

‘You don’t do it in public’: Racism, respectability and responsibility in *Celebrity Big Brother*

The 2007 series of *Celebrity Big Brother UK* resulted in an unprecedented international focus on the series itself, and on the issue of British race politics. This was due to a series of incidents of alleged racist bullying perpetrated against Bollywood star Shilpa Shetty by three of the British housemates. Subsequent academic analyses of the incidents have focused almost exclusively upon the actions of one of the British housemates – Jade Goody – and have explored how racism was denied or otherwise accounted for by Goody. In contrast, what has been given little attention are the accounts provided by Shetty herself after winning the series and leaving the *Celebrity Big Brother* house. In this paper we examine one particular interview conducted with Shetty, and in so doing explore the very specific ways in which Shetty accounted for racism, and the relationship between this and her identity claims as an Indian celebrity. We conclude that whilst on first pass it may appear that Shetty denied the existence of racism in the *Big Brother* household, it may instead be suggested that she produced a very complex and nuanced account. In so doing, not only did she maintain an image of herself as a responsible and ‘respectable’ Indian woman, but she was also able to state that racism is unacceptable and requires ongoing attention. In this way, we suggest, Shetty potentially opened up a space that would otherwise have been unavailable had she simply responded ‘yes’ to the question ‘were the actions of the British housemates racist?’.

Keywords: *Celebrity Big Brother*, discourse analysis, racism

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Introduction

As many readers of *Celebrity Studies* may already be aware, the 2007 series of *Celebrity Big Brother UK* made international headlines for the alleged racist bullying of Bollywood star Shilpa Shetty by three of the British celebrities: Jo O'Meara, Danielle Lloyd and Jade Goody (with Goody's mother Jackie Budden and Goody's husband Jack Tweed also implicated in the allegations of racism). Specific incidents of bullying toward Shetty (who was later crowned the winner of the show) included Lloyd calling her a 'dog' and questioning her English, O'Meara telling Shetty that she should go home, Goody referring to her by the 'racist neologisms' (Zacharias and Arthurs 2007, p. 451) of 'Shilpa Poppadom', 'Shilpa Fuckwallah' and 'Shilpa Daroopa', and Budden referring to Shetty as 'the Indian' (allegedly because she could not pronounce her name).

The tensions reached their peak when Goody started a verbal fight with Shetty (which also involved O'Meara and Lloyd), leading to the public eviction of Goody from the house, followed by Tweed, Lloyd and O'Meara (Budden had been evicted earlier). In response to the flood of complaints about racism and bullying by these housemates against Shetty, an investigation was launched by UK media regulator Ofcom to determine whether or not the bullying constituted racism. At the same time, both British and international politicians weighed in on the issue, with a Labour MP tabling a motion related to racism on the show, and Indian ministers questioning British Chancellor Gordon Brown about the broader implications of the alleged racism for British society in general, during a trip to India.

Yet despite this significant attention to what happened in the *Celebrity Big Brother* household, the outcomes, in our opinion, pale in comparison to the severity of the events that occurred in the house. In terms of outcomes, Ofcom (2007) determined

that the comments made to Shetty by O'Meara, Goody and Lloyd all amounted to a breach of the Broadcasting Code (however these were not labelled as racism as such, but rather were depicted in the Ofcom determination as a failure on the part of Channel 4 to 'apply generally accepted standards' as they relate to 'offensive' material). In regards to the celebrities themselves, Lloyd was reported to have lost lucrative modelling contracts and O'Meara experienced a very public mental breakdown over the allegations. Of them all, Goody was most vilified by UK media after her eviction from the house, yet her subsequent diagnosis with, and ultimate death from, cancer, lead to her being given what was in effect a public pardon. Whilst we do not treat her death with mockery, we note that this pardon flew very much in the face of the seriousness of her bullying towards Shetty (actions that we would suggest were at the time seen as unforgiveable).

The net outcome of all of this was that *Celebrity Big Brother* returned in 2009 after a one year hiatus, the message arguably being that racism was the province of individuals rather than the broader culture or nation. Moreover, the implication was that even if racism could potentially be apportioned to individuals, it could just as easily be explained away through recourse to notions of intentionality (i.e., all of the British housemates claimed, post eviction from the *Big Brother* house, that they never meant to be racist and that they could not be so even by accident, as they were not racist people). What was reaffirmed by the incident, then, and what we see time and time again in discursive studies of denials of racism (e.g., van Dijk 1991; 1992; 1993; Wetherell and Potter 1992), is that it is, in effect, located almost 'nowhere': only a small minority of people are apparently 'intentionally racist' (and these people are hard to find), the implication being that the nation is a benign entity with no responsibility for the perpetuation of racism.

Of course this relatively neat ideological outcome of the 2007 series of *Celebrity Big Brother* UK has not gone unremarked by academic commentators. There is already a significant body of research published on the incidents of alleged racist bullying, almost exclusively with a focus on the actions and comments of Goody. An entire issue of the journal *Dark Matters* was published on the topic in 2007 (Sharma and Sharma 2007) with another special issue on the topic published in 2009 by the *Entertainment and Sports Law Journal* (Gies 2009). There was also a special commentary and criticism section of *Feminist Media Studies* devoted to the topic in 2007 (Zacharias and Arthurs 2007). Other individual articles have been published, most of which have similarly focused on Goody's actions and comments, including examinations of the denial of racism (Riggs and Due 2010; Wright 2008), constructions of celebrity and racism (Rahman 2008), and explorations of the wider social implications of Goody's actions (Riggs 2009). Added to this is an apparently ever-growing number of publications on a range of topics that deploy the Goody-Shetty 'incident' as an exemplar, including articles on the problems with reality television (Sparks 2007), the effects of global communication (Chakravartty and Zhao 2008), accounts of prejudice (Buchanan 2007) and xenophobia (de Souza 2007), examinations of racism and the law (Phillips and Bowling 2007) and analyses of celebrity culture on television (Bennett and Holmes 2010).

This summary of previous research on allegations of racism in *Celebrity Big Brother* UK brings us to the present paper, and requires an engagement with Turner's (2010) incisive comments in the launch issue of *Celebrity Studies*, where he critiqued the fact that celebrity research to date has primarily focused upon the discursive effects of celebrity and the role that celebrity plays in reaffirming intelligible identities to the viewing audience. Whilst we take these concerns as legitimate, and

support Turner's call for a more varied approach to celebrity studies, we nonetheless suggest that a continued focus upon the discursive effects of celebrity is especially warranted if the focus is upon representations of racially marginalised celebrities and the ways in which such representations are resisted. This is certainly pertinent to the case of *Celebrity Big Brother*, where the focus of almost all the publications to date on racism in the 2007 series have concentrated exclusively on Goody's actions. What has received much less attention, however, are Shetty's responses, both within the house and subsequent to the series ending. This is notable given the fact that, whilst immediately after the key altercation between herself and Goody, Shetty stated to another housemate that she felt Goody's actions were racist, she later went on to retract this statement in the comment "You know I actually thought about it, and I know it's not a racist thing" (*Celebrity Big Brother UK 2007*, Day 16, 19/01/07). Shetty repeated this time and time again after leaving the house, which was taken by the media in general as lending support for the claim that the incidents in the house did not represent racism.

What disappears, however, in this presumption that Shetty's retraction signifies no accusation racism, are the specific meanings and interpretations that she herself attributed to the actions of Goody and the other housemates. In other words, Shetty's retraction of racism as an attribution has to date been read through the lens of a nation highly invested in maintaining a notion of inclusivity. What is to be gained, then, by examining one of Shetty's accounts of her time in the *Celebrity Big Brother* household (during a televised interview with Kay Burley aired after the series ended), is a counter-narrative of the events, the interpretation of which may contribute to an understanding of the complex ways in which racism is understood and responded to. In the analysis that follows, we present one such interpretation. Our claim, of course,

is not that we can know what Shetty was thinking, nor that as non-British nationals we can adequately represent an ‘Indian perspective’ on the issue. Rather, what we offer is a detailed examination of the ways in which Shetty talks about race, racism, discrimination, culture and what she deems to be appropriate modes of self-presentation. Importantly, our focus is not upon Shetty as a signifier of Indian culture, and as such, we do not seek to attribute broader meaning to Shetty’s words beyond the specific interactional context in which they occurred. Nonetheless, and with regard to celebrity studies and Turner’s (2010) aforementioned concerns, we believe that there is much to be gained from considering how Shetty’s responses within the interview may contain within them a much more complex message to the UK public than one that simply denied racism.

Whilst the uptake of such potential messages is something we cannot comment upon, we believe it is no less important to consider how – despite the potential operations of incommensurabilities in serving to render Shetty somewhat less culturally comprehensible to the British public – Shetty’s statements offer an alternate narrative about what happened in the household. To note: that Shetty was undoubtedly invested in her own position within media interviews is not our primary point of concern here. Rather, what we take as interesting for celebrity studies are the specificities of how Shetty constructs racism within the interview and the implications of this for challenging racism in the future.

Method

A DVD-recording of the interview between Shilpa Shetty and Kay Burley was transcribed according to Jeffersonian (1987) conventions in order to facilitate a close reading of the interview. The transcribed interview was then read several times in

conjunction with viewings of the video, each time noting broad features of the interview that appeared of most interest for closer analysis. To gain a deeper understanding of the effects of specific rhetorical devices and their role in the construction of a particular identity for Shetty (specifically in relation to accounting for racism), we then selected particular extracts from the portions of the dataset identified in the repeated readings and viewings as of potential interest, and subjected them to a discourse analysis. This approach, which has already proven to be useful in analysing celebrity interview fragments (Abell and Stokoe 1999, Abell and Stokoe 2001), presumes that language is always already shaped by the environment in which it occurs (in this case the media).

Whilst as Goffman (1959) suggests, any social interaction can be seen as a performance on a stage (during which personal beliefs may not be reflected at all), it is not the facticity of Shetty's account that is the centre of our analysis. Rather, our focus is two-fold; on how the interactions between Shetty and Burley open up a particular discursive framework for how racism is defined and understood, and on how Shetty manages this in relation to her construction of herself as an Indian celebrity. We are of course aware of the fact that the data we analyse here are taken from a high profile media interview, and that as we noted in the introduction, Shetty's responses would to a certain degree reflect her complex negotiations of both her identity as a celebrity and the sensitivity of the topics at hand (Clayman and Heritage 2002). Nonetheless, we would also argue that the interview may reflect some *in the moment* constructions of an account of racism that appears to be far from polished or scripted. As we suggested in the introduction, however, our claim is not that we can 'know' what Shetty 'really' thought about her time in the *Big Brother* house (and certainly discursive analyses are not interested in making claims about beliefs or

attitudes). Rather, our claim here is that the interview represents one example of the working up of a racism account in the talk of two individuals, and that it provides quite a different account to that given by other key players in the incidents in question as reported in previous research summarised earlier.

Having noted our focus on the verbal interactions between Shetty and Burley, we feel it important to note that there are other aspects of the interview that are likely important but which we do not attend to in the analysis that follows (but which equally require attention in future research). Specifically, we recognise that the interview was facilitated by a commercial television station – Channel 4 – whose likely remit centres upon maximising viewing figures, which often means sensationalist reporting. As such, Channel 4's neutrality in terms of fact representation must be open to question both theoretically and empirically, such as was the case with complaints Ofcom (2010) received about the station's coverage of the 2010 British General Elections. Mindful of the station's biased broadcasting practices, it is perhaps of no surprise to see Burley obediently follow an imposed narrow agenda of seeking controversy and repeatedly pressing Shetty to openly admit to having been subjected to racism. This staging of the interview in sensationalist ways was exacerbated when at key speech points the camera focused on Shetty's face and hand gestures even before Burly finished asking her questions, thus pre-empting to the viewer that both the question and response were likely to be of import (van Leeuwen and Jewitt 2001).

In addition to the impact of the source of the media outlet itself and the sensationalist styling of the interview, we also recognise the potential impact of the physical interview setting, and in particular the lighting and decorations which do a lot of anthropomorphic talking. In other words, given that one's identity is intimately

shaped by where one is (Hugh-Jones and Madill 2000), the interview space can work to form, shape and preserve particular power relations to define the identity of others to keep them in their place. In the interview between Shetty and Burley, the almost fairy-tale-like bright and sunlit room with its plush pink sofas, ornately decorated fireplace, and upper-class green garden outside the window are ideologically-vested in their depiction of a quintessential Britishness. They endow the conversation about racism with a character that is likely distant and removed from the lives of viewers, and certainly removed from the ‘reality’ of the *Celebrity Big Brother* household.

Furthermore, the idyllic (and as we suggested above, quintessentially British) setting in which the interview is set stands in direct contrast to the elaborate jewellery and golden star-studded sari worn by Shetty (which is also juxtaposed with Burley’s blouse and short skirt). In this sense, whilst the setting potentially operates to remove the interview from the reality of the viewer, it nonetheless functions to reiterate the cultural differences that Goody, O’Meara and Lloyd argued were the very basis of their ‘disagreements’ with Shetty. As such, and similar to Redmond’s (2009) argument about the deployment of food as a marker of cultural difference throughout the series of *Celebrity Big Brother* (in which only Shetty’s culture and food-making practices were marked as ‘other’, with British food and culture typically remaining unremarked), both the clothing in, and imagery surrounding, the interview again operate to construct Shetty as culturally other.

Mindful of these issues related to the setting of the interview and its role in staging racism (and indeed Shetty) in particular ways, we are nonetheless focused in the following analysis upon the particular ways in which the spoken word served to produce a specific reality about racism within the interview.

Analysis

In the first extract presented below, Burley asks Shetty about her experience in the house:

Extract 1

- 1 Burley: How did it differ from your expectations, the realisation of what
 2 happened?
- 3 Shetty: I didn't go in in with ↑any expectations so umm (3) I ↑didn't ↑expect
 4 ↑anything (.) I just thought uh it was a ↑great platform↓ to showcase
 5 um our culture and I ↑honestly didn't go as a Bollywood actor (.) as
 6 just a Bollywood actor I was going as (.) um (1) as a ↑responsible
 7 Indian citizen (.) and it was a huge responsibility to shoulder (.) and I
 8 don't think, you know, people really understood that (.) and umm
 9 ↑yeah I was I so ↑glad (.) I am so glad I went there because there were
 10 ↑so, there were so many things that people got to see.

In this first extract, Shetty can be seen as attempting to convey the impression that her acting 'mask' (Goffman 1959) has been off all along, and that being 'responsible' is a part of her character. Whilst Shetty acknowledges that she did go in as a Bollywood star (line 5), she dispels any suspicion of artificial conduct that would come with this by rhetorically shifting the focus away from her profession (line 6) - which is then positioned as peripheral – and instead emphasises her nationality (line 7), which she presents with pride. Furthermore, in utilising the category 'responsible Indian citizen' (lines 6-7), Shetty deploys this particular membership category to explain certain

duties that she supposedly had (e.g., representing her home country). By constructing herself, in essence, as a ‘cultural ambassador’ (lines 4 and 5), she stresses the importance of her role and charges it with a formal load, which entails specific category-bound activities (Sacks 1992) that in this context require a certain level of social propriety.

Yet whilst Shetty focuses primarily in this extract upon her own actions in the house, her statement in line 8 (‘I don’t think, you know, people really understood that’) doesn’t straightforwardly let the other contestants off the hook; it also locates them within a relationship to her statement that being in the house was a ‘huge responsibility to shoulder’ (line 7). In other words, although Shetty does not explicitly hold the actions of the other contestants to the same standards as she would her own, she suggests nonetheless that their actions *did* impact upon her and potentially impaired her ability to be responsible for representing the values of her country. In making this claim, Shetty thus sets up an account of her time in the *Big Brother* house where the other participants are not free from accountability, a point we return to throughout our analysis and concluding discussion. The general tendency that Shetty displays in Extract 1 toward leaving open the potential for other people’s actions to be held to account - whilst not specifically making an explicit judgment about them - is further evidenced in the second extract:

Extract 2

- 1 Burley: were you offended↓?
- 2 Shetty: ↑more than offended I think I was ↑very ↑amused (2) Jermaine and I
- 3 uh (1) kind of (1) wanted to look at it um in a >way that was very
- 4 humorous but after a point< (.) it was just (1) it was just so weird (.)

- 5 because (.) I started to feel that I was uncool not being able to ↓burp
 6 and flatulate heh heh be-because (2) because uh (3)
 7 Burley: you're not saying you never do that obviously
 8 Shetty: heh heh (1)↑but I mean ↑come ↑on (2) you don't gloat about it (.) >you
 9 don't do it in public there are some things that are just not done<

Avoiding appearing in public with 'an axe to grind', Shetty, does not simply confirm that she was offended though nor does she literally deny it. Instead, her use of the ironic 'more than offended' (line 2) deflects Burley's query by passing it off as amusement rather than offence. This somewhat paradoxically-framed response may be aimed at closing up any further deliberation about her feelings as well as constructing her feelings in terms of entertainment. Not only does this function as interpretative denial (Cohen 2001), but it also plays the role of pre-emptively rebutting a charge of oversensitivity or bitterness. Since such emotional work might be seen as a performance evoked by the normative rules of the given interview setting, we should remember that her 'belief' (Goffman 1959) in that version of reality remains inaccessible to us.

As the extract progresses, Shetty expands her account by introducing another person into the discussion, namely African American Jermaine Jackson (line 2), who Shetty suggests also 'wanted' (line 3) to view events in a humorous way. At the same time, however, she imparts that she suggests that this humour-oriented attitude was not actually possible. Furthermore, she implies that adopting this particular attitude was difficult not just for her, but also for Jackson, thus creating a cross-cultural consensus. The generic vagueness of the third person pronoun 'it' (lines 3-4) also functions to allow Shetty to make a judgement without actually having to name who it

is she is judging. This is aided by the statement ‘I started to feel that I was uncool’ (line 5), which allows for her claims to ‘weirdness’ to be read as reflecting her own position, whilst at the same time implying that this was the product of the British housemates’ actions.

This potential implicit accusation, however, is mitigated by the verb ‘started’ (line 5), which presents Shetty’s shift in attitude as gradual rather than abrupt. In this way, Shetty appears as a reasonable and measured person, which inoculates against the potential charge of any unfair exaggeration on her part. It is only when Burley makes a direct comment about Shetty’s own bodily noises that Shetty is then forced to make a clear statement of propriety, abnormalizing the public displays of the other housemates (lines 8-9). Yet Shetty does so by couching her response in terms of herself (lines 8-9, ‘you don’t do it in public’), though of course implicitly the statement is about *all* who do such things, setting a clear standard of what constitutes appropriate or inappropriate social behaviour. However, this is done in a way that is indirect and roundabout, allowing Shetty to avoid explicitly criticizing the British housemates. Here again, then, Shetty provides a model of how to dissent or indeed judge the actions of others, without actually making a clearly judgemental statement, a model that has implications as the interview progresses, as can be seen in the following extract:

Extract 3

- 1 Burley: I do want to just finish with umm with going through the list and ah
 2 Jade (.) umm (.) ‘damaged and aggressive’? (.) is that how you
 3 described her?

- 4 Shetty: uh (.)↓no (3) I ↑never said damaged (.) I said aggressive (.) obnoxious
5 at times (1) and umm (3) yeah mannerless heh heh yeah I'm not
6 mincing my words am I? (.) but ah (2) yeah so when people said that I
7 was being kind (.) I ↑wasn't (.) I'm I'm being honest that's what I
8 thought >but when I said she's not a racist I meant that too< (.) so
9 (.)↑yeah she was juvenile (.) I think
- 10 Burley: ↑That's not actually what you said was ↑it? What what you said when
11 you came out of the house was, 'I don't think that she meant to be a
12 racist'
- 13 Shetty: Yes
- 14 Burley: That doesn't meant that you thought that she wasn't
- 15 Shetty: ↓No. There's a big difference. See when you're a racist (.) if I had to
16 hold a grudge (.) ah it would have to be against someone who
17 contrived to be racist. 'Oh I don't like an Indian. Oh I don't like that
18 colour. And I will not, you know, I will I will be as mean as possible to
19 that person because of the person's colour or for or for the reason
20 that he hails from this place'. uh then I would have a reason to get
21 upset. (.) Jade (.) Jade didn't come from there. Umm. I think it
22 stemmed from jealousy, maybe insecurity, you know, but definitely
23 wasn't contrived racism.

Shetty's hesitation and sigh (line 4) betoken a sensitive character in regards to the raised issue, and give away her struggle to maintain 'expressive control', which is the ability to send coherent signals during a performance (Goffman 1959). By admitting to calling Jade aggressive, obnoxious, mannerless and juvenile (lines 3, 4 and 7), and

in light of the previous extract where she had avoided making direct judgements about the actions of others, this type of directiveness must be read as serving a particular function. We would suggest that what it achieves is a construction of Shetty as honest ('so when people said that I was being kind I wasn't. I'm being honest', lines 6-7), and moreover that in being honest about this particular set of judgements that she could be taken as honest when she states 'but when I said she's not racist I meant that too' (line 8). We would suggest, further, and on the basis of the increased speed at which Shetty delivers this statement, that her construction of honesty was primarily in the service of the denial of racism, or more specifically as we discuss now and throughout the remainder of the paper, in the refusal of a particular way of making an accusation of racism.

We can see an example of the apparent investment Shetty has in providing a very particular account of racism when she responds in lines 15-23 to Burley's challenge over the difference between claiming that Goody didn't 'mean' to be a racist, as opposed to actually considering Goody's actions as racist. In response, Shetty very skilfully constructs an image of racism (i.e., 'someone who contrived to be racist', lines 16-17) – one that would warrant 'holding a grudge' (line 16) – which she can then say doesn't apply to Goody ('Jade didn't come from there', line 21). Yet just because, by Shetty's logic, Jade is not worthy of a grudge (because she didn't say any of the particular things listed on lines 17-20), this is not the same as saying that Goody was not racist toward Shetty. This can be seen in the final lines of the extract where Shetty concludes by stating what might have motivated Goody's actions (i.e., jealousy or insecurity, line 22), and which she suggests don't constitute *contrived* racism (line 23), but which could well constitute racism (as signified by Shetty's reference to the unnamed 'it' that 'stemmed from jealousy, maybe insecurity', line

22), albeit racism not warranting a grudge. Shilpa's investment in constructing racism in the interview in this very specific way is further exemplified by the following extract:

Extract 4

- 1 Burley: One of the quotes was from Jade. She says (.) 'you need a day in the
2 slums. Go in your community and go to all those people who look up
3 to you and be real, will you'. Was that racist?
- 4 Shetty: (2) ((chuckles)). Uh like I said, when Jade ↑said things she never ever
5 thought before she spoke
- 6 Burley: But was it racist?
- 7 Shetty: ↑No. Not for me. See I said I said the words to [Cleo]
- 8 Burley: [You ↑did]
- 9 Shetty: Because at that time point of time I thought it was being racist. But
10 then I, I'm someone who is extremely pragmatic (.) and I analyse
11 things (.) and in hindsight (.) <I want to believe that it wasn't>. That's
12 the reason I went into that diary room and a lot of umm a lot of people
13 thought, a lot of Asians were angered, especially in India, a lot of
14 Indians were angered, thinking that I retracted my statement because
15 *Big Brother* told me to (.) No. I didn't. Like I said before and I'm I'm
16 reiterating, my integrity and my honour's really not up for sale and I
17 would never do that. The conversation between *Big Brother* and me (.)
18 uh where I retracted my statement began with *Big Brother* asking me
19 (.) uh if I was okay, and that they had heard that Jade was being racist

20 to me, and what I felt at that point. So that is when, (1) I I heard the
 21 ↓words, and I felt terrible (.) that I had said it, (.) that I had made such
 22 a harsh ↑statement (.) and that was being judgmental (.) that's not ↑me.

In this extract, Shetty's chuckle (line 4) not only trivializes Burley's question, but also Goody's controversial remark, with the seriousness of the latter impugned and endowed with the meaning of an unplanned bad taste joke stemming from ignorance rather than spite. This response to Burley's call to name Goody's actions as racist accrues to Shetty an image of respectability, which in turn both denies to Goody an air of responsibility, and also implicitly constructs her as culturally *inferior* (a point noted in previous analyses of the *Celebrity Big Brother* series, (see Riggs 2009), and one that we only note in passing here as an intersectional analysis of the class- and race-based aspects of the data would require much more space than we have available here).

Yet at the same time as leaving open this inference about the differences between herself and Goody as being class-based, Shetty curtails her willingness to proclaim Goody's actions as those of a racist by limiting her response to her own interpretation: in response to Burley's questioning *again* of whether Goody was racist, Shetty replies 'no. not for me' (line 7). In so doing, Shetty again does not *per se* deny that Goody's actions were racist, but instead simply reiterates that they were not for her (on the terms defined in the previous extract). Shetty's reference to herself as 'extremely pragmatic' (line 10) further bolsters the rationality and non-judgmental nature of her argument about the apportioning of blame for racism by suggesting that her position in the interview is well thought out and indicative of reflection. Yet, at the same time, this statement refuses a simple interpretation of being a straightforward

denial of racism: it takes ‘pragmatism’, ‘hindsight’ and desire (‘I want to believe’, delivered quickly on line 11) to be able to see that something is not racist. In other words, whilst in the moment something can be racist, later it can become not-racist, albeit with a considerable amount of work put into making it such.

Of course turning something from being racist to being not racist requires considerable investment. In the remainder of the extract Shetty first denies such an investment, only then to go on and show precisely what her investment appears to have been. In regards to the former, Shetty indicates her sympathy toward the ‘anger’ experienced by ‘a lot of Indians’ (lines 13/14), yet by stating that her integrity and honour are ‘not for sale’ (line 16), she maintains an image of respectability that mitigates against anger toward her from any party. In so doing, Shetty constructs an image of herself again as reflective and responsible, rather than as someone whose actions are contrived; her retraction was not contrived but rather a considered response to the situation. Yet this suggests to us that what Shetty *is* invested in, then; namely not appearing contrived, something that a ‘responsible’ Indian citizen with ‘integrity and honour’ would not do.

Further, what would be contrived for Shetty, it appears, is to make ‘harsh statements’ or to be ‘judgemental’ (line 22). In other words, by constructing herself as pragmatic and prone to analysing things, maintaining a claim to racism would have been contrived as it would have required an ongoing commitment to ‘harsh statements’ and ‘judgements’. Retracting her accusation of racism (here redefined by Shetty as ‘a statement’, line 18) allows Shetty to maintain an image of herself as a responsible person who does not make explicit or clearly identifiable ‘harsh statements’. Importantly, though, this is not the same as suggesting that she did not possibly see Goody’s actions as racist (as can be seen in the statement on line 21 ‘I

heard the words and I felt terrible that I had said it', the operative words being 'said it', rather than the alternative of 'thought it'). Thus, and as we suggest from the following and final extract, it is not necessarily the case that Shetty did not see racism, nor that she condones what happened in the *Celebrity Big Brother* house, but rather that for her *making an accusation of racism* is 'not in her dictionary':

Extract 5

- 1 Shetty: See for me the word racism (.) is (1) it just doesn't exist in my
 2 dictionary. I've said this (.) you know (.) innumerable number of times
 3 so (1) <it doesn't exist and I believe that it ↑shouldn't exist in the
 4 world>
 5 Burley: but it does
 6 Shetty: it does and (.) something needs to be done about it >and that's the best
 7 thing that's come out< (.) of this reality (.) show
 8 Burley: ↑what?
 9 Shetty: that (1) people (.) have suddenly woken ↑up (.) and people want to take
 10 a stand about it (.) and I am glad (.) that the British audiences (1)
 11 ummm (.) are supporting it

Shetty's condemnation of racism might be seen as an act of presenting a perfect vision – an 'idealization' (Goffman 1959) - which may serve as a bid for the floor rather than a simple disclaimer (lines 1-2). This is notable as it further exemplifies our previous suggestion that whilst at times Shetty appears to explain racism away, in actuality it is potentially the word itself that she pushes aside, rather than necessarily the actions that the word defines. Burley, however, does not take this point up, but rather

challenges Shetty's wish that 'it shouldn't exist in the world' (line 1), thus forcing her to acknowledge 'its' continued existence. Rather than commenting on the details of her own experience, however, Shetty refers to a generalised need for 'something to be done about it' (line 6).

When Burley puts pressure on Shetty to dispel the ambiguity in the statement 'that's the best thing that's come out of this reality show' (lines 6-7), Shetty gives an account of racism in which it is only after the fact that 'it' can be seen as such, as signified in her statement that 'people have suddenly woken up' (line 9). Yet the logic of 'waking up' only makes sense if it is considered possible for racism to pass unnoticed (i.e., as if the observer were asleep). Furthermore, it is important to consider what exactly the 'British audiences' (line 10) have 'woken up' to. That people could want to 'take a stand' (lines 9 and 10) and 'support it' (line 10) requires an object against which a stand is being taken. This object, then, must be racism, and moreover, the racism experienced by Shetty. Otherwise, if there is not a concrete fact against which the audience are reacting, then they have indeed not woken up, but rather are still dreaming (i.e., if there is no racism then they are reacting to nothing). By concluding in this way, Shetty is thus able to denote the existence of racism as something requiring action. Whilst this does not involve her claiming to be a victim of racism herself, there is again no literal denial that she was not. Instead, her comments, spoken in the general and in the neutral pronoun, facilitate a 'responsible' voicing of racism that certainly lets no one off the hook, at the same time as it makes no explicit judgement against anyone.

Conclusions

In undertaking the above analysis, our intention was to examine how Shetty accounted for herself as an Indian woman, how she managed Burley's repeated focus on one specific account of racism (which primarily seemed to centre upon encouraging Shetty to name the actions of the British housemates as racism), and how Shetty in turn defined and accounted for racism herself. What we have shown, is that by constructing herself as a responsible Indian citizen, and by imbuing that category with the requirement to be non-judgemental and honest, the typical ways in which racism is normally challenged were largely curtailed for Shetty. Yet as we have also suggested, this does not mean that Shetty simply denied racism, nor does it mean that there are not clear implications arising from what Shetty *did* have to say about racism. Rather, and what we suggest occurred in Shetty's comments, is that racism was treated with the subtlety and complexity with which it was, in many instances, enacted.

To elaborate: certainly in the house, and as we indicated in the introduction, Shetty was subjected to a considerable degree of explicit hostility and harassment that appeared to be racially motivated. Responding to that, as has long been the work of anti-racist practitioners, typically takes the form of pursuing legal retribution through recourse to claims of hate crimes, challenging those who enact racism, and encouraging redress at an interpersonal level for the effects of racism. And certainly these were responses that were pursued as the show progressed and after it ended: Ofcom undertook an investigation in which the possibility of legal prosecution (of both the show and Goody in particular) was mooted; explicit comments were challenged by the host Davina McCall in the exit interviews with the British

housemates in question; and apologies were made by the British housemates during the interviews.

Yet despite these responses to the explicit forms of discrimination faced by Shetty in the household (and the responses to them), there were still other forms of marginalisation that occurred within the household that were just as likely racially motivated, but which were much more subtle and which thus largely went unchallenged. A key example of this was the often repeated statement by Goody, O'Meara and Lloyd that they felt that Shetty was not 'real' – that her self-presentation *as an Indian woman* was fake. Over time, they altered this claim and referred instead to cultural differences to explain their distance from Shetty, her behaviour and mannerisms., an alteration that is insidious for the ways in which it allows racism to continue, albeit under a different guise (i.e., 'cultural differences'). In response, Shetty's engagement with racism in the interview is nuanced and powerful: not only does it draw attention to the complexities of challenging racism, and the problems associated with Burley's approach, but it also keeps class-based differences between herself and Goody firmly on the table, associating blatant racism with low intelligence and ignorance.

Of course in making these comments, our point is not that Shetty should have felt compelled to present a non-threatening account of racism and her experience of it. Rather, our point is twofold: first, that what Shetty did was skilful for the subtle way it presented the 'facts' of racism (which neatly mirrored the often subtle enactments of racism itself). And second, Shetty was also skilful in her negotiation of talking about a very sensitive topic in ways that could potentially encourage British people to 'wake up', 'take a stand' and 'support' the challenging of racism. Ideally, perhaps, Shetty would have also felt able to speak clearly of her experiences and to potentially

name racism and call for a response to it. Yet such a set of actions would, quite likely, have potentially resulted in a negative reaction from British viewers (who may have felt accused of racism by implication). Instead, the approach she adopted made it very clear that ‘contrived’ racism is unacceptable, that racism does indeed exist and needs to be challenged, and that those who experience racism have the right to speak of it in ways that they deem appropriate or ‘responsible’.

Even though the subject of our modest research was one interview between an Indian actress and white British journalist, the analysed interview fragments may allow for drawing some general conclusions about racism denial in celebrity interviews, at least when a context of multicultural tapestry is considered. In other words, it seems that complex or indeed contradictory ways of understanding racism are not solely the province of those who are charged with it (Figgou and Condor 2006). Complex accounts of racism may be just as evident, if not more so, amongst those assumed to have fallen its victim. Yet having said that, it is important to distinguish between the motivations between such complex accounts of racism: whilst for the victim of racism a complex account may, as we suggested above, serve to illustrate precisely the complex ways in which racism functions, for the accused a complex account may serve to mitigate against the accusation.

Certainly, previous research on accusations of racism (see Augoustinos and Every 2007, for a summary) suggests that, in general, such accusations carry with them a moral judgment against the accused, which must then in turn be defended against. Research on the denial of racism (e.g., van Dijk 1992) suggests that this is achieved in one of two ways: 1) by suggesting that racism requires intent to hurt (and certainly this was utilised by Goody in her denial of racism, see Riggs and Due 2010) and 2) by positioning racism as only the province of ‘irrational’ or otherwise

prejudiced individuals (who, as we suggested in the introduction, are purportedly hard to locate). Racism in this sense is thus seen as something that is exceptional or as an aberration to the norm of cultural 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. What often disappears, then, both in accusations and denials of racism, is the fact that any ‘individual racist’ is always already the product of a broader social context in which racialised hierarchies are continually reproduced, and which produce individuals as intelligible *through* race as an organising category (Riggs and Augoustinos 2005).

To return to Shetty’s account of racism, then, what we can see occurred was that through the construction of herself as a representative of India, Shetty in effect made the implicit statement that the British housemates too were representatives of their own culture. In so doing, and without making an explicit accusation of racism, Shetty managed to indicate the endemic nature of racism, and signalled that this required attention. She did this by avoiding the standard approach to making an accusation of racism (i.e., for the most part she avoided making judgments about the other housemates) and the response this typically evokes (i.e., literal denials), and instead left open the possibility that ‘it’ (i.e., racism, both in the ‘contrived’ form by her definition, but also in the more nebulous form that she left undefined) was indeed present in the house and certainly something that could be seen and challenged, even if she herself did not clearly name it.

What Shetty did, then, was engage in making a comment about racism which in effect functioned to prevent all of the standard responses (i.e., that racial minorities are out to make trouble or are delusional or simply mean-spirited). In so doing, and what we are left with from the interview, is a very clear challenge to British audiences

not to simply reduce racism to the actions of a few of the British housemates, but instead to consider how their views (which are most certainly by no means the most extremely racially hostile views possible amongst British citizens) reflect something about the existence of racism across all sectors of the British society. Whether this challenge compelled many viewers to action is the topic of another study altogether, however what we have shown here are the merits of further examining the complex ways in which accusations of racism are managed.

To conclude, and to return to Turner's (2010) call for celebrity studies to move beyond discursive analyses, this paper has demonstrated that there is ongoing utility in such analyses. Specifically, this is the case where it is marginal group members and their management of discrimination that is at stake. To do otherwise, we would suggest, would serve only to deny the importance of discursive analyses precisely at the moment when they show themselves to be an important tool in challenging discrimination *on the terms set by marginal group members*. In other words, and given the long history of discursive studies of celebrity that have focused primarily on white celebrities, it would seem unwise to minimize the ongoing importance of discursive studies just when the consideration of celebrities outside this racially privileged location becomes a point of focus. Instead, we suggest the need for a renewed focus on discursive studies that attempt to map out the complex ways in which racially marginalized celebrities resist such marginalisation, and in so doing provide opportunities for reconsidering how we understand and address racism.

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