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'They're more than animals': Refugees' accounts of racially motivated violence

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Abstract

Previous discursive research has found that minority group members may deny or downplay the existence of discrimination. However, to date little research has addressed the issue of violence against minority group members. This study therefore draws on interviews with asylum seekers and refugees in a Scottish city to analyse their reports of violence committed against them. One form of reporting violence was by way of a complaint available to any speaker, in making no reference to attributes of attackers of victim. When racism was alleged, it was presented as a tentative, reluctant or 'last resort' explanation. The descriptions offered by interviewees reflected the contributions made by the interviewer, highlighting the ways in which these reports are interactional co-productions. The results suggest that accounts from victims of seemingly racially motivated violence may function in similar ways to 'new racism' in making racism seem to 'disappear'. These findings point to the potential difficulties that arise in identifying and looking to challenge instances of 'new racism'.

Introduction

Racially motivated violence is a pernicious experience for members of minority ethnic groups. Despite extensive research on racist discourse of majority group members (e.g., Augoustinos, Tuffin & Rapley, 1999; van Dijk, 1993; Wetherell & Potter, 1992) and how they produce and manage accusations of racism (e.g., Chiang, 2010; Every & Augoustinos, 2007; Goodman, 2010; Goodman & Burke, 2010; Riggs & Due, 2010), and on minority group members' generalised discussions of discrimination (e.g., Colic-Peisker, 2005; Verkuyten, 2005), very little extant discursive research has analysed minority group members' accounts of being victims of racially motivated violence (Stokoe & Edwards, 2007). This article explores, through detailed analysis of interviews with asylum seekers and refugees in a major Scottish city, how minority group members account for violence that has been committed against them.

Racism and discourse

Discursive approaches to psychological phenomena argue that language is not a neutral medium that describes the world, but rather is actively engaged in creating that world; i.e., language is constitutive of reality (Potter & Wetherell, 1987; McKinlay & McVittie, 2008). Wetherell and Potter's (1992) seminal study illustrated how people flexibly deploy aspects of liberal ideology in talk to justify ethnic inequality and to avoid being seen as racist. Other research has illustrated how majority group members structure their arguments to legitimise inequality while denying being racist (e.g., Augoustinos, LeCouteur, & Soyland, 2002; Augoustinos & Reynolds, 2001; Augoustinos, Tuffin & Rapley, 1999; LeCouteur & Augoustinos, 2001; Nairn & McCreanor, 1990, 1991; Rapley, 1998). Furthermore, Condor, Figgou, Abell, Gibson and Stevenson (2006) show how majority group members may seek to defend potentially racist claims made by others who are co-present and thereby imply those making accusations of racism are irrational. Thus, Augoustinos and Every (2010) argued that denying racism is a pervasive aspect of racist discourse and that there is a taboo against making accusations of racism.

Indeed, van Dijk (1992) illustrated that those accusing others of racism risk being described as over-sensitive and intolerant. For instance, Every and Augoustinos (2007) demonstrated that refugee advocates face difficulties in challenging racist discourse, as describing someone's arguments as racist can violate conversational conventions resulting in defensiveness rather than constructive dialogue that could result in meaningful change. This is supported by other research on discussions relating to asylum seekers, where speakers carefully construct their responses in ways that are critical without making explicit racist accusations, otherwise risking being accused of censorship or stifling debate (Goodman, 2010; Goodman & Burke, 2010). Similarly, Riggs and Due (2010) illustrated how accusations of racism were managed sensitively in televised interviews with reality TV show contestants. In particular, the term 'racism' tended to be avoided – replaced with less specific terms such as 'bullying' – and the interviewer relied on footings (Goffman, 1981) to present racism accusations as stemming from members of the public rather than herself. In the American context, Chiang (2010) illustrated that racism accusations could be treated as conflicting with constitutional rights.

To date research on racist discourse and accusations of racism has focused on majority group members, often neglecting minority group members' talk. In this regard, Kirkwood, Liu and Weatherall (2005) argued that it is important to look at how minority

group members' constructions create a more empowering and relevant social psychology for people in minority groups. Moreover, research needs to address the question of how minority group members talk about and make accusations of racism, as there may be crucial differences compared with members of majority groups.

However, in addressing this issue, Verkuyten (2005) found that minority group discourse could downplay discrimination, and suggest that some minority group members were overly sensitive to discrimination, both of which emphasize the scope for individuals to take responsibility over their lives and possibilities for social mobility. Similarly, Colic-Peisker (2005) found that when Bosnian refugees in Australia recounted incidents that could be described as discriminatory, they did not portray them as such and argued that they were not victims of discrimination. The author suggested that this positions the refugees as 'insiders' who they see as more similar to most Australians than migrants and refugees who are not white, associating themselves with what they see as a positive identity. In contrast, Stokoe and Edwards (2007) illustrated that people may produce accusations of verbal racial abuse in interactions with mediators and the police and in doing so make racist motivations clear. Such accusations however were often produced as 'counter complaints' in circumstances where the speakers were themselves facing accusations of acting unreasonably and in which issues of intolerance were already salient for those involved.

Overall, discursive research on racism shows how majority group members may legitimise inequality while presenting themselves as not racist, accusations are produced in sensitive ways orienting to an apparent taboo on making such accusations, and minority group members may deny being victims of racism. Excepting the research on verbal racist abuse (Stokoe & Edwards, 2007), all of these serve to make racism disappear. However, most of this research focused on generalised views on discrimination rather than specific instances (e.g., Colic-Peisker, 2005; Verkuyten, 2005). Questions of how members of minority racial groups report being victims of violence, and how, if at all, their accounts invoke accusations of racism, have remained relatively unexplored. Previous discursive research into the accounts of victims of violence in other contexts may provide some insight in this regard.

Discourse and victims of violence

Research into victims' accounts of violence suggests that they minimise the nature of the aggressive acts which they describe or even deny that episodes of aggression have arisen. For instance, Gavey (2005) found that women who have had unwanted sexual contact may deny that the incident constituted rape and thus minimize its seriousness. Similarly, Reavey, Ahmed and Majumdar (2006) interviewed South Asian female victims of sexual attacks. They noted that social work professionals involved in helping these women faced various problems associated with cultural norms within the victims' communities. For example, the importance of family relationships meant that they were concerned about bringing shame to the family and adversely affecting the 'honour' of their husbands.

Furthermore, victims may provide accounts that conceal acts of violence. For instance, Berman (2000) examined narratives produced by homeless youths in urban Indonesia in a 'street bulletin' where children shared their experiences with other street children. Although some described violent acts, violence was often excluded from the narratives or minimized. Berman suggested this was partly because violence was the norm in these children's lives and also because this allowed them to avoid positioning themselves as victims. So in some cases victims may produce accounts that deny, downplay or justify violent acts.

This review of relevant research illustrates that minority group members may orient to the sensitivity of making racism accusations and victims may downplay the seriousness of violent acts. However research has yet to analyse minority group members' accounts of violence. As illustrated by Edwards (2005), producing complaints requires the careful negotiation of both the description of the event and portrayal of the speaker's disposition. Therefore this study's research questions are: how do minority group members produce accounts of being victims of violence, and how, if at all, do these accounts invoke accusations of racism?

Method

Data were gathered by means of researcher-led interviews. This approach, although common in the social sciences, has attracted a range of comment from discursive researchers. In his re-analysis of the interview data focused on racist talk originally appearing in Wetherell and Potter (1992), Edwards (2003) suggests that collecting spontaneous talk is 'preferable' to interview methods. As Stokoe and Edwards (2007) argue, we learn little from interview studies about how racism occurs in everyday life because what is said is guided by the interviewer's agenda and because research interviews constitute their own form of social interaction. As Stokoe (2010) points out, such interviews are 'researcher-saturated' settings and she has suggested that in some researcher-led interviews, the 'stakes are low' for participants in contrast to other settings such as police interviews. However, Edwards (2003) does note that interview data can provide an appropriate resource for identifying participants' interactional orientations. And, moreover, the issue of what is to count as high or low stakes is in itself a participant-led concern. Here, as the data discussed below demonstrate, the present participants can be seen to design their responses around the presence or absence of candidate explanations for the episodes of violence they describe. In this sense, the interviewees' responses orient to the interactional sensitivity (Edwards, 2005) of making complaints. In this respect, we treat the researcher-led interview here in line with Talmy's (2011) perspective on the research interview as a 'social practice' where discursive elements are occasioned within the social interaction represented by this specific form of discursive event. Specifically, these interviews provide contexts within which issues of group memberships and their associated properties come to be negotiated by all of those who are co-present (Condor, Figgou, Abell, Gibson & Stevenson, 2006).

Semi-structured interviews were undertaken in English by the first author (a white, non-British man) with 15 adult asylum seekers and refugees in Glasgow (ten men and five women). They were from 11 different African or Middle Eastern countries. Seven interviewees had leave to remain and the remaining eight either had an active asylum claim or had had their claim refused. They were recruited through three support organisations and interviews took place on their premises. The organisations and potential interviewees were informed that the interviews would focus on interviewees' experiences in Scotland, including contact with members of the host society. Interviewees were asked about experiences in the UK, problems encountered, assistance received, access to accommodation, education and employment, contact with other members of the local community and adjustment to life in Scotland. They were not asked specific questions about racism or violence, unless they raised these topics themselves.

Interviews lasted between 18-64 minutes, averaging 33 minutes. Most interviewees had a competency with English sufficient for the interviews to be conducted and analysed; in two cases the interviewees' English language abilities led to poor quality interviews and two

participants chose not to have their interviews audio-recorded. These have been excluded from the analysis. All other interviews were digitally recorded and transcribed using an abbreviated version of Jeffersonian notation (Jefferson, 2004). Participation was voluntary and confidential and participants received £10 for taking part. Identifying information has been removed and the interviewees have been assigned pseudonyms.

Transcripts were coded for sections referring to descriptions of violence as experienced personally by the participants or by immediate family members in the host society. Extracts were selected for more detailed analysis based on how the accounts were constructed and analysed with discourse analysis (Potter & Wetherell, 1987; McKinlay & McVittie, 2008), paying particular attention to how constructions of various people worked to manage issues of explaining and assigning responsibility for violence as reported. Analysis focused also on examining how interviewees' reports of violence were responded to and taken up or not taken up in the contexts of the interviews and the consequences of these responses for the production of the reports.

Analysis

The following analyses focus on interactional sequences in which interviewees produced accounts of violent episodes and oriented to motivations for violence. As these analyses demonstrate, however, the interviewer's responses within these interactional contexts bring their own consequences for how the interviewees report the experiences.

Extract 1 follows a passage of talk in which the interviewee has been describing his experiences of living in the host society. The extract begins with a question that asks the interviewee whether he had experienced any particular incidents with local people.

Extract 1

```
1    INT    have you 've you had any particular (.) like inc↑idents (.) with peo:::ple
2    R1     ↑yeah
3    INT    °oh yeah°=
4    R1     =I was attacked eh
5    INT    you were attacked?
6    R1     yeah (.)
7    INT    yeah °right ok°=
8    R1     =th that that was in (.) last year in ↑June
9    INT    yeah mm yeah and what wh what happened?
10          (2.0)
11   R1     I was just at<u>tack</u>ed for no ↑reason
12   INT    °yeah°=
13   R1     =yeah I was jus: just about to enter the- (.) the ↑flat eh
14   INT    °yeah°
15   R1     and three guys came in and they attacked me >for no ↑reason<
```

Following the initial question that asks about particular 'inc↑idents', the first section of Extract 1 in lines 2 to 8 includes several turns in which R1 refers not only to one particular experience but to the form that the experience took in that he was 'attacked'. We see at lines 3, 5 and 7 the interviewer responding to each of R1's descriptions with a minimal acknowledgement of the preceding turn. Although the interviewer's contributions potentially

might encourage R1 to continue with his description, unmarked acknowledgements such as 'mm hm' and 'yeah' as Pudlinski (2002) notes, can serve a variety of functions and their effects remain to be resolved as an interaction unfolds. Here, at line 8, we see R1 orienting to the interviewer's minimal acknowledgements as being less than encouraging in that he concludes this part of his report by stating the date on which the attack occurred, namely 'last year in ↑June' but providing no detail beyond that.

Thus it is only when, at line 9, R1 is asked a further question that specifically seeks further details of the attack that he expands on the description that he has provided. The description that follows at lines 11 to 15 is framed as an account that avoids reference to particular attributes of those who carried out the attack. More specifically, R1 states that the attacks occurred 'for no ↑reason' (lines 11 & 15). Moreover, the attack is portrayed as occurring while R1 was involved in a mundane activity – 'I was jus: just about to enter the- (.) the ↑flat' (line 13) – normalising his own behaviour and implying that he was not responsible for the violence (Widdicombe & Wooffitt, 1995). The attackers are described only in general terms as 'guys' (line 15), which references gender but no other attributes.

We should again note that the interviewer's turns at lines 12 and 14 take the form of minimal acknowledgements of R1's prior turns. The interactional consequence of these turns is seen at line 15 in R1's upshot that 'they attacked me >for no ↑reason<', which he treats as the conclusion to his expanded description. His report of being the innocent victim of an inexplicable attack thus takes the form of an account that is available to any such victim, in that it does not rely upon any attribution of motivations or characteristics (other than gender) either to his attackers or himself.

The interviewee in the previous extract described experiences of personal violence but did not attribute that violence to racial motivations or actions. In the extracts that follow, however, we examine instances in which refugees did explicitly address the potential for such actions to be racially motivated. Extract 2 is from an interview with a man who has been in the UK for eight years and has had his asylum claim refused. At this point in the interview, the interviewee has been describing moving from London to Glasgow, and the interviewer asks 'and how did that go, moving to Glasgow?' R4 replies by describing an initially positive set of experiences and continues with the account shown in Extract 2.

Extract 2

```
1    R4     I had no troubles in [area of Glasgow] y' know but when I came here (3.0) ºyou
2           knowº (.) I get I started getting people >calling me names< and stuff u::m=
3    INT    =ºokayº
4    R4     throwing stuff at me >sometimes you know< when I when I would be walking
5           down this road (2.0) some ↑bored people are out there
6    INT    ºyeahº=
7    R4     =you know when you'd walk past they're thro::w things at [you
8    INT                                                           [right
9    R4                                                                  [>and stuff like that<
10          (.) I'm thinking that's just (.) that's probably about (.) my colour or >summin' like
11          that< you have to think like this 'cos there's no other reason (.) but >some people
12          are just bored< they would probably=
13   INT    =heh=
14   R4     =>do it to anybody< you know
```

Here R4 begins by contrasting two different sets of experiences that he has encountered while living in the UK. These are distinguished temporally and evaluated in highly contrasting terms. When he previously lived in a different part of Glasgow he experienced 'no troubles' whereas his current experiences are marked by verbal abuse with people '>calling me names< and stuff' (line 2) and physical violence in terms of people 'throwing stuff' (line 4 and line 7). He frames his own actions in mundane, everyday terms as 'walking down this road' (lines 4 to 5) and 'walk past' (line 7), arguing similarly to R1 in Extract 1 that he could not be held responsible for the difficulties that he encountered. Moreover, in describing these incidents he introduces a categorisation of '↑bored people' (line 5). This categorisation attributes no particular characteristics or motivations to his attackers, other than the absence of alternative motivations and makes available one candidate explanation as to why R4 has experienced the problems that he is describing.

As in the previous extract we see the interviewer, in his turns at lines 3, 6, and 8, offering minimal acknowledgements of the descriptions that R4 is producing and of the candidate explanation that has been introduced at line 5. The interaction in the above extract however differs from those seen previously in that, in his next turn at lines 9 to 12, R4 continues by introducing a second candidate explanation for the actions of those who abuse and throw things at him, namely that it is 'probably about (.) my colour'. Several features however mark out this alternative explanation as being more tentative than his earlier suggestion that any difficulties are attributable to '↑bored people'. First, R4's reference to 'I'm thinking' suggests that what he is about to say is a spur of the moment possibility rather than a preconceived explanation for what occurs. Second, his depreciatory (Lee, 1987) use of 'just' downgrades the status of the explanation by minimizing its significance. Third, he immediately follows the explanation once produced by qualifying his commitment to it in stating at lines 10 to 11 that it might be '>summin' like that<'. Finally, he argues that this possibility is something that would occur to any person in his position in the absence of other explanations, stating that 'you have to think like this 'cos there's no other reason'. In these various ways, R4 manages the 'subjective side' of his complaint (Edwards, 2003, 2005), indicating that he is not a person who is disposed to complain on unwarranted grounds and that he does not have predetermined views that would lead him to treat such matters irrationally or to label others or their actions as racist in the absence of further evidence. Indeed, R4 himself continues by further undermining the possibility of being heard as complaining by reintroducing his earlier explanation. At lines 11 to 14 he again characterises those who carry out such actions as 'bored' (line 12) and discounts the relevance of specific features of victims such as himself, stating that perpetrators would 'do it to anybody' (line 14).

What we see then in Extract 2 is the interviewee tentatively introducing the possibility of abuse and violence being related to colour and thus potentially racist. This candidate explanation, however, comes in an interactional context in which the interviewer's minimal responses are open to being treated in a range of different ways. Here, a primary concern for the interviewee is that of not being heard as complaining unjustifiably. An explanation based upon characterisations and attributions available to any speaker, thus, is less open to challenge than one that relies upon particular attributions that might or might not accepted by an interactional partner.

The fourth extract is from an interview with a woman who has been in the UK for four years and has had her asylum claim refused. Here, R14 provides a report of violence experienced by her son. The report is framed in terms of possible racism, yet R14 again downplays suggestions of racist motivations.

Extract 3

1	INT	could you tell me anything about the <u>con</u>tacts that you've had with people in
2		Glasgow so contact >y' know< people that you've [me::t
3	R13	[uh huh
4	INT	[and talked to [and
5	R13	[yea::h
6	INT	[if it's been
7		goo::d or ba::d or anything=
8	R13	=good good [eh::m
9	INT	[anything
10	R13	it is ↑common in the world that maybe in [R13's country of origin] somebody
11		(1.0) eh doesn't like (.) anybody from <u>ano</u>ther country
12	INT	right=
13	R13	=it's true because they <u>did</u>n't know (.) <u>why</u> (.) we are here (.) sometimes they told
14		me (.) <u>black</u> (.) come back in your <u>coun</u>try (1.0) eh and my and my son has the
15		problem (0.8) in the street front my <u>eyes</u>
16	INT	yeah
17	R13	um that um (.) the the mmm Scottish uh student (.) eh::::m kick my son with
18		↑<u>glass</u> (1.0) and (.) I told (.) <u>why</u> (.) with (.) >the Scottish people< ↑<u>why</u> and he
19		told (.) mmm oh you c- and you must (.) come back in your <u>coun</u>try why you is
20		(.) <u>come</u> here? (1.0) and uh (.) I told uh (.) I saw this problem (.) uh (.) in the the
21		<u>school</u> (.) his school and (.) um the <u>po</u>lice in his school (.) and uh his head
22		teacher eh told (.) this uh mmm uh student is >very <u>bad</u>< and his wr- his
23		behaviour is >very <u>bad</u>< and uh I told ↓<u>no</u> he is good (.) he ↓<u>did</u>n't know
24	INT	( )
25	R13	about <u>every</u>thing (.) my head t- his head teacher told <u>no</u> (.) he is <u>no</u> only about
26		<u>racist</u> (.) only but he is very bad in the school and he <u>must</u> go <u>out</u> for one week
27		when he go out for <u>one</u> week (.) my son was ↓crying (.) it was four (.) uh four
28		years ago (.) and he was ↓crying and he told no my mum e::h I (.) my heart e::h
29		hasn't (.) my heart e::h tell me he must come back in the school

In the initial sequence in Extract 3, at lines 1 to 7, R13 is asked to describe her contacts with people in Scotland. Notwithstanding that at line 8 she positively evaluates her experiences as 'good good' the interviewer's response of 'anything' at line 9 invites her to provide further description. In the remainder of the extract, R13 goes on to report two forms of negative and criticisable behaviour carried out against her and her son. At lines 13 to 14, she describes how an indefinite set of people referred to as 'they' have told her '<u>black</u> (.) come back in your <u>coun</u>try'. This is followed at lines 17 to 20 by a description of an incident in which a Scottish student 'kick my son with glass' and told her son 'you must (.) come back in your country, why is you come here'. Here, references to skin colour, nationality and country of origin make available the inference that such behaviours were racially motivated. The statements also imply that the presence of people outside of their country of origin is a legitimate matter for question and that the individual who posed the question did not know the answer.

It is important to note how R13 frames these descriptions. She begins at lines 10 to 11 by referring to the universality of what she is about to describe in that 'it is ↑common in the

world' and continues with a specific reference to her own country of origin, suggesting that her description could equally apply there. There follows a generalized description in the form of 'somebody (0.8) eh doesn't like (.) anybody from <u>ano</u>ther country', making available a potential motivation for individual behaviour grounded in prejudices related to nationality. Following this, R13 offers another causal explanation for behaviour that might apply to people that she encounters in her present circumstances, that 'they didn't know (.) why we are here'. This explanation makes available two inferences, first that R13 has legitimate reasons for being where she is, and second that if other people had been aware of these reasons they would have acted differently.

This provides a context for R13's descriptions at lines 17 to 23. Rather than being heard as extremely negative and criticisable actions, these descriptions become understandable on the grounds that R13 has carefully worked up. Interestingly, Figgou and Condor (2006) found similar accounts from majority group members in Greece regarding discussions of prejudice, as racism was portrayed as ubiquitous and as often due to ignorance; the effect here is to downgrade the culpability of those who carried out the behaviours against R13 and her son.

We should note also how R13 reports her experiences subsequent to the attack upon her son. R13 and the teacher characterise the boy who attacked her son in highly contrasting ways. The teacher is presented as criticizing the boy and his actions, characterized at lines 22, 23 and 26 as 'very bad' and at line 26 as 'racist'. In contrast, R13 presents herself as supportive, describing the boy at line 23 as 'good' and explaining his actions as the result of ignorance in that 'he ↓<u>did</u>n't know'. Thus, although R13 makes racist explanations relevant, she describes herself as resisting any such ascription and as understanding the boy's attack upon her son differently. This characterisation provides the basis for R13 to report her son's emotional response to the events, in 'crying' and arguing that the boy 'must come back in the school'. This response, together with R13's descriptions of her own actions in challenging the teacher's characterisations, mitigates the boys' culpability for the attack while emphasizing the supportive and positive stance adopted by herself and her son. In this way, R13 introduces as relevant the topic of people who act negatively towards others on the grounds of nationality and race. However, she minimizes the extent to which she herself can be heard as explaining such actions on the grounds of racism.

Here, we again see the interviewer at lines 12, 16 and 24 produce minimal acknowledgements of the descriptions offered by R13 in the preceding turns. In each case, however, the interviewer's response albeit minimal leads R13 to develop her account further and to provide further details of the claims that she is making. In this extract, these acknowledgements are taken up by R13 in her following turns as indicating acceptance of her claim that although others might make accusations of racism, she herself does not seek to explain her and her son's experiences in this way.

The final extract is from an interview with a man who had been living in the UK for seven years and had refugee status. The extract comes during a section of the interview in which he was describing his reasons for moving to Glasgow from a city in England. This account differs from those above due to the way the interviewee develops a more specific accusation of racism.

Extract 4

1   INT   so you just de<u>cid</u>ed to go to Glasgow?
2   R9   ex- ex<u>act</u>ly

3	INT	okay
4	R9	so I mean and now the only thing I you know I mean I mean (.) the reason- (.)
5		the only reason I give <u>myself</u> (.) <u>is</u> (.) I say now you're meant to be on this ↓side
6	INT	okay
7	R9	so I mean (.) a lot of things ↑<u>happened</u> when I since I came h<u>ere</u>
8	INT	okay
9	R9	yeah >for instance< you know I was attacked <u>twice</u>
10	INT	°oh really°
11	R9	I came he::re (.) in (.) Glasgow having <u>all</u> my t<u>eeth</u>
12	INT	really
13	R9	and as you see <u>now</u> all <u>this</u> part ((points to gap in teeth)) (.) is fully <u>gone</u>
14	INT	°yeah°
15	R9	and (.) now I was attacked <u>twice</u>
16	INT	geez=
17	R9	=in the ↑c<u>i</u>ty
18	INT	god
19	R9	and I did <u>noth</u>ing to <u>no</u>body
20	INT	geez=
21	R9	=and even I <u>don't</u> know (.) them those people who are (.) did >did this to <u>me</u><
22	INT	god
23	R9	and they just came me I'm (0.7) I mean four three <u>guys</u>
24	INT	geez=
25	R9	=giving me p<u>u</u>nches y- you know b- you know (.) and that was you know I mean
26		(.) I said I mean (.) these guys you know they're <u>animals</u> even the eh- I even I (.)
27		even (1.0) they were not even an- m- animals but they're <u>more</u> than animals
28		because the <u>animals</u> (.) animal unless you do something to ↑<u>them</u> (.) they won't
29		come for <u>you</u>
30	INT	mmm
31	R9	so (.) I was wondering what they are <u>sav</u>age
32	INT	mmm
33	R9	and I think, <u>what</u> the <u>hell</u> is <u>this?</u> I mean we are in two thousand- two thousand
34		and ten
35	INT	yeah
36	R9	so I mean the worl- the world had (.) is <u>grown</u> and and getting <u>bigger</u>
37	INT	yeah
38	R9	so (.) and nobody (.) nobody do <u>this</u> any more I mean (.) in this >in the <u>wo</u>rld<
39		(.) in the real <u>world</u>
40	INT	right yeah
41	R9	yeah certainly so and I say I did <u>noth</u>ing to nobody [as far as I know
42	INT	[mmm yeah
43	R9	you know and I will say maybe (.) this thing is is my <u>skin</u> (1.0) yeah and I hate to
44		<u>say</u> that

The extract begins with the interviewer questioning the grounds for R9's presence in Glasgow. In replying, R9 indicates the limited scope of such grounds in stating that 'the only reason' he is present there is that he is 'meant' to be there. R9 continues by providing as a rationale for this state of affairs a description of his experiences within the city. At line 7, these are introduced merely as 'a lot of things ↑<u>happened</u>'. However, in what follows, the

example provided for such experiences emphasises their negative nature. At lines 9 to 15 R9 describes his experiences of being attacked during his time in Glasgow. He refers to the frequency of these attacks, repeating at lines 9 and 15 that they happened 'twice', thereby discounting the possibility of being attacked as an isolated occurrence. R9 also emphasises the consequences for him through the use of two contrasting extreme case formulations. At line 11 he states that he came to Glasgow 'having all my teeth', a state of affairs contrasted at line 13 with his current state in that in one part of his mouth the teeth are now 'fully gone'. R9 gives weight to this claim by directing the interviewer's attention, at line 13, to visible evidence of this consequence and at line 15 emphasises the extent of his negative experiences by repeating his description of being 'attacked twice'. In continuing, at line 19 he discounts the possibility of his bearing any responsibility for provoking these attacks, stating that he 'did <u>no</u>thing to <u>no</u>body'.

This far R9's description of being attacked resembles that produced by R1 in Extract 1, in that he has produced an account that presents himself as an innocent victim of violence but does not attribute any motivations or characteristics to those who attacked him. What however is of particular interest here is how the interviewer responds to these descriptions. We see at lines 3, 6, 8, 10, 12 and 14 minimal acknowledgements of the sort seen in previous extracts. As R9's description progresses however, the interviewer responds at lines 16 and 18 with 'geez' and 'god'. Such turns, far from being potentially ambiguous acknowledgements, comprise rather more evaluative acknowledgement of the experiences that R9 is describing. They display the interviewer's understanding of what has been described this far (Schegloff, 1982), signalling that he understands R9's description of the attack to be a serious one.

In the turns that follow, R9 treats his description of being seriously attacked as established and provides further description and initiates a search for candidate explanations at lines 21, 23 and 25. The interviewer's turns at lines 20, 22 and 24 all treat R9's preceding turns as equally serious as are his earlier descriptions and so work up the stakes involved in these descriptions. In terms of the candidate explanations that he offers for the attack, R9 describes at lines 23 to 25 how 'four three guys' that he didn't know 'just came' and were 'giving me punches'. In addition to denying any actions for which he might be deemed culpable, this can also be heard as part of a search for an explanation as to why he was attacked in the manner described. This search for possible explanations then is taken up and unpacked in the remainder of R9's description.

R9 commences his search at line 26 by characterising his attackers as 'animals'. This characterisation works first in providing a candidate explanation of the behaviour of 'these guys': they behaved in this manner because they were animals, not humans. Second it works as a criticism: in behaving in this manner, their actions failed to conform to standards of behaviour that separate out humans from animals. In continuing, however, R9 at lines 27 to 29 discounts this description of 'animals' as a potential explanation in stating that 'unless you do something to them (.) they won't come for you'. Moreover, the distinction between 'these guys' and animals is set out within a comparative framework, through the use of 'they were not even an- m- animals', in which the behaviour of 'these guys' is to be taken as more blameworthy than that of animals.

This is followed at line 31 by an indication, via 'so (.) I was wondering', that an alternative is to be proposed. R9 introduces the category of 'savage' and indicates that his attackers might belong to this category. 'Savage' can be taken here to refer to people who do not conform to 'civilized' norms of behaviour. So once again, this works as both potential explanation and as criticism, in providing a reason for why R9's attackers assaulted him and asserting that such actions were blameworthy in that they fell short of civilized behaviour.

However, as with the earlier claim in relation to animals, this candidate explanation is produced in a manner that indicates its problematic status. First, the current status of this alternative explanation is immediately problematized in that it is presented as something that R9 merely 'wondered'. This receives further emphasis in that R9 goes on to pose the question 'what the hell is this', suggesting that his preceding description does not provide satisfactory explanation. Moreover, his reference at lines 33 to 36 to the year in which the attack took place, and his description of the world at that time, suggests that the existence of the proposed category membership group 'savage' is inconsistent with the time and circumstances described and therefore presents the attack as even more inexplicable. Further emphasis comes at line 38 in the extreme case formulation 'nobody do this any more'. Clearly this statement is not presented as being literally correct since he has just described people committing such an act, but it heightens the rhetorical effect of his claim by indicating that people who behave in the way that members of the category 'savage' behave no longer exist 'in the world'.

Moreover, R9 at line 39, by referring to 'the real world', further emphasises the inexplicable nature of his experience, and he again rules out the possibility that his own actions might have led others to attack him. What this search for and discounting of these two candidate explanations at lines 26 to 41 does is to pave the way for R9 at line 43 to introduce a further possibility, 'maybe (.) this thing is is my skin'. This comes only after he has ruled out other candidate explanations, is marked by the qualifier 'maybe', and introduces in only an indirect fashion the fact that R9 is visually distinct in terms of skin colour from the white residents of Glasgow. R9's upshot 'I hate to say that' presents this explanation as one that R9 has arrived at reluctantly and only in the absence of any other possibility (Edwards, 2003, 2005). This positions R9 as someone not inclined to label a wider range of behaviour as racist and implies that racial motivations are located in the world rather than merely in his perception of it.

Discussion

This analysis has shown that when refugees and asylum seekers who are victims of violence account for their experiences sometimes, as was the case in Extract 1, these accounts share design features with other forms of talk where complainable matters are being introduced. But where such explanations include accusations of racism, these are produced tentatively, reluctantly or as 'last resorts'. These strategies allow the explanation of racism to be put 'in play' while avoiding the negative consequences associated with making accusations of racism. This focus on potentially racially motivated violence addresses a gap in discursive research that has been limited to majority group members' discourse, minority group members' general discussions of discrimination and verbal racist abuse.

One way the speakers dealt with racism was to deny that actions were racist or reduce their seriousness. For instance, speakers presented those involved as being a minority of people beyond the bounds of normal behaviour, or locating events temporally and geographically, thus avoiding general negative evaluation of the host society. Alternatively, and in contrast to previous research on complaining (Edwards, 2005), speakers can provide accounts that are vague on details, thus playing down the seriousness of incidents and avoiding being seen as 'whingers'. Furthermore, they could provide alternative explanations – such as boredom – that reduced the culpability of the individuals involved as well as portraying incidents as non-racist. This contrasts with the findings of Stokoe and Edwards (2007), whereby accounts of verbal racial abuse were 'headlined' in a way that brought

attention to the perpetrators' dispositions, and suggests a potential difference between accounts of verbal and physical racism that deserves further exploration. Related to this, speakers could put the explanation of racism 'in play' – for example, by suggesting it then negating it, or by presenting it as coming from someone else – allowing them to avoid holding to a direct accusation of racism themselves. All of this allows victims of seemingly racist violence to talk about this while avoiding difficulties associated with making direct accusations of racism.

In cases where speakers did attribute the violence to racism to some extent, accounts were presented in ways that carefully managed the position of the speaker. For instance, second level explanations – such as the violent behaviour being due to ignorance – reduced the culpability of the attacker as well as presenting the speaker as caring and reasonable. This explanation has the additional merit of implying potential for positive change, in terms of the attacker as well as wider society. Furthermore, explanations of racism were produced tentatively and only after eliminating other explanations, thus avoiding the identity of someone who is overly sensitive or sees racism everywhere, and presenting racism as part of reality rather than a subjective or potentially biased aspect of the speaker. This could be done through accounts that emphasised the innocence of the speaker as well as presenting the incident as otherwise unexplainable. This shows that accusations are produced sensitively, and speakers orient to an apparent taboo on making such accusations.

These findings have a number of important implications, both in terms of understanding racism and in identifying and challenging particular acts of racially motivated violence. Previous discursive research has identified how majority group members produce discourse that justifies inequality while denying being racist (e.g., Augoustinos, Tuffin & Rapley, 1999; van Dijk, 1993; Wetherell & Potter, 1992). These results suggest a parallel process in which members of minority groups only reluctantly produce complaints that rely on racism. In some respects, this seems odd. There seem obvious reasons why perpetrators of violence might seek to mitigate their actions. For example, Stokoe (2010) discussed the way that men accused of violence against women during police interviews seek to categorize themselves as men who would not engage in such violence. However, as Stokoe points out, these men have an understandable motivation to minimize the seriousness of the crimes with which they are accused. Here, however, it is the victims of violence who downplay the racial motivations involved. As highlighted by Colic-Peisker (2005) and Verkuyten (2005), this may function to justify their presence in the host society or otherwise put a focus on individual responsibly and the scope for positive social change. Similar to the way that majority group members deny the existence of prejudice or minimise culpability due to their group membership (Condor et al., 2006), it may be that this denial relates to their (potential) membership of the host society. Thus, one candidate explanation lies in potential resulting difficulties for refugees and asylum-seekers in establishing their own motivations for seeking to remain in a host country. An alternative explanation, however, might lie in the interactional difficulties that can arise in establishing complaints of racism. Many previous studies, as noted above, have pointed to the range of means at the disposal of majority group members to ward off any such accusations. What we see in the present study, therefore, might reflect the discursive advantage of the majority group as taken up in the interactional orientation of refugees and asylum-seekers to such matters. In short, the making of racially-based claims might well be just too problematic to bring off successfully and, furthermore, might at the same time be used to cast doubt on the motivations of those who seek to remain while criticising members of the host society. Moreover, refugees and asylum seekers may find themselves in a particularly difficult situation, as they are reliant on the host society for

protection so any accusations of racism may be taken as ungrateful as well as raising questions about the legitimacy of their claims of persecution in the countries they have fled. However, the apparent difficulties in making direct accusations in accounts of racially motivated violence may serve – along with 'new racist' discourse – to make racism difficult to identify and address.

These results have particular implications in relation to 'hate crimes'. For instance, one definition of racially motivated hate crimes requires that the act is perceived as racially motivated by the victim (Jardine & Bellamy, 2009). Our analysis suggests that violent episodes may be produced as 'real' but it is the racial motivations that constitute the most problematic aspect of such accounts. This is in line with the findings of Riggs and Due (2010), that accounts of 'bullying' were less problematic than accounts of 'racism', and the findings of Stokoe and Edwards (2007), that people were more willing to accept responsibility for general verbal abuse, or even homophobic abuse, than racial abuse. This suggests that racist acts are treated as particularly unacceptable, more so than simple acts of violence, to the extent that victims are inclined to avoid making such serious allegations. In this regard, it is worth noting that the high-profile murder of an asylum seeker in Glasgow in 2001 was initially treated as racially motivated, but this aspect of the charge was removed during the court process and ultimately no evidence was found to support the case for the murder being racially motivated, highlighting the difficulty of this concept (Coole, 2002).

It is important to reflect on the potential limitations of this study given its reliance on qualitative interviews rather than naturally occurring data (Potter & Hepburn, 2005; Rapley, 2001). Comparing with Stokoe and Edwards's (2007) study on accounts of verbal racial abuse made to mediators and the police highlights some similarities in the accounts (e.g., the use of vagueness and inviting the recipients to draw conclusions when assessing the accounts) and some key differences (particularly regarding the avoidance of accusations of racism). Interestingly, the research interviewer for our study acts in a similar manner to the community mediators in their study, as he tends to produce relatively minimal responses, except where the interviewees state being victims of severe violence ('really?', 'geez', 'god'). Where the interviewer does produce such evaluative responses in the present study, in Extract 4, the interviewee goes on to attribute his experiences to racially-motivated violence. What this suggests is that reports that invoke explanations based on race, instead of being viewed as individual accounts should be treated as collaborative productions of all involved. Condor and colleagues (2006) noted that what is to count as racist talk or non-racist talk is an interactional concern for all those who are co-present when such talk is produced. In the present case, we see the corollary of that finding, in that complaints that rely on racism equally are co-productions of the interviewer and interviewee. Further research is required to explore whether the difficulties in producing accounts of racially motivated violence persist in other contexts, such as police interviews, where the stakes and interactional turns are different (Stokoe, 2010). However, the analysis of such accounts in the context of research interviews is important in itself, as such methods are commonly used for exploring the issues faced by refugees, asylum seekers and other minority group members, and these methods may neglect the social constraints on people producing accounts of racism.

Overall, this study has illustrated the sensitivity with which members of minority groups make accusations of racism, even in cases of seemingly racist violence. In this regard, the apparent taboo on making racist accusations means that such accounts may actually play down or deny the existence of racism in ways that mirror 'new racist' discourse, potentially making racism more difficult to identity and challenge.

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