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contemporary racist discourse: taboos against racism and racist accusations

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During the last twenty years there has been a burgeoning literature on the language of contemporary racism in Western liberal democracies such as Australia, New Zealand, Britain, Europe and the United States. Much of this literature has been informed by discursive psychology, which not only analyses everyday talk and conversation, but also formal institutional talk that can be found in parliamentary debates, political speeches and newspaper articles. One of the most pervasive features of contemporary racist discourse is the denial of prejudice. Increasing social taboos against openly expressing racist sentiments have led to the development of discursive strategies that present negative views of outgroups as reasonable and justified, while at the same time protecting the speaker from charges of racism and prejudice. This research has demonstrated the flexible, contradictory and ambivalent nature of contemporary racist discourse, which is organized by common and recurring tropes used by majority group members to justify and rationalize existing social inequities between groups. These justifications are premised largely on the flexible and rhetorical use of liberal and egalitarian commonplaces that draw on principles of freedom, fairness, and individual rights.

In this chapter we outline the theoretical and analytic approach of discursive psychology and its implications for the study of prejudice and racism. We review discursive research conducted in Australia, New Zealand, the UK, Europe and the United States to illustrate how majority group members manage issues such as indigenous rights claims, immigration and racism in their talk. This review highlights some of the discursive resources and strategies that majority group members deploy to justify and rationalize negative outgroup evaluations, while at the same

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time positioning themselves as non-prejudiced. Finally, we consider a largely ignored phenomenon that appears to be closely associated with the denial of prejudice: while there are increasing social taboos against the expression of racism, there are also increasing social taboos against making racist accusations. Such charges and accusations are invariably met not only with strong denials, but also with moral outrage. We demonstrate how speakers, in particular anti-racist critics, attend to this taboo by avoiding making such explicit accusations, and instead frame their criticisms in indirect and subtle ways.

discursive psychology

Discursive psychology, broadly defined, describes a number of social psychological approaches that are predominantly concerned with analysing the socially constitutive nature of language (see also Potter & Hepburn, this volume). Most contemporary psychology, in particular social psychology, adheres to the notion of internal mental representation. As such, social psychology has been concerned predominantly with examining the cognitive contents of the mind, making use of notions such as attitudes, stereotypes and representations, and has focused on how such cognitions are generated by cognitive mechanisms and processes. From this perspective, cognition is conceptualized as prior to language. Language is viewed primarily as a communicative medium through which cognition finds expression. Most social psychologists also subscribe to a realist epistemology: that there is a knowable domain of facts about human experience and consciousness that can be discovered through the application of reason and rationality (science) or through hermeneutic interpretative methods.

The emergence of the social-constructionist movement in psychology (Gergen, 1985) challenged this realist epistemology and the dominant paradigm of cognitivism. This challenge can be attributed to the increasing interest in the role and function of language as a socially constitutive force in consciousness and experience. This 'turn to language', which was part of a larger intellectual tradition in the humanities and social sciences during the 1980s, emphasized the role played by language in creating and reproducing meaning in everyday social interaction and practice. Conceptualized as a social practice, language has no fixed meaning outside the context in which it is used. Further, this approach argues that the language we use to describe our world shapes our perceptions: objects, activities, events and categories derive their epistemological status from the definitions we create for them.

One influential application of these ideas was that of Potter and Wetherell's early work on discourse analysis and its application to social-psychological topics. In their seminal book, *Discourse and Social Psychology*, Potter and Wetherell (1987) combined the theoretical and empirical foundations of speech act theory, ethnomethodology and semiology to arrive at a distinctive approach to the analysis of discourse. Based on Austin's speech act theory (1962), a central emphasis running through this approach is that people use language 'to do things'. Words are not simply abstract tools used to state or describe things; they are also used to make things happen. People use language to justify, explain, blame, excuse, persuade and present themselves in the best possible light. Thus, language is functional. As in ethnomethodology, the focus is on the ordinary, everyday use of talk that has practical consequences for participants: how people use language to understand and make sense of everyday life. Language is viewed as reflexive and contextual, as constructing the very nature of objects and events as they are talked about.

Because language in social interaction is the site where meanings are created and changed, and because it is the primary way of performing actions, discursive psychology argues that language itself should be the object of study rather than used as a conduit to 'other things'. Discursive psychology considers language in its situated use, within the process of an ongoing interaction. It examines how accounts are constructed: how people do things such as present their accounts as factual (Potter, 1996). Discursive psychology also identifies patterns of language that constitute aspects of society and the people in it. This second aspect draws attention to the social nature and historical origins of the world 'out there'. It involves the study of power and resistance based on the assumption that the language available to people enables and constrains their actions (Wetherell & Potter, 1992).

The approach to discourse adopted by us in our own research is informed by the early work of Potter and Wetherell (1987), in addition to more recent theoretical developments and extensions in this tradition (Billig, 1991, 1998; Edwards, 1997; Edwards & Potter, 1992; Potter, 1996; Wetherell, 1998). Broadly, this approach analyses how talk and texts are socially organized to achieve local actions, such as identity management, as well as ideological effects that rationalize and legitimate oppression. It examines both the broad patterns and themes within talk (interpretative repertoires or discourses), as well as the techniques and linguistic tools through which accounts are imbued with the status of fact and truth. It also examines how accounts are organized argumentatively, i.e. how they are designed to compete with alternative versions of social reality.

discursive psychology and racism

Traditional social psychologists have generally sought to understand racism as an aspect of cognition. This may be contrasted with discursive psychologists, who seek to understand racism as a social practice: as an aspect of discourse and communication that is primarily linguistic rather than cognitive.[1] Discursive research on the language of racism has examined the ways in which discursive resources and rhetorical arguments are put together to construct notions of race, disadvantage, identity, and how majority group members use these resources in everyday talk to justify and legitimate current social practices. Discursive psychology locates these language practices or 'ways of talking' at a societal level, as products of a racist society rather than as individual, psychological and/or cognitive products (Wetherell & Potter, 1992). The analytic site therefore is not the 'prejudiced' or 'racist' individual, but the rhetorical and discursive resources that are available within an inequitable society.

The implications of this work for the study of racism may be explored with reference to discursive psychology's challenges to a central explanation of racism in traditional social psychology: categorization and stereotyping. The stereotype construct has played a pivotal role in social-psychological approaches to racism and prejudice in the last sixty years (for a history of this see Condor, 1988; Hopkins, Reicher & Levine, 1997). The increasing dominance of social cognition as a theoretical framework during the past ten years within social psychology has led to a proliferation in the stereotyping literature. In this framework, stereotyping is regarded as the outcome of a pervasive cognitive tendency to categorize people into their respective group memberships – a process that is understood as either serving to simplify an overly complex world (e.g., Fiske & Taylor, 1991) or to render it more intelligible (Macrae & Bodenhausen, 2000). Stereotypes are conceptualized as a stable set of descriptions and attributes of a particular social group that are highly consensual, pervasive and resistant to change. These approaches also document negative consequences of categorization and stereotyping that include objectification, distortion, bias and prejudice.

Discursive psychology argues that some of the subtlety and complexity of intergroup relations may be obscured by this social cognitive approach. In particular, it ignores the social nature of categorization and its links with power. Discourse analysts treat categorization as something people do, in talk, in order to accomplish social actions: to deny racism; to present the self positively and the other negatively; and to classify a group as worthy or not worthy of particular entitlements. Categorization also serves a broader

social, political and cultural function: to maintain (or challenge) existing social inequalities. Indeed, social cognitive research on categorization may itself be examined as part of the discourse of racism. Both Condor (1988) and Hopkins et al. (1997) argue that accounts of race categorization and stereotyping as general, potentially benign, evaluatively-neutral cognitive processes ignore the specific meanings and implications of the use of 'racial' categorizations and their place in the exclusion and oppression of other groups. These researchers argue that such an account of stereotyping as a natural human process may itself be used to legitimate racism by denying the moral accountability of racist practices, rendering invisible the links between racism, power and politics, and entrenching racism as inevitably defining intergroup relations.

There have been a number of discursive studies of social categorization and racism that demonstrate the flexibility of social categorization and its links with maintaining power relationships. Wetherell and Potter (1992) investigated the way white middle-class New Zealanders (Pakeha) used the particular categories of 'race', 'culture' and 'nation' in their talk of Maori–Pakeha relations, and how these rhetorical constructions were used to legitimate the existing social order of inequality and Maori disadvantage. While many of the respondents spoke favourably of Maori cultural identity, ultimately this identity was viewed as secondary to homogeneous and unifying 'national' identity. The category of 'nation' was used in Pakeha talk to limit and constrain the aspirations of Maori identity, which in its 'radical' form was seen to undermine and threaten national unity. Attempts to identify as 'Maori' and to tie category entitlements of land rights, cultural recognition and affirmative action programmes to this identity were denied by redefining Maoris as 'New Zealanders' and thereby constructing a Maori identity as divisive and threatening. What this contextual selectivity demonstrates is the important rhetorical and ideological work that is being accomplished by the use of particular categorizations in different contexts. In some contexts a 'Maori' cultural identity is valorized, but in others, it is seen as problematic and to be replaced by a superordinate national identity as a 'New Zealander'.

The flexible content and strategic functions of social categories are also clearly demonstrated in research in the UK and Europe examining the construction of immigrants. A common rhetorical device observed in arguments in the UK asylum seeker debates is the division of immigrants into 'good' immigrants and 'bad' immigrants (Lynn & Lea, 2003). 'Good' immigrants were represented as already in the country, invited and as arriving 'legally', whilst 'bad' immigrants were those who arrived without

authorization. However, in Austrian discussions of the relationship of immigrants to the category of 'native Austrians', they were categorized as 'immigrants', an homogeneous group who represented a burden and threat to the Austrian people (Sedlak, 2000).

The construction of categories also normatively binds entitlements to those categories and is an essential rhetorical move in politics. Le Couteur et al. (2001) examined the 'Address to the Nation' of the Australian Prime Minister John Howard. They demonstrate in Howard's speech how the categories of Indigenous Australians and farmers were constructed in order to bind certain entitlements to these categories. The category of farmers was represented as the symbolic expression of Australian-ness, as positive, productive and socially beneficial. They were described as important to the future of our country in terms of their generation of wealth, which was tagged as the source of assistance for the less fortunate (implicitly, in this speech, the indigenous communities). Their claims on the land and on the government were positioned as indisputable and compelling. By contrast, 'Aboriginals' were constructed as passive, inactive and unproductive. Indigenous Australians were described as people we must continue our effort to improve. Their relationship with the land was represented as a 'special affinity' that did not contribute to wealth production. Their claims to a place in the negotiation over land could thus be dismissed as less compelling and indisputable than the entitlements of the farmers. By prefacing his policy of the severe restriction of indigenous land rights with the above categories, Howard paved the way for these changes to be seen as normal, obvious and right, whilst preserving a positive presentation of his government, and effectively removing the claims of Indigenous Australians from serious consideration in the debate. Research such as this demonstrates the links between social categorization and political and social power, and clearly posits stereotyping as a social rather than solely as an internal, cognitive process.

Examining social categorization from a discursive perspective demonstrates that categorization, rather than being a natural phenomenon reflecting cognitive processes and uncontested external objects, is a complex and subtle social accomplishment. The categories of the 'other' briefly examined here reveal that these categories are flexible and variable in their deployment in arguments to maintain existing social inequities.

discursive research on racism

Discursive studies on the language of racism have been conducted for a range of sites, including the media, parliament and everyday talk,

and in many countries, including the Netherlands (van Dijk, 1984, 1987, 1991, 1993, 1997; Verkuyten 1998, 2001), Belgium (Blommaert & Verschueren, 1998), Europe (Wodak & Van Dijk, 2000), Spain (Rojo, 2000), South Africa (Seidel, 1998), the UK (Billig, 1988; Jones, 2000; Reeves, 1983; Lynn & Lea, 2003), the USA (Mehan, 1997; Santa Ana, 1999; Thiesmeyer, 1995), New Zealand (Abel, 1996; McCreanor, 1993a, 1993b, 1993c; Nairn & McCreanor, 1990, 1991; Wetherell & Potter, 1992), and Australia (Augoustinos, Tuffin & Every, 2005; Augoustinos, Tuffin & Rapley, 1999; Augoustinos, Tuffin & Sale, 1999; Le Couteur, Rapley & Augoustinos, 2001; Rapley, 1998, 2001; O'Doherty, 2001).

This research reveals a commonality in the discursive resources (i.e. interpretative repertoires, rhetorical devices) of the contemporary language of racism across topics, arenas (public, private, political, media) and countries. One of the crucial properties of contemporary racism is its denial, typically illustrated by the ubiquitous disclaimer 'I'm not racist, but…' (van Dijk, 1992). Those who argue against the interests of minorities typically deny that they are prejudiced. Reeves (1983) in his study of British political discourse, uses the term 'discoursive deracialization' to describe the strategy by which politicians avoid using racial categories. For example, calls for immigration restrictions, although ostensibly relating to non-whites, are phrased in such a way that race is not mentioned.

American researchers have referred to this as the 'new racism', which denies being racist, in contrast to 'old-fashioned racism', which was unambiguous in terms of its racist agenda. This new racism appropriates liberal individualist principles such as the work ethic and self-reliance to argue for 'racist' and discriminatory practices. Negative feelings and attitudes are justified by 'matter of fact' observations that minority groups transgress central values such as hard work, thrift and self-reliance (Katz & Hass, 1988; Kinder & Sears, 1981; McConahay, 1986; Pettigrew & Meertens, 1995). However, the distinction between old and new racism in this way is less than clear cut, as there is evidence that even 'old fashioned' racists choose their terms and arguments strategically (Billig, 1988).

Billig (1988) argues that contemporary political leaders, the media and citizens are faced with a social taboo against expressing *unjustified* negative views against outgroups. General norms and values prohibit blatant forms of prejudice (Billig, 1988; van Dijk, 1992). Billig (1988) suggests that the concept of 'prejudice', a product of Enlightenment liberalism, is associated with irrationality. Thus speakers attempt to maintain a subject position of being 'rational' by constructing their views as 'reasonable' and framing their talk in such a way as to undermine or

prevent possible charges of prejudice. Those who wish to express negative views against outgroups take care to construct these views as justified, warranted and rational (Rapley, 2001).

This serves a number of functions. On a local level, people, institutions and countries deny, mitigate, justify or excuse negative acts and views towards minorities in order to position themselves as decent, moral, reasonable citizens. Condor, Abell, Figgou, Gibson and Stevenson (in press), note that denials of racism protect the reputation of ingroups as well as the individual. These denials also function on a political, social and cultural level to marginalize claims of prejudice, thereby controlling resistance and disruption and maintaining existing social advantages and power.

The discursive resources used for denying, rationalizing and excusing negative views of outgroups can be loosely grouped into three types of strategies: (a) framing negative views as ostensibly based on conditions external to one's self, rather than on internal, psychological motivations; (b) re-defining racism as 'extreme, violent behaviour', as 'doing equity', as 'honesty' and as 'over-sensitivity'; and (c) deploying liberal and egalitarian principles of fairness and 'treating everyone the same', regardless of social group membership.

external rationales for negative views

Research has found that speakers use a 'reasonable prejudice' repertoire, constructing negative views as based on incontrovertible, external reasons, rather than as stemming from an internal, psychological cause (Billig et al., 1988). Two popular externalized justifications for negative views of outgroups are to argue that the negative view is a response to the negative characteristics of the outgroup (blaming the victim); and to re-present racist views as economic concerns.

Blaming the victim. Attributing inequality to the characteristics of the outgroup is a strategy van Dijk (1991) calls 'blaming the victim'. In this classic neo-liberal trope, problems are described not in terms of social or historical causes, but as caused by individuals' characteristics and destructive choices (Le Couteur, Rapley & Augoustinos, 2001).

Augoustinos, Tuffin and Rapley (1999) found evidence of victim blaming in their study of everyday discourse on Aboriginal and white relations in Australia. Participants constructed the issue of Aboriginal poverty as a consequence of their '(wilful) disengagement from productive activity' (p.355) and Aboriginal alcoholism the result of an individual choice to drink. Similarly, the Aboriginals' 'failure to achieve' was attributed

to the 'dead weight' of other problematic Aborigines, who prevented progress. By shifting the responsibility for poverty and alcoholism onto the individual, white speakers were able to reject claims that these issues were the result of systemic racism and discrimination.

Victims of racism are not only blamed for problems such as inequality, unemployment and alcoholism, but are also constructed as the cause of the majority group's racism. Reeves (1983), van der Valk (2000), Jones (2000) and Verkuyten (1998) found that politicians and focus group participants argued that immigration and the presence of immigrants caused racism and was responsible for the rise of extremism. The participants in Verkuyten's (1998) study argued their negative views of 'foreigners' grew out of their experiences living in a multiethnic community: they were not racist until they lived with immigrants and observed their unhygienic and immoral lifestyles.

Economic arguments. Negative views of an outgroup can also be externalized by framing them as a concern with economic practicalities. Blommaert and Verschueren (1998) found that immigration was consistently constructed in the Belgian media as a threat to prosperity, to the future of 'our' children, the viability and integrity of the social security system and majority group employment. An ostensible concern for cost-efficiency was often used to legitimate the refusal to grant asylum to refugees. Refugees were depicted as a drain on the economy, requiring a large financial outlay for little return (often juxtaposed with the financial benefits of 'other immigrants': Blommaert & Verschueren, 1998).

Economic arguments can also be used to re-frame negative views of an outgroup as a concern with economic practicalities. Augoustinos, Tuffin and Rapley (1999) found that participants rationalized racism as 'justifiable anger' over 'unfair' government handouts to Indigenous Australians. Participants argued that negative feelings towards Aborigines were not based on 'the colour of a person's skin' but on the 'social advantages they are seen to have'. One participant framed the pervasive dislike of Aboriginal people as 'taxpayers […] worried about where their money is going', rather than racism.

redefining racism

Contrary to the assumptions of much research on racism, the category of racism, and attributions of race and racism, are not static, nor are they value-free, empirical scientific statements about observable objects in the natural world. Rather, the category of racism is constructed flexibly and variably in ways that manage the moral accountability and identity

of the speaker as non-racist. By re-drawing the boundaries of what may legitimately be defined as 'racist', the category of racism may be used to position individuals as non-racist by placing their own behaviour and views outside of the boundaries of 'racism'. This is demonstrated by the variety of constructions of racism observed across sites of formal and informal talk about 'race'. These constructions include racism as violence, racism as equity, racism as honesty and racism as over-sensitivity.

Racism as violence. The 'reasonable prejudice' repertoire, outlined above, is coincidental with a repertoire of 'unreasonable prejudice', in which the reasonably prejudiced argue that the 'real' racists are those who engage in violence (Billig et al., 1988). The use of extremism as the measure of racism is often used to allow the 'reasonably prejudiced' to distance themselves from racism: the identification of 'real' racism opens the way for the expression of negative views as 'not' racism (van Dijk, 1991).

This was found by Verkuyten (1998) in his study using focus groups in the Netherlands. Participants constructed 'real racism' as the Nazi extermination of the Jews and the violent protests of extreme right-wing political groups. By defining racism as extreme actions, they were able to distinguish themselves as not racist.

Racism as equity. Billig et al. (1988) suggest that linked to the concept of prejudice is the notion of equality, as to be non-prejudiced is to treat all people equally. Thus it is imperative, in order to avoid charges of racism, that the reasonably prejudiced uphold the values of equality whilst formulating unequal views. This is demonstrated in arguments opposing affirmative action that are expressed as a concern that no group should receive special treatment or more than their fair share (Augoustinos, Tuffin & Every, 2005).

In his study of the maiden speech of Pauline Hanson, an Australian right-wing political candidate, Rapley (2001) found that the speech drew upon locally nuanced, culturally pervasive discourses of egalitarianism, mateship and the notion of a 'fair go' to construct a version of self as representing 'equity'. Hanson redefines her negative views of Indigenous land rights and affirmative action as a defence of the right of white Australians to be treated equally, rather than as a prejudicial view of persons on the basis of their race.

As Billig et al. (1988) argue, the argument that it is 'we' who are unfairly treated and thus the 'real' victims of prejudice, re-casts oppressor and oppressed. This was found by Verkuyten (1998); participants in his study redefined themselves as the object of discrimination from anti-racists. In this argument, the injustice of discrimination is not questioned, but who is being discriminated against is challenged. This allows participants

to define themselves as part of the moral community, as upholders of equality, whilst espousing negative views of others (Verkuyten, 1998).

Racism as honesty. Rapley (2001) also found that a key strategy in Hanson's speech was to redefine racially negative views as the expression of frank, down-to-earth, common sense. This was also noted by van Dijk (1991) who found the British media argued that articles on 'blacks' and crime, for example, were reporting the 'truth' and therefore were not racist.

Racism as 'over-sensitivity'. In this argument, racism is redefined as the victims of racism being over-sensitive. This was found by Nairn and McCreanor (1990) in their study of submissions to the Human Rights Commission on race relations in New Zealand. They examined the use of notions of 'sensitivity' in Pakeha (white New Zealanders) constructions of a fight between Pakeha and Maori students after the Pakeha students performed a mock Haka (Maori dance). The behaviour of the Pakeha was attributed to 'insensitivity', rather than racism, whilst the Maori response to the mock Haka was attributed to 'over-sensitivity'. This functioned to allocate blame for racial tension to the undue sensitivity of the Maori, whilst minimizing the responsibility of the Pakeha.

The attribution of racism to the over-sensitivity of the oppressed was also found by van Dijk (1997), Augoustinos, Tuffin and Rapley (1999) and Augoustinos, Tuffin and Sale (1999). Augoustinos et al. (1999, p.95) give the following example from a majority group member:

> Also too they often look for *reasons* that are not there. Ahh they feel that because they're Aborigines if something doesn't happen it's because they're Aboriginals (Ah ha). Umm often, ok I admit that sometimes it may be the case in jobs and whatnot but ahh I think often it's not warranted?

In this account, experiences of racism by Aboriginal people are contested with the suggestion that Aboriginal people are claiming racism where it does not exist. Such strategies locate the source of racism in the individual psyches of Aboriginal people, and infer that racism is more imagined than real. The magnitude of racism is minimized with the suggestion that, while some claims are justified, 'often' these are unwarranted.

liberal arguments for 'illiberal' ends

Wetherell and Potter's systematic analysis of racist discourse in New Zealand (1992) found that the intellectual resources of Western political

democracies structure the discourse of race politics. Discursive resources such as human rights, egalitarianism and equality have been utilized in anti-racist discourse, and are perhaps common-sensically associated with liberalism and democracy. However, Wetherell and Potter (1992) found that these same intellectual resources are also successfully deployed to support arguments whose effects or aims could be claimed to be 'illiberal' and undemocratic. They found that these intellectual traditions were mobilized as 'rhetorically self-sufficient arguments'; that is, they were used by participants without further explanation, allowing the ethical principles of liberal philosophy to do their rhetorical work. When these ethics raised potentially opposing or problematic issues, participants then drew on the discursive resource of 'practicality', most frequently in the form of the principle/practical dichotomy in which a principle is cited, but is excluded as impractical in the current situation.

Wetherell and Potter (1992) identified ten rhetorically self-sufficient arguments utilized by white speakers to justify the inequality between Pakeha and Maori citizens:

1. Resources should be used productively and in a cost-effective manner
2. Nobody should be compelled
3. Everybody should be treated equally
4. You cannot turn the clock backwards
5. Present generations cannot be blamed for the mistakes of past generations
6. Injustices should be righted
7. Everybody can succeed if they try hard enough
8. Minority opinion should not carry more weight than majority opinion
9. We have to live in the twentieth (twenty-first) century
10. You have to be practical.

All of the strategies for denying racism outlined in the previous sections can be seen to draw on these intellectual resources. For example: redefining racism as 'equity' draws on the argument that 'everybody should be treated equally'; the categorization of Indigenous Australians as unproductive relies on the argument that 'resources must be used productively'; and the construction of inequality as the fault of minorities draws on several arguments such as 'present generations cannot be blamed for the mistakes of past generations' and 'everybody can succeed if they try hard enough'.

Although these rhetorically self-sufficient arguments were used extensively in the Pakeha discourse examined by Potter and Wetherell, the researchers emphasized that they were deployed in flexible and often contradictory ways. They stressed that these maxims should not be viewed as cognitive templates or schemas that structured and organized Pakeha discourse, but rather as 'tools' or 'resources' which were combined in variable ways by the respondents to do certain things, most notable of which was to avoid a 'racist' identity and to justify existing Maori–Pakeha relations.

accusations of racism

So far we have examined talk and text that, whilst avowing non-racism, reasonableness and liberal values, functions to maintain and justify social inequality and existing power relationships between white majorities and non-white minorities. However, this language of prejudice and racism is intertwined with, responds to and shapes a counter anti-racist discourse. As yet, there has been little research examining talk by majority-group members that accuses other majority-group members of racism.

The pervasive, negative positioning of anti-racists and majority-group accusations of racism plays a significant role in shaping a counter anti-racist discourse. Van Dijk (1992, p.90) writes:

> the person who accuses the other as racist is in turn accused of inverted racism against whites, as oversensitive and exaggerating, as intolerant and generally as 'seeing racism where there is none'…Accusations of racism then soon tend to be seen as more serious social infractions than racist attitudes or actions themselves, e.g. because they disrupt ingroup solidarity and smooth ingroup encounters: they are felt to ruin the 'good atmosphere' of interactions and situations. Moreover, such accusations are seen to impose taboos, prevent free speech and a 'true' or 'honest' assessment of the ethnic situation. In other words, denials of racism often turn into counter-accusations of intolerant and intolerable anti-racism.

Indeed, van Dijk (1992, p.93) goes on to argue that: 'the very notion of "racism" may become virtually taboo in accusatory contexts because of its strong negative connotations'.

Examples of this negative characterization of anti-racists and accusations of racism have been documented in studies conducted in the United States, Britain, Europe and Australia. In the USA, supporters of an anti-

discrimination bill were categorized as the 'human rights industry' and as 'demagogic', constructing them as incompatible with American values of democracy and freedom of speech (van Dijk, 1997). In the UK, refugee sympathizers were derisively tagged as 'white liberals': wealthy elites who espoused humanitarianism but, duplicitously, did not disadvantage themselves by providing for asylum seekers but forced this burden on to others (Lynn & Lea, 2003).

The theme of anti-racists as out of touch with the mainstream was also found in the Netherlands. Participants in Verkuyten's (1998) focus groups positioned anti-racists as ignorant of the reality of living in a multiethnic community and therefore without legitimate right to speak of the 'facts'. These participants also presented anti-racists as discriminatory towards the majority white population.

In Australia the construction of accusations of racism as a violation of free speech was popularized during debates over indigenous and white Australian race relations (McIntyre & Clark, 2003). For example, notable political journalist Paul Sheehan (1998) alleged that 'racist' was a loaded term employed by the 'Thought Police' (post-modern academics, Labor politicians and members of the 'elite multiculturalism industry') to silence their opponents. As in Belgium and the UK, 'the elites' has become a powerful derogatory categorization applied to those who oppose conservative and reactionary policies on immigration, refugees and indigenous peoples. As such, anti-racists are constructed as an out of touch, privileged minority. As part of the maintenance of social inequity, the construction of anti-racists as pernicious, oppressive, discriminatory or just plain crazy (the 'loony left') is a potent way of silencing prejudice claims.

The work of Jones (2000) in the UK suggests that majority group members who are critical of immigration policies attend to these accusations against anti-racists by framing their criticisms as reasonable and rational, and avoiding overt allegations of racism. She found that in the UK political debates on new asylum laws, beyond very general statements, opposition speakers rarely openly addressed race and racism. She examines a speech from Labour MP Chris Davies, in which he argues against a clause barring asylum seekers from employment because it 'will mean worse employment prospects for the Asian community…and black people'. He goes on to state 'I believe that the Government are playing the race card...and they are appealing to the white, Conservative-minded vote'. He later claims that the government will fail because most people in Britain are 'fair minded'. Jones argues that Davies avoids direct statements regarding racism by claiming that Asians and blacks will experience

'worse employment prospects' rather than prejudice and discrimination. She also suggests that 'Conservative-minded' is a euphemism for the white racist vote, and 'fair-minded' a euphemism for 'not racist'. The function of these euphemisms is to construct the policy negatively whilst maintaining a 'reasonable' self-presentation.

Jones's research, together with that on the negative construction of anti-racists, suggests that those criticizing racist policies and outcomes must attend to pervasive concerns that accusations of racism are unreasonable and discriminatory by presenting their position as reasonable and rational. The remainder of this chapter turns to consider recent evidence examining the increasing pervasiveness of taboos against making racist accusations taken from the Australian parliamentary debates on asylum seekers. Specifically, it examines the subject position performed by a politician criticizing asylum seeker policy in Australia, how racism is defined in this criticism and the local and ideological functions of this construction.

making and managing accusations of racism in the australian parliament

The data for this analysis comes from a corpus of the 2001 Australian Senate Hansard speeches on the *MV Tampa*, amendments to the *Migration Act*, and the *Border Protection Bill 2001*. In 2001, 438 asylum seekers were shipwrecked off the Australian coast, rescued by the Norwegian container ship the *MV Tampa*, and subsequently refused entry into Australia by the Australian government. Australian troops boarded the vessel and removed the survivors to hastily established processing camps on Pacific islands, where many remain incarcerated today. After this incident several bills were passed through the Australian parliament: retrospectively legalizing the hostile takeover of the *Tampa*, excising islands from Australia's migration zone to prevent persons landing there from invoking asylum obligations, allowing strip searching of asylum seekers in detention from the age of ten, reducing avenues of appeal for migration decisions, and restricting the definition of refugee. The Australian Labor Party (ALP), then (and now) in opposition, supported the legislation proposed by the conservative government, as did the far-right Senator of the One Nation Party, with the result that some ALP ministers, independents, Greens and Australian Democrat senators were the only voices of dissent.

Parliamentary discourse such as these Senate debates has been called 'elite discourse', and it is studied to examine the role of politicians in the reproduction of racism and anti-racism (Wodak & van Dijk, 2000). The choice of parliamentary debates allows a continuation of, and

comparison with, previous work reviewed here, particularly that of Jones (2000) and van Dijk (1992). Wodak and van Dijk (2000) also suggest that parliamentary debates are useful sites of analysis, because it is in this forum that policies are legitimized and legislation is adopted that directly affects the lives of minority groups such as asylum seekers.

The analysis that follows draws attention to the ways in which participants/speakers attend to the accountability of their talk and thus construct their talk to take account of possible challenges. Rather than attempting to define what 'really' constitutes 'racism', in this analysis we sample the production of racism as an everyday phenomenon as it is produced by social members in talk-in-interaction. In this way, it attends to the indexicality and contingency of the meaning of this construct in a changing political climate. It is thus well placed to offer insight into the changing face of the race debate in Australia and internationally.

The extract below is taken from Senator Andrew Bartlett's (immigration spokesperson for the Australian Democrats) speech on the *Tampa* crisis. It features justifications and warrants for his opposition to the government's border protection bills that position him as reasonable and rational. It also features two redefinitions or euphemisms of racism which have been commonly deployed in accusations of racism in the Australian parliament: racism as the One Nation Party and/or Pauline Hanson; and racism as 'playing the race card'.

1 I do not think we want to have an election played on the race card. We have
2 had debate about people putting One Nation last on their how-to-vote cards.
3 There is not much point putting them last on how-to-vote cards if we are
4 going to adopt their policies at the same time.
(Senator Andrew Bartlett, Senate Hansard, 28/8/01, p.26794)

This account does much work to position the speaker (and his claims) as reasonable, rational and representative (rather than the accusation of a wealthy minority elite). In the first line, Bartlett establishes a race-based election as not only something he is against but others also oppose, through his use of 'we'. He also presents the decision to put One Nation last on how-to-vote cards as the outcome of a 'debate'. This positions the decision as the result of a participatory democratic process and thus the result of deliberate and rational group decision-making. Both position the speaker's claims as reasonable and legitimate, as well as consensual.

As well as attending to accountability in these ways, the speaker also constructs two versions of racism, which have both local identity management functions and ideological effects. Firstly, Bartlett uses the phrase 'played on the race card'. This construction was also found in parliamentary speeches in the UK (Jones, 2000). It does not accuse the politicians of being racist themselves, but of generating racism for political gain. It constructs racism as readily aroused and manipulable by politicians. This is interesting in light of the 'blaming the victim' strategy outlined previously, which argues that immigrants themselves are responsible for generating racism. In this construction, responsibility is shifted on to politicians, which has important implications for addressing racism, an issue discussed further below.

This repertoire of 'racism as playing the race card' recognizes that racism may be a political tool wielded through electioneering such as speeches, advertising and pamphlets. This is somewhat different from social psychology's conceptualization of racism as located within the person. This construction still has a strong negative connotation, possibly as strong as accusing a person of being racist. To generate racism, for one's own gain, constructs the accused as manipulative, immoral and unrepresentative of the national good (a very important position for a politician). By accusing the government of playing the race card Bartlett avoids more explicit or problematic terminology, whilst still hearably calling the government to moral account for their actions. This repertoire of 'playing the race card' encompasses the generation of racism for political gain as a morally accountable act.

As a second construction of racism, Pauline Hanson's One Nation Party is used to stand in for racism (line 2). Pauline Hanson won a seat in the 1996 Australian general election as an Independent, after being dropped from the conservative Liberal/National Party for 'racist' comments. Her election, achieved with a large swing in the vote in her favour, was accompanied by a media furore. The 'race debate', as it was coined by the Australian media, came to be identified with her. She was named in many media reports as the 'spark' that ignited the debate (Rapley, 1998). She was widely vilified in the general press as anti-Aboriginal, anti-Asian and anti-free trade. Her party campaigned for asylum seekers arriving by boat to be turned away. That One Nation has also been equated with racism here (note that this is the only party named in the account, it is closely associated with the term 'race card', and the speaker highlights that the party has been placed last on how-to-vote cards, effectively denying them another seat in parliament), without explanation or elaboration,

suggests that this equation of racism with One Nation has entered the Australian consciousness as 'common sense'.

As noted in the previous section, definitions of racism as extreme behaviour such as the Nazi holocaust are commonly deployed in order to distance a speaker's negative views about others as not racist. The identification of racism with the One Nation Party is interesting in this context, because it locates racism in contemporary Australian society, rather than in the distant past or in other countries. This definition of racism also encompasses the new racism. As noted by Rapley (2001), Hanson claimed her anti-Aboriginal stance was actually a defence of the Australian principle of egalitarianism and also that her use of terms which may be heard as racist was actually 'honesty'. The equation of racism with this kind of new racism, albeit still one of the most direct examples of overt racist talk in recent Australian political history, redefines racism as talk and policies that discriminate against indigenous peoples, refugees and migrants, despite their ostensibly liberal justifications.

These two definitions of racism feature as part of a critique of the majority-group as racist and have functions at both a local and ideological level. Locally, they accomplish an accusation of racism that is indirect, complex and subtle. By accusing the government of playing the race card and adopting the policies of One Nation, speakers avoid more explicit terminology (such as racist or bigot), whilst still hearably calling the government to moral account for their actions. These definitions of racism, together with the use of rhetorical tools such as the consensus warrant noted above, act as a prolepsis against charges commonly levelled at accusations of racism. Ideologically, they engage in a struggle for meaning over what may be criticized as racist. These definitions attempt to encompass actions such as the generation of racism for political gain and new racist talk as morally accountable racist acts. In this way actions, such as the exclusion of asylum seekers under discussion in these debates, may be challenged as morally unacceptable, with the view to mobilizing the populace to accept asylum seekers.

They also play a role in establishing solutions to racism. In both instances, these definitions lend themselves to the idea of combating racism through political change: by voting against the government and the One Nation Party. However, in some respects the identification of racism with politicians, particularly the personalization of racism to one person/party, may prove problematic. In its equation of racism with a minor political party and its leader, the repertoire of racism as Hanson is similar to definitions of racism as extremism reviewed in the section on new racism. It was noted there that the equation of racism with

extremism is used to define a subject position for the speaker as 'not racist'. In the current context, racism as Hanson may potentially sideline a focus on the institutionalized racism of social structures participated in by all Australians.

conclusion

The issue of the exclusion of minority groups remains an entrenched and difficult one. As demonstrated by the discursive research on the language of contemporary racism, race talk has effectively adapted to a social and moral taboo against overt expressions of prejudice. Through adopting rhetorical strategies that deny racism, such as presenting one's negative views as reasonable and rational, defining racism in such a way that one's own actions may be categorized as non-racist and the deployment of tropes of equality and fairness, the discursive construction of an unequal society is re-produced and re-constructed daily. However, as our analysis of a speech from the Australian Senate debates on asylum seekers demonstrates, anti-racist counter discourses are also adapting to this new racist discourse. Speakers manage the socially delicate act of making an accusation of racism through presenting themselves as reasonable and rational, whilst also defining racism in such a way that new racism is still called to moral account. Defining racism as 'playing the race card' calls politicians to account for inciting racism in others, whilst allowing the speaker to avoid making explicit accusations of racism that may prove to be problematic. There are also some problems posed, however, by the re-definition of racism as Pauline Hanson/One Nation that may work to obscure widespread and institutionalized racism by locating racism within an extreme but minor political party.

The study of counter arguments has not yet been a major focus of discursive research. However, the initial exploration here suggests that it is an area ripe for further study that may contribute to the elucidation of contemporary race talk. Most importantly, it is hoped that such analysis will contribute to strengthening efforts to combat racism.

note

1. Of course, it seems that both these perspectives ignore a fundamental aspect of racism: the material means through which oppression is expressed and experienced. Discursive psychologists address this argument in two ways. Firstly, they point out that to claim something is 'constructed' does not mean it is non-existent or not 'real'. Secondly, they point out that discourse is the primary way in which physical realities such as apartheid are established

and maintained. Such a system must be made sense of, legitimated, justified and supported by the populace. However, there are a number of researchers who argue that discursive psychology has not sufficiently tackled issues of subjectivity and the body (e.g. Parker, 1988) and this remains a contentious issue in the field.

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