Racist Name Calling and Developing Anti-Racist

Initiatives in Youth Work

Research Paper in Ethnic Relations No.14

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Abstract

This paper examines the manifestation of white racist talk in multi-racial
adolescent peer interactions. The primary focus is the phenomenon of racist
name calling. Through documenting a series of name calling incidents an
analysis is made of the context within which 'race' is evoked. I show that
while there exists a significant area of experience shared by both black and
white youth that denies the significance of race or colour, racist discourses
continually break through in the form of name calling.

I argue that in order to develop anti-racist initiatives which go beyond simply
prohibiting this form of abuse, one must develop a sensitive appreciation of the
way notions of 'race' enter into the lives of young white working class
Londoners and the work these discourses perform. I argue that one must develop
anti-racist strategies which engage with racism outside of reactive incidents
where crude racist materials are used.

Anti-racist strategies must be developed which include a sensitive appreciation
of the locales where they are implemented. The aim should be to re-articulate
lived cultural practices with alternative symbolic and ideological materials.
The common sense of young whites can be built on. I suggest a two fold strategy
whereby cultural studies projects explore the meaning of 'race' in a non-
confrontational way, alongside a structure in which manifestations of racist
abuse are dealt with collectively.

Contents:

Outbreaks into action must be considered the results of both the internal
potential and a set of eliciting factors in the environment.
                              Adorno, T. et al 1950, 972

Yeah, I mean... I did call him a 'paki' but it don't mean nothin I was just
mucking about. I've got nothing against him we were just mucking about.
                         Terry (13 years old, male, white English)

This paper emerges from the frustration I felt as a youth worker in attempting
to implement anti-racist initiatives within a community of white working class
young people. Inside the youth club the use of racist language was prohibited.
As practitioners we simply offered a series of proscriptions and did little to
further our understanding of how racism entered into the social worlds of white
young people. It was this gap between 'the rules' and young white's lived
experience that ultimately limited any attempt to engage with those who used
racist abuse.

Racist name calling was either dismissed as 'just another example of kids
larking about', or simply condemned as being wrong. Both responses were equally
redundant. I argue that in order to proceed towards intervention one must seek
to understand the contexts which produce and articulate the 'voices of racism'.
It is simply not enough to produce 'new evidence' of racist practice (Kelly,
1987) what is needed is a deconstruction of the way in which racist language is
used and the work it performs within communities of young people.

Critical analysis seems to be haunted by the paradox that the 'idea of race' has
social consequence but it is ultimately an analytical paper tiger (Miles, 1984a;
1984b; 1988 and 1989). The problem which has preoccupied many writers has been
how to establish the epistemological validity and causal power of racialisation
and race formation without endorsing everyday ideological discourse (Keith,
forthcoming). It is within this context that the concepts of 'racial
categorisation' and 'racialisation' have been used to refer to what Miles (1989)
calls "those instances where social relations between people have been
structured by the signification of human biological characteristics in such a
way as to define and construct differentiated social collectivities" (p.75). In
in what follows I describe how notions of race enter into the social life of a
community of working class residents and their children in an area of South
London. My basic assertion is that incidents of racist name calling amongst
white young people should be situated within specific class locations and
understood in terms of the developments that are occurring within the social
world which they inherit and transform. Racism, as I have commented elsewhere,
"cannot be reduced to a past ideological inheritance: neither can it be
understood as a strictly contemporary development. Race is invented and re-
invented in complicated and diverse ways" (Solomos, and Back, 1990).

The discussion consists of three main sections. The first of these describes
the nature of adolescent social relations within a South London neighbourhood
(section 1-3). In the second I recount and analyse four incidents of racist
name calling that took place within a youth club setting in this area (section
4). I end the paper with some comments on how critical initiatives on racist
name calling may be more effectively developed.

1.   White Youth and the Analysis of 'Popular' Racism

During the 1970's two contradictory strands of thought referring to white youth
and race were offered. Firstly, writers interested in race identities,
particularly Peter Weinreich (1975a, 1975b, 1979), view white youth as being
'more stable' than other ethnic groups. Although Weinreich also refers to the
'identity crisis' experienced by white adolescents all of his evidence portrays
white youth as experiencing low levels of identity conflict with parents and

other whites (Weinreich, 1979:105). The assumption here is that being white is less 'problematic' because white children do not suffer from the 'confusion' and 'crisis' experienced when placed 'between two cultures'. This cultural/ personality essentialism erects a model of white identity which contrasts the victim/ problem discursive couplet applied to black youth within the race literature (Gilroy, 1987). Secondly, during this period discussions of racism were dominated by the importance of neo-fascist youth groups and extreme expressions of racist rhetoric and action (Daniel, and McGuire, 1972; Billig, 1978; Cashmore, 1984; Pearson, 1976; Murdock, and Troyna, 1981). One of the central themes of this work was that the material position of white working class youth, in the context of a period of economic decline, leads them into racist and exclusionary political (Husbands, 1983) and cultural (Cohen, 1972) responses. David Marsland (1978:96) crudely sums up:

White youth is neither educated nor guided firmly or effectively towards racial equality, by parents or teachers. (Nor even, alas, by teachers with deep commitments to a more abstract notion of equality.) Instead, they are merely threatened with high- mindedness and law, and [ultimately as a response to this failure] recruited into racialist parties.

Together these two literatures produce a confused set of messages. On the one hand white youth are represented as stable and unproblematic but on the other they are seen to present the problem of being monolithically racist. Racist youth manifest a social problem but white young people are characterised as having fewer 'problems' than their 'ethnic' peers.

An important exception within the literature that was produced on racism during this time is the work conducted by Annie Phizacklea and Robert Miles (1980) within a working class area of London. The white workers within this study exhibited two contradictory forms of political consciousness. They expressed a restricted form of radical class consciousness which coexisted with a racist perspective that 'explained' their material position as a result of the presence and privileged treatment of black workers. Phizacklea and Miles showed that the racism of the majority of their white respondents was piecemeal. A racist 'explanation' of their material plight was one of a number of other explanations which contradicted the scapegoating of fellow black workers. Their white respondents exhibited an "inchoate political consciousness" which with regard to 'race' was full of contradictions (Phizacklea, and Miles, 1980:176). This kind of approach has been developed in much of the subsequent literature that has emerged relating to the racial consciousness of white people.

During the past five years new perspectives on the analysis of racist ideas have been developed within socio-linguistics (van Dijk, 1984; 1987), social psychology (Billig, 1982; 1986; 1988; Billig et al, 1988; Cochrane, and Billig, 1984; Wetherall, and Potter, 1986) and ethnography. In much of this work discourse analysis has been used to disentangle the dynamic processes involved in the transmission of racist ideas. The starting point is that crude racist discourse is one of a number of race repertoires available to white people. This approach allows the grammar of racism to be deconstructed. For example van Dijk (1984:65) shows that contradictory themes in individual accounts are often introduced with a connecting "but". Terry quoted 'at the beginning of this paper is engaged in this process. He admits to using racist language (ie. the word 'paki') but then maintains that the meaning of this term is emptied out in the context of play (ie. I was only mucking about"). According to Billig (1982; 1986) it is necessary to understand this process in its rhetorical context. He suggests that the 'two handedness' of racist responses is a way of deflecting criticism.

Additionally, there exists a growing ethnographic record documenting the relationship between white youth and notions of race (Hewitt, 1986; Jones, 1988). While racism appears to affect the most intimate relationships in multi-

racial peer groups (Hewitt, 1986:236; Jones, 1988:465; Cashmore, 1987:79-95) it
is far from passively received. As Jones points out in his study of white
inhabitation of black youth cultural forms in Birmingham:

Above all they [his respondents] demonstrate that one of the most powerful ways
in which whites learn about racial structuring of social situations is via the
lived contradictions through which they are forced to go. (Jones, 1988:465)

It is clear in these recent studies that the social semantics of 'race' are far
from simple or unitary. I will argue that 'whiteness' and 'race' are social
constructions fraught with ambiguity and that white young people resist,
transmit and navigate these notions in the contexts of their peer groups.

2.   The Ethnographic context - Rivertown

What follows is drawn from ethnographic work conducted in a South London
neighbourhood where I was employed as a youth worker for two years and which I
will refer to as Rivertown. Rivertown is a large post-war council estate
located next to the river Thames within the northern half of a South London
borough. The research, which was started in 1985, has a broad focus but
concentrates on how young people from various backgrounds experience growing up
in multi-racial contexts. During this time I collected ethnographic data on 99
informants who visited the youth club and whose ages ranged from 12-25. I
conducted individual interviews both taped and untaped in combination with group
discussions. All of the young people I spoke to were born in South London or
had lived there for more than five years. The ethnic origin of these young
people is as follows: 10 Afro-Caribbean informants, (6 M, 4 F); 11 Vietnamese
(7 M, 4 F); 15 mixed parentage Afro- Caribbean/ white English (6 M, 9 F); 4
Turkish/ Greek Cypriot(4 F); 56 white English (26 M, 30 F); 3 N/S. Irish (2 M,
1 F). In addition to this I also carried out participant observation within
adolescent peer groups in a variety of forms. Many of the incidents that I
describe in what follows were recorded from participant observation within
Rivertown Youth Club.

Within local folk lore Rivertown is referred to as a white stronghold. As a
young black person from a neighbouring area described:

I just don't go down them areas. It's not safe for someone like me.

Qu. What do you mean?

A black man like me don't go to them areas, I don't know what it is I just don't
feel safe.

The first time I visited the Rivertown Youth Centre I noticed the letters N.F.
which had been sprayed on the wall next to the entrance. The graffiti had faded
and was barely visible and in a sense this was an apt metaphor for the decline
of extreme right wing political support in the area. In the early eighties a
gang of young white men, who were purported to be active National Front members,
had dominated the Youth Club. By the mid eighties this group no longer used the
club and although the user population was predominantly white it was by no means
exclusively the domain of white young men.

Rivertown was built in 1966 by the Greater London Council. At the time it
constituted a large prestige development catering for 3,000 residents and a
model of slum redevelopment. The most important factor affecting the
composition of Rivertown was the policy of tenancy allocation adopted by the
G.L.C. The letting procedure was officially known as 'selective tenancy',
although the residents of the estate referred to it incisively as 'vetting'.
This process resulted in the bringing together of a public housing aristocracy
of relatively affluent - almost totally white - working class residents.

However, with changes in tenancy allocation the Rivertown landscape was transformed and with the transference of the management of the estate to the local borough, tenancies were allocated according to need. Subsequently, populations of Afro-Caribbean, West Africans, Turkish and Greek Cypriots and, most recently, Vietnamese refugees have been settled there. As late as the 1981 census 77% of the estate were born in England and only 8.6% of residents were from the New Commonwealth. This figure does not include black British residents but it does point to the relatively small population of black people settled on this estate. In other districts of this London borough 40-50% of the resident populations are of African and Afro-Caribbean origin.

There exists a division between the initial residents (who are commonly referred to as 'estate people') and the more recent settlers. Many of the 'estate people' harbour resentment towards the 'newcomers' who are blamed for the decline of the estate. The Vietnamese refugees have come in for particularly bitter treatment in this regard. Opposition by established residents to the settlement of ethnic minority tenants manifests itself in a racialised form (Miles, 1989). The cultural and racial 'difference' of new tenants is used to explain the falling standards of housing provision and the decline of general living conditions. The logic of this discourse revolves around the assertion that the degeneration of public housing is explained in terms of the 'lower' standards of hygiene and 'lack of responsibility' of ethnic minority tenants. Racist formulae of this type are widely circulated and can be heard in almost every context where established residents congregate. The development of this ideological response is linked to an engagement with their economic circumstances (Phizacklea, and Miles, 1980; Cashmore, 1986). As Hall states "racism represents the attempt ideologically to construct those conditions, contradictions and problems in such a way that they can be dealt with and deflected at the same moment" (Hall, 1978:35).

The central concern of this section is to map out the youthful constituency in which young people operate and the extent to which these 'adult' definitions impose on, or affect their social practices. I portray a cultural space in which 'race' is temporarily and superficially banished as a meaningful conception (2). It must be remembered that this process takes place within a world where common sense is forged within the numerical predominance of 'white' young people. However, there exists no simple notion of community/ race closure with which the voice of racism is usually associated and that is found within the accounts of many of their parents. In fact, the young people themselves would often say that it was "out of order" to talk about people's colour.

The vernacular of these young people draws on a wide variety of linguistic sources. These include ethnically un-marked forms of black language, for example: "na mean", "rasta", "facety" (meaning cheeky), "safe" (meaning good, sound, o.k., certain), "innit?" (is it not?), tief (thief), "cuss" (to insult), "shame", "bad" (meaning good), "wicked", "nish" (nothing). These terms are not utilised in strategic switches, as in the case of the previous accounts of code switching (Hewitt, 1986). Neither are they conscious white inhabitation of black forms, rather the use of these terms exemplifies a process where lexical items filter through into a shared speech community.

These forms are available in the immediate social milieu. 'Black voices' are heard on street corners in the play ground and are recognised at every public registration of the black presence within this area. The lack of marked annunciation strips these words of their heritage and gives them a new place within a specific location. Rather than linguistic mixing (Rampton, 1989:19) this language re-working takes on syncretic expression (Rampton, 1989:18) and the resulting vernacular should not be conceptualized as a mixed bag with discrete parts, but as a collection of linguistic forms articulated by particular speakers which exhibits such a great degree of fit that they must be considered as one form. It is not a matter of mixing heritages but making a new

heritage from a collection of signifiers appropriated and stripped of their meaning. This is close to what Hewitt (1989:139) has termed a "community English".

In addition to these black speech forms lexical items from white working class vernacular are used, phrases like: "get out of town" (meaning don't be ridiculous), "mucker" (friend), "geezer" (man), "na" (no) and items of non standard grammar e.g. the use of "like" as an emphasising tag. The points of inheritance may be from the parents, they may be located at school or they may emerge from neighbourhood extra kin relations. What is significant is that these voices are not automatically deemed the logical point of identification. Rather they are one of many resources available for play and youthful linguistic assemblage.

In addition to these briefly outlined linguistic processes there exists a highly diverse mixture of popular cultural forms. Particularly significant is the adoption of Afro-American and Afro-Caribbean genres of popular music:
Afro-Caribbean Reggae, Sound systems, Rub a Dub and M.C.'ing.
Afro-American Soul, Hip Hop & Rap, Acid House, House.
These forms have been given new meaning as they take their place within the context of contemporary London in general and within this neighbourhood in particular.

My point is that within this constituency there exists a process of re-working and re-assembling of charged symbols. Rodney, a white working class boy who lives in the area, represents this process. Here is an extract from my field note book which documented our first meeting.

Rodney is 15 years old. He lives in D. Tower with his mother and father who are both English. He has blonde hair and is about 5ft 2in. We met over the pool table and exchanged conversations in between shots. Initially we talked about music. He was listening to a Saxon Studio tape, and we discussed reggae, M.C.ing and Rub a Dub. I asked him why he liked the music and he said that he didn't know. Papa Levi was the M.C. on this particular cut and I asked him if he understood the lyrics. He said he could. I mentioned that I liked rub a dub and Rodney looked at me curiously and laughed. Rodney was wearing a Millwall Football Club T. shirt, on it was a Lion in Rambo like battle dress holding a rifle standing in front of a Union Jack flag. Above this figure Millwall was proclaimed. I asked him about the shirt and we started to talk about football. He said he liked Millwall because they were 'harder' than other teams. The conversation ended quickly because Mark (a friend of Rodney's) arrived.

The lasting impression I have of our first meeting was one of complete confusion. I couldn't understand how Rodney could on the one hand like and admire music that is invested with black political messages and on the other allied himself to the discourses on nation that were evoked by the images of militant and racially exclusive nationalism he also sponsored. While these symbols may appear in opposition to one another for Rodney there was/ is no contradiction. The important point to grasp is that the subjectivities of these young people are multiple (Henriques, et al, 1984) and reflect the diversity of ideologies and discourses which they both consume and engage with. These symbolic exchanges are rich and ambiguous, forging an arena where new claims are made on cultural symbols.

My concern here is to try and present and describe a domain within which 'race' is temporarily deconstructed. This space is defined by patterns of interaction and the sharing of cultural and linguistic materials. What this process allows is the provision of linguistic materials which are equally accessible to 'black' and 'white' alike. So in this space there exists no simple process where the 'bleaching' of difference occurs under the hegemony of white predominance; rather a subtle process exists in which cultural heritages are appropriated and

placed together with a degree of fit, their meanings modified so that they take on a new life. This new life exhibits a territory that is temporarily - and perhaps superficially - 'colour blind'. As Teresa, age 17, puts it:

"Colour don't come into it we are all the same round here". (3)

While this 'communality claim' will be questioned in what follows, I maintain that there is a significant interactional level of reality where the salience of 'race' is denied. It is not as van Dijk (1984:117; 1987:347) has stated that this denial is simply a form of impression management which aims to avoid a negative evaluation of the speaker by the hearer. This interpretation is associated with a process where respondents deny their own prejudices, and in doing so deny that there is anything psychologically or morally wrong with themselves (Myrdal, 1944:37; Billig, 1988; Potter and Wetherall, 1988). In the Rivertown situation patterns of multi-racial friendship are to some degree facilitated by this de-racialised discourse. As Billig et al (1988:110) has incisively stated: "the recognition of the social inappropriateness of prejudice, are not conversational gambits devoid of ideological contents". The nature of the ideological dilemma (Billig, et al, 1988) which young white people face is that de-racialised discourse and racist ideology can appear semantically and grammatically within the same sentence. This is more than simply a clash of competing and contradictory ideas in common sense, for it has direct implications on the social relationships that exist within multi-racial peer groups. Young people's claim that prejudice is inappropriate is not simply a rhetorical move. Rather, it is related to the lived relationships and experience of those who participate in multi-racial peer groups. The disruptive potential of racism threatens the terms of these relationships. This de-racialised discourse has to be understood in context of the work it performs ie. the facilitation of inter-racial contact and communication.

3.   Interaction and ritualised duelling play: 'cussing', 'wind ups' and banter

The interactions that take place between young people within the youth club and in the surrounding area exhibit a dynamic quality. It is not simply a matter of the existence of a volatile multi-racial social structure because the young people themselves are constantly negotiating the terms of this structure. Play is instrumental in this process, for it is in play that young people are involved in their passage through youth and social learning. Young people 'learn to belong' but they are also involved in an active process which probes the meaning of belonging.

i)   'Cussing' as a form of verbal play

In Bateson's essay on a "Theory of Play and Fantasy" he outlines the processes wherein meaning is transformed by metacommunication in play. He uses material gathered from observation of animal behaviour to show how an act of aggression - like a bite - can have its meaning emptied in the course of play:

Not only does the playful nip not denote what would be denoted by the bite for which it stands, but, in addition, the bite itself is fictional. (Bateson, 1978:155)

While the material he draws on is from observation of otter behaviour he uses this as a vehicle to develop a general theory of play. In the process of play, practices and actions which are invested with non play meanings are subverted and inverted by collusion. Through playing, a negotiated alteration of meaning takes place which dislocates practice from what it stands for in wider usage (Hewitt, 1988a).

This perspective on play is applicable to the kinds of exchanges which occur in this adolescent community. I use the term 'duelling play' to describe the kinds of playful interactions that take place within this context. This is referred to in the peer group as 'cussing someone out' (which has overtones of an insult) and 'wind ups' (which is the process of getting another person angry then ridiculing their anger by exposing its illegitimacy - "I was only joking"...."only winding you up"). In operating this kind of play the sensitive line of significance is policed. On one side of this line is the meaning which the word/ exchange stands for in wider usage, on the other is a meaningless denotation guaranteed in play. The tension in this kind of early and late adolescent play is centred around the issue of whether these practises mean what they stand for or not.

Duelling play is a process whereby young people test out the boundaries of interpersonal relationships (ie. how far play can be extended and pushed). These exchanges have greater significance than just play for play's sake. They not only mark the boundaries of tolerance within friendships but they also mark those who are included in the peer group - those who are 'alright' - and those who are excluded - 'wallies'. In the following extract a play exchange is recounted between two girls who are in early adolescence (they are both 11). Prior to this exchange these two girls had been involved in a game of 'back slap and chase' (this is a descriptive term not one that the young people use themselves) within the youth club. The game involves slapping an opponent on the back then running off, the recipient then tries to return the blow. This particular evening six young people were involved divided into two teams.

Extract 1. Kelly and Mary

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Kelly:  Did Scott get you? (to Mary)
Mary:  Na.  'e's too slow
(both girls laugh)
Kelly: But you can't get away from me though, I'm way too fast for you.  I could
get you any time you ain't that fast.
Mary:  Yeah but at least I'm not slow in the head.
Kelly:  You calling me stupid.
Mary:  Na but you can be a bit of a div sometimes.
Kelly:  You can't talk.
Mary:  You can't talk (both girls laugh)
Kelly:  You idiot! (still laughing)
Mary:  Don't cuss me I ain't done nothin to you - divy.
(The tone of the exchange gets more intense)
Kelly:  Oh, shut up you wally (said loudly in a confrontational manner).
Mary:  Don't tell me to shut up.  I'll say what I like if I want to.
Kelly:  Well don't say it around me then.
Mary:  You're...
Kelly:  Shut up you wally (Kelly turns and walks away.)
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This extract is an example of 'cussing'. It emerges out of a particular play context (ie. the aftermath of a back slap and chase game) and during this exchange a number of claims and counter claims are being made about athletic and intellectual prowess. Kelly starts this by stating she is athletically superior to Mary (lines 4-5). Mary then counters this by 'putting down' Kelly's intellectual ability. However, during this banter (lines 6-10) the exchange remains at the level of play, the meanings invested in these prowess claims are not escalated to insults. This metacommunication breaks down when Kelly calls Mary "You idiot!" (line 11), challenging Mary's intellect/ not being divy/ not being "slow in the head (line 6). Mary then accuses Kelly of 'cussing' and cusses her back calling her a 'div'. From here the exchange is escalated into open confrontation and the play state is abandoned. Kelly tells Mary to "shut up" (line 14) and accuses her of being a 'wally'. Mary protests the right to criticise: "I'll say what I like if I want to" (line 15). This resource is often employed in 'cussing' exchanges. It is used to legitimise any comment that may be critical or adversarial. Kelly recognises that Mary can say what she likes but she qualifies this by abandoning the exchange - "don't say it around me then" (line 16). This marks the total breakdown of the play state and Kelly turns and walks away.

The significance of this exchange is that the boundaries of what can be accepted in friendship are being marked. Up until line 11 both girls have colluded to empty out the meaning of the claim that either one is stupid. But at a crucial point, (line 11) this agreement breaks down, throwing the face to face status of their relationship into crisis. While their friendship does not breakdown irreparably, the boundaries of what can be agreed within this friendship are established.

ii)   Wind ups, masculinity and status

While cussing is equally apparent within male and female friendship/ peers groups, the phenomenon I have referred to as 'wind ups' is predominantly a masculine preoccupation, usually associated with public gaining and losing of face. Often what is communicated in a 'wind up' is the status of individuals vis a vis the peer group. In the following extract two boys are involved in a 'wind up'. Bob, who is 16 and of white English parentage, is the main actor. Robert, who is 15 and of Irish parentage, is the 'wind up subject'. Tony, 16 of Afro Caribbean and white English parentage, is the observer/ foil.

Extract 2. Teaspoon wind up.

Bob: 'ere Tony 'ave you seen the size of his hands (pointing at Roberts hands
while stirring his tea).
Tony: Yeah come here Robert let's 'ave a look at those hands.
(Robert walks over)
(Bob puts his hand on the table for comparison with Robert)
Bob: Put your hand down there next to mine (looks at Robert).
(Robert looks at Bob and puts his hand down)
(Bob takes the spoon out of his tea and puts it on the back of Roberts hand)
Robert: Agh - you wanker!
(Bob and Robert laugh)
Bob: What a wally
(all three boys laugh)

There are two things I want to point out here. Firstly, the Tea spoon wind up initiates Tony into a group where 'wind ups' are not taken as insults. Tony agrees to enter a set of relations where a wind up does not stand for conflict (Davis, 1982:63-6; Kochman, 1972). The play state is maintained. Although insults are hurled by Robert (line 10) and Bob (line 12) their meanings are empty. Secondly, within this interaction status positions are defined. Bob and Tony establish themselves as the agents, who act upon Bob - the subject - who is shamed. Bob is included in the peer group but at the same time relegated to a secondary status (at least in the context of the interaction). This process is constantly being repeated within these peer settings. The actors may be agents of 'wind ups' in one situation but relegated to subjects in others. It is in this way that peer status is contested and continuously modified.

While presenting these practices in their youthful manifestation they are by no means confined to these settings. In fact, the practice of 'wind ups' must be located within male working class occupational culture in general (Roy, 1953 and 1960; Vaught and Smith, 1980; Willis, 1977). The cultural/ occupational practices found in the world of work are echoed in male adolescent peer groups. This was made clear to me in a conversation I had with Darren, a 17 year old bricklaying apprentice in the youth club.

Extract 3. Darren, apprenticeships, 'wind ups' and working.

Les: What are you doing now?
Darren: Well me and Rodders we're on the building now ain't we.
Les: Do you like it?
Darren: Yeah, it's alright innit Rodders (Looks over at Rodney playing pool,
Rodney looks back). Bricklaying, innit alright. Yeah we 'ave a great ...it's
alright you know what I mean. The blokes we work with...they are...na
mean...everyone gets the piss taken out of them but they are alright. It's like
when you are new they suss you out...make you look stupid. There was this one
geezer today and they told him to go down to the stores and get a bag of 'glass
nails' and he fell for it - you know what I mean. They are always laughing and
joking with you but that's the way it is.
Les: Do they do the same to you?
Darren: Me, not really. I remember once they sent me to the stores for a
'rubber hammer' (laugh). And another time, they wanted me to get inside a piece
of scaffold pole to measure its diameter. I mean there ain't no way anybody is
going to get inside a scaffold pole is there (laugh). Another time they tried
to get me to go down to the stores to get some holes for a bag of nuts....all
stupid things like that. But if you don't know what kind of things come out of
the stores how are you going to know any better.
Les: Do they get you sweeping up and things like that?
Darren: Na, they have someone else do that because I am a bricklayer - that's
what they 've got me there for and that is what I am going to learn.

There are striking similarities between the content of occupational 'wind ups' and those practised in male adolescent peer groups. Darren says that "every one gets the piss taken out of them" (line 6-9) implying that these practices define a notion of group, a group that 'plays'. Again there is a suggestion that this is a rite of passage "when you are new they suss you out....make you look stupid" (line 8-9). But in the process of defining/ inclusion there is also the attribution of status (Cohen, 1986:56-7). Through various 'wind ups' (glass nail, rubber hammer, scaffold pole, holes for a bag of nuts) the apprentices are made "to look stupid" conferring on them a non-adult/ junior/ subordinate status. Interestingly Darren both recognises this and resists it with regard to himself (line 21-22) but accepts its wider legitimacy.

In this section I have shown that duelling play - as characterised here - can dramatise notions of status at a variety of levels. Firstly, 'cussing' can plot the boundaries of familiarity and friendliness within male and female peer groups. Secondly, that duelling play in the form of 'wind ups' takes on predominantly masculine expressions. This may be explained and echoed in the kind of transitions young men are in the process of navigating. This passage is constituted by the occupational cultures of working class male life. The result is an apprenticeship in both inclusion and status.

4.   Racist name calling and conflict situations

All of the incidents that will be discussed here took place in the Rivertown Youth Club context. Racist name calling was a regular occurrence. Over a six month period I recorded 32 incidents where racist discourses were used in 'cussing' or 'wind up' exchanges. I am sure that there were many more cases that were not reported. These incidents would usually occur in cycles. Sometimes two weeks would pass without event and then three or four episodes would happen during one session.

The youth club followed the policy directive of the Inner London Education Authority (the wages of the workers were paid by I.L.E.A.) which explicitly stated an anti-racist stance prohibiting racist name calling in I.L.E.A. institutions. This policy was made known to the users of the club and the Senior Youth Worker drew up a list of rules which were given to each member. Racist and sexist name calling was placed second behind drug use on the list of prohibited activities. The club rules, circulated in September 1985, stated:

Derogatory terms, ie. racist and sexist comments, or foul language amongst members or directed at staff will not be tolerated. If a member continues to disregard this rule then action will be taken which could result in banning.

This kind of proscriptive statement took no account of the lived cultures of the young people who were subject to these rules. The practices of 'cussing' and 'wind up's' were simply labelled as 'bad' behaviour which lead to ideologically unacceptable expressions of racism and sexism. This response, based on reaction and suppression, was also suggested by the National Union of Teachers in their booklet, Combating Racism in Schools (1981). As I will show proscriptive anti-racism was fraught with difficulties when it came to dealing with incidents in the youth club. I want to make it clear that I still support the view that rules are necessary to state openly that racist abuse is unacceptable. However, the central point I stress is that proscription alone is not enough.

The use of racist ideas in conflict situations was closely linked with the cultural practices I have outlined in the previous section. Indeed the full meaning of these episodes can only be understood in the context of: firstly, the existence of a youth culture where the salience of race is denied; and secondly, the existence of 'duelling play' in the form of cussing and wind ups. I have chosen four incidents to try and exemplify the complex set of processes

which are in operation within these conflict situations. While quantitative evidence of the frequency of this kind of abuse exists (see Troyna and Hatcher, forthcoming; Kelly, 1987) there is little known about the micro-dynamics of these encounters. All of the 32 incidents I recorded had unique characteristics. Here I refer to only four examples in order to try and get some purchase on the kinds of social forces that are in play within particular episodes of racist name calling.

4.1   Incident A. Cussing and Racist Name calling

This exchange took place during a general youth club night. It involved John, Bob, Dave, Debbie and myself. John (15 years old) and Debbie (16 years old) are brother and sister. Their mother is white English and their father is of Jamaican origin. Bob (15 years old) is white English and Dave (15 years old) is white Irish. All the young people involved in this exchange are from Rivertown estate. My role in this interaction was as a youth worker. I am white. In many ways I was responsible for maintaining the rules of the Centre. The incident begins with a comment about Dave's hair which had been cut that day.

Extract 4. John, Debbie, Bob and Dave.

Bob: Alright Dave, who did it to you?
Dave: Leave it out Bob.
John: Don't mock the disabled.
Dave walks away leaving Bob and John playing pool.
Bob: He ain't right with that hair.
John: I don't know what you're saying with a face like that (referring to Bob's skin complexion because he was suffering from quite acute acne)
Bob walked around the pool table and whispered something.
John stopped playing pool, looked at Bob.
John: What did you say?
John swung the pool cue at Bob.
Les grabbed the pool cue and took it away from him. John then picked up a chair, Les stopped John from hitting Bob with the chair. Bob moved back, away from the pool table. There was more shouting. John's sister - Debbie -and another black girl ran over to the scuffle. Les was holding John stopping the fight.
John: You come near me and I'll kill you. Don't say anything about my sister or my colour right?
Bob: I didn 't say anything about your sister.
Les: I think you've said enough Bob.
John's sister and her friend took John over into the corner of the youth club. Bob stood alone by the space invader machine in the club. Telephone rang Les went into the office to answer the call.
John: (Shouting at Bob from the corner of the club) You wait until my brother hears about this, nobody says anything about my colour right.
Bob: I never said nothing about your colour.
John struggles to get away from Debbie.
Debbie: Leave it John he's not worth it.
Les comes out of the office and walks over to Bob.
Les: Bob what did you say?
Bob: I never said nothing all I said was 'passage to India'.
Les: That kind of comment will not be tolerated here Bob.
Bob: So it is alright for him to cuss me out but I'm not allowed to cuss him back.
Les: No it's not alright but....
John walks across the youth club floor looking at Bob and Les. He approaches pointing at Bob.
John: I'm going now and when I come back I'm going to be with my brother.
John storms out of the youth club.
Debbie: (Following John down the floor of the club followed by her friend) Don't you call my brother a 'paki'.
Bob: I didn 't call him a 'paki'.
Debbie: Yes you did, don't deny it.
Bob: But he's not a 'paki' is he?
Debbie looked back didn't say anything and walked over to the canteen, where she sat down with her friend.
There was a pause Bob stood alone by the space invader machine. The head of centre walked up to Les and suggested that he talk to Bob about the incident.
Les: (walks over to Bob) Bob do you want to come in the office?
Bob looks back says nothing and reluctantly follows Les into the office.
Les: What you said was wrong you shouldn't bring John's colour into any argument.
Bob: But it is alright for him to say anything about my skin (his voice is trembling with intensity).
Les: No it is not alright for him to say anything about your skin, but you've got to understand that it is not the same and that you are putting him down because he's a different colour. You are judging him on his skin colour alone.
Bob: Alright, I'm sorry about that. I shouldn't have said anything about his colour but I was just try to get him back for cussing me.

This extract starts with both Bob and John 'winding up' Dave about his new hair cut (line 1-5). Dave leaves (line 4) and then John 'cusses' Bob about his complexion. Bob's comment "passage to India" implies that John is of Asian origin calling into play the racist construction - 'paki'. Here Bob is trying to 'cuss' John back by using racist discourse and to hurt him as he has been hurt. After the initial moment of confrontation the youth club divided into two camps - black and white! John, Debbie and her friend went to a corner of the youth club to calm John down. However, Bob stood alone close to the Space Invader machine and didn't talk to anyone until I approached him.

In this case, Bob is using heavily loaded racist materials in order to hurt John. Although Bob did not call John 'paki' he evokes a discourse that constructs the British Asian population as a stigmatised group (Cohen, 1988b:23). John resists this process. He says pointedly - "don't say anything about my sister or my colour" (line 19-20). Here he is not simply rejecting the applicability of the term 'paki' but he is also rejecting Bob's right to give his colour meaning within racist discourse.

Twice in the course of this exchange Bob complains that it is unfair that John can 'cuss' him but he can't cuss him back (Line 37-38 & 61). Bob protested later on in the evening that it was "alright for John to say anything about me but if I say anything about him I am automatically in the wrong". The important thing to grasp here is that Bob is using racist resources in a context where meaning and significance are often inverted and transformed ie. in duelling play. Bob repeatedly denies the repercussions of what he said: "I never said nothing about your colour"(line 30); "I never said nothing" (line 35); "I didn't call him a paki"(line 47). But perhaps the most revealing exchange is between line 45 and 50. Debbie opens the exchange (line 45) and warns Bob not to call her brother a 'paki'. She does not challenge Bob's use of colour terms of reference - as in John's case - but confines her criticism to the application of this stigmatised term to John. Bob immediately denies calling him the name (line 47). Debbie repeats the accusation. Then Bob accepts and qualifies the accusation with "but he's not a 'paki' is he?". Here Bob is justifying the 'cuss' because it uses illegitimate terms of reference. He does not reject the use of a racist construction (i.e. the term 'paki') but simply maintains - in his defence - that in this case the term is not applicable.

There is a two handedness in the style of Bob's discourse. The content of the cuss is guaranteed in racist ideas which are intended to hurt 'but' its meaning is denied because these terms of reference are illegitimate in John's case. This is the same style of discourse which is operated in both cussing and wind up's. The important difference is that in using racist materials Bob has also violated peer common sense (ie. 'it is out of order to cuss someone's colour') and this results in Bob being ostracised by all of the club members (Line 25).

My intervention shows the limitations of a proscriptive strategy. Initially I acted as a controlling force preventing retribution (lines 13-18). Then, after the incident is recounted by Bob (line 34), I reprimanded him in line with the policy of the Centre (line 36 & 59). In the dialogue that developed I simply state that comments about colour are illegitimate (line 59-66). All of my statements are located within a 'politics of skin complexion' ie. it is unjust to judge people on 'skin colour'. The meaning of race in its wider political sense and the racist constructions used are not touched upon. There are two important failings here: firstly, there is no understanding of the social process within which this incident took place ie. a cussing exchange; and secondly, the racist linguistic materials that were being used are not identified. I am not suggesting that if I had been able to work through this deconstruction Bob's use of racist forms would have been "punctured by a superior logic" on the spot (Cohen, 1988a), but had I been able to identify the constitutive racism invoked in this incident Bob may have entered into a

critical dialogue. Instead, manifesto anti-racism was offered and although Bob left the conversation accepting 'the rules' he was also grudging, ambivalent and confused.

4.2   Incident B. The Chip Shop Mob and Picture Drawing

In the previous example a white youth uses a phrase which evokes a racist construction in order to hurt a black young man in a cussing exchange. The following exchange shows the variety of images of black people which are held by a young white man and represented in a series of sketches. The point I want to stress is that this white youth possesses a number of repertoires which symbolise black people.

This incident involved a group of young men who were members of a gang known as the 'Chip Shop Mob'. These young men are between the age of 19 - 21 and were former users of the club facilities until they were banned from involvement. Most of these boys were, at this point, still excluded from entry. Danny (18, white English parents) and Jack (19, white English parents) were both members of 'the Mob' but they were no longer banned from participation in the club. Lloyd (17, his mother is white English and his father is Barbadian) was not fully involved in 'the Mob's' activities but he was known to be associated with them.

This particular evening Danny, Jack and Lloyd collected in the lower part of the club located close to the canteen. I sat with them for about twenty minutes and during that time a succession of 'wind ups' took place along with general banter. It was at this point Danny, who was particularly good at drawing, started to sketch a figure of a 'skinhead'. I was called away to work with a group of younger kids in the upper area of the club. For the rest of the evening I glanced over at this group of boys but was unable to record any of the exchanges that took place. After the session finished I chatted with a white youth worker who was working in the canteen and she informed me that Jack was 'winding Lloyd up' over something but she was not sure what was the issue. However, she noticed that all three boys left together.

On clearing up I picked up Danny's sketches, these included drawings of prize fighters and the drawing reproduced in figure 1. Also other sketches were scattered around the table including the one reproduced in figure 2. I asked the youth worker who had drawn this and she told me that Jack had drawn it when he was trying to 'wind Lloyd up'.

Danny's drawing represents three 'urban stylers'. Significantly, all these examples of working class experience are male. Far left is a skinhead fully equipped with 'bovver boots', Swastika/ National Front tattoos, shaved head, ripped jeans. Next to the 'Skin' is a dreadlocked 'Rasta'. Lastly, a posturing 'Teddy Boy' with elbows quarter bent, wrists pointing down to the floor. His hair is styled in a D.A., sponsoring a drape jacket, boot lace neck tie, 'brothel creeper' shoes and he is smoking a cigarette. Danny also started to draw a third picture of a 'punk' but this was unfinished and I have not included it here. These three characters are examples of masculine 'urban cool' idealised in caricature.

The images do not reflect Danny's experiences or describe his peers. But they do give some insight into the many ways in which race is symbolised. The two white characters - Skin and Ted - have a different posture within this drawing. The Skin is more threatening. His shoulders are pushed back, his neck lunged forward and he brandishes a hammer ready to strike out at the reader. The Ted's pose is less confrontational. He is smoking a cigarette, hands hanging down surveying the scene. This is interesting when one thinks of the histories of Ted and Skin movements which attacked and opposed the black presence in Britain with equal vehemence (Hebdige, 1979:44-45).

The 'Rasta' is the only black figure. He is represented alongside and not
necessarily in confrontation with the two white stylers positioned on either
side of him. While the skinhead figure is threatening and aggressive his
bravado is not directed towards the Rasta. The Rasta is portrayed here as a
prestigious masculine figure. On other occasions within the youth club I have
heard white young men talking about 'dreads' in a positive way and expressing
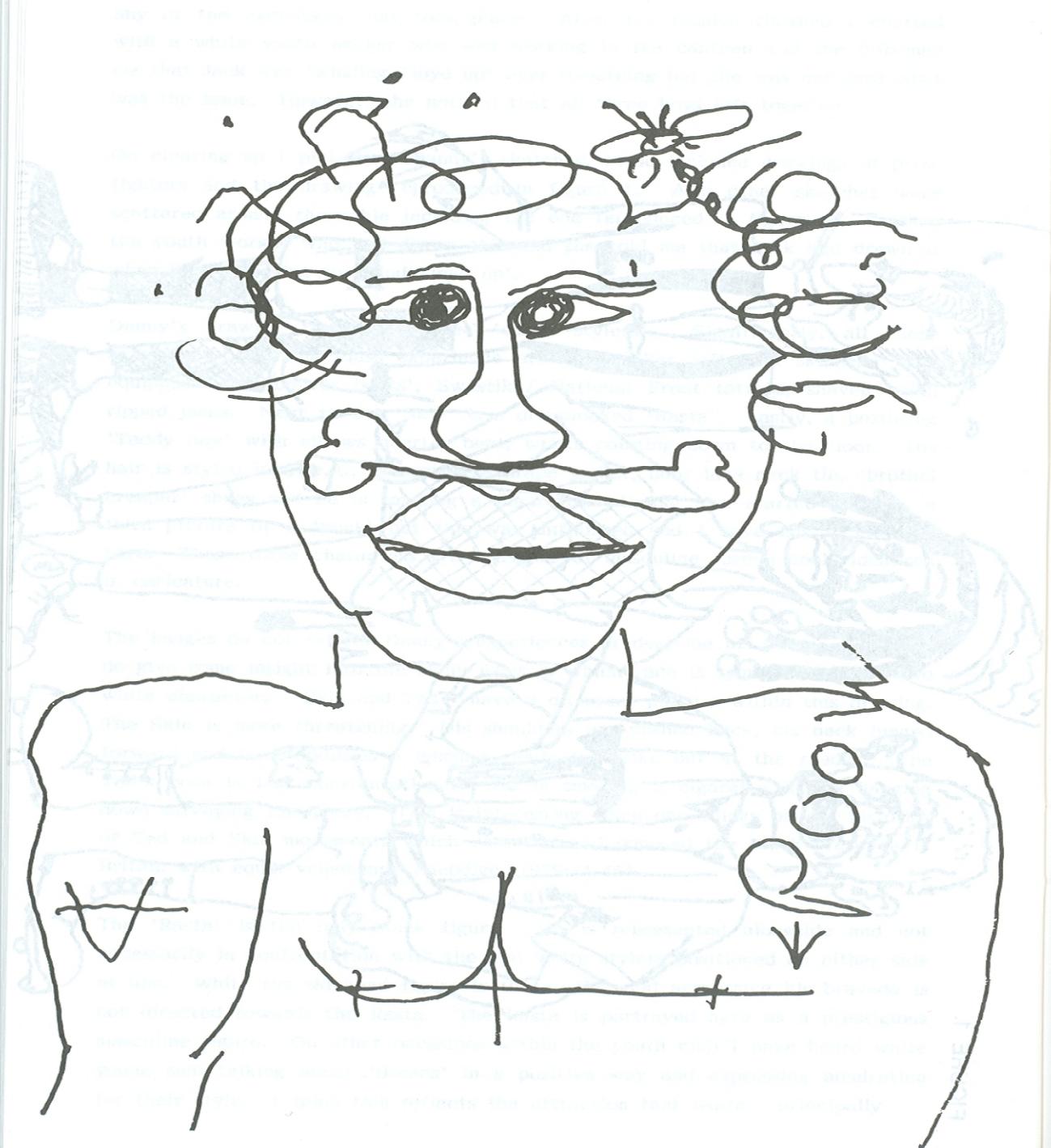admiration for their style. I think this reflects the attraction that white -
principally

Fig 1

FIGURE 1.

Fig 2

FIGURE 2.

male - youths feel towards black cultural modes of resistance. These attitudes towards black culture do not prohibit the use of racist representations. Young whites can switch from apparently positive evaluations of black images into the most crass statements of racist rhetoric. In figure 2. we see such a switch.

Jack, who on other occasions has talked about the 'coolness' of rasta, draws a picture which includes a full armoury of racist symbols. Lloyd is represented as a 'smelly, thick lipped and bone nosed primitive'. It is a live racist construct actualised within a 'play' context ie. the wind up. The raw materials of this 'wind up' bear the hall marks of the heavy historical load which constructs African peoples, from the slave ships to the tarzan movies, as 'primitive animals'. This unabashed racist image is unbelievable even to Jack. Sartre (1965) in his classic essay on anti-semitism showed that extreme forms of bigotry are not even believed by the bigot. What has to be comprehended is the effects these images have on those who are objects of this kind of abuse.

I think this incident shows that white young people can both hold attitudes which construct 'blackness' in a prestigious way while at the same time use crude forms of racist imagery (4). Multiple attitudes towards black people and culture are held by white youth (Cochrane and Billig, 1984) and utilised strategically against black peers.

4.3   Incident C. The interrogation and rebutting of racist name calling

In the two incidents discussed above racist materials were used in context of 'cussing' and 'wind up' exchanges to hurt black peers or lower their status. The incident reported here is an example where racially marked name calling is re-butted by a female peer group. The young people involved include: Esmin, 15, of Turkish Cypriot parents; Sarah, 15, Greek Cypriot parents; Martin, 15, white English parents; Lynne, 15, white English parents. The girls gathered outside the youth club talking, laughing and sharing stories. Martin walked towards the entrance. I sat close to the door of the youth club and watched the following exchange unfold.

Extract 5. Sarah, Esmin, Lynne and Martin

Esmin: (Looks at Martin approaching) Look what the cats dragged in.
Martin: Shut up you paki!
Esmin: Fuck off you racist bastard.
Martin walks in the building and pays his money. Esmin, Lynne and Sarah follow
Martin into the building.
Esmin: Who do you think you are?
Sarah: Yeah, Martin, Martin.
Martin walks quickly upstairs.
Sarah: (follows him upstairs then shouts upstairs) You white shit!
Lynne: (following Sarah) Martin... white trash!

Here Martin uses the term 'paki' (line 3) and applies it to Esmin. This name is illegitimate within the common-sense terms of this female peer group. Esmin rejects this racist definition (line 4). Then all three girls mobilise against Martin as they bring into play counter insults (line 8-12). These three girls mobilise against an accusation made by a boy. Here gender intersects race constructing an alternative plan of alliance. Esmin, Lynne, and Sarah, are united in the opposition to Martin's racist 'cuss'. Interestingly, all three girls make reference to Martin's whiteness. These names are not guaranteed in racist discourse and cannot hurt in the same way.

It is tempting to read, and applaud, this extract as an example of 'folk' anti-racist praxis. However, there are two important factors to take into consideration. Firstly, 'paki' is recognised within this adolescent meaning system to be illegitimate when applied to people of Greek or Turkish Cypriot origin. When I challenged Martin about the use of this term he dismissed my criticism by saying "well, she isn't a paki is she!" There is an important contradiction between stating 'it don't mean nothing' and choosing a 'cuss' which is particularly designed to hurt. His only defence in this situation is to say 'but she is not...'. This repeats the strategy adopted by Bob in incident A. Secondly, this kind of mobilisation is not always applied to people outside of friendship groups. I have recorded other accounts where at least two of the young women reported here made derogatory comments about Vietnamese (within the area) and Afro-Caribbeans (from outside the area) utilising racist constructions. On one occasion I was sitting in Lynne's house watching television with her family and an image of a young black man walking across a street in South London appeared on the screen. She immediately launched into a tirade about 'lazy', 'ignorant', 'violent', 'criminal' black people who lived in other areas.

Young white women expressed contradictory attitudes towards black people in the same way as their male peers. However, the young women did not use racist insults as often. Over the six month period where I monitored racist abuse in the club 24 out of the 32 incidents were perpetrated by males. This can be explained in terms of the prevalence of 'wind up' play amongst young men. These masculine cultural practices acted as the platform on which racist name calling was utilised. It would also be true to say that there were more young men using the youth club. This may have contributed to the higher frequency of racist name calling amongst males. But the youth club was not exclusively a masculine domain. It was clear that ritualised expressions of masculinity, in the form of the type of play I have described, were directly connected with the operation of racist language.

4.4   Incident D.   The Disco

This incident took place during a disco that was held within the Club. It was an extra-ordinary night and during the course of the evening an explosion of race consciousness was triggered by three episodes of racist name calling. As the evening drew to a close an incident occurred around the sound system. The four boys involved this time were: John, 15 years old, from incident A; Tony, 19 year old, black British parents born in Jamaica and lives in a neighbouring estate; Alex, 15, white English and living in Rivertown (these three boys were running the sound system and John was D.J.ing); and lastly, Pigsie, 15 years old, white English boy who lives on the estate.

Extract 6. The sound system incident

John was having problems with the turntable. Alex and John were trying to fix
the hi fi. Tony was standing behind them. Pigsie walked up to the sound
system.
Pigsie: Hurry up and turn the record over you black bastard (laughing expecting
John and Alex to join in)
All four boys stop. There is a pause.
Tony: (in marked creole) Gwaan likkle yout! (stares at Pigsie)
Alex: I think you'd better go Pigsie! (Pigsie turned around and walked away
from the sound-system).
The disco ended about half an hour after this incident. Alex and John recounted
the incident to me in the office while packing the sound-system equipment away.
Alex said repeatedly that "Pigsie was out of order. It's out of order saying
anything about someone's colour". John repeated this statement. In the post
session meeting Brian - a black youth worker - reported that he had spoken to
Pigsie after the meeting and that Pigsie had said: "I'm sorry I said that. I
did n't mean anything by it. I've known John all my life, for years....it
didn't make no difference. I don't know why I said that".

Pigsie uses a racist insult in what he regards as a play context (line 4). At the very end of the evening he protested this to Brian, a black youth worker (line 18-21). So, for Pigsie the insult did not denote what it stands for in usual usage. On many other occasions within the youth club John, Pigsie and Alex have 'played with' race concepts within cussing and wind up exchanges. On one occasion the three boys took on inverted racialised roles ie. John articulated crude white racist rhetoric while Pigsie and Alex accused him of being a fascist. This phenomenon has also been reported by Roger Hewitt (1986) in his analysis of inter-racial friendship within this area. Hewitt maintains that spectacular inversions of this kind "seek to acknowledge and deal with its [racism's] undeniable presence whilst acting out the negation of its effects" (Hewitt, 1986:238). This process also operates within black peer settings. Here black speakers use racist rhetoric against peers in a context where meanings are subverted.

Pigsie maintains that 'race' is irrelevant to him in his declaration to Brian. But this attempt to subvert racist meanings by making them the subject of play is confounded because: firstly, the prevalence of racist incidents during the disco; secondly, the role Pigsie takes on is uninverted. Pigsie is white, he is using racist language but nevertheless he denies that it is meaningful. He is defining a racist position and in doing so acknowledges the presence of racist abuse within their social world. He attempts to deny the applicability of racism to his friendship with John by using abuse in this crass 'meaningless' form. Pigsie attempts to register the existence of racism but places its applicability outside of his immediate circle of friends. However, the degree of fit between Pigsie's whiteness and his use of racist language makes the altered play meaning impossible to sustain.

This exchange shows the crucial element of agreement within the process of defining play meanings. Although Pigsie was a good friend of John's he was unknown to Tony. Tony uses creole to not only check Pigsie's racist posturing but also to symbolically counter Pigsie's 'race talk' via the language of resistance. There existed no agreement to banish 'race' as a meaningful register. The historical weight of racism which such comments stand for can not be successfully subverted in this context. Significantly, John and Alex condemn Pigsie's actions as being "out of order" when reflecting on the incident (lines 13-14). In doing so they define the terms of their friendship but also repair the volatile cultural space within which their friendship exists.

Summary

In all of these incidents racist names are used by young whites despite the proscriptive rules of the Centre and the de- racialised common sense of the young people themselves. There are two important points to emphasise. Firstly, racist constructs are used as strategic resources. Young whites do not inhabit racist notions in total or unitary ways. In this sense the racial consciousness of white young people is highly fractured and ambiguous. The relationships that young whites share with their black peers are in direct opposition to the use of racist rhetoric because of the divisive potential of 'race' as a social parameter. It is in 'cussing' and 'wind up' situations where the relationship between black and white youth is most vulnerable to the use of racist materials. Any attempt to interrupt this usage must be informed by an understanding of the dynamics of these social practices. Secondly, the racial common sense of young whites exhibits a multiplicity of race symbolisms which permits positive evaluations of black people to coexist alongside crude racist imagery (Billig et al 1988). In the context of name calling this leads to the use of racist language followed by a denial that these words mean what they stand for in wider usage ie. "but it don't mean nothin..."

It is not enough to label duelling play as 'bad behaviour' and prohibit it in the hope that this will stop racist abuse. The wider functions which this play performs are important and central to the experience of young people in this area. The goal should be to re-articulate these lived practices with alternative modes of representation (Cohen, 1988a). This does not mean replacing negative stereotypes of black people with positive ones, but rather to lead young whites to "resist the captivation of any medium or message which tells them that they can become only what they already are" (Cohen, 1989:14). It is important to encourage young whites to explore their own inheritance. I am not suggesting a kind of 'psychic surgery' where racist ideas are removed by ideological incision. As I have already shown, there are elements within the experience of white youth in this adolescent community which oppose, or are at least in conflict with the use of racist language. Anti-racist strategies must make use of progressive 'folk' practices which are already in place - like the existence of a de-racialised common sense in this setting - in order to develop a grounded program for intervention.

5.   White Youth and Anti-Racist Initiatives

In order to disrupt 'racist reasoning' one must develop an understanding of and sensitivity to the environments where it is housed. When a white youth racially abuses a peer and says "but it don't mean nothin" one has to be ready with some answers showing the loaded inheritance of terms like 'paki' and primitivist images of African people. Equally, an attention to ideological inheritance alone is useless if there is no account of the social context from which racist name calling occurs. What I am suggesting is an anti-racist strategy that is sensitive to the micro-sociology of constituencies of young people and at the same time able to identify the multi-racism which constitutes the 'British way of life' (Cohen and Bains, 1988:63; Troyna and Hatcher, forthcoming).

The place of racist verbal abuse is going to take on new and justified political significance in the aftermath of the inquiry in to the murder of a Ahmed Iqbal Ullah at Burnage High School in Manchester by a 13 year old white student. Darren Coulburn after stabbing Ahmed to death boasted to fourth and fifth year students 'I have killed a Paki'. In the report Murder in the Playground (Macdonald, et al, 1989) produced by the Panel who received evidence at Burnage, there are some important criticisms of the anti-racist policy practised in the school and suggestions for future strategies. I want to end this discussion by looking at some of the lessons that can be learned from Burnage.

In the report the authors criticise what they refer to as 'moral/ symbolic anti-racism' which has "no room for issues of class, sex, age or size" (Macdonald et al, 1989:402). They argue that anti-racist programs must be sensitive to the character and the history of communities which reside in any particular locality. One curriculum innovation which the Panel identified as a good practice was the work of the Frontline Theatre Group.

Young people were recruited to take part in a play which was based on the life of Len Johnson a Manchester boxer and political campaigner. He lived from 1902 to 1974, the child of an African father and an Irish mother. The whole story was researched and written by the players, in this way the young people explored their own heritage in a non confrontational way. The Inquiry reported:

What struck us was that the students were using the play and its themes as a metaphor for their own lives and were learning about their culture, about the significance of their friendships and relationships with each other at school and at home, about their attitudes to women and about race and class. In the course of the play they unpack and lay bare the contents of a sexist and racist culture (Macdonald et al, 1989:363).

It is this kind of cultural studies approach that has been developed by Philip Cohen (1988a; 1989) at the Institute of Education in London. The strength of this strategy is that it can raise issues about racism outside of the reactive/ proscriptive situations I have described and attempted to understand in this paper. This kind of approach has a lot to offer within the youth club situation. Phil Cohen has shown how anti-racist work of this kind can be both educational and fun. Cultural studies may offer young people with alternative discourses on race but the question of how to tackle racist incidents remains unaddressed. As I have shown it is quite possible that young whites can take on board anti-racist discourse and at the same time use racist materials in other contexts.

I have stated that it is important to establish codes of behaviour or rules within the youth club with regard to verbal abuse. However, in Rivertown Youth Club there existed a gap between the rules and the young people who were forced to comply with them. I think the essential question is how to lessen that gap. The ultimate sanction for the youth workers in Riverside was to ban particular members from attending the youth club sessions. This decision was made by the youth workers. The result was that 'being banned' conferred a degree of oppositional status on the young person involved. Youth workers were sometimes seen as surrogate teachers/ social workers whose authority was to be challenged. This kind of resistance is very similar to the processes which Paul Willis (1977) has described in the school setting. Racist materials were occasionally used to offend white 'liberal' youth workers. Here the meaning of 'race' is further complicated by the nature of youth workers as agents of control.

Reflecting on these experiences it is clear that there is a need to include young people in the process of determining what kinds of behaviour are permissible ie. what is 'in order' and what is 'out of order'. In short, there has to be some form of representation where young people can take responsibility for themselves and their peers. This strategy is suggested in the Burnage Report where they advocate the setting up of student organisations in schools which are part of the overall management structure. It is important and necessary to attempt to construct comparable structures within youth clubs. It is very difficult to set up members committees but they can be viable if they are seen to be in the interests of young people.

I have shown that duelling play is an integral part of growing up in places like Rivertown. Racist material are utilised in the context of 'cussing' and 'wind-up' exchanges but they are by no means the only resources that are called upon. The point of these exchanges is to find something that will be hurtful to the subject and to establish a 'pecking order'. The issue here is how to establish these relations in a way which guarantees that serious injury does not result? An answer may be to develop a wide ranging approach to name calling in all of its forms. There exists an unevenly developed discourse where young people state that it is 'out of order' to cuss someone's colour. This phenomena could be built on and a structure developed to make those who are 'out of order' answerable. Something along the lines of a 'cussing tribunal' might easily perform this function. Here users and youth workers could meet to discuss particular incidents and implement decisions. The composition of this group should reflect the user population. In this way members would become part of the decision making process and specific incidents of name calling could be worked through. Equally, perpetrators could then be called to justify themselves. Any form of cussing which is unacceptable to the subject – including gendered forms operated against young women – could be brought before the 'court'. This forum would make dialogues possible between youth workers and members and between members. An approach of this kind would enable racist incidents to be explored alongside ideas about gender and sexism. As a result the question of 'banning' youth club users would then be placed in the hands of youth workers and members.

Young people are happy to use any resource within duelling play as long as it is effective and in doing so they can win advantage. It is quite feasible that anti-racist discourses that are introduced through cultural studies could operate in this way. In short, the common sense of young whites can be built on. It is not a matter of exorcising racism from their minds, but rather to develop those aspects of white common sense which contradict racist explanations. I am suggesting a two fold strategy whereby cultural studies projects explore the meaning of 'race' in a non confrontational way, alongside a structure in which manifestations of racist abuse are dealt with collectively.

I also foresee at least three problems with this approach. Firstly, the Youth service is chronically under resourced. In Rivertown youth work was very demanding and resulted in a high turnover of staff members. The problem was that the staff had very little time to think beyond the prospect of keeping the youth club operational on a daily basis. Therefore, this kind of approach is only possible if youth workers have the time and resources to develop and operate these initiatives.

Secondly, racist justifications may be articulated by those who are 'judging' within the 'cussing forum'. As a result black youth club members may be further exposed to racism. Youth workers need to be trained in anti-racist techniques so that this situation is guarded against. However, there may be a great deal of formative power in placing white young people in a situation where they can denounce the use of racist materials by a peer. This might have a greater impact on the perpetrator than a proscriptive sermon from a youth worker.

Thirdly, this strategy is limited because the orbit of racism is defined in terms of those who interact within the youth club setting. In Rivertown the creative cultural exchanges which I outlined in the early part of this paper do not extend to include young people of Vietnamese origin. In this respect Vietnamese youth were not part of the process of partial de-racialisation which I have attempted to described. As a result a division existed between those young people who are included within the maxim "colour don't come into it" (see page 16) and the Vietnamese. Here anti-racist initiatives must take on board these nascent cleavages developing within this adolescent community. It is vital in this situation to explore the interconnection of racisms. Although there may be some flaws within this approach it is important to think beyond simply establishing rules of behaviour for white young people and move towards a serious dialogue with them.

I have argued that racist name calling has to be understood in the context where it is expressed. Any meaningful anti-racist program within Rivertown, or places like it, must take into account the class composition, parent culture and youthful responses that are specific to this area. This kind of approach has the potential to move beyond just prohibiting manifest forms of racist language towards an engagement with the racist constructions that young white people articulate and use.

Notes:

1.   This research was undertaken as part of a doctoral dissertation. In 1988/89 I developed this material while working in combination with Barbara Tizard, Ann Phoenix and Roger Hewitt at the Institute of Education. During this period I contributed to a research project which was entitled 'Social Identities and Adolescence' that was funded by the Department of Health. I would like to acknowledge the support given by the Department of Health and to thank Barbara, Ann and Roger for their continuing advice and the time they have spent commenting on this paper. I would also like to thank the anonymous referees of this paper for their incisive observations.

2.   A number of people who read this paper prior to its publication suggested that the denial of the importance of 'race' exhibited by young people might be explained by the effect that the youth club setting has on adolescent interactions ie. "that the youth club offers a specific context for a limited deracialisation of a more usual racialised common sense". This may have been a factor. However, I feel that the processes described by Hewitt (1988b) which result in 'deconstructed ethnicities' was profoundly important inside and outside the youth club. In this sense the volatile multi-racial consensus which I refer to was not the result of an artificial setting. Rather it formed an important part of the ideological landscape in which young people live and relate to one another.

3.   This inclusive definition did not extend to the young people of Vietnamese origin in this area (Back, 1990). The young Vietnamese were excluded from the peer groups I have described and took little part in the youth club. This raises important questions relating to degree of inclusion that this particular assertion claims. Equally it creates an important additional issue when considering the plight of the Vietnamese and the way this is connected with the orbit of racism in Rivertown.

4.   Unfortunately I do not have space here to explore this issue but I have commented on it elsewhere (Back, 1990).

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