'

In Extract 6, we see another example of a situation in which one speaker attempts to manage another's utterance by attempting to silence them.⁶

Extract 6: *Non-cooperative completion*

- 1 Nick But their attitude was, 'we will get these Krauts'. Now that sort of
2 attitude is the one that [we would-
3 Kath [I mean, you have that in every country, dear. It's
4 not just the British.
5 Nick, Yes but we can go on=
6 Kath [interrupting]=*BUT* we can go on for ever and ever, but the thing is as far
7 as we ourselves are concerned, Britain is *part* of Europe.

In his first reported turn, Nick is projecting an image of unique rationality and tolerance on the part of himself and, in this case, his wife through explicit comparison with other (prejudiced) in-group members. Kath, however, treats this as problematic, and intervenes to repair Nick's condemnation of 'the British'. She does this by cutting across her husband's account to offer an implicit admonishment and an exposed mitigation, using a strategy of universalization ('you have that in every country, dear', Line 3). Nick indicates nominal acceptance, using a 'yes but' formulation, but proceeds to signal an intention to continue to hold the floor ('we can go on', Line 4). At this point, Kath seizes the floor, echoing Nick's 'but we can go on' (Line 5), but transforming its function from that of preface to a further narrative to that of extreme case formulation and coda ('for ever and ever', Line 5). She then moves to terminate the discussion, by introducing a gist statement ('but the thing is'), which summarizes Nick's argument concerning their collective pro-European attitude, but which excludes criticism of 'the British'.

The occasioning and functioning of accusations of racism and talk about race

In this final section, we shall extend the scope of our discussion slightly. Up to this point, we have considered how speakers can defend absent others and conversational partners from charges of prejudice, and may act collaboratively to suppress hearably prejudiced

⁶ This audio-recording was made in 1998 during a 2-week period in which Susan Condor recorded all of her mundane social interactions.

talk. In this final section, we extend our argument to its logical conclusion, and consider how the expression of prejudiced attitudes may also constitute a collaborative accomplishment. That is, we explore the potential utility of focusing both empirically and theoretically on the *discursive event* in which a prejudiced utterance is made, managed or suppressed, rather than presuming that the talk in question can adequately be understood by treating the individual speaker as independent cases.

The stretch of talk reported in Extract 7 has been taken from an encounter in which the interviewer, Clifford Stevenson, had informally approached a group of neighbours as they were chatting over their garden fence.⁷ The Abbotts, a couple in their 80s, and the Bishops, a couple in their 70s, lived on a working-class housing estate on the outskirts of a small market town in the south of England. The interviewer was in his late 20s, with an Irish accent (which, it later transpired, the participants had misrecognized as Scottish). Prior to the reported stretch of talk, the Abbotts and the Bishops informed the interviewer that they had originally moved to their current semi-rural area of residence from London. From previous experience, it was possible to anticipate that under these circumstances, 'white flight' stories might be available. The reported extract of conversation commences at a point at which Clifford poses what was intended, and in this case successfully functions, as an indirect 'trigger question', designed implicitly to provoke talk about ethnic minorities.

Extract 7: 'You're not allowed to shoot them any more . . .'

- 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 an
 4 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]
 11 Cliff Uhuh?
 12 Mrs A =But, when you've been living in a house, we lived in a house for nearly
 13 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

⁷ Interview conducted for the project *Migrants and Nationals*, funded within the Leverhulme Trust Constitutional Change and Identity programme (Grant no. 35113).

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- 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 any more, you realize that don't you?
 35 ((all laugh))
 36 Mrs B (((laughing)) Shut up!)
 37 Mrs A (((inaudible))) I gave my gun up!
 38 Mrs B Can I take him away?
 39 ((all laugh))
 40 Mrs A I said I gave my gun up!
 41 Mrs B Yes
 42 Mr A I'll tell you something-
 43 Mrs A It's the same with people that are not even black people. [I've got
 44 a grandchild who's married]=
 45 Mr A [We're the only ones to be married in a submarine.]
 46 Mrs A =to a Jamaican boy.
 47 Cliff ((to Mr A)) Really?
 48 Mrs B We're not even married.
 49 Mr A During war time
 50 Cliff ((inaudible)) That's fantastic
 51 Mr A And that's true.

In many respects, the stretch of conversation presented in Extract 7 represents a textbook case of a 'modern' form of 'racist discourse': Mrs Abbott voices negative opinions about ethnically defined 'others', whilst at the same time, attending to a normative opprobrium against prejudice. She prefaces her account with a pre-emptive identity disclaimer ('I'm not prejudiced, about coloured people', Line 9), which is also repeated in the form of defensive claim on Line 30. In addition, Mrs Abbott establishes her status as a reasonable person through reference to her own (long-suffering) first-hand personal experience relayed through the use of the generic 'you': 'when you've been living in a house' (Line 12). Her complaints against her Pakistani neighbours are not articulated as criticisms of their personal attributes: indeed, she concedes that 'They were very friendly' (Line 21). Rather, Mrs Abbott works up an account that we would recognize from van Dijk's (e.g. 1987) work as containing a gamut of features characteristic of guarded forms of discourse, including demonstratives of distance ('they weren't us', Line 24), and allusions to the mere fact of difference. She also attempts a strategy of apparent concession (van Dijk, 1987, p.93) 'It's the same with people that are not even black people' (Line 43), although she loses the floor to her husband before she is able to complete this.

As we have already seen, the interactional success of any defensive identity claim should be regarded as a matter of reception. In this case, the transcript reveals

the reception of Mrs Abbott's claim to a non-prejudiced identity to have been mixed. Mrs Abbott's version of events is explicitly supported by her husband and by Mrs Bishop, apparently challenged by Mr Bishop, and receives no direct verbal indicators of evaluation from Clifford, although his encouraging back-channel responses indicate attention and signal her continued right to the floor. At the same time, we may note a collaborative consensus concerning what features of the ongoing discourse might conceivably be regarded as 'prejudiced'. Unlike Extract 5, in which the label 'coloured' was treated as problematic, in this case none of the parties involved objects to Mrs Abbott's use of the label 'coloured people', and Mr Bishop's reference to 'the Pakis' also passes unchallenged.

This stretch of talk also draws our attention to some more general issues concerning the collaborative accomplishment of talk about ethnicity and 'race'. Had this represented a more formal interview setting, the transcript would probably record the 'Pakistani neighbours' story' in the form of a monologue, in such a manner as to attribute Mrs Abbott with sole agency for its production. In this case, we can recognize that although Mrs Abbot spontaneously introduces the topic of race and ethnicity, her action is in fact contingent upon Clifford having afforded a suitable conversational opening, and upon the other interlocutors allowing her to take and to retain the floor. Here, we can see how 'Mrs Abbott's' account⁸ is sustained, and in fact worked up, through the effective support of interlocutors, who provide reinforcement through markers of agreement (in the case of Mrs Bishop) and displays of intersubjectivity including cooperative completion and echoing (in the case of her husband), and indicators of interest on the part of Clifford. In this case, the requirement of effective support from the other people is rendered particularly apparent since we can contrast the relative success of the story about the Pakistani neighbours with the fate suffered by Mrs Abbott's second story opening concerning her grandchild 'who's married to a Jamaican boy' (Lines 44 to 46), in which case her bid for the floor is displaced by her husband's offering: 'I'll tell you something . . .' (Line 42) ' . . . We're the only ones to be married in a submarine' (Line 45).⁹

Finally, we can begin to appreciate how talk about race and ethnicity (which may or may not come to be cast as 'racist' or 'prejudiced') may itself be used as a resource with which to perform a range of rhetorical business (Eliasoph, 1999). In most research that collects samples or accounts of racist discourse, the talk in question is elicited by direct questioning on the part of an interviewer, typically within an over-arching frame that represents the research as concerned with the respondent's experiences of, or attitudes towards, 'foreigners', 'the reception of immigrants' and so forth. This, in turn, has necessary implications for the types of rhetorical work that speakers are performing in their roles as respondents. On the basis of an analysis of interview data, van Dijk (1987) has suggested that racist discourse is typically oriented towards two rhetorical objectives: 'prejudiced talk about minorities . . . has the overall goal of negative other-presentation, while at the same time preserving a positive self-presentation' (p. 86). However, attention to the various ways in which talk about nation, ethnicity, race and prejudice may be occasioned in the course of ongoing conversation may allow us to appreciate how talk about ethnic 'others', and about prejudice, may be used to

⁸ The representation of this stretch of talk as 'Mrs Abbott's' need not involve an imposition on the part of the analyst, but in fact reflects the orientations of the other participants.

⁹ In this context, Mr Abbott's interruption might be read as a strategic attempt to silence his wife and Mr Bishop by moving the conversation on to safer discursive territory, in a manner similar to that used by Kath in Extract 6.

accomplish a range of local rhetorical objectives, many of which may have very little to do with the expression of authentic attitudes or the direct conveyance of information.

In this case, Mrs Abbott's 'Pakistani neighbours' story was not launched simply to voice a complaint, justify an opinion or to inform the interviewer, although it does, of course, do all of these things. In addition, the story provides a reportable topic affording a claim to the floor. In this respect, her statement, 'I'm not prejudiced, about coloured people' (Line 9) serves both as a disclaimer and as a pre-announcement, a bid for the floor and a signal concerning the nature (a complaint) and hence the reportability of the narrative to follow. The fact that the function of the 'Pakistani' story may have had less to do with the relaying of negative opinions about 'others' *per se* and more to do with matters of entertainment (cf. Billig, 2001) is indicated by the ease with which this topic is displaced by another amusing personal anecdote concerning the Abbotts's marriage in a submarine.

We can also appreciate the various social actions that may be accomplished by the act of levying charges of prejudice against another person as it is occasioned in the course of ongoing conversation. Mr Bishop's suggestion (Line 12) and direct assertion (Line 24) that Mrs Abbott's account is indicative of prejudice is not treated by the others as an attempt to proffer information, nor even a serious commentary on Mrs Abbott's character. Mrs Bishop treats her husband's interventions as attempts to seize the floor, and as such, a breach of etiquette rather than as a serious challenge to Mrs Abbott's identity: 'No, listen to her! Wait, wait, wait' (Line 14), 'Shut up!' (Line 28). The status of Mr Bishop's charge as playful banter – an example of what Goffman (1959, p. 128) might term 'a "kidding" inconsiderateness for the other' – is indicated by the explicit manner of its delivery, which, in contravening conventional norms of politeness may serve as a marker of intimacy (Brown & Levinson, 1987). The non-literal nature of this identity challenge is also signalled through Mr Bishop's use of hyperbole: 'You're not allowed to shoot them any more, you realize that don't you?' (Line 27). In effect, rather than contributing to the suppression of the problematic talk, Mr Bishop's interjections fulfil the same sort of 'devil's advocate' role as Kilroy's challenge to Sally in Extract 1. In this case then, charges of prejudice are in fact being employed not to suppress the ongoing talk, but rather to promote it precisely by virtue of constructing the exchange as potentially controversial.

Concluding comments

In this paper, we have suggested that current social psychological approaches that focus on attitudes possessed by, interpretative repertoires expressed by, or strategies adopted by, individual social actors may neglect the essentially dialogic character of the management, suppression, production and display of everyday talk about race and ethnicity. Our observations concerning the social and dialogical aspects of prejudice suppression and denial as it occurs in conversational contexts are not intended as critique of existing social psychological approaches. However, they do point to some theoretical and empirical lacuna in the current social psychological literature.

First, we suggested that a focus on the dialogic character of conversation allows us to recognize how the success, or otherwise, of a claim to non-prejudiced character ultimately depends upon its acceptance or rejection on the part of an audience. In this respect, prejudice denial and mitigation represents an essentially collaborative exercise. This consideration in turn affords an appreciation of the ways in which the status of any

particular utterance, action or event as 'racist' or 'prejudiced' may itself constitute a social accomplishment.

Second, we pointed to the ability of social actors to defend not only themselves, but also others, from charges of prejudice. On occasion, this may take the form of defending the reputation of absent others, including groups with which the speaker identifies. However, we noted the need for caution before assuming that social actors necessarily adopt a single, or consistent, footing throughout a stretch of talk. In the cases considered here, the question of which personal or social identities are relevant to the matter in hand could itself constitute an essentially contestable component of debate.

Third, we considered how, as an aspect of face-work, prejudice mitigation and denial may also be undertaken on behalf of other co-present individuals. More generally, during the course of any social encounter, interactants may take joint responsibility for policing conversation, and for correcting and suppressing the articulation of prejudiced talk.

Finally, we noted the logical corollary of these observations: that in everyday life, the occurrence of 'racist discourse' is likely to represent a collaborative accomplishment, the responsibility for which is shared jointly between the person of the speaker, and those other co-present individuals who occasion, reinforce or simply fail to suppress it.

Although we have explored these issues specifically with respect to the question of the suppression, mitigation or denial of prejudiced talk, this may be seen to raise some more general issues for social psychological theory and research. First, our analysis points to the complexities of social action as it occurs in dialogic encounters, which may not easily be captured by the common procedure in social psychological theory and research of parsing social activity into separate 'cases' and 'variables' (cf. Condor, 2003). We have drawn attention to the problems of analytically attributing actions such as 'prejudice mitigation', 'prejudice suppression' or even 'racist discourse' to particular, singular, social actors. In addition, we have pointed out how, for practical purposes, it may be impossible to distinguish a speaker's adoption of a 'social' as opposed to a 'personal' identity, or to map each on to distinctive, temporally bounded 'contexts'.

Second, our analysis points to the need to recognize the sphere of micro-social relations as a legitimate object of concern for social psychological work on prejudice, racism and, indeed, intergroup relations more generally. Existing work on prejudiced discourses, cognitions and attitudes has tended to focus on the 'functions' that these may serve either for individuals, or in relation to macro-social phenomena (cf. Tajfel, 1981). It is not our intention to question the legitimacy of either of these types of perspective. However, our analysis also points to the need to consider how discourse concerning race, ethnicity and doubtless other social category distinctions may also be treated as a matter of civility, strategically oriented to the local interactive contexts in which it occurs.

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