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"It's not their fault that they have that colour skin, is it?" Young British children and the possibilities for contesting racializing representations

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"It's not their fault that they have that colour skin, is it?"

Racialisation, Representation and Resistance at school

Within the realms of the academy the dynamic and multiple nature of racism(s) are fiercely debated; symbolic, institutional, cultural, localized, global, new, old, neo-colonial, gendered, blatant, subtle (Back and Solomos, 1996; Durrheim & Dixon, 2004; Leach, 2005; Omi & Winant, 1986; Pettigrew & Meetens, 1995; Sears, 1988) are all terms used in making sense of the ways in which racism adapts itself to the changing contours of the societies we inhabit and research. As a social psychologist informed by Serge Moscovici's (1961/1976; 2000) theory of social representations which highlights the interrelations between knowledge systems constructed in the reified worlds of science and academia and the knowledge produced and debated in the more everyday spheres of cafes, bars, classrooms and kitchens - a central concern of mine in the study of racism is *how is racism understood in the everyday?* How is racism made sense of? Does its contested nature enter into 'ordinary' experiences? Does new racism, for example, have significance in our commonplace discussions about 'race' and racism¹? Furthermore, as a social psychologist concerned with the impact of racism on the identities of children and teenagers, how do young people make sense of racism? How do they explain its operation and its consequences in their lives?

A more pressing issue, I suggest, is how is racism *problematized* in the everyday? How is it challenged by young people who experience it and/or witness it in the contexts of school, media and community, for example? In what ways can children and young people negotiate, navigate and contest its significance and rupture its hold over the ways in which we make sense of ourselves and make sense of each other? Consider the quote in

¹ 'Race' is problematized here with speech marks in order to disrupt its taken-for-grantedness and often naturalised status in everyday and academic discourses and so highlight its ideological construction. I also use *race* as a verb - to draw attention to the ways in which representations and practices operate in the ideological construction of 'race'. When using *race* as a verb, I have used italics and no speech marks.

the title of this chapter (from a 9 year old white British participant in the research discussed here) "*It's not their fault that they have that colour skin, is it?*" What does this question do? Does it ride on the dynamics of racism that fixes difference on the skin of the other and constructs such difference as something 'bad', something 'at fault', or does it problematise society's racism and so reveal support for and allegiance to those targeted by racism? In many ways it does both, as the tag "is it?" questions the taken-for-grantedness of racist discourses and so could be said to disrupt, perhaps momentarily, the hold of racism on social cognition and identity.

As Reicher asks, "It is one thing to provide a sophisticated understanding of structural forms and cultural/ideological products. But how do these then translate into forms of behaviour that either reproduce or challenge existing social forms?" (2004, p. 941). In the field of racism, studies and theories have attended principally to the social, psychological and sometimes institutional *reproduction* of racism, and so neglected an analysis of the social, psychological and institutional conditions of resistance in the face of racism (Hook and Howarth, 2005). I suggest that we also need to look for moments and spaces of resistance, where and when racist discourses are held up, disrupted and contested. To do otherwise would naturalise and objectify racism - as an impermeable and predetermined aspect of our ongoing realities (Howarth, 2006a).

If contemporary Social Psychology is to make a useful and an original contribution to the analysis of racial categorisation in the everyday, I suggest we need to explore the ways in which *representations that race* become problematic, contested and rejected in people's everyday sense-making, talk and action, as Condor (1998) has also proposed. This is not to imagine some idealized world where we can dismiss the grasp of racism over collective memories (Riggs and Augoustinos, 2005), spatial arrangements (Durrheim and Dixon, 2005), institutionalised practices (Howarth, 2004) or subjectivities (Hook and Howarth, 2005) - a utopian and politically dangerous vision Ahmed (2004) warns us. As Gilroy points out, while racism "involves a mode of

exploitation and domination that is not merely compatible with the phenomena of racialized differences but has amplified and projected them in order to remain intelligible, habitable, and productive" (2004, p. 33), it is imperative that we explore the ways in which the underlying logic of racism is also made *unintelligible, uninhabitable* and *non-productive*.

Mama's (1995) account of Psychology and 'race' points to the ways in which the discipline has marginalised the experiences and perspectives of those racialised and so produced homogenising and acritical accounts of racism. She calls for a comprehensive examination of the possibilities for personal change, agency and transformation in the relationship between racism and identity. She explains that:

"Racism can be seen as texturing subjectivity rather than determining black social and emotional life. Put another way, race is only ever one among many dimensions of subjectivity and it never constitutes the totality of an individual's internal life. Even where racial contradictions feature a great deal in people's history and experience, the fact they are responded to by personal change means that they are not an omnipresent force acting on passive victims" (Mama, 1995, p. 111-112).

I suggest that social representations theory is a valuable tool for the study of racism, precisely because it addresses the dialectic between representation and identity, and so focuses on possibilities for agency, resistance, social change and transformation (Howarth, 2006b). Social representations and social identities must be seen as two sides of the same coin. In positioning ourselves in relation to others, that is in asserting, performing or *doing* identity, we reveal our perspective on the world, our ways of seeing and constructing the world, that is - our social representations. And just as identities tie us to particular communities of others and simultaneously highlight what is individual and unique about us: representations carry traces of our collective histories and common practices and simultaneously reveal the possibilities of resistance and agency. The relationship between social representations and social identities becomes more complex, more fraught and sometimes more damaging in relationships and contexts that are racialised. *Representations that race* particular power relations, communities,

bodies, practices and ways of knowing impact on social identities in ways that may damage identities, lower self-esteem and limit the possibilities of agency, community and humanity.

In this chapter I discuss the relationship between representation, identity, power and resistance in relation to research into experiences of racism in predominantly white primary school in the South-East of England. While we do have to recognise that identity and esteem can be damaged by racist representations, my research demonstrates how children and young people find innovative ways to problematise racism, disrupt its gaze and so rupture its hold over their own identities. The psychological damage of racism is then an important but partial aspect of the connection between power, representations and identity in this context.

This is the primary focus of my research: I examine how we may privilege, negotiate and/or contest the racialising representations that inform, spoil and re-make our multiple identities. This shows how we are actively involved in challenging racism, re-constructing representations of difference and so redefining the possibilities of identity and community. The chapter concludes with a critical discussion of the possibilities for agency in challenging representations that race. Before moving onto the study itself, I shall first outline ways in which social representations theory inform the design and methods of analysis of the project described here.

Using Social representations theory in the design and analysis of the study

Social representations theory is primarily about the social, psychological, historical and ideological dynamics to the (re)production of knowledge - and particularly knowledge that relates to the social categorisation, differentiation and identification of social groups and communities. The theory locates knowledge systems not only in what we say and write, in text and talk, but also in what we, individually and collectively, *do* - in

terms of social practices, cultural traditions and institutionalised norms (Howarth, 2006c; Jovchelovitch, 2001).

Social representations researchers, therefore, may examine the interplay between different systems of representations (Wagner, Duveen, Verma and Themel, 2000), look at whose interests are at stake in preserving certain systems of knowledge (Jovchelovitch, 1997) and reveal the possibilities for critique and contestation (Howarth, 2004). Social representations therefore enable people to know "who they are, how they understand both themselves and others, where they locate themselves and others. ... There is no possibility of identity without the work of representation" (Jovchelovitch, 1996, p. 125; Howarth, 2002a). To my mind these aspects of the theory make it extremely useful in the study of racism and anti-racist strategies. Verkuyen and Steenhuis (2005) have also commented on the value of the theory, particularly in the study of children's *active* and *collaborative* meaning making of social and cultural relations. As they accurately describe, for social representations researchers:

"cognition is seen as embedded in historical, cultural and sociorelational contexts. Cognitions are not purely individual constructions but are greatly influenced by the kinds of beliefs in the child's environment. The construction of meaning is seen as a social process, and meanings as social products. Common understandings are being created and recreated through interaction and communication between individuals and groups."

Verkuyen and Steenhuis, 2005, p. 661.

Hence what the theory offers the study of racism is an explicit focus on the social dynamics of re-presenting of 'race', that is the collaborative, social and ideological (re)construction, negotiation and contestation of representations and practices that *race*. This is precisely what I examine in this research: children's social representations of racism, in one particular but very ordinary context - a majority white primary school in the South East of England, with specific attention to the possibilities of resisting racism in this context.

These issues are still relatively under-researched in schools - especially in primary schools (Connolly, 2000). What appears missing from much educational research is an analysis of how pupils and teachers themselves make sense of, debate and challenge discourses and practices at school (Sewell, 1997). In addition, research often focuses on the ways in which racism is experienced in 'obviously' multicultural and heavily racialised contexts - where 'race' is literally seen on the bodies of non-white children and their communities (Gaine, 1987). Issues explored tend to be the institutionalisation of racism (e.g., Cole, 2004; Gillborn, 1995), the disproportionate numbers of black pupils appearing in exclusion and discipline statistics (e.g., Blair, 2001; Howarth, 2004) and the failure of (white) teachers and schools to meet the needs of black and other ethnic minority pupils (e.g., Majors, 2001). Predominantly white contexts with predominantly white bodies, by contrast, are constructed and often *researched* in ways that make racialising discourses and practices less visible. I would suggest that it is as important to study the operation of racism in 'white' spaces - precisely to make visible the racialising and racist discourses and practices of whiteness that those of us² invested in whiteness often seek to minimise (Rigg and Augoustinos, 2005). As Admed (2004) points out, however, whiteness is generally only invisible to those not subjected to its essential racism. As we shall see, young black and Asian children in this study had no problem identifying the marginalising and stigmatising dynamics of whiteness and racism operating in their school. As social representations theory would predict, it is precisely these contexts where 'race' and racism are less visible, less debated and less controversial that racialising and racist representations are most hegemonic, 'fossilized' and hence have their most power (Moscovici, 1984).

² It is essential to challenge an 'us' and 'them' racialised dichotomy, where 'we' speak from a positioned of white institutionalized authority about 'them', our non-white Other objects of research. However, it is also important to expose my own positioning and privilege within such institutionalized racialised relations as a white female academic. Being white (and female, mid-thirties with Antipodean accent, living in the local area) no doubt informed the ways in which research participants saw and positioned me and so had an impact on how they spoke about racism in the study. For a longer discussion on the impact of researcher identity in research on racism see Back and Solomos (1993; also Howarth, 2002c).

A predominantly white school, therefore, that is committed to developing anti-racist policies makes good sense as a research location not only in terms of ease of access, then, but also in terms of understanding the tenaciousness and vitality of racism in all contexts. For here, where teachers reject the existence of blatant forms of racism, where many children explain that racism "is not allowed" and where some parents assert that racism is "not an issue" - we can see how racism operates in subtle - and sometimes not so subtle - but quite systematic forms in the children's friendship patterns and experiences of bullying and discipline procedures.

Pupils across all year groups (from 8 to 12 years old) were invited to participate³. Two or three friendship pairs were selected from those who had volunteered from each year group, approximately equal numbers of girls and boys (see table 1). While white British children made up 97% of the school, I over-selected children with other heritage in order to make up half of the sample. The selected sample consisted of 11 White British children (8 English, 3 Irish and/or Scottish), 6 South East Asian (describing themselves as Bangladeshi, British Pakistani, Pakistani, Indian, British Muslim and Muslim) and 5 with mixed heritage from a range of other countries such as Colombia, Italy, Lebanon, Portugal, Spain and Trinidad, as well as the British Roma community. While this is a very diverse sample, it is important to remember that the school itself is predominantly white; most of the non-white children here stand out as the only non-white children in their class.

Social representations theory highlights the dynamic and reactive nature of representation - as we develop representations in different contexts to support or challenge different positions and associations. Hence it demands a very particular

³ As particularly important in research with young children (David, Edwards, and Alldred, 2001; Hurley and Underwood, 2002) I sought their informed consent by stressing the fact that they did not have to participate and could leave the research encounter at any point. If they appeared distracted, unsettled or uncomfortable I reminded them that they could leave. No child took this option, though one interview was significantly shorter than the others (20 as opposed 55 - 125 minutes) as, I suspect, one of the participants was uncomfortable disclosing his experiences of racism.

approach to methods - one that foregrounds dialogue, debate and agency. Furthermore, given the age of the children in the study (8 to 12 years), and given the topic of racism - which many find abstract, difficult to discuss, upsetting, provoking or guilt-inducing (Eslea and Mukhtar, 2000), non-directive research methods were chosen in order to elicit stories from the children that would reflect their experiences and emotions adequately. These were vignettes, story-telling and drawing. As the study explores how they make sense of 'race' and racism - I needed to encourage their participation and interest in the topic. Following Verkuyen and Steenhuis (2005), I sought to position children as "active participants in the situational and interactive construction of distinctions and understandings" (p. 677) relating to 'race' and racism.

One of the reasons I chose to work with the children in friendship pairs was to promote the possibility of debate, argumentation and critique in discussions; being with a friend meant that they were able to comment on the same experiences but often from different perspectives. This strategy is often used in research with young children (e.g. David *et al*, 2001; Morrow, 1999). For example, Claire (2001) found that children were more reserved both on their own and in focus groups, and the presence of friends as "trustworthy others" were more likely to "permit disclosures of confidential material" (*ibid*, p. 9) and differences of opinion. I encouraged such differences as a way of highlighting the connections between identity and representation and hence the role of agency and subjectivity in the collaborative production of knowledge. This also enabled the children to accept the possibilities of difference and contradiction in the telling of different stories.

Using story-telling (where I would tell a story about racist bullying constructed from my pilot research observations⁴ of such incidents at the school; they would also tell their own stories of experiencing, witnessing or enacting racism; see box below) and

⁴ The pilot research consisted of a series of observations in all year groups, breaktimes and playground activities and informal discussions with staff and pupils over a period of 3 months. The purpose of this was to familiarise myself with the school, its ethos and the pupils.

drawing worked well in this regard - as I attempted to position them as "knowers and actors, not objects of the research" (Pole, Mizen, and Bolton, 1999, p. 46). In addition, drawing and story-telling gave them a tangible means of anchoring and objectifying an abstract concept such as racism. All sessions were conducted in English, were tape-recorded and transcribed by the author.

Story to read to pairs:

Faranaz was not very happy at school. There were some others in her class who were always picking on her. They made fun of her name and her accent. One lunchtime they started calling her nasty names. Sarah, who was her best friend, stood up for her and told the other girls to go away. This made Faranaz like Sarah even more as she thought this was very brave.

Questions to ask about story (prompts, not necessarily in this order):

Why did the other children pick on Faranaz?

What kind of names do you think they used?

How would you feel if you were Faranaz? What would you do?

How would you feel if you were Sarah? What would you do?

How would you feel if you had picked on Faranaz? What would you do?

Questions to ask to elicit stories and drawings:

Have you ever seen anything like this at school?

Has anyone ever been mean to you like this? How did it make you feel?

Have you ever been mean this like to other children? How did it make you feel?

Elicit story and drawing

Story-telling or vignettes are a useful way of uncovering both the *social* and *individual* aspects of representations as they can elicit the social or "cultural norms derived from respondents' attitudes to and beliefs about a specific situation" (Barter and Renold, 2000, p. 310) as well as "individuals' perceptions, beliefs and attitudes to a wide range of social issues" (Hughes, 1998, p. 384). It is through narratives that we organize and make sense of experiences, particularly difficult experiences, communicating and objectifying our understanding of abstract concepts, making new connections and coming up with counter-arguments. Not only does narrative enable dialogic sense-making and communication, but it allows us to find different ways of connecting with each other, developing a common identity and thus building a sense of community. As Claire has stated narrative is "at the heart of the construction of identity. The stories we tell are 'who we are'. They hold the meanings of our experiences, the judgments we make" (Claire, 2001, p. 11).

The stories and drawings placed children at the centre of the research process by seeking to reconstruct their experience, capturing both their voices and representations and foregrounding their own subjective meanings (Young and Barrett, 2001). I found that story telling and drawing enabled children to represent and communicate their experiences more freely, and created an informal dynamic between the children and myself which, I hope, promoted trust and thus the disclosure of sensitive material. This gave them more control over what and when to divulge personal experiences - and more control over the research interaction (Barker and Weller, 2003). Both the informality and my interest in their perspectives, I hope, enabled the children to discuss issues that were painful or abstract - or issues that they were hesitant about. It was important to find ways of recognising the emotional weight of these stories and valuing the resilience of these children. In the analysis below I concentrate on the themes that appeared from the children's verbal accounts and have used the drawings as a means of illustrating these.

I have argued that a critical social psychological study of racism needs to explore the possibilities for *problematizing* racism (Howarth and Hook, 2005). Clearly children are more likely to do this in the relatively more formal dynamics of the research encounter where they would feel censured by school rules on racism, social conventions and the presence of a (white) adult⁵. Hence the context itself was constructed intentionally to elicit anti-racist views and a rejection of discriminatory behaviour in general. This is what we explore in the rest of this chapter: what strategies the children collaborate in their resistance against racism.

Contesting racial categories: disrupting racism?

The analysis reveals three dominant ways of representing 'race': 'race' as real, 'race' as imposed and 'race' as contested. While there are some significant age and gender related differences as developmental psychologists would predict (Aboud and Amato, 2001; Fishbein, 2002), all children used all three representations, to different degrees in positioning themselves in the racialised relations of inclusion and friendship at school. 'Race' was most often constructed as 'real' - as visually obvious in the way the Other is seen (marked by black and brown skin) and so difference is made tangible, essential and non-negotiable. In the short story there is no reference either Faranaz's or Sarah's visual appearance. However for most children who drew a picture from this story - one difference was very clear: skin colour. (There was one exception which we discuss below). Take this picture from Jane (Scottish English, aged 11).

Picture 1

⁵ Furthermore my deliberate decision to problematise any comments made by children that could have read as racist would have made it even more difficult for this kind of remarks to be made. Following Connolly (2000) I would signal disagreement and disapproval, attempt to reveal contradictions in their argument and expose their own points of connection and identification with racialised others. This was to highlight the argumentative nature of (their and *my*) talk as well as to limit the possibility that the research encounter could be a space where racist comments were accepted unproblematically (in the name of conducting so-called 'objective' research).

The dialectic of sameness-difference is clear here, as Jane has depicted the girls as very similar in stature, hair-style and clothes with the only albeit very obvious difference being skin-colour. Difference, as the children described, is visually evident and so naturalised and unproblematic. At the same time, children *did* problematise this version of 'race' and reveal how racialised difference was something constructed and imposed on them through associations to foreignness, danger and contagion. Sophie (Italian English, aged 10), explained:

Caroline: So is there racism in this school?

Sophie: Yeah - lots. Lots yeah. The English people, yeah - like 'look at you - smelly', or 'you are really ugly'. And when they touch someone they will 'ooh! I touched her! I need to wash my hands!' And all that stuff. It's like no one wants to sit next to them or anything. Also - like they don't want to get into trouble.

Here 'race', rather than a natural self-evident aspect of human differences, is imposed through a racist gaze that constructs blackness-brownness as different, as ugly, as dirty, as trouble. Children gave various stories that illustrated the operation and power of this representation in their experiences at school, in sport and in the community generally. Here, in this picture by Mark (Bangladeshi, aged 11), he shows us how he has experienced racist abuse at a birthday party barbeque: as a child shouts "you black!" and an adult demands he "get out of here":

Picture 2

Hence there are two competing representations of 'race': it is either something that is understood as 'real' - in that it can be seen, touched and even caught from the Other, or it is something that is constructed, imposed and deeply hurtful. Both of these representations are discussed in detail elsewhere (Howarth, under review). Here I describe the ways in which the children problematised and rejected the significance and power of racism. In these accounts that contest 'race' we see these other two

representations at play. In the quotes given below, the children's names are pseudonyms that they chose themselves. The ethnicity given is how they defined themselves (which was sometimes different to school definitions, see table 1).

Very evident in all the children's accounts was the claim that racism affected relationships and interactions at school. Take this discussion between Mark (Bangladeshi, aged 11), and Tak (English Colombian, aged 11), after we have discussed what they like about the school I ask:

Caroline: So what don't you like about this school?

Mark: The bullying - people calling us nasty names - like 'coloured' or 'Paki'. People pick on us because of this (*he touches his arm, indicating that his skin is brown*). That makes me feel bad.

Caroline: How do you feel Tak?

Tak: I just want to be like everyone else. I want to be white, I wish I could rub this off -

Mark: If I was white, people wouldn't pick on me and I wouldn't get into trouble. If I was white, people wouldn't notice me.

Tak: And the teachers should do something about it.

Caroline: What do the teachers do about it?

Tak: They treat it like anything else - like calling someone fat, or four-eyes. Look, people call me fat, people call me Paki. It is not the same thing.

Caroline: Ok. Why not?

Tak: Fat is just me, it's here (*he touches his stomach*), fat is my body. My body doesn't feel these things. If they call me Paki - it's all of me - and my family too. It's everything - my mum, my home, I don't know how to explain. It hurts. It hurts me a lot more.

Shocking as this is, there were many similar accounts to this - that point to the very tangible and the very damaging reality of racism in these children's lives. Not only does racism limit friendship patterns at school, but it impacts on children's sense of belonging, identity and esteem. Racism was presented as an almost mundane feature of everyday encounters that penetrates how people see one another and themselves - in both very explicit racist bullying, as we see above as well as in ways that may be quite elusive and unconsciousness. This is discussed in detail in Howarth (under review). Here I am interested in what sense children made of this - how they explained the existence

of racism and how far they contested it. If children introduced an individualised version of racism, where only some people are racist, I asked them what motivated people to target black or Asian children at school. To this Lizzie (Irish English, aged 10) explained, "they can't think of an answer"; they do it because "they have not got anything else to do" (Frank, Spanish Trinidadian, aged 11). As Sharon (Irish-Scottish, aged 11) admits "I was bored most of the time. You pick on people just because you are bored." It appears as a dominant discourse in school life, an easy weapon in "the social regulations of belonging" (Brah, 1996, p. 192) and friendship.

Despite this salience, children found many ways to problematise racism and its operation at school. Their collaborated strategies included the following:

- Contest the ideological construction of difference
- Highlight the 'stupidity' of racists and the contradictions of racism
- Develop protective and inclusive friendship networks and claims to commonality
- Expose the invisibility of whiteness and reject white identities
- Produce self as agent not object in racialised networks of power

The ideological construction of difference was contested by challenging the significance of racism - describing how it is superficial and "only on the outside" (Mark, Bangladeshi, aged 11). In rejecting racialised difference children proposed "alternative narratives" (McKown, 2004, p. 610) that asserted connection and commonality with their peers, saying that "I am *not* different. I am like everyone else" (Frank, Spanish Trinidadian, aged 11) and "we are all the same really" (Amina, white British, aged 11). This shows how children are actively involved in challenging racism, re-constructing representations of difference and so redefining the possibilities of identity and community. We see this throughout the analysis.

Many of the children developed an individualistic account of racism - where racism exists "because some people are really, really, really, really, really stupid!" (Tonia,

British Pakistani, aged 12). Like 'race' itself, racism is seen as somehow inscribed in the body or the mind of the racist, and it is so illogical that it is only people who are "dumb" who could be seduced by the contradictions of racism.⁶ Take this exchange between Matthew and John (both white British, aged 9) and myself (Caroline):

Matthew: Some people are racist, not all.

Caroline: So why do you think that some people are racist?

John: Because they don't like the other type.

Matthew: I think they are stupid. And ignorant.

Caroline: And ignorant?

Matthew: They are like ill - and they may they have a special something inside their body probably - and that makes them do that, or they are probably drunk or something like that.

Matthew appears to be more reflective and critical of racism than John (this may be due the fact he himself has experienced a lot of name-calling over his 'ginger' hair). While racialised differences are constructed as 'real' by John - evoking a systematic classification of human 'types', Matthew constructs the racist as someone who cannot make sense of things logically.⁷ Other children in the study, mostly children who had experienced racism themselves, characterised racists as "mad" and "stupid", for example saying that they should be in a "mental asylum" (Mark, Bangladeshi, aged 12). There is a trace of this in Catherine's (English, aged 8) picture: she explained that the bullies "look stupid" (see below). I asked why they were dressed differently to Faranaz and Sarah, she answered:

Catherine: They look stupid! They won't wear the school uniform. They are stupid and do not go to school.

Picture 3

⁶ Archer and Francis (2005) also found that children explained racism as a product of cognitive immaturity - something that "a few silly people are" (p. 400). This echoes certain intellectualized versions of racism where racism is represented as the property of *certain* individuals (Leach, 2002). We must accept that scientific accounts of racism filter into and shape commonsense notions of racism (McKown, 2004). Hence it is important to challenge academic accounts that individualise racism and so divert attention away from its institutional, historical and cultural constitution. For a fuller discussion of the consequences of such see Howarth (2006b).

⁷ McKown (2004) has commented that it is important to distinguish children's awareness of race (what we seen from John) from children's awareness of racism (Matthew).

Similarly John 2 (Muslim, aged 10) explains:

John 2: You just think - how many lessons have you had before telling you that racism is wrong, racism is wrong, but they don't understand it. 6 and 7 year olds can understand it, but some adults can't understand it. Adults can say things about skin colour, or 'you come from another country', how they look like and all that. I don't know why. It's stupid! It does not make sense.

With much passion and anger the children highlighted the contradictions of racism, often pointing to the fact that otherness, difference and tangibly blackness/brownness are simultaneously feared and desired (as theorists such as Fanon, du Bois and Hall have long recognised). For instance they point to the fact that black and brown skin signals difference and yet many white people do not like being "all white and pale" (Frank, Spanish Trinidadian, aged 11). Similarly, when discussing the impact of racism Tonia (British Pakistani, aged 12) says:

Tonia: I just think - there is one thing that REALLY gets me about it - is all people who are white - they love going into the sun and getting a tan to make themselves brown. And then they want to make fun of black people, and they are brown! It's stupid!

Not only do the children point to the fact that brown and black skin is desired but that otherness itself can be a quality envied by white people. Thomas (who describes himself as white and 'looks' white while having some Indian heritage, aged 8) in discussion with Richard (white British, aged 8) and myself for example, asserts that people are jealous of the attention that difference attracts:

Caroline: Okay, Richard, why do you think that the other children picked on Faranaz?

Richard: Cos she is a different colour because that sounded like an Indian name and her accent - and being different really.

Caroline: So if someone speaks differently - why do other children pick on them?

Richard: Cos they are different.

Caroline: But why pick on them?

Thomas: Maybe because they are jealous! Because they get all the attention because they are different.

Highlighting the contradictions of racism can be seen as a way of contesting representations and practices that *race*. Some children, such as Tonia (British Pakistani, aged 12), gave many examples of these; for instance, she described how white audiences admire black celebrities in film, music and sport such as Ashley Cole and Will Smith but "don't like anyone on the street who is black". Many of the boys commented on the operation of racism in football and said that it was "unfair" (Frank, Spanish Trinidadian, aged 11) that black players were not treated like white players. Here is a picture from Bob (English, aged 11), depicting a miserable looking black footballer in front of a sea of white faces (and a McDonalds 'I'm loving it' advertisement):

Picture 4

For other children an understanding of the constructed nature of 'race' and the inherent tensions and inconsistencies in racist discourses is less obvious and comes out in discussion only after explicit challenges either from myself or the other participant. Take this discussion with Amina (white British, aged 11) and Lizzie (Irish English, aged 10). For an early stage in the interview they asserted that some children are 'picked on' by racists simply because "they are different" and have different cultural practices, in relation to dress and food for example:

Amina: Well loads of people picking on someone because they were different or their skin colour is different. Or they can't wear the certain clothes that you are meant to.

Lizzie: Yeah, some people pick on them because they are not wearing the clothes that they should wear. You look at them and judge them, and just hate them because of that and don't get to know them.

Difference is quite obvious for them at this point: it is visually apparent and defined by (dominant white) social conventions. Racism appears as 'the fault' of the Other as other cultures maintain different social and cultural practices. The

interview continues with much discussion on racism and bullying at school, where I pressed both girls to take the perspective of the other (Mead, 1972) and imagine how it is to be seen as different and so "hated". They tell me stories and draw pictures of their own experiences: Lizzie has experienced prejudice directly as she is half Irish and Amina had a friend with a "funny accent" who was picked on. At the end of the interview, about an hour later, I ask them if there is anything they would like to add:

Caroline: Okay, is there anything else you would like to say about this?

Amina: Bullies do it because they have a great sense of power. They like their own power and control - and they are afraid of other people - especially other people who are different.

Caroline: So, different? How are they different?

Amina: They are different - because (*pause*), well they are. (*pause*). They look different, they wear different clothes, they EAT different food. They are different. But it doesn't matter. We are all the same really.

Lizzie: Those are just small things, it doesn't matter you eat. Anyway, I like their food. Everyone likes curry, and that's different. And pizza, that's not English, but we like that. That's Italian.

The dichotomy 'us' and 'them' (their food; we like that) is still apparent. However difference is beginning to appear more complex and less transparent. Difference may be inferred in different foods, though we 'all' enjoy these - so we may all be involved the practices of claiming difference and claiming community. What we begin to see, albeit fleetingly, is that there is a clear dominant social representation of difference (where some people simply 'are' different) that does not fit completely with their own experiences and subjective understandings - as the representation 'doesn't matter' as 'I like their food'.

Representations of difference and commonality are also apparent in the children's friendship networks and claims to inclusion and belonging. Some more straightforward examples of children protecting themselves against racism were 'sticking together' and 'sticking up' for one another. Cathleen and Jessica (both British Bangladeshi, both aged 10) gave examples of this: on every visit to the school over a period of 4 months, I

observed that these girls were only ever in each other's company. After discussing the short story, Jessica said that Faranaz and Sarah are 'best friends', just like them. I ask:

Caroline: Okay - so you two are best friends?

Cathleen: Yes - and we always stick up for each other. We don't need anyone else to stick up for us.

Caroline: So what do you do?

Jessica: We just make each other feel better.

Caroline: And do you say anything to the other children?

Cathleen: No - because that will make it more worse.

Caroline: So have you ever seen anything like that happen? (*pointing to the text of the story I have read them*)

Jessica: Yes - but not now, not recently. But there was this time when Melissa pulled my hair down to the ground and was horrible to me. She called me a 'blackie'.

Caroline: And what happened?

Jessica: She told a lot of lies and I told the truth. But we both got bad bookings - and I did nothing at all. It was her fault and what she said was bad. And Cathleen made me feel better.

The picture that Cathleen and Jessica drew together (as they did not want to draw separate pictures, quite revealing in itself) also emphasises commonality and similarity. Unlike all the other pictures of Sarah and Faranaz, here they are almost identical:

Picture 5

Difference, so apparent to the other children, is not visible here. An implication is that, for them, difference does not matter, or perhaps *should* not matter. While Jessica and Cathleen found it easy to relate to each other and care for each other through their shared experiences of racism, it was apparent that many white children in the school also challenged systems of exclusion and difference through their friendship with non-white children. White children who were racialised through minority white ethnicities (such as Greek or Irish) or through their friendships with black and Asian children also found ways to connect with those racialised and/or to reject racism. Take this quote from Catherine (white British, aged 8) who has witnessed this herself:

Catherine: Like there is this boy in our class - people always say to him - "errrr I don't want to touch you" - and he is a bit dark.

Caroline: So people are horrible to him?

Catherine: no - not everyone - there is another boy - Patrick he is always playing with him and he is not dark. Other people will pick on him but Patrick plays with him. Patrick is Irish and is picked on a lot because of the way he talks.

Children who have experience of racism and other forms of prejudice (being Irish, having 'ginger' hair, being fat) recognise a common bond and develop friendships through these shared experiences. Mark (Bangladeshi, aged 11) and Tak (English Colombian, aged 11), who we met above, were close friends and described many experiences of "sticking up" for each other. They discussed how they collaborated ways of inverting racist discourses and using these against the racialising other. For instance:

Caroline: So have you been horrible like that, or racist ever?

Tak: Yeah - if someone was to say 'oh you black, you have been left in the oven for too long', we go - 'oh you are so white cos you are um, made up with white chocolate'. But I have only said that about 4 times or something.

Mark: We will stick up for each other.

There were various references to chocolate in the study. Kelley (white British, aged 11), for example, observes that some of her friends "get called things like 'you chocolate face'" and in Matthew's (British, aged 9) picture a very sad looking child is being called "chocolate head":

Picture 6

As we have seen there were also examples of calling *white* people 'white chocolate'. This is interesting as it does not necessarily work to simply reject a racialised connotation. It could be seen to demonstrate the fixity of the racist gaze and the impossibility of stepping outside of its frameworks (Ahmed, 2004). It could also be seen as a way of proposing connection, a commonality - for the racialised other is often depicted as 'chocolate coloured' - and so if the white other is seen as 'white chocolate' then rather

than asserting difference - this asserts an essential sameness. As Richard (white British, aged 8) emphasises "underneath, we are all the same". So Tak (English Colombian, aged 11) above, may in fact be asserting a connection to the white children who call him "chocolate head" and so very subtly disrupting a racist dichotomy. There is not a clear answer to what these pieces of talk 'do' in any definite sense in terms of maintaining or rejecting racist representations. What is important is that they throw up these questions and contradictions, and so work in ways that unsettle and destabilise racialising and racist associations and stereotypes. They may offer new possibilities in terms of asserting identity, connection and humanity - and propose new ways of being seen.

Evident in children's remarks on "white chocolate" is an attempt to subvert the racialising discourses that make whiteness (for many) invisible. While few children in the study in fact used the label "white", children who had experienced racism and their white friends found ways of bringing whiteness into focus. Here, for example, Kelley (white British, aged 11, close friends with Tonia, British Pakistani, aged 12):

Kelley: Because Sharon is white, and Tonia does not make fun that she is white or anything - so Sharon should not make fun that Tonia is a different colour to her.

It is significant that white children such as Kelley in the study asserted connections with children seen as 'other' as a way of rejecting racism - and also minimising the possibility that they could be positioned as racist themselves. Some children who appeared to have close friendships with racialised children tried to minimise or remove their associations with whiteness and implicitly assert their connections with 'other' cultures and places. Catherine (white British, aged 8), for example, said that she preferred holidays in Africa to holidays in England. Amina (white British, aged 11), we saw above, told me that she liked "different" foods such as pizza and curry. Some children criticised white skin, saying that "it makes your teeth look all yellow" (Chelsea, Portuguese Lebanese English, aged 10) and "it's too pale" (Frank, Spanish Trinidadian,

aged 11). Another critique of whiteness was to highlight white histories of oppression and violence, saying for example that "the white people always treat the black people like slaves" (Chelsea, Portuguese Lebanese English, aged 10).

Whiteness is uncomfortable for some of the children - something that has to be negotiated and possibly rejected, as we see below. For Kelley to claim whiteness, would be to claim a difference that would maintain representations of exclusion and othering that she rejects. Hence her only option appears to be to reject whiteness altogether:

Tonia: I really like being brown. I like my skin - it is like an everyday tan.

Spring, Summer, Autumn, Winter - I will be brown. Even if I went to Antarctica I would still have a tan! White people just go red! I would not like to be red. I like being brown.

Kelley: I wish I was brown.

Just as Kelley rejects her own position in a racialising binary, Tonia challenges the unspoken assumption that white skin is 'better'. In doing so she highlights the operation of racialising representations, rejects the privilege of whiteness and claims a proud identity as brown. This could work to unsettle the ideology of racism that positions her as victim of racialising ways of constructing social relations, so Tonia (re)produces her self as *agent not object* of racialised networks of power. Rather than being objectified as a racial other, she takes delight in criticising white skin and positioning herself as essentially, permanently and *happily* brown. Unlike Tak and Mark (see above) she does not wish to be white, she does not want to avoid the racialising gaze and remove her otherness: she confidently asserts it and so challenges dominant representations that *race*. Opportunities like this may be limited, but there provide important occasions for us to (re)position ourselves as agents of representations 'about us' and so demand that we are recognised as we see ourselves.

The possibilities for agency

A psychological reality of 'race' is that the racialised other becomes an object to him or her self (Howarth, 2006c). As Du Bois (1989) explained the racialised other develops a

double consciousness - a consciousness imposed by racialising representations and a consciousness of self that extends beyond and challenges these stereotypes. The racialised other can be so fixed by the representations of the racialising other, and therefore the symbolic violence of these representations is that they constrain the dialectics of self, impose limiting versions of self and so deny humanity, agency and liberty.

'Race' is made an object as the racialised other is fixed and dehumanised (Hall, 2000). As "shared representations penetrate so profoundly into all the interstices of what we call reality that we can say that they constitute it" (Moscovici, 1998, p. 245), representations produce "extremely concrete and real consequences" (Jovchelovitch, 2001, p. 177). Thus representations of 'race' are 'real' in that they constitute a reality for these children: they cannot simply opt out of categories, discourses and representations that race. As Fanon's own experiences of the racist gaze demonstrated so powerfully, these children also spoke of difference being imposed on them.

To conclude here, on the depressing note of the impossibility of moving beyond racist discourses and of the psychological violence racism inflects on all of us, would do no service or justice to the stories told here. The stories here, spoken by very young children, speak to another world, another possibility and demand that we, as social researchers, provide a functionally useful account of agency, resistance and transformation in the face of racialised difference. Social representations theory, as a *radically* social psychological perspective, is useful here - for it allows us to consider how racialising representations are not only anchored in histories of white privilege, oppression and violence but also to explore "those social processes through which novelty and innovation become as much a part of social life as conservation and preservation" (Duveen, 2000, p. 7). What is valuable here is the emphasis on representation as an active collaborative social and psychological project - something *we do* in partnership with or in reaction against others (Howarth, 2006b).

Seeing re-presentation as a collaborative project - something that we are all engaged in whether we recognise this or not, seeing re-presentation as a dynamic and incomplete process - highlights our agency as the represented other, and reveals our collective roles in the production and contestation of difference, its significance and its social, psychological and ideological consequences (Moloney and Walker, 2002). These are the issues that social representations theory brings forward and ones that I have focussed on in discussing the children's experiences and understandings of racism. This invites discussion as to what a critical social psychology of racism might look like - foregrounding questions of recognition, relationship, contestation, agency and, fundamentally, hope.

For the stories given here show that while children feel the inescapability of the racialising gaze, they find ways to resist this, and so to detach themselves from the images imposed on them. In doing so they produce counter images, propose connections with the other, and so produce their identities again - as *agent* not *object* in the resistance of racism. Their accounts show how they attempt to problematise racism, disrupt its gaze and so rupture its hold over their own identities.

Hence while it is true that representations can constrain and limit the possibilities of agency and connection, this is only a part of the story. It is true that children in my research speak of wanting to be recognised and wanting to belong in a way that racialising relations of power do not often allow, but they also speak of anger, of resistance and of ways to undermine the technologies of racism. What is important is that they throw up questions and contradictions, and so work in ways that unsettle and destabilise racialising and racist associations and representations. Their strategies of resistance, collectively negotiated and performed, offer new possibilities in terms of asserting identity, connection and humanity - and so propose new ways of being seen.

As Moscovici has stated, "individuals and groups, far from being passive receptors, think for themselves, produce and ceaselessly communicate their own specific representations and solutions to the questions they set themselves ... which have a decisive impact on their social relations, their choices" (1984, p. 16). We saw this clearly in this study - as the children took up and worked out their own ways of making sense of the institutionalized dynamics of racial categorisation and racism. In other words, we saw how they negotiate social representations of racialised difference and come to position themselves within racialised networks of power and influence at school. This demonstrates how social representations inform the collaborative processes of identification, the 'othering' of particular groups, the objectification of racialised others, and, most crucially, the problematisation and rejection of representations and practices that *race*.

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Table 1

Friendship pairs ⁸	Ethnicity (as defined by school) ⁹	Ethnicity (as defined by participant)	Age	Sex	Yr
Thomas Richard	White Asian (has Indian heritage)	White	8	M	4
	White British	British	8	M	4
Catherine Laura	White British	English	8	F	4
	White British	British	8	F	4
Chelsea Sophie	Other	Portuguese and Lebanese and English	10	F	5
	White British	Italian English	10	F	5
Garth	Roma	Gypsy	10	M	5
	<i>(Preferred to be interviewed alone)</i>				
Matthew John	White British	British	9	M	5
	White British	British	9	M	5
Lizzie Amina	White British	Irish and English	10	F	6
	White British	British	11	F	6
John 2	Pakistani	Muslim	10	M	6
	<i>(Preferred to be interviewed alone)</i>				
Jessica Cathleen	Bangladeshi	British Bangladeshi	10	F	6
	Bangladeshi	British Bangladeshi	10	F	6
Tonia Kelley	Pakistani	British Muslim or British Pakistani	12	F	7
	White British	British	11	F	7
Sharon Jane	British	Irish and Scottish	11	F	7
	British	Scottish and English	11	F	7
Frank Bob	Other	Spanish and Trinidadian	11	M	7
	White British	English	11	M	7
Tak	Other	Colombian and English	11	M	7
Mark	Bangladeshi	Bangladeshi	11	M	7

⁸ Pupils volunteered to be part of the research. They were asked to volunteer in pairs – though two boys asked to be interviewed alone, which I agreed to. Pupils all choose a pseudonym.

⁹ I have 2 slight changes to protect the children's identity. For example, I could have changed French to German if there was only one French child in the school.