

On the parallels between social cognition and the 'new racism'

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This paper questions the degree to which the social cognition perspective allows us to explore and critique contemporary racism. In the first section we consider the way in which the social cognition perspective talks of 'racial' categorization and the processes of racism, and note how these reproduce the key themes to be found in 'new racism'. In the second, we interrogate the adequacy of this approach through exploring how a police officer engages with the charge of police racism. On the one hand, this analysis illustrates the importance of exploring the ways in which racialized social categories are constructed strategically to advance particular understandings of the genesis of social conflict. On the other, it provides a concrete example of how many of the arguments advanced by the social cognition perspective may be used for reactionary purposes (in this case a defence against the charge of racism). We argue that there is a need to resist taking categories for granted and so develop a social psychological analysis of the processes of racialization.

It is a commonplace observation that psychology has a profoundly racist past in which many of our discipline's 'founding figures' propounded theories of 'racial supremacy' and advocated eugenicist policies (Billig, 1979, 1982; Howitt & Owusu-Bempah, 1994). Today elements of this hierarchical racism persist. For example, Rushton argues that black people pursue more primitive reproductive strategies in which more offspring with lower survival rates are produced whilst white people pursue the more advanced strategy of having fewer children more of whom survive (Rushton, 1990; Rushton & Bogeart, 1987; for a critique see Kamin, 1993). Consider, too, Brand's arguments concerning the inferiority of black people's intellects and his description of himself as a 'scientific racist'. However,

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notions of 'racial' supremacy are rather rare in contemporary theorizing and often get a hostile reception: the publication of Rushton's work in *The Psychologist* (the membership journal of the British Psychological Society) met a barrage of protest (see Howitt & Owusu-Bempah, 1994) whilst Brand's book, *The g Factor* was promptly withdrawn by the publishers (*Times Higher Educational Supplement*, 19 April 1996).

These reactions are indicative of a fundamental transformation in the thinking of mainstream psychology. Within a relatively short time, psychology has, as Samelson (1978) documents, shifted from seeking to identify and explain 'racial' differences towards exploring and seeking to reduce racism. At the heart of social psychology's contribution to this project is the concept of 'prejudice', defined by Allport as 'thinking ill of others without sufficient warrant' and as involving 'an antipathy based upon a faulty and inflexible generalization' (Allport, 1954, p. 9). Armed with this concept, social psychologists have sought to explore the processes involved in the production and maintenance of erroneous generalizations about various 'races'. Further, they have sought to correct such generalizations through designing programmes of intergroup contact and championing the cause of desegregation (e.g. Deutsch & Collins, 1958; Jahoda & West, 1951; Pettigrew, 1961; Prager, Longshore & Seeman, 1986. See also Ponterotto & Pedersen, 1993). More recently, as the initial hopes of contact theorists have failed to materialize, social psychology's commitment to bringing about some form of social change has been evidenced in the attempt to identify (and then 'short circuit') the psychological processes responsible for the continuation of negative perceptions of black people even after the provision of stereotype-disconfirming information (Hamilton, 1981; Hewstone, 1989; Hewstone & Brown, 1986; Wilder, 1986).

However, before congratulating ourselves for having moved from being part of the problem to being part of its solution, it is appropriate to reflect upon the adequacy of our discipline's conceptualization of racism. Optimism about social psychology's present position depends upon equating racism with the belief that certain racially defined groups are inferior to others or else that they possess negative characteristics. This equation is sometimes made explicit. Thus in a recent textbook on the subject, van Oudenhoven & Willemsen (1989) state that 'racism is a philosophy expressing the superiority of one race over another race' (p. 15). More often, it is taken for granted in the research. For example, the entire literature on prejudice and stereotype reduction proceeds from the assumption that racism depends on negative perceptions of black people and that the elimination of racism is a matter of eliminating these perceptions. However, this is a very limited view of racism and fails to take account of the complex and changing character of racist thought. Indeed, some recent theorists prefer to talk of 'racisms' rather than racism precisely in order to highlight this diversity (e.g. Bhavnani & Phoenix, 1994). In particular, since the 1980s, a number of commentators have referred to the emergence of the 'new racism' (e.g. Barker, 1981; Gilroy, 1987; Gordon & Klug, 1986; Lawrence, 1982; Seidel, 1986; Solomos, Findlay, Jones & Gilroy, 1982).

The 'new racism' explicitly rejects the notion that some 'races' are naturally superior to others. Rather, it simply assumes that those of different 'races' will naturally dislike each other. Such a perspective is current in many countries. Certainly it predominates in large parts of Western Europe (see the special issue of *Race and Class*: 'Europe: Variations on a theme of racism'). However, for the sake of exposition, we shall concentrate on the British case. There are two important points about the 'new racism' which need to be stressed.

The first is that, although it has some more extreme variants, it is not in itself marginal. Indeed, it could be argued to be the 'common sense' within which mainstream public debate on issues of 'race' is customarily conducted. This 'common sense' was encapsulated in 1965 by Roy Hattersley (a Labour MP and future Home Secretary) through an elegant and concise aphorism. Referring to 'coloured' immigration, he stated that 'without integration, limitation is inexcusable; without limitation, integration is impossible' (Miles & Phizacklea, 1984, p. 57). The argument has two sides which correspond to the two facets of British legislation concerning 'race'. On the one hand, Hattersley presupposes that the mere presence of black people will cause tension and therefore immigration controls based on 'race' are necessary. On the other hand, there is a moral imperative against marginalizing those black people who do manage to get in and therefore anti-discrimination law is required. However, as Miles & Phizacklea (1984) point out, the two sides are not equally weighted. Hattersley's argument can be rephrased as contending that: 'in order to eliminate racism within Britain, it is necessary to practise it at the point of entry into Britain' (p. 57). What is more, once black people are identified as a problem, as the cause of conflict and as a group who need to be kept out of the country, the injunction to avoid hostility to those who are 'here' loses its conviction.

The second point to note is that even if the 'new racism' doesn't propose that black people are inferior, it should not be seen as necessarily more benign than those racisms which do. In common with the supremacist versions, 'new racism' takes 'race' as a natural and inevitable way of categorizing people and characterizes the 'racial' other as necessarily a problem for the 'racial' in-group. That is, it satisfies the two key criteria by which Miles (1989) characterizes an ideology as racist. On the one hand, people are represented in terms of racialized social categories. On the other, the resulting 'races' are defined in terms of relatively fixed biological and/or cultural characteristics which are either negative or bring negative consequences for others (Miles, 1989, p. 79; see also Husband, 1982; Keith, 1993).

The problem in adopting a definition of racism that only includes its supremacist forms is that it allows many who characterize black people as a problematic presence in Britain (and who wish to deny black people rights of entry, settlement and expression, and who oppose anti-racist activities) to deny that they are racist and so avoid censure. Thus many of the key texts of the 'new right' start with a rigid assertion that racism is the belief that black people are inferior and, because that belief is not accepted, the author is not racist (e.g. Honeyford, 1988; Lewis, 1988). For instance, in the introduction to a seminal collection including most of the intellectual luminaries of the 'new right', it is stated that 'the writers in this book are non-racists: they neither share nor condone the view that some people of some other race are for that reason inferior' (Palmer, 1986, p. 3). Similarly, when Enoch Powell was asked in a TV interview if he was a racialist he replied, 'if by being a racialist, you mean a man who despises a human being because he belongs to another race, or a man who believes that one race is inherently superior to another in civilisation or capability of civilisation, then the answer is emphatically no' (cited in Gordon & Klug, 1986, p. 20). Indeed, Powell was to argue that 'true mutual respect' between human beings rests upon the recognition of such differences 'without any implication of superiority or inferiority' (cited in Gordon & Klug, 1986, p. 21). Even the National Front, Britain's major fascist group in the 1970s and 80s, went through a phase where they justified the repatriation of black people on the grounds that all 'races' naturally prefer their own. They therefore promoted all forms of separatism, praising black as

well as white separatist movements in their publications (thus *National Front News* no. 99 featured the slogan 'Fight Racism' encircling a clenched black fist on its front page, *Searchlight*, undated).

Our concern in this paper is not simply that our discipline directs its fire at supremacist racism at the point it has become outmoded (and therefore relatively less insidious) and replaced by other variants. Rather it is that our reduction of racism to its supremacist variants may lead us to ignore the way in which our current theories reflect or even legitimate the 'new racism'. Indeed, it could be argued that psychology has not become less racist, but that, for 'race' as for so many other things, the discipline reflects the dominant ideological assumptions and 'common sense' of its age and that as these have changed so psychology has incorporated elements of the 'new racism' into itself. The need for us to interrogate our own discipline is emphasized by the observation that the 'new racism' is not systematically set out in any one place but is to be found scattered across an array of speeches and articles. Gordon & Klug (1986) suggest that whilst some may see this as an indication of weakness it is in fact the opposite. Precisely because the 'new racism's' ideas are not associated with a systematic theory it is much more difficult to recognize, and hence much more pervasive and dangerous.

This paper explores the question of social psychology's analysis of racism in two ways. First, we compare mainstream psychological research on issues of 'race' with the assumptions of the 'new racism'. Our argument is that there is a commonality between the two and that this extends not only to issues of commission but also to their omissions. Second, we will analyse an interview conducted with a police officer seeking to manage accusations of both personal and institutional racism. We will use this analysis to make two general points. On the one hand, and rather paradoxically, although exemplifying the 'new racism', the flexible character of the officer's discourse serves to undermine the key assumption that 'race' is a categorization that is natural to use. As this assumption is common to both the 'new racism' and the mainstream social psychology of 'race', the flexibility in the officer's 'racial' categorization illustrates the need for a theoretical alternative which conceives of categorization as argumentative and strategic in nature. On the other, the parallels between this officer's arguments about 'race' and racism, and that of the mainstream social psychological literature, illustrate the potential of the latter to lend academic legitimacy and respectability to the 'new racism'.

The 'new racism' and the psychological mainstream

One of the most central assumptions in the new racism concerns the naturalness and inevitability of racial categorization in our experience of similarity/difference. For example, Parekh, in his analysis of the place of 'nationhood' in 'new right' ideology, observes that: 'it is argued or more often simply assumed that the feeling of kinship cannot be acquired or inculcated, it is based on the unity of "stock", "race" or "kind"' (Parekh, 1986, p. 35). In similar vein, O'Keefe (1986) claims: 'the idea that people could live without racial sentiment, without a sense of history or continuity or identity is an obvious nonsense' (p. 189) and Cronin, writing in the *Salisbury Review* (virtually the house magazine of the 'new right'), asserts that 'our need is not simply to be with others of our own kind, but to enact repeatedly the interfusion of our own identities with the identities of others' (1987, p. 46).

This conflation of 'race' and collectivity is also reflected in the place of national identity and culture within the 'new racism'. As we have already indicated, culture and cultural difference play a pivotal role in the new racism. One's culture is seen as a reflection of one's racial heritage and is the overt basis on which people are said to recognize others as similar and experience feelings of affinity. And, because one's culture is so inextricably linked with one's 'race', it follows that the possibilities for people to take on a new culture alien to their own heritage are remote. Such reasoning abounded in the aftermath of the British 'riots' of the 1980s. For instance, Peregrine Worsthorne argued in the *Sunday Telegraph* (29 September 1985) that it was doubtful whether the 'coloured population' could ever assume mainstream 'British values' (quoted in Solomos & Rackett, 1991, p. 56). Indeed, even if 'racial aliens' are entirely brought up in a different culture, they must remain outsiders to that collectivity. To quote Enoch Powell once more: 'the West Indian or Indian does not, by being born in England, become an Englishman. In law he becomes a United Kingdom citizen by birth, in fact he is a West Indian or an Asian still' (cited in Foot, 1969, p. 119). In similar vein, Alfred Sherman argued that parliament could 'no more turn a Chinese into an Englishman than it can turn a man into a woman' (*Daily Telegraph*, 8 September, 1976). Indeed there is a neat symmetry to this argument which means that the 'racial' other can never identify with 'us': 'just as it is human nature for *us* [i.e. white people] to keep to ourselves and instinctual for *us* to form a nation, so it is human nature for *them* [i.e. black people] to keep to their kind and instinctual for them *not* to identify with *our* nation' (Gordon & Klug, 1986, p. 19, italics in the original).

The second assumption of the 'new' racism is that, just as there is a natural affinity between members of the same 'race', so there is a natural antagonism between members of different races. Thus the new racism assumes that 'race' is a fundamental element of self/other perception and that social tensions, and what Scruton (1980) refers to as 'illiberal sentiments', arise from a 'natural prejudice' and 'a desire for the company of one's own kind' (i.e. one's own 'race'). Peregrine Worsthorne puts it thus: 'Birds who are not of the same feather do not flock together at all easily' (*Sunday Telegraph*, 27 June 1982). However, the most famous expression of this view is Enoch Powell's speech of 20 April 1968 in which he prophesized that the streets of Britain would run with rivers of blood were black immigration to continue. Sometimes this conflict is seen to derive from the way in which the presence of 'aliens' threatens to dilute indigenous cultures—what Enoch Powell once called 'the disruption of the homogeneous we' (quoted in Parekh, 1986, p. 37) and a view notoriously summarized by Margaret Thatcher in the run up to the 1979 general election when she claimed that British people have a natural fear of being swamped by aliens. Indeed, where the socially constructed categories of 'race' and 'nation' articulate to produce racialized definitions of national identity, it follows that those represented as the 'racial' other constitute a 'foreign body' which, because it fractures the homogeneity and social cohesiveness of the nation, is necessarily a problematic presence (Barker, 1981; Seidel, 1986). In fact, as Barker observes, the new racism's construction of difference means that 'you do not need to think of yourself as superior—you do not even need to dislike or blame those who are so different from you—in order to say that the presence of the aliens constitutes a threat to your way of life' (Barker, 1981, p. 18). At other times the emphasis is less on fears of in-group disruption than processes of out-group perception. Thus, Ray Honeyford, with obvious reference to psychological theory, argues: 'to

be prejudiced is, quite simply, to be human. All men and women, whatever their origin, creed or colour, are prejudiced. We all have a tendency to prejudge, whether out of social conditioning or prior experience. Sometimes our judgements are irrational and sometimes sound. This tendency is a function not of skin colour but, more likely, the result of our perceptual mechanisms, which, through a system of filtering, prevent us from being overwhelmed by undifferentiated sensory input' (Honeyford, 1986, p.52).

The third assumption is less an assertion of what racism is than an insistence on what it is not. It is systematically argued that issues of power and structural inequality are irrelevant to the analysis of racism. In article after article in the *Salisbury Review* through the mid-1980s, writers attack the inclusion of power in definitions of racism provided most notably by the Greater London Council and by Berkshire Education Authority (Dale, 1985; Flew, 1984; Partington, 1984; Savery, 1985). In similar vein, these and other writers attack the notion of racism involving structural inequalities. Thus Dale (1985) summarily dismisses the notion of institutional racism in Britain as 'almost entirely bogus' (p. 18) and Marks (1986) claims the case that institutions disadvantage black people as, at best, not proven. The consequences of this denial of issues of power are three-fold. First, psychological theory is not only invoked in explaining racism, but the explanation of racism is limited to psychology. Second, there is a similar emphasis on psychology in explaining racial disadvantage. Thus Partington (1984) claims that the school failure of West Indians has nothing to do with discrimination and everything to do with their dysfunctional families (see also Flew, 1992). Third, any measures to deal with structural inequality are dismissed as irrelevant and illegitimate. Perhaps the major targets of the new racism are what writers refer to as 'the race relations industry' (Flew, 1984) and any other form of anti-racist activity. This is clearly reflected in the titles of two of the most influential 'new racism' texts: *Anti-Racism: An Assault on Education and Value* (Palmer, 1986) and *Anti-Racism: A Mania Exposed* (Lewis, 1988). Indeed there is a real sense in which the new racism's account of the psychological dynamics of racism functions as a counter-argument to those who would combat racism through transforming social structure. John Gray (1992), for example, argues that prejudice serves 'a cognitive function that is ineliminable in expressing beliefs that have been acquired unconsciously and that are held unreflectively and unarticulated. The idea that we can do without such beliefs, whatever their dangers, is merely another rationalist illusion. The life of the mind can never be that of pure reason, since it always depends on much that has not been subject to critical scrutiny by our reason' (p. 44). Further, the projects of anti-racists are represented as divisive and hence as a further threat to national identity (Flew, 1992). Indeed, those who seek to achieve social change through highlighting how power is implicated in, and served by, the production and deployment of racialized categories are ridiculed through the assertion that racism is but another example of a general phenomenon: people like people like themselves.

Yet if these are the elements of the new racism how do they differ from the old racism? In some respects the labels 'old' and 'new' may be unhelpful if not actively misleading (Mason, 1994; Miles, 1987, 1993). On the one hand, expressions of 'new racism' are not limited to the recent past. On the other, expressions of 'old racism' are still current. Rather, it may be more useful to think of racism in terms of an 'offensive' and 'defensive' racism. Whereas the former is organized to create 'racial' hierarchies (and hence legitimate exploitation and the production of social inequalities), the latter is organized to defend

these hierarchies from attack through representing the activities and proposals of anti-racists as misguided.

If these are the core assumptions of the 'new racism' what then of those in social psychology? The social cognition perspective dominates contemporary social psychology and views categorization as a form of psychological error occasioned by information-processing constraints. These capacity limitations mean that it is easier (requires less effort) and more efficient (requires less time), to use categories to process information about individuals than to analyse each individual separately (Brewer, 1988; Fiske & Neuberg, 1990; Fiske & Taylor, 1991; Hamilton, 1979; Macrae, Milne & Bodenhausen, 1994; Pendry & Macrae, 1994). At one level, the 'lumping together' of people is viewed as 'adaptive' for it allows the perceiver to avoid being swamped by masses of information. However, the price to be paid is that perception is inevitably biased: the processes of categorization result in representations which accentuate within-category similarities and between-category dissimilarities and distort all subsequent information processing with dramatic consequences for inter-group perceptions (Stephan, 1985).

If social cognition texts assume that categorization, stereotyping and pre-judgment are normal and natural, they also imply that it is normal and natural to use 'race' to structure perception. Simply put, the capacity constraints leading to categorization mean that the dimensions of similarity/difference that are of most use are those that are prominent or easily identified, and many cite 'race' as an obvious example (Allport, 1954; Fiske & Neuberg, 1990; McArthur, 1982; Taylor, 1981). Thus, Hamilton & Trolier (1986), argue that the identification of features as the basis for categorization is 'not a difficult problem' because such features as a person's 'race' are immediately obvious to any perceiver (p. 129). Similarly, Brewer (1988) and Fiske & Neuberg (1990) suggest that 'race' may be seen as one of a small number of 'primitive' categories that are automatically used and which may only be overcome if perceivers can be motivated to form more accurate individuated judgments (see also Hewstone, Hantzi & Johnston, 1991).

If the practical effect of the 'new racism' is the way in which its account of the dynamics of racism counters analyses which identify the role of power in the construction and dissemination of racialized understandings of social problems, any commonality between it and contemporary social psychology must raise questions about the degree to which our discipline is able to act as a critique. Indeed, the possibility arises that not only may we fail to provide the theoretical basis needed for critique, but that our theories, in reproducing this new common sense, function in the capacity of 'expert testimony' in defending against the charge of racism. So what of the commonalities?

One striking commonality concerns the category 'race'. Whereas others argue that without racist ideology there would be no category 'race' (e.g. Keith, 1993; Mason, 1994; Miles, 1989, 1993) and so make the usage of this category (i.e. the racialization of social actors) the issue of analytic concern, we find the social cognition literature talking of 'race' as a non-problematic 'given' which is normal and natural to use. In effect this 'disguises the social construction of difference presenting it as somehow inherent in the empirical reality of observable or imagined biological difference' (Miles, 1993, p. 48) and so concedes an important first step to those who would articulate and disseminate the ideology of racism. Another commonality concerns the focus upon processes internal to the individual. Indeed, the social cognition perspective construes the relevant psychological processes as essentially perceptual in nature (see Billig, 1985, for a critique). Whilst it is

not denied that other disciplines have a contribution to make to the study of racism, the idea that a social psychological analysis should take the form of an investigation of perceptual processes internal to the individual produces an analysis of categorization which pays no attention to power or practice. Indeed, it is assumed that it is possible to talk of the psychology of 'racial' categorization without reference to such factors (note, for example, how Hamilton argues that 'aspects of our cognitive functioning may, *by themselves*, constitute the basis for stereotyping and intergroup differentiation' (Hamilton, 1981, p. 336, our emphasis). Yet, as 'race' is not a natural category but rather racialized categories are socially constructed, we need a social psychology which focuses upon the social processes and strategies through which categories are constructed (and racialized). And such a social psychology must pay proper regard to action and social practice. Simply put, the effective categorization of people is not 'just' a matter of mental representation or classification (Jenkins, 1994). Rather, it entails action which intervenes into, and indeed constitutes, other people's experience of the world and their place in it (Jenkins, 1994; Keith, 1993; Reicher, 1993). Thus we need a study of the power relations and social practices which affect who is able to act on the basis of their category constructions and so make them heard and count for others. Yet, rather than providing this, the social cognition perspective offers an account couched in terms of the 'natural and common capacities of the human mind' (Allport, 1954, p. 17). Not only is our attention drawn to processes internal to the individual, but these processes are seen as relatively automatic, biologically determined universals (see Billig, 1985, for a critique). As a corollary there is a naturalization of the relevant processes which closely parallels that found in the 'new racism' (note, for example, the parallel between Allport's claim that we have a 'propensity to prejudice' (Allport, 1954, p. 21) and Honeyford's argument that 'we all have a tendency to prejudice' (Honeyford, 1986, p. 52)).

Relatedly, this treatment of 'race' and power means that we provide arguments which trivialize racism. The argument that 'there is no theoretical or empirical reason to assume that forming generalizations about ethnic groups is radically different from forming generalizations about other categories of objects' (Taylor, Fiske, Etcoff & Ruderman, 1978, p. 778) obscures the distinctive power relations and social practices involved in racialization. Similarly it obscures the distinctive meanings of racialized categories. Consider the way in which national identity is racialized in the 'new racism' (Miles, 1987, 1993). Inevitably this means that the category 'race' has unique implications for definitions of belonging, rights and entitlement. Yet the social cognition perspective's treatment of 'race' allows no consideration of these meanings. If the only consequence of treating 'race' as 'nothing special' was an impoverished social psychology unable to explore the processes and consequences of racialization, it would be bad enough. However, when these inadequacies allow these meanings of 'race' to be obscured it has the effect of neutralizing or sanitizing 'race' (Condor, 1988) and so giving legitimacy and respectability to the very category and category-related practices that should be subjected to criticism.

Whilst elements of this critique of contemporary social psychology have been made elsewhere (Condor, 1988; Henriques, 1984; Reicher, 1986; Wetherell & Potter, 1992) we wish to extend them through exploring how a member of an organized social institution with considerable power to intervene into others' lives (the police force), talks about 'race' and racism in the context of rebutting the charge that the police are racist. Our analysis is organized so as to make two broad points. The first is that 'race' is not invariably used

to represent others. Rather, racialized categories are deployed strategically in order to advance particular accounts of the genesis of social problems. More specifically we show that in his engagement with the charge that the police are racist, our police officer advances different sorts of social categories according to whether he is seeking to deny the existence of critical opposition to the police or, when this cannot be denied, explain it away. The second is that accounts of racism, which construe it as a problem of overgeneralization brought about by processes internal to the individual, can be important weapons in the new racism's project to contain and trivialize the charge of racism.

An interview with a Police–Schools Liaison officer

A context of controversy

The analysis uses material from an interview with a police–schools liaison officer working in a large English city. Although police–school contact has a long history, Police–Schools Liaison (PSL) represents a more formal, institutionally organized contact programme in which police officers work in schools on a regular basis. PSL has been surrounded by controversy (see Carter & Coussins, 1991; Menter, 1987). Whilst governmental and institutional reports see PSL as serving important educational ends (e.g. Association of Chief Police Officers and the Society of Educational Officers, 1986; Department of Education and Science, 1983, 1988; Scarman, 1981), others criticize it as a crude public relations exercise which allows increased intelligence gathering (e.g. Advisory Committee on the Police in Schools, 1986; Hackney Teachers Association, undated; Issues in Race and Education, 1982). This controversy has been especially heated because of black youths' experiences of police racism (Benyon, 1986; Cashmore & McLaughlin, 1991; Hall, Critcher, Jefferson, Clarke & Roberts, 1978; Institute of Race Relations, 1979, 1987; Keith, 1991, 1993) with PSL's critics arguing that it brings police racism into the school environment (Advisory Committee on the Police in Schools, 1986; Hackney Teachers Association, undated; Issues in Race and Education, 1982; Menter, 1987). Indeed, in 1979 the National Union of Teachers branch in the London borough of Hackney (the Hackney Teachers' Association) called for a suspension of PSL visits and reaffirmed this position in the wake of the conflict between police and crowds protesting about police racism in the early 1980s (see Carter & Coussins, 1991; Menter, 1987).

Local controversy

Two local events meant that the issue of police racism was the subject of renewed attention at the time of the research reported here. First, the police had recently mounted a large 'stop and search' operation (hereafter referred to as 'Operation Ruby') in an area of the city associated with black people (hereafter referred to as 'Downtown'). Such operations have frequently been construed as racist and have been the occasion for acts of collective action by black people (Keith, 1991, 1993; Kettle & Hodges, 1982; Solomos & Rackett, 1991). Indeed, 'Ruby' itself met considerable resistance (occasioning the deployment of 'riot' police) and was cited by many as an instance of racist policing. Second, the charge that the police were racist was revitalized by an incident in which a local PSL officer was accused of making racist remarks at school (resulting in him being refused continued admission to the school). As with 'Ruby', this incident received considerable local and national media attention.

Given these events and the history of poor police–black relations in the city (Kettle & Hodges, 1992), it is understandable that PSL officers were very concerned about the charge that they, and the institution of which they were a part, pursued racist practices. Such concerns were frequently communicated to N.H. in informal conversations and were indeed raised at routine PSL briefing meetings (attended by N.H.).

Against this backdrop of controversy PSL officers found themselves under scrutiny in the form of a Home Office funded evaluation of PSL (Hopkins, Hewstone & Hantzi, 1992). As part of this project, PSL officers were interviewed and it was no surprise to find that the interviewees sought to engage with the criticisms that were in circulation and present favourable impressions of themselves and their work.

Our selection of one of these interviews for detailed analysis does not imply that it is 'representative'. Nor should it be taken as a criticism of a single individual. Rather, the reason for its selection is that it allows us to explore the inadequacies of the social cognition approach to 'racial' categorization and as a corollary highlight the need for a social psychology which explores the argumentative construction and deployment of racialized categories in the explanation of social problems.

The interview

The interview involved N.H. (white, male, early 30s) and a PSL officer referred to here as Lloyd (white, male, late 40s–early 50s). Lloyd had several years' experience of PSL and had himself found his behaviour the subject of public debate (both within schools and the police force) after he had been accused of expressing racist views in a school. The interview started in an office in a state secondary ('comprehensive') school and continued in the local police station. Lloyd agreed to it being tape recorded. When transcribed it runs to 22 pages of single-spaced text. To preserve anonymity all names have been changed: 'Downtown' is an inner-urban area with a significant black community and 'Northtown' a traditional working-class council housing estate. Where extracts are reported the transcript page number is given.

Analysis

Given the controversy surrounding PSL in general, and Lloyd's behaviour in particular, the interview can be analysed for the way in which the charge of police racism is contained and rebutted. For the sake of clarity we have divided our analysis into two. The first concerns the nature of the social categories advanced by Lloyd. The second concerns the parallels between Lloyd's construction of the dynamics of racism and that contained within social cognition texts. With regard to the first, our analysis demonstrates that whilst the overall project of undermining the charge of racism remains constant, Lloyd's account of the relevant social categories changes as a function of developments in the immediate rhetorical context. This variation in Lloyd's category-related talk suggests that several phenomena seen by the social cognition perspective as the outcome of automatic processes internal to the individual can be reconstrued as strategic in nature. With regard to the second, we will see how arguments closely paralleling those of social cognition texts may be used to trivialize and otherwise contain the charge of racism.

The strategic construction of social categories

In this section we consider the strategic use of 'race' to represent people. There are times when Lloyd engages with the charge of racism through representing black people as a culturally distinctive, alien 'racial' other. However, at other times the charge of racism is anticipated (and contained) through constructions which imply very different social categories and category relations. More specifically our analysis shows that Lloyd first seeks to rebut the charge of racism through advancing category constructions which imply that inter-group tension and collective conflict is absent, and then, following a change in the interviewer's questions (raising issues concerning the protests around 'Ruby'), advances racialized constructions of black people as a means of explaining away protest and the charge of police racism.

Category constructions when the charge of racism is implicit: The absence of social division/conflict. The material discussed under this heading comes from the first ten pages of the transcript. The interview starts with general questions concerning Lloyd's work and the reasoning behind it and can be considered in relation to the alternative accounts of the role of the police (and PSL in particular) in circulation.

In response to the first question concerning his perception of his work, Lloyd argues that 'a policeman is very much someone who is part of the community, irrespective of who you are and what age you are. It is somebody who you can turn to for help with whatever problems you have got' (p. 1). Obviously, this constructs a commonality between police officers and others ('the community') with Lloyd emphasizing that this exists 'irrespective of who you are' (see Potter & Reicher, 1987, for a discussion of the deployment of notions of 'community'). In similar vein, when Lloyd speaks of his relations with staff and pupils within the school, he advances a construction in which the police are located alongside the school staff working to achieve the common aim of furthering individuals' development:

1. We are preparing kids, I mean school now is not so, I mean yes there is an emphasis on academic achievement but it is very much an emphasis these days on the sort of wholeness of the individual if you like where we are not just educating kids from the academic point of view, we are preparing them for life outside and I guess that the school sees me as very much helping in this role (p. 2).

A construction in which staff and police work together (note the use of the term 'we'), preparing young people for life, obviously presents the police's presence in school in a very different light from those critical of PSL. Indeed, far from being 'outside' agents, the police are construed as sharing with teachers a particular educational philosophy (one which recognizes and seeks to develop the 'wholeness of the individual'). This is further developed as Lloyd proceeds to describe his work as involving 'counselling' children and 'discussing with staff how best we can help these kids' (p. 2). He continues that others outside the school (e.g. parents) recognize his membership of the community and feel that they can trust him:

2. They feel that they can trust me. Quite a few of the problems that I deal with don't originate from the school, they originate from the homes where parents have 'phoned me up about their kids or problems that they have got themselves. That is good really, it is something that I had not foreseen when I started the job. It is nice to have that sort of relationship with the community (p. 5).

Thus far, Lloyd has constructed an account in which the relations between the police and others are defined in such a way that the police are not involved in any structural

antagonism with 'the community' or indeed with any other group. Indeed, the officer is a trusted member of the community seeking to help its other members. This conception is confirmed and elaborated upon in his response to a question concerning the nature of his input to classroom lessons:

3. I feel we live in a very, very, selfish society where by and large most people only think about themselves, they don't think about other people. I mean, yes we live in a democracy where providing we don't break the law we are allowed to do what we want, more or less. Say what we want and do what we want. Which is great, and obviously the police are there to uphold democracy if you like, but then there is the other side of the coin really. While it is important to sort of guard our rights in a democracy as individuals, it reaches a point where there is bound to be conflict between what is good for individuals and what is good for society as a whole. And again I think that is something that young people don't think about. They are very much thinking about their rights all the time. I spend quite a bit of time with the fourth and fifth years sort of introducing this concept to them, and, just whose rights are the police there to uphold anyway? Are we there to uphold the rights of individuals or are we there to protect the rights of society as a whole? I am very fond of coming in and talking about this, getting them to think about situations where actions of individuals conflict with the interest of society as a whole, things like industrial disputes, peace marches, Greenham Common, this type of thing (p. 7).

Given that others charge the police as serving sectional interests, this construction of conflict represents the police as socially neutral. Of particular interest is the way in which events which could be taken as evidence for *inter-group* conflict are represented. Take, for example, the deployment of police at anti-nuclear demonstrations or industrial disputes. Whilst open to alternative constructions in which the police are construed as acting alongside some social actors and in opposition to others, this activity is here represented as action protecting the interests of 'society as a whole' from attack by individual selfishness. Indeed, precisely because conflictual events are represented as 'situations where the actions of individuals conflict with the interest of society as a whole', it denies the relevance and meaning of structural division and makes it difficult to see the police as being anything but socially neutral.

A similar construction was evident when Lloyd continued to speak (unprompted) about the police practice of stopping and questioning people on the street. This is a practice that has been the focus for many complaints. For example, it was frequently cited by school pupils as unfair and illustrative of the police's distance from, and hostility to, young people (see Hopkins, 1994). Further, the disproportionate number of black people who are subjected to such practices has frequently been cited as evidence that the police are racist and the large-scale stopping and searching of black people (as in Ruby) has often prompted considerable criticism and protest. However, whereas others construe such conflict as illustrative of a wide social division between the police and others, Lloyd construes it in a manner which confirms his account of the police's role in protecting 'the rights of society as a whole'. Thus he argues:

4. I try and get them to see why sometimes they come into conflict with the police and that we are not there to sort of stop them enjoying themselves and sort of doing things they want to do. We are sort of trying to protect their rights and at the same time we are trying to protect the rights of society as a whole and this is where the police are in conflict with the youngsters a lot of the time and one of the biggest complaints the youngsters come up with is, you know, they'll say to you 'I got stopped on the street the other day' and they don't go a lot on this so you explain why it is necessary to stop people on the street. And one of the scenarios I sort of set them is the fact that they all live in the Northtown area, what would happen if there was a lot of burglaries in the area? Would they be happy with it? And get them to think about how we are going to go about solving it from a police point of view. And generally they will come up with

all the right answers, you know, put extra patrols on the streets, we're going to be stopping vehicles late at night, people moving about. And then you sort of say OK, you just left your girlfriend's at one o'clock in the morning and you are walking back home, you get stopped and it is part of this process. Now what do you think about being stopped? Of course in the end they'll realize that there is a good reason why they get stopped sometimes (p. 7).

Repeating the argument that the police 'protect the rights of society as a whole', Lloyd construes the stopping and searching of people as they go about their daily business as arising from the needs and interests of the general public. Indeed, when asked how to deal with a particular situation the pupils 'come up with all the right answers' and advocate the very practices that are frequently complained about ('stopping vehicles late at night, people moving about'). As a corollary, the conflict around such operations is construed as one of misunderstanding: once people have the chance to reflect on the issues and so 'realize that there is a good reason why they get stopped sometimes', the basis for conflict disappears. It should also be noted how, at the same time as advancing a particular version of the police's relationship with others, Lloyd's claim about these others' acceptance of his version of events works to establish its veracity: not only is it socially shared (rather than 'his' and 'interested'), it is shared (and produced) by those that initially complained.

If we review this material it is striking for the way in which conflict is represented. Whether talking of the policing of industrial disputes and political protest, or the stopping and searching of people as they move around their neighbourhood, Lloyd represents the police's activity as action on behalf of society as a whole, and opposition to such action as, either, an instance of individual selfishness, or misunderstanding. Given the very public controversy about Ruby, PSL and his own behaviour, this construction of social relations may be analysed for the work that it does in countering the charge that the police are racist. Simply put, it is organized to counter the argument that conflict with, and criticism of, the police is frequently collective, because to acknowledge this collective protest would inevitably raise questions about the police's practices, social functions and allegiances.

Category constructions when the charge of racism is explicit: Racializing black people and the charge of racism. If until now conflicts surrounding policing have been represented so as to make it difficult to see them as social/collective, this changes when the interviewer explicitly asks about Operation Ruby and so raises questions about why black people protest about the police's activities. In this section we explore how the collective form to this criticism is represented and highlight the marked contrast between the social categories that are advanced here and those advanced in the first half of the interview. In essence, our argument is that, whereas Lloyd previously constructed the conflict so as to represent it as other than inter-group, it is now quite explicitly represented as inter-group. Further, black people are represented in terms of a particular sort of social category: they are racialized and constituted as an alien collectivity with a distinctive and relatively unchanging culture. Indeed, as we will see, their charge of racism is itself racialized and dismissed as arising as an inevitable corollary of their cultural difference. Relatedly, the charge of racism is construed as evidencing the problematic nature of their presence.

The first question to address the collective conflict surrounding Ruby occurred on p. 10 of the transcript and, along with the subsequent exchange, is reproduced below.

5. Hopkins: Do things that happen outside the school which involve the police, sort of, ever, have any consequences for what you are doing inside the school? Say things like Operation Ruby, things like that?

Lloyd: Oh, yes, I mean, after the last, after Operation Ruby I did spend a session with the fifth year talking about Operation Ruby. Now, it wasn't entirely successful, it was the head of English who sort of said 'come in and talk to my group about Operation Ruby'. There was quite a few West Indians in the group who lived in Downtown who, I mean, were individuals with great big chips on their shoulders basically, who did not want to hear what I had to say and it made the session very, very, difficult really. I always felt it was a waste of time. The teacher had to step in and sort of say 'look you are asking the same questions over and over again and you know, shut up and give PC Lloyd a chance to put his point of view'. I felt it did not do a lot of good really, it was, yeah, I mean, some of the kids listened to what I had to say but I felt it almost got out of control at times.

Hopkins: What were the questions that they were asking?

Lloyd: Oh they were just sort of, out and out, sort of, well, they weren't asking questions. They were basically just sort of running down the police all the time and saying was it right that people should be sort of stopped on the street all the time and searched and police could raid people's houses in an operation like this? And you try to explain the reasons why it was necessary for Operation Ruby but they did not want to know really, they just kept on and on with their sort of grudges (p. 11).

In an important sense, the interviewer's question takes the charge of police racism that forms the argumentative context for the interview as a whole and makes it quite explicit. As a corollary, Lloyd's strategy of argumentation begins to shift. This develops over several exchanges and is initially focused upon discrediting those who articulate the charge. Thus Lloyd construes their questions about the legitimacy of certain police practices as other than questions: 'they weren't asking questions', they 'were basically just sort of running down the police all the time'. Nor was this just his own impression: the teacher also recognized that these were not questions but 'grudges' and 'had to step in and sort of say look you are asking the same questions over and over again and you know shut up'. Further, Lloyd's definition of these people as 'individuals with great big chips on their shoulders' clearly implies that their perception of reality is distorted. In fact, they are motivated to avoid the proper appraisal of reality: they 'did not want to know really', 'did not want to hear what I had to say', and 'just kept on and on with their sort of grudges'.

The idiomatic 'chips on their shoulders' also appears in Lloyd's response to the next question asking for an explanation of Ruby and its background:

6. Basically Operation Ruby was set up because for some time we had been aware of a small minority—a very vociferous minority—in Downtown. They were not complying with any of the laws at all. There were a lot of drugs being pushed around Downtown and there was a certain criminal element that were quite openly breaking the law at every possible opportunity and very little was being done about it. Very powerful little outfit really. At any time the police tried to intervene, numbers appeared on the streets and made life very difficult. And we turned a blind eye to a lot of these things. It got so bad eventually, the muggings down there were two-a-penny, so something had to be done about it to stop it getting out of hand. All the intelligence they had they decided to mount Operation Ruby. It caused a lot of resentment amongst a lot of the people in Downtown. Basically amongst this lawless element really. There was a lot of people who supported Operation Ruby, who were glad to see the police coming in and doing something about it. But among this sort of criminal fraternity and the youngsters with their chips on their shoulders it caused a great deal of resentment (p. 12).

For our purposes, the key issue concerns the way in which this works against those alternatives which construe the police as acting against black people. One way in which this is done is to present the decision to mount Ruby as based upon a proper and rational appraisal of the situation. Thus he describes a situation in which some people 'were not complying with any of the laws at all' but 'were quite openly breaking the law at every

possible opportunity'. Their characterization as a 'very powerful little outfit' serves to convey the impression that this criminal activity was highly organized and dangerous. Indeed, Lloyd suggests that if anything was problematic, it was not the mounting of Ruby but a preceding lack of police activity. For example, he implies that it was because 'we turned a blind eye' that crime grew and 'got so bad' that 'something had to be done about it to stop it getting out of hand'. With such a construction Lloyd is then able to argue that the hostile response cannot be taken as saying anything about police racism. On the one hand, he argues that the criticism of Ruby was not shared by all: 'a lot of people' supported Ruby and 'were glad to see the police coming in and doing something about it'. On the other, the criticism of the police is explained in a way which minimizes its significance as saying anything about the legitimacy of the police's activities. Thus the criticism is defined as coming from the 'criminal fraternity' (which by its nature may be expected to resent the attentions of the police) and the 'youngsters with their chips on their shoulders' (thereby implying that it is irrational and saying more about them than the police).

The next step in the shift away from the strategy adopted in the first section came when Lloyd was asked about the meaning of the term 'chips on their shoulders':

7. Hopkins: Right. When you say that they have got 'chips on their shoulders' what sort of . . . ?

Lloyd: Well, they are, I mean, it's, I think you have to understand West Indian culture really to understand the background to a lot of this. You see the West Indians very much believe you sort of don't involve other people when you are sorting out your problems. Part of their way of life is you very much sort out your own troubles. Now, over there, they would not dream of involving the police in sort of problems and they resent very much the role the police have over here. And they also very much resent the fact that things that they see as part of their way of life they are not allowed to do. I mean drug taking is a good example—especially amongst the Rastafarians who will tell you that cannabis is a part of their beliefs if you like (p. 13).

As the opening hesitations ('Well, they are, I mean, it's') suggest, Lloyd may not have expected his use of the vague idiomatic 'chips on their shoulders' to be interrogated in this manner and it is quite possible to imagine that he could have 'worked up' a range of very different accounts. However, the key point is that Lloyd chooses to develop an account which is racialized. Thus he represents black people born, educated and living in Britain as 'West Indians' and ascribes to them a set of cultural values and practices that sharply differentiate them from people 'over here'. Further, not only do black people constitute an alien other whose way of life is no different from that 'over there', but their cultural difference is used to exonerate the police from the charge of racism. Simply put, black people's criticisms of the police arise from their cultural difference. On the one hand, their 'way of life' involves such practices as 'drug taking' and so attracts police attention. On the other hand, their belief that 'you very much sort out your own troubles' means that black Britons have a problem in accepting police attention. In other words, this construction offers a particular account of the absence of consent in the policing of black communities. Whereas alternatives imply that this state of affairs can only be understood in terms of the processes whereby consent was withdrawn as a function of police racism, Lloyd implies that it is a cultural given. Indeed, both the absence of consent and the charge of racism arise from black people's otherness. Yet, for all that this account of conflict is racialized and racist, the manner in which it is achieved is noteworthy for its subtlety. Thus, the narrative structure to his account warrants his claims. He implies priv-

ileged information and authority ('I think you have to understand West Indian culture really') and recruits others (e.g. 'Rastafarians who will tell you') to represent his construction as not his (and interested), but an 'out there' reality (Potter & Wetherell, 1988). Similarly, although conflict is blamed on the other, there is a sense in which this blameworthy behaviour is inscribed within the 'facts' of difference and so unavoidable. Such mitigations for blameworthy behaviour obviously work to counter the charge that Lloyd's construction reveals things about his own psychology (Billig, 1988; Billig *et al.*, 1988; Potter & Wetherell, 1988).

Having explained black people's criticisms of the police in terms of a racialized account of cultural difference, Lloyd proceeds to argue that black people's culture (and not police racism) constitutes the real problem. Indeed, the expression of this alien culture is itself construed as constituting a racist attack on 'our' culture. For example, immediately after the material reported in extract 7, Lloyd continues to argue as follows:

8. And there is a small minority who have no intention of sort of conforming to the standards that we have in our society, who are very, very anti-police. And who, in their, who, I think are totally racist in their attitudes. They're totally sort of anti-white as well. They take their resentment out on whatever form of authority they can see, which in the case of the police is the natural outlet for their anger really. I mean the police are on the streets and it is the only authority that is visible to them and sort of represents, you know, sort of, what the country stands for, so they sort of take it out on the police. And it is very, very, difficult to get through to that sort of person. I mean they are so biased and so 'anti' and we can try reasoning with them but you know they sort of just verbally attack you all the time and do not want to listen to what you have to say (p. 13).

According to this construction, the charge of police racism is but an element of a more generally intolerant refusal to conform 'to the standards that we have in our society'. Indeed, accusations about police racism are doubly delegitimated. On the one hand their charge is but a specific instance of a general 'anti-white' prejudice from those that 'are totally racist in their attitudes'. On the other, because the police symbolize 'what the country stands for', they are specially singled out as targets and are 'the natural outlet for their anger'. Again, this category construction means that the charge of police racism is construed as saying nothing about police racism and everything about the problematic nature of their presence. And in doing so, Lloyd is clearly reproducing key elements of the 'new racism'. Culture is defined in relation to 'race' and cultural difference construed as problematic. Further, the racialized other is construed as having no respect for 'our' way of life and 'the standards that we have in our society', and the charge of racism turned around (c.f. Barker, 1981; Billig *et al.*, 1988).

By now the contrasts between the first and second section of the interview should be readily apparent. In the first section conflict was constructed so as to make it impossible to view the police as serving sectional interests: the police were represented as acting on the behalf of all and conflict construed as arising from either individual selfishness or misunderstanding. However, in this second section, following the interviewer's explicit reference to the reality of inter-group conflict and the charge of racism, we find Lloyd advancing a category construction which highlights inter-group conflict. This variation alerts us to the strategic nature of categorization and the need to be sensitive to the work that any categorization does in relation to alternatives. Thus, in relation to the alternative category constructions available, Lloyd's construction in the first section functions to represent collective conflict as individual selfishness and define the police as members and

defenders of 'the community'. In the second section, where the reality of collective conflict must be addressed, Lloyd's representation of conflict in terms of racialized social categories has a variety of strategically significant effects. Take the issue of why protest about the police takes a particular collective form. In an important sense the category used to represent black people is one which assumes that they constitute a category that is 'given'. This naturalizes the collective shape to black people's action and consequently detracts attention from the possibility that it is police racism that has led black people to define themselves (and act) collectively as black people. Relatedly, not only is the collective nature of black people's action explicable but so too are the behaviours exhibited by this social category: the absence of consent in police-black relations is construed as a cultural given arising from the facts of group membership.

That categories are racialized at this juncture and in this manner suggests that there is much to be gained from viewing racialization as strategic. Certainly 'race' is not an ever present feature of Lloyd's talk. Rather, black people are represented in terms of racialized categories at the moment when Lloyd is forced to address the reality of black people's collective protests about the police. At this point, his earlier category construction (according to which collective conflict is in effect denied) is manifestly problematic and Lloyd's racialization of black people functions to undermine the argument that their collective protest says anything about police racism. Thus the wider implication of our analysis is that categories are constructed in and through language and must be analysed as arguments against alternatives (cf. Billig, 1985, 1987). Indeed, they must be located in the context of controversy and analysed for the work that they do in such controversies (e.g. as arguments about the justice of certain forms of policing).

The dynamics of racism

In this section we consider how Lloyd deflects the charge of racism through advancing a particular account of the dynamics of racism. In doing so we will highlight several parallels between his account and that provided by the social cognition perspective. As Lloyd's construction is strategically organized so as to trivialize racism, these parallels should be a source of considerable concern to a discipline interested in challenging racism and testify to the problems associated with the social cognition perspective's naturalization of the relevant processes.

The material discussed here was produced after that considered above. In response to Lloyd's argument that it was difficult to communicate with people who are 'biased' (see extract 8), Lloyd is asked what sort of message he wants to communicate to black people. He replies 'my message has always been the same to that type of person. To my way of thinking and to most policemen, the colour of their skin has nothing to do with it. What we dislike is people who don't obey the law and cause other people to suffer.' He continues:

9. You know, it's a message that they don't want to hear and they will, I mean their favourite thing is 'you're only picking on me because I am black' and that 'you wouldn't do this to a white person'. And in effect the opposite is almost true, I think. Very often the coloured people get away with something that you wouldn't let white people get away with. I think that's true unfortunately. I think sometimes we do turn a blind eye to sort of minor things because we know the hassle it's going to cause. I mean when I was on traffic you wouldn't stop a car in Downtown because you were afraid of the sort of way it would escalate. You'd either wait until the car was out of the area or you didn't bother and to me that's wrong, that

is discrimination in reverse but it is a case of discretion being the better part of valour. You start something off and it escalates and gets out of control. A very, very, difficult situation, but it is one that they cannot see, they will say the opposite is true, that we pick on them because of their colour which is nonsense, I mean I've got some very good friends who are West Indians (p. 14).

Having delegitimated black people's charge of racism through an account of cultural difference, Lloyd here proceeds to turn around the charge that black people are discriminated against and present the 'racial' other as privileged. Far from black people receiving unwarranted police attention (and hence being victims of racism), they avoid warranted attention. In addition to undermining the charge of police racism, this allows Lloyd to reiterate his characterization of black people as a problematic presence. Simply put, their cultural difference leads to a subversion of the values and principles that underlie 'our' approach to policing. Indeed, whilst he and others try to pursue a principled 'colour-blind' approach to law enforcement, it is they who subvert this ideal. At the same time as further problematizing their presence, his condemnation of 'discrimination in reverse' ('to me that's wrong') allows Lloyd to claim for himself the status of the even-handed and non-prejudiced.

The abstraction of racism from any consideration of power relations implicit in this account of police-black relations is developed in Lloyd's response to a later question asking about the way in which he talks about racism in school lessons. After stating that racism is 'something which unfortunately does exist in society as a whole' and 'is something I don't like and I make my views known to the kids' (pp. 16–17), he continues:

10. 'I mean yeah, it is a fault of people in this country as a whole that we generalise. It is not just the—and this is something that the West Indians got to realize—it is not just because they are black they get categorized. I think as a nation we do tend to categorize people into class, and into areas they live in. I mean you've only got to say to someone, talk about Northtown, and one naturally assumes that everyone who lives on Northtown are sort of toe rags, because they live on a housing estate. I think it is a fault of society as a whole that we are very quick to generalize and categorize people into groups just because of where they live or even how they dress (p. 17).

Lloyd then proceeded to cite an occasion when he had gone on a school trip with a teacher's son with 'unclean hair falling down over his shoulders with an earring' and who looked like a 'hippy'. Although Lloyd 'categorized he was a yob' and took 'an instant dislike' to him, he found out that 'in fact he was one of the best kids I have ever met in my life' and so continued:

11. This point I put across to the kids and say, look it is very easy to generalize and categorize people just because of how they look or where they live. And we are all capable of doing that, and it is wrong and you do not judge people on looks, you judge them by their personality, by what they are and you can only do that when you get to know them. And it's a point that I sort of knock over again. I mean yes, unfortunately there is a vociferous minority that lives in Downtown who are not law abiding, who cause a lot of trouble. But you do not judge the whole race just by a small minority (p. 17).

These two extracts may be analysed both with regard to their propositional content and to the interactional work that they do in undermining the charge that the police are racist.

Taking the propositional content first suggests broad parallels with social cognition's account of racism. As we saw, this latter assumes that the problem of racism is one of over-generalization about particular 'races'. Similarly, it focuses exclusively upon intra-individual psychological processes involved in the 'lumping' together of people and the neglect of their individuality. Finally, there is the assumption that the processes involved

in racial categorization are no different from those involved in forming views about any other set of objects.

With these broad parallels in mind let us now consider the ways in which Lloyd's account functions to contain and trivialize the charge of racism. First, take the way in which Lloyd constructs an equivalence between the categories used to represent black people (e.g. 'West Indian') and other categories based upon dress, residential area and so on. This equivalence obscures the distinctive meanings of the former category (e.g. the way in which it defines people born and bred in Britain as constituting an alien presence) and so constitutes an important first step towards trivializing the meanings and consequences of racialized categories. Indeed, Lloyd represents black people's complaints about racism as completely out of proportion to the reality of their situation: quite simply they have to realize that 'it is not just because they are black they get categorized'. Second, Lloyd's argument that 'it is a fault of people in this country as a whole that we generalize' naturalizes and universalizes the social psychological processes relevant to this categorization. Again, this counters those who would highlight the individual and institutional agency involved in the construction of category boundaries and their racialization. Third, and more generally, with the problem of racism implicitly defined as one of erroneous overgeneralization, Lloyd is able to use a condemnation of overgeneralization ('you do not judge the whole race just by a small minority') simultaneously to present himself as non-prejudiced and reassert the racialized and racist construction of the Downtown other.

A related aspect of the equivalence between a 'racial' categorization and any other is that it allows criticisms of the police to be presented as resting on the same faulty processes. Thus, immediately after emphasizing the importance of judging people solely on the basis of personal knowledge (extract 11), Lloyd continues (unprompted) to construe an equivalence between the processes involved in judging a 'race' and the police:

12. In the same way you don't judge the police force by one bad policeman. And yet people do. You only have to read in the papers a story involving police brutality or police corruption and people immediately judge the whole police force by the lowest common denominator, by that one person. And it is something that society is very good at doing. We tend to judge people, or groups of people by the lowest common denominator and this is wrong and we are all guilty of it to a certain extent. It is an attitude that is very hard to change in society, but it is something that I try and tackle in school because I think that it is important. How effective it is I don't know. I can only hope to sow the seeds in kids' minds at this stage and give them time to think about it and think about issues they have not thought about before (p. 17).

Here Lloyd draws upon a condemnation of judging a 'whole race just by a small minority' to challenge the representation of the police in negative terms. Indeed, his naturalization of the processes involved in categorizing people works to imply that negative constructions of the police are hardly surprising and say more about people's attention to particular sorts of information ('we tend to judge people, or groups of people by the lowest common denominator and this is wrong and we are all guilty of it to a certain extent'). However, a more significant feature of his account is the way in which it supports the reduction of racism to a problem of perception and side-steps questions of power and practice. As others present the police as antagonistic to black people (and indeed, identify the police as a key force in the reproduction of racism), his construction of racism has the consequence of defining the police and black people as equal victims of the same perceptual processes. Again, this obscures the asymmetries in power which mean that some (e.g. police officers) have a greater opportunity to make their category construction heard and

count. Indeed, if all are guilty of erroneous generalization, and all are victims of such ubiquitous processes, questions of power and practice are irrelevant. Once again, the wider point here is that the social cognition perspective's reduction of racism to intra-psychic processes, and its associated abstraction of categorization from power relations means that it is poorly placed to critique and counter Lloyd's reactionary rhetoric, and has the potential, despite all intentions to the contrary, to lend it academic legitimacy.

Discussion

In presenting this analysis it should be clear that our intention is not to attack Lloyd as an individual but rather to use our analysis of his talk to interrogate our own discipline's ability to explore and critique racism. Overall, our analysis showed that in his engagement with the charge that the police are racist, he used different categories to represent the police's relations with others. To begin with, he used categorizations which denied the very possibility of collective conflict. Later, after the collective protests about 'Ruby' were raised, he advanced an account which recognized the existence of collective conflict but explained it in terms of 'racial' categories. The observations that may be made concerning these developments in Lloyd's category-related argumentation are several. First, the use of 'race' to represent others is variable: people are not consistently represented in terms of 'racial' categories. Second, the significance and meaning of Lloyd's various category constructions can only be understood through considering the work that they perform in relation to the alternative category constructions that were potentially available (cf., Billig, 1987). Thus, as alternative category constructions could have construed the police as a social institution that acts against black people, Lloyd's earlier category-related argumentation is important for the work that it does in rendering illegitimate questions about social division and the police's sectional allegiances. Third, and relatedly, our analysis highlighted how the use of the category 'race' explained the genesis of social problems in a distinctive way. More specifically, the racialization of collective protest functioned to undermine alternative accounts which could have construed black people's protests and the absence of consent in police-black relations as responses to police racism.

What, then, are the implications of these observations for the theoretical analysis of racism? The most obvious is that we must have a theoretical framework which takes as its analytic focus the strategic use of the category 'race' to advance particular accounts of the genesis of social problems (Miles, 1989, 1993). Thus rather than taking the category 'race' for granted and assuming that the problem of racism resides in the errors of overgeneralization, we should explore the process of racialization and the consequences of this strategy for achieving certain blamings and legitimating certain courses of action (rather than others). As a corollary, we must have a social psychology which pays due attention to the subtle and complex ways in which difference is created, racialized and presented as problematic, and how this is achieved in relation to potentially available alternative category constructions.

In important respects our emphasis upon both the role of argument in the construction of social categories and the strategic nature of category-related argumentation echoes observations made by students of rhetoric and discourse (Billig, 1987, 1988; Billig *et al.*, 1988; Edwards, 1991; Edwards & Potter, 1992; Potter & Wetherell, 1987; Wetherell & Potter, 1992). Such authors are sharply critical of traditional social psychological theory

for neglecting both the constitutive and strategic nature of language. Thus discourse analysts castigate traditional theories for treating language as merely 'the vehicle, one could say, for the psychological goods contained in the individual' (Wetherell & Potter, 1992, p. 6). Relatedly, the discourse analysts' concern with the action-oriented nature of talk leads them to view categorization as a form of social practice, as *something we do*, in talk in order to accomplish social actions such as persuading, blaming, denying, accusing and so on (Edwards, 1991, p. 517, original emphasis).

Yet, if we echo the discourse analysts' concern with the constitutive and strategic nature of categorization, it is important to note where we differ and how this is reflected in the way in which we have analysed Lloyd's argumentation. Discourse analysts are typically highly suspicious about social psychological theories couched in terms of cognitive processes. Indeed, with their sensitivity to the action-oriented nature of talk they have sought to reconstrue many of the topics traditionally conceived of as intra-psychic phenomena (e.g. the topic of 'identity') as discursive phenomena that cannot be analysed without their interactional context and the interactional business that is being attended to. More specifically, it is through analysing the interactional problems presupposed by interactants' statements, and the solutions that interactants bring to such problems, that discourse analysts propose to explore the ways in which identities are claimed, worked up, transformed and dealt with (cf. Wetherell & Potter, 1992; Widdicombe, 1993; Widdicombe & Wooffitt, 1994).

As may be apparent from our analysis we have pursued a coarser grained level of analysis, less attuned to the detail of the interactional business being attended to by Lloyd. Whilst there is much to be gained from such a fine-grained analysis, our coarser level of analysis follows our adoption of a different approach to the issue of identity. Whereas discourse analysts interested in issues of identity typically reject theorizing about the cognitive domain, we do not. Indeed, we accept many of the arguments advanced by self-categorization theory (SCT) (Turner, Hogg, Oakes, Reicher & Wetherell, 1987; Turner, Oakes, Haslam & McGarty, 1994) and hold that the ways in which social categories are defined have cognitive and behavioural consequences (e.g. concerning the shape, form and indeed the very possibility of collective behaviour; Reicher, 1984, 1987). However, we contend that the issues of which categories are relevant in any situation, where their boundaries lie, and these categories' 'attributes' are never 'given' by the external 'stimulus configuration' but are always constructed in and through language (Reicher & Hopkins, 1996a, b; Hopkins & Reicher, 1996). Relatedly, as there are always alternative definitions of these issues, it follows that category construction is inherently strategic and so may be analysed for the way in which it is organized to promote particular forms of social action over others. Given our acceptance of SCT's account of the consequences of category definitions for social action, it should be clear that the analysis of Lloyd's talk constitutes only one element of a wider research project. If we have here emphasized the argumentative construction of categories we also hold that at particular moments and in particular contexts, certain constructions may win out over others and that a properly social account of categorization must include consideration of the determinants of such (temporary) victories. Although this is not possible here, it should be apparent from our earlier observations about the ability to act on one's construction and make it count for others, that questions of power and practice deserve particular consideration (see Reicher, 1988, 1993).

Yet, if such an analysis remains an aspiration, it is appropriate to emphasize the importance of taking a first step in its direction. As our comments about complementing SCT's analysis of the consequences of categorization with an emphasis upon the argumentative construction of social categories make clear, our call for an analysis of the processes of racialization is but a specific instance of a more general call to resist any tendency to take social categories and context for granted. Yet it should also be clear that it is a highly distinctive instance and that the need to replace an acceptance of 'race' as a non-problematic given with an analysis of racialization is especially pressing. Simply put, the consequences of taking 'race' for granted do not only bear upon social psychological theory but also upon common sense. To the degree that we fail to provide a social psychological analysis of the processes whereby racialized categories are constituted and made to count for others we reproduce the taken-for-granted of the 'new racist' common sense. Indeed, as demonstrated in the opening theoretical section, and more concretely in our analysis of Lloyd's account of racism, the social cognition perspective's account of the dynamics of racism bears many parallels with the 'new racism's'. This is not to accuse social psychologists as being intentionally reactionary. Rather, it is to observe that academic theory reflects common sense. However, it is important to note that just as it reflects common sense, so too academic theory participates in its reproduction (Wetherell & Potter, 1992). Thus, the academic's privileged access to the realm of public debate (van Dijk, 1993) entails a responsibility to interrogate our theories and ensure that they critique rather than reproduce common-sense racism.

Acknowledgements

The interview material reported in this paper was gathered by N.H. during the course of a Home Office funded study of Police-Schools Liaison directed by Miles Hewstone. Thanks are due to the relevant police force, police officers and the Home Office for their cooperation and support, as well as to Miles Hewstone.

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Received 16 March 1995; revised version received 21 May 1996

Made available electronically 27 February 1997