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**“A stinking filthy race of people inbred with  
criminality” A discourse analysis of prejudicial talk  
about Gypsies in discussion forums.**

By Lottie Rowe and Simon Goodman

## **Abstract**

Gypsies have been shown to be a group subject to extreme prejudice and discrimination in the UK. The current research explores how Gypsies are portrayed and talked about within UK discussion forums. A discourse analysis was conducted on three discussion forums concerning Gypsies and how they should be treated. The analysis identified the following strategies as being commonly used to express hatred towards, and to argue against rights for, Gypsies: (1) Referring to Gypsies as the 'other' who are abnormal, (2) Constructing criminality as a key characteristic of Gypsies, (3) Suggesting that some Gypsies are 'bogus', which was used to argue against all Gypsies and (4) Presenting Gypsies as outside of the law and given favouritism over settled British communities. The findings are discussed in light of existing literature surrounding the prejudice towards Gypsies and other minorities and suggestions for overcoming this prejudice are presented.

## **Keywords**

Romani, Gypsies, Prejudice, Hatred, Discourse Analysis, Discursive Psychology

## Introduction

### The prejudicial treatment of Gypsies

There has recently been an increased interest in issues surrounding Gypsies<sup>1</sup> in the UK following the high profile eviction of the 'Dale Farm' Traveller site<sup>2</sup> and the popular channel four television programme 'My Big Fat Gypsy Wedding'<sup>3</sup>. Despite this increased interest, Gypsies are one of the most discriminated against minority groups in the UK (e.g. Kenrick and Bakewell 1995; Donahue, McVeigh and Ward 2003). Gypsies and Travellers are recognised as an ethnic minority in the UK; however, compared to that of other minority groups, hostility towards Gypsies is more socially acceptable (Tileaga 2006; Ellis and McWhirter 2008). A MORI poll in 2003 found that 35% of UK residents, approximately 14 million people, admitted to prejudice against Gypsies (Stonewall 2003). Gypsies are one of the most deprived and arguably the most socially excluded minority group in the UK (Ellis and McWhirter 2008).

The exclusion and discrimination of the Gypsy and Traveller population in the UK is reflected in almost every aspect of their lives. This is apparent within the health service, where the British Medical Association considers Gypsies to be the most 'at risk' minority group; with the lowest life expectancy, ten years below national average, and the highest child mortality rate (Cemlyn *et al.* 2009) a figure worse than other ethnic minorities and socially deprived or excluded groups (e.g. Van Cleemput 2010). This exclusion also occurs in education where children show striking levels of under achievement (Ellis and McWhirter 2008) possibly caused by poor attendance at school, for which bullying and racism have been identified as a cause (Liegeois 1987).

A further aspect of Gypsy life, where they face discrimination and exclusion is planning and site location. In 2007, 22% of caravans in the UK were on unauthorised sites (Ellis and McWhirter 2008).

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<sup>1</sup> The term 'Gypsy' is often used to refer to English Romany Gypsies and Irish Travellers. Throughout this paper the term Gypsy will be used to refer to these groups, as this is the term most commonly used in the data.

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-esssex-15738149>

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.channel4.com/programmes/my-big-fat-gypsy-wedding>

Gypsies and Travellers living on unauthorised sites were found to suffer greater levels of stress and mental illness and have poor access to services which assist their exclusion from society (Ellis and McWhirter 2008). Half of the authorised sites provided by councils are located near motorways, railways, rubbish tips and sewage works (Ellis and McWhirter 2008).

Gypsies have been found to be discriminated against within the criminal justice system. Within the UK, recorded incidents of criminal acts by Gypsies are no higher than those within the settled community (O'Nions 1995); however they are more likely to receive a custodial sentence and are less likely to receive bail than non-Gypsies (Meek 2007). Gypsies have disproportionately high rates of death in custody. Meek (2007) demonstrated that 'Gypsy-Travellers' have a more negative experience of the criminal justice system compared to other young prisoners. In the UK and Europe the police have been reported to use extreme force when dealing with Gypsies and Travellers especially when removing them from illegal encampments (Kabachnik 2010).

Prejudice towards Gypsies within society can also be shown through parliamentary and electoral discourse. Richardson (2006) found that Gypsies were used by Michael Howard, when he was the leader of the British Conservative party, as part of his electoral campaign in 2005 to highlight groups in society that need controlling. Turner (2002) examined how Gypsies were portrayed within British parliamentary debates between 1988 and 2001 and found persistent themes of criticism condemning all Gypsies as dishonest, criminal and dirty. Within the debates Gypsies were presented as occupying two extremes: a mysterious figure with psychic power and a thieving dirty criminal, although the criminal portrayal was far more prominent. Another prominent conservative, Ann Widdecombe, was shown to have likened Gypsies to dogs claiming that 'A passer by walked passed a Gypsy encampment and noticed two dogs that were cleaner and fitter not only than the other dogs but the occupants' (Turner 2002:8).

Gypsies and Travellers have been negatively portrayed in the UK media (e.g. Clark and Campbell 2000). Schneeweis (2009) investigated discourse about Gypsies in newspapers in the UK and Romania between 1990 and 2006 and found that they were regularly presented as thieves and beggars. Examples of UK newspaper headlines demonstrating discrimination have been identified, for example: ‘Gypsies leave devastation’, ‘winning the war against Travellers’, ‘Travellers need to clear off’ (Bowers 2010), ‘the Gypsy invasion’ (Clark and Campbell 2000) and ‘safety fears as Gypsies invade’ (Kabachnik 2010). Bowers (2010) argued that if these headlines were about any other minority group that they would be deemed extremely offensive and unacceptable, demonstrating a tolerance for prejudice when this prejudice is directed towards Gypsies.

In sum, this review has demonstrated the social exclusion and marginalisation of Gypsies regarding the UK health service, education system, criminal justice system, media, some (predominantly Conservative) politicians, local councils’ planning systems and the general public. It is therefore claimed that Gypsies are one of the most discriminated against minority groups in the UK.

### **Discursive psychology and Prejudice towards Gypsies**

What these examples from political and media discourse demonstrate is that language used to describe Gypsies functions to present them very much as a problematic group. As will be argued throughout this paper, it is this language that is used to achieve the marginalisation of, and discrimination towards, Gypsies that is outlined above. It can be seen from these examples that Gypsies are presented generally as a problem and more specifically as in need of controlling, dirty and, through the use of the war and invasion analogies, as a very different group who are in direct conflict with the (British) in-group. Tileaga (2007) describes how such talk can be used to delegitimize and dehumanise the people it is aimed at in a way that justifies their moral exclusion, which is described as their removal from the normal considerations that would be applied to most groups. On the basis of this, Tileaga (2007) argues that it is necessary to investigate the ways in

which talk about such groups is used so as to achieve this moral exclusion and advocates the use of a critical discursive psychological approach to such talk.

Discursive psychology focuses on the action orientation of talk and writing (Edwards and Potter 1992). From this perspective, talk about minorities is not assessed to ascertain whether or not the speaker holds 'prejudicial views', but instead it is assessed to see what actions such talk performs. A discursive definition of prejudice therefore consists of 'discourse that denies, rationalizes and excuses the dehumanization and marginalization of, and discrimination against, minority out-groups' (Every and Augoustinos 2007:412). It was demonstrated in the previous section that Gypsies are a marginalised and discriminated against out-group, so the question for discursive psychology becomes: how does talk about Gypsies deny, rationalise or excuse this discrimination?

A limited amount of discursive psychological studies have addressed talk and text about Gypsies. The notable exceptions are presented here. Tileaga (2005; 2006) conducted discursive research on the prejudice towards Gypsies in Romania. A strategy of blaming Gypsies for the negative talk about them was identified as a discursive tool for the justification and rationalisation of the discrimination towards them. Tileaga demonstrated that this was achieved through the use of the notion of 'place' which was used to justify the exclusion of Gypsies and Travellers on the grounds that they do not have a set place to belong. They are therefore positioned as outside of society, which they do not belong to, and therefore they are presented as deserving of exclusion and to be discriminated against (2006). Also in Europe, Leudar and Nekvapil (2000) analysed Czech television debates between 1990 and 1995. Romany Gypsies were described as those 'who do not live like normal people', 'who commit crime and cause problems'. Only Romany Gypsies themselves described 'Romany's as unique people with a valid form of life'.

In the UK no discursive psychological studies have addressed talk about Gypsies, however Powell (2008) and Holloway (2005) have identified arguments that are used in talk about them. Powell

(2008) investigated the stigmatisation of British Gypsies and identified the '(dis)identification' of Gypsies and Travellers, which is implicated through the denial of similarities between Gypsies and Travellers and the settled community. This acts to present Gypsies and Travellers as separate from British society and is used as justification for the prejudice and stigmatisation they endure.

Holloway (2005) demonstrated that white rural residents 'racialise' Gypsies who are consistently presented as the 'other'. The term 'them' was used more than Traveller or Gypsy, which helped distinguish the Gypsy population from the rest of society. Participants described Gypsies as 'darker' with 'olive skin' and 'darker hair' with the absence of white features. Differences between Gypsies and the settled community were not just physiological; differences in clothing were also highlighted. In addition to 'othering' this group, Gypsies were further separated into two groups: the 'true' Gypsy and the 'hanger on'. This presents all Gypsies and Travellers as illegitimate while allowing the speaker to appear caring and reasonable (see Lynn and Lea 2003).

To date no discursive analyses have been conducted about Gypsies in the UK. The aim of the paper is therefore to identify how Gypsies are presented by the public in the UK and to investigate what these presentations are used to accomplish, and in particular, to paraphrase Every and Augustinos (2007:412), does this discourse deny, rationalise or excuse the dehumanisation and marginalisation of, and discrimination against, Gypsies?

## **Procedure**

Discourse analysis (e.g. Edwards and Potter 1992; Augustinos and Every 2007) was used on internet discussion forums following news reports about Gypsies. This internet data was chosen as it allowed for a thorough analysis of the contributions of members of the public about the topic. This type of data represents 'naturalistic data' (see Potter 1997) where participants freely choose to share their comments in the public domain, without the interference of the researchers. It has been demonstrated that this type of data may contain fewer orientations to norms against prejudice which can lead to the



display of more direct and extreme prejudice (Burke and Goodman 2012). This may be due to the minimisation of dilemmas of stake and interest (Edwards and Potter 1992) caused by the potentially anonymous setting (Bomberger 2004) and lack of any serious repercussions for unpopular comments. Therefore discussion forums can be a fertile source or relatively unguarded data regarding prejudicial talk.

Data was collected by the first author in summer 2010 following a thorough search for forums following news reports. Eventually three discussion groups were picked as they contained sufficient posts for analysis and represented a range of different political persuasions. The three forums analysed are: (1) A forum on the Independent newspaper's website<sup>4</sup> under the Headline of 'No Blacks, no dogs, no Gypsies'. This newspaper article was seemingly pro-Gypsy and tried to highlight the racism and prejudice Gypsies and Travellers experience. It described racist attacks and included quotes from various members of the Gypsy community; describing experiences of discrimination. (2) A forum on the website 'foreigners in UK' - a web portal for immigrants in the UK<sup>5</sup>. The headline of the article was 'Gypsy child thieves: controversy over BBC documentary'. The article discussed the BBC documentary<sup>6</sup> entitled 'Gypsy child thieves'. The documentary was part of a BBC Two international investigative documentary series. It examined how Romanian Gypsy children are forced to beg and steal, often for the profit of organised crime. The newspaper article claimed the BBC promoted and perpetuated popular stereotypes against Romany Gypsies. (3) The Sun Newspaper's website<sup>7</sup> under the headline 'Paradise lost to JCB gypsies'. The article was seemingly anti-gypsy and it described the uproar after Gypsies laid down concrete foundations for a permanent caravan plot on their own land.

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<sup>4</sup> <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/no-blacks-no-dogsno-gypsies-860873.html> [at the time of writing the comments accompanying the article are no longer accessible]

<sup>5</sup> [http://www.foreignersinuk.co.uk/blog-videoblog-gypsy\\_child\\_thieves\\_controversy\\_over\\_bbc\\_documentary\\_1383.html](http://www.foreignersinuk.co.uk/blog-videoblog-gypsy_child_thieves_controversy_over_bbc_documentary_1383.html)

<sup>6</sup> <http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b00mkjyd>

<sup>7</sup> <http://www.thesun.co.uk/sol/homepage/news/article2446669.ece>

All discussion forum comments were left between May 2009 and June 2010. As the data was online it did not require transcribing, however line numbers have been added for reference. Posts are included as they were found, so any errors in terms of facts, spelling or grammar have been reproduced.

Once the data was collected and prepared for analysis the posts were copied onto a single document in chronological order for each of the three discussions. As this is a discursive analysis, consideration was given to the construction, function, variation, rhetorical strategies and discursive features of the discourse. The data was read thoroughly to identify noteworthy rhetorical features. The discussion forums were then considered together to identify patterns; these patterns were analysed further so as to ascertain the functions of the strategies. . Exemplary posts representing the eventual findings have been included in this report as those that best illustrate the strategies that have been identified.

## **Analysis**

The following strategies were identified in the analysis as being used to express hatred towards, and to argue against rights for, Gypsies. The first is that Gypsies are referred to as the 'other' and as abnormal when compared to the normal 'us', this is achieved in a number of ways, including through the use of the other strategies. The second is that criminality was constructed as a key characteristic of Gypsies. The third is the use of the suggestion that some Gypsies are 'bogus', or not proper Gypsies, which was used to argue against all Gypsies. Finally Gypsies are presented as being outside of the law and being favoured over settle British people. While it is common for any number of these features to be present in any one post, these strategies are broadly introduced and discussed in turn. These different strategies can be understood as fitting onto a continuum of prejudice ranging from 'othering' through to abnormalisation (Verkuyten 2001) and moral exclusion (Tileaga 2007) with the most extreme being an explicit display of hatred (Billig 2001).

It is worth noting that the vast majority of posts were from non-Gypsies (or at least where the writer did not refer to their being a Gypsy). There is one exception to this that is addressed elsewhere, in an analysis of arguments over what constitutes racism in talk about Gypsies (anonymous author(s), forthcoming)

### **Gypsies are presented as abnormal because they break social norms**

In this first extract, which includes examples of the first and second strategies, Gypsies are presented as breaking social norms and therefore not belonging to British culture because of their nomadic lifestyle.

#### **Extract One, The Independent. Ajlennon 26 February 2010 10.09am**

##### **Stop!**

1. Our society functions on the ideas that if somebody causes a problem for the community then the
2. community ensures punishment, through the legal process, so it doesn't happen again.
  
3. Because Travellers are by nature itinerant, they do not have the same ties to the community as the
4. people who have made their home in a location.
  
5. For whatever reason there is also a high incidence of theft around Traveller camps- in Cambridge for
6. example.
  
7. It is not racist to have an experience of Travellers arriving, thefts increasing, property values
8. decreasing, and to want it to stop.

In this extract the argument is that Gypsies, referred to in this comment as Travellers, live a nomadic lifestyle which means that they do not have the sufficient ties to a community to properly belong to society. This difference is used to account for Gypsies' criminality and inappropriate behaviour,

which in turn is subsequently used to justify hearably contentious comments. The first comment on lines 1-2 implies that Gypsies are outside of normal society. The presentation of Gypsies in this way demonstrated through the use of terms such as ‘our society’ (1), which explicitly positions Gypsies as not belonging. The us and them distinction (e.g. Lynn and Lea 2003) is complete when Gypsies are presented as ‘they’ (3) in contrast to ‘our’ (1). The grounds for this us and them dichotomy are around the ‘ties’ (3) or lack of, to particular locations. This distinction works to demonstrate that Gypsies are not part of the community, which further distances them from society (Gomez-Berrocal and Navas 2000).

The comment on line 5 positions Gypsies as thieves. The adoption of the phrase ‘for whatever reason’ denies any inferences of prejudice, this is an example of the commenter orienting to the norm against prejudice (Billig 1988). Presenting the comment as a causal association means that the commenter can refute any allegations that this is a personal opinion (Billig 1987). The commenter presents the statement as authentic by giving an example of high incidences of crime around Gypsy and Traveller sites. The example is therefore presented as a casual association rather than a personal account which is a case of stake inoculation as the commenter is managing his/her identity as being a reasonable person (Potter 1996).

The final comment on lines 7 and 8 describes Travellers as unwelcome thieves. The commenter begins this final point with a disclaimer (7). This disclaimer at the end of the post, following the claims that Gypsies are both different and criminal, suggests that the writer is orienting to the possibility that the post could potentially be viewed as racist (Billig 1988). However, the disclaimer here is unusual in that rather than disclaiming a view or an opinion (which is more typical of disclaimers, see Hewitt and Stokes 1975) here it is an ‘experience’ that is being disclaimed. By referring to an experience in this way, it is very difficult for this to be challenged, or for this to seem

unfair. This does, however, divert readers away from the possibility that the presentation of Travellers as inherently criminal could be deemed prejudicial.

The reference to the damage to house prices portrays Gypsies and Travellers as nationally socially undesirable and unwanted, and very much not part of the British 'us'. By suggesting a desire to prevent a fall in house prices, the writer is able to position him/herself as caring about those in the community, which brings about a positive self presentation, even though an argument is being made here against allowing Travellers to live nearby. It is by positioning Gypsies as outside of the British 'us' by positioning them as nomadic, criminal, and a threat to local house prices, that justification for preventing them from staying in the local area is made. This text, therefore is an example of what Verkuyten (2001) refers to as the 'Abnormalisation' of outgroups. In this case this 'abnormalisation' is used to present Gypsies as problematic and undesirable and functions to argue for stricter control of Gypsies.

### **Gypsies are presented as criminals**

In the following extract, which again features the first and second strategies identified in the analysis, establishing Gypsies as different is taken further so that in this case it is used to be explicitly derogatory towards them.

#### **Extract Two, foreignersinuk .co.uk. Daniel - 2010-01-23 12:32:5**

1. It doesn't take watching this programme to see what this degenerate culture gets up to. On one
2. stretch of road about 300 meters there can be anything upto 8 Roma forcing a big issue into ones
3. face begging for money. In europe in Paris in London in Rome tourists are warning that they will
4. be stolen from by Roma. This is a stinking filthy race of people and inbred with criminality.

This extract contains perhaps the most extreme prejudice of all of those presented in this analysis. The extract begins with a reference to the documentary that the forum is debating (1). The contributor, Daniel, aligns with the criticism made in the programme and goes on to add his own criticisms of Roma people. The use of the term ‘degenerate culture’ (1) to describe Roma people is particularly dehumanising (Billig 2001). Notice that at this point it is the culture, rather than the race, that is criticised, which is a feature of discursive deracialisation (Augoustinos and Every 2007) that can function to present comments as not racist. Roma people’s problematic status is illustrated with examples of begging, harassment and greed which all warrant the warning that the writer claims is given to tourists in a range of European cities. Their association with the ‘big issue’ (2) a magazine sold by homeless people suggests that all Roma are homeless and prone to begging. After this point is made, Roma are next presented as criminal, as in the previous extract. Their criminal nature is presented as being a feature across all of Europe, with a list of major European capital cities delivered to emphasise this point.

It is these criticisms of Roma culture that are used as the groundwork before the final, and most explicitly prejudicial comment (4) is made. The first thing to notice about this comment is that rather than referring to Roma as a culture, which is a feature of discursive deracialisation (seen at the start of the post), here Roma is referred to as a race, which means that at this point there is an absence of deracialisation and instead an explicitly racialised comment is made. The racialised comment is explicitly prejudicial, referring first to Roma as stinking and filthy, which is a clear feature of dehumanising racist language (see Billig 2001). The reference to ‘inbred’ (4) is also particularly dehumanising (Van der Valk 2001), as the use of the word inbred is associated with animals and uncivilised behaviour. Finally, another explicit association is made with criminality, where it is here suggested that criminality is a part of what it is to be a Roma, so once again crime is referred to as a strategy for othering Gypsies. These comments are not made in a guarded way at all, so there is no

orientation to the taboo against prejudice (Billig 1988), and this comment can be seen as an example of race hatred (Billig 2002). Indeed, unlike the previous extract, where criticisms of Gypsies are used to argue against allowing them to build on land, the purpose of this extract appears to be simply to display hatred towards them (Billig 2001).

In the first two extracts, it has been shown that Gypsies are presented as different from, and inferior to, non-Gypsies, indicating a clear us and them distinction (e.g. Lynn and Lea 2003). Whereas the first extract contains an example of abnormalisation, it appears that this extract has gone further than that with a clear dehumanising element to the extent that this can be seen as an example of what Tileaga (2007) describes as moral exclusion. This is where normal expectations of decency are not deemed necessary for this group; this demonstrates a particularly extreme and worrying level of prejudice directed at Gypsies and it is this extreme form of abnormalisation of Gypsies (dehumanisation) that provides the groundwork for such claims to be made.

### **Gypsies are divided into ‘bogus’ and ‘genuine’ categories**

In this next extract it will be shown how this outgroup rather than being presented as homogenous, is further divided into two distinct categories, that of ‘bogus’ and ‘genuine’ (the third strategy) while also including elements of all the other strategies identified in this analysis.

### **Extract Three, The Independent. Markm99 25 February 2010 03.43pm**

#### **Re: STOP!**

1. The actions of a few thieves and crooks who hide under the guise of being a Traveller to escape
2. persecution tarnish the entire tribe with the same brush.
3. The actions of a few Travellers who disregard due process and set up illegal camps while the local
4. authorities backs are turned tarnish the entire tribe with the same brush.

5. The actions of a few Travellers who abuse the benefits system tarnish the entire tribe with the same
6. brush.
7. If the ones who bugger things up and generate bad press for the genuine, honest Romas, gypsies and
8. Irish Travellers look and sound like the real thing, how are we non-Travellers able to tell the
9. difference?
10. Its not racism. Its confusion over a culture that we don't understand and preserve as lazy, freeloading
11. spongers out on the make by stealing the lead of churches to buy a few beers. Decades of media
12. representations have centred that view point.
13. It's a self-perpetuating vicious circle. We assume they're all crooks and present the attitude, and they
14. assume we hate them and think they're all criminals and present the attitude. A conflict that will never
15. be resolved any time soon.
16. If we try and welcome them with open arms, the few crooks who masquerade as them will take
17. advantage and rob us blind. Sometimes, it's just easier to ban the whole lot just to be on the safe side.

Throughout this extract, the writer uses the distinction between 'genuine' (7) Gypsies and 'crooks' (1 and 16) posing as Gypsies. The dichotomisation of Gypsies as fake and genuine is similar to Lynn and Lea's (2003) findings, which identified the existence of the notion of the 'bogus Asylum Seeker' which was used to argue against all asylum seekers while presenting the speaker as reasonable. The commenter presents the argument as fair and liberal by conceding positive aspects about their lives, which allows the commenter to justify any discriminatory comments (Billig 1991). However, the commenter is also building a rationale to generalise the problems identified to all Gypsies. This is achieved by suggesting that there is no alternative as the fake and 'genuine' distinction as Gypsies are visually indistinguishable because they 'look and sound' (8) the same. This presents being liberal as an impossible task. As with Lynn and Lea's notion of the 'bogus asylum seeker' all Gypsies are presented as problematic, not just those identified as genuine, while the writer avoids bringing about inferences of being in any way unfair.



The use of the word 'tribe' presents Gypsies as uncivilised and different from society. This further helps the commenter to talk badly about Gypsies (Van der Valk 2001) and it is through the use of this strategy that Gypsies are abnormalised. The distinction between the genuine and bogus Gypsy however becomes blurred on lines 7-9, which lays the groundwork for later suggesting that all Gypsies should be treated harshly. Following on from this comment, which could potentially be viewed as problematic, the commenter disclaims (Hewitt and Stokes 1975) racism (10) and instead claims that the cause of the problem is 'confusion'. The portrayal of naivety helps the commenter deny the blame for discrimination, which here is assigned to the media (Van Dijk 1992). While doing so, the 'us and them' distinction is maintained and Gypsies remain presented abnormalised.

Nevertheless, the characteristics that are then used to describe this (mis)representation of Gypsies are particularly negative, with references to being lazy, immoral, criminal and only interested in alcohol (10-11).

The final statement on lines 16/17 is used to justify the exclusion of Gypsies ('ban the whole lot' 17) on the grounds that some Gypsies 'them', who are presented as not really Gypsies at all, are criminals and to prevent them from harming 'us' they should all be banned. Therefore the conflation of the 'bogus' and 'genuine' is used to suggest that all members of the group should be treated harshly (see Goodman and Speer 2007). There appears to be a flaw in this logic, as it is recognised that all Gypsies are tarnished (4) by this misunderstanding, but at the same time, this misunderstanding is used to justify the banning (17) of all of them. Here safety (17) is presented as more important than fairness, to the detriment of most Gypsies. Exactly what is meant by banning a whole group of people is left unclear, but has potentially serious undertones.

It has now been demonstrated that Gypsies are presented as different from 'us', which can allow for them to be dehumanised, and that by suggesting that some Gypsies aren't genuine and because of (unfair) misunderstandings about them, that all must be treated harshly. As well as presenting Gypsies as criminals, a feature of all the extracts in this analysis to date, contributors to these

discussions also position Gypsies as having more rights than settled communities, something that is presented as unfair and a cause of hostilities towards them. An example of this can be seen in the following extract.

### **Gypsies are presented as being outside of the law**

#### **Extract Four, The Sun - Paradise lost to JCB gypsies. cartman 3:19PM, May 25, 2009**

1. Monkeybrain, sorry trap, yes they might own the land but you need planning permission to build on it
2. which they clearly don't have.
3. If I was the council, I'd remove all their concrete until they have the proper permission. As usual
4. nothing will be done because Gypsies are classed as a minority and in this country minorities are a
5. protected species.
6. The Law needs changing right now, police should have the power to move in and stop it , it is illegal,
7. anything goes in this country , except for the people born and bread , we are not allowed to breath and
8. are outsiders, were in the world did they get the money to do this , my brother flogs 7 days a week and
9. can hardly live .British and so ashamed of this dumping system .

This extract is used to argue that Gypsies are above the law and are able to get away with being criminals because they are a minority group. The extract begins by responding to a previous comment, in which it is argued that the Gypsies don't have the necessary permission to build on the land they own. Next, the commenter speaks on behalf of the council involved (3) and suggests that he would take a tougher stance than the council would. The poster then shifts footing so that he is speaking as himself and offers a reason as to why nothing will be done to prevent the Gypsies from building on the land (3-5). This is attributed to the Gypsies' minority status (McConahay 1986), although the use of the term 'classed' (4) suggests that the commenter may dispute this categorisation. 'As usual' (3) generalises what is presented as a problem, so that the so called preferential treatment of minority groups is constructed as an ongoing and recognisable problem, to the extent that he is drawing on a repertoire off out-group favouritism, a position that is built up

throughout the remainder of the sentence, which is used to make a generalised criticism of the country and the way it treats minorities. Criticising the system, rather than the minority group themselves, is a strategy often used when criticising minorities, and has been shown to be a common strategy of the far right (Copsey 2007; anonymous author(s) under submission). The suggestion that minorities are a 'protected species' (5) does two things. First it suggests that minorities, and here specifically Gypsies, have more rights than the majority group (Corlett 2002). Second, the use of the term 'species', something more commonly associated with animals, is particularly dehumanising (Billig 2001) and so represents another example of abnormalisation (Verkuyten 2001), an extreme version of the 'us and them' distinction (Van der Valk 2001) used in talk about Gypsies.

The next part of the post (6-9) is used to reemphasise the ways in which Gypsies are above the law. This is achieved through the contrasting of Gypsy and 'native's' (7) rights, where an account is built up, drawing on personal experience, to show how difficult it is to be British and how easy it is to be a Gypsy. As the police are presented as having no control, Gypsies are presented as above the law. This strategy of highlighting the plight of certain members of the settled community, in this case those with low economic status, is similar to the discursive device 'differentiating the self' identified by Lynn and Lea (2003) in which a similar argument was made against allowing asylum seekers refuge in the UK. This device enables the commenter to appear concerned, as worry about family is displayed, why also suggesting that Gypsies, who are othered, do not work as hard as the British 'us'. The final sentence (9) consists of the commenter stating his nationality, British, but rather than stating that this is a positive identification, this is presented as something to be ashamed of, due to being a group that is presented as being unfairly treated. The strategy of stating that one's nationality is a cause of shame is an effective way of presenting the running of that nation as problematic, so this adds to the criticism of the country found earlier in the extract. Again this draws on the repertoire of

out-group favouritism and suggests that this is a general problem, not restricted only to the treatment of Gypsies, but other groups too.

## **Discussion**

This analysis had identified a number of strategies that are used in the discussion forums in which Gypsies are othered, dehumanised, abnormalised, presented as criminal, and not necessarily 'true' Gypsies, while also being deemed to be treated more leniently than British people; all in the service of presenting hatred towards Gypsies and justifying harsh policies against them and all fitting along the continuum ranging from 'othering' Gypsies to extreme explicit hatred. Together this can be viewed as extremely prejudicial language. The strategies identified will each be addressed in turn.

First, the othering of Gypsies was a common strategy found throughout the data. An 'us and them' distinction has been shown elsewhere to be a common feature of prejudicial talk (Leudar and Nekvapil 2000, Gomez-Berrocal and Navas 2000, Powell 2008, Tileaga 2005) and one that allows for the justification of ill treatment towards that group. This is also consistent with the findings of Tileaga (2006) who identified how talk about 'place' was used as a way of justifying the moral exclusion of Gypsies on the grounds that they have no fixed place, and are subsequently outsiders. This presentation of Gypsies breaking social norms and being separate from society allowed the commenter to portray Gypsies as unwanted (Tileaga 2006). 'Othering' Gypsies in this way can lead to their being dehumanised (Billig 2001) in the discussion forums, which is an extreme form of discrimination, and one that can lead to the justification of particularly harsh measures against them.

The next strategy, where Gypsies were categorised as either fake or genuine was identified as a discursive tool which was used to justify prejudice and discrimination towards all Gypsies, even those considered 'genuine'. The 'bogus Gypsy' is presented as criminal, dirty and a benefit fraud whilst the genuine Gypsy is presented as decent and honest. This dichotomisation is consistent with

previous research by Richardson (2006) and Clark and Campbell (2000) which found that the use of discursive repertoires such as 'bogus' and 'genuine', justified the prejudice and discrimination towards Gypsies. This categorisation allowed the commenter to present the bogus Gypsy as illegitimate. Also, as these negative characteristics were not attributed to 'genuine Gypsies', users of this strategy are able to present themselves as fair, and avoids potential accusations of undue prejudice towards all Gypsies; it enables contributors to be overtly prejudiced towards the 'bogus Gypsy' whilst still complying with the social norm against prejudice (Billig 1988). However, the commenter ultimately resigned to generalising the negative attributes of the bogus Gypsy/Traveller to the whole community on the grounds that they are all visually indistinguishable. This allows the commenter to shift the blame for the generalised negative connotations to the bogus Gypsies rather than attributing it to their own internal prejudice.

A common feature of the posts was the representation of Gypsies as being criminal; this was found throughout the data. Previous research conducted outside the UK has found Gypsies to be positioned as law breaking (Kabachnik 2009; 2010; Dawson 2000; Tileaga 2006; Leudar and Nekvapil 2000; Gomez-Berrocal and Navas 2000; Turner 2002). In this data, the criminal behaviour of Gypsies was used to warrant prejudice and discrimination. This helped shift the blame for prejudice and negative opinions held about Gypsies from the commenter to the Gypsies. The representation of Gypsies as criminals helps to further build the 'us and them' distinction that has been found to be a prominent feature of the discussions about Gypsies. This strategy justifies and rationalises discrimination and prejudice towards Gypsies. It positions the writer positively as a law-abiding citizen and Gypsies negatively, as unruly criminals. This law breaking is used as a rationale for discriminatory comments and evidence to support why the writer has come to feel this way.

In addition to being presented as criminals, Gypsies are also presented as above the law and having more rights than non-Gypsies. This finding shares similarities with the 'differentiating the self' argument where Lynn and Lea (2003) demonstrated that the needs of the British majority are

emphasised and used to argue against rights for minority groups (Lynn and Lea 2003). This strategy has also been identified in anti-minority far right talk, where the majority group is presented as the true victims of inequality while the minority group is constructed as being unfairly supported by the government, for example *anonymous authors* (under review) demonstrate how the leader of the far-right British National Party makes this argument about ethnic minority immigrants in the UK. Here, problems experienced by the majority group are highlighted, while the minority group is presented as being unfairly treated at the expense of the majority group; anti-Gypsy comments therefore become framed as ways of helping the majority group, rather than as prejudicial about Gypsies.

Together, these findings highlight the social acceptance of prejudice towards Gypsies, who are presented as nationally undesirable and unwanted on account of being different and abnormal, being criminals, being presented as sub-human and being given preferential treatment over settled population. While there is evidence of forum users orienting to the norm against prejudice, there is nevertheless a worrying amount of prejudice, often explicitly made, directed towards Gypsies. This analysis has identified a number of similarities and also differences from established literature on prejudicial arguments. In terms of similarities, there is evidence of the othering and dehumanisation of the outgroup (for more on this in an online setting see Burke and Goodman 2012), some adherence to the norm against prejudice (Billig 1988) and the ongoing suggestion that British people are subject to unfair treatment due to the existence of minority groups.

There are, however, also notable differences whereby specific strategies are used only in the context of anti-Gypsy talk which work together to delegitimise Gypsies in a specific way. This is built on the notion that Gypsies do not belong; whereas many out-groups are deemed to belong elsewhere (as is the case with anti-immigrant rhetoric, for example) the references to Gypsy's nomadic and different lifestyle work to suggest that there is nowhere at all for them to belong. This is used alongside the pervasive notion that criminality is a fundamental feature of what it is to be a Gypsy to suggest that Gypsies exist outside of the 'normal' moral order of British society; there is therefore clear evidence

for Tileaga's (2007) notion of moral exclusion of Gypsies through the way in which they are talked about.

## **Conclusion**

While discursive psychology does not offer a simple solution to tackling prejudice, a thorough understanding of the arguments that are used to perform prejudice towards Gypsies may allow for new possibilities for pro Gypsy advocates to develop ways of countering these arguments.

Specifically the analysis has identified strategies whereby anti-Gypsy arguments are constructed in a way that displays and justifies prejudice towards this group, therefore counter-strategies can be developed. These could, for example, involve references to values common to Gypsies and non-Gypsies regarding the importance of family. However, Gypsies and Gypsy advocates will be best placed to decide exactly how to counter these prejudicial arguments. It is argued that a greater understanding of the function of (prejudicial) talk is especially important as the prejudicial talk identified in this analysis cannot simply be viewed as offensive language; such language functions to justify the moral and social exclusion of real people and it is for this reason that it needs to be challenged.

This analysis has identified a number of strategies that 'legitimizes social inequalities' (Wetherell 2003:21), including the othering of Gypsies, who are presented as abnormal, subhuman, criminal and as having more rights than the settled majority, and therefore can be seen to perform prejudice to a vulnerable minority group. The language in this data is particularly offensive, with extreme examples of explicit hatred that do not adhere to the cultural norm against prejudice, and suggests that Gypsies represent an especially demonised population within the UK, as well as elsewhere in Europe. Gypsies are presented as very different to settled communities in dehumanising and degrading ways. These representations need to be challenged if Gypsies are to be treated equally and if discrimination towards them is to be reduced.

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