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Re-presentation and Resistance in the context of School Exclusion:

Reasons to be critical

Running title:

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In this paper I present an examination of how we, in the everyday, develop critical engagement with the shifting relations of power and oppression around us. The paper explores the role of representations in maintaining the racialised patterns of school exclusion in Britain. I use social representations theory to investigate how racialising re-presentations pervade and create institutionalised practices, how these re-presentations invade young people's sense of self and ultimately how young people collaborate ways to resist and reject oppressive relations. The material presented here, from interviews with young people excluded from school, parents, teachers and others involved in school exclusion, illustrates how young people problematise and critique racialising re-presentations while participating in the conditions of oppression and resistance that pervade their experiences of school. The analysis is divided into three sections. The first examines the institutionalisation of stigmatising representations, visible in social practices. The second section looks at the role of re-presentation and engaged critique in the social construction of 'black pupils'. The concluding section explores the possibilities of resistance and critical engagement in the everyday. As a whole this reveals how young people develop critical engagement with the re-presentations that filter into and so constitute their realities. This enables an analysis of the role of resistance and contestation in social re-presentation, highlights the importance of participation and community and so invites a critical version of social representations theory.

Key words:

social representations, resistance, critical engagement, participation, school exclusion

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One of the aims of this paper is to invite a discussion on what a critical social psychology can or could achieve in the field. How can we do 'critical social psychology' in the community? How do we actually research issues that drive critical social psychologists to open up the basic assumptions of our discipline and so begin a critique of what Rose (1996) has called the psy-complex - that intimate relationship between the theories we create and the relations of power and inequality these support and challenge (see also Parker, 1991). As Hepburn has discussed in her useful text on *Critical Social Psychology* (2003), the fundamental concerns are oppression, exploitation and human well-being. Gough and McFadden (2001) assert that critical social psychology "challenges social institutions and practices … that contribute to forms of inequality and oppression" (p. 2). What does this mean for the (would be) critical researcher in the field?

Hepburn has also argued that there are two central tasks for critical social psychology: criticising society and criticising the discipline. People enter into this debate at these different levels: Prilleltensky and Nelson (2002), for example, explore how critical social psychology is 'done' in particular contexts such as health, education, community and work, while the edited collection by Ibáňez and Íňiguez (1997) offers more of a conceptual discussion on what critical social psychology has and should achieve. Particularly insightful work manages to bring these together as a mutually reinforcing and challenging dialectic (e.g., Parker, 2003). However there may be a third task here which deserves attention - and one more in line with a social constructionist approach to community and social change: the examination of how we, in the everyday, develop critical engagement with the shifting relations of power and oppression around us. That is, an exploration into the lived experience of inequality and ideology from the

perspectives of people in context. Thompson (1990) has detailed: "*to study ideology is to study the ways in which meaning serves to sustain relations of domination*" (p. 131, italics in original). What I am suggesting here is that we can develop a social constructionist perspective that explores the relationship between meaning (or re-presentation) and ideology from the perspectives of people in everyday contexts. This could create the conditions for an engaged social psychology of resistance, and one that is embedded in the life worlds of people with whom we, as social psychologists, 'do' research. In this way, critical social psychology could invite a more participatory and so less elitist and divisive approach to the exploration of the conditions of human well-being.

In entering into this discussion, I have another aim for this paper: to examine what potential social representations theory (Moscovici, 1998; Purkhardt, 1993) has in terms of achieving this third task[1]. For critics of social representations this may seem a peculiar choice of theory, as some have claimed the theory is cognitivist and individualistic (e.g., Gough and McFadden, 2001; Harré, 1998), has ignored the importance of social practice (e.g., Potter, 1996; Potter and Edwards, 1999) and so has failed to provide a rigorous analysis of social conflict and power (e.g., Billig, 1998; Parker, 1987). For instance, in their text on *Social Psychology: A critical agenda* Stainton Rogers, Stenner, Gleeson and Stainton Rogers (1995) argue that "the actual medium of transmission of social representations theory is still seen as the individual. As a result, social representation theorists continue to postulate internal ('cognitive') mechanisms" (p. 144). I would argue that this is not accurate: there is not an 'actual medium of transmission' for social representations - there are medi<u>a</u>, literally the media (Haroun, 1997), as well as social institutions (Jovchelovitch, 1997; Foster, 2003), communities (Jodelet, 1991; Howarth, 2001),

[1] I do not suggest that social representations theory is the only perspective to use in addressing the questions I pose: what I do suggest is that those of us who use the theory need to develop its critical potential. Given the emphasis given to 'representation' in critical social psychology (e.g. Edwards and Potter, 1993; Gough and McFadden, 2001; Potter, 1998) and the recognised need for multiple concepts (Ibanez, 1997; Reicher, 1997) – this is a pressing task.

cultures (Wagner, Duveen, Verma, and Themel, 2000) and individuals in dialogue (Wagner, 1994). In addition, the image of social re-presentations being ‘transmitted’ is problematic as this obscures the dynamic and intersubjectively negotiated and contested nature of re-presentation.

While I would not suggest that all of the criticisms of the theory are wholly misplaced (Howarth, 2003), I shall argue that social representations theory needs both to be understood *and* to be further developed as a radically social theory. While social representations theory is still far away from the critical move within social psychology as a whole, there is growing recognition that the theory can and should develop a serious engagement with critical issues – ideology, oppression, resistance, participation and social change (Campbell and Jovchelovitch, 2000; Duveen, 2000; Howarth, Foster and Dorrer, 2004; Imtiaz, 2002; Joffe, 1999; Jovchelovitch, 1996; Oktar, 2001; Scarbrough, 1990). The social basis and critical tool within the theory is its emphasis on *re-presentation*. The hyphen is important here as it highlights the ongoing, the relational and fundamentally the contested nature of re-presentation. It reminds us of the argumentative character of dialogue and practice (Billig, 1998; Howarth, 2003), and so presents us with the possibility of agency, resistance and social change. Hence, as I hope to highlight, re-presentation is intimately tied to the operation and contestation of power.

What I do here is explore young people’s experiences of injustice and discrimination at school. I focus on the narratives of predominantly black British young people who have been excluded from school[2], many of whom assert that systems of racist discourse and practice played a central role in their lives at school. I use social representations theory to examine how these discourses or re-presentations pervade and create institutionalised practices, how these re-presentations invade young people’s sense of self and potential and ultimately how young

[2] Exclusion’ means that a child is sent home or excluded from school because they have (allegedly) violated school rules. Exclusion can be 'fixed term' or 'permanent'. Fixed term exclusion is a short-term, temporary measure (perhaps for as little as one day) and cannot last for more than 45 school days in the school year. Permanent exclusion means the pupil cannot return to the same school - this used to be known as being expelled (www.raisingkids.co.uk).

people find ways to resist and reject oppressive relations. Social representations theory stresses the dialogical and dynamic nature of these processes (Marková, 2000; Moloney and Walker, 2002), and their relationship to the social practices they support, permeate and/or threaten (Costalat-Founeau, 1999; Pereira de Sa, 1992). It highlights how we use social representations to "conventionalise the objects, persons and events we encounter" (Moscovici, 1984, p. 7). As such, the theory is ideally placed to examine the social categorisation of black pupils and the consequences of such categorization on their experiences at school and on their identities. This reveals how young people themselves develop a critical engagement with the re-presentations that filter into and so constitute their realities. In this way, I hope to reveal how I have attempted to 'do' critical social psychology in the community. Before I can begin this argument, however, I need to explain the context of my discussion: black pupils' experiences of school exclusion in the UK.

School exclusion and ethnic minorities

Exclusion from school clearly involves great financial cost and immeasurable human misery and waste for society as a whole (Parsons and Castle, 1999). This is an extremely urgent issue, particularly as Britain's official exclusion figures far outstrip those of other countries in Europe and North America (Searle, 2001). Statistics demonstrate that is those pupils already from socially excluded groups, such as children living in poverty, pupils with special educational needs, and pupils from minority ethnic and refugee communities who are more likely to experience school exclusion (Department of Education and Skills, 2003; Osler and Hill, 1999). Carl Parsons has highlighted how the vast majority of children excluded from school live in families existing on incomes below the minimum wage and "thus represent an area of pronounced social need rather than a cause for blame and punishment" (*The Psychologist*, 2001, p. 366). In addition, those excluded from school are more likely to experience unemployment and homelessness, and are more likely to be involved in crime (Richardson and Wood, 1999; DfES, 2003). School exclusion, therefore, exacerbates and intensifies poverty and

marginalisation – what many now call ‘social exclusion’ (Byrne, 2000). Indeed, this link is recognised in government policy (Social Exclusion Unit, 2001; Department of Education and Employment, 2000).

Exclusions, it has been argued, “provide too convenient a culling system that further oppresses and victimises identifiable groups who are already part of a downward spiral of dislocation and failure” (German, 2001, p. 12). What’s more, in addition to permanent and temporary exclusions (currently over 150,000 a year and expected to rise under new legislation) and unofficial exclusions (for instance, encouraged truancy and unrecorded exclusions), these vulnerable groups in society are the most likely to *feel* marginalized and excluded from the material and symbolic curricula of schooling (Blair, 2001).

Black pupils[3], for example, are between 4 and 19 times more likely to experience exclusion from school than children from other ethnic groups (DfES, 2003; Osler, Street, Lall, and Vincent, 2002; Parsons, 1999). Recent government statistics demonstrate the disproportionate numbers of black excludees starkly (see table below). While only 3 in every 10,000 Chinese or Indian pupils are excluded, 42 in every 10,000 of black Caribbean pupils experience exclusion (DfES, 2003). As the table below reveals, white pupils - as the largest ethnic group in schools - make up the vast majority of exclusions (82%), but the likelihood of exclusion is determined significantly by ethnicity. While white pupils have a 0.14% chance of being excluded, Black Caribbean and Black Other pupils have a 0.42% and 0.36% chance, respectively, of facing

[3] In this paper I use the term ‘black’ to include those pupils with African and/or Caribbean heritage. This is not to ignore the school experiences of pupils from other ethnic groups. However, most research that discusses racialising discourses in the context of school exclusion focus on the experiences of African and Caribbean pupils in British schools (e.g. Majors, 2001; Wright, Weekes, and McGlaughlin, 2000). As I want to relate my research to these studies, I shall use the same distinction. As the proportions of excluded pupils from other ethnic and religious minorities increase (such as Pakistani and Muslim, Madge, 2001), future research needs to be more comparative and include all minorities at risk of marginalisation and exclusion at school.

exclusion. More worrying still is the fact that this disparity is further exaggerated in particular regions: in Yorkshire Black pupils have a 0.63% chance of being excluded.

Ethnic grouping	**Number of Permanent Exclusions**	**% of all exclusions**	**Percentage of School population**
Number	9,517		0.14
White	7,808	82	0.14
Black Caribbean	399	4.2	0.42
Black African	159	1.7	0.16
Black Other	214	2.2	0.36
Indian	56	0.6	0.03
Pakistani	170	1.8	0.10
Bangladeshi	76	0.8	0.11
Chinese	6	0.1	0.03
Any other ethnic group	316	3.3	0.20
Ethnicity not known	313	3.3	-

Statistics from Department of Education and Skills (2003) for 2001/2002

While government statistics demonstrate a one third reduction in the numbers of pupils officially excluded from school over the period 1999 to 2002, there has been a 4 percent increase in the last year (DfES, 2003). In addition to this, research suggests that the numbers of exclusions for particular minority ethnic groups is rising (Madge, 2001). Hence the DfEE's (2001) white paper *'Schools: Building on Success'* has been severely criticised for failing to address the disproportionate numbers of excluded black children. For many this demonstrates that "racial equality in education has still a long way to go and is not a central concern for the powers that be" (Gillborn, 2001, p. 4). The 2003 DfES figures show that the numbers of Black African pupils permanently excluded from school has risen since 2002. Kinder, Halsey and Kendall's (2000) study of 30 Local Education Authorities suggests that exclusions are rising for

Bangladeshi boys and African Caribbean girls (as Osler *et al*, 2002, have also recorded) and that there are hidden vulnerable groups who are disproportionately represented in the figures, such as Croatian pupils.

Research into school exclusions, therefore, needs to highlight the processes and practices that maintain the disproportionate numbers of black pupils excluded from school. Given the demonstrable link between school and social exclusion this research needs to do more than simply describe and therefore support and consolidate the inequalities of the education system. Research into black pupils' experiences of school exclusion needs to be critical.

What would this involve? In general, critical research "challenges the status quo and supports silenced or marginalized voices" as Alvesson and Deetz (1996, p. 193) discuss. In particular, I would suggest that such research take up the three tasks of critical social psychology discussed above: 1) it needs to examine how the academy, social sciences and the psy-complex in particular create the very conditions that transform inequalities in education into a racialised discourse of blame and punishment; 2) it needs to examine how society as a whole has individualised and racialised the experiences of excluded children; 3) it needs to highlight the stories of these children and so gain access into their experience and contestion of discrimination. This would embed our research into school exclusion in the lived realities of those who experience it, challenge it and find ways out of it. It is this third task that I address here.

What is striking about research into the educational experiences of black pupils excluded from school is *not* that this is a gap within educational studies, but that *despite* the extensiveness of research into what is often labelled 'the underachievement of black pupils' it has failed to actually impact and reduce black pupils' negative experiences of schooling. At a recent conference on '*London Schools and the Black Child*' (10th May 2003), for example, there was

general agreement that academic research has had little or no impact on black parents' and pupils' ongoing and arguably worsening experiences of discrimination and exclusion from mainstream schools over the last 50 years.

Why has research been so ineffectual? I would suggest that, until recently, a culture of blame pervaded much debate that presented exclusions as the 'fault' of the individual pupil, the family, the community *or* the school (Blyth and Milner, 1996). Across both academic and media discussions on school exclusion there is an ideology of individualism that holds 'disruptive children', 'bad parents' or 'racist teachers' responsible for exclusions. The structures and discourses that maintain inequalities in the education system go under-theorised and therefore unchallenged. This has inhibited the reach of effective critical research and so limited possibilities for intervention and social change. As Ryan (1976) pointed out some time ago, an "ideology of blaming the victim … becomes a primary barrier to effective social change" (p. xv). Little progress, it seems, has been made. This is at least partly because of the "systematic reduction of cultural and historical phenomena to the level of the individual" (Parker, 2002, p. 2). This individualism that pervades the disciplines of social and educational psychology has intensified the individualisation and so depoliticisation of school exclusion.

Contributing to this individualisation of educational experiences are racialised accounts of exclusion that construct the social pathology of black families and communities and so develop the fiction of anti-education cultures within black communities (Graham, 2001). As Sivanandan has powerfully argued:

> The exclusion of the black child … is once again being regarded as another element in the social pathology of the black family, rather than as an indicator of a differentially structured racism that works against the poorest sections of the black community in particular.
>
> Sivanandan, 1994, p. v.

This removes the school from the focus of analysis, maintains the social pathology of the black family and so preserves the stereotype of dysfunctional and culturally deficient 'other' communities. This individualises the exclusion and pathologises the child, the family and the community as stereotypes of "uneducated parents, crowded living quarters, absence of books, family disinterested in education – all combine to handicap the black child as he enters the school system" Ryan (1976, p. 31 - 32) discussed nearly 30 years ago. More recently Mirza and Reay (2000) have given a very similar account of how black communities have been "ritually pathologised as disengaged and inherently underachievers" (p. 527). One of the parents in this study, for example, maintained that such racist discourse pervaded his interactions at his daughter's school, being told, for example that "obviously you people don't know how to raise your children" by a white school governor. These stereotypes penetrate academic and grass-root discussions alike (e.g., Foster, 1990; Hammersley, 1992; *Taking a Stand,* Radio 4, 27th January 2004) and so limit our critical understanding of the issues, particularly with regard to the cultural and institutionalised patterns of exclusion within education. Hence there are many challenges for researchers in this field. Theories that can combat the individualizing tendencies across social psychology should, it seems, have much to offer. We need a critical approach, hence one that emphasizes that people, inter-group relations and the realities they resist are "constructed under specific conditions of power and contestion" (Alvesson and Deetz, 1996, p. 193). This should be a central goal of a critical social psychological study of school exclusion.

A social psychological approach to education research

"From the very beginning", Jaspars (1983) describes, "social psychology has regarded it as its task to integrate the knowledge of the individual and of society" (p.278). Social psychologists are interested in the conflict between subjectivity and culture, the tensions and attractions, the bridges and the barriers between individuals and the communities and institutions in which they live. Schools are an important stage on which much of this drama occurs. It is where children are confronted with society's social values, cultural norms and contested discourses perhaps to a

greater extent than at home and more overtly than through the media (Coard, 1971; Mirza, 1995). Pupils will come to experience how others 'see' them, and how they are categorized in many different groups – on the basis of gender, class, ethnicity, sexuality and so forth (Lloyd and Duveen, 1992; Connolly, 1998). They will come to see how different social categories are constructed, positioned and contested. They will "see the personal meaning and the status of others, of the rich and the poor, and of the hierarchies of power. Nowhere is this more apparent than in schools" as Cullingford (2000, p. 97) makes clear. In many ways, social psychology tells us, the social and ideological (re)construction of such categorization will inform how pupils see themselves and so impact their shifting negotiation of identity.

Hence, one would think that there are many productive ways to apply social psychology to education. For example, Kremer, Sheehy, Reilly, Trew and Muldoon (2003) have discussed the usefulness of social identity, social comparison and self-fulfilling prophecy theories for education policy and practice. In particular, they highlight the value of these theories in understanding "the importance of social psychological processes in determining educational attainment and school adjustment" (p. 134). For instance, they discuss differences in performance and participation at school across ethnic groups using concepts from social categorization, stereotyping and social identity theory. However little is understood about why there are such differences in educational experiences across different social categories, it seems obvious that these social psychological concepts play an important role. Consider this example from a 15 year-old black British girl excluded from school:

> My teachers said that I cannot walk about the playground with my friends. They said we were a 'gang' that intimidated the other children. But it's okay for the white girls to hang out with their friends – even if there were 10 or 20 of them!! There's only 5 of us. … But, you know, in the classroom, it was like the teachers could not even see us. When I put up my hand they would just look straight through me. As soon as there's some noise, yeah, *then* the teachers look at the black girls. … I got so pissed off with it, I'm just glad I'm out of it.

This young woman maintains that she is ‘seen’ by others - adults in positions of authority over her, in a particular way that marginalizes her position and so limits her potential within the ordered context of the classroom and reifies her visibility and ‘otherness’ within the less-structured context of the playground. This reveals her own critical engagement and participation in the realities she describes. We could examine this extract from many perspectives within social psychology: stereotyping, prejudice, attributions, attitudes, social identity, discourse analysis and social representations. If one’s aim is to uncover the social psychological processes at work here the choice would be difficult as all these concepts offer important insights.

However, in order to counter individualist accounts of school exclusion and to locate the production of racism in schools we need an approach that “can illuminate the more contextually grounded, culturally constituted and therefore socially meaningful aspects of human functioning and social life” as described by Henwood (1994, p. 46). Such an approach needs to be focused on the dialogic and contested nature of sense making and social practices, and needs to be grounded in local practices, institutionalised discourses and community narratives. This is precisely what makes social representations theory particularly apt for this study – as this is a theory developed as a counter to the theoretical and methodological individualism within both social psychology as a discipline (Farr, 1996; Foster, 1999) and within theories of prejudice (Augostinous and Reynolds, 2001), self-categorisation (Billig, 2002) and social identity (Howarth, 2002a) in particular. We need, too, to problematise the category of ‘race’ (Anderson, 2002; Condor, 1988) and examine the cultural production and institutionalisation of racism(s), as social psychology has failed to do (Ahmed, Nicolson and Spencer, 2000; Holdstock, 2000; Howitt and Owusu-Bempah, 1994; Parker, 1999). This would enable us to develop an understanding of how discourses, practices and people are ‘racialised’ in order to maintain and defend structured inequalities in society (Wetherell and Potter, 1992).

I propose that a *critical* version of social representations theory carries the potential of achieving precisely this because it highlights the intersubjectively negotiated and contested character of human relations and engages with knowledge processes and participation at the level of community. Therefore, if one is to develop a critical approach and so find the means to challenge the inequalities described here, we need a theory that recognises:

a) the institutionalisation of stigmatising re-presentations, visible in social practices
b) the role of re-presentation in the othering of social groups
c) the possibilities of resistance and critical engagement in the everyday.

Before tackling each of these points, I shall now turn to the design and analysis of this research in order to situate the production of the claims I make here.

'Doing' critical research

As the voices of pupils and parents are often marginalised or rejected in the context of school exclusion (Morris, Nelson, and Stoney, 1999), it was crucial to use a methodology that brought out the rich and diverse voices of all participants, in line with an "inclusive and engaged approach" (Gough and McFadden, 2001, p. 18) advocated by critical psychologists. Previous research shows that exclusion can have devastating effects "on the well-being of many families, as well as bringing out their confusion and anger about the whole situation" (Hayden and Dunne, 2001, p. 67). According to Lloyd, Stead and Kendrick (2001) what many excluded young people want is someone who really listens to them, respects them and treats them fairly. In recognition of this, I drew on person-centred approaches to develop rapport, trust and conditions of worth in the research context, and to open up issues of subjectivity, investment, difference and acceptance (drawing on the insightful work of Hollway and Jefferson, 1999). Like Lloyd *et al* (2001) I found "young people and their families were particularly responsive to those who approached them in an open, collaborative, non-judgemental way" (p. 57). Given that I am white and the majority of our research participants are black and have experienced various

forms of racism, it was essential to use methods that would encourage trust in the face of difference and sometimes suspicion.[4]

This research did not depict school exclusions as something that simply happen *to* people; the focus was on how exclusionary practices within schools were resisted and challenged by pupils, families and communities. On the one hand, I examined what maintains the uneven patterns of exclusion, and, on the other, explore how exclusion is actively resisted and challenged. Hence exclusionary practices are conceptualised as stable and dynamic and as ideological and contested. This dialectical approach informed our research questions (see below).

Research questions
1. What representations sustain excluding practices? Particularly, do stigmatising representations of black pupils and their communities inform the processes of exclusion and marginalisation?
2. How may exclusion be resisted? Are stigmatising representations contested and subverted at school and within community relationships?

In order to explore the research questions from a range of perspectives, participant observation and unstructured interviews were employed. Participant observation is a particularly useful way of analysing the cultural practices, representations and values that permeate organisations and social relationships (Jorgensen, 1989) and so is especially appropriate for research within a social representations perspective (Gervais, 1997). The 'gatekeepers' were those at community organisations working with young people who have been excluded. They initiated access across Greater London to local community conferences on exclusion (8), parent support groups (6), meetings between anti-exclusion community activists (6), exclusion appeals (8), judicial

[4] Elsewhere I have discussed the researcher-researched relationship, the possible difficulties encountered when researching across difference and, simultaneously, the value of difference in opening up new insights and new ways of seeing (Howarth, 2002b).

reviews (2) and meetings between families and the education authorities about exclusion/reintegration (2). In addition, I sat in on numerous meetings with families, community practioners, and activists. I received and made frequent phone calls with young people, family members and their supporters who all kept me in touch with developments around their own cases and/or who required advice and support. As a whole this participant observation revealed the different discourses manipulated by schools, education authorities, community groups, families and young people in maintaining and in challenging local instances of inequalities and resistance.

Additionally, I interviewed 6 young black people between 15 and 16 years old who had been excluded: two black British girls, one British Nigerian girl, two black British boys and one mixed heritage boys.[5] I also asked each young person to nominate 3 other people to be interviewed, people who had supported them through the period of exclusion. These included parents and siblings, teachers, a head teacher, learning workers and support workers and an equalities policy advisor. Interviewees were asked about the exclusion, why it happened and what could have prevented it. This allowed the exploration of the re-presentations and practices that explain the uneven patterns of exclusion that may leave many pupils disadvantaged and culturally excluded. As the selection of research participants was not intended to be systematic nor representative of all young black pupils excluded from school, I make no claims to generalisibility. However, as I stress throughout this paper, our findings concur with and extend the bulk of research in this area.

The analysis is divided into three sections. The first examines the institutionalisation of stigmatising re-presentations, visible in social practices. The second section looks at the role of

[5] This 'identity labels, such as 'black British' were taken from how participants identified themselves. All names given in this paper have been changed to protect participants' anonymity. The participants chose many of these names.

re-presentation and engaged critique in the social construction of 'black pupils'. The concluding section explores the possibilities of resistance and the critical engagement in the everyday. Within each section I draw on both the ethnographic material as well as supporting material from the school exclusions literature.

1. The institutionalisation of stigmatising re-presentations, visible in social practices

The central theme in this research highlights the institutionalisation of racialising re-presentations, visible in the social practices at school: there was broad agreement that dominant re-presentations of 'race' pervade educational practices and affect black pupils' school experiences. Most obviously, this was through the taught curriculum where history, literature, geography and religious studies were often described as eurocentric. Many education professionals from this research gave stories of black pupils becoming increasing frustrated with their school's perceived inability or unwillingness to bring black history into the classroom, "beyond a fleeting reference to slavery in the Caribbean and starvation in African", as one of the parents put it. For instance, an African Caribbean learning mentor argued that mainstream education alienates many pupils and communities by marginalising their cultures, religions and histories. "Not learning about one's past, and the connections between your history and others, can lead to disembedded cultural identities and poor self esteem", according to an equalities policy advisor. A teacher described how black children need to know their past "in order to go forward with confidence". She felt that some children were uncertain about themselves and their roots as they do not know their own histories. As one of the young black British boys in the study explained:

> Winston: I kept asking the teacher about that, - you know, 'when will we do black history?'. He always said he doesn't know, maybe next year. Then next year, it was just the same.

The literature on school exclusions echoes these feelings. Pupils interviewed by Blair for her study of *School Exclusion and Black Youth* (2001), for example, described how young black

pupils were "demoralised by a school system which denies them recognition through the curriculum, undermines their sense of self, (and) appears indifferent to their needs" (p. 73). Similarly, Richardson and Wood (1999) maintain that "the national curriculum reflects White interests, concerns and outlooks and neglects or marginalizes Black experience" (2000, p. 35). Hence, according to Searle (2001), many pupils with heritage from outside England experience "exclusion through the curriculum" (p. 1).

Consequently the ways we think about, categorise and compare different socially constructed groups have both social and psychological effects. The re-presentation of socially constructed categories, such as 'black pupils' and 'African Caribbean pupils', as well as the re-constructions of 'British history', effect the way these pupils experience school and what they learn about their cultural affiliations. Hence, we can see how these re-presentations pervade and support the institutional culture and interpersonal relationships developed at school. The micro practices of teaching and behaviour management at school may be inflected by dominant constructions of 'the black pupil' in ways that marginalise their positioning within the classroom and so restrict their education. There were several examples given in the exploratory research: here are three.

1. Somali pupils were told off for looking down when a teacher spoke to them when this is a sign of respect in Somali culture.[6] For many English adults to avoid eye-contact is to embody disrespect. However, failing to recognise the cultural embeddedness of this practice neglects the cultural relativity of such expectations and so works to impose dominant cultural practices on others. This has the effect of rejecting 'different' cultural norms and values.
2. Within another multiethnic, multifaith primary school a teacher told me that children were disciplined for not eating with a knife and fork in the school dining room, even when this

[6] An almost identical example is described by Howell (in Madge, 2001) from his study of the educational experiences of Somali and Eritrean youth.

may be normal practice at home. This subtly but powerfully not only tells the child that their cultural norms are at odds with mainstream society's, but again that their practices are unacceptable and so rejected.

3. A third example came from a support worker who spoke of a Muslim girl who was constantly in trouble for avoiding communal showers after sports activities. While her religion explains her need for privacy, her school failed to recognise this, a failing not uncommon in other schools (Woods and Grugeon, 1991). Symbolically this has the effect of marginalising and abnormalising such cultural and religious practices.

Such culturally excluding practices are sustained by otherising re-presentations - contained in teachers' stereotypes, middle-class discourses, institutionalised racisms and eurocentric histories (Runnymede, 2000), and embodied in the micro-politics of everyday encounters (Shotter, 1993). As the young people in the study explained, the consequence of the racialising discourses that pervade their experiences of schooling and relationships with teachers can be permanent exclusion. Grace, a 15 year black British girl explains:

> Grace: I can't say for a fact but its from what I have seen and heard, been a lot of black people that have been excluded (from school) more than white.
> Caroline: Why do you think that is?
> Grace: Racism. They see us as different, like Martians or something like that. They just want to get rid of us or something.

These examples point to the need to explore the role of social representations in maintaining and defending social practices, particularly those that establish and sustain systems of inequality and difference. Social representations theory offers much here as a guiding theory, as previous social representations studies has established the relationship between re-presentation and practice (Pereira de Sa, 1992; Guerin, 1992)[7].

[7] This is another area of the theory that has been criticised. For example, Potter (1996) has claimed that "social representations are ways of understanding the world which *influence* action, but are not themselves parts of action" (p. 168, italics in original). This interpretation must be challenged. Social representations are often *only* apparent in action. Social representations do influence our actions,

Most significantly the work of Denise Jodelet (1991) on social representations of 'madness' and Hélène Joffe (1997, 2002) on social representations of AIDS has highlighted how representations pervade particular social practices in establishing and defending identities against the threat of 'the other'. These studies demonstrate how marginal others are positioned as different and potentially dangerous through the establishment and maintenance of certain institutionalised practices. Social representations research also highlights the struggle over the social construction of meaning (Gervais, 2002; Moloney and Walker, 2002) and the social psychological consequences of power inequalities in the public sphere (Jovchelovitch, 2001). As Jovchelovitch has theorised:

> Some groups have a greater chance than others to assert their version of reality. The asymmetrical situation of different social groups must be considered seriously, for different people bring different resources to bear when it comes to imposing their representations.
>
> Jovchelovitch, 1997, p. 8.

This relates clearly to the points made by black pupils and community practioners in relation to the marginalisation of 'other' histories and realities at school. Using social representations theory, therefore, we can begin to unravel and so confront the symbolic levels of exclusion within the schooling system. Most crucially we can see how social re-presentations permeate the social practices at school and may lead to the marginalisation and stigmatization of 'other' pupils and cultures. Hence social re-presentations may work to sustain and naturalise the marginalisation of particular communities at school.

2. The role of re-presentation in the othering of social groups

The young people, parents and community practioners who participated in the research discussed the representation and treatment of black pupils. An education lawyer, for example,

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particularly how we may explain our actions or the actions of others, but they are also contained within and developed through our social actions (Moscovici, 1988; Philogéne, 2001), or more properly our social practices (Marková, 2000).

said that black pupils “are treated as both different and difficult in the classroom”. He felt that white teachers, particularly male white teachers, sometimes react defensively to black pupils, especially boys, as different claims to masculinity compete. Connolly (1998) has made a similar point: white male pupils and white male teachers may feel that their masculinity is questioned by the presumed hyper-masculinity of ‘the Black Man’. In this study, the aunt of an excluded 16 year old pupil was critically reflective on how teachers are intimidated by “the stigma they have about black people, … they see the black child as a threat”.

There were many other examples of this, which point to the ways people engage with power, racism and critique in the everyday. These discussions centre on the re-presentation of these pupils as racialised and as a threat to the order to the classroom and school. Here is an example from Monica – the 22 year old sister of a Black British excluded teenager.

> Monica: I think when they (teachers) see a large group of black girls together they think it’s trouble, or black boys, they automatically think it’s trouble. Which is wrong: don’t judge a person by the colour of their skin.

A dominant image in these accounts is of a physically threatening and dangerous black masculinity. Young people and their family members recognised the racist and sexist implications of this overriding image, discussed widely by social researchers and social theorists (e.g., Gilroy, 1987; Hall, 1997; Mac an Ghail, 1994). It is so pervasive that Gillborn (1990) labelled it “the myth of the Afro-Caribbean challenge” (p. 57); this echoes one of the black British mothers in the study who felt that “teachers look at black people as troublemakers”. The individual scenarios and experiences described by the pupils are anchored in historical legacies of the ‘black savage’ as studied by Fanon (1952), Hall (1996) and Jahoda (1999) that have portrayed black people as intellectually inferior, naturally aggressive, sexually dangerous and culturally ‘other’ for centuries.

Teachers, as everyone, live in our culture imbued with such re-presentations[8]. Hence it is likely that these re-presentations will permeate teaching practices and their relationships with their pupils in different ways, in different encounters. As others have stated:

> Teachers are influenced by the same stereotypes of African-Caribbean males that exist within the wider society we live in and which views black *masculinity* as problematic and potentially threatening.
>
> Blyth and Milner, 1996, p. 62, italics in the original.

Moscovici has argued that social representations can be *prescriptive,* in that they "impose themselves upon us with irresistible force. This force is a combination of a structure which is present before we have even begun to think, and of a tradition which decrees *what* we should think" (1984, p. 9). Hence, not only do dominant re-presentations of black pupils infiltrate the teachers' encounters with their pupils and their teaching practices in general, but these re-presentations also invade pupils' own understanding of these socially constructed categories and relations of power. This may have profound effects on their self-image as identities are co-constructed through and against the re-presentations that others have of us (Howarth, 2002a).

Pupils are acutely aware of stigmatising stereotypes of their abilities, their behaviour and their aspirations. They described how objectifying re-presentations of blackness as physical and sensual meant that they were pushed into sport, dance and music, when their interests may lie elsewhere. Such restrictive expectations can be seen as a way children are symbolically denied opportunities and hence excluded in its broadest sense (Gillborn and Gipps, 1996; Mac an Ghaill, 1988). A teaching assistant told me that:

[8] For many who made this point in the research, they meant white teachers. However, some pupils, parents and practioners also discussed how black teachers and head teachers may also take on racist representations. They called these "Uncle Toms" and "coconuts", implying while "black on the outside" they have taken on the ideology of the white establishment. This supports my contention that racialising and racist practices should be de-individualised, and located within their institutional, historical and cultural settings. Hence, the focus needs to be the school ethos and institutionalised cultures that support racism (MacPherson, 1999) and this kind of critical social psychology should study "the way power structures how people participate in oppressive relationships and institutions", as Parker (1999, p. 14) has stressed.

> I was pushed into sport and drama at school, when what I was good at was maths and science, because of all these ideas that all black people can do is, you know, dance and run.

A head teacher was critically aware that this may be happening to her own son, at another school to her own. Hence dominant re-presentations of black pupils as underachievers and as anti-education may severely limit their educational opportunities. This echoes similar accounts in other research into black pupils' experiences at school (e.g., Frosh, Phoenix, and Pattman, 2001; Sarup, 1986). Davis and Williams, for example, have argued that:

> Schools are contested sites where Black boys learn to endorse and participate in a masculinity project that restricts their possibilities. … For many of them, schools ignore their aspirations, disrespect their ability to learn, fail to access and cultivate their many talents, and impose a restrictive range of masculine options.
>
> Davis and Williams, 2001, p. 29.

Hence, social representations of 'black youth' can clearly effect the educational experiences and achievements of black pupils, as they themselves are well aware. The pupils in this study reflected on the way dominant re-presentations construct black boys as confrontational, aggressive and anti-education. They explained how it can be difficult to challenge such racist stereotypes and re-present themselves as engaged with schooling and respectful of authority as the possibilities of resistance open to them are likely to confirm dominant re-presentations of 'black youth'; for when you are depicted as 'confrontational', what possibility is there for you to confront practices and attitudes in any other way than that would confirm this expectation? As this 15 year old mixed heritage boy revealed:

Flyn: The thing is I want to tell him (his teacher) I want to say to him: I can do this. I am good at this – so why aren't *you* saying that? And why don't you encourage me? But whenever I try to speak to him, it's like, like …… I don't know, he just sees what he wants to hear. Like – big black guy with bad attitude. That's not me, but, ….I don't know, that's all he can see.

Thus pupils such as Flyn are critically aware of the marginalizing and limiting re-presentations that others have of them, and recognise that it is difficult to contest and resist such racism. The consequences of this can be that these pupils lose faith in their school, disconnect from their

teachers and so disengage from education. As Dani, a 15 year old black Caribbean boy, told me - he has to “keep my mouth shut and my head down” at school as “the teachers think all black boys are rude”. Similarly, a school mentor said that he taught black pupils “survival at school”, which was “basically to sit at the back and keep quiet”. In order to avoid the stigmatising and policing gaze of institutionalised white authority, some follow this advice, to make themselves less visible and so less intimidating to others.

In this way, through trying to protect themselves against institutionalised racism, they may inadvertently sustain the relations of power and racialising practices that limit their possibilities at school. Ironically such passive resistance confirms the re-presentation of black pupils as disengaged and anti-education. As such, they participate in the conditions of their own oppression. Equally, open resistance to perceived injustices and racialising discourses at school also sustains the stereotype of confrontational black youth, when pupils actively resist by truanting, confronting staff and challenging authority. Such resistance is gendered as girls often disengage in class or self-exclude (Osler *et al,* 2002) while boys are more likely to actively contest authority (Sewell, 1997).

3. The possibilities of resistance and critical engagement in the everyday

As Joffe (1998) has pointed out, within a social representations framework “lay people are not seen as ‘victims’ of dominant ideas, but as active agents” (p. 29) who may come together in social groups and community networks to develop strategies that collectively challenge unequal social relations. In examining resistance to stigmatising re-presentations it is important to recognise that “social knowledge is not isolated from the contexts in which it takes shape and, indeed, it can only change and acquire new forms because it is permanently constructed by the agency of the people involved” (Jovchelovitch, 1997, p. 18). What is essential to emphasise is that this cannot be achieved in isolation.

Pupils and those around them, we have already seen, participant in the production of knowledge 'about them' and the social groups with which they are associated – in ways that maintain and contest systems of categorisation, comparison and difference. One of the clearest examples of such participation and resistance in the school exclusion context is the long and rich history of black supplementary schools in Britain; this emphasises the role of community and local histories in challenging ideologies of discrimination and structured inequalities. These alternative educational contexts, or counter public spheres, show the value of social relationships and symbolic 'spaces' where young black people can co-construct oppositional and empowering versions of their communities and so of themselves. These enable the 'transcoding' of stigmatising representations into competing representations of value and worth (Hall, 1997; Murray, 2002).

Education professionals in this study, for example, described how black children flourished across subjects in supplementary schools where local histories and cultures were respected and celebrated. Such community-based activities invited critical engagement with oppressive re-presentations and offered possibilities for collaboratively re-constructing or re-presenting versions of inclusion-exclusion and identity-difference. Without such participation it would be difficult to develop oppositional constructions and so engage in change work, as pupils and parents in the study recognised; they paid tribute to the role of supplementary schools in helping them invert "the myth of (black) intellectual inferiority" (Fordman, 1996, p. 329). As Tola, a British Nigerian 15 year old pupil, explains – comparing her mainstream school with a Saturday school for African Caribbean children:

Tola: (Mainstream) teachers have a certain image of black children, they don't expect them to work to a higher level as anyone else. They try to make…., I don't know how to explain it. They think all black children have come off the street and can't get on in there. …. That's why I like the Saturday school. The teachers there make you work ,…..not because they are mean,…..but because they want you to get on. …….It's like I'm black, you're black, let's just get on with it. You know, I wish like I could just go there 7 days a week! (Laughs)

Other young people in the study had similar experiences, arguing that supplementary schools provided richer educational opportunities and encouraged community pride and cultural esteem. This is supported by other research; for instance Madge (2001) who found that “children thrive in educational settings that valued their culture and instilled them with pride and self-confidence” (p. 51; see also Graham, 2001; Mirza and Reay, 2000). Hence in relationships that offer positive and congruent representations of one’s social groups, pupils have the opportunity to participate in the social construction of their communities and so develop positive self-identities. The “collective strength of others”, as Spears (1997, p. 19) put it, makes critical engagement and resistance possible.

Social re-presentation, as a social and ideological process, therefore offers people strategies with which to subvert stigma and present affirmative versions of self and community. As such we must theorise social re-presentation as “an expression of the agency of social subjects who engage, think, feel and eventually transform the contexts in which they find themselves” (Jovchelovitch, 1996, p. 9). In relation to the racialisation of school exclusion, we can see how pupils actively resist the realities they experience at school and reject re-presentations that marginalize their positions and possibilities within education. Hence social re-presentation must be seen as a quest for social recognition: a quest to be seen as you see one’s self. The social relationships and institutional cultures of educational establishments, be they mainstream schools or alternative forms of education, permeate the everyday experiences of pupils in ways that intersect with their social and cultural identities. Hence, exclusion-inclusion within schooling needs to be examined in these terms: what are the social representations that sustain oppressive practices and how may they be resisted? That is, an examination of how we, in the everyday, develop critical engagement with the shifting relations of power and oppression around us. The discussion given here – on the lived experience of inequality and racism at school - has attempted precisely this.

Reasons to be critical?

What I have attempted to do here is tackle what I have described as a third task of a critical social psychology: the examination of how we, in the everyday, through dialogue and participation develop a critical engagement with the shifting relations of power and oppression around us. I have explored the lived experience of inequality at school from the perspectives of young people and significant others. This offered an analysis of how young people perceive power operating in the context of their experiences at school. It focused on the role of re-presentation and therefore argumentation and resistance in the face of stigmatising institutionalised practices. This illustrates how re-presentation is intimately tied to the operation and contestation of power.[9]

What I have presented here highlights the role of representations in maintaining the racialised patterns of school exclusion and resistance. This illustrates how re-presentation plays a central role in the othering of social groups and, therefore, in the struggle for recognition (Honneth, 1995; Howarth, 2002c). The material that I presented young people and significant others problematise and critique racialising re-presentations while participating in the conditions of oppression and contestation that pervade their experiences of school.

We have seen here how the re-presentation of 'black youth' as threatening and confrontational may led to social encounters where black pupils experience their own reactions in this way. The expectation that black pupils will act aggressively may encourage some of them into *reacting* aggressively. As others have said, this can become a self-fulfilling prophecy as black boys embody the positions they are offered – as 'troublemakers' (Gillborn, 1995; Richardson and Wood, 1999). Similarly John (2000) explains how black students "have internalised the deficit

[9] What this does *not* do is present a critical account of the role of power more generally in social re-presentation. This challenge has still to be met by social representation theorists, but one I believe has to develop from a more thoroughly practical engagement in diverse settings. Hence, it is would be premature to develop such a framework at this stage.

and pathological constructions that society in general and schooling in particular place upon them" and so " 'act in role', thereby meeting the low expectations of the oppressive system" (p.9). Thus, in taking on these expectations black pupils come to embody forms of masculinity and confirm the re-presentation themselves as confrontational and disruptive. In this way stigmatising re-presentations may come to produce the realities they symbolise, as people participate in the oppressive conditions that limit their well-being and freedom.

At the same time and despite the weight of the histories of these gendered racisms, young people, families and community practioners in the study found ways to subvert the individualising, pathologising and racialising re-presentations that sustain relations of power and exclusion. In collaboration with others, they collectively generated oppositional interpretations of their experiences and identities that assisted inclusion at school. This highlighted the role of the community in encouraging resistance, contesting discourses and asserting confident identities. Such counter public spheres may encourage empowering narratives of identity, community and social change.

This shows how people engage with relations of power and inequality in their everyday lives, and critique social re-presentations of black pupils that position them as 'different', 'other' and 'threatening'. What is useful about applying a social representations approach in this study is the focus on re-presentation in simultaneously maintaining and contesting social categories and hence social divisions. This enables an analysis of the role of re-presentation, participation and resistance in systems of othering and social exclusion. From a social representations perspective resistance is a central aspect of re-presentation. In the act of taking on a social representation there is always the possibility of re-interpretation, re-evaluation and argumentation (Moloney and Walker, 2002). As Moscovici (1984) has discussed, while representations "are shared by many, enter into and influence the mind of each - they are not thought by them; rather, to be more precise, they are re-thought, re-cited and re-presented" (p. 9). This distinction is very

useful as it allows for the possibility of agency and resistance as re-presentation becomes a potential space. This means that the collaborative act of re-presentation itself invites participation and resistance.

Necessarily such participation and resistance needs to be developed in relationship with others. Re-presentation, and therefore resistance, can only occur in dialogue with others, even if these are 'generalised' others (Mead, 1972), in contexts and communities where there are competing narratives and competing interests at stake (Howarth, 2001). The social production of knowledge is precisely that - *social.* It has to occur in a community of others, drawing on and working against current 'already presented' re-presentations. The process of re-presentation, therefore, is fundamentally dynamic, ongoing and, crucially for a critical perspective, contested. What this highlights is the argumentative nature of re-presentation (Billig, 1988). As Moloney and Walker (2002) have proposed, social representations theory needs to re-conceptualise Moscovici's 'thinking society' as an 'arguing society' "so that the voices of dispute and controversy are heard in the endless babble" of social representations (p. 314). This type of analysis would promote study into the role of resistance and contestation in social re-presentation, highlight the importance of participation and community and so encourage a critical version of social representations theory. If we focus on argumentation, as "the basis of inquiry and of political change" (Spears, 1997, p. 23), then we can explore the ways in which people engage and participate critically and politically in the everyday.

Re-presentations are socially and *ideologically* (re)constructed in dialogue and practice with actual, multiple and generalised others – and some 'others', particularly powerful institutions and dominant discourses, may have more social capital to impose constructions and so marginalize competing re-presentations. Hence, as Moscovici put it, social re-presentation involves "a kind of ideological battle, a battle of ideas" (1998, p. 403), a battle for meaning and interpretation. This focus on the contestation of re-presentations, on the argumentation that

enables resistance and the relations of power that different re-presentations support or challenge gives social representations theory the tools with which to contribute to a critical social psychology focused on community, resistance and social change.

What I hope to have achieved in this paper is an exploration into what a critical version of social representations theory could look like and how I have attempted to ‘do’ critical social psychology in the community. I have asserted that this perspective focuses on the way re-presentations pervade institutionalized practices and so come to structure relations of power and inequality. It reveals how re-presentations are systems of otherising and excluding that present communities and social groups with historical and ideological challenges in their quest for recognition and dialogue. It explores how people collectively negotiate and contest the institutionalized discourses and practices that inform and reflect their multiple identities. It highlights the possibilities for developing alternative re-presentations, and so for contestion and resistance. It is offers us the possibility of examining how people collectively participate in the social and ideological (re)construction of the relations they live and so highlights how people critically engage in the everyday. I would argue that if we do not use these social and critical tools within the theory we will be guilty of the claim that we, as social psychologists “calmly ignore social inequalities, political violence, wars, underdevelopment or racial conflict” (Moscovici, 1972, p. 21; Reicher, 1997). For this reason, social representations theory needs to become critical.

We need to consider seriously how to ‘do’ critical research in the field and to initiate the possibilities of participation, engagement and resistance in the actual process of doing research; that is, we need to collaborate with our research participants in actually carrying out research as well as in disseminating research findings. This may create the possibilities of opening social re-presentation as a potential space. In doing research the social representations researcher invites participants to reveal and share their re-presentations: this may offer possibilities for reflection,

for critique and debate (Rose, Effraim, Joffe, Jovchelovitch and Morant, 1995). This type of methodology, more common in community psychology (Orford, 1992), organizational psychology (e.g. Schmolze, 2000) and advocated by critical discourse analysis (e.g. Parker, 1991), is something that social representations researchers are yet to adopt. Such an approach, however, would enable social representations researchers to use more participatory and empowering practices in engaging research participants in the processes of research itself. In this way, a critical version of social representations theory could invite a more participatory and so less elitist and divisive approach to the exploration of the conditions of human well-being. Without implementing ourselves as action researchers in processes of social change, social representations research will remain on the fringes of critical social psychology and will remain impotent in its effect. As Moscovici (1972) has said himself, "it is the destiny of all truth to be critical, and therefore we shall have to be critical" (p. 66).

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