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Discursive Management of Resistance to a Multicultural Education Program

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Abstract

In the five decades since the *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka* case ended legalized racial segregation in US schools, achieving multiculturalism and diversity have become primary goals in education. Resistance on the part of students to multicultural educational interventions may pose a significant threat to their success. This study investigates how student participants of a multicultural educational intervention discursively manage their resistance to the program in such a way that they avoid appearing prejudiced. Five strategies are identified whereby students discursively managed their negative evaluations of lessons addressing race and ethnicity: 1) denying prejudice, 2) portraying lessons as uninteresting, 3) constructing diversity as protective against prejudice, 4) normalizing self-segregation, and 5) normalizing prejudice and intergroup tension. The article concludes with a discussion of the practical and ideological implications of the discursive practices identified in the study.

Discursive Management of Resistance to a Multicultural Education Program

Multiculturalism can be defined as a system whereby culturally diverse groups, each having their own beliefs and practices, are accorded status and recognition, not merely at the individual level, but in the institutional structures of the society (Parekh, 2002). Furthermore, multiculturalism involves the promotion of harmony and positive relationships between culturally diverse groups (Cashmore, 1996).

The U.S. Supreme Court's historic decision in the 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka* decision marked the end of institutionalized racial segregation in education in the U.S. Following this decision, the achievement of multiculturalism in education became a primary objective both for moral reasons (the need to redress past and continuing racial inequalities), and because diversity was believed to be beneficial to students of all population groups (Rothman, Lipset & Nevitte, 2003). The philosophy of multiculturalism has taken on profound importance in the social sciences, and particularly in education, where it often serves as a framework for creating policies, training educators, and conducting research (Phillion, 2002).

Allport (1954) noted that intergroup contact must take place under certain conditions (equal status of participants, support from institutional norms and authorities, and shared goals or objectives) if it is to produce positive outcomes. Dixon and Durrheim (2003) caution that contact seldom occurs under optimal conditions, and that informal segregation remains an enduring problem. In other words, despite the fact that legalized segregation ended five decades ago in the U.S., different racial/ethnic groups generally remain segregated with respect to the areas they live in, the schools they attend and their circles of friends (Goldberg, 1998; Massey & Denton,

1993). Furthermore, informal segregation, or self-segregation, in education is pervasive, even in contexts where a substantial degree of ethnic diversity is present (Buttney, 1999; Tatum, 1997).

If diversity on school and university campuses is not resulting in positive contact, but rather in self-segregated groups who are ambivalent, if not hostile, towards each other, then the potential positive outcomes of diversity will undoubtedly be threatened (Orfield & Whitley, 2001). In response to such threats, a number of educational interventions have developed, which aim to encourage intergroup contact under positive conditions and, in doing so, maximize the benefits of diversity in education (e.g. Gaertner et al., 2003; Nagda & Zuñiga, 2003; Wittig & Grant-Thompson, 1998).

Resistance on the part of the students receiving such interventions is a major source of concern for practitioners responsible for implementing them: if students reject the messages of an intervention, fail to recognize its value and actively participate in it, or refuse to substantively engage in the type of intergroup dialogues encouraged by it, then it is unlikely that the intervention will achieve its desired results. Interventions that recruit volunteers as participants have generally been found to produce more positive change in participants than those that are prescribed as mandatory by educational institutions (e.g. Nagda & Zuñiga, 2003; Rabinowitz & Wittig, 2002; Wittig & Molina, 2000). Resistance on the part of students may thus be a primary factor in the equivocal, or even negative, results produced by some interventions (e.g. Molina, Wittig & Giang, 2003; Schultz, Barr & Selman, 2001; Wittig & Molina, 2000)

The aim of this paper is to investigate the way in which students, who have participated in a multicultural educational intervention instituted in their school, discursively manage resistance to, and negative evaluations of, the program. In doing this, we aim to show some of

the rhetorical and ideological features of discourses of resistance to a multicultural curriculum, and their implications for the practice of such interventions.

Method and data

Our data were gathered from seven focus groups that were conducted in a large suburban public high school in Los Angeles County during the 2002-2003 academic year. Each focus group involved four to nine participants (aged 14-16 years), drawn from seven ninth-grade social studies classes that had recently completed a prejudice-reduction program, coordinated by researchers at a large public comprehensive university. This program, known as STOP (Students Take Out Prejudice) consists of seven to eight one-hour-long lessons, which are delivered as part of a mandatory social studies class in the high school. The program is facilitated by undergraduate service interns from the university, who receive six hours of training before delivering the lessons, as well as attending weekly debriefing meetings throughout the course of the curriculum. The lessons focus on the themes of race, ethnicity, culture, friendship and dating, gender, gangs and responsibility, sexual orientation, and promoting equal human worth. The curriculum has an overall message that seeks to reduce all forms of prejudice, highlights the value of multiculturalism, and encourages students to appreciate, and take advantage of the diversity in their everyday lives.

The focus groups were conducted two weeks after the completion of the STOP program, and were facilitated by trained research assistants. Participants were selected using a purposive sampling procedure (Silverman, 2000), ensuring that the ethnic and gender composition of the classes were adequately represented in the focus groups, and including only students who were present for the prejudice-reduction program. Permission from the participants' parents, informed

consent of the participants themselves, and approval from the university's Institutional Review Board was obtained before the focus groups were conducted. The sample consisted of 47 participants. The gender breakdown of the sample was 45% male and 55% female, and, based on self-reports, the sample was 13% African American, 17% Asian/Asian American, 23% Euro-American, 13% Hispanic/Latino, 23% Other/More than one ethnicity, and 11% Declined to state. We have not routinely identified the race/ethnicity of the speakers in the extracts we examine in the following sections, for two reasons. Firstly, we did not wish to impose categories upon them that they did not consider relevant for themselves. This means 'holding off from using all sorts of identities which one might want to use...until and unless such an identity is visibly consequential in what happens' (Antaki & Widdicombe, 1998, p. 5). Secondly, the discursive practices that we identified in our analysis were not exclusively used by students of any particular ethnicity or ethnicities. This observation provides an empirical basis for following Antaki and Widdicombe's (1998) advice.

The focus group participants were asked to discuss their opinions of various aspects of the STOP program, the program facilitators, and the relevance of, and need for, such programs in their high school. Each focus group was approximately one hour in duration, and transcription of the proceedings was conducted in real time by a qualified court stenographer. This method of transcription imposed limitations on our analysis, due to the absence of many important micro-level conversational details in the transcripts. However, this arrangement was necessitated by the wishes of the school administrators, who were reluctant to allow audiotaping of the focus groups due to concerns about the anonymity of the student participants. The focus group facilitators were able to confirm the accuracy of the transcripts, and we believe that they were sufficiently detailed to allow some illuminating analytical insights to be made.

The analysis of the data was guided by an inductive style, and drew on techniques developed within discursive psychology (Billig, 1996; Edwards, 1997; Edwards & Potter, 1992; Potter & Wetherell, 1987). This approach focuses on language as a form of social action and sense making, and treats discourse as ‘a research topic in its own right, rather than treating it as a transparent medium through which the “real facts” of attitudes, events or behaviors can be recovered’ (Potter & Wetherell, 1987, p. 184).

We conducted the analysis using the following steps (cf. Potter & Wetherell, 1987): 1) initial reading of the transcripts to identify broad analytical themes and categories, 2) selection of a subset of data relating to themes and categories relevant to the specific aims of the analysis (this was done inclusively, to ensure that even data that appeared only vaguely related to our aims was not overlooked), 3) close reading of the selected subset of data to develop working hypotheses, using an inductive style of analysis and avoiding psychological interpretations, 4) testing of these emerging hypotheses through repeated close readings of the texts, and 5) an additional reading of the entire data set to ensure that our arguments were consistent with all of the data available to us. It is important to note that these steps did not take place in a linear fashion, but rather in cyclical iterations, as we repeatedly moved between steps in order to progress towards our final arguments (Potter & Wetherell, 1987).

It is important to note that the participants in analyses such as this should not be seen as a statistically representative sample of the population from which they are drawn (see, for e.g., Antaki et al., 2003; Dixon & Durrheim, 2003). Rather, they are seen as members of a community or culture, drawing on collective resources to construct particular versions of reality in a context-sensitive manner, in accordance with the institutional demands of the day (Billig, 1996; Potter, 1996; Wetherell & Potter, 1992). Generalization of findings is thus described in terms of what

discursive practices and rhetorical constructions are possible, or hold currency, within a community or culture, rather than the degree to which these practices are used by many, or all, members of the target population (cf. Antaki et al., 2003; Billig, 1996; Silverman, 2000).

Negative evaluations of lessons addressing race and ethnicity

An initial reading of the transcripts suggested that the students frequently expressed negative evaluations about the sections of the STOP program that dealt with race and ethnicity. In making these evaluations, the students are faced with a dilemma: they wish to express negative opinions of the lessons, but they risk appearing (racially) prejudiced due to the content of the lessons they are criticizing (cf. Billig et al., 1988). Giving negative evaluations of lessons dealing with sensitive issues such as race and ethnicity is thus an accountable activity – it is necessary for those who give this type of evaluation to account for their opinions in such a way that they do not present a negative or prejudiced impression of themselves (Edwards, 2003). Our analysis focuses on nine extracts¹ that exemplify the range of discursive and rhetorical strategies that the students drew upon in order to manage this dilemma.

We identify five major conversational resources that were drawn upon by the students in managing and accounting for their negative evaluations of the sections of the STOP program that dealt with race and ethnicity²:

1. Denying prejudice
2. Portraying lessons as uninteresting
3. Constructing diversity as protective against prejudice
4. Normalizing self-segregation
5. Normalizing prejudice and intergroup relations

We also show how a deviant case provides support for our analytic claims (Silverman, 2001; Speer & Potter, 2000).

1. *Denying prejudice*

Many of the students responded to questions about the STOP program by denying that they were prejudiced, showing that they oriented to the program as an accusation of prejudice (Antaki & Widdicombe, 1998; Speer & Potter, 2000). According to van Dijk (1992) denial of prejudice serves the function of positive self-presentation, protecting the speaker against the negative social consequences of appearing to be intolerant.

Extract 1:

(04/25/02, p. 8)

1 *Facilitator:* Was there anything about the STOP program that maybe you just didn't like or a lesson that
2 didn't relate to your life?

3 *Student H:* Sort of like the ethnicity thing because I'm not like that. They repeated a lot of the stuff. The
4 first couple of lessons seemed to be like the same thing. And I thought the entire program was going to be
5 like that.

Extract 2:

(04/23/03, p. 4)

1 *Student D:* I didn't like the racist one because I've never been racist. That was useless to me. The racist
2 one, where we had to watch a TV show of a different race and see how they would be in that show.

4 *Facilitator:* Yes. That was a homework assignment. It was to go home and watch a program and write
5 write about it.

6 *Student D:* I never judge a person because of their skin color or their race.

In Extract 1, the facilitator solicits comments from the students about lessons that they ‘didn’t like’, or that didn’t relate to their lives. Student H responds by providing a negative evaluation of the lessons that addressed ‘the ethnicity thing.’ The reason for his negative evaluation of these lessons is ‘because I’m not like that.’ Presumably he does not mean that he does not have an ethnicity, but rather that he is not prejudiced against others on the basis of their ethnicity. It is noteworthy that Student H does not make a simple, direct denial, but employs systematic vagueness. In his denial of prejudice and his subsequent description of the lessons (lines 3-5), he uses terms such as ‘sort of like,’ ‘ethnicity thing,’ ‘like that,’ ‘stuff’ and ‘like the same thing,’ rather than being more explicit or detailed. This lack of specificity presupposes that the nature of the ‘stuff’ in question is shared knowledge or self-evident, while functioning as a series of hedges that would allow Student H to amend or justify his statements, should they subsequently be subjected to challenge (Edwards, 2000).

In Extract 2, Student D uses a denial of racism as a reason for his dislike of a homework exercise in which the students were asked to observe the representation of different race groups in the media. He describes the exercise both as something he ‘didn’t like’ and as ‘useless’ because he has ‘never been racist.’ Both students thus construct the argument that the sections of the program in question could not be of any value to non-prejudiced people, such as themselves.

Student D’s repeated use of the word ‘never’ (lines 1 and 6) is what Pomerantz (1986) described as extreme case formulations (ECFs). Used in this way, ECFs serve the rhetorical function of defending Student D against potential or actual challenges to the legitimacy of his claims, and thus bolster the rhetorical robustness of his claim of not being racist (Edwards, 2000; Pomerantz 1986). Thus, by using an ECF such as ‘never,’ Student D pre-empts any possible

counter-formulations that he might be anything less than completely tolerant, or even that he might have ever have been so.

The use of the word 'judge' (line 6) lends a moral tone to Student D's account. Student D orients to the strong social norms against prejudice (Sears, 1988; van Dijk, 1992), and his account suggests that he would consider it a negative moral indictment of him if the homework was anything but 'useless,' or if he ever did 'judge a person because of their skin color or their race.' The forcefulness of Student D's denial, shown by his use of ECFs, as well as the word 'useless,' suggests a level of indignance, which is consistent with van Dijk's (1992) suggestion that accusations, or perceived accusations, of racism often tend to be seen as more serious social infractions than actual racist attitudes or behavior.

These denials of prejudice show how Students H and D orient to the possibility that their criticism of an anti-prejudice program may be interpreted as being motivated by prejudice, and thus that a denial is required (cf. Antaki & Widdicombe, 1998, p. 5). Although we cannot infer anything about the truth or falsity of their denials, we see their opposition to the program as problematic in that it serves to undermine the program's anti-prejudice agenda and aims: if we were to take such claims about the uselessness of the program at face value, we might conclude that we should discontinue it, which would guarantee that would be of no use in the future. Hence, even in the absence of any personal prejudice, opposition to active, anti-racist initiatives effectively works to perpetuate the racism that such initiatives aim to oppose.

The above extracts show that, in addition to the functions of self-presentation described by van Dijk (1992), denials of prejudice in the particular context of evaluations of a prejudice-reduction program serve another important function: they act as arguments against the necessity

for having such a program. As we shall see in the following sections, these effects can be achieved in less direct and explicit ways than those observed in the above extracts.

2. *Portraying lessons as uninteresting*

The most common strategy that students used to manage their negative evaluations of the lessons on race and ethnicity was to construct them as boring, repetitive or ‘old news.’

Extract 3:

(12/05/02, p. 3)

- 1 *Facilitator:* Which lesson was really not relevant to you at all?
- 2 *Student F:* I thought they were all kind of boring. Like a few things we did was fun. I fell asleep a few
- 3 times too. They were so boring.
- 4 *Student D:* The whole program was relevant, but it was kind of boring. It had to do with real life but it was
- 5 boring.
- 6 *Student F:* We would talk about the same thing every day or for a week. Two different subjects or
- 7 something.
- 8 *Facilitator:* I hear you saying it's important, but it's boring.
- 9 *Student B:* Like you heard that for the past 14 to 15 years.
- 10 *Student D:* Don't be racist, don't be prejudiced all that stuff.
- 11 *Student B:* Like singing little songs in elementary school.

In Extract 3, as in Extract 1, the facilitator invites the students to talk about any lessons that were ‘really not relevant’ to them. The form of this question (‘Which lesson...’ rather than ‘Were there any lessons...’) presupposes that there were lessons that the students didn’t find relevant, and thus creates a conversational context in which the students are expected to criticize some of the lessons, rather than being pressured to produce only positive evaluations of the

program. In spite of this, the students orient in their responses to the possibility that any negative evaluations they give may be interpreted as being motivated by prejudice. Student F and Student D deal with this possibility by using a conversational strategy of showing concessions, which is described by Antaki and Wetherell (1999) as a way strengthening one's argumentative position against a possible counter-argument.

Student F initially states that the lessons were 'all kind of boring,' but then concedes that 'a few things we did were fun' (line 2), before re-asserting that the lessons were 'so boring,' and even that they caused him to fall asleep 'a few times.' By conceding that some of the activities were fun, Student F recognizes that opposition to his claim (that all the lessons were boring) would be possible, and pre-empts and forecloses a possible counter-argument against this assertion (cf. Speer & Potter, 2000). This concession is undone, however, by the subsequent re-assertion of the original claim, which is actually voiced in an even stronger form than the original claim was. In this way, rather than being weakened by the concession, the original assertion is actually strengthened (Antaki & Wetherell, 1999). A similar sequence can be seen in Student D's turn of speech (lines 4-5), when he states that, although relevant, the program was 'kind of boring,' then concedes that 'it had to do with real life,' before re-asserting that 'it was boring.' Once again, the re-assertion is stronger than the original claim, as it is no longer preceded by the qualifying 'kind of.'

In line 6, Student F provides an additional account to reinforce his characterization of the lessons as boring, stating that 'We would talk about the same thing every day or for a week.' The facilitator's reflective statement 'I hear you saying it's important, but it's boring' is oriented to by Student B and Student D as a request for more information about their opinions, as they subsequently provide further accounts in this respect (Speer & Potter, 2000). Student B's use of

the word ‘you’ (line 9), rather than ‘I,’ invokes intersubjectivity (Billig, 1989; Edwards, 2003). That is, it serves to present his statement as shared knowledge that applies to everyone in his position, rather than only him as an individual. Hence, his statement ‘Like you heard that for the past 14 to 15 years’ constructs all students in the school as having been instructed on the subject matter of the lessons for their whole lives. Student D reinforces this claim by providing what are presumably examples of the things that the students have been hearing – ‘Don't be racist, don't be prejudiced all that stuff’ (line 10). The addition of ‘all that stuff’ at the end of his statement serves as an etcetera clause, showing that the two specific examples given (‘Don’t be racist’ and ‘don’t be prejudiced’) are not exhaustive, but rather that the students have also been taught other, related, values.

Student B’s comparison of the lessons to ‘singing little songs in elementary school’ serves to display the simple nature (as far as he is concerned) of the content of the lessons. He equates having to learn the STOP lessons with being sent back to elementary school to sing children’s songs. The content of the lessons is thus constructed as being unnecessary, and far beneath the level of these high-school students, to the point of it being patronizing or insulting for them to be expected to engage in them. It is thus the nature of the lessons, rather than the preferences or prejudices of the students, which caused their negative evaluations (Billig, 1991).

Extract 4:

(04/24/03, p. 4)

- 1 *Facilitator:* Do you guys have anything to share with us which activities or lessons may not have been
- 2 been relevant so maybe we can change those?
- 3 *Student F:* I liked all of them.
- 4 *Student B:* They were all good except the first three weeks where we just kept talking about race and it got
- 5 boring after a while.

6 *Student A:* Like things we already knew about. And they really emphasized it and went over and over it

7 *Student F:* The same things.

8 *Student B:* And when we heard next week is about dating and friendship, we were like oh, yeah!

9 *Facilitator:* Did you think the first three weeks were repetitive?

10 *Student F:* Yeah.

11 *Student B:* Yeah.

12 *Student H:* Yeah.

Another response to a facilitator's solicitation of information about the relevance of the lessons is seen in Extract 4. Here, the facilitator follows up his invitation by suggesting that his reason for seeking this information is 'so we can change those' lessons that weren't relevant. This can be heard as an invitation to freely criticize the lessons, but Student F responds by making a positive evaluation ('I liked all of them,' line 3). This is qualified, however, by Student B, who echoes the students from Extract 1 by describing 'the first three weeks where we just kept talking about race' as 'boring after a while.' Student A's statement that the lessons in question were 'things we already knew about' produces a similar effect to that of Extract 3, constructing the content of these lessons as unnecessary due to the students' pre-existing knowledge of these issues.

When first responding to the facilitator's question about the relevance of the lessons, Student F uses an ECF, saying that she 'liked *all* of them.' However, after hearing her peers offer some criticisms of some of the lessons, Student F endorses their comments, and softens her initial positive evaluation, agreeing that some of the lessons covered 'the same things' (see Edwards, 2000, for further discussion of the use of ECFs and softeners). She then responds to the facilitator's question about whether the lessons were repetitive with an unequivocal 'yeah.' Student F thus adjusted her evaluations through the course of the interaction, moving from an

extreme positive evaluation to unqualified agreement with a negative evaluation. In this sense, Student F can be seen to be orienting to the evaluations given by her peers. Between them, Students F, B and A negotiate a shared evaluation of the program. The outcome of this negotiation is mutual agreement on a negative evaluation of the some specific lessons, but not of the program as a whole. In this way, a contrast is set up between the negative comments about the lessons on race and ethnicity, and the positive statements about the lessons that followed, marked by Student B's account in line 8 of their reaction when they heard that the next lesson would be about friendship and dating ('we were like, oh yeah!').

As in Extract 3, the students in Extract 4 consistently invoke intersubjectivity, using the word 'we' to describe their prior knowledge of issues (line 6), as well and their positive reaction to information that the next lesson would not be about race and ethnicity (line 8). This serves to construct both the knowledge and the reaction as shared by all students, rather than being specific to the speaker in each case (Billig, 1989; Edwards, 2003).

In Extracts 3 and 4, as well as in Extract 1 (lines 3-4), by constructing the STOP program as boring, repetitive or beneath them, the students were able to suggest that it was the nature of the program, rather than any personal prejudices on their part, that caused their negative evaluations (Edwards, 2003). In this way, they were able to manage the dilemma of wanting to express negative sentiments but not wishing to appear prejudiced (Billig et al., 1988). Furthermore, by constructing their opinions as being shared by other students, the participants in these extracts were able to present themselves as not being alone in their dislike of the lessons addressing race and ethnicity.

3. *Constructing diversity as protective against prejudice*

In the two extracts below, we see how students can mobilize the concept of diversity to inoculate themselves against potential accusations of prejudice and, in doing so, present their school as a context in which a prejudice reduction program is superfluous.

Extract 5:

(04/24/03, p. 6)

1 *Facilitator:* How do you think that this can be improved? What are some suggestions you have?

2 *Student A:* If you are going – like if you did this program in an area that's really diverse, like look at us,

3 there's a little bit of everything here – if you wanted to pick a different area to do this in, I'd say pick an

4 area that has more of one group. Because – usually in those towns where it's all white people – because I

5 have a few family members that live in places like that and I go there and they are really narrow-minded.

6 *Facilitator:* Maybe because it's so diverse, some of these issues you have dealt with or dealing with every

7 day?

8 *Student A:* Yeah, like me living here, ever since my first day of school there have been people different

9 from me and I never really cared about it. But those other places, that's where a lot of those hate crimes

10 happen.

11 *Facilitator:* Do you think diversity is accepted in this school?

12 *Student A:* Yeah. There are clubs for all the ethnic groups. And I never really hear someone bagging on

13 someone's race. There's not really any tension between those groups here at school. It's not like they fight.

Extract 6:

(12/11/02, p. 8)

1 *Facilitator:* Do you think racism is a problem in the school or in the community?

2 *Student F:* Yeah, a little bit.

3 *Student E:* Not at the school because everyone is multicultural. Like if you go back to L.A., I would think

4 so.

5 *Student G*: There's cliques. Certain people hang out with certain people, but in the classrooms there's no
6 problem.

7 *Student E*: Like if they were about to fight =

8 *Student C*: I think the same as what they said.

In Extract 5, Student A responds to the facilitator's request for suggestions on how to improve the program by producing a lay sociological account of prejudice, which features a 'diversity' interpretative repertoire (Potter & Wetherell, 1987; Wetherell & Potter, 1992). Wetherell and Potter (1992) describe interpretative repertoires as 'broadly discernible clusters of terms, descriptions and figures of speech,' which serve as 'resources for making evaluations, constructing factual versions and performing particular actions' (p. 90). The diversity repertoire employed by Student A serves to construct people in contexts characterized by diversity ('there's a little bit of everything here,' line 3) as tolerant, through contrast with the 'narrow-minded' people 'in those towns where it's all white people' (lines 3-5), and where 'hate crimes happen' (lines 9-10).

The diversity repertoire is also apparent in Extract 6, which begins with the facilitator adopting a somewhat psychotherapeutic tone, encouraging the students to share their thoughts about whether racism is a 'problem' in their school or community. In response to this, Student E suggests that it is not a problem at the school 'because everyone is multicultural' (line 3). Again, the diverse context is contrasted with a second context (in this case, L.A.), which Student E implicitly suggests is not multicultural, and where he 'would think' racism is a problem (lines 3-4).

By employing the diversity repertoire, the students in Extracts 5 and 6 are able to suggest that anti-prejudice lessons are not necessary for them, since they have already learned to be

tolerant by attending school in a diverse environment. Furthermore, the empirical grounding of the students' claims in their own experiences as students at a diverse school serves to inoculate them against potential challenges, since only they have access to their own personal experiences (Edwards & Potter, 1992).

The diversity repertoire is reminiscent of Allport's (1954) contact hypothesis. Just as Allport theorized that intergroup contact would lead to reduced prejudice, Student A and Student E suggest that prejudice is unlikely to be a problem in contexts in which intergroup contact is prevalent. Billig (1991) suggests that the use of social scientific concepts in everyday discourse is a reflection of two processes. The first is the 'filtering down' of these concepts into everyday language as they become widely accepted scientific truths. The second involves movement of ideas in the opposite direction, as everyday, commonsense notions of the way the world works are taken up by social scientists who wish to empirically test their validity. In other words, the students are drawing on a commonsense concept that is lent credibility by its status as social scientific knowledge, but this concept originally entered the social science literature as a commonsense notion, and was then validated by empirical testing (Billig, 1991; cf. Moscovici, 1984). In this way, there is a mutual mirroring and reinforcement of commonsense and social scientific understandings of intergroup relations (Durrheim & Dixon, 2000).

It is noteworthy, however, that the version of the contact hypothesis encapsulated in the diversity repertoire implies a simple linearity in the contact-prejudice relationship that, as we discussed previously, has not been borne out in the contact literature (Dixon & Durrheim, 2003), and was not even predicted by Allport (1954) himself.

4. *Normalizing self-segregation*

In their respective references to ‘clubs for...ethnic groups’ and ‘cliques,’ Student A (Extract 5, line 12) and Student G (Extract 6, line 5) hint at the prevalence of the phenomenon of self-segregation (Buttny, 1999) in their school. Although discussion of the issue of ethnic self-segregation was not initiated by any of the facilitators, it spontaneously arose on numerous occasions during the focus groups. While a number of the participants stated that they personally had diverse friendship circles, none disputed the existence of self-segregation in the student body of their school. Self-segregation was normalized by the students in these extracts, whose endorsement of the positive environment described by the diversity repertoire would be undermined by the presence of problematic intergroup relations in the school.

In Extract 5, Student A suggests that some form of self-segregation is positive, replying to the facilitator’s question about respect for diversity by stating that ‘there are clubs for all the ethnic groups’ (line 12). Durrheim and Dixon (2000) note how these ‘clubs’ can serve to justify segregation on the basis of cultural familiarity. This reveals a dilemma of the multicultural ideology. An emphasis on respecting diversity and cultural difference may provide a justification for ethnic separation on the basis of the contention that ‘birds of a feather flock together’ – that it’s natural for people to associate with others that are similar to them (cf. Buttny, 1999; Durrheim & Dixon, 2000; Fowers & Richardson, 1996).

Extract 7:

(12/05/02, p. 11)

- 1 *Facilitator:* What other issues would you like to see it cover?
- 2 *Student H:* I would say like the homework was just like you would have to talk with other people with
- 3 different cultures and I don't know anybody that's different. I'm not going to go up to someone and say,

- 4 'Help me with my homework. I'm going to interview you.' I'm always hanging around with Hispanics.
 5 Almost my whole block is Hispanics. I don't get along with a lot of people and I'm not going to their house
 6 just because I need to do homework.
- 7 *Student G:* I didn't like the homework.
- 8 *Student D:* I didn't like it either. A lot of people didn't really do it because of that. They expected you to go
 9 home and talk with somebody with a different ethnicity and you go to your house and your whole family is
 10 going to be like you are, unless you're adopted.
- 11 *Student B:* Or mixed.

In Extract 7, the facilitator asks if the students would like to see 'other issues' covered in the program. Rather than suggesting any expansion of the program, however, Student H formulates a complaint about a particular homework exercise in which the students were asked to interview someone of a different ethnicity to learn about their culture. Student H alludes to self-segregation in her complaint, stating that she is 'always hanging around with Hispanics' and doesn't 'get along with a lot of people' (lines 4-5). Self-segregation is thus justified in terms of a lack of positive relations with members of other ethnicities, although Student H does not account for why this negative state of intergroup relations exists. This sentiment is echoed by Student D's suggestion that many students didn't do the homework because requiring students to talk to someone of a different ethnicity (or even anyone outside of one's family) was an unreasonable expectation. In fact, Student D and Student B claim that only those who live in diverse families, by virtue of being 'adopted' (line 10), 'or mixed' (line 11), would normally interact with people of different ethnicities.

An important feature of Extract 7 is thus that none of the students present self-segregation as problematic, or as requiring any sort of intervention (including the homework exercise referred to in the extract) to address it. Since it is not possible for the state of intergroup relations

to be changed unless it is recognized as problematic (van Dijk, 1992), these discourses serve as an argument against interventions aimed at achieving a higher degree of integration and, hence, for maintaining a segregated status quo.

5. *Normalizing prejudice and intergroup tension*

The normalization of prejudice and intergroup tension can be observed in Extracts 5 and 6. In lines 12-13 of Extract 5, Student A states that he ‘never really’ hears any racial slurs, and that there’s ‘not really’ any tension between students of different racial/ethnic groups. The use of the word ‘really’, along with the statement ‘it’s not like they fight’ (line 13), reveals how Student A implicitly orients towards, and argues against, potential counter-claims (Billig, 1996). If Student A’s claims were disputed with examples of racial slurs or tension, these counter-claims could be discounted as not *really* being examples of racial/ethnic problems, as long as they fall short of racially-motivated violence between students. In this way, conditions of what can be considered problematic are established, and anything that does not meet these conditions is preemptively dismissed as being unworthy of concern. Similar normalization of intergroup relations can be seen in Extract 6, where Student G states that ‘in the classrooms there’s no problem’ (line 5-6), and Student E suggests what would constitute a problem (‘if they were about to fight’, line 7).

In setting up the criteria by which non-problematic states of intergroup relations are distinguished from those that are problematic, the students are engaging in establishing the boundaries of what Billig et al. (1988) describe as ‘reasonable prejudice’ (p. 114). The seemingly contrary theme of reasonable prejudice depends on the construction of ‘unreasonable prejudice’, which can be easily condemned, thus allowing reasonable prejudice to be justified (Billig et al., 1988). In the above examples, the role of unreasonable prejudice would be signaled by the

occurrence of race-related ‘fights,’ which allows anything short of such incidents can be defended as reasonable or normal, and not worthy of concern or action.

Extract 8:

(12/04/02, p. 5)

- 1 *Facilitator:* Do you think ethnicity in general matters? Is that relevant today?
- 2 *Student D:* Yeah, of course it is. White people don't like to say it is, but it is. Everybody says I'm not
- 3 racist. I'm not homophobic. They probably are, somewhere inside of them. I think racism or hate kind of
- 4 develops in your family because you don't see it anywhere – maybe your friends too. They're a big part of
- 5 it. Everybody has a little bit of discrimination or hate in them. I don't have it to the point where I'm going
- 6 to kill somebody. Like put a Nazi thing on my chest or a Black Panther.

The contrast between reasonable and unreasonable prejudice is also established in Extract 8 where, in response to the facilitator's question about whether ‘ethnicity in general matters,’ Student D claims that ‘everybody has a little bit of discrimination or hate in them’ (line 5). Student D thus uses an ECF (‘everybody’) to describe the presence of ‘a little bit’ as not wrong and non-accountable, by virtue of its status as routinely occurring, and hence natural (Durrheim & Dixon, 2000; Pomerantz, 1986). By contrast, being prejudiced ‘to the point where I'm going to kill somebody,’ or being a Nazi or a Black Panther (lines 5-6), is established as unreasonable. In this way, the type of prejudice that ‘everybody’ (including Student D himself, and the other students in the school) ‘has a little bit of’ is normalized, while the unacceptable types of prejudice that would warrant concern are located outside of the school and its students, in the ‘unreasonably prejudiced Other’ (Billig et al., 1988, p. 115).

6. *Re-characterizing 'racial' tensions: A deviant case analysis*

We describe Extract 9 as a deviant case because it represents the only instance in the data corpus where race is problematized in the context of the school, or students in the school, by being made consequential in a situation in which the threat of violence was visibly present. Nevertheless, the students quickly redraw the incident that originally implied problematic race relations, to suggest that it is as a non-race related event.

Extract 9:

(12/05/02, p. 5)

1 *Facilitator*: When you said it helped a lot of people, do you think here at [your school] racism is an issue
2 that needs to be dealt with?

3 *Student H*: Yeah, there's like the Asian gang. There's a lot of gangs here. They all hang out in their spot.

4 *Student F*: If you go out at lunch, they're in their groups. The other day this Asian guy, he drives a brand-
5 new Porsche and someone keyed it and he wanted to fight.

6 *Student C*: If someone keyed my car there would be a fight. It wouldn't have to do with ethnicity. I don't
7 care if they're white or Asian, there would be a fight. If there's racist people here, then I guess there's an
8 issue. The people I know are open-minded.

9 *Student F*: Look at that Asian guy or that black guy, nothing like that.

In line 3 of Extract 9, Student H refers to an 'Asian gang.' This establishes what Sacks (1972a; as cited in Silverman, 2001) calls a membership categorization device (MCD) that identifies 'Asian' as a member of the collection of categories by which gangs can be described. This serves to establish race/ethnicity as a valid way of categorizing gangs and, in doing so, implies that the other gangs Student H refers to in line 3 are also racially organized (Silverman, 2001). Thus, in describing gangs in the school using a racial MCD, Student H is suggesting that

there is a race-related gang problem in the school. The conceptualization of the problem as racial in nature is made even clearer by its status as a response to the facilitator's question about the extent of racism as 'an issue that needs to be dealt with.' Furthermore, Student F affirms Student H's account, stating that 'they're in their groups' at lunch time, and follows up with an account of an incident that almost resulted in a fight (lines 4-5). The close contiguity of this account with the preceding use of the MCD of racially organized gangs establishes a link between gang activity and the incident in question. This link is reinforced by the explicit mention of the ethnicity of the person involved, which happens to be the same ethnicity ('Asian,' line 4) associated with the aforementioned gang.

In line 6, however, Student C resists the links to race/ethnicity established by the previous two speakers, invoking a script of what would naturally and predictably happen (Edwards, 2003) if her car were keyed ('there would be a fight'). In doing so, she re-characterizes the incident as having nothing 'to do with ethnicity' (lines 6-7). Student C goes on to state that the presence of racist people in the school would be 'an issue,' but argues against this possibility by asserting that the people she knows are 'open-minded.' Student F then reverses his previous position by agreeing that students in the school are not described solely in racial terms (line 9).

The statements of Student C thus serve to defuse the earlier accounts of race-related tension, and to replace it with a construction of the racially tolerant nature of students in the school. This characterization is allowed to stand as the final word in the discussion, and is even reinforced by one of the students who had initially problematized racially organized gangs in the school. Thus, despite the initial accounts of tensions linked to race/ethnicity, the listener is left with the overall conclusion that these tensions are not related to race after all.

Concluding comments

We have identified several ways in which students who have participated in a multicultural prejudice reduction intervention manage their negative evaluations of the intervention:

1. Denying prejudice
2. Portraying lessons as uninteresting
3. Constructing diversity as protective against prejudice
4. Normalizing self-segregation
5. Normalizing prejudice and intergroup tension

The discursive strategies we have discussed, as well as the deviant case, share a number of important commonalities. Firstly, they all have the ideological effect of presenting the STOP program, especially the lessons on race and ethnicity, as unnecessary in their school. In other words, by using the above strategies to de-problematize racial prejudice in their school, the students were able not only to account for their negative opinions of the program, but also to suggest that there is no need in their school for interventions that aim to address and reduce prejudice (cf. van Dijk, 1992). These arguments, if left unchallenged, may serve to justify students ignoring the positive messages of the program, and thus to perpetuate any serious intergroup issues that do exist in the school. In fact, evidence that such issues are salient for the students can be seen in the way they orient their talk towards these topics. Hence, in providing accounts of practices such as self-segregation and potential race-related tension, the students are orienting to them as salient and problematic issues that require explanation of some sort (cf. Antaki & Widdicombe, 1998; Buttny, 1999; Speer & Potter, 2000).

Secondly, the nature of many students' evaluations of the STOP program show that they perceived the implementation of the program in their school as an accusation of prejudice

directed either at them, or at their school in general (Speer & Potter, 2000). Responses such as this are a matter of concern for practitioners of similar programs, as they are likely to result in defensiveness, or even rejection of the program, which may erode its possible positive effects. The management of such perceived accusations should thus be a priority for practitioners, who must continue to present and improve methods of delivering interventions in such a way that they are received as efforts to build awareness of important social issues, rather than accusations of prejudice.

Finally, throughout our data, prejudice and racism were overwhelmingly described as residing ‘inside’ individuals (Extract 8, line 3), or as individual-level attributes. This type of conceptualization of prejudice is also reflected in much of the social science literature since the early work of Adorno et al. (1950) and Allport (1954), but has been heavily criticized more recently (e.g. Billig, 1991; Bonilla-Silva, 2003; Potter, 1998). An exclusive focus on the individual aspects of prejudice and racism by the students in our data serves to draw critical attention away from institutionalized inequalities that undoubtedly exist, if not in their particular school, then in the broader society (see, for e.g., Goldberg, 1998; Massey & Denton, 1993; Solorzano & Ornelas, 2002). If we equate prejudice with ‘individual psychological states, “institutional racism” becomes a logical impossibility...By making institutional racism an impossibility in theory, this sort of discourse justifies it in practice’ (Billig, 1991, p. 137; cf. Bonilla-Silva, 2003). Thus, to be truly non-prejudiced, it is necessary to move beyond individual egalitarianism towards being actively anti-prejudiced, by working to oppose the societal systems that support racial/ethnic inequality (Billig, 1991; Tatum, 1997). This raises the importance, for practitioners of multicultural education, of challenging the individualistic view by raising

students' awareness of the pervasiveness of institutional discrimination, and identifying the roles that individuals can play in challenging structural inequalities.

Notes

1. In parentheses at the beginning of each extract is information containing the date the focus group was conducted, and the page number of the original transcript from on which the extract appears.
2. As we mentioned previously, the STOP program also addressed numerous other issues, including friendship and dating, gender, gangs and responsibility and sexual orientation. Our analysis, however, focused particularly on the lessons that addressed issues around race and ethnicity.

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