

## **INTRODUCTION TO THE SPECIAL EDITION OF PINS - CONTEMPORARY RACISM: A CRITICAL REVIEW OF SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGICAL APPROACHES.**

*Kevin Durrheim  
School of Psychology  
University of KwaZulu-Natal  
Pietermaritzburg*

During the past 25 years a number of new approaches to studying the psychology of racism have been developed. Prior to this, the main focus was on the prejudiced personality. The early literature took bearings from Allport's (1954) classic, **The nature of prejudice**, accepting that prejudice was a cognitive distortion – “a faulty generalization” – that was based on negative affect or hatred of outgroups. Following the theory of authoritarianism (Adorno et al, 1950), prejudice was understood to be a stable and general trait, grounded in the personality of the prejudiced individual.

In 1971, following political and legal change prompted by the Civil Rights Movement in the USA, Donald Kinder and David Sears (Sears & Kinder, 1971) found that their sample of Californian suburbanites supported racial equality and desegregation but at the same time opposed a black mayoral candidate. This is the first report of the duality of racial attitudes that has been widely noted since by social psychologists (see Crandall & Eshleman, 2003). Rather than racism being a stable and general trait, opposition to transformation to the racial status quo was paired with favourable racial attitudes and opposition to racial segregation (see Durrheim & Dixon, 2004).

This duality in racial attitudes signals historical change in the expression of racism. Forms of blatant, crude or old-fashioned racism that underpinned Jim Crow Racism in the USA disappeared. In the West generally social norms have changed in tandem with legal and political change (Barker, 1981; Pettigrew & Meertens, 1995; Schuman, Steeh, Bobo, & Krysan, 1997). However, the new liberalism and egalitarianism of the post World War II period has not seen the eradication of racism as a social form or set of social/health/economic relations of inequality (Pettigrew, 2004). In contrast with the attitudes of the pre-war period, almost all Americans today support racial equality and inclusion, and yet, for example, the past 30 years has seen no change in the average income and wealth of African Americans in comparison with European Americans: On average, African Americans earn approximately 60% of their white counterparts, and their wealth is a dismal 8% of whites (Oliver, 2001).

The problem we have to address then is the seeming paradox of change and stability in racism. Racism, much like the system of capitalism that Wallerstein (1991:84) described, “... requires constant inequality, [but] it also requires constant restructuring of economic processes. Hence what guarantees a particular set of hierarchical social

relations today may not work tomorrow". What we have to explain is this combination of change and stability in racism. How is it possible that racism continues unchecked while individual attitudes and social norms have been radically restructured?

In the introduction to this special edition of **PINS** I will review the attempts found in mainstream social psychology to explain this duality in racism. Later I will contrast these traditional approaches to the approaches articulated in the contributions to this special edition. I will suggest that the work represented in this volume develops a critical anti-racist tradition of scholarship in South African social psychology.

### **REPRESSION: A DYNAMIC EXPLAINING THE DUALITY OF RACIAL EXPRESSION.**

Mainstream social psychology has used the theoretical device of repression to explain the perpetuation of racism in a normative context opposed to racism. A series of distinctions have been drawn between race related expressions that are implicit or explicit, covert or overt, automatic or controlled, or surface or depth. Generally, people will display egalitarianism and racial tolerance, but repressed residues of intolerance will surface under certain conditions. In an early demonstration of this duality the Donnersteins (Donnerstein & Donnerstein, 1972, 1973) used an experimental setup similar to that of Milgram, giving white subjects the opportunity to express aggression by administering shocks to black and white "learners". Black learners received shocks of higher intensity and longer duration than whites. However, under conditions where subjects were anonymous or told that their behaviour would not be recorded (i.e., there was no censure) there was increased aggression toward black but not white subjects (see also Gaertner & Dovidio, 1977). Crosby, Bromley & Saxe (1980:554) conclude their review by stating that: "whites today harbour covert hostility toward blacks. When the conditions are 'safe' (i.e., no retaliation, no censure, anonymous), the hostility emerges in the form of direct aggression ... When the conditions render the direct expression of aggression unsafe, the expression of hostility becomes indirect". Whereas earlier theories of racism posited stable and general traits, the focus now was to elicit and explain contextual variation in racism.

There have been two general ways of understanding this repression. The first approach, espoused by the theory of symbolic or modern racism (McConahay, 1982; Sears, 1988), understands repression in a wily sense. People know that blatant racial expression is not sanctioned and so express racial hostility covertly "in terms of abstract, ideological symbols and symbolic behaviors of the feeling that blacks are violating cherished values or making illegitimate demands for changes in the racial status quo" (McConahay, 1982:706). Since opinions about blacks pushing too hard for change and getting unfair special treatment by government do not use crude racial stereotypes, they were less easy to attack as racist; and hence McConahay promoted his modern racism scale as a non-reactive measure. The items were not direct and explicit expressions of racism but nonetheless provided racist individuals with a means to express hostility towards blacks in covert or symbolic ways. Of course, in contexts where racism was not sanctioned, underlying racial hostility would be expressed in more direct ways.

A second set of theories understands repression in a non-wily sense. Not only is underlying racism kept from public awareness, but it is also repressed into the unconscious and kept from individual awareness. A number of different subliminal

priming techniques are used to tap into unconscious racially biased schema. For example, when subliminally presented black and white faces are paired with positive (e.g., intelligent) or negative (e.g., lazy) adjectives, there is a tendency for both black and white subjects to reveal implicit negative evaluations of blacks and positive evaluations of whites: they respond more quickly when the white face is paired with the positive adjectives and when the black face is paired with the negative adjective than in the other conditions (Greenwald & Banaji, 1995; Jost, Banaji & Nosek, 2004). Gaertner and Dovidio (1986) have coined the term aversive racism to describe such unconscious expressions of prejudice. Although people who genuinely believe that they are liberals will avoid blatant racism, they will express prejudice in uncontrolled and automatic behaviours such as eye contact and blinking (Dovidio et al, 1997).

### **ADEQUACY OF REPRESSION ACCOUNTS?**

These theories of repression provide elegant solutions of the problem of the duality of racism. Normative racial tolerance and egalitarianism are surface expressions that mask deep-seated hostility. How though can such repressed hostility account for the ongoing racism and segregation that characterises Western society? How, for example, are the massive patterns of “hypersegregation” that characterise many American cities today (Massey & Denton, 1993) brought about by repressed antipathy when almost all Americans are opposed to the principle of racial segregation? How does the underlying prejudice serve to shape explicit decisions and social interaction?

The theory of symbolic racism argues that negative affect has become “conjoined” with traditional American values (Kinder, 1986), and so racial exclusion, inequality and segregation can be defended in the open as it were by appeals to liberal and conservative platitudes and commonplaces. Kinder & Sears (1981; Sears, 1988) suggest that hostility towards blacks may be expressed in seemingly non-racial opinions, for example, against policies of affirmative action, welfare, busing, etc. which have been designed and implemented to change the material circumstances of African Americans and redress the effects of the racist past. Politicians and policy makers engage in symbolic politics, playing on white fears about property prices, dropping standards, etc. as they elicit support for policies that have a negative impact on the black community (Sears, 1998).

Theories of implicit racism have a more difficult task explaining how such unconscious prejudice could produce the effects of racism we see in society. They draw sharp distinctions between different domains of behaviour, and argue that each domain of behaviour is shaped by a particular kind of attitude: “... implicit attitudes would primarily predict more spontaneous race-related behaviours, whereas self-reported racial prejudice would primarily predict more deliberative responses”. (Dovidio et al, 1997: 520). Dovidio et al (1997) showed that implicit attitudes among whites were correlated with nonverbal features of interaction with black interlocutors (visual contact, blinking), but that self-report measures of racial attitudes were associated with written evaluations of the interlocutors. The reason for this distinction is that verbal evaluations are open to control and are thus shaped by normative pressures, whereas nonverbal responses are automatic, uncontrolled and unconscious (see Dovidio, 2001).

The difficulty for theories of implicit racism is to explain the real world significance of repressed attitudes. Implicit racism may predict blinking but how is it related to decisions

and actions that people make and undertake in private and public contexts – e.g., where to live, who to employ, who to arrest, etc. Since implicit attitudes are only correlated with nonverbal (automatic) behaviours, there is a difficulty in showing the relevance of this work for an anti-racist project.

The theory of symbolic/modern racism also encounters difficulties in explaining its relevance to developing a critical understanding of real world phenomena. Sniderman and Tetlock (1986, 2001) have argued that the correlation between symbolic racism and policy attitudes such as opposition to affirmative action is spurious because symbolic racism is measured in terms of such policy attitudes. The response has been to try and strip off the cognitive aspects of racial expressions – e.g., using the feeling thermometer, a crude indicator of how hot or cold you feel toward members of other race groups – to show that “symbolic racism has substantial origins in antiblack affect” (Sears, van Laar, Carrillo, & Kosterman, 1997:36). Affect is chosen as the best way of measuring prejudice, for much like implicit attitudes, Sears believes that affect is experienced “immediately, quickly and spontaneously, without any necessary cognitive content” (1988:75). This lands the symbolic racism tradition in the same predicament as the implicit racism tradition: at the heart of racism lie deep-seated unconscious impulses and associations – the problem is showing how these give shape to the racism in everyday life. In plumbing the psychological depths with theories of repressed racism, attention is drawn away from a concern with how prejudice is woven into the fibre of individual and social life (see Durrheim & Dixon, 2004, in press).

Both traditions of scholarship have been self-referential, focusing on technical and methodological issues such as whether old-fashioned and modern racism are correlated; or whether implicit and explicit racism are correlated. Research as not typically been concerned with how individual racial expressions are implemented and set to work in institutions and everyday contexts, to produce the effects of racism we see all around us. This should be of prime interest for the critical social psychology of racism.

### **THIS SPECIAL EDITION OF PINS.**

The call for papers for this special edition of **PINS** emphasized the duality of contemporary racism: “Racism has been outlawed, there is a greater mixing of peoples than ever before, and yet the boundaries to privilege continue to fall along ‘racial’ lines. As the new globalized and interconnected world comes under economic, environmental and political threat, race consciousness and racism are being rekindled.”

This issue consists of four main articles, each of which grapples with the problem of change and stability as they attempt to understand the contemporary form of racial expression. Derek Hook provides a welcome elucidation of Homi Bhabha’s writings about the racial stereotype. Bhabha uses Freud’s model of fetishism as an analogue to explain three features of the stereotype: (1) it functions at both the level of discourse and identification, (2) it is an ambivalent form of identification and discourse, and (3) it evidences the quality of repeatability in changing historical and cultural contexts. Hook shows how, as a fetish, stereotyping “is a special device for managing co-present and yet opposed beliefs”. By providing an explanation of the duality of racial expression, Bhabha answers “One of the challenges in understanding racism [which] is the question

of how racist attitudes and beliefs seem quite able to function at the level of co-existing irreconcilable ideas”.

The following two articles report discursive analyses of talk by white interviewees about race and transformation in South Africa. Werner Böhmke and David Neves analyse the talk of white commercial farmers in the Eastern Cape about democracy; and Jacob Wambugu analyses the talk of white university students about affirmative action. Both of these groups of interviewees speak with great passion about their own and others experiences of change and about principles of justice, fairness and good. In both cases, it is easy to identify a struggle in the text as speakers position themselves in favour of change but also against change. They are against apartheid but also against efforts by government to address the effects of apartheid. The interviewees oppose transformation, employing stereotypical depictions of the racial other, at the same time as presenting themselves as non-racists.

In the final article, Desmond Painter suggests that this same duality is evident in the reflexive racism that underlies the seemingly anti-racist efforts of the South African Government and discourse analysts themselves. He draws on the work of Balibar and Žižek to develop an understanding of a reflexive form of racism evident in accusations of racism levelled against minority groups who resist or are indifferent to the “compromised” liberal universals of nationalism and globalization. In a cheeky reversal, Painter charges discourse analysts with the same ideological shortcomings that they normally lay against their research participants. At the suggestion of one of the reviewers, John Dixon was asked to formulate a rejoinder to this argument, which is published along with reply by Painter.

It is noteworthy that no contributions were received that drew on the symbolic and implicit racism traditions reviewed above. South African research has not been much influenced by the mainstream tradition in social psychology. The reason for this is partly material and institutional. We have no laboratories for experimental research in the social cognition tradition. Neither do we have the funding to conduct the large-scale representative surveys that have sustained the sociological tradition of race attitude theorizing (and symbolic racism research). The contributions to this special edition reflect this. There is a concern with theoretical work and an empirical focus on language and the expression of racism.

The articles published in this special edition of **PINS** reveal a tradition of scholarship that is well equipped to respond to the challenge of explaining the duality and the paradox of change and stability in racial expressions. Instead of positing that repression, secrecy and unconscious dynamics account for the tenacity of racism, the articles focus on practices and meanings that are “out in the open”. Together, the articles proffer three interrelated lines of explanation. First, all four articles argue that racist effects are reproduced by *ideological* means. Böhmke and Neves, Wambugu, and Painter all consider the way in which a liberal ideology of individual rights and freedoms is used to ground opposition to policies that seek to effect practical change to the life conditions of black people. Hook argues that ideology is imbued with fantasy, and as such frames reality in a way which cannot simply be debunked by reason. As long as these ideological traditions exist, racism will persist. Second, the articles argue that the persistence of racism is rooted in practices of *identification* and subject positioning. The

two discourse analyses show that groups of whites as diverse as commercial farmers in the rural Eastern Cape, and university students in KwaZulu-Natal portray and see themselves as victims (cf. Dixon & Durrheim, in press). This provides them with a footing to make strong arguments against change, while simultaneously reproducing stereotypical images of black incompetence. Finally, the articles draw attention to the role that *discursive practices* – especially the rhetorical elements of language usage – play in establishing and defending opposition to change. Opposition to change is made defensible by rhetorical strategies such as the denial of racism (cf. Durrheim, Quayle, Whitehead & Kriel, in press), and expressing support for anti-racist principles (cf. Durrheim & Dixon, in press).

The kind of social psychology published in this edition of **PINS** has great promise for developing a critical anti-racist tradition of scholarship. Its greatest strength is that it explains the tenacity of racism, not in terms of deeply buried psychological elements that scuttle and hide, but in terms of widely shared and efficacious meanings and practices that are out in the open for all to see.

## REFERENCES.

Adorno, T W, Frenkel-Brunswik, E, Levinson, D J, & Sanford, N (1950) **The authoritarian personality**. New York: Harper.

Allport, G W (1954/1958) **The nature of prejudice** (abridged). Garden City, NY: Doubleday.

Barker, M (1981) **The new racism: Conservatives and the ideology of the tribe**. London: Junction Books.

Crandall, C S & Eshleman, A (2003) A justification-suppression model of the expression and experience of prejudice. **Psychological Bulletin**, **129**, 414-446.

Crosby, F, Bromley, S & Saxe, L (1980) Recent unobtrusive studies in black and white discrimination and prejudice: A literature review. **Psychological Bulletin**, **87**, 546-563.

Dixon, J & Durrheim, K (in press) Dislocating identity: Desegregation and the transformation of place. **Journal of Environmental Psychology**.

Donnerstein, E & Donnerstein, M (1972) White rewarding behavior as a function of potential for black retaliation. **Journal of Personality and Social Psychology**, **24**, 327-333.

Donnerstein, E & Donnerstein, M (1973) Variables in interracial aggression: Potential in-group censure. **Journal of Personality and Social Psychology**, **27**, 143-150.

Dovidio, J F (2001) On the nature of contemporary prejudice: The third wave. **Journal of Social Issues**, **57**, 829-849.

Dovidio, J F, Kawakami, K, Johnson, C, Johnson, B & Howard, A (1997) On the nature of prejudice: Automatic and controlled processes. **Journal of Experimental Social Psychology**, **33**, 510-540.

Durrheim, K & Dixon, J (2004) Attitudes and the fibre of everyday life: The discourse of racial evaluation and the lived experience of desegregation. **American Psychologist**, **59**, 626-636.

Durrheim, K & Dixon, J (in press) **Racial encounter: The social psychology of contact and desegregation**. London: Psychology Press.

Durrheim, K, Quayle, M, Whitehead, K, & Kriel, A (in press) Denial of racism: Strategies used by the South African media. **Critical Arts**.

Gaertner, S L & Dovidio, J F (1977) The subtlety of white racism, arousal and helping behavior. **Journal of Personality and Social Psychology**, **35**, 691-707.

Gaertner, S L & Dovidio, J F (1986) The aversive form of racism, in Dovidio, J F & Gaertner, S L (eds) (1986) **Prejudice, discrimination and racism**. New York: Academic Press.

Greenwald, A & Banaji, M (1995) Implicit social cognition: Attitudes, self-esteem and stereotypes. **Psychological Review**, **102**, 4-27.

Jost, J T, Banaji, M R & Nosek, B A (2004) A decade of system justification theory: Accumulated evidence of conscious and unconscious bolstering of the status quo. **Political Psychology**, **25**, 881-920.

Kinder, D R (1986) The continuing American dilemma: White resistance to racial change 40 years after Myrdal. **Journal of Social Issues**, **42**, 151-171.

Kinder, D R & Sears, D O (1981) Prejudice and politics: Symbolic racism versus racial threats to the good life. **Journal of Personality and Social Psychology**, **40**, 414-431.

Massey, D S & Denton, N A (1993) **American apartheid: Segregation and the making of the underclass**. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press.

McConahay, J B (1982) Self-interest versus racial attitudes as correlates of anti-busing attitudes in Louisville: Is it the buses or the blacks? **Journal of Politics**, **40**, 692-729.

Oliver, M L (2001) The social construction of racial privilege in the United States: An asset perspective, in Hamilton, C V, Huntly, L, Alexander, N, Guimaraes, A S A & James, W (eds) (2001) **Beyond Racism: Race and inequality in Brazil, South Africa, and the United States**. Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers.

Pettigrew, T (2004). Still a long way to go: American black-white relations today. From desegregation to diversity: 5<sup>th</sup> biannual Convention of the Society for the Psychological Study of Social Issues (SPSSI). (25-27 June 2004). Washington, DC.

Pettigrew, T F & Meertens, R W (1995) Subtle and blatant prejudice in Western Europe. **European Journal of Social Psychology**, **25**, 57-75.

Schuman, H, Steeh, C, Bobo, L & Krysan, M (1997) **Racial attitudes in America: Trends and interpretations** (revised edition). Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press.

Sears, D O (1988) Symbolic Racism, in Katz, P A & Taylor, D A (eds) (1988) **Eliminating racism: Profiles in controversy**. New York: Plenum.

Sears, D O (1998) Racism and politics in the United States, in Eberhardt, J & Fiske, S T (eds) (1998) **Confronting racism: The problem and the response**. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.

Sears, D O & Kinder, D R (1971) Racial tensions and voting in Los Angeles, in Hirsch, W Z (ed) (1971) **Los Angeles: Viability and prospects for metropolitan leadership**. New York: Praeger.

Sears, D O, van Laar, C, Carrillo, M & Kosterman, R (1997) Is it really racism? The origins of white Americans' opposition to race targeted policies. **Public Opinion Quarterly**, **61**, 16-53.

Sniderman, P M & Tetlock, P E (1986) Symbolic racism: Problems of motive attribution in political debate. **Journal of Social Issues**, **42**, 129-50.

Sniderman, P M & Tetlock, P E (2001) Reflections on American racism, in Cashmore, E & Jennings, J (eds) (2001) **Racism: Essential readings**. London: Sage.

Wallerstein, I (1991) The construction of peoplehood: Racism, nationalism and ethnicity, in Balibar, E & Wallerstein, I (eds) (1991) **Race, nation, class: Ambiguous identities**. London: Verso.

#### ERRATUM

Embarrassingly, we made an error (given the content of the article – a Freudian slip no doubt!!), with Len Bloom's article in **PINS 30** (2004). On the first page of the article (p35), the heading should obviously read **Background**.