

# **RACISM, ELITES, AND CONVERSATION**

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Various types of discourse play a fundamental role in the reproduction of racism in European and North American societies. Thus, in the everyday lives of white people, conversations about minorities, immigrants, refugees or ethnic and racial affairs more generally serve to express and persuasively convey ethnic beliefs, attitudes and ideologies, as well as commonsense interpretations of concrete “ethnic” events. Within the framework of a large project on the relations between discourse and racism, a systematic discourse analysis of such conversations in the Netherlands and the USA, however, shows that many of these beliefs have been pre-formulated by various elite groups and institutions, especially in politics and the media. Elites are here defined as those groups that have preferential access to, as well as partial control over, the means of ideological reproduction, and thus also shape the manufacture of the ethnic consensus. Although virtually all members of white dominant groups have interests in reproducing the system of ethnic and racial inequality that results from this consensus, prevailing elite power and hence elite discourse within the dominant white majorities of Europe and North America need to be the focus of critical attention in an explanation of the mechanisms underlying the reproduction of racism in western society.

## **1. Popular vs Elite Racism**

The structural nature of racism presupposes its reproduction among the white dominant group at large. As part of our present work on racism and discourse, in which particular attention is paid to the role of the elites and their discourses in the reproduction of racism, this paper examines the impact of such elite discourse on

everyday conversation about ethnic affairs among white group members.

In the increasingly multi-ethnic societies of Europe and North America, white people routinely engage in spontaneous talk about ethnic minorities, immigrants or refugees (van Dijk 1984, 1987a). White citizens in the inner cities often talk with each other about their minority or “foreign” neighbors, and about the changes newcomers have brought to the neighborhood, the city or the country. Whether or not such changes are perceived to be negative, or even threatening, white ingroup members thus spread and confirm commonsense beliefs, if not ethnicist or racist prejudices, about the various outgroups.

Direct daily perception or interaction, however, is not a necessary condition for such conversations. Also in predominantly white neighborhoods, white people have knowledge and opinions about ethnic affairs, and talk about this with friends, neighbors, colleagues or acquaintances. Their direct “ethnic experiences”, if any, may in this case be based on occasional meetings with minorities or immigrants in public places or on the job, or, more often, they may derive them from conversations with other whites and especially from the mass media (Hartmann and Husband 1974; van Dijk 1991).

To examine the impact of elite discourse about ethnic affairs on everyday conversations, this paper briefly summarizes and reinterprets some selected results of a large project on racism and conversation and then focuses on the possible elite sources of such talk, especially in the mass media. Data for our study are drawn from some 180 interviews with white people from different neighborhoods in Amsterdam and San Diego.

### 1.1. *Theoretical framework*

The theoretical framework that informs the discussion in this paper is somewhat different from the one used in our earlier work on the expression of ethnic beliefs in everyday conversation (van Dijk

1984, 1987a). In line with the analyses of our current research on elite racism (van Dijk 1993), this paper not only focuses on the structures and strategies of discourse, social cognition and communication, as in the earlier studies, but also on the socio-cultural and political dimensions of the “popular” reproduction of commonsense ethnic beliefs in and through spontaneous everyday talk. Since racism in our framework is defined in terms of white group dominance, and its power needs to be effectively managed and legitimated, we assume that various elite groups not only contribute themselves, each in its own social domain, to the reproduction of white dominance, but also have interests in getting popular support for their attitudes and practices (Omi and Winant 1986). This popular support may partly be assessed by traditional survey research, but the details of argumentative legitimation and their underlying attitudes and ideologies should also be made explicit through detailed discourse analysis of everyday talk about ethnic affairs.

The top-down view on the processes of the reproduction of racism does not mean that the population at large passively accepts the ethnic “views from the top” or that popular racism does not have its own socio-economic and cultural dynamics (Phizacklea and Miles 1979). Indeed, the thesis of the role of elite racism does not make the trivial claim that societal power, including racist ideologies, is simply dictated from above. The production and reproduction of social power is much more complex, and presupposes active contributions from various social formations, institutions, domains and layers of societal structure (Lukes 1986). The same is true for the reproduction of racism within the white group: not only are white groups dominant in western societies, also within the white group, there is a complex system of dominance relations, which implies that elite power also prevails in the domain of ethnic attitudes and practices.

The thesis of the specific elite role in the reproduction of racism is not trivial. The converse (bottom-up) thesis, namely that racism primarily has popular roots, which may then be manipulated and exploited by elite groups, seems to be supported by our own finding that white people in poor inner-city neighborhoods frequently

express their resentment against the “politicians, who have let them in”. This seems to point at a discrepancy between popular and, allegedly liberal, elite views of ethnic affairs.

Consistent with our theoretical framework, one explanation of such popular reactions would assume that these popular feelings are preformulated and supported by propaganda of the more explicitly racist elites of the extreme right, e.g., by racist party leaders such as Le Pen of the *Front National* in France or Schönhuber of the *Republikaner* in Germany. An alternative and in my opinion more powerful explanation of popular racism is that the seemingly moderate forms of racism of the elites may be translated into a more radical form of racism in everyday situations, specifically in contexts of perceived competition, alleged minority-favoritism and unfavorable socio-economic conditions of the white working class or lower middle class.

The processes at work here are so complex that even their initial formulation can only approximately pin down what the exact questions should be. Thus, the “popular racism” thesis could easily be defended autonomously by explaining grass roots racism as a result of feelings of resentment and frustration due to poverty, unemployment, inner-city decay, and socio-cultural alienation due to the arrival of other groups, especially those from other countries and cultures and/or with another color.

However, although such aggression-frustration or resentment-and-competition factors may explain some of the specific forms of popular racism, they cannot account for the fact that similar forms of racism are well-known in different socio-economic or cultural circumstances, viz., when conditions of alleged unfair competition or (the fear of) the presence of increasing numbers of foreigners in the neighborhood are not realized. In other words, racism is not limited to poor whites or even to lower middle class whites who fear to lose their modest gains and who express their resentment against “those below” seen as “risky competitors” in their delicate socio-economic situation.

Most importantly, however, the thesis of (the primacy of) popular racism cannot explain the racism of the elites themselves. It

does not explain, for instance, how “ordinary” citizens, who virtually have no access to the means of public discourse and reproduction, and especially the mass media, would be able to spread their racist attitudes among the population at large without the active support or collusion of at least one powerful elite group, such as specific, popular right-wing media. Although occasional media interviews with “ordinary” people and negative stories about the inner cities make popular resentment against immigrants widely known, also among the elites, such information is likely to be used by the elites only if it serves their interests. Thus, they may use such public feelings to legitimate either their own racist discourse and practices or other socio-political aims that are consistent with such views, e.g., to show that racism is *there*, in the inner cities or among “ordinary” white people, and not *here*, among the elites themselves.

Unfortunately, even conversational data and their subtle discourse analysis are not likely to fully resolve these issues. For instance, it might be relevant to systematically compare the everyday talk of highly educated people in elite positions, with that of “ordinary” white people. However, we have found that positive self-presentation strategies in everyday talk are particularly prominent in conversations of the elites, most of whom will avoid expressing blatantly negative feelings towards ethnic minorities. This result is also familiar in more superficial survey research (Bowser and Hunt 1981; Apostle, Glock, Piazza, and Suelze 1983; Schuman, Steeh and Bobo 1985; Jaynes and Williams 1989). Popular talk is usually more straightforward and more explicit about ethnic attitudes, although even “ordinary” people make use of the well-known disclaimers and other face-saving moves that show they are aware that racist talk is against the official norm.

Although there are individuals and sub-groups, both among elites and among the population at large, who have explicitly anti-racist attitudes (Taguieff 1988), ethnic inequality as a systemic, structural property of western societies can only be reproduced if the majority of the white group subtly or blatantly engages in discriminatory activities and shares stereotypes, prejudices or other negative social representations about minorities. Such a system can

in turn only be reproduced when also the elites are actively involved in it, and, indeed, if it is also in their interest. It may therefore be predicted that also the elites share in the ethnic prejudices and the discriminatory practices of white society. However, these attitudes may appear to be subtle or focused on specific topics that are relevant for the elites, for instance, immigration policies, affirmative action programs, busing, cultural differences, religion, language use, education, and scholarly research. Indeed, such indirectly racist or ethnicist attitudes, which are often couched in a discourse of "cultural differences", have been identified as elements of "modern" or "symbolic" racism (Barker 1981; Dovidio and Gaertner, 1986).

Since even these forms of more subtle elite racism are sometimes hard to find expressed explicitly in official or public discourse or even in informal interviews, they also need to be assessed by other means, for instance by less monitored direct observation, by focusing on questions that do not seem to require "delicate" answers, and especially by analyzing the experiences of minority group members themselves. Studies of minority attitudes and of experiences of minorities with elite racism have unambiguously shown that both subtle and blatant racist discourse and practices are also widespread among the elites (Wellman 1977; Essed 1984, 1991; Sigelman and Welch 1991).

Together with other and our own studies of elite discourse in the media (van Dijk 1991), textbooks (van Dijk 1987b), politics and corporate talk (van Dijk 1993), these findings provide empirical support for the theoretical prediction that in present western society ethnic dominance is managed top-down. In other words, racism is reproduced by manufacturing popular consent as well as general consensus.

For further theoretical evidence, consider the alternative hypothesis: if the elites were consistently *anti*-racist, their preferential access to the means of ideological production and reproduction would make such anti-racist attitudes and practices prevail in society, if only in the many crucial elite contexts (politics, media, employment, social affairs, etc.). At the same time, the elites would in that case make sure that racist attitudes and practices would

be illegitimate, illegal or marginal, as is and was the case for communist attitudes in anti-communist America. This however is not the case. Therefore, we may conclude that, except for small sections, white elites are not anti-racist. Of course, this argument presupposes a theory of elites and their ideological influence in society. Such a theory does not assume, however, that elite influence, for instance on popular attitudes and ideologies, is always direct and straightforward (Mills 1956; Domhoff and Ballard 1968; Stanworth and Giddens 1974; Bourdieu 1984; Lichter, Rothman and Lichter 1990; van Dijk 1993).

Finally, there is ample scholarly research on the various historical traditions of elite eurocentrism and racism, for instance in politics (Lauren 1988), the sciences (Chase 1975; Haghghat 1988; Duster 1990), philosophy, history and the other humanities (Said 1979; Barker 1981; Todorov 1988), linguistics (Romer 1989), the media (Hartmann and Husband 1974; Martindale 1986; van Dijk 1991), and many other domains. This long tradition of elite racism in various domains suggests that it would be highly unlikely that elite racism would suddenly have disappeared from present western society. It is true though, as we have assumed above, that such racism may have become more subtle, more indirect, more implicit (Dovidio and Gaertner 1986), and may have changed into a system of attitudes and practices which the elites, also in the social sciences, deny to be racist in the first place (Essed 1987; van Dijk 1992a).

Although we may not be able to find in our data clear-cut answers to the many questions raised or implied above about the mutual influences between the elites and the population at large, systematic analysis may perhaps bring us closer to a better definition of the problems involved. First, we shall do so by summarizing some of our earlier findings about the structures of everyday talk about minorities, and then focus on those passages where white people talk about their information and belief sources. For further details about the discourse analytical and socio-cognitive approaches to the reproduction of racism through everyday conversations about minorities, we refer to our earlier work (e.g., van Dijk 1984, 1987a).

## 1.2. *Discourse analysis*

Since discourse analysis plays such a prominent role in our theoretical framework, both as a method of description, and as a broad, integrative, multidisciplinary theoretical approach to the many facets of the communicative reproduction of racism, a few remarks are in order about discourse analysis.

In our view, discourse analysis has two closely related aims, viz., a systematic and explicit description of the structures and strategies of text and talk, on the one hand, and an analysis of the relations between these properties of discourses with those of the various contexts of language use and communication in which such discourses are produced, understood and used, viz., the structures, strategies and processes of cognition, social situations, societal organization and culture, on the other hand. In a brief slogan: discourse analysis studies text in context.

These textual analyses proceed at several levels and along various dimensions, e.g., those of linguistic discourse grammar (phonetics, phonology, syntax, and semantics), as well as other discourse structures, such as those of style, rhetoric, schematic organization (e.g., argumentation and narrative structures), the interactional structures of dialogue and the pragmatics of speech acts. Thus, in a semantic analysis, we focus on the meanings of words, clauses and sentences, viz., on propositions, and especially on the ways these are locally organized in coherent sequences, as well as globally in overall topics or themes. Similarly, a discourse syntax examines the various syntactic forms sentences and sequences of sentences may take in the expression of semantic, pragmatic or contextual structures.<sup>1</sup>

Especially relevant for the analyses in this paper are of course the interactional and in particular the conversational properties of spontaneous talk. Such talk is, first of all, organized by speaker

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<sup>1</sup>Various contributions in the *Handbook of Discourse Analysis*, (van Dijk 1985), offer details about discourse analysis and its methods.

change through turn taking: one speaker speaks at a time, with minimal overlap, and each speaker follows rules and strategies managing turn allocation and appropriation. Secondly, as part of broader interaction patterns, speakers may try to realize specific conversational goals by means of global strategies, locally realized by different moves. To persuade the listener and to make a good impression, are examples of such overall strategies, also implemented in talk about ethnic affairs. Note that these and other strategies are jointly produced by both (or more) speakers in the conversation. For instance, listeners may cooperate (or not) in getting a story told by showing interest, or in an argumentation by providing support or counter-arguments. Thirdly, conversational interaction is an *on-line* activity, exhibiting many features of spontaneous talk, such as grammatical “errors”, repetitions, hesitations, pauses, repairs and false starts. Below, however, we shall disregard many of these surface properties of talk, in part because much of our data are translated from the Dutch. Rather we shall focus on the contents of conversations, that is, on overall topics as well as on various strategies of formulating these at the local level.

In order to link such structures with their various contexts, a cognitive approach is taken: mental representations and strategies are postulated that explain how discourse is cognitively prepared, executed, monitored, understood and stored in memory (van Dijk and Kintsch 1983). A distinction is made between three types of cognitive representation, viz., models, scripts and attitudes.

*Models* are unique, personal, context-bound representations of the events or situation a discourse is about, for instance a specific ethnic incident told about in a “foreigner story”. These models, which are organized by fixed event or situation schemata (Setting, Time, Participants, Action/State, etc.), feature both the language user’s personal knowledge about a situation, as well as evaluative beliefs (opinions) about them. Whereas such models are personal and episodic, scripts and attitudes are general, abstract, socio-cognitive representations shared by members of a group. *Scripts* are abstract schemata that represent shared, stereotypical knowledge of a group or culture (e.g., the script of “going to the movies”, or “going to the

supermarket”). *Attitudes* are here understood as complex mental schemata that consist of general group opinions, e.g., about nuclear energy or about the Middle East. Thus, contrary to traditional social psychology, we do not take attitudes to be personal opinions. Obviously, such general group scripts and attitudes are related with more personal, ad hoc models of specific events: such models may embody instantiated beliefs from scripts or attitudes, whereas the latter are acquired or changed due to the (mostly repeated) beliefs represented in models.

Ethnic prejudices, then, are a specific type of (negatively oriented) group attitude about other ethnic groups, featuring general opinions organized by a number of fixed categories, such as Origin (Where do they come from?), Appearance (What do they look like?), Socio-economic goals (What do they want here?), Socio-cultural properties (What do they do?) and Personality (What kind of people are they?). Finally, these attitudes may be further organized, at a still deeper, abstract level, by overall *ideologies*, featuring among other things the relevant norms and values of a group and representing the fundamental interests and goals of a group.

In other words, these social cognitions are the crucial interface between individual and society, and between discourse on the one hand, and socio-cultural and political contexts, on the other hand. They embody how individual language users, *as* white group members, interpret ethnic events, evaluate other groups, understand and act in institutions, acquire and transform their culture, on the one hand, and individually plan, execute or understand the discourses about ethnic affairs in relation to these more general group beliefs. These social cognitions are also at the heart of the reproduction of racism. They explain, for instance, how text and talk about ethnic affairs may contribute to the confirmation or change of ethnic opinions and attitudes, and conversely how such opinions and attitudes control action and hence discourse about ethnic events.

Obviously, in this paper, we can only pay attention to some dimensions of this vast and complex theoretical framework. We restrict our attention to conversational structure on the one hand, and

to elite cognitions and their societal positions, activities and institutions, and especially their discourse, on the other hand.

## **2. Topics**

We begin with a macro-semantic analysis, that is, with the study of what discourses “are about”, globally speaking, or in other words: what their main topics or themes are. Such topics are important for many linguistic, cognitive and social reasons: they organize the local meanings of a text, and provide overall coherence, they determine how people understand and memorize a text, and therefore they embody what is, both cognitively and socially, the most important and prominent information of a text. Theoretically, topics are represented as (macro-)propositions, that is, as propositions that are derived by macro-rules or macro-strategies applied to the local propositions of a text, thus forming an overall, hierarchical macrostructure, or thematic structure, of the text. Thus, macrorules reduce the vastly complex information of all word and sentence meanings of a text or talk to a few macropropositions that are easier to plan, understand or memorize, and which at the same time organize the complex meaning structure of the discourse at a higher, more abstract level. Generally, what people remember of a text or a conversation is its (subjectively assigned) macrostructure. Summaries and abstracts are the well-known verbal expressions of such underlying macrostructures (van Dijk 1980).

What do people talk about when they talk about ethnic affairs? To answer that question, we should first recall that both in the Netherlands as well as elsewhere in Western Europe and Northern America, “foreigners” or minorities are often topicalized. As soon as the neighborhood or the city are being discussed, as well as a number of other issues, many speakers spontaneously start to talk about “them”. That is, both discursively and cognitively, everyday experiences as well as other sources of information must have established close associations between ethnic minority groups, refugees, and a number of relevant everyday issues, such as

immigration, neighborhood life, (un)employment, housing, education, welfare, poverty and crime.

Hence, in more theoretical terms, both in their mental models of concrete events and situations as well as in their more general social representations of other groups and ethnic relations, people have established links between ethnic minority groups and the various knowledge and belief schemata that are used to organize information about everyday life. Models provide the (concrete and subjective) “facts”, used both in stories as well as in argumentation, whereas more general opinions from social representations serve as a broader interpretative framework for ethnic events. What is prominent in both models and in more general attitude structures will preferably be formulated as topics in talk. This means, conversely, that we may interpret frequent topics of talk as reliable indicators of ethnic beliefs, although such beliefs may be transformed by face-saving or other positive self-presentation strategies for the discussion of “delicate” topics in conversational interaction.

When analyzing spontaneously introduced topics of talk, we first of all find that they have a function in a broader explanatory framework. Racism is not merely a system of dominance that is manifested in discriminatory practices, but also functions as an ideological framework that “explains” for white people what is going on in multi-ethnic societies (Apostle, Glock, Piazza and Suelze 1983). Problems, concerns, or experiences that defy other, less “obvious” or less attractive, explanations thus tend to be attributed to the presence of “others”. If the neighborhood is decaying, it is easy to blame the “foreigners”, and the same is true for unemployment, neighborhood crime or difficulties in housing, education or other social domains. In predominantly white neighborhoods, the concerns may also be focused on crime and insecurity in the city, or on culture, language, affirmative action and education. This is precisely what happens, and many of the topics are orchestrated within such an explanatory strategy of making sense of everyday life in multi-ethnic society.

These commonsense explanations also limit the very scope of topics. Whereas in ordinary conversations, people may talk about

virtually everything, this is not the case in talk about ethnic affairs. Rather, what we find is that a limited, stereotypical list of topics tends to come up, related to specific “problems” associated with immigration or the presence of ethnic minority groups in the country, the city or the neighborhood. That such concerns are not strictly local may also be concluded from our finding that such topics (and even their formulation) are often very similar in two cities as far apart as Amsterdam and San Diego. Their stereotypical nature also suggests that the descriptions and explanations involved are not simply inferred, “bottom up”, from actual personal experiences, but that they are grounded in *shared* experiences, if not on (mass) mediated experiences of others. For instance, inflation, rising prices, or changing values are not concerns that tend to be associated with the presence of foreigners, whereas unemployment, neighborhood decay, crime or housing, are routinely attributed to the effects of minority presence or immigration.

Part of this attribution process may be readily understood in terms of commonsense inferences: the presence of many new people psychologically explains the restricted distribution of public resources. However, other concerns do not have this immediate “logical” explanation. Most people, for instance, are not daily victims of crime and, even less, victims of identified minority criminals. This means that for many people fears of crime must be based on information from other sources, both conversational, as well as mass mediated. The same is true for prejudices about welfare abuses. Very few whites are actually able to witness such abuses, if any, but everyday talk is replete with stories about them. In general, then, we may conclude that ethnic topics are only partly derived from mental models based on personal experiences, and that many stereotypical topics must have been inferred from other forms of text and talk. That such topics are prominent also in white neighborhoods or in cities with no or few ethnic minorities further suggests that they are probably inferred from the mass media, that is, from news reports or movies. Here we find a first indication of the *elite-mediated reproduction* of prejudiced ethnic beliefs, even if the media may in

turn claim to “speak the truth” and to “voice the concerns of ordinary people”.

Abstracting from a variety of more concrete conversational topics, we find that the topics may be broadly categorized as follows:

1. Cultural Differences
2. Deviance
3. Unfair Competition

The topic class of Cultural Differences features the many topics that focus on the perceived or assumed cultural differences between the ingroup and the outgroup: language, religion, clothing, food, customs, norms and values. Thus, many stories, or more isolated general remarks, focus on communication problems (“They don’t speak our language”, “They don’t even learn our language”), religious customs associated especially with Islam, usually related to assumptions about other cultural differences (e.g., the position of women in Muslim families), cooking smells, and many other “strange” customs, such as home slaughtering of sheep, Ramadan, and so on. For white people in mixed neighborhoods, these are often topics based on personal experiences; for others, such models may easily be derived from the mass media, which pay extensive attention to them.

The observation of Cultural Differences is seldom neutral. On the contrary, these differences tend to be interpreted negatively, viz., as intolerable difference, and especially as a supposed lack of adaptation. Many of the stories about such Cultural Differences are closed by the narrative and argumentative evaluation: “We are not used to that here”. Similarly, they tend to be accompanied by strategic comparisons: “We also adapt to the customs of other countries when we go there”. Apparently, the basic underlying norm for these negative evaluations is that people should adapt to the country they live in, that is, adopt its norms and values. On the other hand, people sometimes also express official minority policies, especially in the Netherlands, namely that “of course people should also be able to keep their own culture”. The implication of this

apparent contradiction is that the principle of cultural “tolerance” is limited in everyday life by the equally valid principle of “respect” for the host culture, so that Cultural Differences should not be too “visible”.

Perceived Cultural Differences generally tend to be exaggerated and polarized, as may be predicted also by well-known socio-psychological processes (see, e.g., Sagar and Schofield, 1980): the members of outgroups are on the one hand seen as “all the same”, whereas as any differences, however small, with the ingroup tend to be emphasized in order to better define the identity of both ingroup and outgroup. Thus, many negative phenomena that also characterize European(ized) culture, such as the subordinate position of women, religious intolerance, or abuses of parental authority are often associated with the “pathological” culture of immigrants in general, or with that of Islam, in particular. If children are doing badly at school, drop out or play hooky, such common events tend to be attributed to “cultural backgrounds”, and seldom to bad schooling or discrimination in the classroom. Especially at this point, everyday stories and media stories are closely intertwined, and many of them must have a more elitist basis: blaming the victim is a well-known feature of elite discourse, which tends to explain institutional shortcomings of public policies and practices (e.g., in education and employment) in terms of minority “deficiencies” or minority culture.

Note also that difference is not merely negatively interpreted because it may be seen as a threat to our culture, or as a lack of necessary adaptation. But also, the other culture tends to be perceived as inferior, namely as “backward”, “old-fashioned”, or even “primitive”. We recognize in these implicit evaluations the kind of comparative judgments being made in textbooks and the media between European or western cultures, on the one hand, and non-European (Third World) cultures on the other hand. Although such cultural comparisons are typical of elite discourse, they have also found their way into popular beliefs and talk. The strategic avoidance of racist talk, however, precludes explicit topicalization of

superiority, which is however routinely implied in much talk and text about “them”.

It is interesting that when Cultural Differences are not defined in a negative way, the overall discourse also appears to be much more “tolerant” or even respectful of other cultures. Stories in this case are not used to illustrate the “backwardness” of the other culture, but to amuse the hearer with a truly interesting “point” about the other culture. The same is true when speakers are able to see the fundamental similarities between cultures: as soon as the “others” are seen as “people like us”, social representations about ethnic minority groups tend to support an overall anti-racist attitude or ideology. In other words, various properties of talk on ethnic affairs tend to show coherence at several levels of analysis.

The topic class of Deviance goes one step further along the same dimension, and features the many topics that express model, or prejudices that focus on unacceptable forms of difference and on explicit violations of norms and laws. The major sub-category here is of course crime. Many everyday stories focus on crime in the neighborhood or the city, or more generally on feelings of insecurity that see minority crime as a major problem. However, we argued that such crime topics are rarely based on personal experiences, but seem to be associated with stereotypical views of minority crime that are also prominent in the press: mugging, drugs, assaults, violence, prostitution, and other forms of “street crime” or with “social crimes” such as welfare abuse, illegal immigration and residence. or faking passports or documents, all extensively covered in the press (van Dijk 1991).

Finally, Unfair Competition is the class of topics that deals with negatively valued participation in the use of public resources, such as work, housing, employment or welfare. Whereas competition is more generally a powerful factor in negative outgroup perception (Rabbie and Wilkens 1971), competition topics in discourse about minorities are further characterized by a strong normative element, viz., that the competition of the others is seen as “unfair”. Although the word “unfair” is seldom actually used, the concept is usually implied, and presupposes the norm that “those who are first, have

priority”. That is, native Dutch people should have priority in the allocation of scarce resources like work and housing. “Foreigners” are not only seen as unfair competitors in this case, but also as people who get “unfair” special assistance from the authorities: the prejudice is widespread that they get priority, despite the fact, often shown in research, that they tend to be discriminated in the allocation of work and housing. In sum, social perceptions of unfair competition and alleged favoritism are closely related.

Lacking direct personal observation, information (about the allocation of resources or favoritism of the authorities) is usually derived from the press, and stored in general social representations. On the other hand, people sometimes also derive these beliefs from mental models about personal experiences, e.g., when they notice that when one of their family members or friends does not get a job or an apartment, and when they see that an immigrant family did get a job or an apartment. That such an immigrant family may have waited much longer is a consideration that is discounted in such comparisons.

The perception of Unfair Competition is not merely based on the priority norm, but also seems to presuppose a much more evaluative dimension of superiority/inferiority: not only do we deserve priority because we were here first (or because this is “our” country), but also because we are “better”. Obviously, this is seldom expressed explicitly, but more subtle discursive features do indeed signal this dimension, which is implicit in many other topics.

The three major topic classes discussed above overlap in many respects, and have many intermediary categorizations. Thus, the perception of failing cultural adaptation may well be seen as a form of Deviance, and the concept of Unfair Competition may also be present in the topic classes of difference and deviance, for instance when minorities are seen to get special treatment because of their different culture: special language classes, remedial teaching, intercultural education programs, or building mosques for Muslims, may all be seen as undeserved special treatment of minority groups. At this point, the activities of the authorities may be seen as incompatible with the interests of ordinary white people. Precisely

this perception of unfair competition in the realm of culture may be used by racist political parties, such as the *Front National* in France to muster popular votes, whose slogan is: *Les français d'abord!* (French First!).

More generally, then, the three topic classes may be summarized by the notion of “threat”: perceived threat to our country, space, culture, laws, norms, values, work, housing, welfare or other socio-economic and cultural resources. Here, we arrive at the ideological core of the social representations and discourses that result from group conflict in general, and from the reproduction of white group dominance, in particular: the other group is seen to compete for the power and privileges that define white group dominance.

### **3. Schemata: Stories and Argumentation**

Topics are usually part of an abstract textual schema. For instance, they may be part of a story schema, or be used as the “content” of an argumentation schema (or both). This means that each topic may in principle have a specific, conventional function in the conversation. Whereas topics define the meaning, or global semantic content, of a discourse fragment, these schematic categories or functions define the abstract global *form* of the text, that is, the linear or hierarchical ordering of topics.

#### *3.1. Stories*

Personal experiences in everyday talk about ethnic affairs tend to be expressed in the form of stories. That is, stretches of the conversation have a narrative schema, featuring such conventional categories as Summary, Orientation, Complication, Resolution, Evaluation and Coda or Conclusion, usually in this order, although installments of the Evaluation may be given at several positions in the story (Labov and Waletzky 1967). Thus, a story about a typical

Cultural Difference topic may begin with a combined Summary and Evaluation: one speaker for instance begins her story as follows: “This sheep slaughtering is another thing I find awful”, after which follows a stereotypical story about home slaughtering of sheep.

Analysis of a large number (144) of such stories in Dutch interviews showed interesting features. First of all, many stories do not seem to be complete, in the sense that about half of them lack a proper Resolution category. That is, whereas a Complication is being told, typically so about a negative event in one of the categories of Cultural Difference, Deviance or Competition, such a predicament is not resolved by an action of the storyteller (or another protagonist with whom the storyteller identifies, e.g., a family member, a friend or colleague). As a result, the “problem” remains, and the story finishes with a negative Conclusion like “This is how things go in the neighborhood” or “You always see that with blacks”. In other words, the story in fact becomes a complaint, which precisely signals that a problem or predicament is created by the others, and that “we” are unable to solve that problem.

Consider for instance the following mini-story, told in the course of a conversation between three lower class women at the hairdresser. The topic class is “foreigners”, and the macro-opinion is that “they want to come here only to become rich”. The following fragment has not been edited, and its English translation closely follows the spontaneous style of the speakers. Unlike most other conversations we collected, this story was taped when the women thought the recorder was off. The interviewer (a female student) was present, but did not participate in this fragment of the conversation.

W 1: Well, like that Surinamese lady uhm well then she came to live in that apartment, well uh she presented herself very decently, it is a nice little lady and so on, and uh well she had gotten money from welfare to buy things and uh a carpet well that was not enough, she had to have more money because she had to buy a bed as well, so she naturally went back to welfare to ask, and yes: somewhat later a beautiful bed, OK via W and uh N or so cheap direct order chains, and those they also

cheated because they had uhh a hifi and I don't know what, but (???)

W2: They come to the Netherlands to uhh spoil the lot...

W3: Well not to uhh but simply to profit of 'Dutch people have it made, we also want to have it made'. (I-D- 1)

We see that when the general point of foreigners as scroungers has been made, the actual story is introduced by the summarizing "illustrative" device "like...", followed by an Orientation, which usually describes an everyday situation (a Surinamese lady who became a neighbor and got welfare money to get her apartment redecorated), in which something unexpected or negative happens, represented in the Complication (the Surinamese lady was not satisfied, wanted more, and cheated welfare). There is no Resolution here, merely a general Conclusion, formulated interactively by both other women.

Note also that the very negative conclusion of W2 is toned down somewhat by W3. The Complication is based on two "violations", viz., the violation of the law (cheating on welfare), but even more seriously, a violation of the norm of gratefulness: the Surinamese woman is seen as ungrateful, and hence as deviating from the norm that guests (foreigners) should be satisfied with what "we" give them. In other words, stories convey powerful moral evaluations about the behavior of the outgroup, and are concluded by generalizing statements about the negative properties of the whole minority group.

Since stories are special communicative expressions of underlying mental models, viz., a discourse genre about past events and actions that are meant to amuse or interest the audience, the lack of a Resolution category suggests that the negative events are also represented without a solution in the model. One specific "ethnic event", thus, is seen as characteristic of the whole ethnic situation, viz., as problematic, and as creating "problems for us". It is not surprising, therefore, that such stories are also often accompanied by the strategic move of reversal (to which we shall come back below): Not *they* but *we* are the victims, a move one also encounters in the

right-wing British press (van Dijk 1991). This is how a woman in Amsterdam formulates this reversal:

Listen, they always say that foreigners are being discriminated against here. No, WE are being discriminated. It is exactly the reverse. (II-SM-4)

Interestingly, stories told by white speakers who do take positive action in solving what they see as an ethnic conflict, are usually much less prejudiced. Such stories may however have a more paternalistic slant and focus on the positive role of the storyteller, which may be part of a strategy of positive self-presentation. Even if also in such stories an outgroup action may sometimes be represented negatively, it is not always generalized to the whole group, or else it is seen as a “problem” that can be resolved when “we” do something about it. In a very negative, racist sense this may mean that the storyteller or the protagonist “taught them a lesson”, whereas in a more positive sense, it may mean that the storyteller gave in, accommodated, or otherwise showed himself to be wise in solving the conflict. The latter storytellers usually have a much less confrontational and negative view of the ethnic situation or of other ethnic groups for that matter.

### 3.2. *Argumentation*

Another interesting dimension of negative “stories about minorities” is that they usually have an argumentative or persuasive function, and not primarily an amusing function (we have seen that more positive stories about cultural differences may have such an amusing role). This means that the story, as a whole, is embedded in a broader argument, of which it constitutes the “facts” supporting the premises of the argumentative schema (van Dijk 1992b). If stories are about personal experiences, and if personal experiences are by definition taken to be true, such stories are strong points in an argumentation: they do not merely express an opinion, but tell about

events that the speaker has actually experienced. The Evaluation of the story therefore often also functions as the Conclusion category of the conversational argument, and usually pertains to a negative characteristic of the outgroup, of the present ethnic situation in general, whereas the Coda may formulate the practical conclusion for future action, viz., the kind of actions the storyteller will engage in to counter the problem, e.g., “I will never rent a room to Turkish people again”.

More generally, then, talk about ethnic affairs has a strong persuasive function: the speaker wants to persuade the hearer (whether the interviewer or hearers in other social situations) to adopt the beliefs of the speaker, or at least tries to make her/his own beliefs defensible or reasonable. We shall come back to the strategic nature of the latter function (namely, positive self-presentation), below. Overall, therefore, speakers will resort to all possible means to implement this goal, e.g., by rhetoric or argumentation.

Consider for instance the following, schematized argument drawn from a conversation with two elderly citizens (themselves immigrants from Canada and Sweden, respectively) I interviewed in San Diego:

1. You should learn the ways of the country you come to
  - 1.1. Too many people demand that we adapt to their ways
2. The US is a melting pot, with people from many nations
3. If you would go to Holland, and if people wouldn't speak English there, you would be in bad shape.
4. Children at school learn from an American teacher, they learn American laws, and about governing the American people.
5. If they didn't speak English in the working world, they would not know that two and two makes four in American (and: we would not educate them to take their place in the world).
6. We lost a whole generation (due to education in Spanish).
7. People must respect the country they are in, like we would do if we went to Mexico or other countries.
8. People from northwestern Europe do adapt here, but people

from Southern countries they always demand their rights.  
(A-TD-1a,b)

This argument centers around the well-known point that immigrants should learn the language of the country they come to live in. We have seen that, as part of the category of Cultural Difference, topics often focus on the resentment felt when the “others” are seen not to adapt or not to learn the language. The argument starts, indeed, with the general norm of adaptation, and rejects the reverse: they should not expect, let alone demand, that we adapt to them. This commonsense reasoning, based on the priority principle, is widespread in such arguments. Next, the speaker resorts to another well-known move in such conversations, viz., that of Comparison: we/you would also have to adapt in another country if they didn’t speak our/your language. The adaptation norm is further worked out in argumentative move 4: learning English in the USA is essential, e.g., at school, or to know U.S. law. This argument is further supported by a powerful move, namely the Apparent Altruism move (“It is in their own interest”), which avoids a possible counter-argument of self-interest, and shows that the speaker is sympathetic towards the other group. After that move, the initial norm is reformulated, followed again by a Comparison. The overall Conclusion, however, is that contrary to people from Northwestern Europe, those from the South (Mexicans and others) are not willing to adapt.

We see in this example that arguments focus on a specific, stereotypical “problem” attributed to the outgroup (they don’t learn English), which is used to support the general conclusion that the outgroup generally has negative characteristics. The basis for the negative conclusion is provided by the general, commonsense norm that people should adapt to the country they live in. To enhance the difference between Us and Them, however, it is further necessary to use comparisons: we would adapt in another country. And finally, to avoid a negative face, the speaker will also present the application of the norm as being in the interest of the other group. In other words, each argumentative move is geared towards the establishment of the

overall “point” of all racist discourse, viz., that “they” are no good, and that “we” are OK, an overall strategy that we earlier described as a combination of negative other-presentation (derogation) and positive self-presentation (face-saving, and ingroup favoring).

Analysis of other arguments in these conversations shows that the same moves are made quite often to support the (negative) conclusions of white people about their foreign co-citizens. Some of these moves may be summarized as follows:

- (1) Mentioning a norm violation (lack of adaptation, welfare abuse, stealing, being ungrateful, etc.).
- (2) Negative consequences: norm violation has negative consequences for the country or for society as a whole.
- (3) Emphasizing the norm and its rationality.
- (4) Comparison between “Us” and “Them”: we do follow the norm.
- (5) Negative conclusion from the comparison: they have another mentality.
- (6) Reversal: we are the true victims of this deviance.
- (7) Apparent altruism and face-saving: it is for their own good if they respect the norm.

The norm violation itself may be illustrated and further supported by a story, as we have seen above. Stories, therefore, function within such a persuasive argument, and the “moral” of the story literally follows the moral norm expressed or implied by the argument. Both narrative and argumentative conclusion, then, strategically contribute to the overall point of racist conversations, viz., to portray “them” negatively, “us” positively, and hence the overall ethnic situation as “unbalanced” and as fundamentally problematic. It is this predicament that everyday stories and arguments try to interpret, evaluate and to resolve. The “real solution” to the problem, however, is seldom made explicit, and may vary for different speakers. Some imply, agreeing with explicitly racist parties, that minorities “should be sent back to where they came from”, or that the authorities should no longer “let them in”, whereas others insist that all is well when “they only adapt”. It needs

no further argument that the demand of adaptation is really a demand for subordination. Arguments of culture, thus, may be used as acceptable moves in what these conversations are really about: dominance, power and interests.

#### 4. Local Semantics

Topics and conventional schemata characterize texts at the global level. At the local level of words, sentences and strategic moves of conversation, we examine first some properties of meaning. Semantic analysis of meaning not only pays attention to what is explicitly expressed, but also to meanings that are inferred from explicitly expressed meanings and their associated world knowledge. Various types of implicitness play a prominent role in texts about minorities, also because face-saving strategies require that speakers avoid expressing explicitly negative propositions about minorities. Hence, we find many examples of implications, presuppositions or allusions. Thus, in the following example it is merely suggested, but not explicitly stated that the “foreigners” cause the white people of the neighborhood to leave:

I find it terrib-. . . it is predominantly foreigners in this neighborhood. All Dutch people want to leave. Most are busy to try to get away. There are so many here on this square who want to leave. (SM 4)

Note that this speaker also interrupts an initial negative evaluation, and “repairs” it with a more indirect attribution of the situation in the neighborhood. The same negative evaluation is implied by the following passage:

(The neighborhood is decaying). People have come to live here who didn't live here before ... there has been some, how shall I, how shall I put it [pause] yes, I should not say asocial, but yet people who are not like us.... (RA2)

Again, it is clearly implied that the “foreigners” who came to live in the neighborhood are seen as the cause of neighborhood decay, which is the current topic, but the speaker says so in a very indirect and veiled way. Also this example has a form of correction, namely when the speaker thinks the concept of “asocial” is probably too strong, so that it is replaced by a vague description of difference: “people who are not like us”.

#### 4.1. *Disclaimers*

Disclaimers are a characteristic element of discourse about foreigners. Apparent denials, concessions, denials, contrasts and other functional relations between propositions are used to combine, at the local level, the realization of both the overall goal of negative other-description, and that of positive self-presentation. More generally, disclaimers and other moves of face-saving or positive self-presentation are important strategic means of social impression management (Goffman 1959; Hewitt and Stokes 1975; Tedeschi 1981).

Apparent denial is the most familiar of these disclaimers. They typically begin with a denial of a negative statement about self (“I have nothing against Blacks”), followed by a statement, introduced by *but*, that says or implies something negative about the other group. Here is a typical example from Amsterdam (extra stress is marked with bold):

uhh...how they are and that is mostly just fine, people have their own religion have their own way of life, and I have **absolutely** nothing against that, **but** , it **is** a fact that if their way of life begins to differ from mine to an **extent** that.... (III-RL-2)

In this case, the speaker first extensively shows her “tolerance” for different cultures, and emphatically denies that she has anything against that, but then with equal emphasis she also asserts that there are boundaries to her tolerance. The denial in this and similar cases

is called “apparent” because the context of such passages clearly shows that the speaker does have something against the other group. Note that the first parts of such apparent denial pairs always seem to refer to a general norm, in this case the respect for each other’s culture, which is then “applied” and “corrected” in the second part, as if general social norms are compared to specific personal circumstances, which require an exception to the norm. Here is an example of a woman in California, this time without but:

I would put up one **heck** of a battle if my daughter decided to marry Black ... and it doesn’t have to do with superiority or anything else, it’s just too vast a difference for me to be able to cross over. (A-LG-3)

The impression that may be formed on the basis of the first sentence, namely that the woman is racist, thus, is strategically avoided by denying that (racist) feelings of superiority are involved. Instead the more defensible point of “difference” is mentioned. Interesting of this example is also that the woman not so much blames the other group, but rather her own lack of adaptation. Despite the objection against her daughter “marrying black”, this also suggests that this speaker has much less negative feelings about blacks as such, which is indeed the case in the rest of the interview. Hence, even at the local level, we find subtle strategic moves, such as self-blame, that may signal more general social representations expressed in the conversation.

Apparent concession is closely related to apparent denials, but formulates the inverse relation: something positive is said first about the other group, usually about exceptions, after which a negative claim is made about the group as a whole, or about the entire ethnic situation, as in the following example taken from an interview in Amsterdam:

Yeah, . . . what could they be afraid of? They are of course afraid, uhh you can of course not point to anybody in particular, there are of course very sweet Surinamese, those I also know,

you know, and I am sure there are also very sweet Turks and Moroccans, but the whole package of what is now going on, like that uhh that economic collapse.... (III-AB-4X)

Note that the apparent concession here is interpolated as soon as the speaker wants to spell out that people are afraid of (black) Surinamese. At the same time, she also tones down her accusation by the stereotypical Dutch phrase translated as “you can’t point to anybody in particular”, which makes the accusation less direct. The concession that there are also (“**very**”) sweet Surinamese is further emphasized by extending the concession also to other ethnic groups. The final negative part of the apparent concession, introduced by “but” is similarly formulated in a rather vague and devious way. In other words, at this local level the speakers may go through a complex set of moves that minimize the negative statements, and emphasize the tolerance of the speaker.

Euphemisms, mitigation, toning down, or other forms of understatement have both a semantic and a rhetorical function in these conversations, and usually serve also to avoid negative judgments of the hearer about the ethnic attitudes of the speaker. Here is a Californian example, in which a very negative opinion is expressed as an understatement followed by a tag question (“a **little** bit strange, isn’t it?”):

And if you happen to want to sit down quietly for a moment, and there are stamping children and a a and a a kind of kasbah on the street at the same time, then that is a matter to which **WE** happen to have to adapt ourselves, and that situation is a **little** bit strange, isn’t it.... (A-LG-1)

The stronger form of apparent concessions is apparent praise (“You are a very nice guy, *but*”), comparative contrast (“*We* work hard, but *they* don’t do anything”), and other local moves that combine the familiar goals of face-saving with outgroup derogation. Thus, a general negative statement may be made, which is then backed up with an example (“They all abuse welfare. Take for

instance my neighbor. He....”), or conversely, a generalization following a concrete example (“That is what he did. They are all like that”). These semantic moves are not necessarily used as face-saving moves, but have a role in argumentation, viz., when general conclusions must be drawn from concrete cases (stories), or when a general statement must be backed up with a concrete example.

This analysis of local semantic relations between propositions of conversations, as well as of strategic moves such as those of implication, understatement and disclaiming, show not only that white speakers are acutely aware of the interactional logic of impression formation when they talk about delicate topics. Also, they show that they are well aware of the general, social norms that prohibit explicit expression of racist opinions. In order to manage the contradiction between the social norm and the personal opinion, speakers may go through sophisticated moves to combine the goals that derive from this social norm and their personal opinion. We have shown above, however, that this “personal” opinion may be widely shared. That is, what is presented as an account of personal experiences is an account by a group member of group experiences, and hence as expressing social, group attitudes.

## **5. Style, Rhetoric and Conversational Features**

Among the many other characteristic properties of conversations about minorities, we may finally briefly mention some that pertain to the actual forms and formulations of the underlying meanings studied above. Some elements of style and rhetoric were already mentioned earlier. For instance, euphemisms and other forms of mitigation also have a stylistic and rhetorical dimension: Words may tend to be selected that do not express the “true feelings” of the speaker, but are chosen to emphasize the speaker’s “tolerance”. Understatements may similarly be used to emphasize very negative evaluations in “nice” words.

Actually, unlike in some forms of non-monitored conversations among close friends or family-members, conversations with relative

strangers (as are our interviewers), at least in California and the Netherlands, tend to avoid explicit racist terms or descriptions of ethnic minorities. This suggests again that the general social norm of tolerance is well-known and even partly interiorized. Sometimes, lexical selection is even referred to as such:

Man: I saw two of them, on their back. I saw that they were dark  
uh things

Woman: Yes, “minorities” you should call them (II-PD-5)

Similarly, a rhetorical analysis may reveal the strategic uses of comparisons (typically to compare positive ingroup behavior and negative outgroup behavior), irony, and other rhetorical figures that manage the interplay between positive and negative evaluations.

One characteristic aspect of the description of ethnic minorities is the special use of pronouns and demonstratives. That is, instead of using full descriptive terms such as “Mexican Americans”, or “My Surinamese neighbor”, speakers may simply say “They” or “She”, or “These people”, even when a full descriptive term is required by rules of textual coherence. Such referential terms may sometimes be interpreted as pronouns of distance, when the use of actual names suggests familiarity or closeness. Also, they may be interpreted as part of a more general strategy of avoidance, by which speakers tend to de-emphasize the ethnic implications of what they say by disconnecting negative statements from ethnic groups. Vagueness, allusions and suggestions are also part of that strategy.

Finally, a study of conversational interaction reveals that the same process of norm-based self-monitoring of discourse may result in many forms of non-fluent speech, for instance in hesitations, repairs, corrections or false starts as soon as speakers refer to minority groups. Some examples of this form of hesitation have been encountered above.

## 6. Elite Sources of Ethnic Beliefs

Now that we have gained some insight into some of the properties of daily talk about ethnic affairs, we should examine in somewhat more detail whether such conversations also provide information about the sources for the knowledge and opinions white people use. We therefore analyzed all passages where speakers explicitly or implicitly refer to other sources or to opinions they share with others. We are specifically interested in the influence of elite sources, such as political and media discourse, and shall examine how people react to the opinions of the elite. Do they agree, or reject such opinions? What are the strategic functions of these references to such sources in conversational interaction? For instance, people may use what they read in the paper as further argumentative support for their own opinion.

### 6.1. *The media*

It has been a central tenet of our work during the last years that the media are a major source of “ethnic beliefs” (van Dijk 1991). In this earlier work, as well as in this paper, theoretical arguments about the flow of social information, as well as empirical data, repeatedly suggest that since most white people have few everyday experiences with minority groups, their knowledge must be largely based on the media. However, except from a few clear cases, such a hypothesis is difficult to prove (or in fact, to disprove), as is generally the case in traditional “effects” research (Bryant and Zillman 1986). Theoretically, people may derive most of their knowledge, and especially their opinions, from conversations with other white people, or from personal experience, especially in cities or countries with rather high percentages of minorities (see also Hartmann and Husband 1974).

In the perennial debate on media effects, we generally favor a qualified view of “strong” media influence. However, in our framework such influence is not generally considered to be

immediate, although this may be the case in specific circumstances and for special stories, but long-term and structural. That is, the media gradually contribute to general world knowledge, to the attitudes as well as to the overall interpretation frameworks of media users.

That is, their influence is mainly ideological (Hall 1980). They will allow variation of opinions and attitudes, and indeed may themselves exhibit such variation, and signal similar variations among other, e.g., political, social or academic elites, but they also impose boundaries on such variation.

Thus, they are not merely the main social institution for the manufacture of consent (Herman and Chomsky 1988), but also for the preferred pre-formulation of the consensus (see also the discussion in, e.g., Altschull 1984; Lichter, Rothman and Lichter 1990).

Within this general, socio-cultural and socio-political analysis of media influence, we more specifically propagate a combined socio-cognitive and discourse analytical approach, in which the detailed textual structures of media messages, as well as cognitive strategies and representations (of social knowledge, beliefs, or attitudes) are systematically analyzed to examine actual processes of “influence” (see also Graber 1984; Harris 1989). In this perspective, then, we prefer to speak of processes of (ideological) *reproduction*, rather than of “effects” or “influences”. This notion of reproduction embodies both the active user component of “production” and the component of “transformation”: attitudes and ideologies will always be reproduced—and changed—as a function of the position and interests of the groups adopting them (for details, see van Dijk 1988a, 1988b).

Although the issues involved here are quite complex, the problem of the role of the media in the reproduction of the general or “popular” consensus on ethnic affairs is more specific, and hence somewhat easier to pin down. Thus, it is less difficult to make a plausible case for the argument that most white people in societies with a few percent ethnic minorities cannot have daily contacts with minority group members. Therefore, even when white people

regularly talk with others about ethnic minorities, it is also quite likely that the main source for most white people must be the mass media. For children, textbooks and lessons may be an important additional source, although at least in the Netherlands, educational materials are hardly rich in information about minorities (van Dijk 1987b, and summarized in van Dijk 1993). Books, such as novels, comics, or social science texts form a further source for segments of the white population. Besides news in the press and on television, finally, movies play an important role in the formation of social representations, although in the Netherlands these will largely be about ethnic groups in other countries, especially the USA and the UK.

In other words, although the sources of information about minorities are quite varied, the mass media are the most likely source of information about the present ethnic situation in one's own country, although reproduction of media information in everyday conversation may provide an important second order source. In the inner cities and in countries with a larger percentage of minorities, such as the USA, personal experiences may also play an important role.

Fortunately, speakers in conversations about minorities sometimes spontaneously mention the sources of their beliefs, if only to legitimate their truthfulness. Television and the newspaper play a prominent role in such self-reported sources of information or beliefs. Even when people are mistaken about such sources, or when the media are only strategically used to support an argument or to enhance credibility of a statement, we assume that the media have an indirect role in the reproduction of ethnic beliefs. Our previous empirical research about the influence of minority coverage (see van Dijk 1991) also suggests that beliefs about ethnic events, such as the immigration of Tamils and other refugees, with which the vast majority of white people cannot have personal experiences, are largely based on media information. Our question in the remaining part of this paper, therefore, is not whether or not the media play a prominent role in social information processing, but what kind of information or beliefs seem to be derived from, or attributed to the

media, and what role such references to the media play in the reproduction of ethnic beliefs in cognitions and conversations in everyday life.

Analysis of our conversational data shows first that there is a rather striking parallelism between the overall frequency of ethnic topics in the press and the frequency of media references for the same topics by media users: cultural differences, crime and deviance, competition and discrimination are the topics that are most often attributed to media information, or conversely, these are the topics people remember best from the media. Since people also have comments about such coverage, also the performance of the media themselves is often evaluated, a topic that is of course absent in the press: the press is among the few social institutions that seldom publishes self-critical analyses. On the other hand, there are topics that do appear in the press but are little mentioned in the interviews, viz., immigration and government policies, although it may be assumed that most readers know about these topics, and mostly know about them from the media.

We may conclude from this parallelism that the interest of the speakers, whether or not supported by personal interests, is very similar to that of the media. This may (but need not) imply that the media have succeeded in setting the agenda of "ethnic discussion", or simply that the frequency of their messages about a certain topic is acknowledged by the interviewees (whether or not they do discuss these topics in spontaneous conversations). Somewhat more speculatively, we may further assume that ethnic topics which could have been covered more intensively by the media are also virtually absent from our interviews (or from the passages about the media coverage of ethnic affairs), such as reasons of immigration, everyday life of minorities, the economic contributions of minority groups, difficulties experiences by minorities, ethnic arts, education, politics, etc. Given our conversational data about media sources, we therefore conclude that on the whole, the media set the agenda of public discussion about ethnic affairs, and that the media users are aware of this media role, both positively (topic frequency corresponds to media references related to those topics) and negatively

(non-topicality in the press leads to non-topicality in everyday talk)(see also Iyengar and Kinder 1987).

In order to analyze in more detail what opinions are being derived from media coverage, as well as the functions these media references have in talk, let us pay more systematic attention to some of the topics and examples.

## 6.2. *Cultural problems*

In multi-ethnic societies, cultural differences are a major topic of interest, not only in the media or in textbooks, but also in everyday conversation. Part of this interest is due to the need to provide commonsense explanations of everyday events and interactions, and its topicalization in talk may therefore also be based on personal experiences when the speakers live in cities or regions with a sizable minority population. If we examine the passages about cultural differences or problems in which speakers also refer to the media, it is striking that almost none of these media references has positive implications for immigrants or minorities. On the contrary, when cultural differences are (also) attributed to media sources, they are often interpreted negatively, that is, as an intolerable infringement of “our” culture: failure to learn the language, failure to adapt, religious intolerance, the position of women, etc.

Let us give a few examples, and in this case also specify some contextual data.

For these examples the following conventions are being observed: Fragments between parentheses are summaries or context information, e.g. current topic; each interviewee is also characterized by gender, age, profession (if any), area (high or low contacts between majority and minority group members) and the overall ‘prejudice profile’ of the conversation, measured on a scale of 7 (P 1: explicitly anti-racist to P7: explicitly racist). Transcriptions and translations are as literal as possible, to maintain the flavor of the Dutch examples, and

including false starts, hesitations, repairs, and other phenomena of spontaneous speech that may express production monitoring and interaction strategies of face-saving. When several speakers are quoted, M stands for Man, W for Woman, and I for Interviewer. Passages marked with (S) give an edited, summarized version of the transcript.

(1)I-B-S (Woman, 60, hi-con, P2)

(Teaching Dutch language and history). Well, I have always followed these programs, you know, about foreigners on uh on uh TV, and that used to used to uhh I mean that is indeed a big problem because uh for instance uh Turks I believe and and uhh Moroccans I believe they want to speak mainly their own language and all that and well that is impossible, isn't it (..)

(2)I-C-6 (Woman, 60, lo-con, P6)

We saw a program on television with a Dutch woman who was married to such a, such a Turk, and that that didn't work out at all, and she wasn't even a small girl, but a school teacher.

(3)I-F-7 (Man, 45, market vendor, hi-con, P6)

A few months ago I saw on TV, there was a minister who tells a Turk a Turkish girl. It was I believe in Sonja Baren's show <famous TV talk show> and she says, yes, but the Dutch they put us off, then the minister says, I don't remember his name, but he says, but the DUTCH have to adapt to those foreigners. I beg you, where are we heading for like this?

These passages have in common that all three of them refer to television programs. Even more than the newspaper, television often features such cultural stories, or discussion programs that are related to cultural differences or cultural "problems". Also, as noted above, the reactions of the interviewees are all negative, although the first woman, in line with the rest of her interview, only seems to imply that foreigners cannot continue to speak (only or mainly) their own language. Her frequent hesitation phenomena also suggest that she is heavily monitoring what she says. The woman in example (2) uses the information inferred from television in an argument that is very negative about foreigners, and in support of the statement that the presence of foreigners (and mixed marriages in particular: she often

refers to her daughter having problems with foreign men) is bad for the country. The man in example (3) reacts angrily not only against accusations of discrimination by a Turkish girl, but especially against what he sees as the opposite of what he would see as the norm, viz., that foreigners should adapt to us. The fact that a cabinet minister voices such an opinion makes things even worse, since such statements may be seen as expressing official policy. For our discussion about elite racism it is also interesting to witness how lower class white people in the inner cities may sometimes resent what they see as the “tolerant” ethnic attitudes of the elites.

Occasionally people may take some distance from media stories about cultural particularities, or even analyze them in a general, anti-racist perspective:

(4) III-TM-2xa/b (Man/woman, 18/49, student/secretary, lo-con, P3/P3)(S)

I: The newspaper had a story last week about people who thought that their children were put back because of too many foreign children in their class.

W: Yes, that was also on TV at Sonja’s talk show

M: For instance, the blood is dripping from the walls because of the slaughtering sheep on the balcony upstairs.

W: Those are just old wives’ tales, of course.

(5) III-ET 1 (Man, 37, university teachers, lo-con, P1)(S)

(Story in the newspaper). Yes, those stories you read all the time, like slaughtering sheep and blood-streaming-from-the-walls type of stories you hear everywhere where people have unfounded opinions. (You also hear those stories on the train). It is important to react to this, for instance when in the paper, or as I recently saw on TV, people do as if those stories are normal, and that the media just register them so that people are getting used to them and a normal way of storytelling.

Several of the interviews we conducted in a low-contact, white middle-class neighborhood in Amsterdam in 1985 referred to the same popular talk show (Sonja), in which members of the right-wing racist *Centrum Partij* (CP) in the Netherlands were allowed to

explain why they did vote for the CP. Such TV shows not only have a large audience, but when they deal with controversial topics, such as racism, they also appear to set the agenda for much everyday talk: several interviewees referred to it spontaneously. This talk show also provides the background and coherence for example (4), where the woman acknowledges that she had heard about a story attributed to the newspaper by the interviewer and recognized it as something she had seen on TV. Without transition, her son then introduces the stereotypical racist stories attributed to CP members, which his mother, in a next turn indeed rejects as “old wives’ tales”. We see that the (implicitly) critical stance of the TV program is shared by these viewers.

This implicitness is criticized by the man in example (5) who extensively discusses how stories are features in the media, repeated on the train, and then begin their own life. He resents the fact that the media, including the TV talk shows referred to, let racists speak without much further comment, thereby legitimating or “normalizing” racist opinions. Although many interviewees appear to be rather well informed about the information, the programs and the stance of the media about ethnic affairs, few of them are able to make explicit the role of the media in the reproduction of racist beliefs. These passages, as well as the earlier ones, also show, however, that the reaction to media stories and programs is far from uniform, and that the ambiguity of ethnic affairs coverage in the media may confirm negative opinions and stereotypes, but also give information to anti-racist media users about the role of the media in spreading prejudice.

### 6.3. *Crime*

If we disregard crime and police series on TV actual news about crime is usually attributed to the press. Unlike local news programs in the USA, for instance, Dutch television news seldom features crime items, unless they are serious or when there is a special occasion (for instance, a special, a police or scholarly report). As

with the topic of Cultural Difference, the topic of Crime and its media references are virtually never positive for ethnic minorities. The overall tendency in such passages is that minorities are criminal, that the presence of foreigners in the city has made the city unsafe, and that “you can read that every day in your newspaper”. Some examples:

(6)I-C-6 (Woman, 60, lo-con, P6)

You only have to read the paper. How many of those cases when you read the paper, it is practically always a Moroccan or a Turk or so who have been involved in a stabbing or shooting. Yes, and I think they should do something about that, because the other day...

(7)I-G-7 (Man, 45, market vendor, hi-con, P6)

(Decay in Amsterdam, crime). It is very dangerous. You have to look nowadays at the people, you read about it in the paper every day (..) A while ago it was in the paper that eighty percent of those foreigners are in jail, against twenty percent of Dutch.

(8)III-RL-3 (Woman, 40, lo-con, PS)(S)

Crime of foreigners is much more serious, and that is not only in the most widely read morning paper <*Telegraaf*> but also in the other papers. In nine of ten cases, it is a foreigner.

In such examples, the newspapers nearly always serves to “prove” the point that minorities are criminal. Although some interviewees have personal experiences with minority crime, most have not, and their general prejudice of minority crime is therefore largely fed by media stories. We have seen that although readers may selectively read the press in this respect, we also have found that alleged minority crime, and especially “black crime” is a major topic, particularly in the right wing popular press (van Dijk 1991; see also Graber 1980, 1984). Interestingly, the woman in example (8) explicitly mentions that this is not only the case in the right wing popular newspaper in the Netherlands, but also in other newspapers (which is correct). The fact that the press is used as a credible source may also be inferred from the use of “numbers”, viz., the statistics mentioned in examples (7) and (8), which are also attributed to the

newspaper. In other words, reference to the press has an argumentative and persuasive function in order to make prejudiced opinions more credible. The crimes mentioned in such cases are nearly always muggings, assaults, theft and drugs, and mentioned especially when people are arguing that the neighborhood or the city “is not safe anymore”.

#### 6.4. *Other negative behavior*

Although the press is the standard source for crime stories, it is sometimes also referred to as a source for information about other negative behavior of minority groups, such as welfare abuse, competition (e.g., in housing and education) and even a typical experience topic such as asocial behavior (noise, cooking smells):

(9)I-F-1 (Man/Woman, 50/50, hi-con, P4/PS)

M: (Radio program: Surinamese woman complains) And the only thing that came from her mouth was “I am being discriminated and the Dutch all have good housing”. Well, it is a big lie, it is not true.

(10)II-PD-5 (Woman/Man, 60/65, hi-con, P6/PS)

W: (Sometimes I am so mad). They simply get priority. Television too: minorities, minorities. When you wake up, you hear minorities, minorities.

(11) III-SV 2x (Woman, 37, lo-con, P2)(S)

(Sonja’s Talk Show. Discussion about racist party). A man from Rotterdam said that he thought that his children were put back because of foreign children.

(11)III-RL-4xa/b (Woman/Man, 79/80, lo-con, P4/P4)(S)

W: I don’t like it if they live off our pocket and maintain whole families abroad, and that is what you hear.

I: Where do you hear that?

W: Well, I read that in the paper, and you hear talk about that.

These examples show a somewhat different pattern of interaction between media and media users. Whereas the woman in example

(11) uses the press in a general way to back up her stories about welfare abuse, the other interviewees react negatively to any media attention for minorities. The woman in example (10) explicitly discusses this media attention, and resents it because she concludes that minorities get priority over Dutch people. Here is another example of the predicament of poor whites in the inner cities who not only perceive unfair competition, but also may accuse the elites (politicians, media) to have too much understanding for the problems of minority groups.

### 6.5. *Discrimination*

Whereas the topics discussed above usually provoke references to the media to support a negative point about minorities, the media may also be used as a source of information about discrimination. This is not surprising because most white people have no other information source about discrimination. The reactions to press stories or TV programs about discrimination are mixed. We have already seen that some people resent too much positive attention for the difficulties of minorities. On the other hand, the more liberal media users may use the press to back up their opinion that there is a lot of discrimination. Many of these references are critical about discrimination and racism, and hence explicitly or implicitly in favor of minorities:

(12) III-GE-3 (Woman, 38, lo-con, P2)(S)

I used to think that there is no discrimination in the Netherlands, but I am changing my mind about that. Although I do not see it personally, I read about it in the paper and see it on TV, and therefore it is probably true, like blacks who are not allowed to go into some discotheque.

(13) III-MS-1 (Woman, 48, lo-con, P2)(S)

I saw that program on TV with the Centrum Party in Sonja Barend's Show, and heard this guy telling about the old inner city neighborhoods, and I can imagine that people who are in

doubt might be persuaded by what he said. Especially younger people, because the older ones remember the war too well.

Example (12) nicely shows that information about discrimination in the media may contribute to awareness about discrimination in society, and also that the press or television are an important substitute for personal experiences. Moreover, the woman also finds the media credible sources for this kind of information. The next example shows that people are aware of the ambiguity that may exist in responses to the arguments or appeals of racist parties. It is also interesting that the interviewee believes that for older people, war experiences (particularly the racism of the Nazis as well as the Holocaust) have discredited any form of racism. Although in the Netherlands this is true—up to a point—as far as anti-semitism is concerned, our own conversational data unfortunately do not confirm this optimism about the particular sensitivity of older people to the issue of contemporary racism.

Despite the frequent positive reactions to information about discrimination in the media, other examples show that sometimes people are reluctant to believe discrimination stories. Another typical reaction, especially related to the issue of “unfair” competition, is reversal, for instance when interviewees maintain that *they* are discriminated against, and not the “foreigners”, an argumentative move we also encountered in opinion articles in the British press (van Dijk 1991).

### 6.6. *Media bias*

Finally, interviewees also regularly comment upon media bias in the portrayal of minorities. Since much of the information about minorities is obtained by the media, it is indeed likely that people may also have an evaluation of the role of the media. Interestingly, most of these comments are critical:

(14) III-AB-2x (Woman, 15, lo-con, P2)

(Fear in the inner city). Because when you read the newspaper and a Dutch man has raped somebody, it says J.B.H., so-and-so has... But when it is a Turk, it says ‘A 26 year old Turk from such-and-such. . .’, then you think gosh, then you really get scared. Like this morning we saw a murder again, or in De Jordaan <popular neighborhood in Amsterdam> close to a Turkish coffee house somebody was stabbed, and again it is a Turk. And then you ask yourself, maybe this Turk has provoked it, and....

(15) III-CB-3x (Woman, 69, editor, lo-con, P3)(S)

I: Do you have the impression from the papers that foreigners are more criminal than the Dutch?

W: I don’t know. I really couldn’t tell. I would have to see the statistics. I canNOT say that.... But it does bother me when they write about a Surinamese so-and-so, but I believe that is diminishing. People have commented on that in letters to the editor. They don’t write that it is a Dutchman who has done so-and-so.

(16) III-ET-1 (Man, 37, university teacher, lo-con, P1)(S)

People will always tell big stories like that, but in this case it is serious, because it poisons the atmosphere, and if all that is published in the paper.... And people of the newspaper they say ‘We are not there for the good news, but for the bad news’.

These and several other examples show a surprising knowledge and awareness of the press portrayal of ethnic affairs. Several media users complain about the use of irrelevant ethnic identification (especially in crime news), as we also see in examples (14) and (15). The man in example (16) even goes a step further and knows about the kinds of news values and arguments used by journalists in their defense against accusations of negative reporting about minorities.

Interesting, also for methodological reasons, is example (15), where the interviewer asks a question that might be heard as slightly “leading”. In natural conversations, and also in our informal interviews, however, even such leading questions seldom appear to lead interviewees in the direction of a desired or expected answer. On the contrary, even after apparent concessions (“OK, but...”), interviewees will normally reject the presuppositions or other

implications of such questions, and formulate their own opinion. In this case, the reference to “statistics” in the answer of the woman also suggests that she may have misunderstood the question as “Do you think that foreigners are more criminal than Dutch”, and not as a question about what the media suggest. Spontaneously, however, the woman does add that she does not like it when the media use ethnic labels in crime reporting. She observes, however, that this practice has diminished during the last few years. Especially for the more liberal quality press this is more or less correct, although in special cases, and as soon as there is an “ethnic” angle, also the liberal quality press has few reservations about identifying crimes with a special ethnic group (typically so for Surinamese and drugs, or for Moroccan or Antillean youth “gangs”).

The same man as in example (16) further observes, also correctly, that the media may on the one hand use ethnic labels in the identification of crime suspects, but on the other hand seldom use such labels as soon as the news actor is a famous soccer player (like Ruud Gullit), who is virtually always referred to as Dutch, not as Surinamese.

These examples suggest that there are critical readers who are able to understand some of the mechanisms involved in the press portrayal of minorities. Especially the better educated readers are thus able to react to media discourse in a flexible way. They may, as we have seen, have no reason to doubt stories about discrimination, they may denounce specific practices of the press (like the strategic use—or omission— of ethnic labels), and even the arguments journalists may have to legitimate their frequently negative reporting about ethnic affairs.

### 6.7. *Other sources*

Our conversational data feature few references to other elite discourse sources for their information and opinions about ethnic affairs. As may be expected, besides everyday conversations, the media are by far the most important source. Occasionally,

propaganda leaflets of racist parties are mentioned. We have found virtually no references to such potential elite sources on ethnic affairs as religious or church discourse, union declarations and especially scholarly research. Sometimes, especially among younger people, we find references to other elite sources, such as books, textbooks or other educational materials, including an anti-racist movie used in the classroom:

(17) III-ET-3 (Man, 24, student, lo-con, P3)(S)

I do read the papers about all that, and also for my studies I sometimes read things about it in textbooks, but I do not specifically select such articles from the paper for reading.

(18) II[-Ab-2x (Woman, 15, lo-con, P2)(S)

We saw a movie, *The Wave*, we had to write an essay about it, and we talked about it a lot. There are some punks in our class who have extremist ideas about foreigners. But we always argue against them. Racist activities are punished at school. In History lessons we treat the backgrounds of discrimination. There is a student at school who is pro Centrum Party [racist party], and says he doesn't discriminate, but he hates Turks. The information [campaigns, films, lessons] at school help students persuade not to vote CP.

These examples further suggest that talk and text about ethnic affairs may be very lively, and are part of educational programs, both in high school as well as at the university. Example (18) even shows that educational materials and independent personal discussions may also be brought to bear in arguments against racist peers.

### 6.8. *Political discourse*

We have seen above that also in talk about ethnic affairs “ordinary” people quite frequently refer to “the politicians”, and that such references tend to be critical: Politicians have let “them” in, they allow “unfair” competition, and generally “favor” minorities, e.g., in affirmative action, housing and education programs,

employment schemes, and so on. Obviously, this information is seldom derived from political discourse itself, but is also largely inferred from media accounts of political discourse and decision making (van Dijk 1993). This may mean that the media accounts of political affairs favor such biased inferences (as may be the case for the right-wing popular press accounts of left-wing governments), or that the ideological and attitudinal orientation of the media users themselves provides a strong basis for such interest-bound inferences (as will be the case for working class and lower middle class media users).

Media accounts as data for popular inferences about politics are however not homogeneous. In general, we may assume ideological convergence between political and media elites, despite occasional conflicts and contradictions in specific domains. This would suggest that the media do not generally present discourses that invite preferred inferences about minority favoritism.

However, this does not seem to be the case for the popular right-wing press, widely read by the working and lower middle class. In the UK, for instance, such critical media allegations obviously do not focus on the conservative government, but on “loony” left-wing city councils, which are seen to spend “our” taxes on silly multicultural projects or on welfare for minorities who don’t want to work (van Dijk 1991). Obviously, in that case, such prejudiced reporting invites critical reactions both against left-wing politicians as well as against the “favored” minorities themselves.

On the other hand, it is interesting to observe that, in the quality and especially the liberal quality press, such popular inferences, once established, are not resisted either. There are no repeated and insistent stories, for instance, that imply that the resulting ethnic prejudices about such favoritism are misguided, and that the political elites are in fact doing much too little for minorities. Indeed, one might even suppose that the prevailing popular prejudices about favoritism are welcome. The crucial point in this case is *not* that the critical opinions about the “politicians” primarily affect the credibility or the political survival of the political elites, but rather that these critical opinions are transferred to the minority groups

themselves, according to the political psycho-logic that runs as follows: If they are favored, then *they* are to blame, not those who favor them in the first place. On the other hand, for smaller sections of the population, perceived favoritism of minorities may also lead to discrediting of mainstream politicians and to growing support for right-wing racist parties, as is the case in France, Belgium and Germany.

In sum, the influence of political discourse is nearly always indirect, that is, mass mediated, as is also the case in ethnic affairs. In most general terms, the media reproduce the prevailing ethnic consensus of the political elites, with some variations according to party allegiances, e.g. critical coverage of left-wing politicians in the right-wing press. More generally, however, the media do not prefer interpretations that discredit the political elites in general, but rather allow, if not stimulate, the development of a popular consensus about alleged favoritism of minorities for which however minorities themselves are blamed: They are “impatient”, “oversensitive”, “demanding” if not “pushy” in such domains as civil rights, education, employment and politics. This is also how negative reactions against the political status quo can be prevented: minorities become scapegoats for serious social problems of sections of the white population, and the elites may in turn use poor whites as scapegoats for the miserable situation of minorities. That is, the media contributes itself to a preferred social construction, viz., that of “favoritism”, which large sections of the white population, whether rich or poor, will tend to believe to be true. At the same time the media also make sure that the blame will not primarily reflect back on the elites, or only on marginal political elites, such as left-wing city councillors. The processes of information, communication, discourse, and influence, on the one hand, and social and political structures and dominance relations on the other hand, are extremely complex here. We are at present unable to give a clearer picture of this interplay between media elites and political elites and between elite racism and popular racism.

## 7. Conclusions

The conversational data discussed above partly support the thesis that elite discourse, and especially the media, is a major source for information and opinions about ethnic minorities. Frequent references to television and the press in conversations suggest that the media indeed play a prominent role in providing information about ethnic affairs. The parallelism between the most frequent issues in the press and the issues for which most often media references are provided, also suggests that agenda setting is at least part of the influence of the media, and that the media users are aware of the kind of ethnic topics they may typically find in the press.

The data also support the rather obvious assumption that for those topics or issues on which people have no personal experiences, they tend to rely on mass media information. This is for instance the case with such topics as immigration, crime, and especially discrimination. Information about cultural differences is based both on everyday conversation and personal experiences, on the one hand, as well as on media information. Earlier field experimental data (van Dijk 1991), as well as our present conversational data regarding a television talk show about a racist party, show that people sometimes have detailed and vivid memories about such programs. Additional discussions about such programs further enhance their influence among the population at large.

In other words, as far as ethnic information is concerned, the media matter: most of the knowledge people have must have been derived from press or television discourse, or from conversations which themselves incorporated media information. Especially in cities with substantial minority groups, information about everyday social life, perceived "unfair" competition, and cultural differences, may additionally be founded on personal observation and interaction. Note, however, that even in "ethnic" neighborhoods, white people do read newspapers and watch TV and may get information about their neighbors they would not easily get by occasional interaction and observation.

Further confirmation of the informational role of the media is provided by default: topics that are little dealt with in the media, also seldom come up in everyday conversations. Problems and difficulties of minority groups themselves (including racism, unemployment, bad housing, their politics, etc.) are rare in the press, and the same is true for conversations: indeed, how else would most white people know about the problems of the other group? Especially for such “delicate” topics, self-interest is as powerful for white journalists as it is for most other white people.

Our data also show that information (and opinions) in the media are not simply “recorded”. On the contrary, many of the topics or issues dealt with invite or provoke personal and group opinions of white media users. These reactions are as varied as the variation in media discourses and the variation of different groups of media users. One rather clear finding is the rather straightforward negative influence of biased crime reporting on specific groups of readers. Especially people who have negative attitudes about minorities, find confirmation in such crime stories for the criminal or otherwise threatening nature of “foreigners”. Unless based on personal experiences, such opinions of media users are not formed without at least some relevant information from other sources, so that we may safely conclude that the specific prejudices about “ethnic crime” are indeed based on opinions developed on the basis of media stories. People are aware of this contribution of the press, and therefore may use the press as a credible institution in order to defend and legitimate their own opinions. Up to a point, this is also true for opinions about cultural differences and perceived competition, which also may have a negative bias in the press, and which have a similar negative direction in much everyday conversation. The fact that also people in non-contact neighborhoods voice such opinions further shows that they need not be based on everyday experiences.

On the other hand, the media also provide information and opinions that may be used to develop more positive attitudes towards ethnic affairs. For the Dutch media, this is especially the case for the issue of discrimination. Since white Dutch people seldom know about such discrimination from personal experiences, e.g., through

direct contacts with minority group members, information about discrimination in business corporations (though seldom in the media themselves) or about racist parties, is largely derived from the media. Occasionally, also minority group members are allowed to speak in such stories and programs, so that white people also may form opinions about discrimination through the accounts of minority experience. Our data show that this is indeed the case: people are very much aware of discrimination, and routinely express this in their conversations about ethnic affairs. We have seen earlier in this paper that the opinions derived from this information have gradually led to a generally accepted norm that ethnic or racial discrimination is wrong, even if such norms may only be used in disclaimers.

More critical, anti-racist whites finally use such media information to form opinions about other white people, and they may explicitly denounce the intolerance of their own ingroup members, even when they occasionally also show “understanding” for such racist reactions. Media discussions about racism, especially on television, critical letters to the editor, and occasional opinion articles, may also provide more direct anti-racist opinions that may be accepted by white media users. Although such voices may not be dominant, and virtually absent in right-wing media, they will nevertheless be picked up by an anti-racist minority of the media users, while conveying to the more indifferent white majority that resentment against “foreigners” is at least controversial, even when such liberal voices in the media may be resented again in their own right.

These conclusions further confirm the familiar patterns of the persuasive role of the media in the formation and change of attitudes, namely that the influence of the media is not monolithic. The same stories may be used by some people as confirmations of their ethnic prejudices, whereas others may resent such negative stories. Conversely, more liberal, anti-racist voices that occasionally have access to the mass media may help people to develop anti-racist attitudes, whereas others may precisely reject such opinions and develop anti-anti-racist attitudes. In this sense, the media may be seen as both preformulating the elements of racist attitudes, as well

as marginally and indirectly preformulating (often by attacking) anti-racist attitudes. This is in line with a more general, “double” role of elites in society: they influence public opinion, but may do so in different directions.

This implication of our conclusions, however, needs to be qualified. It is not the case, for instance, that this ambiguity of the media (or of other elite discourse) simply “reflects” the ambiguity of the white attitudes about ethnic affairs, otherwise than that white Journalists are of course themselves part of this white group and share its basic ideological orientations. For an issue such as ethnic affairs, the direction of influence is mainly “top down”, that is, from elite media to popular beliefs, if only because the large majority of the white population does not have daily access to information about ethnic affairs from other sources. On most topics, even conversations appear to be largely based on information derived from the media. Our data also suggest that the media set most of the agenda of talk about ethnic affairs.

The same is true for the direction of influence of opinions. Despite the variation in attitudinal reactions of media users to media text and talk about ethnic affairs, there is a rather clear overall pattern in the similarities between media opinions and ideologies and those among the population at large. If most of the media tend to associate minorities with problems, unacceptable cultural differences, and even crime, so does the majority of the population. If the media, after the political authorities, define further immigration, especially of “economic” refugees as a problem, also the majority of media users will tend to do so. The general interpretation framework used by most of the mass media for the representation and explanation of ethnic affairs, thus, is largely adopted by the white population. Socio-cultural and economic conditions are not such that the white population has interest in resisting such a framework: the negative definition of the ethnic situation is in the interest of most white people involved in the daily reproduction of their dominance.

On the other hand, especially the liberal media also persuasively convey the ambiguity of ethnic attitudes, e.g., by placing explicit

racism and discrimination outside of the consensus. Few people are insensitive to accusations of racism or discrimination, and most people will agree that, “officially”, discrimination and racism are wrong. This does *not* mean, however, that the coverage of ethnic affairs in the dominant media is explicitly anti-racist. On the contrary, much of the right-wing press is fiercely anti-anti-racist, whereas even the liberal press often takes a critical distance from anti-racism. In much of the Dutch quality press, for instance, anti-racism is more often and especially more vehemently attacked than racism, especially when anti-racist critique also applies to the press itself (if only because virtually no minority journalists are hired). Nevertheless, an occasional story or interview in the press, a published letter to the editor, or some discussion or news affairs program on television and especially on the radio, may sometimes allow anti-racists to make their point, and this will also influence (small) groups of media users, as well as more general discussions about ethnic affairs. Even explicit media attacks against and marginalization of anti-racists may have a “solidarity” impact, especially on those readers who tend to confirm or develop a counter-ideology against the prevailing ethnic consensus of the (media) elites. This counter-ideology may be developed in the first place by selective counter-interpretation of news reports, but may also be based on other information sources, such as small alternative, “action group” publications or ingroup conversations.

In other words, the influence of the media is seldom specific, in the sense that specific news items or programs have specific influences on the opinions and attitudes of specific media users, under specific circumstances. Rather, such influence is both complex, diffuse and especially “structural”. The overall selection (and neglect) of topics sets the range of interest and discussion of the population at large. The range of opinions admitted to the media also defines the latitudes of public discussion. Radical anti-racist voices may thus be placed as much outside the consensus as radical racist voices. Even more importantly, the fundamental, ideologically based interpretation framework for ethnic events is thus routinely developed and applied in the media coverage of ethnic affairs, and it

is this interpretation framework that is gradually “learned” by the majority of white people.

In specific cases, thus, people may well have different opinions. People may sometimes even resent opinions expressed in or practices of the media, whether these are in favor or against minority group interests. On the whole, however, the interpretation framework that the media, as well as other elite discourses, manufacture and maintain is supported by the shared interest in maintaining and legitimating white group dominance. The liberal media, as well as other elites and the white middle class, may thus pay attention to discrimination, and resent racist parties. However, as soon as fundamental white group interests are at stake, for instance in affirmative action in business or education, the same liberals may have recourse to quite different types of discourse in order to legitimate resistance against this kind of implication of social equality and justice (Dovidio and Gaertner 1986). Reactions in this case are not fundamentally different from those of poor whites who resent it if Mexican, Turkish or other “foreigners” get a job when they are unemployed, or get an apartment when they are themselves badly housed.

Similarly, the politicians, the media, as well as other elites are equally reluctant to acknowledge their own contribution to the perpetuation of ethnic or racial inequality, and often take recourse to strategies of “blaming the victim”, viz., minority groups (or poor whites). in order to avoid being blamed themselves for racist practices and policies. Inner-city decay, persistent discrimination in virtually all sectors of social life, the lack of anti-racist legislation, high unemployment among minorities, bad education and health care for minorities, police harassment and biased legal trials, are among the many results of elite racism that this dominant interpretation framework of the media helps to conceal or to blame on the “others”. Only when the media start to topicalize the role of the elites in the reproduction of racism, and when they consistently also pay attention to the perspective and interests of minority groups, will this dominant interpretation framework change.

In a counterfactual mode, it was suggested above that if the

media had been consistently anti-racist, it would also have manufactured an anti-racist consensus. Obviously, given the position of the media in the overall social and political power structure, this is unfortunately possible only when those who directly or indirectly control the media, that is, (most) other elites, change themselves in the same direction. In sum, the major reason why the press contributes to the reproduction of racism is not only the fact that its biased reporting provokes or confirms prejudiced ethnic attitudes or stereotypical interpretation frameworks among many white people. Also, and even more importantly, it does so by refraining from articulating and conveying frameworks of resistance and change, e.g., by critically reporting about elite-based racism. Racism can only be effectively challenged by anti-racism. As long as the media are unable to formulate such a message in their ethnic affairs coverage, and refuse to persuasively convey it to the white public at large, we have little reason to assume that the white dominant group as a whole will be prepared to share its power with other groups.

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