# SOUTH AFRICAN RACIAL DISCOURSE: A SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGICAL STUDY

by

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*Scholarship needs to pass from the making of myths to
the study of the making of myths and, even, to the
study of the people who make those myths.*
(J. Pocock, 1975: 614; cited in Harries, 1988)

*Hey, White Boy!*
*You know, when you were born, you were purple,*
*then you went pink*
*when you are angry, you go red*
*when you are cold, you go blue*
*when you are scared, you go white*
*you lie in the sun and you go brown.*

*I am always brown,*
*whether I'm angry, cold, scared, or sunburnt!*
*And you, "White Boy", have the cheek to call me*
*...a "coloured"?*
(anonymous graffiti, Cape Town subway)

# Declaration

This is to certify that I am responsible for the work submitted in this thesis, that the original work is my own except as specified in acknowledgements, and that neither the thesis nor the original work contained therein has been submitted to this or any other institution for a higher degree.

A version of Chapter 6 has been presented as a conference paper, and is due to be published in the South African Journal of Psychology later this year as "`That ism on the end makes it nasty': Talking about `race' with young `white' South Africans"

# Abstract

This study examines South African racial discourse within what may be described as a `critical social science' framework. Despite South Africa's long racist history, research which provides a thorough understanding of racism is limited. Consequently, this study aimed to explore the ideological nature of young `white' South Africans' commonsense understandings of `race' and racism through a discursive and rhetorical analysis. Twenty-five young, `white' South Africans were interviewed on a wide range of topics relating to the category of `race' and the phenomenon of racism. Interviews were loosely structured and lasted between two and four and a half hours. The analysis was oriented to identifying the key discourses participants used in the construction of their accounts, as well as the linguistic devices and rhetorical strategies employed in negotiating the "dialectic of prejudice" (Billig et al, 1988: 100). Three principal discourses were identified: the discourse of biologism, the discourse of cognitivism, and the discourse of constructivism. However, not all participants drew equally upon all three of these discourses. The declared political affiliation of the speaker (Nationalist, Liberal or Left-wing) was related to the selection of discourses and the nature of the linguistic resources and rhetorical devices used in the production of accounts. For example, Nationalist speakers tended to construct accounts in terms of the discourses of biologism and cognitivism, but not in terms of the discourse of constructivism. These findings are discussed in the light of contemporary research on the "the language of racism" (Wetherell & Potter, 1992), and their theoretical and pragmatic implications are considered.

# Acknowledgements

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# CHAPTER ONE

## INTRODUCTION

*It was a Friday night. Charles and I were celebrating
his triumph with a drink at the local pub. The
celebrations were well-deserved! Charles⌐parents
were impoverished, illiterate, rural folk; his family
just survived, subsistence farming in one of the
infamous `homelands'. Charles, who had always hoped
to study law, had worked extraordinarily hard to be
accepted by a top South African university. Once
admitted, he was confronted with new unanticipated
difficulties stemming from the overwhelming `white'
middle class culture of the institution. Yet five
years later, he had won a prestigious scholarship to
the United States. I felt enormously proud and happy:
Charles had been one of `my' ASP (Academic Support
Programme) students, and I had shared in the long hard
journey of his intellectual development. We raised our
glasses. Suddenly the warmth of the moment was
shattered. "Haai! Wat doen jy met daaie fokken
kaffir? En jou,jou vuilgat, luigat ... jy stink man!!"
(translation: "Hey you! What are you doing with that
f...ing kaffir? And you, you dirty pig, you lazy son
of a bitch ... you smell man"). A huge man lurched
forward, smelling of beer and sweat. His buddies
pressed behind him leering. I leapt angrily to my
feet. Charles, fine-boned, debonair and immaculately
dressed, put his hand gently on my arm. "Let's go" he
said quietly. "But ..." I began. "There's no point",
Charles replied, with a faint smile. "Come."*

This thesis is about racism, a vicious and brutal
oppression which has destroyed the lives of millions and
violated their most fundamental human rights. In South
Africa, racism has permeated every facet of peoples' lives.
In the all too recent past the virulence of its form
governed where you may live, where you may go to school,
where you may work, how you may travel, whom you may marry,

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even with whom you may share a bed. Centuries of colonial rule coupled with the odious ingenuity of the apartheid regime, saw to it that racism infiltrated every detail of daily living to the benefit of those deemed `white' and to the serious detriment of those deemed `black'.

In this first chapter I hope to sketch the context within which this study was conducted. I therefore begin with a section on history, politics and psychology. This includes a very brief overview of the general history of South Africa as well as of the development of the discipline of psychology in that country. The latter is important since historically psychology has been infused with racist practice, a feature which partly accounts for my desire to undertake this piece of work. In the second section of this chapter, I provide my rationale for the study, and explain the general aims of the research. The third section tackles the issue of terminology with the objective of clarifying my use of certain terms and not others in this thesis. In the final section I provide a brief outline of the remaining chapters.

## 1.1  History, Politics and Psychology: The Context

### 1.1.1  History and politics

It is important before proffering even a brief introduction to the history of South Africa that this be preceded by a caveat which notes that both the content and the process of that history-making is infused with racial bias (Bundy, 1979; Harries, 1988; Meli, 1988; Saunders, 1988; as indeed, is a great deal of South African literature; February, 1981; Gunner, 1988). This is revealed in the fact that the majority of historians are `white' men, and that most texts display an obvious ethnocentric or Eurocentric bent: generally, the country's history is constructed in terms of `white' (Dutch/British/Boer) conquest and advancement, and `black' savagery and backwardness (eg. refer the 11 volumes of Theal, 1887 - 1919). This is illustrated by the fact that many texts pinpoint 1652 as the year when South Africa

`began' (when Jan van Riebeeck arrived at the Cape of Good Hope to establish a refreshment station on the sea-route to India) although, as Thompson and Prior (1982) have argued, much was happening in southern Africa from about AD 300, when the ancestors of the `African' population first began to settle in South Africa.

It may be argued that 1652 did mark the beginning of South Africa's racial history, with the first permanent settlement by `white' people (cf. van den Berghe, 1967). However, as noted the manner in which this history is described is problematic. The story is told almost exclusively from a `white' perspective. `Black' people, when mentioned, are portrayed in a variety of minor roles – as objects of interesting anthropological study (the `tribes' of Southern Africa), as presenting obstacles to `white' advancement (the various clashes/wars between Boer and Zulu for example), or as a useful resource in the extraction of South Africa's mineral wealth (cheap labour on the mines).

The domination of `black' people by `white' people began with the arrival of Jan van Riebeeck at the Cape, an event which heralded two and a half centuries of colonial rule. The Dutch and the British each occupied South Africa at various times until Britain returned South Africa to the `afrikaners' in 1910 after lengthy negotiations which were an "all-white affair" (van den Berghe, 1967) and "designed in the interests of imperialism" (Meli, 1988: 221). This period was also marked by continued resistance on the part of the indigenous population, which culminated in the founding of the African National Congress in 1912.

The period from 1910 to 1948 was characterised by increased Afrikaner Nationalism, racial segregation and oppression on the one hand, and continued resistance on the other. In 1948 the National Party came to power. The apartheid era followed, driven by lunatic policies designed to entrench racial ideology and facilitate more vicious and brutal forms of oppression. `Black' resistance continued. On the

16th of December 1961, *Umkhonto we Sizwe*, the `peoples'
army' was formed: a policy of passive resistance had
brought only violent assault by the State and had not
secured South Africa's liberation.   Even so, it was to take
a further 33 years before freedom was achieved.

On the 27th of April last year the first ever democratic
elections in South Africa were held, resulting in the
transfer of power from the `white' minority to the `black'
majority.   Nelson Mandela, having spent nearly three
decades in jail, was sworn in as President on 10th May.   A
new era was born.

### 1.1.2   Psychology and politics: the early history

It is within this historical context, characterised by
domination and oppression, that the discipline of South
African psychology arose.   It is not surprising to
discover, therefore, that the discipline itself has a long
racist history (Foster, 1991a: 17). Unfortunately, social
science is not an autonomous social practice but is a
product of the society of which it is part (Jubber, 1986),
or as Johan Mouton (1986: 139) has observed:

> ... *social research is, in the final analysis, a
> social practice which implies that it cannot avoid be
> coming entangled in the web of power struggles
> inherent in all societies.*

Psychology and racism were enmeshed in South Africa even
from the earliest moments.   For example, in 1861, the 361
mental patients in the lunatic asylum on Robben Island were
segregated broadly on the basis of `race' (Foster, 1990).
Although racist practice infused mental health care in the
late 1800s and early 1900s, it was not until the 1920s that
psychology began as an institutionalised discipline in
South Africa (Foster, 1991b).   In 1917, a separate
department of psychology was established at the University
of Stellenbosch and shortly thereafter other universities
followed suit.   A sub-department of mental hygiene was

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founded in the state sector following the Mental Disorders Act of 1916 (Foster, 1991b).

From its inception South African psychology tended to focus upon social problems (as defined predominantly by conservative `white' men). The "poor `white' problem", for example, provided psychologists with an opportunity to demonstrate the usefulness of their fledgling discipline in respect of offering `solutions' to societal ills. Indeed, an educational psychologist, E.G. Malherbe, was one of the first people to draw attention to this problem (Louw, 1986). After he encountered poverty-stricken woodcutters in the Knysna forest, Malherbe wrote an article in *The Cape Times* newspaper calling for a scientific investigation into the problem.

During the 1920s a number of psychologists became involved with the plight of the poor `whites', one of whom was the infamous Dr Hendrik F. Verwoerd. Verwoerd was born near Amsterdam in 1901, and moved to South Africa as a child. He studied psychology at Stellenbosch University whereafter he was offered a scholarship to Oxford. Verwoerd declined this opportunity, preferring to study in Germany. He later returned to South Africa and in 1927 became the first professor of applied psychology at the University of Stellenbosch in the Cape.

In 1934 Verwoerd delivered a paper at the *Volkskongress* in which he argued that the problem of poor `whites' stemmed from the fact that `black' people had taken the jobs of `white' people in the cities (Louw & Foster, 1991). He advocated that `black' people be returned to their `homelands', a grim foreshadowing of his later masterplans as principle architect of apartheid. Apart from organising the national conference on the poor `white' problem, Verwoerd's early political activity involved leading a deputation to Prime Minister Hertzog to request that South Africa refuse admission to Jewish refugees from Nazi Germany (Thompson & Prior, 1982).

In 1937 Verwoerd left psychology to become the founder-editor of the newspaper, *Die Transvaler*, through which he championed Afrikaner Nationalism and the Nazi cause in the Second World War. In 1948 Verwoerd entered the Senate, later acquiring the portfolio of Native Affairs - from whence he designed his policy of apartheid. He became leader of the party and Prime Minister in 1958, a position he retained until he was assassinated in Parliament in 1966. Verwoerd, one of the first psychologists trained in South Africa and one of the first chairs in the fledgling discipline, was one of the most virulent racists South Africa has ever seen: to the discipline's shame, it was a psychologist who fulfilled Afrikaner Nationalism's desire for a republic and explicated the ideological justification for `separate development' and its implementation in the `homeland' policy (Thompson & Prior, 1982).

Early South African psychology's focus upon social problems continued to spawn a considerable amount of racist research and practice. For example, the "poor `white' problem" stimulated a wealth of research on mental testing during the 1920s and 1930s. Much of this work adhered to an hereditarian explanation for the consistent under-achievement of `black' people on intelligence tests (eg. Fick, 1929; 1939), although in parallel with international debates, these arguments were countered by those advocating an environmentalist line (eg. MacCrone, 1936; Biesheuvel, 1943).

The `social problems' orientation of much of South African psychology was also evident in the 1940s and 1950s which saw the establishment of services concerned with the attitudes and aptitudes of the armed forces in the aftermath of the Second World War (Louw & Foster, 1991). Aptitude testing remains a strong research tradition in South Africa to this day, although more recently it has been plagued by the difficulties associated with issues of `culture bias' in tests.

While mental testing played a large part in early South African psychology, so too did a body of research which falls broadly under the term `intergroup relations'. Studies were conducted which examined the nature of prejudice, which sought to measure racial attitudes and which explored various aspects of intergroup contact and conflict (refer chapter 3, refer sections 3.3 and 3.4 for a more comprehensive review). Again, much of this research was premised upon the notion that `black' people constituted `the problem', although as we shall see later there were a few notable exceptions (cf. MacCrone, 1930, 1949).

Overall, although the early history of psychology in South Africa was oriented to the resolution of social problems it did not succeed in doing so for the majority of the country's inhabitants. In recent years the elitist nature of much of South African psychology has been seriously challenged, resulting in considerable changes to both theory and practice.

### 1.1.3  Psychology and politics: the recent past

Although the history of South African psychology is characterised by racism, a minority of voices has always spoken out against racial prejudice and oppression. Thus, a divided psychology has mirrored the divided nature of South African society: while some psychologists were advocates of or apologists for the policies of racial segregation/apartheid, others were opposed to these policies (Louw & Foster, 1991).

One of the areas in which this division has been reflected most clearly is the formal organisation of psychologists in South Africa. The first psychological association of psychologists was formed in 1948 (coincidentally, the same year as the National Party assumed political power). However, by 1961 the South African Psychological Association was divided over whether `black' psychologists could become members. When a motion which sought to

exclude `black' people from the Association was defeated, a portion of the membership broke away to form the Psychological Institute of the Republic of South Africa, exclusively for `white' psychologists (Louw, 1987). The explicit exclusion of `black' people by a sector of the discipline remained in force until as late as 1983 when the two organisations amalgamated once more to form the Psychological Association of South Africa (PASA) - with no `race' restriction clause.The 1980s represented a transitional period in the history of South African psychology. A growing awareness was developing of the constraints and restrictions which shaped the nature of South African social research (cf. Savage, 1983) and the "uses and abuses to which `psychology' ... (had been) ... put in the maintenance of apartheid and other forms of social oppression" (Editorial, PINS, 1983). An increasing sense of discontent with mainstream psychology prompted progressive psychologists to re-evaluate their practice. One of the main sources of disillusionment was the newly established organisation, PASA. Many psychologists were concerned about PASA's implicit support of the racial status quo, and the Association's refusal to speak out against human rights abuses in South Africa (such as detention without trial, and torture).

Other problems were identified too. Most psychologists were `white' male and middle-class, and working mostly with `white' middle-class people (Swartz, Dowdall & Swartz, 1986). Mental health services in South Africa reflected broader class, `race' and gender inequalities. The training of psychologists was decontextualised, Eurocentric and uncritical. Within industry, psychologists served the interests of management. Within education, psychologists traditionally supported a meritocratic system and ignored the vast discrepancies in quality of education provided to children of different `races'. It was clear that something needed to be done about the status of psychology in South Africa.

One way in which some psychologists sought to address the problems was to refuse to join PASA. These psychologists, and others, joined the Organisation of Appropriate Social Services in South Africa (OASSSA). OASSSA was formed by progressive psychologists and social workers in 1983 in response to the inappropriate and insensitive choice of a venue for their conference by members of the Institute for Family and Marital Therapy: Sol Kerzner's `flashy' Sun City situated in the `homeland' of Boputhatswana. The organisation aimed to represent progressive psychologists, social workers, psychiatrists and others interested in relevant social and health services (although in practice it was dominated by psychologists) and explicitly highlighted the relationship between apartheid and mental health. OASSSA's statement of principles reflected this commitment to: "the mental health and social welfare of South Africa's people, and to the development of appropriate social services" (Vogelman, 1987:29).

OASSSA was not set up as a formal alternative to PASA, and for most of the 1980s the two organisations continued to co-exist while addressing very different issues. Within OASSSA, one of the most pressing issues concerned the role of psychology within the South African context. Progressive psychologists were preoccupied with defining and developing what was variously termed a `relevant/ appropriate/ community' psychology (eg. Berger & Lazarus, 1987; Dawes, 1985, 1986; Foster, 1986a; Nicholas & Cooper, 1990; Seedat, Cloete & Shochet, 1988; Vogelman, 1987); that is, a psychology working to serve the interests of the majority of South Africans, rather than the interests of a privileged few.

Part of the agenda of developing an `alternative' psychology was to produce `relevant' research. Studies began to emerge on issues such as conscription (eg. Feinstein, Teeling-Smith, Moyle & Savage, 1986; Flisher, 1987; Korber, 1992), clinical psychology within the context of political `unrest' (eg. Swartz, Dowdall & Swartz, 1986;

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Perkel, 1988), the psychological sequelae of police action (eg. Shefer & Hofmeyer, 1988) and detention and torture (eg. Solomons, 1988; Spitz, Eastwood & Verryn, 1990; Perkel, 1990; Foster, Davis & Sandler, 1987), although the topic of racism per se was largely avoided.

The work of people within OASSSA, both theoretical and applied, soon became known within the broader South African and international community. OASSSA members gained an increasing legitimacy and credibility in both these sectors and came to be seen by some as an alternative to PASA, although as noted this was not the intention. As a consequence of these developments, the late 1980s and early 1990s saw PASA experiencing what Louw (1992) has termed a crisis of `cultural legitimacy'. PASA members became aware of the fact that their organisation was too closely aligned to the powerful groups in South Africa and was seen by the majority of South Africans as comprising psychologists who were `servants of apartheid' (Webster, 1981).

This crisis resulted in PASA, OASSSA, and `black' psychologists in South Africa entering into a period of intense negotiation about the way forward. These talks culminated in the founding of a new organisation, PsySSA (Psychological Society of South Africa), on the 28th of January last year. PsySSA replaced PASA and OASSSA, both of which were formally disbanded. The formation of PsySSA represents an entirely new spirit in South African psychology as described in the society's principles and objectives:

> *We acknowledge psychology's historical complicity in supporting and perpetuating colonialism and the apartheid system.*

> *THEREFORE*

> *We commit ourselves to transforming and redressing the silences in South African psychology to serve the needs and the interests of all South Africa's people*

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It is within the spirit of this new era in South African psychology that this research has been carried out: given the racial history of the country and psychology's complicity in that history, the study of racism should occupy a central place within the discipline.

## 1.2 Why Racism?: The Rationale

To those of us growing up within the South African context, the question of `why racism?' seems almost superfluous: when life *is* racism and all else flows from that, what can be more important than addressing the root of the problem? As Foster (1991a: 2) has asserted "merely being in South Africa constitutes sufficient justification for the topic".

Surprisingly, despite the salience of `race' in South Africa, the topic of racism does not dominate South African psychological work. Furthermore research on racism, to date, has tended to be conducted within a positivist paradigm and is essentially (although not exclusively) descriptive, providing little in the way of furthering an understanding of racism (cf. Foster, 1991a, 1991c; and refer chapter 3, section 3.4 for a detailed review). Apart from the lack of critical work in this area, there has also been "surprisingly little research into how laypersons ... understand race" (Boonzaier, 1988: 65): an area which would seem so vital given the social, political and economic history of the country.

Two South African scholars whose work represents an exception to this trend are Don Foster and N. Chabani Manganyi. Both have written fairly extensively in the area of `race'. Foster has produced some excellent theoretical reviews of the development of racial attitudes in children (cf. Foster, 1986b, 1994) and the consequences of colonisation and racial oppression (cf. Foster, 1992), while Manganyi has written widely on the experience of `being-black-in-the-world' (cf. 1973, 1977, 1981). Perhaps one of the reasons that the issue of racism has not been more widely addressed is that critical psychologists

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represent a minority in South Africa. It is also possible that racism has been neglected because of the difficulty of tackling a sensitive issue in an era in which political correctness is high priority. Hopefully, the winds of change which have recently blown through South African politics and psychology will have repercussions for the nature of psychological research in the future.

Indications are that such changes may already be under way. A new-found spirit of reconciliation has encouraged people to address the issue of racism more openly than was possible before. In November 1993, for example, the University of Cape Town held a workshop which sought to examine the manner in which representatives from all the university's constituencies defined `race' and racism with the aim of formulating a clearer position on racist practice. The workshop steering committee had various misgivings about what may transpire given this fairly testing context; however, the workshop proved extremely successful and proceeded without incident. It is these sorts of changes which have begun to facilitate the execution of studies such as this one.

This study, then, stands as an example of the `new order' of social psychological research in South Africa. As such it aims at a theoretical level to challenge the hegemony of a positivist epistemology and at a practical level to provide research which is sensitive to the relations between power and knowledge, and which has an action orientation. It is hoped that this research will not remain behind the hallowed portals of academia, but will be used to the benefit of South Africa's people.

Thus far, this chapter has focused exclusively upon the South African context and while later chapters will deal in more depth with international theory and research, it is important to note by way of introduction that internationally the discipline of psychology has also failed to engage *critically* with the notion of `race'. Indeed, some international scholars are guilty of racism

(eg. refer to Billig's 1985a paper on the psychologist John Ray) and others have used psychology to further racist causes (Evans & Waites book on IQ and mental testing provides a good review, 1981). In addition, although a good deal of research has been conducted on racism or prejudice, the fruits of this research appear extremely limited in terms of actually eradicating this phenomenon.  For example, in the last decade or so, psychological evidence has suggested that racism is assuming a `gentler', more subtle form (cf. Kinder and Sears, 1981; McConahay, 1986; Barker, 1981). However, these findings appear to pertain to a limited sector (middle-class `white') of a particular population (American); across the rest of the globe, racism and genocide remain rife.  In short, it would seem that psychology has not contributed very much in the way of resolving racism - it may be hoped that in time it will do so.

Finally, in the spirit of critical research practice, it is appropriate to comment briefly upon my personal motivation for engaging in research on racism.  Increasingly the researcher's subjectivity has been recognised as not simply influencing his/her choice of topic, but as a valuable resource to be reflexively harnessed to the entire research process.   This stance represents the very antithesis of positivism with its emphasis upon objectivity and value-neutrality, recognising instead that `science' is "one among many truth games" (Lather, 1992: 89) and that knowledge is socially constructed and discursively produced. Feminist writers , in particular (eg. Bhavnani, 1988, 1990, 1991; Burman, 1991a, 1994 ; Hollway, 1989; Lather, 1988, 1992), have been at the forefront of developing this approach, succinctly articulated by Sue Wilkinson (1988: 494) as follows:

> Within a positivist epistemology, with its emphasis
> on objectivity, such values are considered sources of
> bias and obstacles to determining the `facts', but
> within an alternative epistemology, which emphasises

*the social construction of multiple realities and
takes reflexivity seriously, they may be seen as both
central to and as a resource which informs one's
research.*

Informed by these developments in critical theory and
research, I began this chapter with a narrative. It
describes just one of many similar personal incidents. My
reason for its inclusion is two-fold. First, I hope that
for those unfamiliar with South African society, it reveals
something of the nature of everyday life in that country,
and thereby accounts for my desire to engage with racism as
a research topic. Second, this particular incident stands
out from all the others in the following way: it provided
me with a glimpse of how to connect psychology and
politics.

Until then I had been active in `the struggle' but had felt
frustrated at my inability to bridge the gap between
psychology and society. After Charles and I had left the
pub, we returned to my house and talked deep into the night
about racism - about the injustice of it on the one hand,
and about the incomprehensibility of it on the other. We
came to the conclusion that racism was a social and
political act, we despaired at psychology's inability to
produce an account of racism which escaped individual-
social dualism (Charles, it will be recalled had been a
student of psychology), and then we began to ponder about
whether this should necessarily be the case. We generated
all sorts of ideas about how psychology could offer an
alternative account of phenomena such as racism, and by the
end of evening we were brimming with enthusiasm and
idealistic notions of the way forward.

It was some time before I developed the `fruits' of that
evening further and began to formulate this piece of
research (refer chapter 4, section 4.1), but that evening
marked my decision to remain within the discipline and not
to abandon it for a life of politics. As such it marked a
theoretical shift in my thinking, from a resigned

frustration with the status quo to a perhaps idealistic commitment to a `new` and `better` kind of psychology.

## 1.3 Aims of the Study

This study investigated `white` racism. Like Wetherell and Potter's (1992: 1) work in New Zealand, the research is premised upon the assumption that social psychology should enable us to "cut a slice through the communities to which we belong" and thereby "develop a critical analysis of the codes and practices which sustain racism in those places".

Specifically, I wanted to explore the ideological nature of young `white` South Africans' common-sense understandings of `race` and racism. My inquiry was guided by a range of questions: given that social conditions give rise to the forms of talk available, within the context of South Africa's racist history, how do `white` people construct accounts of what `race` is? How do they construct narratives of their own past? What linguistic resources and rhetorical devices do they draw upon in producing accounts? What constitute the main discourses which structure their accounts? How do they articulate their political position in the face of imminent political transformation?

South Africa's political system of apartheid was unique in the modern world (Thompson & Prior, 1982). I was interested in the way in which these particular social conditions were translated into a language of racism. From my personal experience of living and talking in South Africa, a confusing language of racism seemed to exist. It embodied statements which could be construed *both* as racist, and non-racist - even anti-racist. It simultaneously expressed hopes for a non-racial and democratic society, and fears of a future in the hands of a `black majority` with little obligation to look after the interests of `white` people in the face of what had gone before. I wanted to explore this "dialectic of prejudice" (Billig et al, 1988: 100) in the talk of young `white`

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South Africans. I wanted to trace it in detail, with a view to providing a `picture' of `white' racism which would inform anti-racist training in the future.

## 1.4 A Note on Terminology

> *Any book about race and racism runs the risk of using*
> *categories with objectionable connotations.  It is,*
> *for example, very difficult to talk in any  meaningful*
> *way about issues of race in South Africa without using*
> *- not just mentioning - the categories in virtue of*
> *which apartheid expresses itself.*
> (Goldberg, 1993: viii)

The issue of terminology is a complex one.  As Goldberg (1993) has observed, those of us committed to opposing racism are confronted with what Billig et al (1988) may term an `ideological dilemma'. We are concerned to deconstruct `race' and fight racism, and yet in order to accomplish our objectives we have little option but to use the very concepts which service oppression.

The category of `race' represents a defining feature of the lives of the majority of the world's people (Afshar & Maynard, 1994). Unfortunately, many people continue to act as if `race' were an objective reality - both at the level of political discourse and popular ideas - although it has long been recognised that `races' do not exist in any biological sense (Solomos, 1993).  `Race' is a social construction, the meaning of which varies with historical context and geographical location (cf. Afshar & Maynard, 1994) or, in Omi and Winant's (1986: 68) terms, `race' is "an unstable and `decentred' complex of social meanings constantly being transformed by political struggle".

The acknowledgement of these ideas in recent years has resulted in progressive academics raising concerns about their colleagues' uncritical use of the term `race'. `Race relations' theorists (cf. Banton, 1977; Rex, 1970), in particular, have come under attack for reifying `racial' concepts and affording them scientific status (Miles, 1989;

Maynard, 1994). However, the terminological way forward is unclear. For example, the strategy of reiterating that `there is no such thing as `race'' is unhelpful in the face of world-wide racism (Donald & Rattansi, 1992). While `race' may not have any scientific validity, it does have `real' effects, in material and representational terms (Anthias, 1990). Indeed, as Donald & Rattansi (1992) argue, the issue is not whether `race' exists, but how the category operates:

> *The issue is not how <u>natural</u> differences determine and justify group definitions and interactions, but how racial logics and racial frames of reference are articulated and deployed, and with what consequences.* (1992: 1; original emphasis)

It is for this reason, that researchers' have been urged to appreciate the consequences of their own use of categories. For example, Swartz (1985) has argued that deciding on categories is an inevitable and important part of any research project; although in South Africa, psychological research typically describes its subjects in terms of the four `race' groups proclaimed by the government (`white', `coloured', `indian' and `black'). Unfortunately, most research tends to utilise existing population categories (Boonzaier, 1988) in an unreflexive manner - examining, for example, the `different' experiences of `black' and `white' people while failing to challenge the categories which underpin the `difference' (Maynard, 1994: 17).

The recognition in recent years of the socially constructed nature of `race' and the functional orientation of talk has led to considerable debate in progressive circles about what terms to use to describe people of minority group status. Should one use the generic term `black' to describe all minority groups, or should one use terms which specifically designate each minority group?

At present the debate remains unresolved, both internationally and in South Africa. On the one hand, the

use of the term `black' as a political category has been welcomed. It signifies a common experience of racism, expresses the rift between oppressed and oppressors (Maynard, 1994), and provides the foundation for a politics of resistance against the manner in which historically `black' people have been positioned as the `other' irrespective of their differences (Hall, 1992). On the other hand, the term `black' has attracted criticism on the grounds that it tends to refer to people of sub-Saharan African descent, it denies the needs of different cultural groups and is applied to people who may not wish to be defined in that way (Brah, 1992).

Arguably, the dominant trend in South Africa seems to be to opt for a dichotomous system of classification - `black' and `white' (Ormond, 1986). Many people have elected to identify themselves in this way, rather than adopt the imposed form of categorisation previously enshrined in South African law. However, there are still others who prefer to identify with a `coloured' or `indian' group, rather than become amalgamated into the generic category `black' (Wallerstein, 1991).

Ultimately, whatever the system of classification selected, all racial categories represent rhetorical devices which serve political ends, as even a fleeting glance at South African history will reveal. Recognition of the politically and culturally constructed (Boonzaier & Sharp, 1988a; Hall, 1992) nature of racial terms has resulted in the deployment of a number of practices aimed at highlighting this feature of minority groups. These practices include referring to minority groups as `so-called' (as in `so-called coloured'), writing the first letter of the term in lower case and placing the term within inverted commas. Again, while well-intentioned these practices have not met with unequivocal support. For example, Immanuel Wallerstein (1991) in his article on the construction of peoplehood, cites a letter written by Alex

La Guma, an ANC member, to the editor of *Sechaba* (the official journal of the ANC). La Guma writes:

> *I have noticed now in speeches, articles, interviews etc. in `Sechaba', that I am called a `so-called Coloured' (sometimes with a small `c'). When did the Congress decide to call me this? ...When we worked for Congress of the People and the Freedom Charter we sang,*
>
> *`We the Coloured people, we must struggle to exist ...'*
>
> *... I am confused. I need clarification. It makes me feel like a `so-called' human, like a humanoid·...*

In the editor's reply to La Guma, it was stated that although no formal decision had been taken to change from `Coloured' to `so-called coloured', people in South Africa had been increasingly using the latter term (cf. also February, 1981). It is for this reason that where it is necessary to refer to specific minority groups within this thesis, I too have prefaced them with the word `so-called'. However, as a sign of my opposition to the classification system borne of apartheid, I prefer the dichotomous system of `black' and `white' where `black' refers to all those people historically at the sharp end of apartheid and `white' refers to all those people who benefitted from that system.

In keeping with the notion that categories such as `race' are representations informed by the assumptions and intentions of the people who use them (Sharp, 1988a; 1988b), I have followed the convention of placing the words `race', `race-group', `black' and `white' between single quotation marks with the first letter in the lower case.

## 1.5 A Brief Outline of the Chapters

This thesis comprises nine chapters including this first introductory one. The next two chapters present the

theoretical framework within which the study was conducted. The first of these concerns the discursive and rhetorical approach taken in the thesis, while the second reviews psychological research on racism and prejudice.

Chapter four provides a detailed description of the method used in this study, as well as discussing something of the development of the research process. The method is followed by four chapters which present the analysis of `white' South African discourse. The first of these briefly describes some of the preliminary findings by way of introduction to the main analysis. The next three chapters each focus upon a particular form of talk used in presenting accounts of `race' and racism; that is, Nationalist, Liberal and Left-wing discourse.

The final chapter synthesises the findings of this research, and compares them to those of other contemporary studies. Possible explanations for certain observed differences between these findings and those of other pieces of research are discussed. In conclusion, the implications of discourse analytic research are considered.

# CHAPTER TWO

# DISCOURSE ANALYSIS: A FRAMEWORK FOR ANALYSIS

## 2.1  Introduction

The field of social psychology reportedly `began' in the
late 1800s: the oft-cited work of Triplett into the
processes of social facilitation ostensibly mark the
`moment' of the first social psychology experiment, since
Wundt deliberately kept his interest in social psychology
out of the laboratory.  However, it was not until the 1930s
that social psychology began to emerge as `a substantive
grouping'; in fact, most published work of a social
psychological nature has only been produced in the second
half of this century (Howitt et al., 1989).

One of the central characteristics of social psychology has
been, and remains, its fragmentary nature.  As early as
1908, differences between those within the field were
apparent.  In that year two volumes were published, both
entitled `Social Psychology'.  In England, William
McDougall's book was written from a psychological approach,
while in America, E.A. Ross' text assumed a sociological
perspective.  Although the influence of these two authors
upon modern social psychology has not been great (Howitt et
al, 1989), social psychology has remained divided along the
lines of these original texts.  Certain social
psychologists have pursued a distinctly psychological
social psychology, while others have developed a more
sociological social psychology.  In consequence, modern

social psychology has not evolved a unitary status but continues to be characterised by difference, conflict and change (Foster, 1991c).

Perhaps in part it is because of this fragmentation that the field of social psychology has encompassed a broad range of topics. Social psychology has involved, and continues to involve, the study of attitudes, interpersonal attraction, social influence, communication, and intergroup relations amongst other topics. However the last twenty years or so have been dominated by the rise of an area known as `social cognition'. Indeed, there has been a veritable explosion of research and theory in this area which is concerned with "how people make sense of other people and themselves" (Fiske & Taylor, 1991: 1), and is founded upon Fritz Heider's work on attribution theory and Sir Frederick Bartlett's work on schema theory.

Proponents of the social cognition approach claim that it will revolutionise the entire field of social psychology, as is ambitiously reflected in the title of one of Ostrom's (1984) essays on the topic: *The sovereignty of social cognition*. Although advocates of the social cognition approach have some way to go before their objective is fulfillied, one of the areas which has been profoundly influenced by this theory is that of stereotypes (cf. Leyens, Yzerbyt & Schadron, 1994). Consequently, we will be returning to this topic and examining it in a little more detail in the following chapter.

The social cognition framework is representative of a number of theoretical initiatives which began to develop in the late 1960s and early 1970s in response to the `crisis in social psychology' (Elms, 1975). `The crisis' was precipitated by the inability of social psychology to bridge the individual-social divide and to contribute socially relevant knowledge to pressing social problems, and it stimulated considerable debate within the field as how best to conceptualise relations between individual and society. Indeed, it contributed some significant rebuttals

against laboratory-experimental psychology, embedded within a positivist-empiricist framework. However, these debates failed to move beyond the terms of reference of traditional psychology and consequently were unable to progress beyond individual-social dualism (Henriques, Hollway, Urwin, Venn & Walkerdine, 1984).

Before the 1960s, North America had dominated the field of social psychology and very little social psychological work was being pursued in Western Europe (Louw & Foster, 1991). However, in response to the inadequacies of North American social psychology, Europeans began to develop theories and methods which located human subjects within an historical, social, political and economic context. Both Henri Tajfel and Serge Moscovici, for example, developed new theoretical ideas (on intergroup conflict and minority influence respectively) although they employed traditional research methods to test them (Rijsman & Stroebe, 1989).

At the centre of critical arguments espoused during the course of the crisis were the `new paradigm' social psychologists, concerned with ethogenics. Proponents of ethogenics, led by Rom Harre, assumed an anti-experimentalist stance, advocating instead the gathering of accounts informed by the `open souls' doctrine : if you want to know why people behave as they do `why not ask them?' (Harre & Secord, 1972: 101 - 123). The focus of attention was upon language, and the meaning of social behaviour. Two brands of ethogenics emerged. Harre and Secord's (1972) `explanation of social behaviour' was informed by a realist approach similar to structuralism, while Shotter's (1984) more radical ethogenics interpreted social action in a hermeneutic manner (Parker, 1989).

There is no doubt that ethogenics made a significant contribution to psychological debate at the time; in particular, with respect to developing a critique of the dominance of positivist methods of research. However, ethogenics failed to end the crisis in social psychology because it neglected central issues of ideology and power

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(Parker, 1989) and left the fundamental terms of the social-individual couple intact by remaining committed to a unitary pregiven subject (Henriques et al, 1984). Moreover, while this approach favoured an analysis of language, language was viewed as a route to understanding something located inside the person's head (Potter & Wetherell, 1987); that is, Harre and his colleagues were concerned with an actor's `social competence' - a reservoir of social knowledge akin to a set of rules which informed social action and accounts thereof.

Despite the failings of ethogenics, the focus upon meaning and personal accounts of behaviour spawned a range of theories, and a large body of research, variously referred to as `ordinary/everyday explanations' (Antaki, 1985, 1988) `everyday understanding' (Gergen & Semin, 1990), `lay theories' (Furnham, 1988) and `social representations (Moscovici, 1984; Farr & Moscovici, 1984). These theoretical developments were characterised not only by their move to privileging peoples' own understandings, but also by their change in analytic focus: from the *process* of arriving at explanations to the *content* of those explanations, including their structure and function (cf. Furnham, 1988; Moscovici, 1988).

These theoretical models do present significant alternatives to earlier conceptions of social behaviour (such as the immense literature on social cognition); they eschew traditional positivist research methods and offer more socialised accounts of human understanding. However, at root, they too remain wedded to individual-social dualism: to notions of "a real world on the one side and a mental world on the other" (Gergen & Semin, 1990: 12).

The transcendence of the dominance of individual-social dualism required a radical reformulation of psychology's subject matter: no easy task given the manner in which this notion has entirely saturated the discipline for almost a century. However, the past decade has seen just such a development. Informed by the postmodern turn in other

social science disciplines, a minority of social psychologists have engaged with the `turn to text/language'.

This chapter takes as its focus the `turn to language' in social psychology. It seeks to chart the development of discursive approaches, to provide a clear overview and critical appraisal of the basic tenets of the approaches to discourse analysis which have dominated social psychology, to consider the contribution of rhetorical theorists, and finally to consider the theoretical advantages a discursive approach offers to the study of racism.

## 2.2  The turn to language

The `turn to text' signifies certain psychologists' ongoing dissatisfaction with the state of the discipline. Despite what has become known as `the crisis' of the 1960s and 1970s, psychology continues to be "racked by a number of intersecting crises" (Parker, 1989: 9; original emphasis) which are located within the very structure of the discipline itself. Psychology remains constricted theoretically by the terms of individual-social dualism: by an inability to move beyond pre-given categories of `individual' and `society' and a model of a unitary cognitive subject in interaction with a social environment.

The `turn to language' in psychology has found expression in the approach of discourse analysis. Of course, discourse analysis is by no means confined to psychology - quite the opposite: psychology has been remarkably slow to recognise the value of this perspective (Robinson, 1985). By contrast, within other disciplines, the past few decades have witnessed discourse analysis burgeon into an extremely diverse research area with a multiplicity of approaches, some of which bear little or no relation to the other (Burman, 1991b; Potter, Wetherell, Gill, & Edwards, 1990). For example, socio-structural approaches informed by a foucauldian tradition are very different to sociolinguistic

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approaches which confine themselves to the grammatical construction of talk (Gilbert & Mulkay, 1984: 16 - 17).

The origins of the study of discourse may be traced back some 2000 years to the ancient study of language and rhetoric (van Dijk, 1985; Billig, 1987), although the roots of modern discourse analysis have been situated as the mid to late 1960s. Research around this time was scattered and tended to apply semiotic or linguistic methods to the study of texts. It did not embrace discourse analysis as an alternative approach to research, across disciplinary boundaries (van Dijk, 1985).

One of the early influences upon the development of the analysis of discourse was J. L. Austin's delivery of the William James Lectures at Harvard University in 1955. It was Austin (1962: 6 & 12) who highlighted the `performative' nature of language. As he put it: "the issuing of the utterance is the performing of an action" or "to *say* something is *do* something" (original emphasis). Austin's speech act theory was significant in that it highlighted the social context within which language was used. However, this work remained at the level of abstract theory and was not applied to the practicalities of everyday conversation in natural settings (Potter & Wetherell, 1987).

A second line of influence arose from the ideas of microsociology, specifically ethnomethodology (cf. Garfinkel, 1967) and conversation analysis (cf. Sacks, 1972; Sacks, Schegloff & Jefferson, 1974). These approaches involve the study of ordinary peoples' language use in their everyday lives. They embrace the notion that language is *constitutive* of social action and events, and is not simply a conduit for describing or talking about such actions and events. Consequently, the meaning of an utterance will change with the context within which it is produced: a feature known as indexicality.

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Although both of these research traditions are widely acknowledged as being influential in the evolution of discourse analysis, Potter and Wetherell (1987) identify a third theoretical tradition which has informed the discourse analytic perspective: semiology. `The science of signs' was propounded by de Saussure at the beginning of the century, and was developed by Roland Barthes (1972) in particular.  Perhaps the most central point emerging from semiology for the study of discourse is that there is no natural relationship between the signifier (the speech sound) and the signified (the concept).  Rather, the relation between signifier and signified is imbued with meaning via the process of signification.

The influence of these three research areas upon the advent of a discourse analysis pertaining to psychology in the last decade is indisputable.  However, it is the existence of what Kvale (1992a: 1) terms `a postmodern cultural landscape' that enabled the emergence of a radical alternative to traditional psychology.  A postmodern climate has undermined (for some) psychology's search for universal `truths', emanating from a blind belief in the steady and progressive accumulation of scientific knowledge. Consequently, postmodernism has been said to be "slowly dribbling into psychology" (Parker, 1992: 74), giving rise to an approach which is characterised by its "noncognitive, nonsystematic, rhetorical, critical social constructionist" stance (Shotter, 1992a: 58).

The shift away from modern to postmodern sciences involves a considerable reorientation on the part of researchers (the volumes by Kvale, 1992b and Simons & Billig, 1994, and the chapter in Parker, 1989 are useful references in this regard); however, for psychologists perhaps the most significant aspect of the postmodern movement is its focus upon discourse (Parker, 1992).  Within the literature of relevance to social psychology, the term `discourse' tends to be used in two ways.  On the one hand, it is employed to refer to any product - formal or informal, spoken or

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written (cf. Gilbert & Mulkay, 1984; Potter & Wetherell, 1987). Used in this manner `discourse' becomes synonymous with what other authors refer to as `text' (cf. Fairclough, 1992; Parker, 1992). On the other hand, some writers use the term prefaced by an article (*a* discourse). Employed thus, the term denotes "a *system of statements which constructs an object*" (Parker, 1990a: 191). From this perspective, a discourse or a number of discourses are realised within texts - where texts are "delimited tissues of meaning reproduced in *any* form that can be given an interpretative gloss" (Parker, 1992: 6; original emphasis). For those who use the term `discourse' to refer to `text', interpretative repertoires (Potter & Wetherell, 1987) ideological dilemmas (Billig et el, 1988) or practical ideologies (Gill, 1991) find their expression in discourse.

This terminological conflation adds confusion to an already diverse field. Gunther Kress (1985: 27) offers a parsimonious solution to the disorder:

> *Discourse is a category that belongs to and derives from the social domain, and text is a category that belongs to and derives from the linguistic domain. The relation between the two is one of realization: Discourse finds its expression in text.*

In this thesis, the term `text' is used to refer to any spoken or written, informal or formal product since informal spoken text may be tranformed into formal transcribed text in the process of achieving an analysable product. This definition is used by Fairclough (1992) and is synonymous with the definition of what Potter and Wetherell refer to as discourse. The term `discourse' is used in this thesis in two ways. First, it constitutes a synonym for text, and second it refers to "recurrently used systems of terms used for characterizing and evaluating actions, events and other phenomena" (Potter & Wetherell, 1987: 149). I prefer the word `discourse' (like Parker; eg. 1992) to Potter and Wetherell's `interpretative repertoire' which seems to be an unnecessarily clumsy term.

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In order to distinguish between discourse as text, and discourse as a particular system of terms, I tend to refer the the latter in specific terms; for example, the discourse *of* biologism.

Although issues of nomenclature are significant, particularly for reasons of clarity, it is really the assumptions that each author brings to the terms of his/her choice that are central. The field of discourse analysis in social psychology is characterised by the co-existence of two `strands' of research, each informed by slightly different assumptions, and assuming a different level of analysis. The approach of Potter and Wetherell (1987) is most clearly espoused in their 1987 book <u>Discourse and social psychology</u>, although they have published extensively in this area. Parker and Burman's perspective is outlined in various articles (eg. Parker, 1990a, 1990b, 1990c; Burman, 1991b), in Parker's (1992) book <u>Discourse dynamics</u> and most recently in their jointly edited book (1993) <u>Discourse analytic research</u>. Before critically appraising these two approaches, and evaluating their relative merits, let us briefly examine what a discourse analytic approach advocates.

## 2.3   Discourse analysis: an overview

<u>What is discourse analysis?</u>  As we have noted, discourse analysis as "a single unitary entity" (Burman & Parker, 1993: 3) really does not exist. A plethora of discursive practices abounds, derived from various disciplinary sources and oriented toward different analytic foci.

Traditional psychological research views central constructs such as personality, identity, and attitudes as entities lying dormant inside the heads of individuals until laid bare by the discerning psychologist (Burman & Parker, 1993). Language, regarded as a transparent medium which reflects unproblematically existing underlying realities, is viewed as the tool by means of which people may describe both external (the world out there) and internal (what goes

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on in their heads) reality. Hence, language is seen as the pathway to unravelling the complexities of the human mind.

By contrast, discourse analysts regard language as actively constituting or constructing reality. Experiences, selves, even psychological constructs are constituted in and through language; and their meaning is inseparable from the ways they are described in the interactional context (Garfinkel, 1967; Potter & Wetherell, 1987). Language, it is argued, "embodies the `sediment' of social practices which undermines its use as a neutral descriptive medium" (Wetherell, Stiven & Potter, 1987: 60). Furthermore, it is a "reality-creating social practice" (Fowler, 1985: 62), both in respect of objects which have an ontological status (such as a rock) and those objects which are produced within what Parker (1990c: 229) terms the `moral/political sphere'. Objects derived from the latter are advanced for strategic or ideological reasons and constitute phenomena such as `race', and `nation' - and indeed, most of the concepts upon which the discipline of psychology rests. Either way discourse "constructs `representations' of the world which have a reality almost as coercive as gravity, and, like gravity, we know of the objects only through their effects" (Parker, 1990a: 196).

This notion of language as constitutive does not mean, as some critics suggest, that "objects exist only in a trivial way outside of their construction in discourse" (Abrams & Hogg, 1990: 220). Rather, "the object that a discourse refers to may have an independent reality outside discourse, but is given *another* reality by discourse" (Parker, 1990a: 197).

The potential for criticism of this nature to be levelled at discourse analysis, however, has been recognised even among the ranks of its proponents (cf. Burman, 1991b), and is founded upon misunderstandings related to the idea that "all of the world ... can be described as textual" (Parker, 1992:7) and "there is nothing outside of the text" (Derrida, 1976: 158). The articulation of discourses

within texts operates within a context; but, it is not at all clear where text ends and context begins. In a recent review of discourse analytic research, Figueroa and Lopez (1991) identified this tension between text and context as one of a number of tensions fundamental to contemporary discourse analysis.

The tension arises from the very nature of discourse analysis itself: that the world out there is created in and through text. Therefore, despite the fact that things may have an independent reality, we can never know that reality directly. In other words, since the world is given meaning by us, the whole world becomes a text.

How then does language `create' reality? As we have seen, people do things with language. Language is performative, and talk has an essential action-orientation (cf. Austin, 1962). Moreover, language plays a vital role in the daily life of any human being. As people construct accounts, which of course they can do in various ways, they actively select pre-existing linguistic resources from an available pool. The `contents' of this pool are constrained by the sociopolitical context within which the speakers live. For example, social institutions produce particular ways of talking about different areas of social life, "which are related to the place and nature of that institution" (Kress, 1985: 28). The set of statements produced about a particular area, both sets the limits upon or constrains as well as enables or facilitates the manner in which that area may or may not be talked about.

The culturally available resources which form the basis of everyday talk represent *shared sets of meaning* which may contain contradictory ideas. Consequently, meaning is not located merely inside the head of the individual subject, but is informed by the social conditions which `govern' the forms of talk available (Burman & Parker, 1993). Hence, discourse analysis offers: "a social account of subjectivity by attending to the linguistic resources by

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which the sociopolitical realm is produced and reproduced."
(Burman & Parker, 1993: 3).

This focus upon language and meaning within the discourse
framework results in discourse itself becoming the analytic
topic, or as Potter and Wetherell (1987: 160) observe
"social texts are approached in *their own right* and not as
a secondary route to things `beyond' the text like
attitudes, events or cognitive processes" (original
emphasis). Thus, instead of attempting to access the mind
via language, discourse analysts study the texts in which
the images of the mind are reproduced and recast; the focus
of the psychologist's gaze is not private individual
cognitive processes, but shared social knowledge (Valach,
1993).

`Changing the subject' (Henriques et al, 1984) of
psychology in this way implies considerable theoretical
reorientation, since it challenges that which stands at the
very centre of the discipline: `modern individuality'
(Henriques et al, 1984: 1). It necessitates "the
suspension of belief in what one normally takes for
granted" (Potter & Wetherell, 1987: 104) as the focus
shifts from seeing a practice as a reflection of `reality'
to considering the social construction and function of that
practice. For psychology, described by some as a "sub-plot
within the history of modernism" (Polkinghorne, 1992: 146),
the shift to a post-modernist approach represents far more
than a crisis. It represents something akin to a
revolution.

What then, is the status of the individual within the
domain of research termed `discourse analysis'? In
contrast to the rational, non-contradictory and unitary
self, traditionally viewed as psychology's subject (Venn,
1984) - a self also traditionally European and male - the
`turn to language' problematises and retheorises
subjectivity. The assumptions of modern Western psychology
are deconstructed, such as the notion of `self as centre of
experience' which informs psychology's preoccupation with

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the individual as the unit of analysis. The individual subject is no longer viewed as a unified whole, but as a complex of disparate images and events (Gergen, 1992).

For the psychologist, the attempt to describe the timeless and universal features of individual human subjects is abandoned (Potter & Wetherell, 1987), and replaced with descriptions of the discursive practices which produce social and psychological realities. Hence, the individual is seen, not as a pregiven entity, but in the words of Henriques et al (1984: 95) as a "constituted `always-already social' being, as being locked in ideological practices". For instance, Margaret Wetherell (1986) has demonstrated how the notions of masculinity and femininity represent examples of just such ideological practices rather than being a set of traits, psychological states or stereotypes based upon roles (and particularly effective ones at that, since they appear to be the natural and immutable consequences of biology and socialisation).

The force of `discursive or ideological practices' is said to lie in the way in which they `position' people, and their use generates the individual's subjectivity (Henriques et al, 1984; Davies & Harre, 1990). This notion raises questions regarding the degree to which human subjects are constituted (discourse determinism) as opposed to being constitutive (human agency). The work of Althusser, for example, has been criticised for being over-deterministic: people are seen as fixed in a subject position through the range of discursive practices available to them to make sense of the world (Potter & Wetherell, 1987) Althusser's theoretical framework presents an overly passive depiction of human subjectivity - and therefore a limited view of social change (Foster, 1991d).

However, "a theoretical framework which recognizes the social construction of subjectivity in social relations and through discourses does not result in an inevitable lack of agency" as Henriques et al (1984: 57) have noted. It is possible to present the subject as being both socially

determined and capable of individual creativity: "obliged to act discoursally in preconstituted subject positions, yet capable of creatively transforming discourse conventions" (Fairclough, 1989: 169). Indeed, the past decade has witnessed an increasing awareness of human subjects as active agents, and not as being mechanically determined (Harre, 1979; Billig et al, 1988). From a rhetorical perspective, the speaker is capable of producing inventive arguments or in Billig's terms (1987: 100) engaging in the `open-palmed playfulness of witcraft'.

The idea that selves are produced discursively, and therefore that an individual may hold any number of discursive and sometimes contradictory positions addresses the impasse which has plagued psychology almost since its inception: that the presence of contradiction or variability needs to reconciled. Recently, European social psychologists have argued for a social psychology which takes account of contradiction (cf. Billig, 1987) and dilemma (cf. Billig et al, 1988).

In contrast to traditional approaches within the social sciences, discourse analysis directly confronts the issue of variability. Indeed, it turns what has been regarded previously as an "intractable methodological liability" into a "productive analytical resource" (Gilbert and Mulkay, 1984: 13). It is precisely the focus of attention upon the manner in which accounts of social events and actions are socially generated which makes discourse itself the analytic focus (Gilbert & Mulkay, 1984; Potter & Wetherell, 1987). One of the central advantages of this approach is that the researcher stays closer to the data since s/he is no longer concerned with inference, with viewing language as an indicator of something else (Gilbert & Mulkay, 1984).

Discourse analysis, in the light of the postmodern turn, has managed to deconstruct the commonsense image of people as unitary subjects, to retheorise the image of autonomous and undivided human beings which prevails both within the

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discipline of psychology and in Western European culture. This represents an extremely significant step for, as Parker (1989: 96) has argued, it is imperative that psychology adopt such a position if it is to "deconstruct its ideology and its power" - a position advocated by Moscovici in his early call to social psychologists to study "everything that pertains to ideology and to communication" (1972: 55).

But in what way can discourse be characterised as ideological? First, let us consider briefly the concept of ideology. David McLellan (1986: 1) in his book on the topic has observed that: "Ideology is the most elusive concept in the whole of social science". Despite this, many recent writings on ideology are in agreement that ideology is not simply a system of beliefs, values and ideas, nor is it merely a form of `false consciousness' of the real (Foster, 1991d). Since the literature on ideology is diverse, we shall limit discussion to notions that are of relevance to the development of a critical social psychology.

One of the central notions informing recent psychological approaches to discourse analysis (although perhaps not discourse analysis more generally; Parker, 1992) is that language is a principal medium for the operation of ideology (cf. Therborn, 1980; Thompson, 1984). In other words: "the processes of everyday thinking can be processes of `ideology'" (Billig, 1991), therefore it is through an examination of language that ideological structures may be exposed (Kress, 1985).

Sceptics may still question the relevance of ideology (traditionally associated with the discipline of sociology) for the discipline of psychology. Parker (1992: 32) provides a pithy motivation: "the nature ... of individuals at any time flow(s) not so much from their `attitudes' or `motivations' ..., but from the overall ideological context." Discourse analysis functions to deconstruct that ideological context in pursuit of the `ground rules for

action' (Parker, 1992: 32) since psychological phenomena "have a public and collective reality, and we are mistaken if we think that they have their origin in the private space of the individual" (Burman & Parker, 1993: 1). In short, although individuals' construct discourse, they do so within an ideological context which sets the parameters upon their discursive practice.

From this perspective, ideology is realised within the fabric of everyday conversation via the social constructions of reality which give meaning to the discursive or linguistic practices people use to account for their everyday reality. It is in this sense that Wetherell and her colleagues (Wetherell, Stiven, & Potter, 1987) used the term `practical ideologies' in an investigation of discourse pertaining to employment opportunities for women. They note that ideology "is not simply a set of propositions but is primarily a method of accounting or managing a representation. It is an *active* way of making sense. Language use can be varied from moment to moment depending on the participants' interactional goals" (original emphasis).

Similar themes are echoed within the writings of those adopting a rhetorical approach. This theoretical framework has highlighted the failures of both psychological and social theory: the former neglecting the social and the latter neglecting the individual. While this criticism in itself is not new, the theoretical alternative posed by rhetorical psychology certainly *is*. Like specific strands of discourse analysis, and social constructionist theory, rhetorical psychology focuses upon language since "rhetorical acts are above all acts of language" (Billig, 1991: 14), and ideology is articulated through language.

The notion of `practical' or `lived ideology' does not refer to a unified, internally consistent, set of beliefs which informs the individual's everyday life. Rather, it is seen *fundamentally* to comprise dilemmatic or contrary themes (Billig et al, 1988) upon which human subjects draw

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to account for their everyday practice. Contradiction is recognised as a feature of talk (instead of being glossed over or suppressed by means of quantitative techniques) and is expressed in the variable construction thereof to accomplish different objectives or to serve different functions (Potter & Wetherell, 1987).

The idea that ideology embraces contrary themes may be said to encourage the view that both argument/`logos' and counter-argument/`anti-logos' (Billig, 1987) are equally balanced in the equation. However, rhetorical theorists mindfully explain that one theme may be more dominant than another (cf. Billig, 1987; Billig et al, 1988). For example, ideology is most effective when it assumes the status of common-sense, or what Billig (1987) terms `common-places'. Once linguistic resources have become `naturalised' in this way (Fairclough, 1992), they are so familiar, so obvious that they assume the status of `fact' or `truth' and it is difficult to recognise them as simply constituting one *version* of reality. Factual descriptions represent particularly powerful discursive constructions (Potter & Wetherell, 1987). It is for this reason that ideology becomes a "key mechanism of rule by consent" (Fairclough, 1989: 34).

It is the widespread and shared belief in particular social representation (Moscovici, 1982; 1984) which lend a fact-like status to certain discourses or interpretative repertoires. This results, for example, in members of the Flat Earth Society being viewed as somewhat eccentric by the average Western European person. Similarly, particular ideas dominate in many other spheres of public life - `race' (cf. Potter & Wetherell, 1988; Wetherell & Potter, 1992), health (cf. Herzlich, 1973) and `gender' (cf. Wetherell, 1986; Wetherell et al, 1987) to suggest but a few. The inequalities in terms of the discursive resources available for accounting for social life brings us to the issue of power.

What role does power serve in relation to language and ideology? One aspect of a critical view of ideology is that it serves to maintain power relations of domination (Foster, 1991d), and we have seen how ideology "operates as discourse" (Therborn, 1980: 15). To examine ideology in text is to examine the manner in which meaning serves to sustain relations of domination (Thompson, 1984). Discourse reproduces relations of power, it is the location in which these relations are played out and enacted (Fairclough, 1989; Fowler, 1985). It is through discourse that certain practices are legitimated and others are prevented from occurring.

The links between discourse, ideology and power suggest that power should be of significant concern to discourse analysts. Indeed, Ian Parker attests that: "We should speak about discourse and power in the same breath" (1990a: 199). In other words, discourse analysis should not limit its focus to the mere description of specific texts, but should explore the ideological functions of discourse and expose relations of domination and oppression.

From a foucauldian perspective (cf. Foucault, 1977), discourses are implicated in the structure of institutions; that is, certain discourses tend to be affiliated with certain institutions. Discourse analysis needs to address the way in which discourse reproduces institutions. For example, Fairclough (1989) has observed within a range of medical contexts the manner in which power operates both `in' and `behind' discourse to reproduce particular relations of power and subject positions, and the hegemony of the medical institution.

Although Foucault's (1980) work represents the most thorough analysis of power, his framework tends to regard power as all-pervasive, as everywhere (Parker, 1989, Burman & Parker, 1993). This is problematic in that it denies the rhetorical nature of `lived ideology': the notion that both argument and counter-argument are united in dialogue, that where there is logos, there is anti-logos (Billig, 1987).

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The upshot of a foucauldian position on power is that the potential for resistance and social change is negated. However, as Billig (1987: 48) has noted:

> *The power of speech is not the power to command*
> *obedience by replacing argument with silence. It is*
> *the power to challenge silent obedience by opening*
> *arguments. The former result can be attained by*
> *physical force as well as logos, but the latter can*
> *only be achieved by logos, or rather by anti-logos.*

The importance of a discourse analytic framework which includes an analysis of ideology and power should be apparent at this point. However, many strands of discourse analysis completely omit, or pay very scant attention to, these issues. This is especially true of those analyses informed by conversation analytic theory and methodology. Within the psychological discourse literature, the recent text by Edwards and Potter (1992) is exemplary. The text outlines a model for discursive action (DAM) but in so doing demands a micro level of analysis; that is, "close attention to the fine detail of talk and texts" (Edwards & Potter, 1992: 2). The level of analysis in and of itself is not the problem, it is the fact that Edwards and Potter neglect to link the minutia of what is accomplished in social action with notions of ideology and power.

Potter's work assumes a more ideological flavour when he collaborates with Wetherell. Their excellent book Mapping the language of racism explicitly locates racism within the context of "the study of ideology more generally" (1992: 3). and draws out the relations between subjectivity and power. Here too the textual analysis highlights the role of rhetorical constructions and discursive features. However, rather than getting bogged down in heavy (and arguably unnecessary) detail, the analysis clearly demonstrates the manner in which the discursive patterns identified in the text reflect dominant racist ideologies. Furthermore, these ideologies, and their attendant power relations, are grounded within the historical context of

the colonial history of `white' New Zealand.  This is important for: "Ideological power, the power to project one's own practices as universal and `common-sense', is a significant complement to economic and political power, and of particular significance ... because it is exercised in discourse" (Fairclough, 1989: 33).  In short, we need to take account of "the relations of language to the material conditions of its uses and of its users" (Kress, 1985: 29).

On the face of it an approach which departs so radically from mainstream psychology with respect to subjectivity, and which claims to offer both a theory of ideology and power and a method of exploring these notions, would seem to be inherently political. The term discourse analysis is almost synonymous with `critical' and sometimes `feminist' research and has been used in progressive ways (Burman, 1991b).  Wetherell and Potter's (1992) work on the language of racism in New Zealand constitutes one such example.

However, "Is the progressive political practice associated with discourse analysis a necessary or intrinsic feature of discourse analysis itself?" (Burman, 1991b: 329-330).  The need for this question stems from the post-structural foundation of the discourse analytic perspective.  In particular, the emphasis upon meaning as multiple and shifting rather than unitary and fixed, and the focus upon knowledge as socially constructed, uncoupled from notions of `truth'.  The consequence of this view is relativism: that "there is nothing outside of the text" (Derrida, 1976: 158).  That which is `real' is that which is constructed in and through text and the manner in which truth or acceptability is gauged is internal to particular discourses (Henriques et al, 1984).  Thus although discourse analysis has been used to inform political struggle in a number of areas,  Burman (1990, 1991b) maintains that the relativism of the `turn to language' has left a `moral-political vacuum' - for once there is no truth, how does one argue right from wrong?

The notion of a non-unitary self inhabiting a plurality of discursive positions, while theoretically useful in terms of deconstructing individual-social dualism, contributes further to the problem. Specifically, it has been criticised for leaving people as politically impotent, both individually and collectively (Shusterman, 1988, in Skeggs, 1991). In consequence, a discourse analytic framework does not necessarily imply a progressive political position. As Burman bravely argues, given the smug complacency of the `new' order, : "... a motivated, partisan political orientation is proscribed. By this account, theory floats disconnected from any political position - a return to a disturbingly familiar liberal pluralist position" (1991b: 331).

In short, despite the fact that this type of research has been hailed as a "critical, political and potentially emancipatory activity" (Potter & Wetherell, 1987: 104), it would seem that discourse analysis "does not offer a political position in its own right: rather, the political rests in the strategic appropriation of its framework" (Burman, 1991b: 333). This is an issue to which we shall return later (refer chap 9, section 9.2).

Thus far our discussion has been oriented to delineating the principal features of discourse analysis generally. We have touched upon issues of language, self, ideology, power and politics. Much of our discussion has drawn upon the writings of Ian Parker and Erica Burman, and Jonathan Potter and Margaret Wetherell. These four people constitute perhaps the major thrust of discourse analytic work in European social psychology; however, the stance which each pair adopt in relation to their subject is slightly different. The following section examines these differences, with a view to teasing out the strengths and weaknesses of each approach.

## 2.4  Potter vs. Parker: a critical appraisal

It must be expressed at the outset that the differences in
approach between Parker and Burman on the one hand, and
Potter and Wetherell on the other, should not be
overstated.   They have in common the key features of
discourse analysis described above, and their differences
are perhaps best characterised as being of nuance. This
discussion aims to highlight what appear to be the main
areas of distinction, and will avoid becoming a nitpicking
exercise (cf. Bowers, 1988 for a detailed review of Potter
and Wetherell's approach).

Both Parker (cf. Parker, 1988a, 1988b, 1989, 1990a, 1990b,
1990c, 1991, 1992, 1994, Parker & Shotter, 1990a, 1990b)
and Burman (cf. 1990, 1991a, 1991b, 1991c, 1992, 1994;
Burman & Parker, 1993) and Potter (cf. 1988a, 1988b; Potter
& Edwards, 1990; Potter & Mulkay, 1985; Potter & Reicher,
1987; Potter, Stringer & Wetherell, 1984; Potter &
Wetherell, 1987, 1988, 1989; Potter, Wetherell & Chitty,
1991; Potter, Wetherell, Gill & Edwards, 1990; Edwards &
Potter, 1992; Edwards, Ashmore & Potter, 1992) and
Wetherell (cf. 1986; Wetherell & Potter, 1986, 1988, 1992;
Wetherell, Stiven & Potter, 1987), have published
extensively in the area of discourse analysis.  A review of
this writing reveals two major areas of difference: the
first relates to the *level of analysis* employed, and the
second relates to the *amount of applied work* generated by
each approach.  We shall examine these in turn.

As we have seen above (refer section 2.3), discourse
analysis eschews the approach of traditional psychology
which takes the individual human subject as the unit of
analysis.   A view of subjectivity as non-unitary and
multiple necessitates that selves be located within
discourse, and that discourse itself becomes the analytic
topic.   Both Parker and Burman, and Potter and Wetherell,
share this perspective and approach texts with a view to
identifying `discourses'  (Parker  and  Burman)  or
`interpretative repertoires'  (Potter and Wetherell): the

difference between these constructs being essentially one of nomenclature.

However, while these two approaches converge with respect to the *unit of analytic focus*, they diverge with respect to the *level of analysis* each assumes. In a nutshell, Parker and Burman do less of the detailed conversation analytic-type work to warrant their claims regarding the identification of certain discourses, and provide more commentary upon issues of power and ideology. Potter and Wetherell, on the other hand, *do more of the detailed conversation analytic-type work*, and provide less commentary upon issues of ideology and power.

At this juncture let me stress that this observation is about degrees (more or less) and is not in any way suggestive of a total neglect of one or other component in the work of either approach – as mentioned earlier, we are concerned with nuance here. Furthermore, to digress for a moment, there are differences between members of each `pair' of researchers. For example, much of what is regarded as `Parker and Burman's approach' comes from the work of Parker alone (eg. the key text <u>Discourse dynamics</u>, 1992). While there is no doubt that Burman has contributed significantly to the development of this form of discourse analysis, she expresses reservations about its political use (cf. Burman, 1990, 1991d); consequently, much of her work is conducted within a feminist framework. Potter and Wetherell's approach, on the other hand, does represent a joint accomplishment (cf. their major texts of 1987 and 1992). However, the authors differ from each other in terms of politics. Wetherell's stance (again informed by feminist ideas) is more concerned with issues of ideology and power while Potter's proclivity is for more conversation analytic type work (refer also section 2.3).

The differences between the two approaches to discourse analysis relate in part to the sources of historical influence which have shaped the evolution of each perspective. Again, the difference is one of emphasis.

While Potter and Wetherell (eg. 1987; McKinlay & Potter, 1987) ascribe the foundations of their form of discourse analysis to linguistic philosophy, ethnomethodology, and post-structuralism, Parker and Burman (eg. Parker, 1990a, 1992; Burman & Parker, 1993) situate their approach firmly within the post-structuralist tradition. As Parker (1990a: 190) has commented "my *only* understanding of discourse is informed by post-structuralist work" (my emphasis), and he has been critical of Potter and Wetherell's later writing in particular for merely `acknowledging' this significant line of influence (cf. Parker, 1990a). Interestingly, the year after Parker's charge, which took place within the context of a key debate about discourse analysis between the two `groupings' in the journal <u>Philosophical psychology</u>, Wetherell and Potter (1992: 88) claimed to "have been *strongly* influenced by developments in `continental' discourse analysis such as that of Foucault and other post-structuralists" (my emphasis).

Such argument is interesting, even amusing, but it is indicative of deeper differences which underlie the perspectives of Parker and Potter respectively. These differences relate to theoretical objectives and the methodological means of realising those objectives. While both approaches are concerned with the explication of ideology and power through an analysis of discourse, the relations between social institutions, power and ideology appear to be more explicitly formulated within the discourse analytic framework propounded by Ian Parker and Erica Burman. Unlike Potter and Wetherell (1987), and in line with their avowed closer links with the *foucauldian* tradition (cf. Parker, 1990a), Parker and Burman overtly incorporate these aspects of discourse into their theory and method (cf. Parker, 1990a, 1992). In contrast, the approach advocated by Potter and Wetherell is oriented toward discursive function, construction and variation. Issues of ideology and power flow *from* these notions but are not explicitly formulated within their theory or method.

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The advantage of Parker and Burman's approach is that it has immediate and obvious appeal to those of us committed to a psychology of social transformation: it has political face validity. Indeed, it is probably for this reason that their approach to discourse analysis seems to have found greater favour among critical psychologists in South Africa (although very little has transpired in the way of published articles) - Parker and Burman formally visited the University of Cape Town in January 1994. However, while superficially appealing, the method of performing an analysis of discourse put forward by Parker is less than satisfactory in achieving its objective of `ideology critique'(Parker, 1990c: 227) in my opinion. Furthermore, I would go so far as to suggest that this accounts for the fact that Parker and Burman's approach to discourse analysis has stimulated less applied research.

Parker's approach to discourse analysis fails to live up to expectation on three grounds, the first two of which relate to the point of difference regarding `level of analysis' described above while the third corresponds to the point of difference regarding practical application. First, the manner in which Parker conceptualises `discourses' is problematic, second, the method employed for the identification of discourses is flimsy, and third, the way in which this approach has been used does not always seem to be consonant with its overtly political objectives.

Parker's view of discourse has been criticised for its tendency toward abstraction and reification (cf, Abrams & Hogg, 1990; Potter Wetherell, Gill & Edwards, 1990). In essence, Parker's account affords discourses the status of independently existing `realities' which in and of themselves have agentic properties. In line with the post-structuralist thinking which dominates this approach, "there is nothing outside of the text" (Derrida, 1976: 158) - the unfortunate corollary of such a position being its inattention to context, and local discursive context in particular (a point to which we shall return shortly).

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In seeking to identify discourse in text, the aspirant analyst is informed that "the statements in a discourse can be grouped, and given a certain coherence, in so far as they refer to the same topic" (Parker, 1990a: 192). Thus, for example, an examination of text may lead one to identify a `familial' discourse, a `medical' discourse, a `racist' discourse, or a `religious' discourse. Each discourse marking out a `topic'.

One of the problems associated with this conceptualisation of discourse is that it fails to call into question the common-sense assumptions we make about the nature of a topic and hence there "is a real danger that analytic work is simply being replaced by the analyst's common-sense" (Potter, Wetherell, Gill & Edwards, 1990: 210). Furthermore, Parker offers very little in the way of warranting the claims he makes for the identification of certain discourses, beyond appeals to common-sense. Hence analytic practice is reduced to observing `topics' thence termed `discourses', and commenting upon their ideological nature and function. Sometimes, this process seems remarkably similar to that involved in the identification of themes in content analysis - although of course what Parker does with the `discourses' he has observed is entirely different.

Without belabouring the point, perhaps the final criticism relating to these two issues is that Parker's failure to produce working evidence for the observation of particular discourses makes his work especially susceptible to the customary criticism advanced by mainstream psychologists that there *is* no analysis in discourse analysis, and that such work constitutes good journalism at best, and political rhetoric at worst.

Finally, despite the overtly political stance which Parker assumes, his form of discourse analysis has been less widely used than that of Potter and Wetherell in the deconstruction of oppressive social practice (although Burman has conducted some interesting work within the area

of developmental psychology; Burman, 1991a, 1991c, 1992).
Furthermore, the material he selects either to demonstrate
an analysis of discourse, or as the focus of his inquiry,
quite often borders on the frivolous. For example, in 1988
(Parker, 1988b) Parker analysed the discourse of a 2 minute
20 second scene from the English radio soap, `The Archers',
and in a recent chapter (Parker, 1994) he illustrates basic
principles of discourse analysis through the use of a
sample text: the instructions on a packet of childrens'
toothpaste (not surprisingly, we encounter the familiar
`medical' and `familial' discourses, among others).
Similarly, early last year Parker presented a brilliant and
witty paper at a conference in South Africa which took as
its focus a discourse analysis of sci-fi literature.

There is no doubt that examples such as these make for
engaging reading or listening, and do reveal something of the
manner in which dominant cultural practices are reproduced in
the mundane aspects of daily life. However, Parker's desire
to equate discourse analysis with political practice and
resist its becoming "just another psychological method" (1992:
20) could possibly be realised more effectively if
occasionally he elected to deconstruct texts which may be seen
more directly to maintain relations of oppression and
domination.

Potter and Wetherell's work differs from that of Parker
(and Burman) with respect to level of analysis and
practical application, as we noted above. The difference
in level of analysis is governed by the theoretical
conceptualisation of discourse and its implications for
analytic practice. While, broadly speaking, Potter and
Parker differ little in terms of the bald definition of
discourse each proposes, Potter and Wetherell differ with
respect to the considerable emphasis they place upon "the
actual working of discourse as a constitutive part of
social practices situated in *specific* contexts" (Potter,
Wetherell, Gill, & Edwards, 1990: 209; original emphasis).

This attention to `local context' derives from the
conversation analytic work developed by Harvey Sacks, who

pursued his graduate studies under the ethnomethodologists Garfinkel and Goffman. Sacks, and his colleagues Jefferson and Schlegoff, drew attention to the indexicality of language:

> *The point here is that taking sentences in isolation is not just a matter of taking such sentences that might appear in a context out of the context; but that the very composition, construction, assemblage of the sentences is predicated by their speakers on the place in which it is being produced, and it is through that that a sentence is context-bound, rather than possibly independent sentences being different intact objects in and out of context*
>
> *(Schegloff, 1984: 52; original emphasis)*

The notion that meaning alters with local context represents a powerful resource in the analysis of discourse, rather than an obstacle to achieving understanding (Potter & Wetherell, 1987). The indexicality of language is evidenced in its construction and variation which provides clues as to the function thereof. It is through an understanding of the construction, variation and function of talk or text that the manner in which discourse produces and reproduces particular relations of power, has particular ideological effects and supports particular social institutions is analysed. Thus an understanding of ideology and power is obtained through a *detailed* analysis (by combining discourse and conversation analytic work; Edwards & Potter, 1992; Roff & Potter, 1993; Kottler & Swartz, 1993) of the structure and function of discourse since `interpretative repertoires' are "*abstractions* from practices in context" (Potter et al, 1990: 209; original emphasis). In contrast, Parker identifies `discourses' in text directly because his reified conceptualisation affords them an independent status (Abrams & Hogg, 1990; Potter et al, 1990).

The value of providing a clear exposition of the way in which certain rhetorical devices and linguistic features go to make up particular interpretative repertoires which then function to sustain certain ideologies and particular relations of power, is that it makes it possible for the reader to critically examine and reflect upon the way in which the authors have `read' or interpreted a particular text. As Potter and Wetherell note:

> *In this way, the entire reasoning process from discursive data to conclusions is documented in some detail and each reader is given the possibility of evaluating the different stages of the process, and hence agreeing with the conclusions or finding grounds for disagreement.*
>
> *(1987: 172)*

Perhaps somewhat ironically it is the pragmatic approach to discourse analysis advanced by Potter and Wetherell which seems to have been more successful in analysing the actual workings of power and ideology. A sizeable literature across a range of topics has been spawned by the authors themselves, sometimes in collaboration with various colleagues, and sometimes by other researchers. This includes, for example, discursive analyses of racism (Potter & Wetherell, 1988; Wetherell & Potter, 1986, 1992, Dixon et al, 1994; Lea, in press), affirmative action (Potter & Wetherell, 1989), the reproduction of gender inequalities (Wetherell et al, 1987), political discourse (Potter & Edwards, 1990), the social production of scientific knowledge (Potter & Mulkay, 1985; McKinlay & Potter, 1987), and `rioting' (Potter & Reicher, 1987).

This burgeoning literature may well reflect the particular strengths of Potter and Wetherell's framework: their conceptualisation of discourse, their analytic method for the identification of interpretative repertoires, and the accessibility of the theory and method with respect to being put to good political use. However, as Burman

(1991b) has noted, progressive political practice is not an intrinsic feature of discourse analysis itself - but is a function of the discourse analyst.  Thus, the framework of Potter and Wetherell may inform political practice and struggle, as their own work on racism testifies, but equally, it may not.  Furthermore by neglecting to directly theorise issues of ideology and power and incorporate those within a method of analysis, this framework *is* susceptible to being used in a way which neglects these salient issues, and becomes preoccupied with the intricacies of turn-taking, pause lengths and specific speech-acts.  In such instances the analytic focus becomes almost exclusively the local context at the expense of the ideological context within which talk occurs.  The recent text by Edwards and Potter (1992) is exemplary - the book sets out to provide a model of discursive action, yet notions of power and ideology are entirely absent - a serious omission in both my, and no doubt Ian Parker's, opinion.

In summary, on the one hand, Parker's discourse analytic framework explicitly deals with notions of ideology, power and social structure at the level of theory and method, yet does so in a manner which is problematic.  On the other hand, while Potter and Wetherell's approach may be criticised for not formally incorporating these ideas into their theory and method, it does seem better able to provide a critical analysis of the workings of power and ideology.

While there is little doubt that the approaches of Parker and Burman, and Potter and Wetherell, are central to the development of an alternative critical social psychology, a discussion of significant developments in the field following the `turn to language' would be incomplete without considering the contribution of `rhetorical psychology'.  This perspective shares much in common with discursive psychology, but offers unique insights into the workings of what social representations theorist, Serge Moscovici, has termed `the thinking society' (Moscovici,

1984). We briefly consider the impact of `the rhetorical turn' (Simons, 1990) in the next section of this chapter.

## 2.5 Rhetorical psychology considered

A rhetorical approach to psychology shares much in common with the discursive approach outlined above (refer sections 2.3 and 2.4): it too is anti-cognitivist in orientation (Billig, in press), is sensitive to the constructive and performative aspects of language and recognises that discourse is frequently characterised by variability - even in the case of holding strong views (cf. Billig, 1989). However, the rhetorical approach to psychology is more specifically oriented to the study of social thinking (Billig, 1987, 1990b, 1991; Soyland, 1994a, 1994b) and to this end "not all instances of language-action are equally revealing" (Billig, in press: 13).

Students of rhetoric take as their focus the argumentative aspects of discourse since it is through an analysis of argument that thought may be observed. `Private thinking' is seen as being "modelled" upon `public argument', with the consequence that "the structure of the way we argue reveals the structure of our thoughts" (Billig, 1987: 111).

Rhetorical theorists criticise cognitivist accounts for presenting a `bureaucratic model of human thought' (Billig, 1985b): a model which neglects the "two-sidedness of human thinking" (Billig, 1987: 41). From a cognitivist perspective individuals are theorised to cope with cognitive overload, thought to result from the multitude of stimuli which bombard the senses continually, by categorising the world into manageable and meaningful chunks. This perspective offers a very one-sided image of thought, reducing thinking to "the unthinking operations of the filing clerk" (Billig, 1987: 129). The argument of rhetorical theorists is not that such a model of thought is entirely wrong, but that it is incomplete. As Billig (1987: 130) argues, "the one-sided image needs to be opened out into a two-sided one".

This objective is accomplished by embracing the maxim of the Greek sophist, Protagoras: that there are two sides to every question. Protagoras' principle of two-sidedness applies as much to the orations of the ancient Greek philosophers as it does to human thinking. Hence, Billig (1985b, 1987) has argued that the process of categorisation (noted above as the cornerstone of a cognitivist account) is countered by that of particularisation (Billig; 1985b, 1987) where categorisation refers to the process by which "a particular stimulus is placed in a general category, or grouped with other stimuli" and particularisation refers to the process by which "a particular stimulus is distinguished from a general category or from other stimuli" (Billig, 1985b: 82). In fact, Billig (1987) argues that categorisation presupposes particularisation, therefore the two are mutually inter-related. This is aptly demonstrated by the work of Phillip Ullah (1990: 174) on identity in second generation Irish youths: "Comments like `I'm not Irish, I was born in England' and `I'm not English, my mum and dad are Irish', show that the act of particularizing oneself is just as much a part of identification as is that of categorizing oneself".

Rhetorical psychology is important because it draws attention to the argumentative aspects of thinking, but also because such a view accommodates a truly social theory of human thought. No longer are we bound to a perspective which envisages lone thinkers faultily categorising the barrage of information that impinges upon their cognitive faculties. Rather, people think and argue in terms of `common-places', shared common-sense values and ideas (Billig, 1987). In this respect, rhetorical theory has parallels with Moscovici's (1981, 1982, 1984) concept of `social representations', although the former emphasises the rhetorical or argumentative aspects of common-sense whereas the latter does not (Bhavnani has attempted to reconcile aspects of rhetorical psychology with social representations, cf. 1991; Billig, 1988a, 1992b reviews the

relationship between rhetoric and social representations; see also Potter & Litton, 1985).

Thinking and arguing, then, occur within a rhetorical context: a context filled with the contrary themes of common-sense (Billig, 1987, 1991). Attention to the rhetorical context within which views are expressed facilitates an understanding of the variability of everyday conversation (where mainstream psychology is forced to suppress variability in line with its one-sided theory). Billig, like Bakhtin (1981), views human thought as dialogic (Shotter, 1992b). In Bakhtin's (1981) terms speakers may switch between different `registers of voice', expressing contrary themes even within a single utterance. In Billig's (Billig et al, 1988) terms, discourse embraces the dilemmatic nature of common-sense. Individuals engage in internal arguments with themselves in the same way that people argue with each other, `taking the side of the other' (Billig, 1987, 1991) as they justify and criticise different ideological positions. Consequently, for every argument, there is a counter-argument - or, in Billig's (1987) terms, "`logoi' are always haunted, if not by the actuality of `anti-logoi', at least by their possibility" (Billig, 1987: 46).

To be concerned with everyday thinking, with common-sense, is to be concerned with ideology (Billig, 1991; Moscovici, 1983). Billig and his colleagues claim to "stress the *ideological* nature of thought" and "the *thoughtful* nature of ideology" (Billig et al, 1988; original emphasis). Thus, the rhetorical approach involves the study of `ideological dilemmas' (Billig et al, 1988) or the contrary themes of common-sense which provide contradictory positions. For example, Billig et al (1988) have identified the contrary themes of equality and authority in the thinking and classroom practice of school teachers, of health and illness in men who have undergone major heart surgery following cardiac arrest, and prejudice and tolerance in adolescents claiming to support the National

Front.  Similarly, Billig's independent work on prejudice (1985b, 1988b, 1989), and views on the Royal Family (eg. 1988c, 1989, 1990a, 1992a) is replete with examples of the non-unitary and contrary nature of ideological common-sense or the "`common-places' of rhetoric" (Billig, 1987: 192).

In summary, a rhetorical approach has much to offer social psychology - both mainstream and alternative.  The study of ancient rhetoric, drawing attention to the dialogic nature of human thinking, provides insights which are generally lacking in contemporary modern psychology (Billig, 1990b; Soyland, 1994a; 1994b).  Furthermore, in formulating a fundamentally social account of human thought, rhetorical theory provides a framework for understanding issues of ideology and power - although, as Reicher (1988) has appropriately pointed out, Billig does not address satisfactorily the relationship between argumentation and the social practices which facilitate or constrain particular arguments.  In eshewing an account which is overly deterministic, rhetorical psychology has perhaps gone too far the other way.  To reaffirm human agency is important, but social transformation involves considerably more than marshalling the `art of witcraft' to challenge a communities' common-sense (Billig, 1987) and to replace old common-places with new.

The influence of a rhetorical perspective is not limited to the critique of traditional paradigms, however; it has implications for those adopting a discursive approach as well.  Thus although Billig (in press: 8) has suggested that "`rhetorical psychology' could be portrayed as a sub-section of a more general discursive psychology", it would seem that the rhetorical approach offers unique and penetrating insights which have enriched the work of discourse analysts by highlighting the argumentative aspects of discourse. One area in which the union of discursive and rhetorical approaches has proved particularly fruitful is the study of `attitudes'.  In the final section of this chapter we consider some of the

problems associated with this cornerstone of social psychological research, and the manner in which a discursive and rhetorical approach may overcome them.

## 2.6 `Attitudes' reconsidered

Michael Billig has noted: "If conversation and thinking are similar, then those who wish to study psychological processes should pay attention to the details of conversational interaction" (1990b: 291). Similarly, Burman and Parker (1993) and Potter and Wetherell (1987) advocate that since the constructs that form the topics of study within social psychology are *not* to found within the heads of individuals but within the language that has created them, social psychology should adopt the methodology of discourse analysis.

Discourse analysis has been hailed as a radical new approach which `promises' to revolutionise social psychology (Potter & Wetherell, 1987). One of those social psychological constructs which has already seen a radical reformulation is that of `attitudes'. While historically the notion of `attitude' has eluded parsimonious definition, more recently there has been some agreement that they refer to responses which "locate `objects of thought' on `dimensions of judgement'" (McGuire, 1985: 239). Thus, on a given attitude scale individuals are required to express their `attitude' toward a particular `object of thought' - Colgate toothpaste, `black' people, or holidays abroad, for example.

The fundamental assumption embodied within this conceptualisation of `attitudes' is that they represent something enduring within people, and hence something which can be tapped, or measured, with an attitude scale (Potter & Wetherell, 1987). As such, `attitudes' are unproblematically expressed through the medium of language, which reflects the existence of this `inner reality'. Furthermore, `attitudes' are anticipated to be relatively

stable and consistent: if you dislike mushy peas today, you will dislike mushy peas tomorrow.

However, discourse analysts and rhetorical theorists disagree with this conceptualisation. As we have noted (refer sections 2.3, 2.4, and 2.5), they argue that `attitudes' along with other psychological constructs are constructed through language (Burman & Parker, 1993) and do not have an existence `outside' of it. Hence, the measurement of attitudes is problematic (a point we shall return to shortly). Furthermore, discourse is variable and does not correspond to the image of consistency advanced by attitude theorists.

This lack of consistency was forcibly demonstrated in the work of Gilbert and Mulkay (1984) when they set out to examine the raging controversy surrounding an area of biochemistry termed `oxidative phosphorylation'. The degree of variability evident in scientists' discourse encountered by Gilbert and Mulkay was, in their own words, "quite remarkable" (1984: 11): variability was present between different scientists accounts of the same event, between different written documents (eg. research papers and letters) produced by the same scientist, as well as within the course of a single interview with the same scientist.

Struck by the variability in biochemists' accounts of the issues under debate, and the inherent plausibility of each account, Gilbert and Mulkay were forced to consider alternative methodological assumptions to those they had used previously. They state:

> *We had to learn how to deal with variability in our accounts, in a way that recognised that the variability was not just a methodological nuisance, but was an intrinsic feature which we needed to exploit in our analyses."*
>
> *(1984: vii)*

The nature of discursive variability is not chaotic and incomprehensible (Gilbert & Mulkay, 1984; Potter & Wetherell, 1987). Rather, it constellates into certain observable patterns. For example in Gilbert and Mulkay's research, scientists' discourse varied depending on the context of linguistic production; namely, the experimental research paper and the semi-structured interview. Within the former context, an `empiricist' repertoire predominated while in the latter a `contingent' repertoire also prevailed.

It is research like that of Gilbert and Mulkay which has informed the rise of discourse analysis within social psychology. Proponents of a discursive approach recognised that variability is an analytic resource, and that the notion of `attitudes' is theoretically unable to deal with inconsistency (hence the need of those wedded to its use to employ methodological strategies which suppress variation; Potter & Wetherell, 1987). Unlike Gilbert and Mulkay (1984), traditional attitude researchers seem reluctant to rethink their theoretical base, and consequently continue to treat the inevitable variation in their data as `error variance'.

However, it is not just the inability to theorise attitudinal inconsistency that is problematic with respect to the measurement and analysis of attitudes. Potter and Wetherell (1987) raise two other problems: the first of these relates to the status of the attitude object and the second to the translations made from participants' responses to researcher's categories.

Traditional attitude research presumes the existence of the `attitudinal object' (Potter & Wetherell, 1987). It fails to consider that the very construction of such objects depends upon respondents' cultural history. Respondents may therefore ascribe different meanings to the term which refers to the `attitude object'. Simply stated, there is no guarantee that all respondents will interpret the term to mean the same thing. This is particularly pertinent

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when the attitude object is not neutral, as is the case in research on racial attitudes (Potter & Wetherell, 1987). For example, in South Africa academic discussion is frequently punctuated with the question `Do you mean black black?'. This seemingly odd question relates to the lack of objective criteria for categorising people according to `race' (for reasons discussed in the next chapter). Does `black' refer to `black African' or does it refer to everyone who is not deemed `white'?

The second problem Potter and Wetherell (1987) identify is the manner in which participants' discourse becomes translated into analyst's categories. The point they raise is that analysts may re-interpret respondents' answers in ways they never intended, offering Alan Marsh's (1976) research as a case in point. Marsh reported the attitudes of respondents who endorsed the category of `completely unsympathetic' on his attitude scale concerning `coloured immigrants' as being `very hostile'. As Potter and Wetherell (1987) note, hostility implies an active disposition, while lack of sympathy does not.

A consequence of these conceptual and methodological problems is that, despite an enormous amount of research carried out over more than 50 years, `attitude' research has not advanced significantly and remains fraught with problems. By offering a radical reorientation to the subject matter of psychology, the perspective of discourse analysis overcomes problems of cognitive reductionism, and individualism. Instead of divorcing mind from language, discourse analysts study the talk and texts where "images of the mind are reproduced and transformed" (Burman & Parker, 1993: 2). Language use becomes the focus of analysis - specifically the way in which accounts are constructed to serve different functions, as expressed in the variation that is typical of most discourse (Potter & Wetherell, 1987).

Discourse analysts, however, are not the only ones to have been critical of traditional approaches to attitudes and

their inability to account for discursive variation in particular. Rhetorical theorists assert that attitudes are not simply individual evaluative responses to a given attitude object (Billig, 1991). Such a view is `one-sided' since:

> ... *what are often called `attitudes' are not merely rhetorical stances about the social world, but they are stances in relation to other stances: they are arguments about counter-arguments and about what are reasonable positions to take about matters of controversy*

> *(Billig, 1990b: 303).*

Attitudes, then, are positions on matters of controversy and as such occur within a rhetorical context. Moreover, this rhetorical context is shifting in nature, and as it changes so too will the nature of the attitudinal arguments advanced (Billig, 1987) - so much so that speakers may `take the side of the other', advancing the arguments of their adversaries, not just within the quiet confines of internal debate, but in the context of public argument. Attitudes should therefore be understood in terms of the argumentative or rhetorical context within which they originate. Hence, attitudes are fundamentally social, because of the context within which they operate *and* because their content, the attitudinal justifications and criticisms, is constructed from `common-places', the common-sense maxims of every community (Billig, 1987).

Rhetorical theorists' appeals for a truly social psychology are consonant with those of other critical theorists; discourse analysts, social constructionists and those advocating the study of social representations. However, it is the privileging of argumentative meaning and context which represents the unique contribution of a rhetorical approach, and which befits the variable and inconsistent nature of peoples' attitudes. This is perhaps best demonstrated in work on the rhetorical nature of racism.

Hitherto this phenomenon has been understood, by most psychologists at least, in terms of `racial attitudes' and has been measured by a gamut of attitude scales which contain items such as `Black people are lazy'.

There is little doubt that, despite the considerable amount of research into the phenomenon of racism, it remains poorly understood. For example, traditional attitude theorists have battled to reconcile the bigot's negative attitude toward `black' people and his/her ability to foster the occasional inter-racial friendship. Such inconsistency has plagued psychologists for decades - despite their attempts to suppress it, or explain it away in terms of measurement error, or develop ever more complex theories and models (cf. Fishbein & Azjen, 1975; Azjen & Fishbein, 1980).

The perspective offered by discourse analysis has provided psychology with a "genuinely new and alternative way to approach the topic of racism" (Sampson, 1992: cover remarks), while that of rhetorical psychology has revealed that "prejudice is not undilemmatically straightforward; there is a dialectic of prejudice" (Billig et al, 1988). By deconstructing the nature of attitudes and highlighting their social construction, by harnessing discursive variability, by focusing upon the local geography of talk, and by emphasising the ideological nature of thought, new understandings of racism may be achieved. It is to the topic of racism that we now turn, in chapter three.

# CHAPTER THREE

# `RACE' AND RACISM: A CONCEPTUAL AND EMPIRICAL REVIEW

## 3.1 Introduction

Psychology in South Africa has been dominated by `intergroup relations' issues throughout its history. Although the term `intergroup relations' suggests any number of intergroup cleavages (gender, class, language and religion, for example), in South Africa "there is little doubt that the central intergroup problem has been that of `race'" and "the issue of racial domination" (Louw and Foster, 1991:57).

Psychology in South Africa emerged in the early 1920s with the establishment of departments of psychology at a number of universities in the country. Prior to this, various scientists exhorted colleagues to pursue psychological studies of `race' (eg. Loram, 1921) but very little research was forthcoming (Louw and Foster, 1991). In a review of empirical South African psychological research published in recognisable journals before World War II, Louw and his colleagues (1993) identified a total of only 33 studies, the first of which was published in 1925.

The nature of studies concerning `race' in South Africa parallelled developments in Europe and America, although they occurred approximately one to two decades later. Early South African research focused upon what Samelson

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(1978) terms `race psychology', concentrating on the measurement of `objective' mental differences between the `races'. One of the most vigorous researchers in this area was M.L. Fick, a South African psychologist who trained at Harvard University. He concluded, following a series of studies, that

> *Although all the facts regarding the educability of the Native may not be in, the available objective data point to a marked inferiority on the part of the Native in comparison with Europeans. This inferiority, occurring in certain tests in which learning or environmental conditions are equalised for the Native and European groups does not appear to be of a temporary nature.*

> *(Fick, 1939: 56)*

During the 1930s and 1940s, however, this position came under increasing attack (as had occurred earlier in Europe and the United States of America). One of the most extensive criticisms of the hereditarian explanation of test results was advanced by Simon Biesheuvel (1943), head of the Aptitude Test Section of the South African Air Force. In his book, <u>African Intelligence</u>, he concluded:

> *... Under present circumstances ... the difference between the intellectual capacity of Africans and Europeans cannot be scientifically determined*

> *(1943: 191)*

Influenced by European research trends, and by the findings of South African researchers, interest moved steadily away from the study of `objective' `racial' differences and toward `the subjective side' (Samelson, 1978: 268): racial attitudes. The notion of `attitude' is regarded widely as the cornerstone around which social psychology has been constructed (McGuire, 1985), and race attitude research has formed a fairly significant component of this body of work. However, in the light of criticisms levelled at

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psychological research located within a positivist/ empiricist paradigm, the past decade has seen the genesis of several new perspectives regarding peoples' practice in respect of one another (refer chapter 2 for a more detailed examination of this topic). As noted, one of these approaches is discourse analysis which claims to be "a radical new perspective with implications for all socio-psychological topics" (Potter & Wetherell, 1987: 32), including attitudes.

This chapter takes as its focus the notion of `race' and aims to trace the outlines of conceptual and empirical social psychological work in the field. Due to the fact that "tons of paper and type have been devoted to racism" (Kovel, 1988: 3) over the years, this review is biased toward South African material. The first section builds on earlier discussion (refer chapter 1, section 1.4) and critically addresses the concept of `race'. Thereafter, sections 3.3 and 3.4 review South African research on intergroup relations, and in particular on racial attitudes. Recent psychological contributions (the theory of `symbolic' racism, and the social cognition approach to prejudice) to the study of racism are examined in the following sections. The chapter concludes with a few points regarding a discursive approach to the study of racism.

### 3.2 The Concept of `Race'

*I know very well that in a scientific sense there is no such thing as race. As a politician, however, I need a concept that makes it possible to destroy the historical bases that have existed hitherto and to put in their place a completely new and anti-historical `order' and to give to this new order an intellectual basis.*

*(quoted in Alexander, 1985a: 132, from Wilhelm Girnus, Wermacht Geschichte? Berlin/Leipzig, 1946: 16)*

Although `race' is often regarded as the classification or categorisation of people according to physical characteristics, it is "essentially social and political in meaning and reference rather than biological" (Boonzaier, 1988: 58). Indeed, quotations such as the one above bear testament to this: it was reportedly said by Hitler in 1934.

This section of the thesis addresses some of the central issues surrounding the notion of `race' (thereby building upon the ideas raised in the earlier discussion on terminology; refer chapter 1, section 1.4), with particular reference to the South African context. It serves too to clarify the author's stance with respect to what has been termed "a four letter word that hurts" (Fried, 1975: 38).

A significant aspect of the `modernisation' of Africa involved "the classification of detail into manageable units" (Harries, 1988: 25). Early European explorers and colonialists reacted to the unfamiliar and `foreign' nature of the world with which they were confronted in Africa by imposing upon it their pre-existing systems of meaning, systems informed by "late nineteenth century evolutionist and Cartesian thought" (Harries, 1988: 37), as well as by developing those meanings in accordance with their own `new' experience (Banton, 1977; Miles, 1989). Acknowledged European `experts', informed by positivist beliefs, arrived in Africa to delineate boundaries which, according to South African historian Patrick Harries, were seen to be "givens that were as historically discrete as they were incontrovertible" (1988: 25). In the name of science, objectivity and reason, the people of Africa were classified into various groups: groups which have informed oppressive political practice as well as stood as a basic unit of analysis for social scientists.

Although "representations of the other" (Miles, 1989: 11) existed prior to European expansion and the advent of colonisation in the 15th century (Banton, 1977; Miles, 1989), it was as a consequence of these developments that

the dichotomous discourse of `civilisation' and `savages' was established. Initially, these representations incorporated both positive and negative features, albeit rooted in conceptions of `difference'.

By the end of the 18th century, European representations of the African signified inferiority on phenotypical and cultural grounds. However, this inferiority was not predicated upon notions of inherent differences which were fixed and immutable; this was the prerogative of the emergence of `race-science' in the 19th century (Miles, 1989). Building upon earlier conceptions of `the other', `race-science' constructed `races' as biological types of human beings arranged in hierarchical relation to one another; an idea which still holds sway in various quarters, despite incontrovertible proof to the contrary.

Undoubtedly, European `race-science' impacted upon late 19th century South Africa, merging with and transforming "a locally already-entrenched racism" (Foster, 1991d: 365) and serving as the basis and justification for the policies of segregation from 1910 and apartheid from 1948 (Boonzaier, 1988). However, as early as 1858 the "Grondwet" (Constitution) of the South African Republic stated that it would "countenance no equality between white and coloured inhabitants, either in Church or in State" (reported in Suzman, 1960: 339).

In more recent times the lives of South Africa's people have been overshadowed by the Population Registration Act (Act No. 30 of 1950). This act provided for the compilation of a Population Register in terms of which every person had to be classified as a `white person', a `coloured person', or a `native'. For details of the `definitions' contained within this piece of legislation, the reader is referred to Suzman's (1960) comprehensive review of racial classification in the legislation of South Africa. However, to highlight the absurdity of this Act which has been described as the corner-stone of the Apartheid policy of the Nationalist government, let us note

the definitions of a `white person' and a `coloured person' respectively:

*a person who in appearance obviously is, or who is generally accepted as a white person, but does not include a person who, although in appearance obviously a white person, is generally accepted as a coloured person.*

*a person who is not a white person or a native.*

While two criteria are identified for the determination of `whiteness': obvious appearance and general acceptance (by `white' people, of course), `colouredness' is ascertained solely by the negative process of exclusion. As Suzman (1960: 367) has noted "the legislature is attempting to define the indefinable" since "the absence of uniformity of definition flows primarily from the absence of any uniform or scientific basis of racial classification". Essentially, these labels denote "categories of people each of which is defined by the fact that its members share a common relationship to other categories in the South African polity and to the material base of the society" (Sharp, 1980: 8).

While the infamous Population Registration Act (1950) was repealed in 1991, the categories it sought to entrench remain ingrained in every aspect of South African society. As Leonard Thompson (1985) has argued, the political mythology that legitimises the social order of South African society is founded upon the assumption that humanity is divided into fundamentally different `races' possessing inherently different physical and cultural qualities. For many South Africans it is self-evident that their society is comprised of different `race groups', each with its own culture and traditions; it is believed that these groups have an objective existence in the real world (Sharp, 1988b). Consequently, and despite the changes of the recent past, the economic and social status of every

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individual in South Africa continues to be governed by the legacy of his/her racial classification.

The past few decades have seen a small but growing body of writing which has challenged the historically bounded and politically constructed nature of such categories (Harries, 1988). Quite simply, "there is not a shred of scientifically respectable evidence to support" the view that there ever were, or currently exist, such things as `races' (Fried, 1975: 42). As La Fontaine has stated:

> ... *there is no gene which determines an individual's race. `Race' is a social category, not a scientific classification of Homo Sapiens, or an empirical reality.*
>
> *(1986: 2)*

However, `pure' racial assumptions, categorisations and arguments are rare; more frequently racist talk and action makes reference to religion, culture, tradition and/or language (Miles, 1989; Boonzaier & Sharp, 1988). Consequently, the demise of scientific racism has had little impact upon popular assumptions of racial difference (Boonzaier, 1988). Indeed, there has been a recent resurgence of interest in biological arguments of racial differences, exemplified in the widespread appeal of the pseudo-scientific writings of socio-biologists such as Desmond Morris and Robert Ardrey (Barker, 1981).

Historically, the preponderance of research in South Africa (and elsewhere) has served to perpetuate the existence of racial categorisation, and thereby afforded the notion of `race' unwarranted legitimacy. Sharp (1980) has noted how seldom social anthropologists in South Africa have questioned the validity of the `ethnic' or `racial' boundaries which inform their investigations. Indeed, most social scientists - psychologists being no exception -are trained as empiricists and therefore readily endorse the positivist assumption that reality is a directly-observable

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phenomenon. Yet, critical engagement with constructs such as `race' is essential if racist practice is to be challenged and transformed (Alexander, 1985a; 1985b).

Unfortunately, for social scientists who are critical, the issue of `race' cannot lead to a straightforward rejection of the concept because while `races' do not exist as biological or scientific entities, "the effects of the ideological process are very real" (Foster, 1991d: 363). Beliefs about the nature of `race', irrespective of their truth or falsehood, have considerable social, political and economic significance (Banton, 1977). As Hilda Bernstein (1978: 5) has observed, the opponents of apartheid are forced into "a semantic trap" in that by using the language of apartheid, one has accepted something of its basic premise (refer also chapter 1, section 1.4). Indeed, it is just not possible to write about South Africa, and particularly issues of `race', without employing the very concepts to which one is virulently opposed. Very often then research which implicitly, even explicitly, denies the existence of `races' continues to distinguish between people on the basis of `race' as a consequence of their differential experience.

This trend is exemplified in South African research on racial attitudes. The move away from "race psychology" toward the study of racial attitudes in the 1930s was instituted by liberals concerned about the pervasive nature of racism; yet, such research was, and remains, replete with the uncritical use of racial categorisation. In the following section we examine the contribution of the man who initiated the study of racial attitudes in South Africa, and who dominated the field for some four decades.

### 3.3  The Contribution of I. D. MacCrone

There is no doubt that the notion of `race' has been "an organising principle of South African society" (Louw & Foster, 1991: 67). Yet, the study of `race' attitudes has not been a particularly significant feature of the South

African research landscape. Indeed, in the earlier part of this century - before 1950 - the work of I. D. MacCrone represented something of a lone voice in this regard (Louw & Foster, 1991). Louw and Foster (1991) account for this relative neglect in terms of the limited number of psychologists in South Africa at that time and the fact that `race' attitudes were considered to be an issue only by people holding liberal views.

MacCrone, who held senior positions at the University of the Witwatersrand (Head of the Psychology Department, and later Principal and Vice-Chancellor) and within the Institute of Race Relations, devoted many years to the study of `race' attitudes. Using a range of methods and diverse samples (including small samples of `coloured', `Indian' and `black' people; 1938, 1947), MacCrone sought to describe patterns of racial attitudes as well as explain their origins. His well known `frontier hypothesis' postulated that the conditions of the 18th century eastern Cape frontier resulted in Afrikaans-speaking `whites' embracing a narrow group-based ethnocentrism. In MacCrone's terms the frontier represented "not merely a place or a population but a process" (1961: 21).

The `frontier hypothesis' laid the groundwork for the development of MacCrone's (1953) notion of the `puritanical-Calvinist personality'. Following a series of factor analytic studies, he proposed that a particular personality type could be identified which was linked to ethnocentrism and negative attitudes toward `black' people in particular. As Louw and Foster (1991) have noted, MacCrone's work strongly parallels that of Adorno et al's (1950) theory of the Authoritarian Personality. Moreover, "MacCrone was clearly working along these lines *before* the publication of The Authoritarian Personality, and the basis for this, including the use of psychoanalytic concepts, was quite apparent as early as his 1937 book" (Louw & Foster, 1991: 70; original emphasis). In fact, MacCrone's first paper investigating the psychological factors affecting

'white' racial attitudes drew a distinction between conscious and unconscious factors, and noted in respect of the latter:

> ... but since this disguised expression is a proof of their urgency, they are probably not less but more potent than those factors which are found to be operative in the upper, superficial or conscious levels of the mind.
>
> (1930: 596)

This extremely brief review in no way does justice to the fullness and significance of MacCrone's work; however, no study of 'race' in the South African context would be complete without reference to his pioneering contribution to the area. MacCrone provided much of the impetus (along with Pettigrew and Allport, refer section 3.4) for later psychological work on intergroup relations, and 'race' attitudes, and it is to this period in the history of South African studies of racism that we now turn.

## 3.4  Race Attitude Research

Research on the racial attitudes of children (refer Foster, 1986b for a comprehensive review) and adults has constituted a significant proportion of South African work in the area of intergroup relations.  A smaller and less systematic area of work has been concerned with the effects of racism upon 'black' identity and self-esteem (cf. Biko, 1978; Foster, 1992, 1994; Manganyi, 1973, 1977, 1981). While there is no doubt that all of this work is important in the context of obtaining an understanding of racism and its effects in South African society, this discussion will focus upon adult attitudes since they have the greatest bearing upon the concerns of this thesis.

To date, studies of racial attitudes in South Africa have tended to be oriented to examining the attitudes of 'white' people toward 'black' people, and have typically employed quantitative methods of data gathering analysis - various

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types of attitude scales have been used. These have included Thurstone-type scales such as MacCrone's (1937a) and Lever's (1977) `Attitudes towards the Native' scales, Likert scales such as Heavan and Moerdyk's (1977) adaptation of Ray's (1976) `anti-black' scale and Duckitt's (1990) `subtle racism scale', social distance scales such as MacCrone's (1937) social distance questionnaire and various adaptations thereof (cf. Pettigrew, 1960; van den Berghe, 1962; Lever, 1972; Heavan and Groenewald, 1977; Spangenberg and Nel, 1983), measures to assess stereotypes such as Mynhardt and Plug's (1983) prejudice scale, the scale discrimination technique such as Colman's (1971) `attitudes to Africans' scale, and the semantic differential such as Nieuwoudt and Plug's (1983) and Thiele's (1988) measures of ethnic attitudes. For a comprehensive review of the use of attitude measurement in South Africa, the reader is referred to an excellent article on the subject by Foster (1991e).

Research into racial attitudes over the past 60 years has yielded remarkably consistent results (Foster, 1991a, 1991c). Four major trends may be discerned. First, South African racial attitudes exhibit a racial `colour bar' on the part of `white' people. In other words, `white' people consistently prefer `white' groups to all other `black' groups, and this trend is greater for Afrikaans-speaking `white' people than it is for those who speak English (Foster, 1991c). Afrikaans speakers repeatedly manifest more prejudice towards outgroups than English speakers (Pettigrew, 1958; Orpen, 1970a, 1970b; Mynhardt, 1980; Nieuwoudt & Nel, 1975; Lever, 1975) and are significantly more authoritarian (Heaven & Stones, 1980).

Second, there is some evidence to suggest that English-speaking `white' people in particular have become slightly more liberal in their views since the 1980s (Hofmeyer, 1990). Third, contrary to the Human Sciences Research Council's (1985) report on intergroup relations in South Africa, `black' and `white' attitudes do not represent a

`mirror-image' of each other (Foster, 1991a, 1991c). `Black' people have been shown to be more tolerant than `white' with respect to all out-groups (Vergnani, 1985) and `black' people have consistently held relatively positive attitudes toward English-speaking `white' people (Foster & Nel, 1991). Fourth, recent research (IDASA, 1990) has revealed that `white' South African students still hold racist views suggesting that "racist attitudes are still prevalent in South Africa" (Foster, 1991c: 207).

These findings are important, particularly within the context of South Africa's socio-political history, but the research is not without problems. Four key areas of difficulty may be distinguished. First, it takes `race-groups' as unquestioned `givens', and in so doing serves to reproduce those groups (Foster, 1991a, 1991c). Second, this research is informed by traditional attitude theory which views the individual subject in isolation from issues of ideology, politics and power. Even those studies investigating racism as a function of conformity to social norms, locate that racism at the level of the unitary human subject and relegate society to `an independent variable'. This is consummately illustrated in Nieuwoudt and Plug's (1983: 166) longitudinal study of racial attitudes which spanned the Soweto uprising. They comment, with respect to what they term `The Soweto Effect': "The fact that time is the independent variable in this study merely means that we are interested in the effects of historical events on ethnic attitudes". One the most significant events in South Africa's history is thus transformed into a mere variable, the `effect' of which is ascertained by a single score on an attitude scale. In addition, it may be more accurate to describe the events of the Soweto uprising as a cause rather than an effect in Nieuwoudt's study.

The third problem associated with South African racial attitude studies is that they "have been long on description and rather short on explanation" (Foster, 1991c: 207). Most studies are extremely thin on theory;

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indeed, many omit to address the meaning of basic concepts. Notions such as `authoritarianism' and `social conformity', for example, are reified - treated as `givens' - or defined operationally in terms of the measurement instruments employed.

Some exception to this rule is to be found in the body of research informed by the psychoanalytically based theory of the Authoritarian Personality (Adorno et al., 1950). Many South African researchers turned to investigating the topic of racial attitudes generally and the role of authoritarianism in accounting for prejudice in particular, following the extended visits of well-known American social psychologists Gordon Allport and Thomas Pettigrew in the 1950s. The hypothesis that authoritarianism may have little significance in societies in which prejudice is normative received considerable attention (cf. Pettigrew, 1958, 1960; Colman & Lambley, 1970; Orpen, 1970a, 1970b) and in line with research elsewhere (eg. Bagley, Verma, Mallick & Yung, 1979; Yinger, 1983) was generally supported. For instance, South African `whites' were found to be no more authoritarian than samples from Australia, Scotland or England (Ray, 1980). However, John Duckitt, a leading contemporary figure in South African `race' attitude research has argued recently with regard to South African studies on authoritarianism, conformity and prejudice that "this evidence is far from conclusive and that this perspective has not yet been adequately tested" (1991: 180). In his critical review of this literature, Duckitt pinpoints a number of factors which seriously undermine the validity of the research; these include the reliance upon Pettigrew's scale of social conformity (although Duckitt does not explain why this is a problem, it may be that he is concerned about the lack of triangulation of methods in this area), problems with the F-scale and its alternatives (eg. not balanced against acquiesence, low internal consistencies and reliabilities; Altemeyer, 1981, Duckitt, 1991) a predominance of small

student samples, and most significantly the absence of comparative data.

Duckitt's criticisms are important and appropriate, particularly with respect to issues of sampling and the generalisability of results. A vast number of South African racial attitude studies have relied upon incidental samples of `white' English-speaking students, and have failed to be circumspect about the generalisability of their findings. The work of Christopher Orpen (1975: 108) is exemplary. Orpen conducted three studies using 88 English-speaking students at the University of Cape Town, 90 English-speaking students at the University of Cape Town, and 101 English-speaking high-school students from middle-class homes. In the paper which reported these studies of authoritarianism and normative prejudice, Orpen concluded: "taken together, these studies point to the *crucial* role of the cultural milieu in shaping the attitudes of white South Africans toward non-whites in their midst" (my emphasis). No comment was made about the limitations of the samples used, nor about the differences between English and Afrikaans speaking `white' people with respect to authoritarianism which Orpen (1970a, 1970b) had previously stressed.

Given Duckitt's status in South African research on racial attitudes it is worthwhile examining his contribution briefly before turning to the final problem associated with this body of research. Duckitt (1983, 1988, 1991, 1993) attempted to address the limitations of previous research in a major study of racial attitudes in South Africa. He examined racial prejudice in a nationally representative sample of `white' South Africans (Duckitt, 1988) using more recent measures of conformity (Marlowe Crowne approval motivation scale) and authoritarianism (Ray's balanced F-scale) which have been shown to demonstrate good validity and reliability. The results of this study indicated that social conformity was not significantly related to prejudice, while authoritarianism was. This finding was

supported by two further studies in which Duckitt employed Altemeyer's right-wing authoritarianism scale (regarded as superior to the F-scale measures) leading Duckitt (1991: 188) to conclude that "... authoritarianism is a powerful determinant of prejudice in South Africa".

Duckitt accounts for this apparent reversal in findings with respect to authoritarianism, conformity, and racial prejudice in terms of the soundness of the instruments used to measure these constructs. He argues that earlier studies involved the employment of unsound and invalidated measures; a problem he claims his research does not experience. Clearly, Duckitt's findings are important in terms of understanding racial prejudice. Further studies are needed to confirm or refute his significant findings.

A final `problem' associated with research into racial attitudes in South Africa (and elsewhere) is that it has been `infiltrated' by researchers with dubious backgrounds. The most infamous of these is J.J. Ray (1976) who developed an `anti-black scale' to measure attitudes towards aborigines in Australia which was adapted by Heavan and Moerdyk (1977) for use with South African samples. Ray's influence, albeit indirect, is interesting since he has longstanding links with the Nazi party (Billig, 1985a) - links which Ray (1985: 441) maintains were for "the purpose of unobtrusive data gathering" (Ray, 1985: 441). Another researcher `concerned' about racial attitudes and allegedly sympathetic to fascist views is A.J. Gregor (pers comm., Professor Don Foster) who conducted research on the development of racial attitudes in South African children (Gregor & McPherson, 1966). Perhaps this is evidence enough that as noted earlier (refer chapter 2, sections 2.3 and 2.4) politics and ideology constitute a fundamental part of social research.

This synopsis of the dominant characteristics, findings and problems of South African research serves merely to sketch something of the nature of that research to date. In the following section, our discussion broadens to consider two

relatively recent developments in theorising racism: 'subtle' racism and social cognition approaches to prejudice.

## 3.5 The Nature of Racism

It may be argued that while the layperson knows all too well what is meant by the terms 'race' and 'racism', the social scientist does not since "the range of literature, the number of competing theories, the plethora of definitions, the confusions and the agonizings are quite bewildering" (Foster, 1991a: 2). The aim of this section of the thesis is not to provide a comprehensive overview of this enormous literature, but to focus briefly upon those lines of thought which have the greatest relevance. Two theoretical accounts of racism which have been of considerable significance in the last decade or so are the theory of symbolic or modern racism, and social cognition accounts of stereotypes. It is to each of these that our discussion now turns.

### 3.5.1 Racism: changing with the times?

One of the more recent developments in racial theorising is that the nature of racism has changed: that the apparent decline in racism in the Western world actually represents a change in the *form* of racism. This 'trend' is mirrored in theorising across a number of Western countries as is evident in the work of Frank Reeves (1983), Martin Barker (1981) and Michael Billig (1987, 1991; Cochrane & Billig, 1984) in Britain, Teun van Dijk (1987) in the Netherlands, Wetherell and Potter (1992) in New Zealand, Sears, Kinder (Sears & Kinder, 1971) and McConahay (McConahay & Hough, 1976) in North America, and John Duckitt (1991, 1993) in South Africa.

Generally, it appears that crude expressions of racism are no longer countenanced. Racism has assumed a more disguised form, one which has been variously characterised as 'new', 'symbolic', 'modern' or 'subtle'. Racial discourse has been subject to the process of what Reeves

(1983) terms `sanitary coding'. It has become variable and shifting (Billig, 1991; Wetherell & Potter, 1992) and as such more deniable.

In South Africa, very little research has been conducted along these more recent lines. In fact, the work of John Duckitt (mentioned earlier) stands out as the only attempt, apart from a small study conducted by Lea and her colleagues (Lea, Bokhorst & Colenso, in press), to examine the thesis that racism has changed. Duckitt (1988, 1991, 1993), informed by developments in North America, sought to gauge the nature of racism in South Africa; his question: has racism in South Africa assumed a `subtle' form? The remainder of this section will focus upon this theoretical development in racial theorising since it constitutes an important and sustained body of work, and has been applied to the South African context.

In the 1970s and early 1980s a number of authors (eg. Kinder & Sears, 1981; McConahay & Hough, 1976; Sears & Kinder, 1971) argued, in response to findings using traditional measures of racism which indicated a decline in anti-black prejudice, that the nature of white racism had changed. These theorists contend that "old-fashioned racism, with its trinitarian creed of white supremacy, black inferiority, and racial segregation, has fallen out of fashion" (Sniderman & Tetlock, 1986: 130). `Old-fashioned' or `red-necked' racism has been replaced by a `new' racism, a racism that is `symbolic' or `modern' in form.

The impetus for these new theoretical developments originated in research carried out by Sears and Kinder (1971) concerning the reactions of suburban `whites' to the 1969 mayoralty campaign in Los Angeles. This study revealed a discrepancy between `white's' endorsement of racially egalitarian values and opposition to social policies associated with those values. `White' voters seemed to harbour abstract and moralistic resentments

towards `black' people, leading Sears and Kinder (1971) to formulate the concept of `symbolic racism'.

Later, following further research in the area, the two researchers refined their definition as follows:

> *a blend of antiblack affect and the kind of traditional American values embodied in the Protestant Ethic. Symbolic racism represents a form of resistance to change in the racial status quo based on moral feelings that blacks violate such traditional American values as individualism and self-reliance, the work ethic, obedience, and discipline.*

*(Kinder & Sears; 1981: 416)*

In the meantime "working somewhat independently" (Kinder, 1986), another team of researchers, McConahay and Hough (1976) also distinguished between `symbolic racism' and `old-fashioned' (so termed because it is "now out of style in sophisticated and opinion-making circles"; p. 24) or `red-necked' racism (so termed because it was/is "most fervently expressed by the uneducated and by lower class whites"; p. 24). They too provided a definition of the `new' racism:

> *the expression in terms of abstract ideological symbols and symbolic behaviours of the feeling that blacks are violating cherished values and making illegitimate demands for changes in the racial status quo*

*(1976: 38)*

In essence then, `symbolic racism' is assumed to be typical of affluent and suburban American whites, is thought to be rooted in early socialisation, and is purported to manifest in a set of behavioural acts (eg. opposition to busing, affirmative action) that are justified on a non-racial basis but that maintain the racial status quo. Thus, symbolic racism embraces `whites' rejection of the

principles of racial injustice simultaneous with their continued resistance to social policies designed to address such injustice.

Although empirical support for the theory has been forthcoming in a series of studies (eg. McConahay, Hardee & Batts, 1981; McConahay, 1982; 1986), the notion of symbolic racism has not escaped serious criticism. Indeed, it has been criticised on terminological, conceptual and empirical grounds. Sniderman and Tetlock (1986: 130), perhaps the theory's most thorough critics, have concluded that symbolic racism is "in practice, a flawed idea".

Some of the confusion surrounding the notion of `symbolic racism' stems from a tendency in the literature to regard all theorists in this area as operating from the same premises (Sniderman and Tetlock, 1986; and Kinder, 1986 are notable exceptions). While there is considerable overlap between the conceptions of Sears and Kinder and that of McConahay, sensitivity to the differences in perspective may clarify some of the apparent inconsistencies.

While both conceptions emphasise the abstract nature of symbolic racism, the insignificance of personal experience, the central role of early socialisation, and the twofold operation of the components of prejudice and traditional values (Kinder, 1986), they differ with respect to the symbolic racist's perspective upon racism in American society. McConahay's conception of the symbolic racist incorporates a belief that racial discrimination no longer prevails. Sears and Kinder (Kinder, 1986) are critical of this view arguing that such an approach "encourages a tendency to label people who are racist when they are not" and "a tendency to write off traditional racism as a spent force when it is not". This reactionary stance seeks to locate racism predominantly within the working class, and to protect the middle class from ugly name-calling. There certainly appear to be other areas of disagreement between the two `schools' of thought but these are beyond the scope of this review and the reader is referred to Sniderman &

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Tetlock's (1986) comprehensive critique for the intricacies of further differences.

Notwithstanding the differences between theorists in this area, the symbolic racism formulation is fraught with problems at almost every level. Indeed, the term itself has been a source of hindrance leading Donald Kinder, who originally coined it along with colleague Donald Sears, to express reservations. Some years ago he asserted that their selection of `symbolic racism' to connote the construct was "a move I have come to regret" (1986: 153) and "an unfortunate choice" (1986: 155). Somewhat earlier, McConahay and colleagues changed the term to `modern racism' "in order to emphasize the contemporary, post-civil rights movement nature of the beliefs and issues" (1981: 565). They note that while modern racism is symbolic, so too was old-fashioned racism. The critics too find the term unsatisfactory; Lawrence Bobo, in his appraisal of symbolic racism expresses a preference for the term `sophisticated prejudice' (1983: 1196).

Of course, such debate reflects underlying conceptual problems and not simply a predilection for `nice names'. Pettigrew (1985: 339) regards the term as "slippery" and the formulation as suffering "conceptual vagueness". One aspect of these problems relates to the conceptual relationship between the two components of prejudice and values. While symbolic racism theorists emphasise that this form of racism is "the *conjunction* of racial prejudice and traditional American values" (Kinder, 1986: 154; original emphasis), in particular, individualism and self-reliance, others (eg. Sniderman & Tetlock, 1986) have speculated as to whether traditional values simply serve to mask or camouflage racism, or are genuine.

Further ambiguity in this regard arises, as Kinder (1986) admits, from the term `symbolic racism' which fuels misunderstanding in that it gives undue emphasis to the racism component and neglects the value component. In short, it does not adequately reflect the hypothesised

nature of `symbolic racism' which is racial prejudice *and* traditional values. McConahay's (McConahay et al, 1981) preference for the term `modern racism' embodies the same problem in that it fails to address the fundamental dualism the term embraces (prejudice and values).

Another problem located at the conceptual level *surrounds* the fact that symbolic racism theorists argue that this form of racism does not stem from self-interest or realistic group conflict motives (Kinder & Sears, 1981). However, the manner in which they conceptualise these notions is extremely narrow in that it accounts only *for* objective and not subjective experience (Bobo, 1983; Pettigrew, 1985). In a re-analysis of the Michigan National Election Study data used by Sears and his colleagues, Bobo (1983), employing a definition of self-interest which included subjectively perceived threat, found that opposition to busing reflected *both* prejudice and group conflict motives.

Inevitably, conceptual vagueness translates into empirical *confusion* and a further host of problems are discernible regarding the operationalisation of the construct and the empirical evidence to support its existence. While Kinder (1986: 161) attests that research evidence reveals that "symbolic racism and traditional racial prejudice are *empirically* distinct, and have separate and independent political effects", others are less convinced. Criticism comes from various quarters: research evidence for the claim is weak (Weigel and Howes; 1985), operationalisation of symbolic racism is inconsistent and not clearly *distinguished from* traditional racism measures (Pettigrew, 1985), and how does one interpret intercorrelations between tests purportedly measuring two different things (Sniderman & Tetlock, 1986)?

Ultimately, it would appear that the "conceptual and empirical distinctions between symbolic racism and `old-fashioned' prejudice have been exaggerated" (Wiegel & Howes, 1985: 117). For example, Kleinpenning and Hagendoorn

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(1993) in a comprehensive analysis of different forms of racism, found that symbolic racist beliefs lay very close to those of biological racists. Moreover, "antiblack prejudice is still strong among American whites" (Crosby, Bromley and Saxe, 1980: 546). Indeed this is a position acceded to by Kinder (1986) who agrees that earlier he and Sears may have "claimed too much" in arguing that American whites had become racially egalitarian and that traditional racism was `dead' among affluent and suburban whites. Hence, he acknowledges that "old-fashioned racism remains alive and all too well" (Kinder, 1986: 161), although he continues to maintain that the political impact of traditional racism is negligible in comparison to subtle racism.

Finally, an issue which does not appear to have been addressed in the literature pertaining to symbolic or modern racism is that of the theory's class and urban bias. The notion of symbolic racism is confined to the attitudes of `white' people who are both *middle-class* and *suburban* (refer to the definitions cited above), *yet*, academic debate concerning this topic very often operates without acknowledging the hypothesised specificity of the construct. In other words, symbolic racism is referred to *as if* it were applicable to the entire population; general statements abound in the literature such as "the nature of white racism has changed during the last decade" (Weigel & Howes, 1985: 117). Thus `white' becomes synonymous with a particular sector of the population: suburban and middle-class. This practice is problematic in itself; however, it also draws attention away from the fact that amongst other sectors of the population, racism remains prevalent and arguably more rampant.

In summary, the theory of symbolic racism is important in that it attempts to account for perceived changes in attitude amongst certain sectors of the `white' population. However, it is fraught with problems, as detailed above. In South Africa, the concept has not been widely adopted,

save for the work of John Duckitt (1991, 1993) who has developed a `Subtle Racism Scale' for use with local samples in order to address the fact that the use of traditional measures in South Africa "has become increasingly problematic with the social changes of the past decade, and specifically the collapsing legitimacy of Apartheid" (1993: 116). While the Subtle Racism Scale has been reported to have good construct validity (Duckitt, 1991), a recent study by Lea and her colleagues (Lea, Bokhorst & Colenso, in press) has raised doubts about the empirical relationship between the constructs of traditional and symbolic racism. No significant difference was found between the mean scores obtained on measures of symbolic and traditional racism completed by 150 South African school-children. The findings of this small study suggest that racism involves hitherto unaccounted for components in addition to traditional and subtle expressions of racial prejudice.

Perhaps the greatest problem with this work is that it remains located within a positivist-empiricist epistemology. Studies of this nature have been criticised severely since the `turn to language' outlined earlier (refer chapter 2, section 2.2) and many authors have argued convincingly that racism is not best conceptualised as `an attitude' (refer chapter 2, section 2.6). Similarly, discursive and rhetorical theorists have levelled criticism at social cognition accounts of prejudice.

### 3.5.2   Social cognition approaches to prejudice: a critique

Social psychology has been informed by various theoretical approaches during the course of its history, but as noted earlier the past two decades have witnessed "a tidal wave" with respect to what may be termed the social cognition framework (Eiser, 1986; Howitt et al, 1989; Leyens et al., 1994: 75). Social cognition approaches focus upon the way in which people think about themselves and others; although different tendencies (Fiske & Taylor versus Hamiltion)

within the approach tend to emphasise different aspects of person perception in this process (Leyens et al., 1994).

In crude outline, social cognition approaches view the social world as "extremely rich in variety and diversity" (Hamilton & Trolier, 1986: 128). Consequently, the sensory faculties of the human subject are seen to be bombarded by an excess of stimuli. In order to make sense of, and cope with, this bewildering array of stimuli, the processes of human perception and cognition need to simplify, order and organise the stimulus world. This is achieved through the process of categorisation (Fiske & Taylor, 1991). Various studies have confirmed peoples' tendency to group together that which is similar and to differentiate between that which is not. Moreover, this process applies equally to elements of the material and social world; that is, to categorising things such as line lengths (eg. Tajfel & Wilkes, 1963, 1964; Tajfel, 1981), or other people (Wilder, 1978). Hence, as Potter and Wetherell (1987: 116) point out, categorisation "is seen as a natural phenomenon, rather like breathing", or in the words of Leyens and his colleagues (1994: 77):

*A human being without prejudgement would be nothing more than biological magma.*

Categorisation, then, functions to minimise the differences between stimuli in order to simplify the complexity of the stimulus world. In so doing, however, it necessarily distorts that stimulus world (Hamilton & Trolier, 1986): while categorisation is vital to competent functioning, it has the drawback of misrepresenting `reality' and thereby introducing biases and misperceptions.

One of the central areas of investigation in social cognition research is the conditions under which categories and prototypes remain unaltered, and those under which that information is changed in the light of new information. It is for this reason that the study of stereotypes and

stereotyping are "ideal objects" of study for social cognition researchers (Leyens et al., 1994: 77).

Building upon the assumptions that categorisation constitutes a primary element of human thinking and that it involves both a simplification and distortion of the stimulus world, social cognition theorists view stereotyping as "the outgrowth of normal cognitive processes" (Taylor, 1981: 83). Indeed, Hamilton and Trolier (1986) have commented that efforts to explore the extent to which cognitive factors *alone* produce prejudiced outcomes "has progressed with impressive success". Stereotyping and racial prejudice are seen as the `normal' and inevitable consequences of the nature of human thought (Billig, 1985b). Moreover, stereotypes are seen as something positive – they facilitate and smooth social interaction – rather than as something evil and negative (Fiske, 1994). The crux of a social cognition approach to prejudice is again succinctly captured by Leyens (Leyens et al., 1994: 18):

> *There is no pathology in stereotyping, but the content of stereotypes may be pathogenic.*

Despite the popularity of the categorisation approach in respect of understanding the nature of prejudice, it has received powerful criticism from discursive and rhetorical psychologists alike. Three aspects of that critique will be focused upon in turn. First, Michael Billig (1985b, 1987) has seriously questioned the premises which inform the categorisation approach. Second, Wetherell and Potter (1992) raise important points in relation to issues of `representation and reality' in social cognition research. And third, this approach has failed to produce a truly *social* account of prejudice.

Billig's (1985b; 1987) attack on categorisation theory pivots around its `bureaucratic model of human thought'. This model, argues Billig, produces an image of the thinker as a filing clerk dully following the rules associated with

the dreary routines of the job. Billig argues that a rule-following model of thought is not incorrect, but that it is incomplete:

> *Human thinking may express prejudice, but tolerance is not an impossibility; we can shut unpleasant truths from our mind, but we can also face up to them; we may behave like timid rule-following bureaucrats, but rule-creation, rule-breaking, and rule-bending can also occur; we may process information, but that is not all we do.*
>
> *(Billig, 1987: 130)*

From a rhetorical perspective, categorisation is not a biological necessity; rather, in line with Protagoras's ideas about the *two-sidedness of human thinking*, the process of categorisation *and* its opposing process, particularisation, are central to understanding human thought (Billig, 1985b; 1987). Peoples' talk is oriented to the context within which it is generated and this may lead them to speak in terms of categories, *or* to make a special case. For example, Cochrane and Billig (1984) found a `genteel fascism' among 15 and 16 year old children of predominantly working class neighbourhoods from West Midland schools. This was exemplified by discourse which, while endorsing racist practice (the expulsion of `non-whites' from Britain), acknowledged that prejudice is wrong.

Rhetorical psychology has challenged the one-sided view of thought propounded by social cognition theorists, and its implications for prejudice. Prejudice is no longer regarded as the mere categorisation of people who are perceived to be similar to each other, yet different to the perceiver. Instead, prejudice is viewed as dilemmatic or dialectic, and recently there has been an outpouring of studies to confirm this (cf. Billig, 1988b, 1991; Condor, 1988; Dixon et al, 1994; Essed, 1988; van Dijk, 1987; Wetherell & Potter, 1986, 1992).

The second angle of attack upon social cognition approaches to prejudice comes from Wetherell and Potter (1992) and concerns the manner in which reality is represented. These authors highlight an inherent contradiction within social cognition theory. On the one hand the process of categorisation is said to structure human perception and cognition, and therefore could be seen to be *constructing* thought. On the other hand, the characteristics which influence category selection are viewed as `real'; as Hamilton and Trolier (1986: 129; original emphasis) note, categorisation is assumed to "reflect ... *actual* similarities and differences" between people. While veridical representation is possible, it is not always achieved: the limitations of human cognition require that the individual fail in the face of the complexity of the stimulus world.

The principal issue Wetherell and Potter (1992) raise is that social cognition approaches are unclear as to where the line should be drawn between a cognitive act which represents an accurate reflection of reality and that which represents a mistake. From a discursive perspective (and a rhetorical one) people use language to construct different versions of the world. Thus, people are not seen as passive victims of their cognitive structures, mechanically categorising the world into manageable pieces as they go about their lives (Potter & Wetherell, 1987). Instead, as Edwards (1991: 515) puts it :"categories are for talking". Categories, and their particulars, are drawn upon flexibly in the construction of talk and in relation to its function.

The third line of criticism that may be levelled at social cognition approaches to prejudice concerns their inability to offer a truly *social* theory of human thought, for while the content of stereotypes may be widely shared, the process of stereotyping is, by definition, an individual one. In Billig's terms (1985b, 1987), it is the lone bureaucrat who is sifting through the disorderly

information with which s/he is provided, filing that which is relevant and discarding that which is not. Unfortunately, the social categorisation approach remains locked within individual-social dualism. Even when applied to groups rather than individuals (cf. Tajfel, 1978), it "succeeds in evacuating the social content entirely from ... (an) explanation of the perception of intergroup differences" (Henriques, 1984: 75). Or, as Billig et al (1988: 2) observe:

> *Cognitive psychologists have been notably remiss in examining how the processes of cultural and ideological history flow through the minds of their laboratory subjects.*

It would seem that social cognition theory has failed in its promise to revolutionise psychology's understanding of prejudice. As argued earlier (refer chapter 2), it is the pathway of discursive psychology that appears to point the way forward.

### 3.6 Summary

In an attempt to overcome individual-social dualism, a small group of predominantly European based social psychologists (e.g Billig, 1985b, 1987, 1991; Henriques et al., 1984; Parker, 1989, 1992; Potter & Wetherell, 1987) has been exploring alternative conceptions of the human subject. In the past five years there has been a steady rise in discursive studies which appear to offer "a genuinely `new psychology' compared with what has gone before" (Harre & Gillett, 1994: vii). One of the topics to which a discursive approach has been applied is that of racism.

A discursive approach to racism provides an entirely different conceptualisation to traditional psychological theory. To recap, such an approach views racism as a "series of ideological effects, with a flexible, fluid and varying content" (Wetherell & Potter, 1992: 59). Racism is not to be found inside the heads of human subjects, but is

sought in language, for language is the principal medium of the ways in which meaning serves to sustain particular relations of power.

`Races' as biological entities do not exist, they are "ideological practices all the more effective because they appear as natural and inevitable results of biology or experience" (Wetherell, 1986: 77). They achieve the status of social reality through ideological processes such as `racialisation' (Miles, 1989). However, while ideology is historical and produces human subjectivity, human beings also *re*-produce ideology in their everyday lives (Foster, 1991d). Finally, ideologies such as racism are closely related to material practices of domination (although theorists differ with respect to how this relationship is articulated).

To date, discursive studies of racism represent but a fraction of the research in this area. A handful of studies have been conducted in Britain (e.g. Billig et al., 1988; Billig, 1991; Cochrane & Billig, 1984; Pickering, 1994), the Netherlands (e.g. van Dijk, 1987; 1988; 1992) and New Zealand (e.g. Potter & Wetherell, 1988; Wetherell & Potter, 1986; 1992). In South Africa, when I began this research, there was but one published paper (Kottler, 1990) in the area: it attempted to address discourses of racism in anthropological texts, but was devoid of theory and the analysis was not particularly scintillating either. Given the unique nature of racism in South Africa, it seemed astonishing that psychologists were reluctant to seriously pursue this avenue of research. A discursive approach to racism appeared to offer exciting possibilities - for `mapping the language of racism' in that country, and for informing anti-racist training. At last, we turn to the study itself.

# CHAPTER FOUR

# THE METHOD

## 4.1 Introduction

The previous chapter examined research on racism. It was argued that much of that research is limited by the positivist and empiricist base upon which it is founded. This study, like that of Wetherell and Potter (1992: 98), sought not to yield "yet another psychologically reductive study of racism", but rather to produce a psychological account of racism which located that phenomenon firmly within the ideological context within which it is expressed, and practised.

This chapter aims to chart the development and execution of the study; in so doing the questions which drove this study will be illuminated. The first section describes the forces which propelled me to examine the topic of `race' and racism, and the preparatory groundwork which I undertook before beginning the study itself.

## 4.2 Preparing the Ground

### 4.2.1 The Politics of Psychology

I was born in South Africa, two years after the Sharpville Massacre, in a `whites' only maternity hospital in Cape Town. The Population Registration Act required that on my birth certificate I be defined in terms of `race'. So I entered a `world' thoroughly permeated by racism, characterised by racial injustice and inequality. However,

the Prohibition of Mixed Marriages Act, the Immorality Act, the Separate Amenities Act, and the Group Areas Act kept me blissfully `ignorant' of the horrors of apartheid for most of my childhood - except for the time I could not get to my gymnastics class in central Cape Town because "the `blacks' were rioting".  It was 1976.

Upon leaving school I went to University to read sociology and psychology.  There I discovered a different `reality' to the one I had known before.  First year Sociology was absorbing, riveting: our lecturers included Neville Alexander, and Frederik van Zyl Slabbert - both astute intellects and politically involved.  The course was structured around key sociological constructs: `race', `ethnicity', `nation', `tribe', `culture' ... Each one was systematically examined and unmasked.  Berger and Luckman's (1979) text `The social construction of reality' became my inspiration; it provided an explanation for the fluidity of reality I experienced, something I previously had been unable to account for.

Psychology, in contrast, predominantly lacked a critical edge. Hence my delight when I happened upon the work of French philosopher and psychologist, Lucien Seve (1975; 1978).  Here was a psychology which seemed not to suffer from the social-individual dualism which pervaded the discipline of my choice.  Despite occasional highlights such as these, I completed my undergraduate training undecided whether to pursue postgraduate work in sociology or psychology.  Social psychology on the face of it seemed to offer a solution, but I knew it did not (refer chapter 2, section 2.2 and chapter 3, section 3.5 for a critique of traditional social psychology).  In the end, I plumbed for `clinical' psychology Honours - the result, an academically challenging year but one in which I became thoroughly disillusioned with the elitist nature of the discipline. Finding the idea of setting up in private practice and seeing an endless stream of comfortable middle-class `white' people too much to bear, I withdrew my name from

the short-list of candidates for the highly sought after 6 places on the Clinical Masters Programme. Instead I joined `the struggle' and signed up to do a Masters degree in Community Psychology.

The ensuing eight years represented the groundwork for my Phd, and lead to my decision to register at Loughborough University in 1992. It was during this time that my ideas crystallised and my objectives as a psychologist became clear. I wanted to be involved in an `alternative' psychology - a psychology which pertained to *all* people, but particularly to those who were oppressed or silenced. Moreover, the way forward was not that of food-parcels and platitudes, but through challenging the very structures which served to reproduce unequal relations of power.

Many of our days at university in the 1980s, were characterised by mass meetings, peaceful marches, and violent confrontations with the police. Psychology *became* clandestine meetings, letters to the newspapers, press conferences, rubber bullets, teargas, purple rain (dye used by police to mark `political agitators') and the occasional sjambok weal if you were `white' - far, far worse if you were `black' (cf. Foster et al, 1987). And pervading all this was the issue of `race'. It dominated our lives every second of the day; sometimes implicitly, sometimes explicitly. All of us, irrespective of the category to which we had been assigned, seemed to be grappling with similar issues.

Like Wendy Hollway (1989: 9; original emphasis), I cannot say "at what point ... I started doing *research*". I too read widely over this period, had endless discussions with friends, colleagues and comrades, and kept a diary. The diary was filled with ideas and thoughts and questions. In about 1990, struggling to accommodate what I had observed and experienced with mainstream theory, I turned to the theory of social representations. At first, it seemed to hold an enormous amount of promise. However, apart from the ambiguous and inconsistent nature of much of

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Moscovici's writing (Bhavnani, 1988), and the diverse nature of the research conducted in the name of social representations, the group bounded nature of the theory (Potter & Litton, 1985) seemed too limiting.

Moscovici's theory of social representations could not account for the degree of variability I encountered between and within peoples' talk. Were they racist? Sometimes the answer was clearly yes, and sometimes it was clearly no. Was *I* racist? Sometimes the answer was clearly yes, and sometimes it was clearly no. I felt frustrated by psychology's inability to account for the nature of the problem which confronted me until I discovered a theoretical framework which fitted with my experience. A discursive framework, and more specifically a rhetorical framework, enabled me to understand the racism I encountered: it constituted an `ideological dilemma' (Billig et al, 1988). I knew then that I wanted to explore peoples' talk about the category of `race' and the issue of racism. It was time to begin the pilot work.

These brief historical traces may seem of little consequence to those unfamiliar with alternative psychological perspectives. However, it is widely acknowledged that research is not neutral and value-free (Fairclough, 1989; Parker, 1992). Indeed, from the perspective of Personal Construct Theory "personal experience is a rich and relevant source from which to derive, and in terms of which to argue, psychological issues" (Bannister, 1981: 195). Researchers *do* bring to their work their personal experiences and political values. This affects their choice of topic and the manner in which they perceive it (Wilkinson, 1988; Fairclough, 1989). Hence, it is important to `declare ones interest' both in terms of producing a self-reflexive analysis, and providing the reader with an understanding of what informed the work. Importantly, this process of self-declaration is not seen as undermining the merits of the research, as Norman Fairclough (1989: 5) has stated:

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*The scientific investigation of social matters is*
*perfectly compatible with committed and `opinionated'*
*investigators (there are no others!), and being*
*committed does not excuse you from arguing rationally*
*or producing evidence for your statements.*

Some authors prefer, in the spirit of declaring their
position, to categorise themselves - as `marxist' and
`feminist' (eg. Gill, 1991), for example, or `socialist'
(eg. Fairclough, 1989). I have reservations about this
method of asserting lines of allegiance because I think
there is a danger of a certain glibness on the one hand,
and a lack of clarity on the other. Many such terms are
not so easily defined, and dispensed with. Of course all I
have done, instead of choosing to construct myself  in
terms of specific categories, is to construct a brief
narrative detailing the events which led to this Phd.
Although the narrative may well lead to my being
categorised, I hope that by providing `a potted history',
the reader is better able to judge the influence that this
has had upon my work.

### 4.2.2    The study begins to take shape

It was toward the end of 1990 that my ideas crystallised
into wanting to explore peoples' talk about the category of
`race' and the issue of racism. At that time there were
three constituencies within which talk about `race' and
racism arose from time to time. Each of these
constituencies had an interest in the `Academic Support
Programme' run at the University to accommodate the needs
of students from disadvantaged educational backgrounds;
that is, students who were not `white'.

The first constituency was the students themselves. I held
a post straddling the departments of Academic Support and
Psychology then, being responsible for all aspects of
academic support in the Department of Psychology.
Frequently, the sort of problems students encountered were
rooted in `race'. We had numerous discussions. The second

constituency was the staff of the Psychology Department, a politically diverse group for "in seriously divided societies, social science is itself seriously divided" (Jubber, 1986: 113). Occasionally, affirmative action issues would arise resulting in sometimes heated debate. The third constituency comprised the first year psychology tutors: 27 young South Africans, predominantly `white'. As first year co-ordinator I had a good deal to do with the tutors; I trained them, met them fortnightly to discuss tutorial content and saw them individually whenever they had difficulties. Many of these difficulties were constructed as having to do with `black' students (then approximately 20% of the first year psychology student population): their isolation, non-participation, poor language skills and the complexity of assessing some of their work.

The tutors were a bright, articulate group. I knew them well since I had been responsible for their appointments, and, as mentioned, saw them often. Like them, I was a young `white' middle-class South African. Broadly speaking, we shared a liberal to left-wing view. In short, we had much in common. They trusted me and knew me to be a person of some integrity and sincerity. On the whole, it would probably be fair to say that we liked each other and our meetings, both formal and informal, were usually relaxed and friendly.

The point of mentioning these three constituencies is that they provided me with the ideas that I wanted to explore further. It was here that issues of `race' and racism were openly discussed at certain times; sometimes in a restrained and polite manner, but more often in the context of debate and disagreement. This was not something which occurred within the context of my political work; that is, as an active member of a number of organisations within the National Liberation Movement, and as a member of the executive committee of two. To have raised ideas of `race' or what constituted racism within that context would have

been politically insensitive and somewhat perilous, for obvious reasons.

At first I toyed with the idea of using snippets of discourse about `race' and racism as they naturally arose. However, after a couple of weeks of systematically attempting to gather spontaneously occurring accounts, I realised it was wholly impractical. Instances of `race' talk were entirely unpredictable, occurred infrequently, and very seldom constituted more than a `moment'. Even if discourse on `race' had been of a more frequent or sustained nature, recording instances of talk would have proved difficult. I would have had to tape whole meetings or tutorial groups hoping for perhaps five minutes of relevant material. This was not the way forward.

It seemed that if I wanted to access peoples' talk about `race' and racism, I was going to have to elicit it. Group discussion, while interesting, would not have provided the depth of discussion I was after. In the South African context in particular, people are extremely cautious about what they say and to whom on matters of `race'. I needed to speak to people one-to-one, but they needed to be people who would trust me and be prepared to talk, debate and discuss as openly as possible. Once more my experience paralleled that of Hollway (1989: 16): "I knew which people were capable of exploring themselves in the kind of way that would tell me something, and I also knew how to relate to them in order to facilitate this." It was the tutors.

I drew up a list of open-ended questions which I thought provided the framework for a thorough and wide-ranging discussion on `race' and racism. This I discussed with a number of my academic colleagues who were also active in the struggle against apartheid. On the strength of their suggestions, I added in a `section' on identity and effected a few minor changes. This schedule of questions formed the basis of, what would be called in the orthodox literature, my `unstructured interview' (cf. Breakwell, 1990).

Two interviews were conducted to pilot the interview
schedule; primarily, to ascertain whether it would elicit
the kind of material I was after, and to obtain feedback
from the interviewees as to their experience of the
interview itself. Both of the pilot interviewees had been
employed previously as Psychology I tutors but had left the
university at the time of the interviews. Each interview
was held at a time and place convenient for the
interviewee, and lasted approximately three hours.

In the feedback sessions after the interview, the
interviewees expressed the opinion that our discussion had
been extensive and deep. My schedule of questions seemed
to constitute a useful framework for stimulating and
sustaining discussion. I found I barely had to glance at
the schedule, as most of the `topics' I wanted to cover
arose spontaneously. However, the schedule of questions
did provide me with a useful mental check-list which
ensured that I covered all of the aspects of `race' and
racism that I wanted to address.

Listening to the tape-recordings of the two interviews
confirmed my sense that their informal and unstructured
format had more than achieved its objective: the material
was dense, rich and varied. Moreover, in response to my
final question of the interview: "Is there anything we
haven't covered that you feel is important in respect of
issues of `race' and racism?", the two interviewees had
commented as follows:

> I think we have exhausted _everything_, (laughter)
> utterly and totally (Pilot interviewee 1)

> Are you joking! (laughter) I didn't realise there
> were so many issues! (Pilot interviewee 2).

Both participants were also extremely positive about their
experience of the interview. They were asked to comment on
aspects such as the structure and flow of the interview,
interviewer style, and level of rapport. The only
suggestion for improvement came from the first interviewee
and this was that, given the length of the interview, the

option of a break to obtain some coffee would be a good
idea. I included this in the second pilot interview with
positive results. The break was useful and facilitated the
congenial atmosphere I wished foster.

Finally, and to my surprise, both pilot interviewees
expressed their `gratitude' for being asked to participate.
They declared that South Africans need a `safe' space to
explore issues of `race' and racism, but do not have one.
This idea was to be echoed in the responses of the study's
participants (and led to my running a series of workshops
to address the issue), to whom we now turn.

## 4.3   The Participants

For discourse analysts, the issue of sample size is not
necessarily `the bigger, the better' as it is within
traditional social science. Due to the labour-intensive
nature of analysing discourse, and to the shift in analytic
focus from individual to discourse, the researcher is no
longer bound by the need to produce enormous samples.
Instead, the researcher should be guided by his/her
research question (Potter & Wetherell, 1987). For the
purposes of this study, the group of tutors with whom I was
working seemed an ideal `sample' for the reasons outlined
above (refer section 4.2.2). By discourse standards the
number of people interviewed in this study and the amount
of material analysed could be judged to be large. However,
I felt that there was no rationale for selecting certain
tutors and not others, and that a larger sample would
create the opportunity to test the degree to which
discourses or interpretative repertoires are expressed
within a fairly homogenous group.

All 27 tutors were interviewed; of these 25 defined
themselves as `white', one defined himself as `Indian' and
another defined herself as `black'. For the purposes of
this study these two interviewees were not included in the
analysis. This was not a decision which was taken lightly
as it goes against my principle of seeking not to

perpetuate notions of `racial' difference in psychological research. However, after analysing the discourse of these two participants along with the remainder of the group it became clear that, for obvious reasons (namely, decades of racial oppression and discrimination), there are differences between the discourse of the oppressed and the discourse of the oppressor. Furthermore, the inclusion of these interviews would have proved unwieldy as they introduced a whole gamut of other issues. Consequently, I conducted further interviews with young South Africans defined as `not white' and hope to produce the results of this separate study elsewhere in due course.

The participants of this study, then, comprised ten men and fifteen women: a total sample of twenty-five. They ranged in age from 19 years 3 months to 26 years 10 months and were all students at one of the `liberal', English-speaking universities in South Africa. Approximately half were post-graduate students (5 registered for Masters and 8 for Honours degrees) and half were undergraduates (all in their final year of registration). The majority (84%) of participants was registered for Arts or Social Science degrees, while a minority (16%) was registered for Law, Science, or Business Science degrees. All undergraduate participants were reading Psychology as a major course and all postgraduates were registered for degrees in Psychology.

All participants described themselves as coming from middle to upper-middle class backgrounds. Most of the participants' families would be described as professional, with at least the father having received some form of post-school qualification and occupying a blue-collar position. In 55% of cases mothers had received post-school qualifications and were employed. Only 20% of mothers were housewives.

## 4.4   The Interviews

The research interview plays a crucial role in any study reliant upon this method for producing its analytic material. This section of `The Method Chapter' considers the interview in detail, from issues relating to the status of the interview within a discourse analytic perspective to the transcription and presentation of interview material.

### 4.4.1   The status of the interview within discourse analytic research

Until very recently the research interview has been understood within a positivist framework; that is, it has been seen as a methodological tool for gathering scientific information in the form of verbal reports which are used to infer things about human cognitive processes (cf. Bainbridge, 1985). The value of simply asking people about the things you wish to know has long been recognised. Gordon Allport first noted the merits of this approach in 1942 (Brown & Canter, 1985). Over the years, interest in gathering peoples' accounts has been sustained by researchers such as George Kelly (1958; personal construct theory and repertory grid) and Rom Harre (Harre & Secord, 1972; open-souls doctrine). More recently, there has been increased recognition of the status of `ordinary explanations' as respectable and unique data (Antaki, 1988; Brown & Canter, 1985).

However, despite the fact that interviewing is generally accepted as a valid method of research, it is also regarded as having serious limitations because, in itself, it comprises "a social process of considerable complexity" (Brenner, Brown & Canter, 1985: 1). Some of these limitations include the time-consuming nature of conducting interviews that will yield valid and reliable data, the potential for bias arising from the intensive nature of the encounter, the possibility that respondents may refuse to answer sensitive questions, and a host of difficulties

associated with making sense of the interview material once it is to hand (Brenner et al., 1985).

There is no doubt that these problems *do* apply to interviews as seen within the parameters of orthodox psychological research. However, the status of the interview within discourse analytic research is very different to that within traditional research (Potter and Wetherell, 1987; Wetherell & Potter, 1992). As Potter and Mulkay (1985: 248) argue:

> *Instead of attempting to produce definitive versions of participants' actions and beliefs, ... interview data should be used to reveal the interpretative practices through which participants come to construct versions of their social world.*

Interviews are no longer seen as the means to access a `reality' of attitudes and opinions; rather, they are viewed as providing instances of discourse which become `topics in their own right' (Gilbert & Mulkay, 1984). Hence, there is no need to adhere to the systematic and formal approach usually adopted within interviews in order to maximise response consistency. Variability is no longer treated as a "mere technical difficulty" (Potter & Mulkay, 1985: 252), but as an inevitable and important feature of discourse (Potter & Wetherell, 1987; refer chapter 2, sections 2.2 and 2.3 for detail).

Informed by this theoretical re-orientation to `the interview', a discursive approach assumes a different method of interviewing to that traditionally used. No longer restricted by the formal procedures necessary to confine discursive variability, discourse analysts use interviews in an `interventionist' and `confrontative' manner (Potter & Mulkay, 1985; Potter & Wetherell, 1987). Thus, the same issue may be approached a number of times in an interview (for instance, within the context of different topics) in order to establish the links "between the

interviewee's accounting practices and variations in functional context" (Potter & Wetherell, 1987: 64).

Although discourse analytic studies may make use of a variety of sources for obtaining analytic material (such as archival material, newspaper articles, audio-tapes of radio programmes, video-tapes of television programmes, and transcriptions of specific social interactions such as police interviews with suspects or social work interviews with clients) the advantage of conducting interviews is that the researcher may *actively intervene* and *explore* prevailing ideological common-sense (Potter & Wetherell, 1987).

It is no doubt for this reason, that interviewing has been used in a number of key discourse analytic studies: Gilbert and Mulkay's (1984) research on scientists' interview talk, Wetherell and Potter's (1992) research on racism, and Ullah's (1990) research on social identity, for example. The next section details how the interview was used within this study.

### 4.4.2   Conducting the interviews

The study was introduced to the tutors at one of the regular fortnightly meetings I held with them. I explained that I was doing my Phd on issues of `race' and racism and that I wanted to explore these issues with people who knew me well enough to feel comfortable to do so. I also said that although, or perhaps because, `race' was such a salient issue in South Africa, it was something that we seemed to think about a great deal, but often not with much clarity. I informed them that it was these sorts of issues which would form the basis of the interview.

I explained why I wanted to use the tutors (as outlined above, refer section 4.2.2) but stressed that they were under no obligation to participate if they did not wish to do so. I reassured them that it would have no impact upon my relationship with them and the work (as employee or student) they did in the Department of Psychology. I

suggested that if they did not wish to participate they left me a note to this effect; if I did not receive a note, I would approach tutors individually with a view to setting up a mutually convenient time for the interview. Questions were invited about any aspect of the study at this point. No one declined to participate in the study. Interviews were conducted throughout the course of the academic years 1991 and 1992 but were specifically scheduled during periods of low pressure with respect to the tutors' own work and that of their students.

All interviews were conducted in my office. I had been concerned about the possibility that this context may invoke too much of the lecturer - student/tutor dynamic. For this reason I discussed the setting of the interview with the tutors at the meeting in which the research was introduced. Tutors unanimously expressed their willingness to be interviewed in my office and claimed that my fears were unfounded ("we've never seen you in that role anyway, why should we now?"; Lucy). Despite these assurances, the issue of my status in relation to that of the interviewees must be addressed in terms of a reflexive analysis (refer section 4.6). The interviewer-interviewee relationship is characterised by unequal relations of power (Bhavnani, 1991), and this was reinforced here by lecturer-student/tutor relations.

For the purpose of the interview both interviewee and interviewer sat in comfortable chairs away from the researcher's usual work-space. To avoid unnecessary disturbances, the office telephone was transferred to another line and a large `do not disturb' notice was posted on the office door. The interviews lasted between two and four-and-a-half hours, and were audiotaped. A letter of appreciation was sent to each participant.

### 4.4.3  The interview outlined

The purpose of the interview was to elicit accounts of `race' and racism from young, `white', middle-class,

English-speaking South Africans. To this end, a detailed schedule was developed (refer appendix 1 and 2) which set out the questions to be asked and which specified probes and potential follow-up questions.

The structure of the interview was tripartite, comprising an introduction, a `body', and a conclusion. The opening moments of the interview were taken up with my explaining to the interviewee that I was interested in peoples' accounts of `race' and racism. I placed considerable emphasis on the fact that it seemed to me that as `white' South Africans in the context of imminent political transformation, we frequently seemed to be engaged in personal struggles with our selves about these issues. This was something that I `knew' from my close contact with the tutors as a group, and it provided a spring-board for legitimating discussion about issues of `race'.

Interviewees were invited at this juncture to ask questions, of clarification or information. Unlike interviews with strangers where this procedure is something of a rite of passage and rarely elicits any response, the interviewees in this study frequently did avail themselves of the opportunity to ask questions. These were sometimes of a personal nature (eg. why did I choose this topic for my Phd?), and sometimes related to issues which I hoped to cover in the interview (eg. how was I defining racism?). The former I answered candidly, while the latter were used to reassure the interviewee that questions of such a nature were precisely the reason for this research and constituted exactly the kinds of things I had hoped we could think through and discuss in the interview itself.

When all questions had been addressed, I asked the interviewee's permission to tape the interview (none refused) and informed them that our discussion would be entirely confidential. I assured them that their responses would remain anonymous in terms of the written Phd or any publication which might arise from the study. Finally, I asked the interviewee not to discuss any aspect of our

interview with any other tutor until all the interviews were complete.

The last part of the `introduction' to the interview involved my asking the interviewee a number of biographical questions (refer appendix 1). I sometimes felt that they disrupted the flow of the interview and in retrospect I think it may have been more satisfactory to have asked interviewees to fill in a short biographical questionnaire at the end of the interview.

The interview itself covered five areas or themes (refer appendix 2). These were: the notion of `race', `race' in the South African context, racism, self-identity, and political affiliation and opinions. Each area comprised a number of questions or topics, and various probes and follow-up questions. Every question was viewed as a point of discursive departure and not as an end in itself. Consequently, any question could lead to a series of further questions in order to explore fully the ideas and opinions of the interviewee.

Each question was informed by a set of loose assumptions and was put to interviewees for a purpose: to elucidate a particular aspect of young `white' South Africans' talk about `race' and racism. In order to stimulate as much discussion as possible about `race' and racism, I indirectly tapped South African commonplaces, I drew upon issues I knew to be contentious in the South African context, and framed questions which were informed by psychological theory such as symbolic racism (Kinder & Sears, 1971) and social identity theory (Tajfel, 1982). Thus each of the questions and potential probes was put to participants for a reason and discussion was `controlled' and not allowed to range entirely freely. Potter and Wetherell (1987: 165) note with respect to this kind of interview:

*Bringing off an interview which systematically covers*
*a range of topics, yet is open-ended enough to allow*

*the respondent to elaborate on their views in a relatively naturalistic conversational exchange, is a craft skill that takes some developing.*

However, during the last ten years I have participated in a number of programmes aimed at developing interviewing skills, have conducted many interviews across a range of contexts, and have taught interviewing skills to diverse groups of people, therefore I felt comfortable with this form of interview.

The `body' of the interview was concluded when the interviewee and I seemed to have exhausted all avenues of discussion, rather than after a specific period of time had elapsed. The interview simply continued until it reached a point where discussion waned; that is, when I felt that all the areas and sub-areas I wished to discuss had been covered, and when the interviewee did not pick up any more points raised in the interview - either by me or by him/herself.

At this juncture, then, I would begin to draw the interview to a close. First, I would ask the interviewee if there was anything that we had not discussed that s/he felt was important, or if there was anything else s/he wanted to say in relation to anything we had talked about. Sometimes this invitation stimulated further discussion (for example, interviewees may have attempted to clarify their position here), and sometimes it did not. I would then invite the interviewee to ask questions or make comments about any aspect of the interview or the wider study. This quite often resulted in a conversation about discourse analysis or my studying overseas, for example. Finally, I would thank the interviewee for their time and convey my appreciation of their participation.

This closing period usually took ten to fifteen minutes and, in my opinion, was exceedingly important. It provided the space for both the interviewee (and the interviewer) to relax, to laugh, and to prepare to re-enter the world

outside my office door. Although much has been written on the importance of the closing stages of an interview (cf. Grummit, 1980; Hunt & Eadie, 1987; MacKenzie Davey & McDonnell, 1986; Russell, 1972), the intensity of these interviews (which left the interviewee, in particular, drained and exhausted) made this process extremely necessary.

### 4.4.4   The issue of empowerment

Finally, it is important to add a note to this discussion of the interview regarding the issue of empowerment. A small, but significant, body of writing has been developing within the social sciences in the last few years which has been concerned with "what it means to do research in an unjust world" (Lather, 1988: 570; cf Lather 1986; Bhavnani, 1988, 1990, 1991). One of the assumptions informing the conduct of research within this context is that an emancipatory social science must build empowerment into its research design, and contribute to social transformation by developing appropriate social theory. As Deschamps (1982: 97) has noted:

> *It is necessary to insert into social psychology a concern with problems of power, or, more precisely, with relationships of power. If this is not done, ... (there is a) risk of skirting around a number of phenomena the study of which is indispensable for our understanding of certain forms of social behaviour.*

In South Africa, in particular, there have been increasing calls for psychology to become more socially `relevant' or `appropriate' (cf. Dawes, 1986; Berger & Lazarus, 1987; Perkel, 1988); that is, to take account of the unequal relations of power (class, `race', gender, disability) that pervade the society.

This study was fuelled by my own abhorrence of human injustice, and constituted an extension of my previous work with oppressed and stigmatised communities (cf. Lea, 1986; 1988; Lea & Foster, 1990). However, although the

participants in this study were not exactly in need of empowering, this did not mean that the interviews omitted a social change element. Part of my role as interviewer, and one legitimated within the discursive paradigm, was to actively encourage participants to think through the foundations of their racism and to confront their inconsistencies and ambiguities. There was implicit within my interviews a consciousness-raising agenda. That this was `successful' may be implied from the feedback I received from participants in the months after the interviews. A number of them claimed things like "you know, I stop myself in mid-thought sometimes since we spoke and say `now *hang on here*'" (Paul) and "I look at black people differently since our interview. I even find myself saying to my boyfriend `Excuse *me*?' when he makes a comment" (Jennifer). Perhaps not unexpectedly, one interviewee who had grown up in an area where `black' people were seen as particularly menacing, found that the interview had stirred up `too much' and we decided that a few sessions of therapy were necessary. I referred her to a colleague.

### 4.4.5    Transcription and presentation

From a discourse analytic perspective it is imperative that the entire proceedings of an interview be transcribed for two reasons. First, transcription itself constitutes a form of analysis (Ochs, 1979) and second, "the researcher's questions become just as much a topic of analysis as the interviewee's answers" (Potter & Wetherell, 1987: 165). The interviewer's questions actively construct the context within which the interviewee's response is framed. Furthermore, it is not possible to explore discourses thoroughly from a partially transcribed tape as discourse analysis requires endless reading and re-reading of the text as the initial codings and discursive patterns identified shift and change as the analysis evolves. It is for this reason, that I think Hollway's (1989) approach of selectively transcribing is somewhat risky.

A researcher's system of transcription needs to accord with the type of analysis s/he wishes to perform (Edwards & Potter, 1992; Wetherell & Potter, 1992). My interest lay in the *content* of the discourse, not the process - although the two can never be entirely separated. I did not need to attend to the conversation analytic detail of the talk, therefore I adopted a system which could be described as loosely Jeffersonian (cf. Atkinson & Heritage, 1984; Jefferson, 1985 for fuller version and original conventions; refer appendix 3 for example). The approach taken here is very similar to that adopted by Wetherell and Potter (1992) in respect of their interviews with `white' New Zealanders. This method of transcription maximised readability and the extracts presented in the following chapters of this thesis are included in the form in which they were transcribed.

Each of the interviews was transcribed verbatim by an extremely experienced research assistant using her own sophisticated equipment (top of the range hi-fi, foot-pedal and headphones) including a graphic equaliser to clarify the occasional unclear passage. Complete transcription constituted an enormous task: 25 interviews averaging 3 hours in length. Although Potter and Wetherell (1987) estimate a rate of about 10 hours of transcribing to one hour of tape, an experienced transcriber not hampered by including detailed conversation analytic conventions may take 5 hours to one hour of tape. Nevertheless, this translated into some 375 hours of transcribing time.

The final corpus of transcribed material comprised some 1000 lines of text. The next step involved what to do with it. In the following section, I outline the method of analysing discourse used in this study.

## 4.5 The Best Method of Discourse Analysis

We have discussed, fairly extensively, in chapter two (refer sections 2.2 and 2.3 in particular) the theoretical principles which inform a discursive perspective. However,

before introducing the method of discourse analysis used in this study, it may be useful to recap upon a few of the central ideas which inform the manner in which analysis is conducted.

It will be recalled that orthodox qualitative methods of analysis tend to assume the existence of a pre-linguistic transcendent reality, a `truth' which may be revealed through its repeated appearance in the accounts of research participants. Discourse analysts reject this assumption on the grounds that there is no `truth' beyond that which is constructed through language (Potter & Wetherell, 1987; Edwards & Potter, 1992). Hence, the central feature differentiating discourse analysis from traditional social science methods is its treatment of discourse as a topic in its own right (Gilbert & Mulkay, 1984).

Typically, traditional qualitative studies operate according to the methodological principle of what Gilbert and Mulkay (1984: 7) term "linguistic consistency"; that is, if a "sufficient proportion" of participants' narratives seem consistently to account in the same way for a particular social practice, then such narratives are seen as reflecting that social reality. From this perspective the context of discursive production is only attended to in order to dismiss inconsistency between accounts which undermines the researcher's interpretations; in other words, some explanation is proffered as to why a particular account may deviate from the `truth'.

The difficulty with this perspective is that the context of linguistic production is viewed as a source of error variance, rather than as an integral part of the production of participants' discourse (Potter & Wetherell, 1987). The traditional view therefore neglects the idea that "all language functions in contexts of situation, and is relatable to those contexts" (Halliday, 1972: 28-29; original emphasis). The context-dependent nature of participants' discourse confirms that discourse can not be seen as reflective of that which it purports to describe,

since any observed similarities in discursive content may be due as much to similarities in the context of linguistic production as to similarities in the events recounted (Gilbert and Mulkay, 1984).

Discourse analysts view discourse as inextricably related to the context of its production. Peoples' accounts are assumed to vary according to the functional context within which they are produced (Potter & Wetherell, 1987). The focus of a discursive analysis is therefore upon "the dynamic and organised properties of language use" (Wooffitt, 1992: 46) and no attempt is made to go `beyond' the text in order to account for participants' attitudes or actions. From the perspective of Potter and Wetherell (1987; 1992), the analysis of discourse is oriented to the principles of construction, function, and variation. However, as Ian Parker (1992: 43) has pointed out:

> The analysis of texts has to be placed in cultural context, and an understanding of discourse dynamics developed in an account of tensions and transformations in culture.

Consequently, the conception the reader gains from a text is produced by the particular form and sequence of the words in that text and their location within `general cultural systems of meaning' (Potter, Stringer, & Wetherell, 1984).

It is important to recognise that these social and cultural contexts are themselves products of discourse since they are constructed through the use of recurrent patterns of language. Hence, text and context are intricately intertwined and are not neatly bounded:

> Our use of language in defining the social does not take the form of a ghostly presence _outside_ of the social. Rather a society comes into being in the way that it does _precisely through_ the associations

> *actors make as they recruit others to their definition of it.*
>
> *(Bowers and Iwi; 1993: 364, original emphasis)*

Although the past decade has witnessed a burgeoning interest in discourse analysis, it is not possible to speak of discourse analysis as a single unitary entity since this would be to gloss over the philosophical distinctions which inform different approaches (Burman & Parker, 1993). Furthermore, discourse analysts seem unanimous in their view that it is not really possible to outline a *method* of discourse analysis (Potter & Wetherell, 1987; Fairclough, 1992; Burman & Parker, 1993). Despite this, a number of authors have attempted to present guidelines aimed at facilitating an analysis of discourse (cf. Potter & Wetherell, 1987; Fairclough, 1989, Parker, 1992), although none of them are particularly helpful to the new initiate.

Potter and Wetherell (1987: 168), for example, provide the advice that performing a discursive analysis is akin to "riding a bike" rather than "baking cakes from a recipe". Although their chapter on `how to analyse discourse' does provide some useful pointers regarding the pragmatic aspects of going about a discourse analysis, it does not leave the reader very enlightened about actually *analysing* discourse. Ian Parker's (1990a, 1992) `steps' for discovering discourses do not prove much better, although they are useful in terms of clarifying some of the theoretical ambiguities that plague discourse analysis.

Norman Fairclough (1992), a sociologist/linguist, has also attempted to address the problem of `doing discourse analysis'. His chapter, again, presents only guidelines and is useful in terms of pragmatics. However, in being closely tied to his theory of discourse which aims for a "detailed linguistic analysis with the dynamism of social change" (Frawley, 1993: 421), Fairclough's method is vague and lacks detail at times (Zupnik, 1991).

In short, there is no simple formula for achieving a discourse analysis. The most accurate `description' of what it is that discourse analysts do comes from Potter and Wetherell (1987: 169):

> ... there is a broad theoretical framework, which
> focuses attention on the constructive and functional
>     dimensions of discourse, coupled with the reader's
> skill in identifying significant patterns of
> consistency and variation.

Thus while certain researchers rely heavily upon their own intuition and experience to analyse discourse (eg. Hollway, 1989), others attempt to systematically warrant their findings in terms of their theoretical frame of reference using linguistic evidence (eg, Wetherell & Potter, 1992).

My preference to work within an accepted analytic framework is linked clearly with my history of conducting and being involved in research within the South African context. The argument is as follows: our research takes place within societies which remain wedded to positivist notions of knowledge. Progressive research, aimed at effecting change, will have no effect if it can be decried as emotional journalism. Transformative research must have political power, it must be able to convince people of the need for change. A policy of treading a fine line is needed - working within a progressive frame of reference, but one which has the power to be translated into `hard evidence' should the need arise (we shall return to this issue in the discussion).

This principle was most forcibly demonstrated by the South African State's response to the work of Professor Don Foster and his colleagues (1987) on detention and torture in South Africa. `Experts' were paraded in the national press denouncing his findings on the basis of the `unscientific' nature of the research. Fortunately, Foster's research was sufficiently `scientific' for many people within South Africa, as well as the wider

international community, to be disparaging of such a response. The credibility and legitimacy of the research led to its having widespread repercussions.

In summary then, the method of discourse analysis followed here accords with the guidelines espoused by Potter and Wetherell (1987). This involves first coding the material into categories, potentially of research interest, before undertaking the analysis proper. The analysis itself is oriented to identifying patterns of variability and consistency in the material, and then analysing the function and effect of the discourse, using conversation analytic type strategies to provide the linguistic evidence for one's claims.

Finally, although I had no knowledge of Wetherell and Potter's (1992) New Zealand study until I was well into my own research, working within their theoretical framework has proved fruitful in that it has facilitated a comparison between the language of racism in South Africa and that in New Zealand (refer chapter 9, section 9.1). However, before turning to the analysis of the research material, we need to introduce the issue of reflexivity, one of the corner-stones of a discursive analysis.

## 4.6 The Issue of Reflexivity and the Role of the Researcher

In South Africa, perhaps in contrast to Britain and Europe, it is fairly widely acknowledged among English-speaking Departments of Psychology that reflexive, critical studies are needed at this point in the intellectual history of our discipline (Levett, 1989). However, while the concept of reflexivity is adroitly used in the witty conversation of post-modern intellectuals, its meaning frequently remains ambiguous. Wilkinson (1988) has suggested that this is because it is used in different ways and at different levels of analysis by different researchers.

The term 'reflexivity' may at once seem astonishingly simple, and confusing. However, it is possible to identify

two central facets associated with the construct, both of which have their origin in George Kelly's (1958) Personal Construct Theory. The first of these relates to the notion that "the language of construct theory is directly and equally applicable to psychologist and subject" (Bannister, 1981: 194). In other words, any psychological theory applies as much to the researcher as it does to the people whom s/he studies, since they both actively construct the world around them.

Reflexivity, therefore, challenges the objectivist commitment of `science' to discovering `reality', to laying bare the `truth', the `facts'. Rather, it urges us to recognise that at the heart of science lies representation (Woolgar, 1988a). The manner in which we conceptualise a problem will affect the way in which we study it, and account for our findings (Henwood & Parker, 1994; Parker, 1992). Moreover, by studying something, we change it.

Recognition of the discursive construction of `science' and its `data' has precipitated interest in examining the process through which `scientific' knowledge is created. For example, a body of literature has emerged which takes as its focus `the sociology of scientific knowledge', or SSK (eg. Mulkay & Gilbert, 1982, 1983; Potter & Mulkay, 1985; Woolgar, 1988a, 1988b; Ashmore, 1989). However, it has been argued that by exposing the subjective and constructivist nature of `science', researchers are "sawing the branch upon which they sit" (Latour, 1988: 155): by deconstructing the truth claims of `natural' scientists, social scientists are also deconstructing the status of their own `knowledge', for the issue of reflexivity applies as much to the texts of social science, as it does to any others. Hence, psychologists, too, are `exposed' as being in the game of fact-construction (Edwards & Potter, 1992).

Indeed, it is for this reason that generally reflexivity has been portrayed within the social sciences as a `problem' - and has been ignored (Woolgar & Ashmore, 1988). However, Woolgar (1988b) argues that in order to come to

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In the current study two aspects of the researcher's relationship to the researched need to be acknowledged. The first concerns the academic relationship between researcher as lecturer and researched as students/tutors. The power differential embodied in this relationship would have affected the nature of our interaction despite participant's assertions that they saw me as friend and equal, and the emphasis upon participatory democracy in the programme in which we were jointly involved.

The second aspect of the research relationship concerns the possibility that the researched were aware of the researcher's political position. It is likely that interviewees were aware that I was not in favour of the political status quo; however, many 'white' people in South Africa would have declared a similar position at that time. Moreover, it is unlikely that any of the interviewees knew the extent of my involvement in the liberation struggle since I never encountered any of them in the course of my political work.

terms with the way in which representation pervades science, our approach *should* be reflexive since we need to explore ways of investigating our own use of representation. Such a commitment to a reflexive analysis has been observed in both discourse and conversation analytic research; however, Wooffitt (1992) maintains that it is within the domain of discourse analysis that the implications of reflexivity have been more fully explored. The advantage of discourse analysis is that it urges reflexivity upon the researcher and those who read the researcher's writings (Parker, 1992). Moreover, reflexivity is viewed as "a resource for, rather than an obstacle to, empirical research" (Wooffitt, 1992:67).

This brings us to the second facet of `reflexivity' mentioned at the beginning of this section: the notion that a reflexive analysis involves the researchers' awareness of and sensitivity to his/her own role and the influence it has upon and within the research process. It is argued that if reflexivity is to be taken seriously:

> ... one *is obliged to acknowledge the continuity between the psychological processes of researcher and researched, and to accept that they are necessarily engaged as participants in the same enterprise - a dialogue of knowledge construction*
>
> *Wilkinson (1988: 495)*

- Ideally, in recognition of the social construction of 'scientific' knowledge, discourse analysts need to construct analyses characterised by what Potter and Wetherell (1987: 183) term 'a self-referential' quality, examining simultaneously the topic of investigation and the researcher's analysis of that topic.

## 4.7 Summary

Discourse analysis represents a radical re-formulation of psychology and, as such, requires an entirely different methodology. This chapter has sought to elucidate the main

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issues pertaining to the method of research employed in this study. However, the manner in which these issues have been presented may be slightly misleading. Discourse analysis is fundamentally a *process*. Hence one does not code, analyse and write-up in neatly sequential steps. Rather, one moves back and forth between these stages in the research process as the analysis of discourse is re-formed until a satisfactory and coherent account of the discourse dynamics can be formulated.

The next four chapters detail my discursive analysis of the talk of young `white' South Africans, each one tackling a different aspect of the discourse. Finally, we turn to the analysis.

# CHAPTER FIVE


## THE ANALYSIS: LAYING THE GROUNDWORK


### 5.1 Introduction

The aim of this chapter is to present the preliminary analysis of the research material. The analysis of discourse is a long and difficult process, and my objective in presenting these early stages is to provide the reader with some insight into the way in which that process was developed in this study. Too often discourse analysts omit to explain *how* they arrived at their conclusions. It is my belief that this constitutes an oversight on their part (refer chapter 2, section 2.4). If discourse research is to carry weight and to have value, the manner in which conclusions are drawn must be made explicit.

In getting to grips with the research material, Potter and Wetherell (1987: 167) recommend "some coding". Months of coding and attempting to find patterns in the data eventually proved fruitful. Participants seemed to be using three main discourses in their accounts of `race' and racism. It is the principal aim of this chapter to *describe* these discourses. Having done so, it will be possible to move to a detailed *analysis* in the following three chapters - although, of course, it is almost impossible to describe without analysing since description is already a form of analysis.

- In addition, it is important to provide a caveat to the reading of the discourses defined here. Each of the three discourses embraces a set of arguments which draws upon two sources; namely, lived ideologies or commonplaces about social interaction and certain aspects of social psychological theory (it will be recalled that all participants had pursued an undergraduate psychology training). The former are reinforced and empowered by the latter. Thus the discourses of biologism, cognitivism and constructivism **do not** constitute veridical representations of particular psychological theories, but embody the manner in which some of the ideas associated with those theories are harnessed to lay arguments in order to provide scientific weight to claims in respect of issues of 'race' and racism.

## 5.2  Defining Discourses

Repeated readings of the interview transcripts led to the definition of three discourses which participants used in the construction of talk about the nature of `race' and racism.  The following three sections define and describe the discourse of biologism, the discourse of cognitivism, and the discourse of constructivism.  Examples from the interviews are cited to demonstrate how each discourse is identified in the text.  Since the main purpose of this chapter is to describe the discourses, as a precursor to the analysis proper, it is not my intention to burden the text with detailed accounts of rhetorical devices and linguistic manoeuvres. ●  *Finally* , to invoke the words of Wendy Hollway (1989; 53-54) in relation to the discourses she identified in her own doctoral thesis, these categories "do not refer to actual entities.  They are heuristic, that is, they are tools to help in organising the accounts of participants and I have judged their utility and comprehensiveness accordingly".

### 5.2.1   The discourse of biologism

The discourse of biologism pivots around the idea that `races' are immutably different, occasioned either by references to overt biological differences or to insurmountable cultural differences. The former arguments, known as `scientific racism' (Miles, 1989) embrace the notion that `races' constitute biologically distinct entities "whose capacities and achievements (are) fixed by natural and unalterable conditions which (are) common to the collectivity" (Miles, 1989: 32).  The `scientific' discourse of `race' originally arose in the context of the development of science and its application to the natural world, but later came to include the social world of the late eighteenth century (Banton, 1987: 28-64).  By the 1950s, there was strong evidence to suggest that the idea of race had no scientific value at all (Miles, 1989:36). UNESCO, for example, published a series of statements concerning the nature of `race' around that time.  One of

these concluded that "race was less a biological fact than a social myth" (cited in Barkan, 1992: 341). Despite this, `scientific evidence' continues to bolster arguments for the existence of populations with a distinct biological character (Banton, 1977: 16-17; Guillaumin, 1980: 46).

While arguments which attest to the scientific status of `race' may still find expression today, modern racial discourse typically avoids the declaration of open anti-black sentiment. It is for this reason that recent theorists have propounded the emergence of a `new', `modern' or `symbolic' racism (Barker, 1981; Kinder & Sears, 1981; McConahay, 1986). Today, references to a biological basis of `race' are often obfuscated and ambiguous; instead, the inevitability of racial segregation is warranted via insurmountable cultural differences - that is, a `differentialist' racism (Taguieff, 1984; cited in Balibar, 1991a). Etienne Balibar has described this form of racism as "racism without races" (Balibar, 1991a: 21) since, like biological arguments, it too serves to naturalise racial `differences' and to see those differences as immutable and insurmountable. In other words, *culture can also function like a nature* (original emphasis), for although a differentialist racism replaces biological heredity with insuperable cultural differences it sees those differences as operating like biology. Consequently, cultural integration is seen as tantamount to "the intellectual death of humanity and would perhaps even endanger the control mechanisms that ensure its biological survival" (Balibar, 1991a: 22).

The following series of extracts provides examples of the way in which the discourse of biologism was articulated in the talk of the young `white' South Africans who participated in this study:

**Tom:** *I would start off with a sort of scientific basis, looking at differences (.) in which case you can only get five races: caucasoid, negroid, mongoloid, australoid etcetera*

**Joe:** *Okay well I know the caucasoids which are the white race and the negroids which are the American blacks, australoids and (.) what are the others?*

**Jennifer:** *My mother thinks that there's something different. She says that the brain size is different and that they're less clever and that but I don't know how true it is (.) there might be something to it. They apparently did research (.) you know she goes to all these conferences and she says there was some sort of research and the way they think is different.*

**Glen:** *... but there are certain things that are inherent to a race which are never going to see (.) are never going to mix successfully with different aspects of another race.*

**Nick:** *I avoid mass meetings because I can't remember who said it, but someone said there's always a whiff of the lynch mob and there is (.) you know I don't like to think that I'm scared of them for race reasons but I suppose I have to consider that.*

**Gill:** *I mean if you take away the word `race' and you substitute it with ethnicity or you take that away and you substitute it with something else (.) I mean there is there is some kind of ... people are different but I don't know what (.) I don't know what ...*

The discourse of biologism was identified in the corpus of interview material where the speaker made reference to the scientific status of `race', and/or to the immutability of `differences' between `race-groups'. Statements such as those made by Tom, Joe and Jennifer constitute examples of `scientific racism'; Tom and Joe speak about the "scientific" division of the human population into five "pure races" (caucasian, mongolian, malay, american and ethiopian), while Jennifer refers to research which seems to approximate Mortons's craniometry ("the brain size is different"). The elements of a `differentialist racism' are apparent in statements such as "there are certain things that ... are never going to mix successfully with different aspects of another race", "I don't like to think I'm scared of them for race reasons", and "people are different but I don't know what (.) ...".

Thus far this discussion has been oriented to delineating the elements which comprise the discourse of biologism in order to demonstrate how I identified this discourse in the text. However, despite the emphasis upon description at this stage, it is necessary to make some preliminary comments about the function of the discourse. Principally, the discourse of biologism functioned to construct the category of `race' and the phenomenon of racism as `fact'. In other words, speakers constructed accounts which appeared to constitute a description rather than a claim. As we shall see in following chapters, various rhetorical devices and linguistic strategies enable speakers to "make a specific version appear literal, solid and independent" of themselves (Edwards & Potter, 1992: 105).

With respect to the discourse of biologism, this was accomplished through overt reference to `science' on the one hand, and widespread evidence of `natural' cultural difference and segregation on the other. By externalising racism in this manner, the speaker constructed racial differences as `real', as existing `out there' and by doing so managed to disclaim a racist identity: the speaker was not expressing the contents of an irrational mind, but was merely commenting upon social `reality'. Moreover, this reality served to legitimate racist practice.

The way in which the discourse of biologism functions in the talk of young `white' South Africans should become clearer in the chapters which follow. The aim of this cursory description has been to familiarise the reader with the nature of this talk. In short, text which conveyed the immutability of race, through reference to biological or differential ideas was identified as embracing the discourse of biologism. In the following section, a different set of arguments is described. These I have termed the discourse of cognitivism.

## 5.2.2   The discourse of cognitivism

The discourse of cognitivism is informed by lay beliefs about human cognitive processes and intergroups relations, as well as some of the central tenets of the psychological theories of social cognition and social identity.  Social psychology is largely dominated by the study of social cognition (Eiser, 1986) and as students of psychology, the participants in this study have all been exposed to social cognition research as well as to the work of social identity theorists.

Edwards and Potter (1992: 13) term as `cognitivism' the approach "of claiming for the cognitive processes of individuals the central role in shaping perception and action".  For the purposes of this analysis, that which is defined as a discourse of `cognitivism', will include accounts informed by both social cognition and social identity type arguments since both approaches foreground the importance of cognitive mechanisms - social identity theory is premised upon the notion that "the understanding of the cognitive `mechanics' of stereotypes is essential for their full and adequate analysis" (Tajfel, 1981: 145). Consequently, although social identity theory operates at the level of intergroup relations (social cognition theorists operate at the level of the individual) and incorporates the motivational elements of achieving positive self-identity, it remains a cognitive account (Wetherell & Potter, 1992).  Furthermore, speakers tended to conflate social cognition and social identity type accounts suggesting they best be conceptualisd as constituting a single discourse.

The discourse of cognitivism, then, comprises rudimentary ideas about social categorisation combined with those of social identity to offer an account of racism.  However, at this juncture in the interests of defining and describing this discourse clearly I shall discuss the social cognition and social identity elements separately, although within the text these two sets of arguments were intertwined.

Social cognition theorists assert that "the social world continuously presents a rich, varied, and complex stimulus environment that can easily tax the attentional and information-processing capacities at the perceiver's disposal" (Hamilton & Trolier, 1986: 142 - 143). Consequently, social perception is selective, the process of categorisation simplifying the diversity of the social world and making it comprehensible. This categorisation is assumed to "reflect ... *actual* similarities and differences" (Hamilton and Trolier, 1986: 129; original emphasis) between people, but categories may also bias the manner in which information is processed, organised and stored in memory, as well as the type of judgements (stereotypes) made about members of those social categories.

Racial prejudice is viewed within this perspective as an error of the latter variety. Although, social cognition theorists would argue that any form of prejudice is probably multiply determined, they propound the primacy of cognitive mechanisms in this process. As Hamilton and Trolier (1986: 152) argue: "biases inherent in our information-processing systems can, *in and of themselves*, have profound implications for understanding stereotypes and stereotyping" (my emphasis). In accounting for prejudice in terms of natural biases within information-processing systems, social cognition theory views prejudice as *inevitable*. As Billig (1987: 126) has observed: "prejudice is the inescapable outcome of thought".

The discourse of cognitivism draws upon these sorts of ideas to account for racist practice as is illustrated in the following series of extracts:

**Liza:**  *I mean I think it's a natural tendency for people to categorise.  I really do believe that, so in that way I don't think you can ever do away with prejudice really.*

**Joe:**  *Our human system is biologically tuned to notice these differences otherwise we couldn't notice them in the first place*

**Andrew:** *Race is just a category that people, other people put other people into (.) on the basis of the colour of skin ... It's also a way of making sense of all the different (.) one is bombarded with so much stimulus and I guess race categorisations are like giving things names. It makes ordering all this information you receive simpler.*

**Luke:** *I don't know, it's difficult because I sometimes think whether people categorise because that is how they have been taught to think or whether it is something innate in people and I don't know. It would be nicer to think that it's not innate because then you could do away with things like, or theoretically do away with things like race.*

**Tracy:** *... I think that the categories in themselves are quite innocent enough but it's just the notions that you ascribe to them and the ways of seeing them that become harmful*

**James:** *Because I do believe that people are inherently racist (.) well not inherently but rather that racism is quite an important part of human beings generally, no matter who they are.*

**Nick:** *It's [reducing racism] a long slow process but I think it is going to change of necessity. Of course, we'll find something else to pick on ... I mean, look at the world. Where are the non-prejudiced people, are there any?*

The discourse of cognitivism, defined in terms of the ideas behind social cognition type arguments, was identified in the text through reference to ideas which expressed the biological need for humans to categorise and those which articulated the potential for biases to arise as a consequence. Statements such as "its a natural tendency for people to categorise" (Liza), "one is bombarded with so much stimulus" (Andrew), "our human system is biologically tuned to notice these differences" (Joe), and "it makes ordering all this information you receive simpler" (Andrew) constitute examples of the former. Instances of talk which made reference to the prejudiced outcome of social categorisation included: "the categories in themselves are quite innocent enough but it's just the notions that you ascribe to them ... that become harmful" (Tracy), "people are inherently racist" (James), "it would be nicer to think

that it's not innate" (Luke) and "we'll find something else
to pick on" (Nick).

Before describing the remaining features of the discourse
of cognitivism, brief commentary upon the function of these
arguments is warranted.  In the main, the discourse of
cognitivism functions to absolve the individual from
responsibility for racist practice on the grounds that
*everyone* is racist.  Since the process of categorisation is
biologically functional and universal, individual human
subjects cannot be held accountable for the unavoidable
consequences thereof.  Racism is inevitable.

These arguments also enable the speaker to construct him-
or herself as desirous of being non-racist.  For example,
Luke says "it would be nicer to think that its not innate".
As we shall see in later chapters, this discourse enables
speakers to distinguish between `good' and `bad' racists.
`Good' racists comprise people like themselves who although
at the mercy of their biology try not to be racist, while
`bad' racists comprise `other' people who not only submit
to their biology but also engage in racist practice with
intent.

As noted above, although social cognition type arguments
formed a significant part of the discourse of some of the
participants in this study, it was usually supplemented by
talk which drew upon the ideas behind the work of social
identity theorists.  Social identity theory, like social
cognition theory, stresses "the importance of the adaptive
cognitive functioning of Man in the causation of prejudice"
(Tajfel; 1981: 141); hence, it too links racism to ideas of
biased and stereotypic judgement (Wetherell & Potter,
1992).  However, social identity theory goes beyond this
view and takes as its focus intergroup relations.  In
assuming the social identity of a group, people become
ethnocentric - preferring their own group (the in-group)
and discriminating to various degrees against people of
other groups (the out-group).  In essence, social identity
is defined as "the cognitive mechanism which makes group

behaviour possible" (Turner, 1982: 21), while a social group represents a number of individuals who have internalised the same category membership as a component of their self-concept (Turner; 1982: 36).

These sorts of ideas were incorporated into the talk of the young `white' South Africans in this study in the following ways:

**Luke:** I think to a lot of people it [race] is important in the sense that it influences their relations with other people. And I think with some people it is more important than for others. People who perceive a need to identify themselves with certain groups.

**Sam:** I did a research thing last semester on the symbolic construction of boundaries, and boundaries no matter what they are are important, just to get an in- and an out-group.

**James:** I think (.) I think we all need differences er I think I need differences because if I didn't have differences then for example um I'd feel _incredibly_ insecure (.) I think differences then for example are _very_ necessary for your sense of being in the world [laughs]. So sorry to take another paradigm I think it's (.) in order to have an identity you need to compare yourself to others.

**Nick:** ... you need to categorise the world in some way, because you need to have a feeling of belonging to something which I think necessitates there being something to which you don't belong. And I think race is a set of assumptions about that grouping you've created.

**Heidi:** Perhaps there is a need in everyone for belonging to something but perhaps some people view it in different contexts, like they'll feel they belong to running (.) whereas maybe if you don't have that many other commitments to which you feel strongly it would be easier for them especially in this country to fall back on your race, you know, at least you belong to that group if not to any other.

**Andrew:** People will always find some feature to define the ingroup and an outgroup (.) to define their group as opposed to someone else's group and race is a hell of a useful thing to do it along those lines so I don't think it will stop. [What do you think is behind that mechanism of ingroup-outgroup stuff?] I think it's to do with knowing what your identity is and being more secure in yourself,

> having an ingroup kind of reinforces that identity.
> I'm not that person, I'm this kind of person.

**Emma:** *People are very protective of their own (.) so for instance you're very protective of your family ... and then it sort of extends and people seem to take race as an extension of themselves so you know every white is an extension of a white person and I think it might be the same for other race groups.*

The discourse of cognitivism has been described above as including textual reference to the biological role of social categorisation, and the inevitability of prejudice as an outcome of thought. However, as noted, the discourse of cognitivism also incorporated social identity type notions – in particular the cognitive need for categorisation *linked* to the importance of social groups. Examples of statements which refer to the cognitive need for social categorisation include "you need to categorise the world in some way because you need to have a feeling of belonging to something" (Nick) and "we all need differences" (James) in order to "find some feature to define the ingroup and an outgroup" (Andrew): we also saw examples of this aspect of the discourse of cognitivism in the previous series of quotations. The signficant role of social groups was articulated through statements such as "you need to have a feeling of belonging to something" (Nick, and also Heidi), "if I didn't have differences ... I'd feel *incredibly* insecure" (James, original emphasis), "boundaries no matter what they are, are important, just to get an in- and an out-group" (Sam) , "its to do with knowing what your identity is and being more secure in yourself" (Andrew), and "differences ... are *very* necessary for your sense of being in the world" (James, original emphasis).

We have noted already that the discourse of cognitivism serves to remove responsibility for racism from the speaker by universalising racism through reference to biological mechanisms of social cognition. Lay beliefs about `intergroup relations' supported by some of the ideas

behind social identity type arguments serve to reinforce the inevitablility of antagonism between different social groups through appealing to the role of groups in meeting the social needs of individuals. Here the argument is slightly different to the one we reviewed above. Humans categorise the world in order to create social groups to which they can *belong*. Again, though, this process is fuelled by a `need' which is universal ("we all need differences", James). This `need' entails two primary components, both of which are important for the psychological well-being of the individual: the need to establish an identity, and the need for a sense of security.

The power of this argument lies in its `veracity'. The notion that universal and fundamental psychological needs become the basis for group hostility assumes a factual status (this is something we shall return to in following chapters). The consequent feelings of identity and security lead one to feel "very protective of your own" (Emma) which in turn excuses feelings of animosity toward others. Thus racism is `understandable' in terms of the biological mechanisms of human social cognition and in terms of the basic needs of the human psyche.

Again social identity type arguments facilitate a division of the social world into `good' and `bad' racists since `race' is just one of many potential categories in terms of which the individual may chose to identify him- or herself (refer Heidi, for example), and since the psychological need for belonging is greater in some people than in others (refer Luke, for example). `Good' racists, the speaker included, chose not to identify themselves primarily in terms of `race' and do not feel a great need to belong to a `racial group'. `Bad' racists elect to identify with their (the implicit assumption being that this is a `real' group) `race' and consider it to be important for their sense of identity.

In summary, this section has described talk which I have defined as the discourse of cognitivism: a discourse drawing strongly on a number of social `commonplaces' and upon the ideas behind social cognition and social identity theory. In the next section, the third discourse - the discourse of constructivism - is defined.

## 5.2.3 The discourse of constructivism

The discourse of constructivism "asks one to suspend belief that commonly accepted categories or understandings receive their warrant through observation" (Gergen, 1985: 267). It challenges the objective basis of knowledge by asserting that the terms in which the world is understood are `social artifacts'. Consequently, the objective criteria for identifying "such `behaviours', `events', or `entities' are shown to be either highly circumscribed by culture, history, or social context or altogether nonexistent" (Gergen, 1985: 267). Human beings are seen as possessing agency rather than being the passive processors of information (Sarbin & Kitsuse, 1994). Wetherell and Potter's stance on the concepts of race, culture and nation are exemplary of a constructivist position: "race, culture and nation are not natural phenomena but constructed categories. Modern accounts of groups are closely related to current social arrangements and must build on past discursive achievements. Categories change and what was once ideologically useful and persuasive can become obdurate and awkward material stubbornly resisting the reworkings of later generations" (1992: 118).

As before, this brief description merely serves to sketch the defining characteristics of what I have termed a discourse of constructivism in the accounts of young `white' South Africans. The following series of extracts demonstrates how this discourse appeared in the text of the participants in this study:

**Luke:** *I mean on one level there are certain differences there. For example in this country white people have had more privilege through you know years of discrimination, since 1600, you know white people*

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*have had certain advantages. But there is nothing intrinsic to being white (.) it's more a coincidence, historical factors which have produced the sort of situation we have in this country. Ja, I mean the mechanics of how it happened are very complex, processes happening over centuries but it's that kind of thing I suppose it could be called social construction (.) social construction of race.*

**Sam:** *Race is a socially constructed thing which makes it important in the eyes of the people watching.*

**Nick:** *Race ... I think it's essentially something that people make up*

**Jennifer:** *... and I think race is just what people make of it, I think it's not something that's there. I think it's more of a thing up here in the head you know ... I think it is very much a mental construct.*

**Liza:** *Well ... [race has arisen] through politics and history really (.) all the way up through the centuries and then obviously apartheid was the cherry on top in that way.*

**Ruth:** *I don't recognise race okay? I don't think it's a (.) I think it is an <u>absolute</u> construct okay so for me it doesn't mean anything. Yet to say that it's not an issue ... because I mean I think that politics seems to revolve around these supposedly objective factors that people are calling race (.) you're trying to explain people in terms of a whole lot of criteria which is worthless unless it's going to be used as a political tool.*

The discourse of constructivism was identified in the above extracts through reference to ideas of `race' as a constructed category, and `race' as being ideologically useful. With respect to the constructed nature of `race', statements such as `race' is "an absolute construct" (Ruth), or `race' is "a mental construct" (Jennifer), as well as notions that `race' has been constituted "through the centuries" (Liza & Luke), through "politics and history" (Liza), "historical factors" (Luke), and "apartheid" (Sarah) constitute examples. With respect to the idea that `race' is an ideologically useful category, statements such as "these supposedly objective factors that people are calling race" (Ruth) and `race' is "a political

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tool" (Ruth) "which makes it important in the eyes of people watching" (Sam) are exemplary instances.

Again, while the aim of this section is to define and describe the discourse of constructivism, it is necessary to comment briefly on the general function of the discourse before moving to the analysis proper. As we shall see more clearly later, the function of the discourse of constructivism is to acheive for the speaker a non-racist, even anti-racist, identity. It communicates not only the speaker's fundamental opposition to racism, but to the very category of `race' itself. In rejecting the category of `race' and critically deconstructing the historical, economic, political and social construction thereof, the discourse of constructivism accomplishes for the speaker a critical, progressive, even left-wing position. At the same time, as we shall see in the chapters that follow, the discourse of constructivism shields the speaker from criticism of racism if they do express racist views because this discourse includes arguments about the way in which people are positioned by dominant ideologies. Thus, in South Africa, the occasional racist `slip' is excused on the grounds that the speaker has been powerfully socialised into a racist discourse.

## 5.3  Summary

In summary this short chapter has sought to define the three discourses which dominated the talk of young `white' English-speaking South Africans'; however, this `description' has oversimplified the complex nature of `race' talk in two ways. First, these discourses did not occur as discrete entities. Talk typically comprised an intricate web of at least two discourses, and sometimes all three. Second, these discourses are related to the declared political affiliation of the speaker. In the interview, participants defined themselves as Nationalist, Liberal or Left-wing in response to a question which asked where they located themselves on the political spectrum. At first, I treated these responses as comprising yet more

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'race' talk, but after months of unsuccessful pattern searching I found a pattern. The corpus of material I had gathered needed to be understood in terms of these three political groups, *then* my search for pattern in the data was rewarded. Perhaps not surprisingly, the language of racism in South Africa was related to politics. Nationalist, Liberal and Leftwing participants provided different sorts of accounts - in terms of the discourses used to construct those accounts and in terms of the rhetorical strategies used to accomplish specific linguistic ends.

In brief, Nationalist speakers tended to draw upon the discourses of biologism and cognitivism, Left-wing speakers tended to draw upon the discourse of constructivism and to a lesser degree the discourse of cognitivism, and Liberal speakers tended to draw principally upon the discourse of cognitism but also incorporated both the discourse of biologism and the discourse of constructivism. In the chapters that follow, I attempt to untangle the complex web of South African 'race' talk, to provide an analysis of the "dialectic of prejudice" (Billig et al; 1988: 100). To do so, I tackle each political group separately, therefore the next three chapters present a treatise on Nationalist, Liberal and Left-wing talk respectively.

# CHAPTER SIX

# NATIONALIST TALK: `THAT ISM ON THE END
# MAKES IT NASTY'

## 6.1  Introduction

This first analytic chapter takes as its focus the talk of
participants I have called `Nationalists'.  Nationalists
were united by their avowed support for the National Party
in South Africa; that is, the party which came to power in
1948 and was still in power at the time of the interviews.
In short, National party supporters supported `the
apartheid regime'.

The talk of interviewees defined as nationalist was
constructed in terms of the discourses of biologism and
cognitivism described earlier (refer chapter 5, sections
5.2.1 and 5.2.2)  Although social constructionist arguments
*(in 20% of the nationalist interviews)*
were used occasionally/ these tended to occur early in the
interview, and in relation to formal questions such as `How
would you define race?'.  Since most of the interviewees
were aware of the interviewer's opposition to the
Nationalist government, these responses were in all
likelihood governed by the phenomenon of impression
management.  By articulating critical views, nationalists
may have been attempting to present themselves as
progressive and non-racist within the context of an
interview with someone whom they believed to be supportive
of such a position.  However, beyond approximately ten
minutes into the interview and within the context of

personal and informal conversation, the discourse of social constructionism was rare.

The discourses of biologism and cognitivism employed in the talk of nationalists constructed for the speaker the position of `realist' - a term used frequently among this group. Realists, unlike idealists (those nationalists defined as to the left of themselves), do not attempt to deny the `facts'; those being that `races' represent biologically distinct entities, that there are insurmountable cultural differences between different `races', and that biological processes of human social cognition adaptively function to determine such differences. These `facts' provide nationalist speakers with the warrant to deny that they are racist on the grounds that all people could be considered racist. For them, it is only a minority of irrational people who actively discriminate against others that are truly racist.

This chapter unravels these discursive constructions and specifically examines how the discourses of biologism and cognitivism function to achieve a position of `non-racist' for members of this group.

## 6.2 `If you mix a horse and a cow, do you get another race?': The Discourse of Biologism

The discourse of biologism comprised two forms of argument, a scientific racism and a differentialist racism (refer chapter 5, section 5.2.1). All nationalists drew upon both forms, and frequently the two were blended together. The following series of quotations presents examples of scientific racism which occurred within the context of discussion about the development of people in different parts of the world. This was a topic which nationalists spoke of at length, in contrast to liberals or leftists. It occurred relatively early in the interview within the ambit of discussion about defining `race':

**Tracy:** *Okay, it couldn't have been the environment so it must have been something in the people [] As they say if Africa had been left and not discovered and*

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> *things went on as they were doing it would  have been desolate by now.*

**Jennifer:** *To be fair I don't think they meant to be  the oppressors, that is the whole European nature. They want to go out, they want to explore, they  want to see what it is all about. They see it as  progress (.) we see it as progress and I think  that is part of the problem with South Africa at  the moment we are trying to change a lot of things that are not inherently part of them which is a  contradiction because I started off saying there  is no race. But there are differences.*

**Sarah:** *Maybe the white person had a stronger drive to explore to see how things worked whereas the black culture was quite happy with the way things were going.  I think maybe it is something in the drive that white people want to dominate maybe in the same way that men dominated over women.  The woman has to stay at home as the fibre of society so the man is the creator and maybe the same things happened with blacks.  The blacks were the slaves [giggle] and couldn't aspire to anything and didn't have the opportunity.*

In each of these extracts, the speaker accounts for the `differences' between `black' and `white' people in terms of inherent characteristics.  Tracy loosely refers to "something in the people" which she proposes explains why Africa would have become desolate if it had been left to its original inhabitants. Although not specified, this "something" appears to be of a similar order to Jennifer's notion of "nature" and Sarah's ideas of "drive".  This was a common theme in the talk of nationalists:  the `inherent differences' between `white' and `black' people were described in terms of the qualities `white' people had and `black' people lacked (a presence or absence of drive, ambition, or motivation, respectively).  Indeed, this is a very thinly disguised characterisation along the lines of the classic racial stereotype. `White' people are regarded as motivated to discover new things and progress, while black people are seen as lazy and lacking in initiative.

It is generally acknowledged that today overt racist remarks are not acceptable (Billig, 1991).  How then do the nationalists attempt to accomplish a position of non-

racism, when articulating the sort of ideas cited above? In short, they organise their accounts into factual descriptions, the status of which is warranted through a number of rhetorical devices and linguistic strategies. Tracy, for example, couches her argument within the logical format of `if not x ..., then y' - if not the environment, then something in the people.   This constitutes an example of the rhetorical device of `empiricist accounting' (Edwards & Potter, 1992).   Tracy's argument is then reinforced by her appeal to the social commonplace that without the intervention of `white' people, Africa would have been devastated by its `black' inhabitants. Tracy distances herself  from this more contentious assertion by shifting her interactional "footing" (Goffman, 1981); that is, she indicates that the views are those of another, unnamed, source. Moreover, the idea that Africa would have become desolate save for the `white' person's intervention represents something of a common-place in right-wing circles.   As Clayman (1989: 30) has noted, "the number of persons aligned with a given statement can be seen as an index of its facticity.  Thus, a widely endorsed view is not easily dismissed as the idiosyncratic artefact of a particular person's understanding, for such support endows it with a certain intersubjective validation".

Jennifer invokes principles of fairness and equity to warrant her assertion that "Europeans"  did not intend to oppress others but were governed by their "nature".  The construction of a three-part list ("they want to go out, they want to explore, they want to see what it's all about") emphasises the point Jennifer wishes to convey; that is, that "Europeans" possess a natural drive to "progress".  The repetition of "they see it as progress, we see it as progress"  lends further weight to the idea. While "they" appears to refer to the group Jennifer has termed Europeans, the referent of the first person plural (we) in the second utterance remains unclear. It could be referring  to  the  interviewer-interviewee  pair; alternatively to a broader subset of `white' people, for

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example, those who are educated. The effect of the use of
`we' is to indicate that Jennifer is not solely responsible
for the position she is reporting, she is expressing the
opinions of at least one other person (the interviewer) and
probably more (cf. the `we discourse'; Wodak & Matouschek,
1993).

Finally, Jennifer provides a contemporary example as
further evidence of the `fact' that `white' and `black'
people are inherently different (and which absolves
`whites' of any responsibility for racism). The problems
of South Africa she argues, stem from the differences
between the `races': it is `black' people who represent the
real problem since they can not keep up with the changes
that `white' people are trying to effect since certain
"things ... are not inherently part of them". At this
point Jennifer acknowledges the contradiction between her
argument at the beginning of the interview that there is
"no (such thing as) race" and her current line of thinking.
However, it is dismissed with a perfunctory "but there are
differences", possibly because she is confident that she
has put her case strongly enough.

Sarah attempts to warrant her account of differences in
"drive" between `white' and `black' people by comparing
`race' to `gender'. She parallels the `fact' that men have
dominated women for centuries with the domination of
`white' people over `black'. However, perhaps most
extraordinarily she does not draw out common themes of
injustice and oppression, but describes a natural order in
which `white' men created, supported by women (the fibre of
society) while `black' people were destined to be "the
slaves". Possibly because this argument is so blatantly
racist (and sexist), Sarah gives a nervous laugh after
saying "blacks were the slaves" and then attempts to
justify this utterance by commenting on `black' peoples'
lack of aspiration and opportunity.

These examples demonstrate how the discourse of biologism
serves to establish `races' as `fact' (although not always

successfully, as we see in Sarah's account); that is, as having a real existence independent of the ideas of human beings. Implicit in these `facts' is a hierarchy of races with `white' people creating, progressing, and uplifting others, while `black' people contentedly accept the status quo. Such descriptions construct the nationalist as the dispassionate observer reporting on the `facts'. The speaker is not the irrational bigot, but a rational being appraising an external reality.

Although nationalist talk was strongly framed by the *(as noted, all nationalists drew upon this linguistic resource to varying degrees)* arguments of `scientific racism, perhaps the more dominant manifestation of the discourse of biologism was that of differentialist racism (Taguieff, 1984). The central feature of differentialist racism, as noted earlier, is the insuperability of cultural differences. Arguments along these lines tended to be lengthy, incorporating detailed illustration of the points made and for this reason we shall consider a single extract of text.

The passage is taken from an interview with Glen and occurred within a very long sequence of talk in which he was addressing the question of whether `race' influences his judgements of people. In the midst of denigrating `black' taxi drivers and expressing strong reservations about being in a group of `black' people, he paused and then said:

**Glen:** *I don't know if it is appropriate to put it in here but personally I don't believe there's much hope for racial harmony in this country and I really don't think there's much scope for it throughout the world. The fact that racism (.) race was involved in legislation here for so many years I believe blinds people to the fact that racism is prevalent in most countries. (.) and I really don't believe that there can ever be racial harmony because the differences are too great and going back to sport , I mean we have two classic examples.*

This extract represents an example of a speaker providing a clear self-interruption of their talk. Glen had been describing his response to `black' taxi-drivers and groups

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of `black' people when he suddenly interrupts himself with "I don't know if it is appropriate to put it in here". As Jefferson (1974) has noted, self-repair may be directed at correcting errors in the attempt to speak appropriately to particular people within particular circumstances. Thus Glen displays his sensitivity to, and understanding of, the interactional consequences of his racist utterance by embarking upon a protracted account of racial differences, presumably in an attempt to warrant his earlier statements.

Given the context of the repair, Glen is cautious initially with respect to his argument of racial incompatibility. His use of the terms "much hope" or "much scope" create the impression of someone who is reasonable; although Glen is sceptical, he has not ruled out completely the achievement of racial harmony. Glen attempts to achieve a neutralistic posture with respect to `race' by constructing racism as `fact' citing national and international evidence for the widespread prevalence of racial disharmony.

Moreover, within his argument there lies an implicit criticism of people to the left of Glen's position (those later identified as `idealists'). As Billig (1987) has observed, the context of rhetoric comprises not only the opinions which the speaker is attempting to justify but also the counter-opinions which are implicitly or explicitly being criticised. Glen reproaches "people" (presumably non-racists and anti-racists) for being "blinded" by the crass form of racism that occurs within South Africa, and for not having the sagacity to realise that racism is a universal and inevitable phenomenon. In short, as Sarah said: "Apartheid did not cause racism, racism caused apartheid".

Glen hereby presents himself as the acute analyst reflecting upon the national and international scenario and observing `truths', while `others' attempt to deny the reality of racial differences. Having established `the facts', Glen is in a position to put his case more strongly. The earlier and gentler version "I don't

actually believe there's much hope or scope" translates into the firmer "I don't believe that there can ever be racial harmony".

Further warrant for this latter statement is provided in an extremely vivid and lengthy example taken from South African sport. The extract has not been reproduced because of its extensive nature but in essence it contrasted `white' South Africans playing rugby against New Zealand in a stadium cloaked with the National flag and supported by `white' spectators singing `Die Stem', with the simultaneous occurrence of `black' South Africans playing soccer against Cameroon in a stadium cloaked with ANC flags and supported by `black' spectators singing `Nkosi Sikelele Afrika'.

Glen's example, with its references to cultural symbols such as flags and songs, and deployed to bolster arguments for peoples' natural and inevitable preference for `their own' is representative of Taguieff's (1984) differentialist racism, or what Balibar terms `neo-racism' (1991a). Interestingly, and in support of the point that Balibar makes with regard to culture functioning like nature, Glen concludes this narrative with "there are certain things *inherent* to a race which are never going to see (.) are never going to mix successfully with different aspects of another race" (my emphasis). In other words, culture blurs into nature even within a single utterance, or as Bakhtin (1981: 291) would argue the "`languages' of heteroglossia intersect each other in a variety of ways".

In summary, in what amounts to some 60 lines of text, Glen constructs an argument for the existence of `races', and their fundamental incompatibility. These `facts' are established via the arguments of scientific and differentialist racism, or what I have termed the discourse of biologism. This discourse functions to shield Glen from criticism on grounds of racism because it establishes racism as having an independent reality `out there'. Consequently, Glen can deny that he is racist (see also

Cochrane & Billig, 1984; Potter & Wetherell, 1992; van Dijk, 1992) - he is not an irrational bigot, he is merely reporting `the facts'.

While these `truths' certainly played a central role in the arguments of nationalists, *(100% of this group utilised them)* members of this group also marshalled a second line of defense against potential criticism on the grounds of racism. This second set of arguments, like the first, has biology as its base but concerns the cognitive functioning of human beings. The discourse of cognitivism, while providing powerful arguments of its own serves to reinforce those of the discourse of biologism as we shall see in the following section.

## 6.3 `It's perfectly natural after all': The Discourse of Cognitivism

The discourse of cognitivism embraces the commonsense notions of human perception which have informed the development of social cognition and social identity theory, and some of the central features of those theories (it will be recalled that the participants in this study had read psychology at university). The central tenet which underpins the discourse of cognitivism therefore is that certain processes of social cognition are biologically functional; that is, they enable the human being to order an otherwise chaotic world. However, biases in human information processing may occur; indeed, are inevitable. Consequently, racism is unavoidable.

In this section, we examine the manner in which these arguments are employed by nationalists to support racist practice. This is achieved by examining first a set of extracts which demonstrate predominantly (although not exclusively) social cognition-type arguments, and second a lengthy extract illustrative of talk which embraces social identity-type arguments. This distinction is made in order to deal with the material clearly and simply; however, as will be seen, it is a `false' distinction in that often

both forms of talk were intertwined in any one piece of discourse.

The following three extracts were taken from a range of contexts since this set of arguments proved to be fairly popular:

**Jennifer:** *I think people like some sort of order in their lives and if there was no definitions or boundaries or anything we wouldn't know where to go or who we are. So you say well (.) like you ask me well, I'm 20 years old, and I'm female and I'm a varsity student. I immediately have three categories. I'm not a male, I'm not older and I don't work. And I'm white. Those things they create a picture of you*

**Heidi:** *Categorisation need not necessarily be a bad thing as I said before I think it is important for people to belong to groups (.) and I think whatever group you form people will feel that their group is better than the other group. So if it happens to be based on race, so what? As long as people don't behave terribly to those people and treat them inferior.*

**Tracy:** *I think the categories in themselves are quite innocent enough but it's just the notions that you ascribe to them and the ways of seeing them that become harmful. That ism on the end sort of makes it nasty.*

The three extracts above provide evidence of the way in which Nationalists drew upon social commonplaces about *(again all Nationalists used these arguments to varying degrees)* human perception, and some of the central ideas associated with social cognition theory. The function of this type of argument was to provide the speaker with a powerful warrant for the division of the social world into `races'. In particular three arguments were used to defend racist practice. First, categorisation is a necessary process which "provides order" in an otherwise disorderly world ("they create a picture of you"). Second, the categories in themselves are neutral ("not necessarily a bad thing", "quite innocent"), and third, categorisation has positive benefits in terms of identity ("it is important for people to belong to groups", they define "who we are"). This third line of argument, however, approximates the ideas of Social Identity Theory. As noted, discourse is convoluted:

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it is hardly ever characterised by discrete discourses following neatly on from one another, unless perhaps the context is one of `pretty conversation' (Billig, 1987).

In each of these extracts, the negative consequences of categorisation are ignored or downplayed, while the positive effects are highlighted. Jennifer provides a general argument ("if there was no definitions or boundaries or anything"; my emphasis) about a specific category ("race" categorisation) to reinforce the notion that categorisation is essential. Moreover, the significant function of categorisation attains factual status through the construction of a series of three-part lists (Jefferson, 1990). The first of these communicates the disorderly implications of not categorising ("no definitions or boundaries or anything"), while the second two emphasise the useful definitional function of categories ("I'm 20 years old, and I'm female and I'm a varsity student"; "I'm not a male, I'm not older and I don't work").

Significantly, Jennifer has avoided the category of `race' until this point, then she tacks on "And I'm white". This manoeuvre may be oriented to Jennifer's primary objective of constructing an argument in favour of racial classification and her recognition that such an argument requires a racial referent if it is to be effective. It could also signal Jennifer's attempt to demonstrate how little significance the category of `race' has for her, hence `white' is not a central characteristic in her self-definition. Perhaps most importantly, it serves to reinforce Jennifer's notion that `race' is one category among many (the factual status of which she has already established) and therefore `just' because she recognises the category does not mean that she is racist.

Heidi and Tracy convey similar ideas in the extracts presented above, although Heidi incorporates some of the ideas of social identity theory. Tajfelian notions of ethnocentrism are used to bolster feelings of superiority,

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and Heidi asserts this position using the strategy of challenge ("so if it happens to be based on race, so what?") - an extremely unusual manoeuvre for Heidi and for the sample as a whole. Tracy on the other hand attempts to downplay the negative consequences of categorisation ("it's *just* the notions that you ascribe to them"; my emphasis). Her use of the word `just' intimates that stereotyping is something minor and relatively uncommon; although ironically Tracy describes people of other `race' groups as `them', somewhat undermining her argument.

In short, these extracts demonstrate how the ideas of social cognition theory form the basis of arguments which are used to bolster racist practice . They function to support the idea that racists represent an irrational minority and that it is only the members of this small group who make stereotypic judgements or act in overtly racist ways. However, as we saw in the extract from Heidi, the ideas of Social Cognition Theory seldom occur in isolation.

While the previous extracts focused upon the way in which notions of social categorisation may be mobilised to defend racist arguments the following excerpt, taken from an interview with Joe, demonstrates how the ideas behind *(all Nationalists made use of this* Social Identity Theory may be used to the same effect. *second form of* Within the context of a discussion on racism, the *argument,* interviewer asked "okay, so what constitutes racism? What *although in some cases* sorts of things would be racist for you?". The extract *it was more developed than in others)* cited below constitutes Joe's response.

Joe: *Saying like bad things about another race. But then I ask myself you know in the town of Oranje there we have a group of people, are they being discriminatory or reservatory? Are they just trying to keep their whites together or are they trying to exclude the blacks? Do you see what I'm saying? Are we trying to exclude people or are we trying to keep people together? Now those people in Oranje could be perceived as being racist because they are throwing the blacks out or otherwise they could just be perceived as being reservatory because they are just trying to keep the whites in. How do you look at it? Do you look*

> *at it from that side or from that side? (.) If*
> *someone says `I'm establishing this town just for*
> *whites', that is racist for me but it is not as*
> *badly racist because he's not picking out the*
> *blacks or the coloureds or the chinese. She's*
> *saying `I'm merely reserving this for whites, I'm*
> *not racist against the blacks, it's just including*
> *only the whites' Instead of the guy who says*
> *`blacks stink, coloureds are alright, Indians are*
> *mediocre and whites are fine'. Now there we have*
> *racism because we have specific physical groups*
> *defined, each one giving a different attitude*
> *towards them.*

Joe constructs his answer around an example drawn from contemporary South African political debate. It concerns the intentions and actions of a group of right-wing (some would say extreme right-wing) Afrikaners who have determined that a town called Oranje in the Northern Cape shall be exclusively for `whites'. All `black' people who originally lived in the town have been forcibly removed and no `black' people are allowed in the town, not even as servants.

Joe begins by providing an almost rehearsed response "saying bad things about another race". He then appears to wish to qualify this statement, his use of the word `but' at the beginning of the next sentence would seem to suggest this intention. However, the nature of what he is about to say is extremely delicate, the majority of `white' South Africans would see the inhabitants of Oranje as racist. Joe shifts interactional `footing' (Goffman, 1981) in an attempt to achieve a neutral posture, formulating the issue as a series of questions. The repetition of the central dilemma Joe identifies suggests that he is aware of the possibility of being accused of racism. Hence he asks "Do you see what I'm saying?", and distances himself from the ideas by framing the abstract question "How do you look at it?"

Joe's phrasing of his final question ("do you look at it from that side or from that side?") embraces the dilemmatic nature of the issue: is ethnocentrism discriminatory? It also hints at `two sides of the same coin' and has

undertones of the `white' side versus the `black' side. Irrespective, the dilemmatic nature of the issue is clearly communicated and this functions to construct the idea of racism as problematic and not achieving easy resolution. The driving force behind this argument is psychological theory in the form of social identity theory; that is, that groups of people (such as race-groups) display own group preference or ethnocentrism. Hence Joe's question "are people who prefer their `own' being merely reservatory, acting in accordance with their `nature'". Following on from what he argued earlier, Joe is asking if it reasonable to argue that preference for one thing necessarily implies discrimination against something else. Having established the reasonableness of the proposition, he puts his opinion more strongly.

In the following lines, Joe portrays the difference between racism and `bad' racism using a series of hypothetical examples (Wooffitt, 1992) and shifts in interactional footing (Goffman, 1981). The footing shifts back and forth from first person to third person, the latter being a hypothetical third party. The hypothetical example serves "to distil regularly occurring features of events and bring them together in a form which may not strictly represent the occasions of their occurrence in `real life'" (Wooffitt, 1992: 84). Thus Joe is able to portray his response to what he constructs as two different types of people, the `bad' racist and the `ordinary' racist. (He ignores the possibility that the same person may well be responsible for both sorts of statements; indeed, in all likelihood would be given his right-wing example). The `bad' racist is therefore caricatured using the strategy of extreme case formulation (Pomerantz, 1986) as someone who would comment on seeing a `black' person "he's a kaffir and he steals and he's an alcohol abuser". The word `kaffir' is seldom employed today due to its overtly racist denotation. Again, the rhetorical strategy of the three-part list repeatedly formulates the type of racist sentiments that a `bad' racist may employ.

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By contrast, the `ordinary' racist is represented as being `just' ethnocentric, and not discriminatory. The manner in which Joe uses the word `just' slips between his two examples of reported speech. In the first, the hypothetical person is establishing the town "*just* for `whites'"; however, in the second example in which Joe interprets the person's position, the word just is replace with a synonym "I'm *merely* reserving..." as well as being used itself but in a different context "it's *just* including...". The meaning of `just' therefore shifts from connoting that one is doing something for a specific group of people to connoting that one is doing something insignificant (I'm *only* doing ...). Hence with a subtle shift in meaning Joe constructs an argument which makes claims that there is little wrong with own-group preference: an argument premised upon commonsense understandings of intergroup relations, and bolstered by the ideas of social identity theory with which Joe would have become acquainted in the undergraduate study of psychology.

To reinforce the distinction he is attempting to assert Joe formulates another hypothetical example of the reported speech of the `true' racist. This example provides Joe with the elements from which he wishes to distil his argument. That is, that `true' or `bad' racism involves the identification of specific groups and the application of negative attributes to members of those groups. However, Joe still hedges his commitment to such a position by maintaining that ethnocentrism "is still racism but for me it's not as bad".

### 6.4 `Facing the facts': The Realist Talks

The nationalist speaker achieves for him/herself the position of non-racist by advancing an extreme definition of racism, and by accounting for racist practice in terms of a series of `facts' about the world. While each of these `facts' functions as a warrant for the position that nationalist speakers assume in relation to issues of `race', it is their incorporation into the category

`realist' that provides the argument with its ultimate force. Indeed, the selection of linguistic categories (in this case, realist and idealist) is rhetorically significant; "they are designed for talking" and accomplish specific interactional objectives (Edwards, 1991: 537). Nationalists disclaim a racial identity and justify their stance on racial issues by accounting for their actions in terms of `keeping their feet firmly on the ground' and `facing the facts'. Furthermore, their arguments simultaneously criticise people (cf. Billig, 1987) to the left of themselves for being idealists - for "having their heads in the clouds" and "not being able to face up to reality".

The following sequence of talk occurs about three quarters of the way into an interview with Heidi and is exemplary of the arguments nationalists made with respect to the notions of `realism' and `idealism':

**Interviewer:** *And how have your views changed over time (.) or haven't they changed much?*

**Heidi:** *Well, when I was much younger it [race] wasn't important at all so I didn't really think about it and then when I started thinking about it quite seriously I was very very angry about it. I sort of went to the extreme you know `this is* <u>*terrible*</u> *that these things happen' and that's when I joined the group at school and then I was jolted back again to my normal `well, it doesn't really matter'. And I don't know (.) my views have basically become more realistic now I think. I think that's the only real change, not any extreme notions.*

**Interviewer:** *And by `realistic' , what do you mean?*

**Heidi:** *Well that I view things in terms of real people and not things that I've heard other people say and things I would wish and some sort of idealistic society that I would have wanted in high school.*

In this sequence of talk, Heidi draws flexibly upon the categories of `realist' and `idealist' in order to construct an image of herself as not racist. As with most *(85% of Nationalists in total)* interviewees/who made use of these terms, they are invoked

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toward the end of the interview. This presentation strategy (although probably not conscious) serves to `correct' any earlier misperceptions that the speaker suspects may have been conveyed: the speaker is not racist, s/he is merely a realist. Indeed, nationalists would argue that their idealism is constrained by the realities of racial difference. A closer examination of the discourse of Heidi will reveal how nationalists achieve this rhetorical goal.

The first aspect of Heidi's talk which is of significance is her description of how she felt ("very, very angry") when she began to reflect on racial issues in South Africa. This phrase represents yet another example of extreme case formulation (Pomerantz, 1986), here used to maximum effect in the sense that Heidi is attempting to construct an account of her feelings as extreme, and idealistic. Indeed, her next utterance validates the function of this rhetorical strategy: "I sort of went to the extreme you know". Heidi then shifts `footing' (Goffman, 1981) and makes use of reported speech to communicate the sort of things she would have been saying at that time, as opposed to her views now. The tone of "this is *terrible*, that these things happen" was exaggeratedly earnest and troubled, again functioning to highlight that which she wishes to construct as an unnecessarily extreme response.

It was these feelings of concern that led Heidi to join a group at school which set up social gatherings aimed at bringing `black' and `white' children together. Perhaps not unexpectedly (given the complexity of the situations under which contact leads to improved intergroup relations; Foster & Finchilescu, 1986; Mynhardt & du Toit, 1991) this experience proved to be negative for Heidi (she described it in detail earlier in the interview). Her interactions with `black' children served to highlight racial differences and not reinforce similarities. When speaking about the incident Heidi said "I couldn't feel like one of them at all. I felt very much like one of *us*, above these other people that were rushing to the table". Hence Heidi

describes being "jolted" back to her previous position, communicating the `shock' she experienced at `discovering' how `different' "these other people" were. This description constructs Heidi as being concerned with issues of `race' and racism, but constrained by the `reality' of the differences between her and `black' people. In other words, racism is firmly located out there, it is externalised and is not a result of Heidi's irrational personality.

The use of reported speech ("well it doesn't really matter") again serves to distil the central elements of Heidi's position which seems to be that racial differences are of no consequence as long as one does not have to have contact across the boundaries that define them. She reinforces this position by reiterating that it is one of `realism' (recognising that there *are* differences), and not extremism (denying differences).

Finally, Heidi defines realism in terms of what it is - a concern with "real people" (again emphasising `real' differences) - and in terms of what it is not using the powerful construction of three-partedness (Jefferson, 1990). At this point her implicit criticism of those who do not share her view is most clearly evident. `Idealists' do not form their own opinions but view the world through the eyes of others, they live in a fairy-tale land of wishes and dreams, and they remain in an extreme phase of desiring an ideal society that is characteristic of adolescents.

In summary, the case of Heidi serves to demonstrate how *(as noted, 85% directly made use of these linguistic manoeuvres)* nationalists select and use particular categories, realist and idealist, in order to disclaim a racist identity. Through establishing a series of `facts', nationalists account for their actions in terms of realism; that is, they attempt to "make their discourse `reasonable' by finding external reasons for discrimination" (Billig, 1988b: 91). In addition, implicit in nationalists' justifications of their position are the seeds of criticism

of those with whom they share an argumentative context. As we have seen, nationalists claim that they `facing the facts' while others cling to their wishy-washy ideals.

In the final section, we shall examine the rhetorical strategy of denial which pervaded nationalist discourse. Clearly, if `races' are a fact and racism an inevitability, then all people may be considered racist. For the nationalist, racists represent that handful of irrational personalities who act in overtly prejudiced ways; they, by contrast, are not racist - they are realists.

## 6.5 `It's not my fault': Denial and the Absence of Reflexivity

Denials of racism assume a prominent role in contemporary racist discourse (Cochrane & Billig, 1984; van Dijk, 1992) and are epitomised in the classic disclaimer `I'm not racist, but ...'. However as we shall see in the following two chapters (refer section 7.3 and 8.3 respectively), denials of racism were not a feature of the discourse of left-wing interviewees in this study, and were uncommon in the accounts of liberals. However, this well-known phenomenon *was* characteristic of the talk of nationalists, possibly because the nationalists in this sample were similar to the type of people interviewed in previous studies.

The lower frequency of denials of racism in this study, compared to others, may be attributable to aspects of the South African context (refer chapter 7, section 7.3), but remains difficult to explain in the absence of actually comparing the material. However, differences between the political groups in this study in their use of denial appear to be related to the nature of the argument developed to disclaim a racist identity.

Briefly, all interviewees attempted to externalise `race' and the phenomenon of racism via some combination of the discourses of biologism, cognitivism and social constructionism. However, while left-wing and liberal

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interviewees admitted that they had internalised racism, nationalists failed to describe a process whereby they were socialised into being racist or positioned by a discourse of racism. Hence, they*// denied that they were racist: racism remained a function of `real' differences, of `facts' external to the individual and beyond their control.

It is for this reason that, while left-wing and liberal discourse was replete with references to personal experience of racism and was laden with accounts of guilt and self-reproach, these were almost entirely absent within nationalist discourse. For nationalists, the reality of racial difference and antagonism was unquestioned and therefore they did not assume personal responsibility for it. Their talk was typically constructed around this `fact': "You see I take quite a selfish attitude. I say these people are much more different to me but that's not my fault. The fact that it is like that is not *my* fault" (Glen; original emphasis). Thus, while the admissions of racism of left-wing and liberal speakers were functionally linked to discourse which was reflexive (cf. Ashmore, 1989; Woolgar, 1988b) in nature, the denials of racism of nationalist speakers were functionally related to talk that was characteristically non-reflexive.

The following sequence of extracts, serves to illustrate how nationalist denials of racism function within the non-reflexive nature thought. Again they are gleaned from a variety of interview contexts, but stem principally from talk about relationships with people who are not `white' and narratives of the speaker's personal development.

*Jennifer: I've got a very very good friend, one of my best friends is a coloured girl and she's a wonderful person and I really get on with her and we're really good buddies and (.) but I always think to myself thank goodness she's not one of those coloured people. The fact that she is coloured doesn't come into it because she doesn't act coloured.*

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**Sarah:** *I didn't know the difference between a black and a
white or Uncle Peter and the garden boy*

**Tracy:** *We were talking about some family that wanted to
move into Meadowlands and I said `well, why not?'
And he said `well Tracy remember, they're coloured'
and I said `oh yes, oh ja.'*

**Joe:** *Intimate in sexual relationship? [yes] Not with a
black person, no. With a coloured girl, yes. I've
seen some very beautiful coloured girls. But not
with a black girl, no. I've always found that
physical characteristics are the initiator of
anything and I don't think I could find a black
girl that was beautiful (.) but I think what we
are looking here is a preference for physical
characteristics, not a preference for race.*

These extracts typify the talk of nationalists and possess
features identified in other studies concerned with `race'
talk (eg. Billig, 1991; van Dijk, 1987). Jennifer even
provides us with a classic `some of my best friends are
black' statement. Her version is formulated to maximum
effect by means of the rhetorical strategies of extreme
case formulation (Pomerantz, 1986) : "a *very very good*
friend", and the construction of a three-part list
(Jefferson, 1990) : "she's a wonderful person", "I really
get on with her", "we're really good buddies".

Interestingly, Jennifer's disclaimer does not function to
ward off a racist attribution, quite the contrary. Instead
of the traditional `I'm not racist, some of my best friends
are black', Jennifer's formulation is the exact opposite
"One of my best friends is a coloured girl ... but ...
thank goodness she's not one of those coloured people".
This extract typifies the non-reflexive nature of
nationalist talk. While left-wing and to a lesser degree
liberal interviewees would have engaged in some reparative
work following a statement so transparently racist,
nationalists rarely did so. This is possibly because the
arguments of liberals and those on the left fundamentally
questioned the category of `race', while those of the
nationalists asserted the legitimacy of the category on the
basis of `differences'. These differences, however, were
not limited to those between `black' and `white', but

included `differences' between `good' `black' people such as Jennifer's friend and `bad' `black' people who were to be avoided.

The accounts of Sarah and Tracy incorporate another argument commonly associated with denials of racism; that is, that the speaker is unaware of `race'. Again, this contrasts sharply with the other two groups of interviewees who admitted that they were extremely conscious of `race'. Ironically, Sarah uses the term `garden *boy*' in the example she uses to warrant her argument that she fails to notice peoples' skin colour. Her very language belies the fact that she was only too aware of the difference between "Uncle Peter and the garden-boy" (Note: garden `boy' was the term traditionally used to refer to `black' adult men employed in the gardens of `white' households. However, in recent years it has become increasingly unpopular due to its overtly racist connotations).

Tracy uses reported dialogue in a brief account of her lack of awareness of `race'. The exchange occurs between Tracy and a `coloured' friend and the topic of discussion is a family desirous of moving into an area called Meadowlands, very close to where Tracy lives. Meadowlands was a `white' area under the previous Group Areas Act which was still in force at the time of the conversation. Tracy is attempting to construct an image of herself as someone for whom `race' means nothing. However, to simply assert this is not sufficient. By reporting a conversation with another person, significantly not a white person, Tracy lends credibility to her account. Moreover, she is able to register her `lack of understanding' as to why the family could not move into Meadowlands and her almost vague recollection of the issue at stake "oh yes, oh ja". The utterances of the voices of Tracy and her friend are *designed to reveal that her lack of awareness of `race' was* confirmed by a `coloured' person: he gently reminds her that the family is `coloured'.

In the final extract in this series, Joe is responding to a question from the interviewer about having an intimate relationship with someone who was not white. This question was put following a fairly extensive discussion about the interviewee's relationships with people of other `races'. The gist of Joe's argument is that he could not have a sexual relationship with a `black' woman because he does not find them physically attractive. He denies that such a position is racist in two ways. First, he attests that he could have such a relationship with a `coloured' person and uses the familiar strategy of extreme case formulation ("some *very beautiful* coloured girls") to emphasise the point. Second, he directly denies that not finding "black girls" attractive is racist, and attempts to argue that it is simply an issue of certain physical characteristics using the common-place that physical attraction is the factor that propels one to get to know someone better.

In summary, the talk of nationalists was replete with denials of racism and was characterised by an absence of reflexive thought. Consequently, it was very different to the talk of interviewees on the left and those of liberal persuasion. For nationalists, the discourses of biologism and cognitivism established `race', racism and the perception of racial differences as universal truths. Racism was located `out there' entirely, and was denied any presence `within' the nationalist speaker. Possibly because nationalists were convinced of the force of their own argument, they failed to be reflexive. Furthermore, critical self-reflection may have revealed elements of racism within the speaker and that would have fundamentally undermined the position they were attempting to construct.

### 6.6  Summary

In summary, the talk of Nationalists was constructed principally in terms of the discourses of biologism and cognitivism. However, the two were not mutually exclusive. The common thread which bound them together and caused them to blur into one another was biology. In total four `facts'

were established through reference to the ideas of `science'.

1.    `races' are biologically distinct entities, inherently different from one another (scientific racism).

2.    `races' remain `naturally' separate due to insuperable cultural differences (differentialist racism).

3.    the process of social categorisation is a natural and functional biological mechanism which reflects actual similarities and differences evident in the `real' world (social cognition type arguments).

4.    universal cognitive processes predispose all people to ethnocentrism, and therefore to discriminating against groups other than their own (social identity type arguments).

The ideas embodied within the first premise are reinforced by each of the following three. Cultural differences mirror inherent biological differences, biological mechanisms of social cognition confirm that distinct groups exist in the world `out there', and feelings of enmity towards those other groups reflect natural patterns of segregation. These four aspects of nationalist `race' talk combine to provide the speaker with a powerful warrant for denying that s/he is racist. Nationalists claim that they are not irrational bigots, rather that they are merely providing a factual account of an external reality. Consequently, they define themselves as realists.

In the following chapter the focus of discussion is the talk of liberals. As we shall see, their language of racism presents quite a different picture.

# CHAPTER SEVEN

# LIBERAL TALK: `I'M SORRY ABOUT ALL THE CONTRADICTIONS'

## 7.1 Introduction

This chapter concerns the talk of those participants whom I have termed `Liberals'. These speakers declared their support for the Democratic party, a small party to the left of the Nationalist party and historically associated with liberal `white' English-speaking South Africans. Liberal talk differs from the Nationalist talk examined in the previous chapter, and the Left-wing talk analysed in the subsequent chapter, in terms of the discourses and rhetorical devices used in the construction of accounts of `race' and racism.

The talk of interviewees who defined themselves as Liberal was constructed in terms of all three of the discourses identified earlier (refer chapter 5, sections 5.2.1, 5.2.2 and 5.2.3); that is, the discourses of biologism, cognitivism and constructivism. Although the discourse of cognitivism was primary, the talk of Liberals drew flexibly *frequently - (ie. all interviewees in this group drew upon this discourse at least 6 times - in their talk)* upon the remaining two discourses. Consequently the language of Liberals constituted the most variable talk in this study, echoing elements of Nationalist talk (heard through the discourse of biologism in particular) *in 70% of cases* and Left-wing talk (heard through the discourse of constructivism) *in 60% of cases* within a unique construction of topics and rhetorical strategies.

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Liberal participants typically described themselves as beset by contradiction. Although the manifestation of contradictory themes in modern racial discourse (Billig, 1988b) is well established, the reflexive commentary of speakers themselves upon this feature of their talk seems to have received little attention. In this study, sixty percent of Liberals apologised during the interview for their lack of clarity. Clare, for example, at the end of her interview offered the following:

**Clare:** *Ja, I mean it's [`race'] not a resolved thing for me at all. It is a hugely problematic thing that I have not come to terms with at all (.) it is that ambivalence (.) I'm not sure where my views are at ....*

Of course, we shall be examining the function of this type of statement within the sections that follow.

Apart from the degree of variability evidenced in Liberal talk, it differed in two other respects from the discourse of Nationalist and Left-wing speakers. Liberals focused on emotion. Speakers in this group spoke about themselves and about their feelings, especially feelings of guilt and anxiety, a great deal. Even within the context of talking about the injustices of Apartheid, Liberals spoke primarily about how it concerned *them*. In other words, their talk was preoccupied with the self. By contrast, people on the left framed their language within a wider concern for `all South Africans' or `the oppressed', for example; while Nationalists couched their discourse within talk of `an external reality' or `the hard facts'.

The concern of Liberals for themselves was echoed through their expressed opinions on a range of topics or issues. Liberals voiced reservations about the policy of affirmative action, fears of reverse racism, fears of material losses following nationalisation and a concern not to be seen as `white' by `black' people in South Africa – in other words, to be seen as a non-racist individual and not as a member of an oppressive minority group.

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These central themes of Liberal talk will become more apparent in the detailed analysis which follows.

## 7.2 The discourses of Liberalism: `I'm always aware not to seem like I'm a spoilt white brat'

The discourse of cognitivism outlined earlier (refer chapter 5, section 5.2.2) is founded upon the ideas behind Social Cognition and Social Identity Theory. Although Nationalist and Left-wing interviewees used this discourse in the construction of their accounts of `race' and racism, it was amongst Liberals that it predominated. In essence, this discourse served to construct the notion of social groups and the processes of social categorisation, social identity, and social comparison as `truths', enabling Liberals to disclaim a racist identity.

Indeed, in warranting their claims to non-racism, Liberal speakers frequently made explicit reference to particular theorists and theories, especially the work of Henri Tajfel; for example:

**Alan:** *You know like the work of Tajfel and his cronies (.). All these theories go a certain way to explain part of why we make these distinctions and why we have this inability to just look at someone as a person.*

Here Alan is using Tajfelian theory to excuse racial categorisation (and stereotyping) through citing the notion that such processes are biologically functional and unavoidable. As noted earlier, the danger of cognitivist approaches (Edwards & Potter, 1992) is precisely that prejudice is seen as inevitable (Billig, 1987). Moreover, these ideas are adopted not by the diehard racists, but by those who define themselves as liberal, progressive and *non-racist*.

The ideas behind Social Identity Theory form the basis of a differentialist racism (Taguieff, 1988) in that they enable the speaker to maintain insurmountable differences between `races', while refuting a biological basis to `race' and arguing that in reality there are no `human races'. Thus,

nature is replaced with ideas of social categorisation, social identity and ethnocentrism which explicate the `spontaneous' tendency for human groups to cohere. In short, it legitimates a distinction between `us' and `them' within a framework of "racism without races" (Balibar, 1991a: 21).

Despite the arguably more acceptable form of these neo-racist arguments (Balibar, 1991a), speakers are well aware of the normative sanctions against the expression of racist sentiments. For this reason we have seen an increase in studies investigating `modern', `symbolic' or `subtle' racism (eg. Duckitt, 1993; Kinder & Sears, 1981; McConahay & Hough, 1976; McConahay, 1986), and in studies such as this one which focus upon the discursive practice associated with `race' talk (eg. Cochrane & Billig, 1984; Condor, 1988; Wetherell & Potter, 1986, 1992; van Dijk, 1987, 1992). The Liberals in this study repeatedly expressed their concern to be "as liberal as possible" (Rose) and to be "completely rid of the stain of racism that I bear" (James), demonstrating their appreciation of the negative consequences of conservative and racist views.

However, perhaps the most significant feature of Liberal talk was its complex, confused and contradictory nature. Here, "the dialectic of prejudice" (Billig et al, 1988: 100) was most in evidence. In particular, it was articulated through a fundamental tension between the social and the individual, but was echoed through sub-dilemmas such as self versus others, and apathy versus activism.

The following, rather lengthy, extract exemplifies the nature of this talk. The speaker, Chloe, is addressing the causes of racism. Immediately prior to the cited extract, she provided an abstract description of some of the ideas behind Social Identity Theory to account for the phenomenon of racism. At this juncture, the interviewer asked Chloe to provide a concrete example of the theoretical ideas she

was outlining.  The following extract represents her response:

**Chloe:** ... *sometimes when these big meetings are held []*
*this is an instance of feeling (.) feeling the*
*difference um (.) for this particular one I was*
*with this man I was speaking about (.) and just*
*somehow within that crowd I felt quite isolated (.)*
*I felt very different (.) and I wanted so much to*
*feel the same (soft laughter) I wanted so much to*
*be able to sing with them (.) and I couldn't (.)*
*and I just felt a real gap (.) which was partly my*
*fault as well (.) I felt it was their meeting (.)*
*although there were other white people there as*
*well and it was very much an open to everyone*
*meeting  (.) I just felt very much (.) I felt at*
*that moment `this is their struggle' (.) and `why*
*am I here?'  (.) `this is their struggle' (.) and*
*it's not  really like that.  I don't see it like*
*that (.)  but just then I felt it.*

Chloe constructs her answer around a narrative of concern
for racism in South Africa.  The content of the account is
significant in that it is designed to portray the speaker
as *anti*-racist; that is, she describes her participation in
an anti-apartheid activity, a mass meeting (mass meetings
such as the one Chloe referred to occurred frequently in
South Africa at the time, they were usually focused around
a specific issue or event and were attended by concerned
`white' people although the majority were usually `black').

However, Chloe's account is typical of the Liberal
*discourse in this study and as such is by no means*
"undilemmatically straightforward" (Billig et al, 1988:
100).  One may note that it is formulated predominantly
within the first person singular (I) and is punctuated by
references to how `I feel', and what `I want'. Chloe is not
addressing the plight of `black' people, rather she is
highlighting how this affects *her*.  As mentioned above, a
focus upon self, upon `I', was a striking feature of this, *for most*
*(all participants couched their arguments within the context of `I' of the*
group/and at times created difficulties for the speaker in *interview)*
that it seemed to contradict their arguments for the
salience of social groups.

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In this extract, Chloe is confronting the following contradiction: at other points in the interview she had argued that `race' was of no consequence to her (we shall be examining the nature of this argument shortly), yet here she wishes to make a case for racial differences. Generally, an argument of no differences between people accords with a position of non-racism/ anti-racism (refer Left-wing discourse in chapter 8), while assertions of racial difference are suggestive of an underlying racist ideology (refer Nationalist discourse in chapter 6). Chloe wishes to account for her `feeling white' in terms of `the difference' between `black' and `white' people; however, she has to choose her words carefully so as to construct the difference as a feature of an external reality (as did the Nationalists) and not a feature of her prejudiced personality. Let us examine the text a little more closely to ascertain how she accomplishes this objective.

Chloe attempts to achieve a non-racist account of feeling `white' through the use of a number of rhetorical devices. First, she defends against a potential criticism that she felt different simply because she was on unfamiliar territory. In other words, that as a South African `white' she was unused to `black' company and/or experiencing large numbers of `black' people. Of course, this criticism would imply that such a response is unreasonable and indicative of prejudice.

Chloe provides two pieces of information which would rebut such a criticism; the first is that she has attended mass meetings before ("for this *particular* one"), and the second is that she attended with a `black' friend ("I was with *this man* I was speaking about"). Notably, although she had spoken about `this man' at some length earlier, she omits to mention that he is `black' in this context thereby reinforcing the notion that his `race' is of no consequence to her. Chloe's reference to her friend reflects the familiar `some of my best friends are black' argument albeit in somewhat more subtle form. The function of these

two elements of Chloe's argument therefore is to signal that she is not racist: she attends mass meetings against apartheid and she has `black' friends.

Secondly, Chloe constructs her feeling of isolation within the crowd, her experience of `difference', as an singular incident. She begins by asserting that "*sometimes* when these big meetings are held" and then hesitates before formulating the example of "this particular one" with it's significant characteristics described in the previous paragraph. The use of the word `sometimes' followed by the description of the incident conveys that this is an unusual feeling for Chloe. Moreover, this idea is reinforced by the claim at the end of the account that it was "*just then I felt it*".

However, not only is this feeling rare, it `just somehow' occurred. The selection of the phrase `just somehow' is significant in that it implies a passivity on Chloe's part. This feeling did not originate within Chloe, it `just somehow' overcame her. She had not gone to the meeting expecting differences; quite the contrary, she had gone to a mass meeting, as she had in the past, with a `black' friend *to protest against racism*. Yet `just somehow' she felt isolated and different. Thus Chloe constructs herself *as passive, neutral and essentially non-racist*.

Thirdly, Chloe asserts that her intention at the meeting was the exact opposite of what occurred :"and I wanted *so much* to feel the same (soft laughter) I wanted *so much* to be able to sing with them" (my emphasis). Chloe makes use of the rhetorical devices of repetition and extreme case formulation (`so much'; Pomerantz, 1986) to maximise the genuiness of her desire to `be at one with black people'. However, there are two features of this statement which belie other agendas. First, surely one only expresses a deep desire to feel the same if one is experiencing a feeling of difference? And second, the second sentence in this couplet contains an irony: Chloe wants `so much' to be the same as `*them*'. While `so much' serves to highlight the

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desire for sameness, `them' functions to expose the difference - the contrary themes of modern racial discourse are captured within a single sentence.

In the midst of this statement Chloe laughs softly. The laugh seems to be directed towards herself and constructs Chloe's belief in `sameness' as naive. In other words, it reinforces the notion that Chloe `innocently' assumed that `race' was irrelevant and happened upon feelings of `difference' at this particular meeting. In this respect the extract demonstrates certain parallels with the Nationalist material. Chloe wants to believe that everyone is the same (Nationalists would explicitly define this position as one of idealism) and yet she is confronted with the `reality' of difference (what Nationalists would describe as a position of realism).

In order to warrant her assertions of difference, Chloe provides an example. She argues that she felt a "*real* gap" (my emphasis) at the moment when the formal aspects of the meeting gave way to singing. The term `real' is clearly designed to convey that the `difference' between people who are `black' and those who are `white' is `fact' - and not a feature of an irrational mind. Indeed, this whole account functions to describe how Chloe stumbled upon `the truth'. It constructs Chloe as unwilling to accept `differences'; yet, `forced' to confront the reality of their existence (in this respect, Liberal discourse is not dissimilar to Left-wing discourse).

Chloe's acceptance of the reality of racial `difference' is expressed through statement that she is willing to assume partial responsibility for her feelings of isolation ("which I felt was partly my fault as well"). It is probable that the `part' for which she would accept responsibility is learning the words of the song(s) sung at the meeting. However, Chloe implies that the rest of the responsibility for her feelings of isolation lie elsewhere. Although this remains undefined, it resonates with

Nationalist talk – Nationalists argue that it is not their fault that races *are* different.

Finally, Chloe argues her case more strongly with references to "*their* meeting" and "*their* struggle" (original emphasis). However, Chloe shifts her interactional footing (Goffman, 1981) in order to distance herself from these more sensitive statements. By making use of reported speech Chloe separates the roles of animator and author. The `animator' is the current speaker, the `author' is the person who originally composed the words (Clayman, 1989). This rhetorical strategy serves to distinguish between Chloe now (animator) and Chloe then (author), enabling Chloe to deny that she still experiences racial differences and to assert that it was "just then I felt it". Although, of course, in the spirit of contradiction, less than a page further on in the transcript, Chloe affirmed that `race' was important for `black' people in particular in South Africa "especially because (.) it is their struggle for freedom, okay?".

In summary, Chloe employs a number of rhetorical devices to construct herself as non-racist, despite her formulation of an argument which supports the existence of racial `differences'. Essentially, Chloe espouses a differentialist racism which postulates insurmountable `cultural' differences between people defined as belonging to different `races'. It will be recalled that `the moment of exclusion' for Chloe occurred when the singing began.

The lines of argument used to strengthen a position of differentialist racism are those associated with theories of Social Cognition and Social Identity. As noted above, this extract follows immediately upon Chloe's accurate presentation of some these ideas, in particular those of Henri Tajfel, and represents her concrete example of how they operate in practice (refer also chapter 5, section 5.2.2).

Ideas of the inevitability of social categorisation, of the 'natural' formation of social groups, and of the centrality of psychological processes such as social identity and social comparison are established as 'fact' through reference to the 'science' of psychology. These 'truths' enable Chloe to construct herself as being non-racist, even anti-racist, since they provide 'objective' and external accounts of prejudice: prejudice is inevitable, *yet* Chloe is attempting to overcome feelings of racism in herself.

While the Liberal discourse of which Chloe's talk is exemplary, is different to both Nationalist and Left-wing discourse, it contains elements of both. Although Liberals do not warrant their accounts by reference to biology, they do develop arguments which seek to establish insuperable cultural differences between races. Indeed, it is perhaps this notion which reflects the tensions of liberalism most clearly. On the one hand, cultural arguments operate like biology as Balibar (1991a) has demonstrated. This, coupled with assertions of the biologically functional role of social categorisation and the inevitability of racism result in Liberal talk resonating with that of Nationalists. Yet, on the other hand, the argument for cultural differences (as opposed to biological ones) is used by Liberals to argue for the social construction of 'race' (as we shall see shortly). In this way, Liberal talk approximates Left-wing discourse. This observation serves to highlight the dilemmatic nature of Liberal talk, and to affirm the fundamental significance of the 'wording of meanings' (Kristeva, 1986); that is, meaning does not precede wording but is developed within the context and content of argumentation.

Thus far our discussion has concentrated upon group-based arguments contained within Liberal discourse on 'race' and racism. However, closely intertwined with arguments for the salience of social groups and intergroup processes are arguments which afford primacy to the individual. Liberal

speakers argue that although categorisation and racism are inevitable, they believe in `the individual'. They assert that they are `individualists' and that they pride themselves on treating all individuals equally irrespective of their group membership. Concurrently, they express a desire to be seen as an individual and not as a member of the oppressive minority: `a spoilt white brat'. The following series of extracts provides examples of this type of argument. They are taken from various discursive contexts since the individualist argument permeated most topics concerning `race' and racism:

**Simon:** *Well for me personally I like to ignore it um I suppose most people don't and sometimes you can't help seeing that it is there you know you did notice differences but um I do try to ignore race (.) it's something I've tried to teach myself to do um throughout my life is to say well it might enter your head in the first few minutes of meeting someone and then you immediately try and put it away and say `well look, there is no race here there is no difference in race here.*

**Tom:** *It seems to me that we just make use of these descriptive terms and I personally am not particularly interested in doing that and I'm very much in favour of of looking at people as individuals not as anything else.*

**Stacey:** *I think groups have a polarising effect. I mean if you belong to one group then you will always be juxtaposed against another group or another two groups. You know all that second year theory (.) and I don't really understand the point of doing that unless you're playing a rugby match where you want to win. But if you want everyone to come out winners then why group people? []*

Liberals seemed to account for the individualist argument in two ways; they either addressed the apparent contradiction between their arguments for the overwhelming power of social categorisation and their claims to treating people as individuals, or they chose to minimise it. These two strategies are reflected in the above quotations. Simon adopts the former strategy: addressing the *(80%)* contradiction and, like many Liberals, describing his valiant efforts to overcome biology and socialisation and achieve his ideal of individualism and non-racism. Tom and

Stacey on the other hand, employ the latter strategy. *(used by 75% of this group)* They minimise the power of social groups (although they both argued vociferously for this at other points in the interview) and imply that it is a matter of choice as to whether one perceives people as individuals or as members of a particular social group. In order to understand better the nature and function of these arguments we need to examine the text a little more closely.

Just prior to the first excerpt Simon had been arguing for the inevitability of social groups, warranting his statements by means of the now familiar notions behind Social Cognition and Social Identity Theory. Possibly in defence of a potential criticism from the interviewer that such a position remains fundamentally racist, Simon qualifies his earlier stance. He attempts to disclaim a racist identity by denying that `race' is significant within his interpersonal relations. However, his argumentative strategy is sophisticated in that he juxtaposes individualist arguments against cognitivist ones.

For example, Simon initially states: "personally I like to ignore it" (`race'). However, this unmitigated denial of racism is immediately followed by a three part list (Jefferson, 1990) which serves to highlight the uniqueness of Simon's position ("I suppose most people don't") ,and the difficulty involved in maintaining it ("you can't help seeing that it is there", "you do notice differences"). Furthermore, his description of how he perceives the individual is formulated within the first person singular (I), while his accounts of `noticing differences' are formulated within the second person plural (you). This rhetorical construction serves to heighten the contrast between Simon and other people: while everyone is subject to the processes of biology and socialisation, Simon is exceptional in his personal quest to overcome racism.

Moreover as we have noted previously, the discourse of cognitivism constructs ideas of difference as part of an

external reality - one which is impossible to overlook because it exists visibly `out there'. Hence, even people like Simon "can't help seeing that it is there" (my emphasis) because "you do notice differences". The inevitability of social categorisation and prejudice `excuses' Simon for his perception of racial differences. He is not the irrational bigot who intentionally involves himself in racist practice; on the contrary, Simon constructs himself as like everyone else (in that he is subject to the same reality) but better (in that despite this, he attempts to perceive people as individuals and not as members of racial groups). We may note here that this account has parallels with the arguments of both Nationalist and Left-wing speakers. With respect to the former group, the similarity lies in the expression of the view that biological mechanisms of social cognition function to `pick up' real category differences, such as `race'. With respect to the latter group, the similarity lies in the distinction between `good' racists (like Simon) and `bad' racists (other people).

In order to warrant his assertions of non-racism and to clearly convey the formidable nature of the task he has set himself (thereby building a defense against occasions of failure), Simon describes the lengths to which he has gone in order to overcome his own prejudice. He claims: "I've tried to teach myself (.) throughout my life to say ... there in no race here" (my emphasis). Simon's use of the word `tried' signifies two things; first, he has made an effort to overcome racism where "most people don't" and second, overcoming racism is not easy - one can try, but may not succeed. The rhetorical device of extreme case formulation (Pomerantz, 1986) evident in the phrase `throughout my life' dramatises and magnifies Simon's efforts to overcome the `natural' tendency to perceive `race' and prejudge people on that basis.

Finally, Simon provides a hypothetical example of how he reacts when he meets someone who is not `white': he tells

himself "well look there is no race here, there is no difference in race here". By shifting his interactional footing (Goffman, 1981), Simon manages to "distil regularly occurring features of events and bring them together in a form which may not strictly represent the occasions of their occurrence in `real life'" (Wooffitt, 1992:84). This functions to provide the listener with a general case and significantly, since the nature of the description provided is general, any claims contained within the example are not available for scrutiny (Wooffitt, 1992). It should be noted that the content of this quotation is similar to that of Left-wing speakers. They argue that there is no such thing as `race' and that its `existence' is a social construction. Arguments for individualism thus incorporate more progressive ideas gleaned from an alternative theoretical base.

In summary, Simon accomplishes his non-racial position via the discourse of cognitivism and to a small degree via some of the ideas which are typical of the discourse of constructivism. The discourse of cognitivism establishes certain ideas, which demonstrate the inevitability of racism, as `fact'. These `facts' function to excuse Simon of any racist practice in which he may engage. He would argue, in the face of potential criticism, that he is not really racist, he (like everyone else) is subject to the biological mechanisms of social cognition and the powerful socialisation of value differentials associated with people defined as belonging to different `races'.

The discourse of constructivism, heard through the argument of no differences between people, provides Simon with an ideal to aim for: that he can treat all people as individuals because there are no differences between them. Simon constructs himself as battling to overcome biology and socialisation in an attempt to achieve this ideal. His argument is designed to engender a sympathetic response in the listener, one which excuses any racist assumptions Simon might make in the face of the lengths to which he has

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gone to treat people as (equal) individuals and to be non-racist.

Although arguments such as Simon's were common among Liberal speakers, many of this group (70%) at times downplayed the component of the inevitability of racism contained within cognitivist discourse. This is illustrated in the remaining two quotations; in particular by Tom's statement: "we just make use of these descriptive terms", "I personally am not particularly interested in doing that" (my emphasis) and Stacey's assertion: "I don't really understand the point of doing that".

Tom suggests in this extract that the category of `race' operates simply to describe an external reality. In this respect his talk is similar to that of Nationalists who argued that the category in itself is innocent. However, Tom is constructing a slightly different argument here. He is desirous of disclaiming a racist identity and aims to do so by constructing racists as people who operate with intent. Hence, he asserts that `people' (ie. racists) `just make use' of the category, unthinkingly and because they find it expedient to do so. Tom, by contrast, claims not to be "particularly interested in doing that" since he is "very much in favour of looking at people as individuals not as anything else". Arguably, although he does not explicitly mention the repercussions of racial labelling, Tom's talk remains informed by the idea that mere description leads to stereotyping and prejudice. This construction serves to portray racial categorisation and stereotyping as a matter of choice, a choice made by irrational bigots but not made by reasonable people like Tom.

Stacey's account achieves similar rhetorical objectives. She also implies that intergroup relations have more to do with choice than with processes of social cognition or socialisation despite formulating strong arguments to the contrary elsewhere in the interview (for example: "I don't know (sigh) these things seem cast in iron"). Although

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Stacey provides an explanation of inter-group behaviour broadly along the ideas behind Tajfelian theory ("you know all that second year theory"), she claims that she "doesn't really understand the point" of social categorisation and social comparison since "if you want everyone to come out winners then why group people?".

This extract functions to construct Stacey as naive, a strategy also adopted by Chloe as we saw earlier. Stacey's account implies a disbelief that some people are not concerned for the betterment of all people. The rhetorical strategy of what I shall term `assuming naivety' (used frequently by Liberals in particular) achieves for the speaker a position of innocence. More specifically, within the context of talk about `race' and racism, the speaker is constructed as `not guilty' of racism. `Assuming naivety' operates to deny that it is possible to be guilty of something of which one is unaware. Thus if Stacey does not understand why (other) people categorise and compare social groups then she cannot be guilty of that practice herself. Ultimately, this strategy serves to distinguish her good, moral and non-racist practice from the bad, immoral and racist intentions of others.

In summary, these three accounts highlight the manner in which ideas behind psychological theories such as Social Cognition and Social Identity may be drawn upon to achieve a position of non-racism for the speaker. Although the discourse of cognitivism is undoubtedly primary, aspects of the discourse of biologism surface in the guise of differentialist arguments while features of the discourse of constructivism are heard through individualist arguments within Liberal talk.

It is difficult to reduce the complexity of Liberal discourse to simple `rules of thumb', but it is not impossible to trace the dominant strategies of Liberal discursive practice (although it is important to bear in mind that this represents a simplification). Essentially, for Liberals the discourse of cognitivism serves to explain

the social order, to establish racial differences as `real' (refer discourse of biologism), to excuse the speaker of racist practice, and to perpetuate a belief in `race' and therefore to sustain racism. On the other hand, notions of individualism function to reject the dominant social order in South Africa, to argue for `no differences' between `races' (refer discourse of constructivism), and to disclaim a racist identity. Yet, concern for the individual also serves to sustain racism in that it does not address the issue of social structure but locates racism as a problem of individual attitudes.

In the following section we shall examine the rhetorical strategies of the denial and admission of racism within Liberal discourse. As we have seen, Liberals are concerned to impress as non-racist and progressive. In the extracts cited above, the speakers may have seemed to be predominantly denying that they were racist. However, the complex nature of Liberal talk requires that the issue is not as straight-forward as it may at first appear.

## 7.3  Denial and Admission: `one word shouldn't cover it all'

Denials of racism have formed a point of focus within analyses of racial discourse (Cochrane & Billig, 1984; van Dijk, 1987, 1992). However, despite the increasing recognition of the dilemmatic nature of prejudice (Billig, 1988a), the focus upon denial has eclipsed the rhetorical strategy of admission. Admissions of racism are defined as instances in which the speaker declares that their practice (or aspects thereof) is racist. The rhetorical strategy of admission was employed by Left-wing and Liberal speakers in this study, although there were differences between the two groups with respect to frequency of use and rhetorical objectives served.

The absence of admissions of racism in other studies may reflect differences in the population sampled. The South African context is unique with respect to the manner in

which the category of `race' has been abused (Thompson & Prior, 1982; for example, enshrining racial categories in law) and clearly this has implications for the manifestation of racism. Consequently, the central role of admissions of racism within the discourse of Liberal and Left-wing speakers in this study may be a particular feature of the South African political landscape.

It is also possible that admissions of racism have not assumed a prominent role in work on `race' and racism to date for conceptual reasons. Arguably, this is a consequence of the dominance of what Billig (1987) refers to as a one-sided and non-rhetorical psychology; that is, one which fails to see thinking "in terms of a wider conflict between logoi and anti-logoi" since "the notion of conflict is not uppermost in this sort of psychology" (p. 119). Thus, although many researchers examining the discourse of racism tend to assume a discursive paradigm, their work may continue to downplay the dilemmatic nature of thought.

In addition, research on racism frequently takes as its focus people who obviously are racist, and since denials of racism almost represent a defining characteristic of such people, it is easy to overlook the perhaps less frequent occurrence of admission. Indeed, while denials provide the discourse analyst with fertile text to deconstruct, admissions of racism at first may seem rather void. However, admissions of racism must not be accepted `at face value'. As discourse analysts we are concerned with language *use*; in other words, we need to attend to the way in which accounts which incorporate admissions of racism are constructed and the functions that they serve.

The language of Liberals, as we have seen in the previous section is characterised by contradiction. It is unique in both form and content and yet it is permeated by elements of the discourses employed by Nationalist and Left-wing speakers. As may be anticipated, Liberal talk embraces both admissions and denials of racism providing further

testament to the fundamentally contradictory and dilemmatic nature thereof.

There are two features associated with the denial and admission of racism within Liberal discourse which distinguish it from that of Nationalist and Left-wing speakers. First, denial and admission are not clearly separated within the talk. Rather, they are functionally intertwined in order to attain particular rhetorical objectives. Second, where there are contextual shifts in the patterning of denials and admissions within Liberal discourse they are concerned with talk about individual `black' people as opposed to groups of `black' people, the latter most often associated with potential violence. Each of these features shall examined in turn.

The following quotation, which is similar to the extract of Simon cited earlier, represents a typical example of the manner in which Liberal interviewees addressed the topic of their own racism:

**Liza:** *I mean even for myself, you do notice race I don't think I'd go beyond that or I try not to. When you get to know somebody that might dissipate somewhat and it might not be an issue for you any longer ... Race is a hot topic as far as people see one another. It might not have all sorts of judgements slapped on it but it will still be there in the way that they categorise and see each other.*

This extract is typical in that it incorporates both admissions and denials of racism. On the one hand, Liza is admitting that she does notice `race' and that this perception informs her interaction in potential `mixed race' relationships - at least initially (Nationalists flatly deny that `race' affects their perception or interaction with people defined as belonging to another `race' while Left-wing speakers admit that it does). On the other hand, Liza denies that she goes beyond `mere' racial categorisation and that she perceives people in terms of stereotypes. However, she does employ the rhetorical device of hedging to head off the potential criticism that such a position is not possible within the

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South African context. Let us examine the text a little more closely in order to ascertain the functions served by this convoluted rhetorical construction.

Liza's admissions of racism are couched within the discourse of cognitivism; that is, they are informed by the ideas of *Social Cognition Theory*. She argues "you do notice race", "it is a hot topic as far as people see one another". Both these statements convey a sense of inevitability, that for people generally and `even' for Liza the social perception of `race' is unavoidable. She backs up this notion with the argument that although the category may not necessarily involve stereotyping, "it *will* still be there in the way that they categorise and see each other" (my emphasis). We may note that Liza frames this statement within the second person (`they') and not the first person (`we'). It is somewhat unclear as to why she does this, having previously admitted that she too categorises people. Possibly it serves to emphasise the point that this is a general phenomenon.

Again, the ideas behind Social Cognition Theory provide a warrant for racism; the perception of racial categories is constructed as a function of human biology and therefore as not being a reflection of a bigoted personality. Essentially, what Liza is admitting to is `innocent' and `natural' categorisation; what she is denying is that in her case categorisation is linked to racist assumptions and stereotypes.

Liza's denial of racism operates at two levels. First, there is the more obvious denial which takes the form that Liza does not hold stereotyped beliefs about people who are not `white': "I don't think I go beyond that or I try not to". Nevertheless, this denial is carefully constructed. The phrases `I *don't think*' and `I *try not to*' shield Liza from the criticism that it is impossible to `just' see the category and blot out the ideas associated with it. Like Simon (refer section 7.2), Liza could argue that personally she is `trying' not to see `race', but that ultimately she

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is engaged in a struggle against her own biology and socialisation.

The second level of denial is somewhat more subtle and is fundamentally linked to the strategy of admission; in fact, the denial is embodied within the admission of racism. The first step in this complex construction is that Liberals produce an account which renders the process of categorisation as non-racist; as we have seen, it is established as a `fact' of human biology. This construction however, represents a *denial* of racism (Left-wing speakers would argue that categorisation per se *is* racism and admit that they engage in this racist practice). Herein lies the twist: Liberal speakers *admit* to categorising people in terms of `race'; however, what they are admitting to has previously been denied the status of racist practice.

In one sense then it would be possible to argue that `admission' is really a disguised form of denial, and this may be an accurate interpretation. However, the crux of understanding racist discourse *is* to tease out the way in which accounts are put together and the rhetorical objectives they serve. What is apparent from this analysis is that the dual strategies of admission and denial represent highly flexible devices with which to achieve certain rhetorical ends. For those who wish to define themselves as Liberal, these ends are first, to portray oneself as non-racist, and second, to do so in a manner which demonstrates a sensitive understanding of the issues at hand. By admitting to `racism', Liberals construct themselves as progressive and reasonable people, as people who are willing to reflect upon their practice and change it in the quest to achieve the ideal of non-racism. By so doing they effectively contrast their practice to that of the `real' racists who flatly deny that they engage in racist practice. As Stacey stated: "one word shouldn't cover it all"; in other words, although she is admitting to

racism, she contends that her practice is very different to that of `others'.

Thus far we have examined the nature of admissions and denials within Liberal discourse and we have seen that the complex interplay of denial and admission serves the dual function of constructing the speaker as non-racist and distinguishing him/her from the `real' racists. Let us turn now to examine the second significant feature associated with the `race' talk of Liberals; that is, the *context* of their admissions and denials.

Billig (1987) has noted that the argumentative context within which a piece of discourse is located is essential to an understanding of that discourse. In the case of Liberal talk, denials of racism tended to predominate within the context of talk about individuals, while admissions of racism tended to predominate within the context of talk about groups. As a consequence of this patterning of admissions and denials, Liberal talk concerning relations with individuals parallels aspects of Nationalist discourse, whereas Liberal talk concerning inter-group relations tends to share certain features with Left-wing discourse.

The distinction between responses to individuals and responses to groups was raised spontaneously by the majority (80%) of Liberal speakers. The remainder of the sample were prompted to address the issue by the interviewer, but produced accounts which were similar in form and content to those accounts which were not directly solicited. The following sequence of quotations exemplifies talk of this nature:

**Lucy:** *You know when everything is really peaceful it's (.) you can look at people and look at different race groups as just different people but when something like this happens you put them back in the big stereotype and you don't look for individual qualities and that sort of thing.*

**Clare:** *I think times when it is relevant for me (.) sometimes (.) is when there are groups involved (.) like the strikes the other week.*

**Nick:** *I do experience that split between individual and group (.) I cannot fail to feel a little uncomfortable in a huge crowd of people of another race. Thanks to George I can now tell you that this is a conditioned emotional response and one which has been given to me by the media.*

**Emma:** *I think there is for white people and I think for myself there is quite a lot of anxiety around numbers of black people you know. You kind of (.) also again it's the stereotypes you know like these `violent groups' you know. Kind of SABC's ideal you know. `As soon as you get a group of black people together you have a war' you know and I mean that definitely would affect me especially at the present moment. But and it's not as though it's a rational thought because I mean it isn't rational at all but it's part of how I feel.*

In each of these extracts the speaker is distinguishing between his/her reaction to groups and to individuals. While Lucy, Clare and Emma produced their accounts spontaneously, Nick's was prompted by a question from the interviewer. However, as is evident from a reading of the cited extracts, there is little to distinguish Nick's account from the accounts of the other three cited interviewees.

Previously (refer section 7.2) we noted that Liberals tend to espouse individualism. They argue that although the process of social perception necessitates categorisation, they prefer to see people as individuals and not as members of a pre-defined `race'. This theme of individualism recurs here. The speakers report a "split between individual and group" (Nick) with respect to feelings of racism. The gist of the argument is that it is easier to be non-racist when individuals are involved because one can focus upon that individual's qualities. As we have seen in the previously cited extracts of Liza (refer above), Simon, Tom and Stacey (refer section 7.2), Liberal speakers argue that although they may notice an individual's `race' they do not subscribe to the stereotypes associated with his/her `race-

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group'. In other words, they tend to deny that their interaction with individuals is racist.

Liberals argue that the conditions under which the individualist approach fails are when groups are involved and/or when there is the threat of violence. Each of the above speakers maintains that other `race' *individuals* invoke in him/her a different response to that invoked by other `race' *groups*. Moreover, the notion of groups is strongly tied to ideas of potential violence. This is perhaps best epitomised in Emma's statement that "as soon as you get a group of black people together you have a war"; although she is critical of this idea, she admits it "definitely would affect me".

How though does this articulate with the strategies of admission and denial, and what rhetorical objectives are achieved? Each of these speakers is engaged in a complex *admission* of racism. Lucy argues that "when something like this happens you put them back in the big stereotype". Clare admits that `race' becomes "relevant [] when there are groups involved". Emma asserts that for `white' people, including herself, "there is quite a lot of anxiety around numbers of black people", and Nick affirms that he does "experience a split between individual and group".

We noted above that admissions of racism frequently embody denial, in that what is being admitted to is constructed as non-racist. In the context of talk about groups, however, the process is somewhat different, although the rhetorical aim is similar: to disclaim a racist identity. The key in this instance is to establish feelings of racism as legitimate and this is achieved by constructing as `fact' the notion that groups of `black' people are essentially violent. In this way, feelings of apprehension, anxiety and fear are constructed not as rooted in racial prejudice but as `realistic' under the circumstances.

For example, both Lucy and Clare make reference to a strike by `black' workers on the University campus ("when

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something like this happens"; "like the strikes the other week"), an event which was punctuated with incidents of racial violence. These widely publicised and witnessed incidents provide a powerful warrant for the legitimacy of the womens' feelings. In effect, this argument maintains that `race' only becomes salient when `black' people organise around racial issues (ie. in groups) and when they act in accordance with the stereotypes (ie. violently). This constructs the speaker as `blameless' and groups of `black' people as guilty: ultimately, it is `black' people who are responsible for racism, not `white' people.

Nick and Emma adopt a different strategy in their accounts of how they respond to groups of `black' people, although it too successfully locates the source of racism externally. Both speakers `blame' the media. Emma critically comments upon the dominant images of `black' people portrayed by the State controlled television and radio, yet declares her susceptibility to them. In other words, she is invoking the strategy with which we are now familiar - of arguing for the power of socialisation and the difficulty of overcoming it in pursuit of non-racism. Hence she argues "because I mean it isn't rational but it's part of how I feel"; the implication being `and there is nothing I can do about it'.

Similarly, Nick argues that he "*cannot fail* to feel a little uncomfortable in a *huge* crowd of people of another race" (my emphasis, later he commented "there is always the air of a lynch mob associated with crowds"). His use of the term `cannot fail', and the adjective `huge', represent examples of extreme case formulation (Pomerantz, 1986) and serve to maximise the conditions to which Nick had to respond. While `cannot fail' connotes that Nick had no choice, his response of feeling a `little' uncomfortable in the face of a `huge' crowd is constructed as seeming entirely reasonable.

Furthermore, Nick makes reference to a senior lecturer in the Department of Psychology (George) whose course in

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Behaviourism has provided Nick with an explanation for his response - and thereby provided a warrant for it. In fact, Nick's response to crowds is not of his own volition but "has been *given to me* by the media" (my emphasis). In short Nick's account like that of Emma externalises the source of racism, locating it in the media. Both of these speakers therefore position themselves as passive recipients of a racist ideology which they would wish to overcome (in this way the talk has strong parallels with Left-wing discourse; refer chapter 8). In essence, they are not to blame for the racism to which they admit since it is a function of living in a racist society and not of a prejudiced personality.

In summary, the talk of Liberals remains complex and contradictory - in general and in respect of the rhetorical strategies of denial and admission of racism. While Liberal speakers deny and admit racist practice, both strategies are oriented to disclaiming a racist identity. Frequently, admissions incorporate aspects of denial, but they may also operate to locate the source of racism as an external reality beyond the control of the speaker. Furthermore, the strategy of admission functions to portray the speaker as sensitive to racial issues, as progressive and above all as reasonable (characteristics not synonymous with racism). In the following section, we examine a little more closely Liberal `claims' to self-awareness and insight with respect to their own racism; that is, to the topic of reflexivity.

## 7.4 The Role of Reflexivity: `Its funny, I can't think of a time when I've been racist'

Over the past few years the notion of reflexivity has received increasing attention in studies concerned with discourse (Ashmore, 1989; Potter, 1988a; Woolgar, 1988a, 1988b). Moreover, as noted earlier (refer chapter 4, section 4.5), the issue of reflexivity is multi-faceted and may pertain not only to an awareness on the part of researchers as to the constructedness of their talk or

texts, but to a similar awareness on the part of lay-people. In other words, reflexivity may itself become a rhetorical device which serves particular discursive objectives.

In the previous chapter we noted that the discourse of Nationalists was characterised by a distinct absence of reflexivity, while in the following chapter we shall see that Leftwing speakers demonstrate considerable reflexive ability with respect to their own and others' talk. In this section of the current chapter we examine the notion of reflexivity with respect to Liberal discourse and not unexpectedly, given the findings of the previous two sections, we find that Liberal talk is both reflexive and unreflexive in nature.

Although at first admissions of racism may seem to embrace a reflexive component, a close analysis of this rhetorical strategy revealed that admissions either embraced a denial of racism or externalised racism, thereby absolving the speaker of any responsibility for their practice. In this way therefore they may be regarded as largely non-reflexive in character. Since we dealt with these issues fairly comprehensively in the previous section, our aim here is to make but a few points specifically relating to the role of reflexivity in Liberal discourse.

As with the strategies of admission and denial, the salient feature associated with variation in Liberal reflexive talk was the discursive *context*. In general, considerable reflexivity was demonstrated with respect to the racist *(all liberal speakers deconstructed the behaviour of others at least once)* practice of others, while a lack of reflexivity was *(none of these speakers commented insightfully upon* associated with the speaker's *own* practice. The following *their own practice)* two extracts are exemplary of the former talk:

**Emma:** *I think they would fear you know of all those many stereotypes like this person's not going to have proper personal hygiene and they're going to be uneducated and they're going to have this bizarre huge family `there are going to be 45 people in this family' (smiles) and they're going to want a wedding in the middle of nowhere and you know all*

> *those kind of things that would never be true about an individual.*

**Nick:** *Having set them up as bad and yourself up as good you immediately fall back into a mode of either 'they are inherently bad and I must hate them' or 'they are bad for various reasons and I must save them'. So you can set up a whole culture around hating and saving which makes them the group which makes people able to say things like 'I know the African'.*

Liberal discourse was replete with talk which sought to deconstruct the racist nature of *other* peoples' practice. By contrast self-reflexive talk was minimal. As with those on the left (refer chapter 8, section 8.4), Liberals used humour and irony to 'send up' the foolishness of others; of course, simultaneously distancing themselves from such behaviour. This is clearly demonstrated in the two extracts above, both of which deploy a number of rhetorical strategies to achieve an account which constructs 'others' as racist (bad) and the speaker as non-racist (good). Ironically, while Nick is able to comment upon the splitting of 'good' 'white' people from 'bad' 'black' people, he fails to realise that in doing so he is re-producing exactly such an account: splitting 'good' racists from 'bad' racists.

In a manoeuvre typical of Liberals, both Nick and Emma position themselves as the detached social observer, commenting upon the vagaries of others. Consequently, both shift their interactional footing (Goffman, 1981) at various points in their accounts to distinguish their views from those of the people whom they are describing. Emma also draws upon the strategies of listing (Jefferson, 1990) and extreme case formulation (Pomerantz, 1986) in her account. These linguistic devices result in the formulation of a caricature of the reactions of 'others' to 'black' people, and this image successfully achieves a contrast between the irrational and racist behaviour of others and the rational and non-racist behaviour of the speaker.

The extracts of Nick and Emma clearly demonstrate Liberal interviewees ability to reflexively consider the practice of `others', and at this point a more detailed textual analysis is not warranted. However, in order to highlight the contrast between Liberal speakers treatment of others' practice and that of their own let us consider one final extract. Here, Tom is describing to the interviewer the response of his family to his brother's intentions to marry a `coloured' woman:

**Tom:** *Of course they all colour their prejudice in a cloak of concern for the child. You know `it is very unfair on the child' [] and you know `to get married and then to have children it's fine for you but you've got to think about the child having to grow up in a society like that'. [What was your reaction?] My reaction was negative but for a lot of reasons which didn't have anything to do with race so much as the fact that she's much younger, much less educated, he's a university graduate, she hasn't even got matric (.) much younger (.) um (.) and I also knew that they hadn't know each other for a very long time so that was my concern.*

This extract represents a working model of the manner in which reflexivity operates within Liberal discourse. While Tom is entirely capable of detecting the racial prejudice underpinning the `concerns' of his family for the child of a `mixed race' couple, he is incapable of recognising that he *too* is "colouring his prejudice" in a "cloak of concern" for his brother.

Tom's description of his family's reaction to the impending marriage demonstrates parallels with the previously cited accounts of Nick and Emma. He too shifts his interactional footing (Goffman, 1981) and directly reports upon the nature of the arguments the family would use to debate the issues surrounding `mixed' marriages. Significantly, Tom's discourse about his own reaction to the relationship draws upon different rhetorical strategies. He lists (Jefferson, 1990) three problems that he anticipates will create problems for the couple in the future: she's much younger, less educated and they have known each other for only a short time. Moreover, he establishes these reasons as

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`facts' ("the fact is") and therefore as completely divorced from the issue of `race'. Once more, we encounter an instance in which a Liberal speaker *denies* racist practice with respect to their own interpersonal interaction.

In summary, Liberal discourse was both reflexive and non-reflexive in nature. Denials of racism were functionally related to talk that was essentially non-reflexive in nature, and tended to occur within the context of discussion about personal relationships with people who were not `white'. Admissions of racism present the analyst with a far more complex picture. While one may assume that they would be related to discourse that is reflexive in nature, we noted in the previous section that Liberal admissions either embraced a denial of racism or sought to locate the source of racism as being outside the speaker. Therefore such discourse may be seen as essentially non-reflexive - and as such, contrasts with Left-wing discourse in which admissions of racism took a different form and were related to reflexivity.

Ultimately, the talk of Liberals remains extremely complex. It is reflexive (unlike Nationalist discourse) when the topic of discussion is other peoples' racism, but it is not reflexive when Liberals' own racism is under scrutiny (unlike Left-wing discourse). However, Liberal discourse *appears* to be reflexive, and therein lies the key to its effectiveness with respect to the rhetoric of racism.

## 7.5  Summary

In summary, the talk of Liberals was constructed primarily in terms of the discourse of cognitivism although it incorporated the discourse of biologism and the discourse of constructivism, more typical of Nationalist and Left-wing speakers respectively. This variability is what characterises Liberal talk and sets it apart from that of the other two political groupings interviewed in this

study. Liberal discourse is fundamentally dilemmatic, and as such is difficult to analyse neatly.

Essentially, the flexible use Liberals make of the discourses of biologism, cognitivism and constructivism enable them to negotiate the discursive nightmare of `race' talk. Thus when wishing to argue for the `reality' of difference, they draw upon the ideas of a differentialist racism and upon the ideas behind the work of Social Cognition and Social Identity Theorists. However, when wishing to distinguish themselves from the practice of others Liberals invoke social constructionist arguments.

Despite the intense variability of talk, the fundamental rhetorical objective remains consistent: to disclaim a racist identity. This aim is realised in part via the strategies of denial and admission and via the apparently reflexive nature of the talk. Complex discursive webs are woven in which the speaker admits to racist practice and yet, does not; demonstrates reflexive and critical analytical ability and yet, does not. Indeed, as noted at the beginning of this chapter, the feeling of confusion and of fundamental contradiction is one shared by the speakers themselves: the majority apologised for the contradictions inherent in their accounts (however, unlike Left-wing speakers, they failed to `analyse' the source of their confusion). The power of these apologies is that they served to construct the source of the contradiction outside the speaker, and to present the speaker as a `nice' person - if you apologise nicely enough, you can get away with anything. For example, Wendy ended her interview by saying:

> I'm sorry about all the contradictions, I feel like I don't know where my head (.) or heart (laughter) is at!

Liberals may be the `gentle people of prejudice' (Campbell, 1971; Williams, 1964; in McConahay & Hough, 1976), but they remain *prejudiced*.

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# CHAPTER EIGHT

# LEFT-WING TALK: `IT'S COME FROM OUT THERE'

## 8.1  Introduction

The previous two chapters have examined the talk of
participants defined as Nationalist and Liberal by virtue
of their expressed party preference.  This final analytic
chapter examines the talk of participants whom I have
defined as Left-wing.  Members of this group were
supporters of the African National Congress and declared
that they would vote for the ANC in an election.  The talk
of Left-wing participants again differed from the talk of
members of the other two groups in terms of the content of
the discourse, and the rhetorical strategies used to
construct accounts.

The talk of interviewees who defined themselves as Left-
wing was dominated by the discourse of constructivism
outlined earlier (refer chapter 5, section 5.2.3).  The
content of talk for this group was significantly different
to that of the Liberals and Nationalists in that it argued
consistently against any biological factor in `race':
neither inherent biological differences nor biological
mechanisms of social cognition were espoused.  However, the
function of `doing talk' served similar ends: as with the
Liberals and Nationalists, academic theories (explicitly or
implicitly) were used to bolster arguments which attempted
to construct the speaker as anti-racist/non-racist or, at
the very least, as a `good' racist.  This section examines

how Left-wing participants discursively achieved this
objective.

## 8.2   The discourse of constructivism: `race is a social construction'

The accounts of Left-wing interviewees were dominated by
the discourse of constructivism which argued against any
biological factor in `race' and, significantly, did not
invoke the kind of `cultural' explanations that Wetherell
and Potter (1992) encountered in their data and that
Balibar (1991a) refers to as `neo-racism'.   Not
surprisingly, these accounts were punctuated with the terms
one has come to associate with Left-wing discourse -notions
of patriarchy, capitalism, oppression, exploitation,
redistribution of resources, nationalisation and the like
featured prominently.   By contrast, they were conspicuously
absent in the discourse of Liberals and Nationalists,
despite equal exposure to these academic ideas.

While in theory the idea of `race' as a social construct
was appealing to those on the left, the daily reality of
`differences' between `black' and `white' people in South
Africa seemed to make this argument difficult to sustain in
practice.   This was primarily due to the association of
`race' as construct with the idea that there were *no*
differences between people of different `races'.   To argue
for a position of no difference in the present South
African context would be to deny decades of oppressive
`white' minority rule and would not be consonant with a
Left-wing position.

Left-wing interviewees repeatedly reflected on the
contradiction between ignoring `race' (because it is a mere
construct) and recognising the differential experiences of
people of different `races' (because of a history of
oppression or privilege).   This occurred at various stages
in the interview and was not precipitated by a specific
question. The following two extracts, taken from the
interview transcripts of Gill and Ruth respectively,

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provide some examples of the dilemmatic nature of this talk:

**Gill:** *It was after Max's inaugural thing and after looking at his breakdowns and I said but why can't we have no breakdowns in Psychology research and she said that you have to acknowledge the differences. And I don't know but I still have a problem with that kind of thing because if we keep on breaking people up then how are we ever going to (.) I don't know (.) maybe I'm just trying to smooth over differences when I shouldn't but I don't see how we can stop thinking about race if it keeps coming up in research.*

**Ruth:** *That's the eternal contradiction (.) I know that I started out this interview speaking about the fact that to me I have a problem with `differences' [hands marking inverted commas] and I suppose (.) I mean I recognise (.) I mean maybe it is stupid to use the word experiences. I mean one could say that experiences is a euphemism for race but I think that (.) I don't think they are inherent. They are certainly not inherent differences, they are experiences that certain people have because of socio-political forces.*

These extracts present arguments that occurred repeatedly *(all speakers in this group used them at least once)* within the discourse of Left-wing interviewees. The nature of `race' constitutes an "ideological dilemma" (Billig et al, 1988): the `theory' of no differences, of `race' as a social construct conflicted with the `practice' of real and obvious differences between people of different `races' in South Africa. In this sense, the discourse of Left-wing interviewees represents a powerful demonstration of the dilemmatic aspects of thinking and arguing (Billig, 1987; Billig et al, 1988).

In both of the above extracts the speaker has pitched her argument at an abstract level; that is, they are reflecting upon the implications of acknowledging or ignoring racial differences which have resulted from decades of differential access to political, economic and social power. Gill is speaking about an exchange she had with a `black' fellow student regarding the inaugural address of a Professor in the Department of Psychology. Earlier in the interview, Gill spoke about South Africans being

"positioned within a discourse of racism" and here she continues this line of argument by questioning how the concept of `race' can ever be challenged, if it continues to find expression in research - particularly critical research as in the case to which she was referring.

This dilemma is echoed in the following extract where Ruth highlights what she refers to as the "eternal contradiction". On the one hand, the desire to move away from racial categorisation and all that goes with it, and on the other hand the impossibility of ignoring the different experiences of `black' and `white' South Africans. As another of the Left-wing interviewees noted : "You can't speak of South Africa and not speak about apartheid and racial issues. They are synonymous with South Africa".

By couching the dilemma in abstract terms, both Gill and Ruth are able to distance themselves from a potentially contentious issue and maintain a position of relative neutrality. In other words, they have constructed a `political' argument regarding the manner in which racism is overcome and have established themselves as `deliberator', reflecting on the issues at stake. However, this dilemma of `no difference versus difference' found expression not only at the level of the political but also at the level of the individual. Indeed, Left-wing interviewees argued that the political must translate into the personal. The following two extracts are exemplary. They constitute responses to a question concerning the effect `race' has upon their thoughts and judgements of people who are not regarded as `white':

**Wendy:** *OK I mean I know for myself a lot of the time I actually (.) it's almost (.) it is a contradiction in a way because it's almost like I try to make an effort for it not really to matter but even making that effort it does ma (.) it obviously does matter because if it didn't you wouldn't have to make that effort.*

**Sam:** *I'm aware of my history, I'm aware that in me there are racist tendencies (.) now there is a*

*contradiction because I try not to be that but I'm*
*aware ja that there are (.) they are there.*

In these extracts the speakers express a desire for the category of `race' not "to matter" to them. However, they acknowledge that "it obviously does matter" and that racist tendencies "are there". Wendy, in an attempt to appear not to be contradicting herself, describes the dilemma as "it's almost (.) it is a contradiction in a way". She hesitates in formulating this statement, possibly because she is thinking about how to best formulate her position without appearing to contradict herself.

Sam admits that he experiences a contradiction within himself but has constructed his racism as `racist tendencies'; this softens the negative association in that to `be racist' implies that it informs the whole person, while having certain tendencies implies that they are not a dominant characteristic of that person's being. This seems to parallel the political arguments cited above. Those on the left assert that there are no real differences between `black' and `white' people hence they do not wish to think in racial terms, yet there *are* differences between `black' and `white' South Africans and they do think in racial terms.

Thus far we have examined the dilemmatic nature of arguments constructed by Left-wing interviewees with respect to issues of `race' and racism. The fundamental dilemma pertains to a tension between `the constructed' and `the real'. Left-wing interviewees attempt to negotiate this dilemma via the discourse of constructivism, thereby attempting to identify themselves as non-racist or anti-racist. It is to the way in which social constructionist type theory is used, and the functions it fulfils, that our discussion now turns.

Earlier (refer chapter 5, section 5.2.1) I referred to the work of Etienne Balibar (1991a: 18) and his notion that "there is in fact no racism without theory (or theories)".

Indeed, I hope to demonstrate that the relationship between theory and practice is not a straightforward one, quite the reverse. For it *how* that theory is used and to what ends, that is significant. As we shall see those theories which would claim to be progressive, even critical, may form the basis of arguments which excuse racist practice. For Left-wing interviewees, constructionist approaches to knowledge offered two lines of argument which together enabled the speaker to escape taking responsibility for their racism.

First, as we have seen, Left-wing interviewees borrow from constructionist approaches the idea that there is no such thing as race, a commonplace within `white' South African Left-wing ideology. Following a constructionist line of argument, those on the left unanimously and consistently argued that `race' is a social construct with a particular socio-political history; that is, there are no differences between `black' and `white' people. Accounts of race as construction, rather than reality, function to achieve a position of non-racialism for the speaker: if one does not believe in `races', one cannot be a racist.

The second element in Left-wing talk, borrowed broadly from the ideas of cultural theory, is the idea of `discourses' - in particular, the idea that people are positioned by discourses. There was much talk of the "discourse of racism" in terms of which `white' South Africans were *(85% of this group mentioned this)* powerfully positioned; although there were some references to the university and organisations involved in the National Liberation Struggle which provided new (non- *(60% referred to this)* racist/anti-racist) "discourses to plug into". Indeed, Gill commented (unaware if the irony of her statement) in a detailed discussion with the interviewer on this point: "it [`race'] is a social construction but I don't know if it's a social construction because that's what I've been told at university".

The force of the first of these two lines of argument (that `race' is a social construct) is that it locates racism `out there'. It is not something inherent, it is not a

category humans beings need biologically in order to comprehend their world, it is something *other* people construct "for political gain" (Luke). Ruth describes the position exactly:

**Ruth:** *I think it is largely or almost definitely come from out there. I don't think it is something that I'm born with.*

The second line of argument flows directly from the first. People are positioned in terms of these powerful discourses which other people have constructed. Political ideologies, such as racism, have grasped passive human subjects who do not have any hope of resisting. Wendy, for example, describes the influence of racial ideology as follows:

**Wendy:** *... very strong (.) I mean I think that it has been so inculcated in our system that I think people automatically judge or their attitudes are a little bit different and it takes a lot more effort to actually begin to see through the label and the colour and everything. I think it's sort of instilled into us.*

Wendy uses the terms "inculcated" and "instilled" to explain a process which could be described as socialisation but which blurs into talk of discourses for all Left-wing interviewees. Others in this group used the words "injected" and "inserted". Each of these terms very clearly portrays individuals as devoid of human agency, as the receptors of a racial ideology which is variously drummed into or placed within them.

For those who describe themselves as Left-wing, constructivist and post-structuralist ideas serve to establish as fact that `race' is a social construct, that the ideology of racism is located `out there' (and not within the individual), and that individuals are firmly positioned in terms of a discourse of racism. The function of this discourse is to remove any personal sense of responsibility for racism from the speaker. Thus, although the discourse of constructivism provides an antithetical set of arguments to those of the discourses of biologism and cognitivism which dominated the talk of the

Nationalists and Liberals respectively, they *function* to the same effect: to locate racism in such a way that it defends the speaker against criticism on racial grounds in that their arguments establish scientific evidence which `proves' that they are neither irrational nor unreasonable.

This last point is sealed by the repeated accounts that Left-wing interviewees gave of their attempts to `fight' racism within themselves. In the extracts of Gill, Wendy (extract 1) and Sam cited above, they describe how they "try" not to see `race' and not to be racist, while in both of Wendy's extracts she addresses the need to make a concerted "effort" to "see through the colour and the label and everything". This phrase is constructed as a three-part list (Jefferson, 1990) which serves to emphasise the enormity of the task at hand; that is, that overcoming `race' is not easy or straightforward. Furthermore, the term `and everything', is an example of what Pomerantz (1986) has called an extreme case formulation. This rhetorical device maximises the evaluative dimension referred to; for example, if a youngster is accused of smoking, they may retort that `everybody' at school smokes. Wooffitt (1992: 81) has noted that extreme case formulations are used when speakers "suspect that their accounts will receive an unsympathetic hearing". In Wendy's case, her arguments may be levelled at the potential criticism that she is racist and has not tried hard enough to be non-racist.

In summary, Left-wing interviewees used psychological theory to achieve two rhetorical aims: *first*, to establish as fact the `out-thereness' of racism, and second to claim that they were passive human subjects positioned by a powerful discourse of racial ideology. In mitigation of the latter argument, they asserted that they were engaged in a *constant battle to overcome their own racism*. These theories claimed for the speakers a position of `good racist' - while admitting to being racist, they were constructing arguments in terms of which they could not be

held accountable for their racism. It is to the rhetorical strategy of `admission' that our discussion now turns.

## 8.3 The Rhetorical Strategy of Admission: `Of course I'm racist'

The majority of studies examining racial discourse have highlighted the phenomenon of denial. Indeed, Teun van Dijk (1992: 87) in a paper entitled `Discourse and the denial of racism' has highlighted "the prominent role of the denial of racism, especially among the elites, in much contemporary text and talk about ethnic relations". By contrast, denials of racism were not a significant feature in the accounts of Left-wing interviewees in this study. Instead the material seemed to be permeated by the very reverse: admissions of racism.

`Admissions of racism' refers to instances of discourse in which the speaker declares that s/he *is* racist. In contrast to the classic `I'm not racist, but ...' formulation, admissions take the form `I am racist, but ...', although the disclaimer may not be so clearly linked to the admission. The following extract exemplifies this form of talk. Luke, the speaker, is discussing with the interviewer the nature of racism; specifically whether racism is something one either is, or is not, or whether there is a continuum along which everyone could be placed:

**Luke:** *Racism isn't something that you are or not (.) and I mean there's a lot of people I mean I (.) for myself there's times when I've like, for example, like I said earlier like seen somebody and rather thought of them as a potential criminal because they're black rather than thinking that of a `white' person and in a sense that is racism and you know I think it is. I am racist. So I think it is very subtle and I think probably all of us are guilty of that (mm). But I think given the circumstances in this country it's difficult for those sort of things not to be around for us to sort of tap into . For example, when you're watching TV, the only news bulletin is the SABC's official government view. So definitely it is graded but I think sort of on more extreme levels when people start consciously identifying with a certain race group and buying into all the other ideologies (.) starting to talk about themselves as*

>*white people. I mean ordinarily I don't think of*
>*myself as a white person at all.*

This extract begins with Luke asserting that racism is not something that "you are, or not", because "a lot of people", including himself, have thoughts which "in a sense" are racist. Luke then reformulates this utterance in stronger terms "you know I think it *is* [racist]", followed by "I am racist". Wooffitt (1992) notes how repair work demonstrates that speakers may analyse their own prior talk and reformulate it in accordance with the concerns they have regarding the construction of their accounts. Here, Luke provides a personal example of racist thoughts and describes this as racism "in a sense". By repairing this statement, Luke defends himself against the criticism that his thoughts *are* racist and that the phrase "in a sense" is an attempt to deny the seriousness of his practice. This piece of text reveals that there is no admission without denial and vice-versa or in Billig's (1987: 46) terms how "`logoi' are always haunted, if not by the actuality of `anti-logoi', at least by their possibility".

Having admitted that he is racist, Luke sets about justifying this position in three ways. First, he uses the rhetorical device of extreme case formulation (Pomerantz, 1986): "*all* of us are guilty" (my emphasis). If all of us are guilty of racism, Luke cannot be accused of racist practice by the interviewer who is also a young `white' South African, for she too is guilty. Moreover if everyone is guilty, the crime is lessened and Luke's racism cannot be ascribed to irrational feelings. This rhetorical manoeuvre was used by all Left-wing interviewees.

Second, Luke draws upon the idea that racial ideology "seeps into" (his earlier words) people without their being aware of it. Cleverly, he uses the example of South Africa's state-controlled media to back up his claims, an idea which hints at brain-washing. People who have been `brain-washed' are not truly responsible for their actions as they are seen to have been unaware of what was happening

*to them.* In essence, they had no choice and therefore cannot be held accountable. All of the Left-wing interviewees described becoming "aware" of being racist in tones which suggested an unwanted `thing' lurking within them like a cancer waiting to be discovered. As Ruth said : "It's something I've become aware of, you know (.) much to my own dismay". This relates to the function of psychological theory discussed above in which interviewees described the powerful effects of socialisation and ideas of being positioned by discourses.

Finally, Luke redefines racism. Although continuing to argue for a graded position (thereby maintaining the stance that everyone is racist) he distinguishes between those who are extreme and those who are not. In other words, between those who choose to be racist (the bad racists) versus those who have had racism foisted upon them (the good racists). The bad racists identify themselves in terms of `race' and "buy into" racial ideology. Luke, by contrast, does not think of himself "as a white person at all" and needless to say does not "buy into" racist ideology. Again the rhetorical device of extreme case formulation ("at all") is used to emphasise the point.

In summary, it is misguided to classify racial discourse in terms of `denial' *or* `admission' for within one are the seeds of the other. Thus although Left-wing interviewees admitted to being racist *(all left-wing speech contained admissions of racism)* and did not exhibit the classic form of denial reported elsewhere (eg. Billig, 1991; Van Dijk, 1987, 1992; Wetherell & Potter, 1992), their talk was constructed to ward off criticisms of racism and to construct themselves as deserving of the title `non-racist' by dint of their self-critical and reflexive abilities. In other words, it is not the admission itself that is of consequence, but the rhetorical function of the admission that is important.

Liberals, for example, used admissions to `clear their name' of racism but made very little attempt beyond that to account for how they were trying to address their own

racist practice. Left-wing speakers, on the other hand, also employed the rhetorical strategy of admission but coupled it with detailed accounts of how they had tried to get to grips with their own racist beliefs. For example, in the next extract Sam admits to being racist but explains that he feel such a title is unfair in the context of his efforts both personally and politically to fight racist practice.

**Sam:** *It's actually just (.) ja as a category I think I am still racist though I don't judge myself for being that. I understand how (.) I give myself the same leeway I give somebody else. Okay I understand why we came to this point and because I'm fighting against it in myself and in my community I feel that I deserve the title `not racist' although I know that I am on a clinical level racist.*

Before turning to examine the role of reflexivity in the discourse of Left-wing interviewees, I wish to consider one last possibility with respect to the way in which `admissions of racism' function to stave off criticism on racial grounds. In my interviews with `black' South Africans (which unfortunately had to be omitted from the thesis due to the large corpus of material) discussions concerning the nature of `race' were often long and challenging. However, when I admitted to being racist because of occasional thoughts or overcompensatory behaviour, interviewees responded along the lines of Themba (an active ANC member):

**Themba:** *No, I disagree. I would not consider you racist because you are aware of those things and are actively engaged in a personal struggle with them, as well as being involved in the struggle for democracy and non-racialism.*

I am not suggesting that my sample of ten is representative of the views of all `black' South Africans, but there is a sense in which admitting to something bad in our society leads to a more sympathetic response. The maxim `knowing what the problem is, is half the solution' embodies that sentiment. Therefore if one can admit to being racist, not only is one demonstrating that one is on the road to

recovery but, people will respect you for that. Finally, the clear parallels between the arguments advanced by Sam in mitigation of his stance and those put forward by Themba on behalf of mine demonstrates that speakers are aware of the power of this `common-place', in Billig's (1987) terms, to accomplish the last word.

## 8.4  The Role of Reflexivity: `race in inverted commas'

Reflexivity is a central characteristic of language (Garfinkel & Sacks, 1970 in Wooffitt, 1992).  Potter and Wetherell (1987) refer to two meanings of `reflexivity' which are significant in discourse analysis.  The first defines reflexivity as "the fact that talk has the property of being both *about* actions, events and situations, and at the same time *part* of those things" (p. 182; original emphasis).  The second refers to the idea that the arguments of discourse analysts regarding the constructive nature of language equally applies to their own texts.  For our analytic purposes it is useful to distinguish a third meaning since it is not only discourse analysts who reflexively consider their own talk or writing.  This third meaning refers to the notion that lay-people may demonstrate an understanding of the constructive nature of language by deconstructing the talk of others and themselves.  It is to this aspect of Left-wing talk that we now turn.

Commentary upon the reflexive character of language was confined to interviewees on the left in this study, not being a feature of the accounts of interviewees who defined themselves as Nationalist or Liberal.  This is not entirely unexpected since the type of arguments articulated by Nationalists and Liberals were grounded in a realist model of the operation of discourse, while those of people on the left were informed by constructionist approaches to knowledge.  However, as discourse analysts we need to examine the rhetorical objectives of the strategy of reflexivity in the talk of those on the left, as well as to

consider the function of its absence in the accounts of Nationalists and Liberals.

Left-wing interviewees spent a considerable amount of time deconstructing the talk of others. Earlier (refer section 8.2, extract 1) we encountered Gill, who criticised researchers and lay-people alike for their continued use of racial categories because it perpetuated their existence. Luke spoke about encountering people who make `they or them-type' comments for example "it's *them* again" and "*they* are doing this" and "look at *them* rioting in the township" (speaker's emphasis). By couching his examples within the frame of reported speech, Luke is able to capture the essence of the talk that he is criticising, as well as clearly disassociate himself from that.

Natalie, who attended an Afrikaans dominated school because it was the only one available in the rural area in which she lived, described how her Afrikaans history teacher "used to say `I'm not being propagandist and I'm not talking politics'" but actively encouraged support for "spotting the communists who were infiltrating the area ... giving a written guideline - obviously they *had* to be black (.) and suspicious-looking and if we *ever* saw anyone like this we were to immediately report them to our headboy (laughter)".

Like Luke, Natalie is deconstructing the talk of others. While he focused attention upon the content of racist language (`them'), Natalie is unpicking the ideological significance of the classic disclaimer `I'm not prejudiced but ...'. She constructs a vivid narrative using the rhetorical strategies of `footing' (Goffman, 1981), to directly report her history teacher's words, and extreme case formulation (Pomerantz, 1986) to maximise the effectiveness of her account. With respect to the latter strategy, Natalie's use of `spotting the communists', `obviously', `if we *ever* saw' (speaker's emphasis) and `immediately' comprise examples. The laughter at the end of this tale was spontaneously produced by Natalie and then

the interviewer in response to her graphic tale about the ludicrous action of her teacher and the appropriateness of the description in both our experiences.

In each of these cases, the speaker describes the talk or practice of *others* as racist and warrants this claim by producing a sophisticated analysis of the practice cited. This form of talk was typical of Left-wing interviewees - they did not rely upon mere description, but were at pains to demonstrate their critical and reflexive abilities. Moreover, it achieved for the speaker at least two objectives. First, it served to construct both the speaker and the hearer as non-racist, even anti-racist. Indeed, quite often in my interviews with Left-wing participants I felt as if they were wanting me to collude with them in maligning what one participant termed `the enemy'.

Second, the rhetorical strategy of reflexivity served to construct the speaker as left-wing. Critical thought and acute analysis of the status quo represent characteristics `expected' within left-wing circles. The rhetorical strategy of reflexivity serves to affirm claims to non-racism, even anti-racism, since the speaker demonstrates their ability to `see through' racist practice. However, in order to avoid the potential criticism of denying one's own racism, the speaker needs to focus the lens of reflexivity upon him or herself as well.

The following extract displays the self-referential quality of talk which is characteristic of people on the left. It *(all left-wing interviewees reflected candidly upon their own practice)* forms part of an account given by Gill at the very end of the interview in response to a question which asked whether there was anything she felt she still wanted to talk about:

> *Gill:*  *I feel that there are such diverse issues that I almost feel that there is no definite answer for anything (.) that there are so many contradictions and there are so many things that I'm not sure about. You know I'm not sure about why I think the way I do and I think sometimes like especially with this idea of race it almost seems silly for me to say that there is no race because this concept gets replaced with something else. I almost feel*

*hypocritical to talk about say culture if I'm not*
*talking about race because I almost seem to be*
*paying lip-service to the whole thing and I feel*
*that I have been socially constructed into not*
*using the word race so I don't feel (.) I don't*
*know how it ties up with my real feelings ...*

The most striking feature of Gill's account is its
dilemmatic quality, it demonstrates clearly what Billig et
al (1988) meant by a `dialectic of prejudice'. Gill
produces a vivid account of the contradictory issues
surrounding the concept of `race': on the one hand, Gill
wishes to argue that there is no such thing as `race'; yet
on the other hand, she is aware that while she may not be
talking about `race' per se, she is still talking about a
`difference' by using other terms such as culture.

It could be argued that Gill offered this account at the
end of the interview in an attempt to explain what she
described as "my distinct lack of clarity". Possibly Gill
felt it necessary to clarify why she was expressing
inconsistent views because in South Africa it would be
expected that people on the left would hold clear and
strong views about issues such as racism; quite simply,
they should be opposed to it. For this reason Gill needs
to locate the confusion within South African society, and
not within herself. She accomplishes this by externalising
the contradictions and constructing them as `facts'. For
example, at the beginning of the extract, Gill uses the
rhetorical strategy of a list: "there are such diverse
issues", "there is no definite answer", "there are so many
contradictions", "there are so many things that I'm not
sure about". The repetition of `there are/is', in
particular, serves to create the issues as `things'
existing `out there'.

Thus, Gill constructs her contradictory views as a
consequence of the external `reality' of South Africa, and
not of her own personal inadequacies and inabilities. She
claims, for example, "I feel that I have been socially
constructed into not using the word race", and "I don't

know how it ties up with my real feelings". These statements construct Gill as passive and not responsible for the contradictions and inconsistencies she has expressed. By externalising the problem, Gill constructs herself as an individual confronted with a contradictory and confusing reality within which she must formulate an opinion. Hence, she is "not sure of why I think the way I do" but this is not because she is a indecisive or incompetent individual, but because she lives in a society characterised by ideological dilemmas.

Gill's account demonstrates how constructionist arguments may be mobilised to excuse the residues of racism Left-wing speakers `find' in themselves, and explain away inconsistency in their accounts. At various points in their interviews Left-wing participants made similar comments. For example:

**Gail:** *You see its difficult to escape. You're positioned in a racial discourse and at the same time you're not supposed to talk about `race'!*

**Trevor:** *I try to avoid using racial terminology at all cost as I've explained (.) but (mm) sometimes it slips out and I think `Oh shit' (.) no matter how hard I try. I suppose its because we're positioned by competing ideologies, to get fancy.*

In this way Left-wing speakers manage to achieve a position in which all flanks are covered: any traces of racism are acknowledged but are no fault of their own since they are positioned by powerful racial discourses. Furthermore, using other terms to refer to `race' is not an unthinking use of euphemism but is the result of the impact of new and competing discourses (or ideologies in Trevor's words) of non-racism/ anti-racism. So dominant are these discourses, Gill argues, that she has lost touch with her "real feelings". In other words, she is a hapless victim caught in a web of discourses which inform who and what she is and how she feels. Her `real' self cannot be held responsible or accountable for her practice, since her discursive self has taken over. In this way, reflexivity is seen to be far more than a characteristic of language, it is a major

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device which can be used flexibly to achieve a variety of rhetorical objectives.

## 8.5 Summary

In summary, the discourse of Left-wing interviewees differed in content and form from that of the Liberals and Nationalists. With respect to content it was informed almost exclusively by what I have termed `the discourse of constructivism'. However, this does not mean that the nature of the talk was consistent and undilemmatic. Tensions relating to what is `real' and what is `constructed' permeated the fabric of every account and served to secure for the speaker the position of `concerned and thoughtful individual'. Furthermore, the ideas of constructionist approaches to knowledge provided the speaker with powerful arguments which located the source of racism `out there' and excused him/her from taking personal responsibility for the racism to which they admitted.

`Admissions of racism' played a significant role in the talk of this group of interviewees acting to construct for the speaker the identity of `good' racist. This strategy was closely associated with talk which was explicitly reflexive in nature; reflexive thought functioned to deconstruct the racism implicit in the practice of others and the speakers themselves. Such analyses of racist practice coupled with the repeated descriptions of how the speaker was endeavouring to purge themselves of the racism with which they had been afflicted `proved' that s/he was deserving of the title anti-racist or at the very least `non-racist'.

In conclusion, the previous four chapters have presented an analysis of the discourse of twenty-five young, `white', South Africans. Most significantly, despite the fact that participants in this study were ostensibly very similar (young, `white', middle-class, university students reading psychology), their discourse was highly variable and did not present as a coherent whole. Instead the central

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pattern identified in the analytic material related to the declared political affiliation of the speaker. Differences in the content and form of accounts were observed between speakers who defined themselves as Nationalist, Liberal or Leftwing, while the accounts of speakers within each of these three groupings shared common features.

Although it is difficult to summarise the central findings of a discourse analytic study in the sense that so much of the important detail is omitted, it is important to do so in the interests of clarity. The findings of this study may be summarised in four points.

1. Talk about issues of `race' and racism was characterised by a high degree of variability. Racism represented an `ideological dilemma' and racist views were contradictory and inconsistent.

2. Three broad discourses were identified which accounted for the variation in talk between participants who categorised themselves as Nationalist, Liberal or Left-wing. These were labelled the `discourse of biologism', the `discourse of cognitivism', and the `discourse of constructivism'. The talk of Nationalists was constructed in terms of the discourses of biologism and cognitivism, the talk of Left-wing participants was constructed almost exclusively in terms of the discourse of constructivism, and the talk of Liberals represented an eclectic mix but was constructed principally in terms of the discourse of cognitivism.

3. These discourses were expressed and articulated through many different linguistic devices and rhetorical strategies (such as three-part lists, extreme case formulations, and footing); however, two rhetorical strategies were particularly salient in functioning to construct the source of the speaker's racism as an external `reality' and therefore to construct the speaker as undeserving of the title `racist'. These were the rhetorical strategies of `admission of racism' and of `doing reflexivity'. Just as

speakers of different political affiliation employed different discourses in the construction of accounts, they also employed the strategies of denial versus admission, and reflexive versus unreflexive commentary in different ways. Nationalist discourse incorporated denials of racism and was characteristically unreflexive in nature. As such it most closely approximated the racial discourse of `white' people reported in other studies (eg. van Dijk, 1992; Wetherell & Potter, 1992). Left wing talk employed admissions of racism and was explicitly reflexive in respect of others and of self; while the discourse of Liberal participants embraced both admissions and denials of racism, and reflexive as well as unreflexive commentary.

4. Overall, the discourse associated with each of the three political groupings was distinct in terms of the discourses and rhetorical strategies used to construct the account. However, all accounts shared a common function: to disclaim a racist identity -albeit that they attempted to achieve this objective in very different ways.

In several ways the findings of this study do not accord with the findings of other discourse analytic studies of racism, and it is this topic that forms the basis for discussion in the final chapter.

# CHAPTER NINE

## DISCUSSION

The previous four chapters have presented an analysis of the discourse of twenty-five young `white' South Africans. This final chapter has two main objectives. The first of these is to highlight the main features of contemporary discourse studies on `race' and racism, and to review the findings of this study in the light of this research. The second objective is to raise and discuss a couple of theoretical issues which have tended to recur in the writing of this thesis, and which have implications for discourse analysis as a theoretical and methodological framework.

### 9.1  Discourse and the Nature of Racism

### 9.1.1   Contemporary findings: a brief review

The `language of racism' (Wetherell & Potter, 1992) has proved to be a popular topic among discourse analysts. Studies have examined the talk of people ranging across different nationalities and different class backgrounds (Billig, 1991). The findings of this small, but solid, body of research have consistently provided evidence for three trends in contemporary racial discourse. These are: that talk about `race' is highly variable and dilemmatic, that modern discourse has become `deracialised' (Reeves, 1983), and that discourse is characterised by denials of racism. Although these trends have been discussed elsewhere (refer chapters 6, 7 and 8), it may be useful to

reiterate the central thrust of these findings in view of the findings of this study.

Traditionally, social psychology has viewed racism as a type of `attitude'; that is, a fixed and consistent response which situates an `object of thought' on a `dimension of judgement' (McGuire, 1985: 239). Discursive or rhetorical psychology (cf. Gilbert & Mulkay, 1984; Potter & Wetherell, 1987; Billig, 1991), by contrast, has demonstrated that peoples' opinions are variable and characterised by dilemma and contradiction. Moreover, this is the case even if the speaker holds `strong views' about the topic of conversation (Cochrane & Billig, 1984; Billig, 1989, 1991). `Views', therefore, are not fixed, even when strong, but vary as a consequence of the action-orientation of talk (which functions to achieve particular consequences through a variety of constructions) and the dilemmatic nature of common sense.

The second finding in contemporary racial discourse is that it has become `deracialised' (Reeves, 1983). More recently, Etienne Balibar has described this discursive phenomenon as "racism without races" (1991a: 21) or "neo-racism" (1991a: 17). The notion that people elect to speak about racial issues without reference to racial terminology accords with North American research on `modern' or `symbolic' racism which stresses shifts in public `attitudes' toward minority groups, from overt and direct expression to more covert and subtle forms (cf. Kinder & Sears, 1981; McHonahay & Hough, 1976) - although researchers in this area continue to conceptualise these shifts in terms of relatively stable and consistent `attitudes'.

The `deracialisation' of modern discourse has been attributed to a `general cultural norm' against expressing prejudiced views (Billig, 1991) which are widely associated with notions of irrationality and unreasonableness (Billig et al, 1988). Modern-day speakers, wishing to avoid being tarnished by the label `racist', avoid racial nomenclature.

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However, this does *not* mean that racism is a thing of the past, as speakers *continue* to espouse racist ideas through the use of alternative nomenclature instead.

The `new' language of racism employs the concepts of `culture' or `nation' (cf. Balibar, 1991a, 1991b; Barker, 1981; Donald & Rattansi, 1992; Wallerstein, 1991) to argue for enduring differences between groups of people. These ostensibly more neutral terms provide the speaker with a reasonable and socially acceptable way of expressing prejudiced views and have been a noted feature of racial discourse in Britain (Reeves, 1983; Cochrane & Billig, 1984), France (Balibar, 1991a, 1991b), the Netherlands (Essed, 1988, van Dijk, 1984, 1987, 1992), New Zealand (Wetherell & Potter, 1992), and the United States of America (Goldberg, 1993).

The third widely reported feature of modern racial discourse is the `denial of racism' (cf. Cochrane & Billig, 1984; Billig et al, 1988; Billig, 1991; Essed, 1988; van Dijk, 1992, Wetherell & Potter, 1992) Denial is oriented to the rhetorical strategy of `credentialling' (Hewitt & Stokes, 1975) in which the speaker wishes to disclaim a racist identity. Denials of racism work by ascribing the speaker's opinions to external `facts', rather than irrational feelings. This is achieved by constructing a `real-seeming version' (Edwards & Potter, 1992) of the world which justifies and legitimates the speaker's evaluative comments (Potter & Wetherell, 1988). For this reason denial usually assumes the linguistic form: `I'm not prejudiced, but ...' where the speaker refutes a racist identity and ascribes their racist comments to external `truths' over which they have no power. The rhetorical strategy of denial has even been found in the talk of National Front supporters (Cochrane and Billig; 1984) suggesting that the cultural norm against prejudice is more widespread than may at first be supposed.

In summary, the past fifteen years or so have witnessed something of a transformation in the expression of racist

sentiments. The moral rejection of racism as `bad' has resulted in the development of new and covert means of expressing prejudice, means which avoid racial terminology and deny racist inferences. *However*, as mentioned above, it would be wrong to assume that `race' talk is uniformly subtle (as do `modern' racist theorists) for racism constitutes an ideological dilemma (Billig et al, 1988). To reiterate, racial discourse is not `undilemmatically straightforward' (Billig et al, 1988). It is characterised by variability (Potter & Wetherell, 1987), a consequence of the speaker's need for rhetorical dexterity as s/he marshals logoi against anti-logoi in the complex context of racial argumentation (Billig, 1987).

### 9.1.2   Discourse and Context: the present findings considered

This study set out to investigate `white' racism in South Africa using a discursive or rhetorical approach. The findings confirm that in some respects the racial discourse of `white' people in South Africa is similar to that of `white' people elsewhere in the world. However, in other respects, the discourse of the present participants was different. While the racial discourse of young `white' South Africans was highly variable, it was neither uniformly `deracialised', nor characterised by clear denials of racism. The discourse in this study presented an altogether more complex picture.

Discourse analysts argue that people use language to achieve particular objectives. For this reason, talk is variably constructed in order to fulfil specific functions (Gilbert & Mulkay, 1984; Potter & Wetherell, 1987). Furthermore, rhetorical theorists claim that talk will vary because it is founded upon the contradictory themes of ideological common-sense (Billig et al, 1988). As we have seen, studies of racial discourse have supported the notion that there is a "dialectic of prejudice" (Billig et al, 1988).

In this study too, the discourse of young `white' South
Africans was characterised by variability. However, this
analysis revealed two sources of variability. First,
accounts varied in relation to the local argumentative
context within which discourse was framed; and second,
accounts varied in relation to the speaker's declared
political affiliation. The first of these sources of
variation is anticipated within a discursive approach, and
confirms the findings of other analyses of racial
discourse. Talk about race is not `undilemmatically
straightforward' (Billig et al, 1988), but is pervaded by
contradiction. In this study, this characteristic of
racial discourse was something which speakers themselves
reflexively commented upon. For example, Liberal
participants in particular frequently apologised for their
`failure' to present clear and uniform views (refer chapter
7).

The second source of discursive variation observed in this
study occurred in relation to the speaker's professed
political position. Participants were asked at the end of
each interview: "What political party or movement do you
support, or most closely approximates your own views?"
Quite fortuitously, this question `divided' the
participants into three groups of almost equal numbers:
Nationalist, Liberal and Left-wing. As we have seen (refer
chapters 6, 7 and 8), members of each of these groups
constructed their talk about `race' differently in terms of
the discourses they drew upon and the rhetorical devices
they employed. Indeed, it would seem with respect to this
study that talk was variably constructed in relation to its
*political* function, since participant's ways of talking
about the world were related to their self-categorisation
in terms of political group, and needed to be understood
within that discursive framework.

The relationship between socially shared `common-places'
and social groups is most directly addressed by Moscovici
(1981, 1982, 1984) in his theory of social representations.

Moscovici argues that social representations are coterminous with social groups (cf Moscovici, 1981; Moscovici & Hewstone, 1982); in other words, that social groups are constituted by their shared social representations, and that social representations are consensually adopted by the group (cf. Moscovici, 1973, 1981). This theory would appear to offer a parsimonious explanation for the findings of this study: Nationalist, Liberal or Left-wing speakers would be expected to hold different social representations since by definition, social representations provide the very fabric of social groups.

However, Moscovici's theory has not escaped criticism – generally, or in respect of the relationship between representations and social groups. The latter is particularly problematic, as Potter and Wetherell (1988: 143) correctly point out, for:

> *"there is no way of talking about the groups concerned independent of social representations, yet Moscovici wants to argue that group membership determines those social representations".*

The problem stems partly from an inherent contradiction in social representations theory. On the one hand, this theory stresses the constructed nature of social `reality'; for example, Moscovici (1973: xiii) states that social representations "determine both the object and the related judgements". However, on the other hand, it fails to theorise the socially constructed nature of categories or groups themselves (cf. Potter & Edwards, 1992; Potter & Litton, 1985), viewing social groups as pre-defined and pre-existing realities instead. For example, Moscovici (1982: 135; *my emphasis*) states that social representations "can *only* be discovered by studying their relations with social groups".

A second problem associated with this relationship between groups and social representations is Moscovici's notion of

consensus (Potter & Litton, 1985). As we have seen, discourse is variable. Thus, while the talk of Nationalist and Left-wing speakers in this study could be said to be consensual in terms of the broad discourses (or social representations) used to construct accounts, the talk of Liberal speakers could not be described in the same way. As was evident in chapter 7, Liberal talk was extremely discordant, combining aspects of both Nationalist and Left-wing talk. Moscovici's theory is unable to account for this discrepancy between social group and social representations.

In short, while the theory of social representations may appear to explain the group-bounded nature of the findings of this study, it is unable to do so because the inherent vagueness of the theory blurs the notion that groups themselves as socially constructed. Moreover, social representations theory is unable to account for the high degree of linguistic diversity displayed within social groups. By contrast, discourse analysts view participants' categorical descriptions as a social practice oriented to serve particular interactional functions (Potter, 1988b; Edwards, 1991). Analysis involves developing an understanding of these functions through an examination of textual construction and variation in relation to both the local and broader socio-political context. In this study three `levels' of context must be taken into account in interpreting the findings: the micro context of conversational detail, the specific context of each interview, and the macro context of the socio-political environment.

As we have seen, analysis of the nuances of interactional detail of the interview transcripts revealed a high degree of variability in racial discourse, as well as certain similarities in account construction (in terms of discourses and rhetorical devices used) within each of the political groups (refer chapters 6, 7 & 8). However, to account for the differences between these self-defined

groups it is necessary to examine more closely the two broader `levels' of context.

The socio-political context of South Africa in the years of 1991/1992 was characterised by the realisation on the part of `white' people that the country was firmly set upon a course which would result in the relinquishing of `white' power and a transfer to `black' power. On the left, preliminary preparations were under way for the first democratic election in South African history. Citizens were anxious to determine which political group would offer them a peaceful and prosperous future and to advocate on behalf of that group. In short, aligning oneself with a political group, and espousing the political rhetoric associated with that group, was an extremely salient activity at the time. Thus it is perhaps not surprising that the discourse of the participants in this study functioned to achieve certain political ends.

While the broader socio-political context of discourse is important, the interview context itself may elicit different ways of talking. Discourse analysts anticipate that in different discursive contexts, different linguistic repertoires may be deployed. For example, Gilbert & Mulkay (1984) found that scientists predominantly used what they termed an `empiricist repertoire' in the context of formal research papers, and a `contingent repertoire' in the context of informal interviews. In this study, therefore, the manner in which participants constructed accounts needs to be understood within the context of the interview itself. It is possible that in a different time and space, participants may have constructed an entirely different account - as was the case with Lucy.

Lucy was interviewed twice, because the tape-recorder failed to record the first time round! The initial interview took place in the midst of a strike by the workers on the university campus. The day before the interview, Lucy's car had been struck by a bottle hurled by an angry worker at students driving onto the campus. During

the course of the interview, the workers had marched around the campus singing and chanting. Lucy was very upset by the events of the strike and became visibly agitated as the march got closer and closer to my office. She categorised herself as Nationalist, and expressed overtly racist sentiments in angry tones; these increased as the marchers got closer and waned as they retreated.

The second interview was held some weeks after the strike, the campus was calm and student life had returned to `normal'. During this interview Lucy categorised herself as Liberal (she would vote for the Democratic Party) and did not express overtly racist views. Her discourse was typical of Liberal speakers and was characterised by contradiction and dilemma (refer chapter 7). Lucy's presentation of two very different accounts in each of these interviews is not a function of an indecisive individual, but of the functional orientation of talk (Potter & Wetherell, 1987). Lucy's `metamorphosis' from Nationalist to Liberal, within the space of a few weeks, is evidence that Edwards (1991) is correct when he contends that "categories are for talking". Categories are not predetermined `truths' (cf. MacNaughten, Brown and Reicher on the category of `nature'), but are employed to serve particular rhetorical ends within the micro and macro context within which that discourse is framed.

Thus far this discussion has addressed the issue of variability in some detail, partly because it is represents a cornerstone of discourse analytic theory and partly because the discourse of the participants in this study was so variable. However, to recap, while the racial discourse of young `white' South Africans shares with previous studies a high degree of variability, it was neither uniformly `deracialised', nor characterised by clear denials of racism. It is to these two aspects that this discussion now turns.

Recent research has documented shifts in the expression of racist views (cf. Balibar, 1991a, 1991b; Cochrane & Billig,

1984; Goldberg, 1993; Rattansi, 1992; Wallerstein, 1991; Wetherell & Potter, 1992). It is argued that modern racial discourse has become `deracialised' (Reeves, 1983), for:

> *whereas once race seemed to be the most effective and prevalent legitimating tool, the ideological baton has now been handed to culture and nation.*
>
> *(Wetherell & Potter, 1992: 119)*

While this trend has been documented in a number of countries, as mentioned earlier, the evidence from the present study is not so straightforward. A `cultural discourse' was used by Nationalists and Liberals, but not by Left-wing participants; and it did not eclipse all other conceptions of `race' as, for example, David Goldberg (1993) attests. Moreover, a `discourse of nation' was entirely absent from the accounts of these young `white' South Africans.

In other parts of the world the general cultural norm against prejudice has resulted in speakers adopting new "masks of race" (Goldberg, 1993: 61) in order to disclaim a racist _identity. However, the South African context produces, and is reproduced by, slightly different ideological commonplaces. The talk of left-wing speakers, for example, eschews notions of `culture'. Indeed, these participants deconstructed `cultural' accounts as racist. The rhetorical device of reflexivity, whereby left-wing speakers displayed this political acumen, functioned to present members of this group as non-racist or, at the very least, as `good' racists.

By contrast, Nationalist and Liberal participants did deploy cultural arguments in their accounts of `race' - but not in quite the same way as has been reported elsewhere. Nationalist discourse, for example, was firmly located within the language of biologism, overt racism was not avoided. However, Nationalists used a `cultural discourse' to *reinforce* biological arguments: to provide further

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evidence that racial differences (and `white' superiority) were `facts', startlingly obvious to anyone who cared to observe them. Thus, rather than forming the mainstay of racist arguments, cultural arguments supplemented biological ones.

In the discourse of Liberal speakers `cultural' arguments formed part of extremely complex accounts. Arguments about the insurmountable cultural differences between `black' and `white' people were expressed via selected notions of Social Categorisation and Social Identity Theory. However, like Left-wing participants, Liberals made use of the rhetorical strategy of reflexivity in order to deconstruct as racist the cultural arguments of *others*. This is what made Liberal talk so dilemmatic: on the one hand, a discourse of culture was scathingly attacked in the accounts of other people, yet ironically, Liberals employed a cultural discourse to disclaim a racist identity for themselves.

In short, while the discourse of culture did surface in some of the accounts of participants in this study, it did not do so with the same force as has been described elsewhere. The language of culture has not superseded the language of `race' in South African discourse. Moreover, the discourse of `nation' does not appear at all.

The absence of a discourse of `nation' is perhaps not surprising given the term's history in the South African context: the `apartheid vision' originally propounded by Verwoerd, and refined in the `reform' period of the 1980s, saw each `race group' developing its own inherent potential within a specifically demarcated territory or set of territories, and ultimately becoming a sovereign `nation' (Sharp, 1988b). `Nationhood' constituted the ideological backbone of the National party's misguided attempt to `divide and rule', and as such has a long association with excessive racism in South Africa. For many South Africans, `nation' represents an old mask of racism and not a new one; therefore it is unlikely that modern-day speakers,

aware of the sanctions against the expression of prejudice, would employ this term.

The third and final feature of contemporary racial discourse is that of denial. Typically, speakers deny that they are expressing racist views in order to disclaim a racist identity. In this study such denials of racism were a feature of Nationalist talk but did not feature significantly in either the talk of Liberal or Left-wing participants. Rather, the talk of these latter two groups was punctuated by admissions of racism. As discussed earlier (refer chapter 7, section 7.3), this finding may be related to the specifics of the South African context. However, it is possible that admissions of racism may have been overlooked in previous research as a consequence of the typically one-sided approach to human thinking adopted by psychologists (Billig, 1987).

Rhetorical theorists, such as Billig (1987, 1991) have highlighted the two-sided nature of human thinking, and drawn attention to the need for a psychology which takes this into account. The findings of this study suggest that identifying denials of racism is an important but one-sided move on the part of discourse theorists - for as logos matches antilogos in the cut and thrust of thinking and arguing, denials of racism match admissions. As we have seen in Liberal discourse (refer chapter 7, section 7.3), these two rhetorical strategies are difficult to separate for admissions embrace denials in order to fulfil particular rhetorical aims. For Liberals, admitting to being racist functions to construct the speaker as a `good' racist, and implicitly incorporates a denial of being a `bad' racist - in Liberals' terms, someone who fails to acknowledge their racism and to strive to rid themselves of it. Left-wing participants tended to construct `cleaner' admissions of racism (refer chapter 8, section 8.3), but here too denials could be heard since admissions served to ward off criticisms of racism and to construct Left-wing

speakers as `non-racist' or `anti-racist' by dint of their modest reflections.

In summary, the findings of this study are in line with current research on modern racial discourse in the following two respects: racial discourse is characterised by a high degree of variability, and is oriented ultimately to avoiding a racist identity. However, these findings diverge from others in respect of the discourse used to construct accounts of `race' and racism, and the rhetorical strategies used to fulfil the function of eschewing a racist identity. In order to account for these differences it has been necessary to consider the dialectical relationship between discourse and society. On the one hand, society constructs discourse since:

*The way in which orders of discourse are structured, and the ideologies which they embody, are determined by relationships of power in particular social institutions, and in the society as a whole.*

*(Fairclough, 1989: 31)*

On the other hand, discourse constructs society - it is both reflective and constitutive of external `reality' since:

*... the discursive act creates groups, interests, emotions, similarities and differences, a social landscape, an anthropology, a psychology of identity and even a geography.*

*(Wetherell & Potter, 1992: 146)*

In the following section the relationship between discourse and society is examined more closely, with reference to the degree to which discourse analysis has satisfactorily accomplished an integration of the two.

## 9.2  The Future of Discourse Analysis: Theoretical and Pragmatic Issues.

The relationship between text and context, or discourse and society, has been comprehensively reviewed in chapter 2 (sections 2.3 & 2.4).  Here, in the light of the analysis of South African racial discourse, I wish merely to raise again a few central points in relation to the current status of discourse analytic theory. Specifically, I wish to address the importance of the concepts of ideology and power for an analysis of discourse, for as we have seen in the preceding section, the findings of this study *have* to be understood within the global, social or political context of South Africa in the early 1990s.

To recap, I argued earlier that the two principal approaches to discourse analysis within psychology are unsatisfactory as they stand (refer chapter 2, section 2.4).  Broadly, Parker and Burman's approach is insufficiently grounded in the text itself although it is useful in respect of issues of ideology and power, while Potter and Wetherell's approach is excellent in terms of textual analysis but is poorly theorised (even recently) when it comes to power and ideology.

As Parker has noted (1992), one of the negative effects of the rise of discourse analysis has been that the notion of ideology has almost disappeared from social psychological analyses.  Yet, the concept of ideology is central to overcoming the individual-social dualism which continues to plague psychology (Henriques et al, 1984).  Moreover, in South Africa in particular (characterised by large-scale intergroup conflict and a long history of domination and oppression) the processes of ideology are obviously central to understanding social psychological issues (Foster, 1991d). Finally, a concern with ideology also reflects the desire of certain social psychologists to produce research which is socially relevant for as Kurt Lewin argued, nearly 50 years ago, psychology should be involved in the investigation of serious topics and committed to the idea

that "research that produces nothing but books will not suffice" (1948: 203; in Billig, 1977: 401). The development of a serious critical paradigm which explicitly addresses social and political issues must be premised upon notions of ideology and power (Burman, 1992; Lather, 1988; Bhavnani, 1988) because it is these concepts which provide the theoretical links between "the structures or strategies of discourse and the local and the global, social or political context" (van Dijk, 1990: 14).

As yet, discourse analysis has not been very successful in connecting the detail of linguistic structure with wider analyses of the constitution of meaning; indeed, van Dijk maintains that "societal, political and cultural dimensions have received short shrift in the study of language use and discourse (1990: 7). The way forward seems to be through a conceptualisation of ideology as practical, lived and embodied within the everyday language of common-sense (Billig et al, 1988). From this perspective, ideology operates through language and involves the ways in which meaning serves to sustain relations of power. Language represents the key to understanding the way in which particular practices are constituted and reproduced (Parker, 1992). Consequently, analyses of discourse should enable researchers to reveal the way in which power relations in society are maintained and changed, to examine:

> *the nature of the social practice of which the discourse practice is a part, which is the basis for explaining why the discourse practice is as it is; and the effects of the discourse practice upon the social practice.*

> *(Fairclough, 1992: 237)*

The social practice of South Africa involves a history of colonialism and capitalism, one shared with many other countries. However, South Africa's political landscape is unique in two respects. First, in no other political

system in a sovereign state has overriding power been exercised by a minority racial group; and second, in no other political system has the central axis of policy-making been the maintenance of racial stratification (Thompson & Prior, 1982). The nature of this social practice provides the basis for explaining the differences between the discursive practice of `white' South Africans and those of other `white' people in New Zealand, Britain and the Netherlands for example.

While discourse theorists have tended to neglect notions of ideology and power, they have also tended to avoid the rather difficult area of social transformation or social change - perhaps with the exception of Norman Fairclough (1992). Fairclough's treatment of social change, however, is typical of his approach generally: it is fuelled by the right convictions, but somehow fails to produce an inspired account. With respect to social change, Fairclough (1992) reduces this vital area to three processes: `democratization', `commodification', and `technologization'. He has an unfortunate penchant for neologism. Ultimately, while appearing to offer an exciting theory of discourse and social change, Fairclough's work becomes bogged down in figures of various dimensions and more terms than exist in the rest of discourse analysis put together. In short, it fails in its objectives (Takahara, 1993).

This study was undertaken during a period of momentous social change and therefore some commentary (albeit cautious and preliminary) on the relationship between discourse and transformation is essential. Given that the interviews were conducted in a time of political upheaval, and that discourse "express(es), describe(es), enact(s), legitimate(s) and reproduce(s) more global levels of societal structure and culture" (van Dijk, 1990: 9), it may be anticipated that participant's discursive practice should reflect something of the social practice of which it

is part. Again van Dijk (1990: 9) has described clearly why this should be the case - discourse participants:

> *bring to bear their membership or position in societal groups or institutions within the local context, thereby at the same time contributing to the reproduction of such groups and institutions at the macrolevel.*

The most striking feature of the analysis of `white' South African discourse was its relationship to `political groups'. Indeed, until I examined the material in this context after months of fruitlessly searching for patterns, the discourse made very little sense at all. The turmoil associated with this juncture in South African political history seems to have caused speakers to mobilise their talk on issues of political relevance in terms of their declared political `position'. In one sense, the analysis of discourse in this study may be seen as a mapping the languag*es* of racism, because "at any given moment, languages of various epochs and periods of socio-ideological life cohabit with one another" (Bakhtin, 1981: 291). Thus, the language of biological racism (frequently assumed to be a language of the past), the language of differentialist racism (generally acknowledged as the language of the present), and the language of `race' as social construction (arguably a language of the future) co-exist, because although each discourse tended to be associated predominantly with a particular political position, this was not exclusively the case - as was evident in Liberal talk for example.

It is possible to begin to see how each of these discursive practices `positions' (Davies & Harre, 1990) the social and political subject in South Africa in 1991. At that time, the Nationalist Party continued to cling precariously to political power: the racist arguments of the past served to legitimate their continued exploitation of the `black' majority. By contrast, for ANC supporters, political transformation was close to hand: the language of non-

1.  The talk of participants in this study was related to their definition of themselves in terms of political identity. Thus, identity was multiple and shifting within the micro context of talk **and** relatively consistent with respect to the interview as a whole. This finding raises questions about the ontology of identity and highlights the need for discursive psychology to address this issue in the near future.

2.  Discursive psychology needs to place more emphasis upon reflexivity; in particular, with respect to the researcher/respondent relationship and the way in which that relationship affects the discourses produced in research relationships. In this study, the respondents had all studied psychology, something which may raise questions regarding the generalisability of the research findings: would members of the general public use similar forms of talk in their accounts of 'race' and racism? Although it is not possible to produce a clear answer to this question without gathering further material (such as texts surrounding a particular issue or incident), I would suggest that similar discourses would be found in lay talk. The participants in this study drew in the main upon **lay** understandings of 'race' (e.g. biological arguments, arguments pertaining to the inevitability of social groups). In this study these were simply backed up by certain ideas gleaned from undergraduate psychological theory.

3.  The analysis of findings presented here is typical of the sort espoused by Wetherell and Potter (1987). However, if discourse analysis is to engage seriously with issues of ideology and power it would seem necessary to explore the development of an approach which tackles functionality not only at the level of individual talk, but at an institutional level as well.

4.  This research, because of both the topic studied and the way in which it has been approached, also has implications for the nature of a political psychology.

It is only through confronting such issues that social psychology may move beyond reformist tinkering and toward a truly liberatory social science.

racism and democracy heralded the imminent birth of a new era. For Liberals, acutely aware of supporting a political party with a minimum of support, the issue of the future presented a dilemma. On the one hand they supported change, but on the other hand, they were extremely wary of too much change: the complex and contradictory nature of their discourse echoed aspects of both Nationalist and Left-wing talk reflecting the ambivalence associated with being poised between the language of the `old' South Africa and that of the `new'.

In summary, the findings of this study have pointedly demonstrated the importance of locating discourse within a broader social and political context as well as a local textual one: issues of ideology, power and social change need to be incorporated more fully into discursive theory and method. Additionally, this thesis has raised four other, related, issues which need mention here although a thorough exposition lies beyond the scope of this chapter:

## 9.3  Conclusion

In conclusion, I wish to make just two points. The first is best expressed in the words of Norman Fairclough (1989: 234).

> *Even while we focus upon language and discourse, let us remind ourselves that social emancipation is primarily about tangible matters such as unemployment, housing, equality of access to education, the distribution of wealth, and removing the economic system from the ravages and whims of private interest and profit*

Fairclough's statement, however, seems to imply that the tangible matters he raises are outside the ambit of discourse studies. I would argue that they are not. While discourses support institutions and reproduce power relations (Parker, 1992), they may also challenge

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institutions and undermine power relations - as we have seen in the South African context. Analyses of discourse should be aimed at empowerment, and ultimately social action (Bhavnani, 1988; Lather, 1988). As Potter and Wetherell (1987: 175) argued in their seminal text:

> *The main point is that application is very much on the agenda and should not be relegated to an optional extra.*

My second, and final, point flows directly from the importance of application. On the 10th of May this year, Nelson Mandela -political prisoner for nearly three decades - was sworn in as South Africa's first `black' State President. Apartheid was dead. However, while this moment may have signalled the end of centuries of `white' rule, it did not signal the end of racism. Such an accomplishment remains a long way off. One of the Left-wing participants in this study (single quotation marks represent the speaker making curved gestures with her hands in the air) put it this way:

> *But how do we get rid of `race', once and for all, when we don't seem to be able <u>not</u> to see the differences (.) whether we call it `race', `culture', `ethnicity', or any other name we care to invent, those words still `make' the difference. Even when I argued that it was a social construction, that still made it <u>something</u>. It feels like trying to conceive the end of the world when you're a child ... it won't end, it can't? can it? ... <u>how will it end</u>?*

A great deal of work remains to be done.

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# APPENDICES

# APPENDIX 1

## INTERVIEW QUESTIONS PERTAINING TO BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION

1.  How old are you?

2.  Is Cape Town your home town? (if not, where did you grow up, when did you move to Cape Town?)

3.  How far did your mother go in school?

4.  Did she obtain any post-school qualifications? (if so, what were they?)

5.  Is your mother employed now?

6.  What work does she do, and how much does she earn approximately?

7.  How far did your father go in school?

8.  Did he obtain any post-school qualifications? (if so, what were they?)

9.  Is your father employed now?

10. What work does he do, and how much does he earn approximately?

11. Are your parents still married? (if not, explore background superficially)

12. Have you any brothers and/or sisters?

13. Do you still live at home? (if not, where do you live, with whom?)

14. Where did you go to school?

15. Did you come straight to university after you had finished school? (if not, what did you do between school and university?)

16. What degree are you registered for?

17. What year of study are you in now?

18. What were/are your majors?

19. What are hoping to do with your degree?

**INTERVIEW SCHEDULE**

**1.    Understandings about `Race'**

1.1    How would you define `race'?

1.2    What makes people different? (characteristics –
       internal? external?)

1.3    How would you define culture? (if arises here,
       otherwise after next question)

1.4    Why are these different `races'?  How do you account
       for the development of different `races'? (evolve,
       religious explanation etc, hierarchy?, different
       `levels of development' in different parts of the
       world?)

**2.    Salience of `Race'**

2.1    Do you think that `race' influences most peoples'
       judgements (attributions) of one another in South
       Africa?  How?  Why?

2.2    Do you think `race' influences your assessments of
       people?  How?  Why?

2.3    How important do you think `race' is in terms of the
       everyday lives of most South Africans?

2.4    How important do you think `race' is in terms of your
       own daily life?

**3.    `Race' Relations and Attitudes**

3.1    Do you have any acquaintances who are not `white'?

3.2    Do you have any friends who are not `white'?

3.3    How did these relationships form?

3.4 Why is it difficult to have relations with people of other `race-groups'?

3.5 What would happen if your brother/sister/close relative wished to marry a `black' person? How would your parents feel about it? (tape superficial reaction, real feelings)

3.6 How would wider family and friends react? (superficially/really)

3.7 How would you react/feel?

3.8 Could you imagine having an intimate relationship with a `black' person? Or have you had such a relationship, are you currently involved in such a relationship at present? (elaborate, explore, any difficulties, explore colour continuum/ colour bar)

3.9 Do you think there are any problems associated with being a child of a `mixed' marriage? (will the increased number of children of `mixed' marriages result in `race' becoming less salient)

3.10 How do you think you'd feel if 80% of UCT was `black' and 20% `white'? How would this distribution affect what happens at UCT?

3.11 If 80:20 in your suburb (all immediate neighbours `black')
your childrens' school
shops
social life
What difference would this make? (standards/bending over `blackwards' type issues)

3.12 How would you feel if at some time in the future the religious festivals or holidays or traditions that you celebrate were no longer recognised?

## 4. Racism

4.1 How would you define racism? (explore continuum of racism vs either racist or not; affirmative action type issues often raised here, `black' backlash)

4.2 What sorts of things constitutes racism for you? (describe, probe)

4.3 What do you think causes racism?

4.4 Can you think of an incident when you've felt particularly `white'? (explore in-group/out-group perceptions)

4.5 Can you think of an incident when you've been racist?

4.6 Is there a racial incident which you have witnessed which you were not necessarily involved in that stands out in your mind?
Describe it.

4.7 How do we get rid of racism? (strategies, suggestions)

## 5. Self

5.1 Who or what do you think has been most influential in shaping you views as you've expressed them today?

5.2 Have your views changed in any way in recent years? Why? How have they changed?

5.3 How different are your views from those of
your partner?
your family?
your friends?

5.4 How would you define yourself? (identify with, explore groups)

5.5 In the South African context, what groups do you see as the most important/salient at the moment?

## 6. Politics

6.1 Where do you locate yourself on the political spectrum? (membership?, vote for?)

6.2 How do you feel about the protection of minority rights? (one person one vote? (Bill of Individual Rights?)

6.3 Will racial tension resole itself in a new South Africa? How?

6.4 Separated/ integrated? What will happen in a new South Africa?

6.5 Do you feel optimistic/pessimistic about the future of this country? Explain.

6.6 Do you have a future vision of South Africa? What is it? And where do you fit in it?

6.7 Is there a point at which you would leave the country?

## 7. General

7.1 Is there anything that we haven't discussed that you'd like to, anything I haven't covered that you feel is important, anything I've said that you want to pick up on?

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# APPENDIX 3

## TRANSCRIPTION CONVENTIONS

### Example 1

**Lea:**    *So, (.) then it is something that affects you on a daily basis (.) is that what // you're saying?*

**Sarah:**  *// Ja (.) I don't (.) if you're busy and you're going through your day it doesn't affect you, but if you've got time to sit back and wonder about life (.) then it does affect you ... start wondering about this whole issue.*

### Example 2

**Lea:**    *But presumably its not (.) I mean in the future it would be perfectly conceivable for you to have an intimate relationship with someone who wasn't white?*

**Sam:**    *<u>Absolutely</u>! No, that's not (.) I wouldn't do it as a kind of badge of honour (mm) to say look I'm <u>really</u> trendy you know.  It would have to be the person and as I'm saying I'm finding black [hands in air for inverted commas] people more and more attractive you know. Maybe it's because I'm on the rebound from Johan you know (.) it might be.*

The system of transcription illustrated in these two examples is based loosely upon that of Jefferson (cf. Atkinson & Heritage, 1984; Jefferson, 1985), and follows conventions used by Wetherell and Potter (1992) in their recent study of `white' New Zealanders.

As noted earlier (refer chapter 4, section 4.4), this system maximises readability; consequently, commas, full

stops, question marks and exclamation marks have been added. The main conventions which appear in the extracts above are explained below:

(.) - pause in speech flow

// - starts of overlap in talk

... - omitted material

<u>xxx</u> - words said with emphasis

(mm)- interjections

[xx]- clarificatory material usually relating to non-verbal gestures