Everyday Antiracism in Interpersonal Contexts: Constraining and Facilitating Factors for 'Speaking Up' Against Racism

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ABSTRACT

Everyday conversations among non-Indigenous Australians are a significant site in which racism towards Indigenous Australians is reproduced and maintained. This study explores the possibilities of everyday antiracism by asking how people negotiate racist discourses in interpersonal contexts. Twelve first year psychology students (10 female, 2 male, aged 18–50) who had completed a compulsory Indigenous studies course were recruited as participants. Semi-structured interviews were thematically analysed for the constraints and facilitators for responding to racism in everyday contexts. As constraints against speaking up, participants offered 'social expectations to fit in', 'fear of provoking aggression and conflict', assessments of 'the type of relationship', whether they 'could make a difference' and the 'type of racism'. As a facilitator for speaking up, participants reported they were confident in challenging erroneous statements when they felt well informed and authoritative about the facts. The research suggests that everyday antiracism requires a preparedness to deal with possible discomfort and 'bad feeling' which participants reported avoiding. The paper concludes with suggestions for stimulating critical thinking and intergroup dialogue in relation to everyday antiracism. Copyright © 2011 John Wiley & Sons, Ltd.

Key words: racism; antiracism; Indigenous Australians

INTRODUCTION

Racial discrimination and negative attitudes towards Indigenous Australians remain prevalent throughout the Australian community (Paradies, Harris, & Anderson, 2008; Pedersen, Beven, Walker, & Griffiths, 2004; Pedersen, Dudgeon, Watt, & Griffiths, 2006). Dunn, Forrest, Pe-Pua, Hynes, and Maeder-Han (2009) report that 63% of Indigenous Australians experience name-calling, ridicule and abuse on a daily basis. The Indigenous participants in Mellor's (2003) study frequently experienced a range of racist behaviours on public transport, in shops, at schools and social venues. The racism included verbal

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abuse, racist jokes, avoidance and being denied entry to venues on the basis of their Aboriginality.

Racism can take many forms, including individual racism, institutional or structural racism, and cultural racism (Pedersen, Clarke, Dudgeon, & Griffiths, 2005), and may potentially be challenged on all these fronts (Pedersen & Barlow, 2008). Everyday racism, or 'racial micro aggressions' (Sue, Lin, Torino, Capodilupo, & Rivera, 2009) are mundane or common everyday acts, including speech, through which people express racism (Dunn *et al.*, 2009). Ngarritjan Kessaris (2006, p. 347) argues that such everyday racism is maintained through the social interactions of non-Indigenous Australians:

> *Munungu* (White people) racism in Australia commonly occurs as normal, shared social activity amongst ordinary, decent *Munungu* folk, and it is covert and linked to colonial beliefs and practices. In this context, *Munungu* are coopted by their own society to oppress others, particularly *Blekbala* (Indigenous people).

In these everyday conversations, non-Indigenous Australians routinely use discourses about Indigenous Australians to justify racial oppression and inequality (Ngarritjan Kessaris, 2006; Riggs & Augoustinos, 2005). For example, such discourses often construct Indigenous peoples as 'primitive', and attribute issues like health problems to a 'failure to adapt' to the dominant culture. Such constructions legitimize current inequalities by 'blaming the victims' while evading any responsibility for Indigenous peoples' disadvantage on the part of non-Indigenous Australians (Augoustinos, Tuffin, & Rapley, 1999). These discourses are couched in terms of liberal 'egalitarian' tropes that position the speaker as rational, fair-minded and non-prejudiced (Augoustinos & Every, 2007; Augoustinos, Tuffin, & Sale, 1999). These, as well as lexical strategies like 'I'm not racist but. . .', allow the speaker to express racist views and simultaneously deny that these views are racist. Both racism towards Indigenous Australians and, importantly, its denial, are thus reproduced in everyday contexts by ordinary members of the majority group (Augoustinos & Every, 2007).

Other parties to conversations are coopted into co-constructing this racism where racism is used to create group cohesion and identity and gain status and personal popularity. Examples include entertaining friends with 'amusing' anecdotes and jokes or telling exaggeratedly racist stories to shock the audience or to demonstrate freedom from the constraints of political correctness (Condor, 2006; Guerin, 2003). Where the expression of openly racist views has become taboo, racist jokes are used to 'say the unsayable', and permit those involved to deny any racist intent with the disclaimer that they are 'just joking' (Billig, 2001).

There is a growing body of international literature on antiracism education and other antiracist strategies, including work in Aotearoa/New Zealand (Liu & Mills, 2006), the United States (Johnson, Antle, & Barbee, 2009) and Australia (e.g. Fozdar, Wilding, & Hawkins, 2008; Hollinsworth, 2006; Paradies, 2005). There is also growing theoretical and research interest in countering everyday racism with what has been called everyday antiracism, for example the work of Durrheim and colleagues in South Africa (Barnes, Palmary, & Durrheim, 2001; Durrheim & Dixon, 2005) and Guerin (2005) in Aotearoa/ New Zealand and Australia.

However, challenging everyday racism is complicated because it is seen to disrupt the flow of conversation, cause offence and result in loss of face for the challenger (Condor, 2006; Guerin, 2003). van Dijk (1992) and Augoustinos and Every (2007) find that because the denial of racism is such a prevalent feature of contemporary racist discourse, accusations of racism attract greater social censure than the racist talk itself. Indeed, in

some communities non-Indigenous people who show support for Indigenous Australians have been ostracised and even threatened with violence (Ngarritjan Kessaris, 2006).

This research suggests that antiracism is met with considerable resistance in everyday situations, and that this resistance plays a powerful role in co-opting people into silence. The authors of this paper are interested in this resistance, what it is, when it occurs, and what effects it has on people's willingness to 'speak out' against everyday racism in interpersonal contexts.

To begin to explore how people practice, or do not practice, everyday antiracism, the first author interviewed twelve university psychology students who had recently completed an Indigenous studies course (a 13-week program of study) and asked them what constrained and what facilitated responding to racism in everyday conversations. While this study was not an evaluation of the course as a whole, this group of students was selected because, having been exposed to Indigenous content for 13 weeks, we were interested to see if possessing such knowledge enabled them to challenge racist talk in everyday social contexts. In this respect, this study extends previous work on the effect of factual information on reducing prejudice against Indigenous Australians (e.g. Pedersen & Barlow, 2008). While Pederson and Barlow measured prejudice and false beliefs in the classroom immediately after the completion of a block of lectures and tutorials with Indigenous content, we were interested in seeing what happened when students encountered racism beyond the classroom, in their everyday social contexts.

METHOD

Data collection

Participants.   Fliers and emails were sent to all 180 of the first year university psychology students who had completed a compulsory Indigenous studies course two months previously. This course aims to develop understanding about Australian Indigenous culture in the past and present, the history of colonization, how government policies and relations with the wider community impact upon Indigenous Australians, issues such as racism and unearned privilege, the contemporary Indigenous context, myths and stereotypes about Indigenous Australians, and the potential role of psychology in redressing Indigenous disadvantage (Ranzijn, McConnochie, Day, Nolan, & Wharton, 2008).

Twelve people responded to the invitation and took part, ten females and two males. Three of the participants were high school leavers, while the remainder were aged from 20 to 60. There was a greater representation of mature-aged students in this study (three quarters) than the proportion in the total class, in which about 80 per cent of the students were high school leavers. The greater willingness of mature aged students to participate may indicate a greater level of confidence with speaking about these matters, or it may indicate a more developed commitment to helping to reduce racism. Therefore, there are many reasons that this sample is unlikely to be representative of the experiences of the broader population, a point that we will return to in the conclusion. There were four participants with non-Anglo-Australian backgrounds and no participants with Indigenous Australian backgrounds. The researcher (the first author) was a female mature age student of fifty-one years from an Anglo-Australian ethnic background, who undertook this research as part of her Honours program. Pseudonyms are used in this paper to ensure the participants' anonymity.

Design.   As the research questions involve understanding what takes place within a particular context, in this case a social and interpersonal context, a qualitative design was used (Lyons & Coyle, 2007). Semi-structured interviews were used in order to better facilitate an open discussion on a topic which can elicit shame, guilt and socially desirable responses (Lyons & Coyle, 2007).

Procedure.   Face to face interviews were undertaken over a three-week period, beginning eight weeks after the completion of the Indigenous Studies course. Each participant was interviewed only once. The interviews took place on the university campus in a designated interview room with only the participant and the researcher present. The interview schedule included questions such as: What are your experiences of everyday racism and their contexts? How do you respond to these discourses? Do you challenge them and in what situations? What prevents you from challenging such discourses? Do you feel adequately equipped to challenge such discourses? However, the exact wording and order of the questions varied between interviews, depending on what the interviewee was saying. The interviews took between twenty minutes and an hour to complete, with an average duration of thirty minutes. Interviews were recorded using a digital voice recorder and then transcribed for analysis.

Data analysis

The transcripts were subjected to thematic analysis. Braun and Clarke (2006) define thematic analysis as a method to identify, analyse and report patterns (themes) within the given data. This involves examining the entire data set in order to identify repeated patterns of meaning.

Thus, the transcribed data were coded by the first author according to types of responses in order to identify themes and issues. Responses that were not relevant to the research topic (for instance, general observations about taking the course) were not coded (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Codes in relation to experiences of and responses to racist discourses included: often hearing; going along with; not saying anything; challenging; wanting to challenge but: lacking confidence, feeling fear, or feeling inhibited. Next, the codes were grouped into broader themes and the related coded data extracts were organized within these themes. Themes included, for example, not challenging racist discourses because of fear of creating conflict, not being able to make a difference, and the desire to fit in with social expectations. The criterion used to classify a theme was the prevalence of a particular response. Prevalence in this sense refers to how often a response was mentioned (that is, by how many participants) and also how a response illuminated important aspects of challenging everyday racism. The significance and implications of the themes were then interpreted with reference to previous research and theory (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section firstly examines interviewees' experiences of everyday racism. Secondly, it explores how interviewees responded to this racism. We examine everyday antiracism in terms of what constrains 'speaking out' and what facilitates it. This ordering of themes does not reflect frequency of responses but is arranged to flow logically from the experiences of everyday racism to identifying constraints and facilitators.

Everyday racism – Ubiquity and normalization

In keeping with previous literature (Essed, 1991; Ngarritjan Kessaris, 2006; Wetherell & Potter, 1992), a recurring theme of these interviews was the normalization of racist discourses about Indigenous Australians in the everyday life of the participants. All of the participants had heard racist discourses about Indigenous Australians in the form of disparaging comments, names and racist jokes. They reported often hearing the claim that Indigenous Australians received unfair entitlements, which was found in previous research to be widespread in the community (Pedersen *et al.*, 2006).

As Jenny reports in response to a question about whether she had witnessed people expressing racist views:

> Yes...I think that's just part of everyday life.

And Julia:

> I think most people [had experiences like that] these days. . . in the form of jokes. . . or even. . . media discourses.

Even Hannah, who immigrated with her family to Australia only three years prior, is familiar with the claim that Indigenous people receive special entitlements:

> Some people believe that Indigenous people have more income from Centrelink [government social service organization] and they have more prosperities and stuff.

These discourses are heard during the participants' early years, within their family, among friends and at school. Cheryl, a forty-year-old mature age student remembers:

> Growing up it was just a part of life, that is the way they were spoken about. . .. As a kid we did have taunts and say those things. I always felt uncomfortable to hear the word 'boong', which was very common when I was growing up, and 'abo' was another one.

The unhedged, overt use of names and attributions based on people's skin colour might be termed 'old-fashioned' racism, however, our interviews, together with the research of McDermott (2008) and Paradies and Cunningham (2009), suggests that 'old-fashioned' is misleading as these types of discourses are still used today. Lisa, who graduated from high school in the previous year, recalls:

> My grandpa actually used to. . . scare us when we were little kids saying 'the Aboriginal man will come and get you if you don't eat your dinner.'

This normalization and the ubiquity of such everyday racist discourses enables them to become 'invisible' to non-Indigenous Australians (Ngarritjan Kessaris, 2006). As Ngarritjan Kessaris (2006) suggests, and the above observations illustrate, everyday racism plays an integral role in non-Indigenous social conversations and relationships. The role of racism and antiracism in social relationships was also the primary constraint on speaking out, as the next section illustrates.

Everyday antiracism – Constraints

In this section, we explore the challenges facing participants in speaking out against everyday racism: fitting in with social expectations, the possibility of aggression and

violence, responses from family and friends, the likelihood of making a difference, and the form that racism takes (e.g. jokes).

Fitting in with social expectations.   The responses reported here reveal that the possibility of jeopardising social relationships inhibits the challenging of racist comments in the course of conversation, as suggested by Condor (2006) and Guerin (2003). Participants said that they disliked racism, but in order to fit in responded either by 'going along with it', or with silence.

Sophie says:

> Back then [before the Indigenous studies course] I didn't participate in it, depending on the level of the joke. ... That was it; I didn't say anything about it.

Jenny, a mature age student who grew up when the White Australia Policy was current says:

> . . . like if somebody tells a funny joke and it's racist you laugh. You might think oh that's awful, but you still laugh.

As Matt expresses:

> I guess you be quiet and go along with things. It is kind of sad to look back and think 'why didn't I challenge it?' But when you are in that situation you make a decision to either speak up or not speak up and I guess back then, you don't because you want to fit in; but it is really kind of selfish, isn't it? It puts you in an uncomfortable position.

When Nicole experienced racist talk among her young male friends, she says that:

> You laugh along with it, because that is what you do.

As suggested by Condor (2006), these responses reveal how the individuals in a group can participate in the construction of racist discourses by going along with it and not challenging it. Racism becomes a co-construction in a group context.

Fear of provoking aggression and conflict.   As also documented by Ngarritjan Kessaris (2006), van Dijk (1992), Condor (2006) and Guerin (2003), participants reported that they did not challenge racism because it may provoke anything from 'bad feeling' to aggression. Megan acknowledges a perception of the threat of danger that can attend attempts to challenge racist discourses in interpersonal contexts:

> I am not usually wanting to rock the boat and usually the people who are very racist are very angry and I prefer not to stir them up.

Julia agrees:

> . . . it would probably cause more of an argument than anything.

Stuart, a mature age student who had previously worked with Indigenous Australians and reported having many Indigenous Australian friends, emphasized the pressure not to create conflict in interpersonal contexts with his response:

> Within the general public I would be quite happy to speak out. But if I was at a coffee shop with a group of friends or at a table with my family. . . (I have four brothers and they rate from being very intolerant to moderately intolerant) I would generally just bite my tongue to keep the peace.

Kennedy and Pronin (2008) suggest that conflict arises when people see another person (a person making a racist comment, or a person challenging a racist comment) as biased,

and themselves as objective. In this situation, people are more likely to respond with a competitive and conflict escalating approach. However, as noted in the introduction, avoiding conflict can become another way in which non-Indigenous Australians justify avoiding challenging racism, unless they are able to do so without 'causing offence'. Whilst Pedersen *et al.* (2005) and Kennedy and Pronin (2008) make the point that challenging racism must be framed in particular, non-threatening ways, at the same time this can lead to a situation in which non-Indigenous Australians are once again focusing on how to feel 'comfortable'. We consider the implications of both these positions for antiracism further in the Conclusion to this paper.

Assessing the relationship: Family and friends. When deciding on how to respond to racism, participants also considered who they were talking to, that is, the type of relationship they had with the people making racist comments. The issue of social tension, as discussed above, was often paramount in these types of considerations. In Sophie's view:

> It is hard around friends because standing up on a racial issue is attacking them.

For Brenda, a mature age student in her forties:

> . . . it depends on the relationship with that person... if it was a friend... probably some of my family but not all, ...I probably only see some of my uncles and aunties once a year so. . . I'd probably just avoid the conversation [with them] if I could.

Cheryl recounts her difficulties with challenging racism in family relationships, and considers the ways it impacts on the way others see her in the family as a possible constraint:

> My sister is another one. . . .she quite often says [about] the way that we are recognising or acknowledging land [acknowledging traditional owners], that she really does not agree with that. I think 'if I could just tell you why, I could make you understand' but I don't feel comfortable doing that for some reason. I am not sure why. I don't think I care that they would shoot me down, or it could be that I just don't want to come across as the martyr.

Megan, a mature age student, also reports:

> . . . at Easter time I was sitting down at the table with my relatives and they all knew that I had Aboriginal friends, and one person brought up something about Aboriginal people, and it was one of the myths about them being lazy. And the next thing, the whole table was speaking about it and I sat there and had this little window of opportunity (with my family, I always challenge them) but this day I sat there and just thought 'do I do this today?' because I knew if I did. . .the next hour I would be arguing this point. And I'm having a really nice lunch and if I let it go in 5 minutes they would forget about it and be talking about something else. So that day I chose not to say anything.

This last comment again illustrates that one of the constraints to challenging everyday racism is the wish to not 'spoil the party', while at the same time illustrating that challenging racism can be perceived as a burden which even highly motivated people may not take up all the time.

Assessing the situation – Making a difference. Another social circumstance that inhibited people from speaking out was their assessments of the likelihood of their comments making a difference. As also noted by Curry-Stevens (2007), some participants felt that the beliefs of others presented a brick wall and adjusted their responses accordingly, such as Julia:

Now I still hear it and nowadays I either don't participate or sometimes I'll try and put in a little correction if it's a false belief. . .but it doesn't often get you anywhere

And Jenny:

[I challenge false beliefs] a little bit but not in depth... especially from my age group being an older person. . .I was born when the White Australia policy was still in action so my cultural educational period was different say from younger people and so my cohorts do carry a lot of beliefs about Indigenous people and [have] not necessarily had direct experience with them. . .. and so it can be very difficult to raise a subject that. . .they don't want to hear a different side about, something that challenges their beliefs.

Jenny's comments contextualize the racist views of her age group within the normalization of racism in public life in their 'cultural educational period'. As Pedersen and Barlow (2008) point out, it is difficult to change people's attitudes when their daily lives are informed by such negative messages. Jenny appeared to use their reluctance to 'hear a different side' as an excuse to avoid challenging them, except for a 'little bit'. As Julia mentioned in the excerpt above, she did at times correct people's false beliefs. The use of this strategy is discussed below.

Form of racism – Jokes.   The form racism takes is also a factor in whether, and how, people respond. In the next section, we explore how participants felt confident in challenging non-factual claims about Indigenous Australians. However, despite the participants' confidence in evidence-based challenges, they reported that they were unlikely to challenge other forms of everyday racism, particularly jokes. In Sophie's view:

. . . jokes is a hard one to deal with because it is always seen to be part of fun, so pointing it out, you are suddenly part of the 'fun police' and so it is hard to bring it up.

In addition to spoiling the fun, which has also been reported in van Dijk (1992), challenging jokes has the added complexity of it being easy for the joke-teller to deny racist intent (Billig, 2001).

Everyday antiracism – Facilitators

The factor that was reported by most of the participants as making a positive difference in speaking out against everyday racism was having evidence to counter erroneous beliefs. As they were students who had completed an Indigenous Studies course, they had recently been exposed to a new way of seeing Australian history and current society. Some found that this information gave them 'evidence' and therefore greater confidence to deal with a particular type of everyday racism – the expression of false beliefs. At this point it is important to distinguish between false beliefs – those which are factually incorrect – and 'special treatment'. Special treatment is commonly perceived as giving unfair advantages to Indigenous people or other groups whereas they are designed to promote equity, to lift disadvantaged groups up to the same level as the dominant cultural group (Hill & Augoustinos, 2001).

The interviewees' quotes below are responses to questions: 'did the course help you challenge racism?' and 'did you learn/would you like to learn skills for challenging racism?'

Stuart articulated how having accurate information had helped him to challenge false beliefs:

Absolutely. One of the big things of the course is that I will no longer sit there and listen to that sort of stuff without saying anything and only just this weekend I saw my brother and sister-in-law and we discussed the concept of race. I feel as though I can speak up, whereas before the course I would feel as though it was wrong but that I could not intervene. This course gives me a level of authority to go back in to my own work area as I do have a basis, as you do get challenged. I find that now because I do speak up, particularly with friends or family, they may say 'what basis do you have for saying that?' and I do have a basis now.

Kerrie was motivated:

With the tools I have been given in Indigenous Studies I can challenge it by speaking out generally, mainly within my friendship group... Now by talking about it a lot, we are educating each other and getting ideas off each other to be more culturally sound so therefore we are challenging racism because we are spreading the word.

Matt also felt inspired after the course:

Definitely. Because it has raised my awareness of the whole thing, instead of sitting back and listening to these things you can try and convert the ignorant.

Hannah had challenged false beliefs since completing the course:

Some people believe that Indigenous people have more income from Centrelink and they have more prosperities and stuff. In the text book I read that this was not true at all and that is very interesting because I hear these comments very often. So then I started to tell my friends and family members that this is not true and [I told them that] some people deliberately say these things just to make a very negative attitude towards Indigenous people.

Brenda also challenged false beliefs after the course:

Yep, I am saying stuff that now I know differently – about them getting money – and I've said, 'well actually they don't get anything different to anyone else'... I react differently now.

The responses of the participants suggest that information about Indigenous Australians gained during the course helped them to speak out when they felt they had counter-evidence for some claims made about Indigenous Australians. Being able to challenge non-factual information about Indigenous Australians is worthwhile, as demonstrated by Pedersen *et al.* (2005). Unfortunately, as the previous section on constraints illustrates, the course material seemed less useful in countering other forms of racist discourses, such as jokes. Whilst having information to counter non-factual information led to participants feeling more confident to challenge this form of racism, and in some cases to actually do so, this still occurred in contexts in which they felt comfortable. We discuss this issue of comfort further in the Conclusion.

CONCLUSION

This paper explored constraints and facilitators in relation to speaking out against racism in everyday conversations. As constraints against speaking up, participants offered 'social expectations to fit in', 'fear of provoking aggression and conflict', assessments of 'the type of relationship', whether they 'could make a difference' and the 'type of racism'. As a facilitator for speaking up, participants reported they were confident in challenging non-factual statements where they felt well informed and authoritative about the facts.

Throughout the interviews, participants indicated their awareness that 'speaking out' in interpersonal contexts can create conflict, and indicated that generally they would not challenge racism because of the disruption to social occasions and social relations. In this concluding section, we want to take up this issue of conflict and explore intergroup dialogue as a possible way forward.

Intergroup dialogue is a 'form of democratic practice, engagement, problem solving, and education involving face-to-face, focussed, facilitated, and confidential discussions occurring over time between two or more groups of people defined by their different social identities' (Schoem, Hurtado, Sevig, Chester, & Sumida, 2001, p. 6). Intergroup dialogue has been shown to have a positive effect on decreasing prejudice amongst university students (Zuniga, Williams, & Berger, 2005).

Although everyday interpersonal interactions are not a formalized space like a facilitated intergroup dialogue, there are a number of principles used in intergroup dialogue that we think can usefully be translated into the interpersonal context of everyday antiracism. Intergroup dialogue suggests that ultimately successful antiracism is not only about challenging and confronting, but a critical reflection on one's own interpretive framework, and a movement towards a productive dialogue. Here, we briefly discuss the idea of a dialogic everyday antiracism as: a long term process; requiring self reflection on interpretive frameworks; building new relationships built on engagement and understanding; a focus on social structures rather than the personal; and engaging with conflict. These principles have been adapted from the work of Schoem *et al.* (2001).

Intergroup dialogue is designed to be an ongoing process, with most dialogues running for several sessions. This reflects the perspective that not much change occurs in a single dialogue. Nor does everything rest on just one conversation. Seeing dialogic everyday antiracism as a process, rather than a one-off achievement, could usefully alleviate some of the pressure of responding to racism. At the same time it gives people the possibility of looking at each opportunity to practice everyday antiracism as one option in an ongoing dialogue, as a space to create a foundation for other dialogues of antiracism.

Dialogic everyday antiracism might also be usefully approached as a way to build different forms of relationships, rather than those that are unaware and embedded in racist practices as highlighted in the Ngarritjan Kessaris (2006) quote at the beginning of this paper. These new relationships have as their basis a 'thoughtful engagement', which seeks broader and deeper understandings of both sides. This approach of inquiry and curiosity acknowledges that antiracism, as well as racism, stems from a particular interpretive framework, and that understanding comes from engaging with another's point of view, rather than only 'challenging' or 'speaking out'. The self-reflective aspect of dialogic everyday racism also enables the challenger to assess their own motives for speaking out (for instance, to make themselves feel better by 'telling off' a perceived racist) and may reduce the hectoring or lecturing that antiracist dialogue could risk becoming.

Also of use may be the way in which intergroup dialogue begins: with an acknowledgement of one's social group identity and that group's role in the social context, affirming individuality within and across these groups, and recognizing commonalities across groups. Beginning with these kinds of acknowledgements allows for a focus on structural social conditions, rather than only personal and intrapsychic conditions. Racism is often perceived as part of someone's personality or attitudes, and this focus – as Kennedy and Pronin (2008) point out – can lead to an escalating cycle of perceived bias and conflict. An interest in social structures, individuality and commonality may be a useful starting point for everyday dialogues about racism since it enables the

challenger to see the perceived racist as being constrained by their own social context, which in turn may reduce the challenger's level of anger or annoyance towards the 'racist', negative emotions which are more likely to reinforce existing racist beliefs rather than reduce them.

Finally, intergroup dialogue accepts and works with conflict, rather than seeking to avoid the expression of contradictory and discomforting view points. As noted throughout our paper, a significant issue preventing non-Indigenous Australians from taking on racism is a desire to feel more comfortable about speaking out. However, as we have highlighted, this desire to feel comfortable can be yet another way in which non-Indigenous Australians avoid challenging racism. It seems there is an impasse here. Whilst the participants in the present study suggested that conversational skills training would be useful, and other research on conflict management such as that of Kennedy and Pronin (2008) and Czopp, Monteith, and Mark (2006) concur, there is unlikely to be a situation in which there will not be a level of discomfort, given the embedded power and dominance that supports racism in the interactions between non-Indigenous Australians. The ironic challenge, therefore, becomes that most people will only speak out where they feel comfortable, however, challenging racism is unlikely ever to be completely comfortable. Even the most skilful interlocutor will not be able to avoid this.

A possible approach, rather than aiming to eliminate discomfort, may be to develop strategies to engage with discomfort, in both the challenger and the person(s) being challenged. Role plays conducted in a safe space within a classroom or other formal/informal context may be a good way to practice an intergroup dialogue which includes conflicting view points, perhaps based on the kinds of scenarios mentioned by the participants in this study.

Our results demonstrate the need to provide factual information which may enable students to at least challenge non-factual statements. Universities can also provide settings to practice intergroup dialogue: critical thinking, reflection, inquiry and engagement. In non-academic settings, the Southern Poverty Law Centre's (2005) on-line book 'Responding to Everyday Bigotry. Speak Up!' may be a useful way of stimulating critical thinking in the wider public. Their book gathers personal accounts of everyday racism and antiracism, and uses these to provide possible discourses that can be used in responding to racism amongst one's family and friends, workplace and in public. For example, their participants suggest that in responding to racism within one's family, one might appeal to family ties, or to family traditions of non-discrimination.

A limitation of this study is the use of a select group of participants, self-selected volunteer psychology university students who had recently undertaken a compulsory course on Indigenous studies. The student participants were asked questions about their everyday racism experiences by a fellow student who had also undertaken the course. Further research is needed with non-Indigenous Australians who have not completed an Indigenous studies course. However, if this particular group of students, with all their background preparation in issues relating to Indigenous Australians, experiences such difficulties in responding to racism in everyday social contexts, it seems to us likely that those who have not had such an education would have even greater difficulties.

Racism is still rife, and there is an increasing body of literature about antiracism strategies (e.g. Boatright-Horowitz, 2005; Paradies, 2005), the majority of them focusing on formal training in cultural awareness, cultural knowledge or similar areas. We have argued that responding to racism in everyday social interactions represents an important site for antiracism that may be facilitated by using the principles of intergroup dialogue.

Given that not only the participants in this study, but each one of us has experienced the struggle over whether or not to speak out, and the mixed relief and shame when one does not, exploring this complex area of interaction represents an important site for further research.

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