The Management of Accusations of Racism in Celebrity Big Brother

Damien W. Riggs
School of Social Work
Flinders University
GPO Box 2100
Adelaide
South Australia 5001
damien.riggs@flinders.edu.au

Clemence Due
School of Psychology
The University of Adelaide
South Australia 5001
clemence.due@adelaide.edu.au

Abstract

The 2007 UK series of Celebrity Big Brother drew considerable attention to Britain as a result of the alleged racist bullying of Bollywood film star Shilpa Shetty by four British celebrity housemates. At stake in these allegations was any perception that Britain as a country promotes inclusivity and discourages racism. In this paper we examine, through an analysis of the exit interviews conducted with the four housemates in question, how accusations of racism were made by the host of Big Brother, and how racism was almost made to disappear in the interviews. Specifically, we elaborate how racism was constructed not simply as an individual aberration, but more precisely as a matter of perception. We then explore how the host of the interviws avoided making accusations of racism herself by implying that it was others who perceived the behaviours of the housemates as racist, and by using other words (such as 'bullying') rather than explicitly referring to racism. We conclude by outlining the implications of our findings for future discursive research on racism, and we emphasise the need to further explore how rhetorical strategies aimed at denying racism operate in the service of shoring up privileged identities.

Introduction

In January 2007 the fifth series of Celebrity Big Brother screened in the UK. From very early on in the almost four-week long series it was apparent that considerable animosity existed from one group of housemates toward one individual within the house. The group consisted of five British celebrities: previous Big Brother contestant Jade Goody, her partner Jack Tweedy, her mother Jackie, and two other young British women: Jo O'Meara and Danielle Lloyd. The individual towards whom much negativity was directed was Bollywood star Shilpa Shetty. Goody, O'Meara and Lloyd in particular drew upon a range of what Zacharius and Arthurs (2007: 455) term "ethnocentric and racist neologisms" to bully Shetty in relation to her beauty regime, her accent, her food handling practices and celebrity status. This culminated in a verbal fight between Goody and Shetty, initiated by Goody and involving O'Meara and Lloyd, which only days later was followed by the public eviction of Goody from the house, followed by Tweedy, Lloyd and O'Meara (Goody's mother had been evicted earlier and thus is not the focus of discussion in this article). In the exit interviews for the four young British people, Davina McCall, the host of UK Big Brother, called each individual to account for their actions towards Shetty. In so doing, McCall provided them with an opportunity to respond to both British and international media allegations of racist bullying, with the following examples of media headlines being reported to the housemates upon their eviction:

> This isn't just about a TV show anymore, it's a major diplomatic row… One would have doubted a week ago the likelihood that the Chancellor of the Exchequer would use a visit to India to talk about celebrity big brother… The celebrity big brother racism row exploded into the political and diplomatic arena today… Concern that the Bollywood actress is the subject of racist bullying today reached Prime Minister's question time.

As these headlines suggest, Britain was placed under the microscope of accusations of racism and was called to account for the possibility that the actions of the British celebrity housemates represented something about British culture in general. What was at stake, then, was not simply the identities of the individual celebrities, but rather the identity of Britain as a tolerant society.

Certainly it would appear to be the case that accusations of racism in general carry with them a moral judgement about the accused, which must be defended against. Research on the rhetorical management of accusations of racism (see Augoustinos and Every, 2007a, for a summary) suggests, much like in regards to the denial of racism, that discourses of rationality and equality are drawn upon in order to construct individuals as free of blame from any racist intent. In other words, claims to an equal playing field are used to justify particular (potentially racist) behaviours, and individuals are constructed as rational beings who understand that 'racism is wrong' (and hence as rational individuals they were not or cannot be racist). Of course the corollary of this is that only 'irrational' or otherwise prejudiced individuals are seen as perpetrators of racism. Racism in this sense is thus seen as something that is exceptional or as an aberration to the norm of rational inclusivity, rather than as a normative practice structuring western societies through the differential allocation of resources (to the privileged) and the ongoing impact of racist policies and practices (upon those who are racially marginalised). This relationship between privilege and disadvantage

thus disappears when racism is made to be about aberrant individuals, rather than a form of systemic and institutionalised power imbalance.

Yet whilst there is a similarity between accusations and denials of racism at the individual level, previous research has tended to indicate a difference between the two in regard to any recourse to notions of the collective (Every and Augoustinos, 2007). This is the case, as we suggest above, because racism is typically located at the level of the individual (who can thus be accused of racism), but it is far less often located at the level of the nation or collective (which is seldom accused of racism). Claims to the collective good are of course often used in the denial of racism (e.g., in claims to national tolerance of racially marginalised groups), but it is largely the case that notions of collective responsibility or systemic racism are often sidelined when only individuals are accused of racism. Obviously there are instances where nations are accused of racism (e.g., Nazi Germany, apartheid South Africa, and to a lesser extent, colonisation in Australia and the US), but by and large it is individuals who are accused of racism (conceived of as an individual act), even though individuals may at time make reference to positive elements of the collective to deny racism (Van Dijk, 1993).

So what we have here is an interesting paradox, whereby the collective is only made salient at particular times (i.e., by individuals seeking to defend against accusations). Moreover, and as van Dijk (1992) suggests in his seminal work on the denial of racism, when dominant group members accuse other dominant group members of racism, the issue of racism again remains one of individual actions or beliefs, rather than reflecting anything about dominant groups as a whole. The answer to this paradox of course is the investment of dominant group members in the myth of the collective as 'good' or as 'tolerant' or as otherwise unassailable in relation to practices of marginalisation (Hage, 1998, Riggs, 2004, Rutherford, 2000). Yet we only need to recognise the historical and contextual contingency of any given moral account to understand that what constitutes a collective good can change to accommodate any resistance to marginalising practices, and thus to maintain the status quo. Thus whilst it may appear to be the case that 'modern' (and supposedly less explicit) racism is different to 'traditional' racism (in the form of explicit violence), the two are in fact sides of the one coin: they both function to maintain social hierarchies, and they both have very real effects in the lives of all 'groups' of people (as understood in terms of 'racial categories').

To return to Celebrity Big Brother, then, and as we demonstrate in the remainder of this paper, accusations of racism indeed appear to be aimed at managing any fall-out for the collective that may result from what is depicted as individual racism. As we illustrate through an analysis of the exit interviews of Goody, Tweedy, Lloyd and O'Meara, the host (McCall) goes to considerable lengths to avoid impugning wider meaning to the actions of the four housemates by hesitating to name racism as such and by focusing on racism as an 'unusual occurrence' or indeed a matter of perception. In so doing, whilst the four individual housemates are largely excused from accusations of racism (though not from accusations of bullying), they are still constructed as aberrant examples of 'individuals in conflict', rather than as emblematic of a nation shaped by practices of colonisation and engaged in ongoing acts of empire. Nonetheless, and as we suggest in our analysis, collective responsibility is never entirely kept at bay – it seeps back into the talk of the individuals and in so doing demonstrates the collective anxieties that shape the lives of dominant group members in Britain (and elsewhere) who are always at risk of being shown up as members of a racially structured society that operates through practices of privilege and marginalisation (Riggs and Augoustinos, 2005).

Analysis

The data that we draw upon constitute the exit interviews conducted by McCall with Goody, Tweedy, Lloyd and O'Meara. It must of course be acknowledged that television programmes in general, and reality television more specifically, follow a particular script aimed at eliciting a narrative for each individual that is intelligible to viewers who have watched the series. Whilst McCall as host and other representatives of UK Big Brother have argued that the show is not edited to achieve a particular narrative, housemates across repeated series argue to the contrary. We are thus mindful that the presentation of the exit interviews in their particular format and situated as they are within a linear progression within the show (from entrance to exit with some casual explanation – i.e., popularity with the public – linking the two) is to a large part orchestrated by the producers of the show. Thus reality television programs such as Celebrity Big Brother operate within a specific institutional setting with a proscribed agenda to provide a particular form of entertainment which appeals to a broad television audience.

At the same time, however, we would suggest that these particular exit interviews represent an exceptional case in comparison to other exit interviews on Big Brother more broadly. Amongst other things, they do not follow the standard structure or utilise the standard questions (which typically focus on 'best moments', or 'gossip' about other housemates). Instead, they are aimed at holding the individuals to account for their actions. Importantly, each of the three interviews (Tweedy and Lloyd were interviewed together) play out in relatively different ways on the basis of how the individuals recognise or deny racism and bullying on their part. Of course it could be argued that as celebrities they would have particular skills in managing hostile media interviews. Though this may be the case, the seriousness attributed to the issue (through the initial screening within each interview of a montage of news clips about the 'racism row' – as outlined in the introduction to this paper – and a second montage of the actual incidents of racism and bullying), and the relative infrequency in which celebrities are ever accused of racism within interviews, would suggest to us that television programming aside, the exit interviews constitute a naturalistic instance of how accusations of racism are managed.

In the following two sections we outline the two dominant ways in which racism was spoken about within the interviews. In the first instance it was largely constructed as an aberration, or indeed as a matter of perception. Such constructions represent individualised accounts of racism. Yet, as we suggest, this individualisation (and indeed minimisation) of racism signals a broader denial of racism as endemic to British culture. In the second instance we examine how accusations of racism are actually made (or not made as is the case here). Here we suggest that talking about racism is clearly difficult for the person in the position of making the accusation, and that the would-be accuser uses a range of strategies to avoid having to make a direct accusation. Together, these two forms of talk about racism within the 2007 series of Celebrity Big Brother UK indicate some of the commonplace ways in which accusations of racism are managed in order to minimise interactional difficulties, and to restrict any accountability to the individual rather than the collective.

Racism as aberration or matter of perception

In each of the exit interviews McCall explicitly constructs the contents of the interview as an aberration, rather than as a routine Big Brother interview. This can be seen in the following two extracts, taken from the interviews with Tweedy and Lloyd, and O'Meara.

Extract 1

```
McCall:    right how are you both feeling?
Tweedy:        like that ((shows hands shaking))
Lloyd:     we've both been like that all day ((laughs))
McCall:    >quite weird< now listen if this had been a normal
           interview ummm obviously ahh we'd be talking about
           your [burping and your farting]
Lloyd:          [laughs                  ]
McCall:    and your moon walking and obviously Jack we'd be
           talking about your new found celebrity status but
           <unfortunately> this isn't a normal interview as you
           are about to find out (clears throat) because
           there's been one massive story .hh that's come out
           of celebrity big brother this year and umm it
           involves ahhh Jo Jack you ((to Lloyd)) umm your
           girlfriend ((to Tweedy)) ummm and Shilpa (.5) ummm
           but it will all become much clearer when you take a
           look at this
```

Extract 2

```
McCall:    now, if this, if this was a normal eviction
           interview I would be talking to you about your
           constant puffing on   [cigarettes]
O'Meara:                         [(laughs)  ]
McCall:    and the     [mooning]
O'Meara:               [yep    ]
McCall:    and how you were surgically attached to that
           dressing [gown (.) at all times                ]
O'Meara:            [yeah I know, its very me (laughs)  ]
McCall:    but this isn't going to be a normal interview… hh
           ummmm I know you're sort of you've been quite
           nervous about it haven't [you since you] got out of
           the house
O'Meara:                            [(nods) yep    ]
McCall:    ummm and (.) and weirdly in the house all week
           you've been saying (.5) that you thought something
           was up
```

Across these two extracts, McCall states that behaviour 'normally' discussed in exist interviews consists of "farting", "mooning", and "puffing on cigarettes" rather than (what we come to learn the topic to be of) racism. Indeed, in the first extract McCall even states that it is 'unfortunate' that this isn't the subject matter that they will be discussing. This explicit construction of the interviews by McCall as 'not normal' (i.e., because they will be primarily discussing racism and bullying in the house) positions racism as being outside the range of normal behaviours typically seen in Big Brother. Such a construction of racism as 'abnormal behaviour' for the show is reflective of the ubiquitous construction of racism as abnormal in society more broadly. This abnormalisation of racism means that it becomes attributable only to *some* people in *extra*ordinary situations. This is in line with Van Dijk's (1993)

argument that racism is constructed as 'elsewhere' rather than as a norm, and therefore highlights the socially accepted idea that racism is now only the province of the extreme right rather than being a systemic issue (Van Dijk, 1993). Given the claims made by the press internationally (as summarised in the introduction), which insinuated that the racism evident in the show was in line with attitudes held by many dominant group members living in Britain, the abnormalisation of racism seen in these extracts reiterates our claims in the introduction that part of the work undertaken by McCall in these exit interviews is to absolve British society more generally of culpability for racism. Thus it could be argued that McCall is invested in denying accusations of racism against Britain as a collective, as well as engaging in 'repair work' on behalf of Celebrity Big Brother in order to mitigate any potential liability for 'causing' the racism to occur in the first place (see Condor, 2006: 452-453 for a discussion of denials of racism made by one person on behalf of another).

In extract 1, McCall also positions racism as self-evident only when it is seen (and thus potentially not when it is enacted), when she tells Lloyd that the reason that the interviews are not normal will 'become clearer' after watching the aforementioned montages that began each interview. Interestingly, this comment suggests that Lloyd will recognise her behaviour in the house as constituting her as justifiably a target for accusations of racism once she has watched a video of the incidents, though at the same time positioning her as 'not knowing' she was being racist when the events occurred (otherwise she would already know why her exit interview would not be 'normal'). This positions racism as being a revelation rather than a commonplace, thus further serving to construct racism as an aberration.

This construction of racism as only evident after the fact and upon scrutiny further constructs racism as an aberration or even as an accident on the part of people who, by this logic, must be at least partly forgiven for doing something they were not even aware they did. Again, racism is reduced to individuals, and moreover to their potentially unintentional behaviours. Such a framing of racism not only softens the accusation of racism itself, but also constitutes it as relatively benign. This plays into conceptualisations of 'modern racism', which is seen as somehow less deleterious in its effects – if Lloyd (and the other three housemates in question here) did not mean to be racist (and cannot even see racism without prompting), then surely they cannot be to blame for it (Riggs, 2009a).

Understood in this way, racism becomes not simply an aberration, but rather a relatively benign incident that must be interpreted as racism in order to be constituted as such. Racism is thus removed from the reality of racialised hierarchies, racialised violence, and social marginalisation (all of which are ongoing in contemporary Britain), and instead is positioned as being even less than 'individual error' or pathology, and more about a matter of perception. Obviously the invitation from McCall is to account for what she reports as a perception of racism by the broader public, but in constructing racism as an aberration she leaves an opening for racism to be treated as a misperception. Indeed, McCall perpetuates this logic of racism as a matter of perception when she almost appears to 'correct' Goody's later account of her actions as 'racism' by downgrading them to a matter of bullying:

Extract 3

```
McCall:     but what about the bully[ing (1) aspect of it?
            ]
Goody:                               [but the bullying (.)
            you] know right (1) I'm not going to sit here
            and justify myself because I can't because you
            know it-its gone absolutely everywhere its in
            front of my eyes I can not justify myself but
            what I can say that if I left that house-
            because I didn't realise the comment that I
            had said which (.) everybody just told me to
            be quiet about umm until it got- u-until it
            got back to me from big brother and when that
            did happen I thought (.) oh my god I hope she
            hasn't heard that and I thought (.) oh my god
            (.) maybe I am racist and I just thought I-I
            don't because when I was saying it I didn't
            think it a-as a racist comment but when it was
            spoken back to me I could [see]
McCall:                               [but]
Goody:      how it could have sounded like that
McCall:     b-but taking the racist side out of it so (.)
            I know that you've argued that you're not and
            you've put that to rest b-but what about the
            bullying?
```

Here, Goody continues to discuss racism even though McCall has referred only to bullying. Interestingly, despite the fact that much of the international controversy surrounding the show focused on accusations of racism, McCall did not take this opportunity to discuss racism with Goody and engage with, or challenge, her denial of racist intent. Instead, she states "but taking the racist side out of it so I know you've argued that you're not and you've put that to rest… what about the bullying?". Thus McCall accepts Goody's denial of racism and justifications of her actions and instead reframes the debate in terms of bullying. In doing so, not only does McCall further avoid making overt accusations of racism (as we discuss further in the next section), but she also accepts Goody's denials as mitigating her of any responsibility she has for the effect her actions has had upon Shetty *on highly racialised terms*.

One consequence of this failure to challenge Goody as to the implications of her actions (as racism), is that the responsibility of taking the issue back up as one of *racist bullying* becomes the task of Shetty who, in the face of McCall's apparent acceptance of the denial of racism, and the construction of it as an issue of perception, is forced (both within the house by Big Brother and in her own exit interview) to report on her own perception. Whilst this paper does not focus on Shetty's own engagement with the topic, it should suffice to say here that Shetty shifts away from labelling Goody's behaviour as racist directly after the incidents, to later stating that it wasn't racism but just a difference of opinion. Obviously we have no interest in impugning Shetty's reasons for this, nor to claim that we 'really' know what happened. But regardless, it is important to recognise how the construction of racism as an aberration or a matter of perception, as we have argued in this section, places the work of interrogating racism squarely back on the shoulders of those against whom racism has been enacted (a point we return to in our discussion).

Having outlined in this section how racism is largely constructed as a matter of individual perception or as an individual enactment (thus absolving the wider society of any accountability), we move on in the following section to look at how accusations of racism are made. As we suggest, even when racism is 'right before us' (i.e., in the montages shown to the interviewees), it is still almost impossible for McCall to label the actions of the housemates as racism. This, we would suggest, indicates not only the interactional difficulty of making an accusation of racism within television interviews, but also potentially some of the broader social contexts that may cause this to be the case.

Accusations of racism

Despite the fact that the three interviews revolved around accusations of racism made by the media and other commentators (as seen in the initial montages shown to the housemates), McCall almost never explicitly used the word 'racism.' Instead, she used a variety of other words to refer to the 'incidents' in question, as seen in the below extracts:

Extract 4

```
McCall:    … so can you understand why some people would find
           that offensive?
O'Meara:   (1) yeah I didn't (.) I didn't even mean it in that
           way though (.) I'm not a racist person at all I'm
           really not (.) I know that I'm not so (1)
McCall:    I mean in the house wh- when you're talking to
           Shilpa (1) there's- there was a question where you
           would sort of mock basically her sort of cultural
           background (.)
```

In this extract McCall refers to the actions of the housemates towards Shilpa as being "offensive" and as "mocking", thus avoiding any explicit reference to racism. The initial question posed by McCall places O'Meara in a position whereby it becomes her responsibility rather then McCall's to give a specific name to her behaviours. In this regard, and despite McCall's framing of the incidents as just 'offensive', O'Meara responds by stating "I know I'm not a racist person", thus framing the debate directly in terms of racism, as if it was on those terms that McCall explicitly questioned her. Despite this re-framing, however, McCall still does not refer explicitly to racism, instead stating that "you would mock her sort of cultural background". The 'sort of' in this comment would seem to indicate that McCall is unwilling to make an accusation even when she is only indirectly referring to racism. Indeed, the hesitation evident in her response (wh- when and there's- there) indicates that McCall is potentially uncertain how to frame her response in the first place once O'Meara has used the word 'racism' (even to deny it). As we can see here, then, naming racism is treated as a potentially delicate matter.

As such, McCall avoids making accusations of racism by naming racism as 'something else' and by placing the onus on her interviewees to identify their behaviour as racist. This avoidance of explicitly referring to racism was also apparent in the following extract, taken from the exit interview with Goody:

Extract 5

```
McCall:      (to Goody) but in (1) that's almost trying to
             excu:se the fact because you and the girls
             have been doing a bit of bitching behind
             Shilpa's back and then you go and tell Shilpa
             what you'd said but its almost (1) that's
             quite [cruel to go to somebody and say]
```

Here, McCall refers to the behaviour as "a bit of bitching" and as "cruel", but again does not discuss racism *per se*. In fact, here McCall suggests that it was cruel of Goody to "bitch behind Shilpa's back", but does not say that the behaviour itself was cruel, and certainly does not say that it was racist. Indeed, in only two instances in the three exit interviews did McCall actually use the word 'racism.' In the first instance this occurred in her interview with Goody, where McCall referred to "racist comments". The second instance occurred in her interview with Lloyd, where she referred to "the sort of racism issue", as can be seen in the extract below:

Extract 6

```
McCall:      my thing- take on [it  ]
Lloyd:                         [yeah]
McCall:      is that its quite hard because each time that
             you've been pulled up on the argumentative
             side and the bullying and the sort of (.)
             racism issue (.) you've you've immediately
             backed down and apologised which you've just
             done [again]
Lloyd:            [yeah ]
McCall:      now but its very easy to just say something
             and then go >ohh sorry I'm terribly sorry I
             didn't mean [it  ]
Lloyd:                   [yeah]
McCall:      do you think watching that your behaviour
             might change or-
```

Again, in this extract McCall does not overtly state that Lloyd's behaviour is racist. Instead, she hesitatingly constructs the incidents as "the sort of racism issue". Indeed, across subsequent media reporting of the events following the evictions Lloyd was largely positioned as a 'dupe' of Goody, and thus by implication as relatively free of blame for the events that took place. Whilst it was reported that she lost a six figure modelling deal as a result of the events that took place in the Celebrity Big Brother household, any further accusations of racism against her largely paled in comparison to those levelled against Goody (and to a lesser extent O'Meara). This downgrading of racism can be seen in this extract where McCall labels the behaviour as "argumentative" and "bullying" before she labels it as racism. Whilst McCall does go on to confront Lloyd about the fact that it is easy to say "ohh sorry I'm terribly sorry I didn't mean it", she does not push this further to discuss the ramifications of her behaviour, and instead lets Lloyd off the hook somewhat by asking her whether her

behaviour "might change". This is as close as McCall comes in any of the interviews to questioning the interviewees as to the results of their actions. McCall never discusses the effect it may have had on Shetty or the fact that racism is not solely the province of some of the housemates, but rather is an endemic aspect of British culture.

McCall's avoidance of clearly labelling and confronting racism is also illustrated in the below extract taken from the interview with Goody:

Extract 7

```
McCall:     I was just going to [say just to      ]
Goody:                         [yeah g-go on say it]
McCall:     bring you back to:: to the racist comments
            that everybody's umm been talking about in the
            press and: abroad and India um what would you
            say then to anybody that's watching that would
            say that (.) you were racist?
```

In this extract McCall avoids directly labelling Goody a racist by referring instead to 'racist comments', therefore suggesting that whilst Goody may have said something which could be considered racist, she is not a racist *person*. This is another subtle moment where racism is rendered relatively benign – if it wasn't the intention of an individual 'racist person', then it can't be treated as emblematic of the culture of which that individual is a part. Furthermore, a 'racist comment' (like any comment) is again open to being treated as one person's perception versus another's. Even when McCall references the possibility (entertained by 'anybody that's watching') that Goody was racist, the use of the word 'were' effectively locates any possible racism as being in one particular *past* instance (or set of instances), rather than as an ongoing set of ways of being in the world that might be labelled as racist (and which might be symptomatic of the broader culture of which Goody is a member). As such, the word 'were' introduces a temporality to racism that allows it to be positioned as 'in the past' or as a 'once off'. Through her failure to label racism as such (and when she does use the word appending it to other descriptors such as 'issue' or 'comments'), McCall effectively reduces racism to a matter of words and perceptions that are divorced from their capacity to hurt or discriminate.

It is also worth noting in this extract that McCall avoids personally accusing Goody of racism by instead locating the accusations as coming from "the press and abroad and India", and later, "anybody that's watching." This attribution of racism to third parties is in accordance with previous research on media interview techniques, which has found that journalists routinely attempt to "place some degree of distance between themselves and their more overtly opinionated remarks" (Clayman and Heritage, 2002: 152). Clayman and Heritage argue that the easiest way for interviewers to achieve this distance is by attributing their remarks to a third party. Thus McCall avoids making an overt accusation of racism herself by utilising techniques of 'distanced footing', that is, adopting a 'footing' which allows the speaker to place distance between him or herself, and what they are saying (Goffman. 1981: 128). This shifting of the responsibility for accusations of racism is set up at the very beginning of the interviews, when the housemates are shown the video of the reaction to the series around the world via news headlines. In the extract below, McCall introduces this video to Goody:

Extract 8

```
McCall:    ok so (1) yeah (1) quite a hard exit I mean
           you must be probably one of the only people in
           England or indeed round the planet that has
           got no idea of the impact that celebrity big
           brother (.5) umm (.) has had (.) lets take a
           quick look at this….

           you've kind of got a taste of what it's about
           there: but I just want to show you one more
           thing before we properly get in to the
           interview to kind of show you the heart
           [of it          ]
Goody:      [yeah ((nods)) ]
```

Here, McCall is able to construct the audience as in on some kind of joke by stating that Goody must be "one of the only people… around the planet that has got no idea of the impact celebrity Big Brother has had…". This makes the audience complicit in, and even responsible for, her accusations of racism since they are aware of the show's impact. Additionally, McCall is able to further work up her 'intermediary' position by "showing [Goody] the heart of it" (the video of the behaviour in the house), and therefore as being a bearer of news rather than making accusations herself.

This 'intermediary' position is further rendered visible later in the interview when McCall defends Goody from accusations made by someone in the audience who shouts for her to 'stop saying it' as she repeats the racist neologism 'Shilpa poppadom' when trying to justify her use of the term:

Extract 9

```
McCall:    well she's trying to describe (.) somebody in
           the audience just said stop saying it but
           basically what you're trying to say is (.)
           you're trying to explain what you said
```

Here, McCall *defends* Goody from what could be considered an accusation of racism as somebody in the audience shouts 'stop saying it'. By doing so, McCall manages to position herself as a mediator between an accusing audience and Goody, and thus manages to avoid a position in which she herself makes accusations of racism.

This is also evident in extract 10, where McCall again positions herself as an intermediary and avoids making direct accusations of racism by attributing such accusations to other people, thereby again utilising techniques of 'distanced footing':

Extract 10

```
McCall:    but this brings me on to: i-i-it seemed a
           little bit also that there was bullying going
           on so what would you say: to: people who s-
```

```
                        [you know you were also saying that you (.5)
                        yes but (.5) there was ]
     Goody:             [no but I was bull- I was bullied myself I was
                        bullied myself I know  ]
     McCall:            pack mentality going on and you were al:l
                        accused of giving (1) Shilpa a very very hard
                        time because she was different now that is
                        bullying
```

Here, McCall asks Goody "what would you say to people who…" rather than stating directly that she perceived Goody to be a bully. This locates the accusation of bullying as stemming from elsewhere rather than from McCall herself, meaning that McCall is able to indirectly suggest that Goody was 'bullying' without accepting responsibility for the argument. And of course, as mentioned early, the entire construction of the incidents in question as "bullying" rather than as racist works to mitigate racism by instead constructing racist discrimination as 'something else'.

As we have shown in this section, accusations of racism appear difficult to make, and indeed are never directly made by McCall. McCall is positioned as the mere voice box for a *global* accuser who has deemed the actions of the housemates to be racist. This position is notable not simply for the fact that it allows McCall to avoid some of the confrontations that may occur when an accusation of racism is made, but also for the fact that it leaves her outside of racism altogether. She isn't the general public who is making the accusation of racism (but who, as we suggested earlier, is nonetheless implicated in actions of the housemates, either as willing viewers or as culturally competent members of a society shaped by racial hierarchies), nor is she the accused. Rather, she sits almost outside of racism, able to see all sides but not required to be accountable for her own location as a white British woman within racialised hierarchies. Our point here of course is not to individualise the issue here to McCall (who could be argued to be simply utilising the techniques available to all interviewers), but rather to indicate the fact that, at least in this specific instance, an (albeit implicit) accusation of racism affords the accuser a place outside of racism. As we discuss in our conclusion, the overall denial of racism by all involved in the series has significant implications for anti-racism in Britain and abroad.

Discussion

The above analysis shows that, like denials of racism reported in literature elsewhere (e.g., Augoustinos and Every, 2007b; Hage, 1998; Van Dijk, 1992, 1993), accusations of racism are also made via subtle, vague arguments in which the word 'racism' is frequently not even mentioned. In fact, in these exit interviews, McCall uses multiple euphemisms for racism, naming it as "bullying" and as behaviour which is "cruel" and "offensive". In so doing, McCall is rendered complicit in the relationships of power which enable racism to continue unchecked by not naming it as a relationship between privilege and disadvantage, whereby those of us who occupy privileged locations within racial hierarchies stand to benefit from them, regardless of our individual intent.

Accusations of racism were also performed in these interviews by constructing the accuser as being 'somebody else', in this case the audience of the show and the rest of the world as seen in the montages of the media reaction to the show. By arguing that it

is these 'other people' who are offended rather than herself, McCall again manages to avoid overtly referring to racism or making explicit accusations of racist behaviour to the housemates in question. In fact, McCall works hard in these extracts to construct herself as an intermediary between those doing the accusing and the housemates who stand accused of racism. Finally, McCall's framing of the exit interviews as an aberration also fits with the construction of racism as 'always elsewhere' as identified by Van Dijk (e.g., 1993, see also Szuchewycz, 2000) in relation to denials of racism. We have suggested that this construction of racism as always somewhere else (and indeed potentially 'just' a matter of perception) serves to render invisible the institutional and everyday nature of racism.

One clear implication of the findings presented in this paper is that what must be placed firmly on the agenda for ongoing examination are the ways in which race privilege is routinely made to disappear, and the challenges this presents to dominant group members in adequately interrogating racism by other dominant group members (Riggs and Augoustinos, 2008). One means for doing this is indicated by our analysis of McCall's positioning of herself outside of racism. Challenging racism as a dominant group member requires those of us in such positions not simply to point out other people's actions whilst leaving our own unmarked. Instead, and taking our own location as white Australians living in a colonial nation as an example, talking about racism requires speaking explicitly of our *own* location as members of a privileged group who stand to benefit from racial hierarchies regardless of our own anti-racist practices. Such an approach moves away from a benevolent or guilt-ridden approach to anti-racism, and towards one where race privilege and racialised networks of power are placed firmly on the agenda for discussion. The most obvious way in which this can occur is when white people such as ourselves 'come out' as white, and speak to other dominant groups members about the implications of this privileged location (Nicoll, 2000; Riggs, 2009b).

Whilst speaking explicitly as white people will likely do very little to ameliorate the interactional difficulties in speaking about racism and race privilege (a necessary discomfort that we consider important for dominant group members to accept), speaking about race privilege definitely holds the potential to refuse to allow whiteness to go unnamed (and thus unchallenged). Such an approach refuses to make recourse to notions of the individual 'bad racist', and instead locates racism as a systemic issue that produces a relationship between privilege and disadvantage for which those of us in privileged positions must be accountable. In this sense, and in opposition to the stance evoked by McCall and her interviewees, accounting for racism should be considered less an 'exceptional' or 'abnormal' occurrence, and instead a routine practice through which dominant group members examine the ways in which social hierarchies operate, often in very mundane (though no less violent) ways.

In conclusion, the data presented here has much to tell us about the investment that dominant group members have in maintaining unequal power relations, and the subtle and complex ways in which they go about doing this. Taking this into practice when developing effective anti-racist strategies involves broadening our remit beyond identifying specific rhetorical devices aimed at denying racism so as to encompass examining how privileged identities are shored up in talk (and how this can be challenged, such as by speaking about race privilege as we indicated above). To fail to

continue in this interrogation would be to again leave the work of challenging racism and privilege to those who experience marginalisation or disadvantage. Exploring the construction of dominant group identities is an important step in continuing to produce a truly interactional or discursive account of subjectivity that is firmly grounded in the real world consequences of a range of practices that operate to shore up social hierarchies.

Acknowledgments

References

Augoustinos, M. and Every, D. (2007a) 'Contemporary Racist Discourse: Taboos Against Racism and Racist Accusations', in A. Weatherall, B. Watson and C. Gallois (eds) *Language, Discourse and Social Psychology,* pp. 233-254. Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan.

Augoustinos, M. and Every, D. (2007b) 'The Language of 'Race' and Prejudice: A Discourse of Denial, Reason and Liberal-Practical Politics', *Journal of Language and Social Psychology* 26: 123- 141.

Clayman, S., and Heritage, J. (2002) *The news Interview: Journalist and Public Figures on the Air*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Condor, S., Abell, J., Figgou, L., Gibson, S. and Stevenson, C. (2006) '"They're Not Racist . . .": Prejudice Denial, Mitigation and Suppression in Dialogue', *British Journal of Social Psychology* 45: 441–62.

Every, D. and Augoustinos, M. (2007) 'Constructions of Racism in the Australian Parliamentary Debates on Asylum seekers', *Discourse & Society* 18(4): 411-436.

Goffman, E. (1981) *Forms of Talk.* Pennsylvannia: University of Pennsylvania Press.

Hage, D. (1998) *White Nation: Fantasies of Supremacy in a Multicultural Nation*. Annandale: Pluto Press.

Nicoll, F. (2000) 'Indigenous Sovereignty and the Violence of Perspective: A White Woman's Coming Out Story', *Australian Feminist Studies* 15: 369-386

Riggs, D.W. (2004) 'Benevolence and the Management of Stake: On Being 'Good White People'', *Philament: A Journal of the Arts and Culture* 4. http://www.arts.usyd.edu.au/publications/philament

Riggs, D.W. (2009a) 'Poppadoms, Princesses and Privilege: Colonial Relations in Action in the Celebrity Big Brother Household', in R. Clarke (ed) *Celebrity Colonialism: Fame, Power and Representation in (Post)Colonial Cultures*. Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars Press.

Riggs, D.W. (2009) 'The Ground Upon Which we Stand: Reading Sexuality *Through* Race', *Lesbian and Gay Psychology Review* 10: 42-46.

Riggs, D.W. and Augoustinos, M. (2005) 'The Psychic Life of Colonial Power: Racialised Subjectivities, Bodies and Methods. *Journal of Community and Applied Social Psychology* 16(6): 445-467.

Riggs, D.W. and Augoustinos, M. (2008) ''The Fine Line Between Compensation and Taking Advantage': A Discursive Analysis of Race Privilege', in R. Ranzijn, K. McConnochie and W. Nolan (eds), *Psychology and Indigenous Australians: Effective Teaching and Practice,* pp. 43-54. Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars Press.

Rutherford, J. (2000) *The Gauche Intruder: Freud, Lacan and the White Australian Fantasy.* Melbourne: Melbourne University Press.

Szuchewycz, B. (2000) 'Re-pressing Racism: The Denial of Racism in the Canadian Press', *Canadian Journal of Communication* 25: 497-515.

Van Dijk, T. (1992) 'Discourse and the Denial of Racism.' *Discourse and Society* 3(1): 87-118.

Van Dijk, T. (1993) 'Denying Racism: Elite Discourse and Racism', in J. Solomos and J. Wrench (eds) *Racism and Migration in Western Europe*. Oxford: Berg.