Communicating anti-racism

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CHAPTER 1  
The recognition of racism in everyday life

Introduction
Over the last decades, expressions of racism in everyday life have been transforming insidiously. Overt expressions of racism have been largely replaced by more ‘subtle’ and reflexive ones that manage to avoid or pre-empt the accusation of racism (Meertens & Pettigrew, 1995; van Dijk, 1992; Potter & Wetherell, 1992). These developments suggest that the identification of racism in everyday life is becoming increasingly difficult. This chapter examines how people recognise racism in times of ‘subtle racism’ and how this process relates to the struggle against everyday racism.

The identification of everyday racism is generally conceptualised as the correct recognition of a particular act as objectively ‘racist’ (Essed, 1991; Mellor, Bynon, Maller, Felicity, Hamilton, & Watson, 2007; Nishimuta, 2008). Such recognition is presumably enabled by a sufficient level of knowledge about racism (Essed, 1991). However, common sense knowledge about racism has been shown to be contested, contradictory and incomplete (Augustinos & Every, 2007, Figgou & Condor, 2006; Müller, van Zoonen & de Roode, 2007; Nelson, Sanbonmatsu & McClerking, 2007). Therefore, in everyday life, objective criteria are often lacking to distinguish ‘racist’ forms of speech, behaviour or representation objectively from ‘non-racist’ ones. This suggests that the recognition of racism in everyday life may be a much more complex, contested and contingent process than is often assumed.

In this chapter, the recognition of racism in everyday life is reconceptualised as a social accomplishment. Seen from this point of view, a particular experience or incident can only be identified as racist when it is discursively constructed as such. The recognition of racism therefore depends on the discursive resources that common sense offers to construct a given incident or state of affairs as racist. This perspective will be used in this paper to present a more detailed empirical examination of the processes of recognition of racism in everyday life.

At present, there have been no studies that directly investigate how common sense knowledge of racism affects negotiations and struggles around the identification of racism in everyday life. Three aspects have remained particularly understudied. First, most studies have
focused exclusively on the ways in which people manage to avoid or pre-empt accusations of racism rhetorically (e.g. van Dijk, 1992; Potter & Wetherell, 1992). In so doing, the processes through which everyday speech or behaviour comes to be recognised as racist have been largely neglected (Nelson, Sanbonmatsu & McClerking, 2007). Second, research has mostly focused on the discourse of politicians and institutional actors via, for example, newspapers or popular media. By comparison, everyday negotiations over the recognition of racism in real life situations have received much less attention. Third, most of these studies analyse either pre-existing (media) texts or individual in-depth interviews and consequently overlook the interactional nature of the struggles around everyday racism (Condor, Figgou, Abell, Gibson, & Stevenson, 2006).

In order to address these issues, a study is presented below on the ways in which Dutch people with various ethnic backgrounds negotiate the recognition of racism in their everyday lives. The main question that will be answered here is: ‘How do people from different ethnic backgrounds identify racism in their everyday lives, and how is this process related to their common sense knowledge and understandings of racism?’ To answer these questions, 8 focus groups were held with 31 people from different ethnic backgrounds in Amsterdam about the presence of racism in common ambiguous everyday situations. Respondents were given a set of 10 vignettes in which a potentially racist act, situation or representation was described and depicted. Among these were, for example, a black man being stopped by the police for no apparent reason or receiving bad service in a restaurant while others were not. Participants were asked to explicate under what conditions they would be sure that racism was occurring in these situations and how they dealt with such ambiguous situations in their daily lives. The focus group provided for a setting in which the active construction and contestation of group norms could be recorded and stimulated by a discussion moderator.

In the following, I first explicate a theoretical framework and specify the empirical focus for the present study. Next, the methodology of the study is explained. This is followed by a presentation of the results of the analysis of the discussions that were elicited in the focus groups. The paper concludes with a discussion of the relevance of these findings for further conceptualization and study of the negotiation of everyday racism and how this reflects on the project of anti-racism.
Recognizing racism

Studies on the experiences of blacks with racism have usefully highlighted the role of individual knowledge in the process of recognition of racism in everyday life (Essed, 1991; Mellor et al., 2001). According to Essed, both knowledge of the norms for acceptable behaviour in various social domains and a ‘general knowledge of racism’ enable people to successfully recognize racism in their everyday lives (Essed, 1991). Racism is recognized when it consists of behaviour that transgresses situated norms for acceptable behaviour and corresponds with general knowledge of racism. In this model, the entire process of recognition is predicated on these two forms of ‘knowledge’ and basically takes two forms. Either it is correct because an individual has sufficient knowledge or it is incorrect because such knowledge is lacking. While individual knowledge and experience are certainly important factors in the recognition of racism, they are not the only factors that determine whether racism can be recognised. This becomes clear especially in everyday situations where behaviour can be difficult to interpret and information about the motives behind it is often not available. For example, in a study on the recognition of racism in everyday situations, Mellor et al. (2001) used vignettes like the one below and asked respondents to discuss whether racism had occurred:

Scenario 1. An Asian male with a number of products approaches the counter at a 24-hour store to pay for his goods. A Caucasian male with a can of drink comes up beside the Asian man and is served first by the shop assistant (Mellor et al., 2001, p.478).

It is clear that the recognition of racism in ambiguous situations like these cannot be reduced to the possession of adequate knowledge about racism and social norms. In the example above, various explanations might be given for the behaviour of the shopkeeper that are unrelated to the cultural difference of the Asian customer. However, the necessary information (i.e. about the shopkeeper’s feelings towards the Asian customer, the intentions behind his behaviour) is not easily accessible in such situations, leaving the behaviour open to multiple interpretations. By focusing only on whether people possess sufficient knowledge to recognize racism, the struggles and negotiations that are necessary to get everyday ambiguous (speech) acts, practices or representations to be recognised as racist are completely ignored. As a result, the victims of racism can easily become blamed for all false negatives (i.e. racism was not identified even
though it did not occur) as well as for all false positives (i.e. racism was identified even though it did not occur).

A more adequate approach may be to conceptualise the recognition of racism as the full social process through which certain (speech) acts, practices or representations come to be regarded as racist. Such a conceptualisation draws attention to three empirical areas of interest. First, it is necessary to address the role of (common sense) knowledge of racism in the process of recognition. A number of authors have already begun to do research into the role of common sense definitions of racism in everyday life (Augostinos et al., 2007; Figgou & Condor, 2006, Lamont & Aksartova, 2002; Verkuyten, 2005). In a recent study, Verkuyten examined majority and minority group members’ own understandings and interpretations of racism and ethnic discrimination in society (Verkuyten, 2005). His study focuses on the discursive strategies used to construct different explanations for discrimination. His account is especially useful as it explores the ways in which different kinds of discursive resources are used to argue for or against the presence and importance of racism in society. However, the study is limited by its focus on talk about racism or ‘ethnic discrimination’ in an abstract general sense in society at large. As a result, his results say little about the ways in which people recognize racism in their own everyday lives.

Second, it remains to be investigated how the identification and denial of racism are socially accomplished and collaboratively produced. Condor, Figgou, Abell, Gibson, & Stevenson (2006) have argued that studies focusing on the negotiation of the meaning and presence of racism have underestimated the interactional nature of both the denial as well as the recognition of racism. This is reflected in the dominance of studies both of media texts and in-depth interviews in which interaction is limited at most to negotiations with the interviewer. These kinds of data offer limited insights into the ways in which people struggle over the recognition with others in their daily lives and the kinds of resources that are available to them in such contexts. Augostinos & Every (2007) and Lamont & Aksartova (2002) have convincingly argued that patterns of everyday talk around the notion of ‘race’ and racism should be regarded as resources with which people can perform social actions such as blaming, justifying, and rationalizing.

Third, at present, the consequences of the ways in which the recognition of racism is struggled over in daily life are unclear. Earlier studies have suggested that discursive resources may be differentially available to people depending on a number of factors. Based on interviews
in the United States and France, Lamont and Aksartova conclude that the national context to some extent determines the resources people have at their disposal to construct non-racist, egalitarian world views (2002). In a study on the interpretation of ethnic discrimination, McLeod and Yates (2003) furthermore found that majority and minority groups may face considerably diverging consequences when they deploy certain resources to argue for or against racism. More specifically, ethnic minorities were in danger of being perceived as not belonging in society if they pressed too strongly for the presence of racism in society (McLeod & Yates, 2003). However, existing knowledge about these processes is sparse and linked to different theoretical models of racism. Furthermore, they accord relatively little weight to the interactional nature of the recognition and denial of racism in everyday life.

The main question posed in the introduction can be subdivided into three sub-questions that correspond with the three issues described above. First, what is the role of common sense definitions in processes of recognition and denial of racism in everyday life? Second, how are identification and denial of racism socially accomplished and collaboratively produced? Third, what are the consequences of the ways in which racism is struggled over in daily life, and how is its recognition socially achieved?

Method
In order to address the three main empirical issues, the present study focuses on uncovering the socially situated nature of any recognition of racism in everyday life. Previous studies have mostly ignored this situated nature by focusing on abstract talk about racism as a general issue in society (cf. Verkuyten, 2005). In order to focus on the situated nature of such talk, this study focuses on negotiations on various mundane, everyday situations in which racism might be perceived. In order to elicit such patterns of talk, 31 participants were interviewed during focus groups with their peers. Participants were between 18 and 42 years of age, and a majority (55%) were female. The composition of the groups varied systematically in terms of ethnicity. Two groups were made up exclusively of participants with a white ethnic background (all were white Dutch in these groups except one white German participant). Three groups were made up of participants with an ethnic minority background: One of these consisted of black Surinam women; one consisted of Moroccan Muslim men; and one consisted of men and women with a Turkish background. The other three groups were composed of a mixture of participants with a
white Dutch majority background and participants with ethnic minority backgrounds (i.e. Surinamese/Ghanese, Surinamese and Moroccan).

In the focus group, participants were asked to discuss the presence of racism in a number of ambiguous social situations in which racism might or might not have occurred. The procedure of the focus group consisted of two phases. In the first phase, participants were asked to reflect about their definitions of racism using two different vignettes of everyday situations in which racism might be recognised. These vignettes were similar to those used by Mellor et al. (2001) in their study. They were similarly intended to be ambiguous cases of racism in order to stimulate discussions about how racism might be recognised. The vignettes used included ‘a Muslim adolescent that was refused at a nightclub’, the packaging of a brand of cereal that featured a black man with exaggerated racial features and positive reproductions of racial difference in the form of a quote by a sports fan talking about a black soccer player saying ‘blacks are by nature stronger and faster and have larger penises’. Participants were encouraged to give examples from their own lives in which they felt racism had occurred or where they were not sure.

In the second part of the procedure, ten of these vignettes were laid on the table and participants were asked to rank them in order of seriousness of the racism they could recognise. This forced participants to discuss amongst each other their shared norms for racist behaviour. The moderator of the focus group ensured that any decisions made by the group were verbally explained by the participants, thus rendering us full view of the discursive resources that participants used to argue for the presence or absence of racism.

Despite the fact that ethnic composition of the focus groups was systematically varied, their discussions showed very similar dynamics and indicated that common sense knowledge and understanding about racism was deployed in a similar fashion. In many instances, for example, a white Dutch participant attempted to identify a certain experience as racist and similarly, many ethnic minority members actively denied the presence of racism in other experiences. Hence, the analysis below centres on the role of common sense knowledge that was shared between ethnic minorities and the white Dutch majority. Nonetheless, in some instances ethnicity did seem to matter strongly in the positions that speakers took up and the discussions they engaged in. The role of ethnicity is therefore addressed directly in the third half of the analysis when the consequences of processes of identification of everyday racism are discussed.
Results

The results of the analysis are presented in the order of the sub questions posed earlier. First, an analysis of common sense definitions of racism is presented. Second, the negotiations and struggles surrounding the recognition and denial of racism are analysed. Third, the consequences of these patterns of recognition and denials for majority and minority members are addressed.

Common sense definitions of racism

The analysis of participant’s definitions of racism revealed that although considerable diversity existed in the ways that they defined racism, they shared the assumption that it was immoral, intentional, negative and directed towards individuals or groups that were considered culturally different. When asked what racism was, a typical response was to describe a person whose behaviour or speech was deemed racist.

Alida: er, racist, I have the feeling that someone who makes racist statements is doing so very consciously too. And then I think it’s very dangerous indeed. If you consciously, how do you say, want to show your superiority, by putting others down, or ehm, its a form of contempt. You make always make racist statements from a position that yours is better.

In accounts such as the one above, the intentional nature of racism is stressed by emphasizing that racist behaviour is ‘consciously’ acted out and thus intended to achieve the undesirable goal of social hierarchisation. Racism is furthermore presented as immoral and antisocial. In the quote above, this is achieved by describing the acts as ‘dangerous’ and the reference to ‘putting others down’. By not specifying the groups that these might be but describing them in generalized, anonymous fashion (‘others’), no rational reasons are offered that could explain such behaviour. As a consequence, racism is constructed as irrational and immoral. In their discussions, participants never disputed the general assumptions of racism as immoral, intentional and negative acts directed at culturally different groups.

The general consensus was that racism implies that many ambiguous instances are classified as non-racist by default. An interesting and highly significant example of this discursive bias was the fact that positive constructions of biological essentialisms could be expressed without raising suspicions or accusations of racism. For example, when groups discussed a vignette in which a soccer fan was quoted as saying that ‘black men are faster runners...
and have more muscles by nature and they have larger penises’, participants typically responded in the following way:

Kwame: this I can better consider to be a compliment [laughter in the group] ‘Black men have bigger muscles and a bigger dick’.
Arnold: they can certainly run harder and faster by nature and I. but not that I am speaking out of personal experience but the second part [of that expression] is also true. There is nothing insulting about it.
Caroline: Yeah, I mean, have a look at those marathons.
Arnold: the 100m sprint. You name it. They just have a stronger DNA.
Caroline: yeah, a stronger physique
Arnold: yeah physique. They fitness for a year and get so big, and when I do (...) [Laughter in the group] Nothing happens.

In the first part of the exchange, Kwame, himself a black man, says that he might better consider it as a compliment. Arnold, a white man, agrees with the refusal to label such expressions as racist because they are not insulting and true. The veracity of the biological essentialism is then supported by Caroline by referencing the fact that black men often win the marathon. In so doing, she implies that the blackness of the athletes has caused them to win the marathon over and beyond all of the other factors that contribute to their success that are unrelated to biology but nevertheless differentiate certain people who happen to have black skin from certain areas of the world from other athletes. Arnold then tries to establish the fact of superior strength of the black body by referencing scientific terminology (‘they have a stronger DNA’) and ends the exchange by jokingly contrasting this superior black strength to his own inferior white body. Thus, ‘othering’ and constructions of essentialist group divides that are prerequisites for those intentional, insulting forms of racism were generally mistaken for harmless compliments because they lacked a negative intention or connotation.

Negotiations and struggles around the recognition of racism

The recognition of racism can be understood as a social accomplishment in which people construct certain events or experiences as racist by drawing on shared common sense understandings of racism. Certain forms of behaviour were recognised as racist unproblematically because they fit well with dominant common sense conceptualisations of racism. For example, two Turkish participants produced the recognition of racism in the following way when recounting the abuse that had recently happen to a mutual friend of theirs:
Djenghis: (...) He is riding his scooter along the bicycle lane, and she was driving a... little disabled people’s vehicle. And erm, out of the blue she starts calling him names, and yeah your kind, and this, and what else did she say, shitforeigner and stuff. (...) And he remained very calm and said ‘madam what is going on, can I help you with something? (...) and she completely went crazy about foreigners and look, that is racist. When there is nothing the matter.

Shirina: he said I must have tried to talk with that woman for 15 minutes but whatever I said, she called me names from here to Tokyo. ‘Madam, madam, can I help you Why are you so angry, what did I do to you?’ No, ‘Your kind are this, your kind are that, you have to get out of the country’. And then he felt like, ‘well madam, a very good day to you, should I have done anything wrong, I’m sorry’ and then he drove off. Yeah, and then he also said, ‘I think that woman must have experienced quite a lot for her to be so frustrated that, ehm I had to listen to that!’

In the quote above, the recognition of racism is achieved by constructing the encounter between the man and the racist woman in close correspondence with the definition of racism as irrational and negative behaviour towards ethnic minorities. Crucial in this regard is the reference to cultural difference in the aggression displayed by the woman. The racist woman is shown to conceive and treat ethnic minorities as different and inferior to herself by verbally abusing the victim (‘shitforeigner’), making generalizing statements about ethnic minorities (‘your kind is like this and that’) and calling for removal of ethnic minorities from the country. Moreover, the woman’s behaviour is constructed as entirely uncontrolled and erratic as she ‘out of the blue starts calling him names’. The descriptions of the victim make it clear that he had done nothing to elicit this behaviour except having a different ethnic background. Through the juxtaposition of the racist woman with an innocent friendly man who politely listens to the woman (who in retrospect even expresses appreciation for the difficult and traumatic events in her private life that must have preceded her racist insults), a strong contrast is generated in which the recognition of the racist becomes a matter of fact.

While the above example gives a clear case of an unproblematic recognition of racism, it was more usual to find such recognition actively struggled over. In these struggles, claims for recognition for racism were contested and countered with arguments that suggested no racism had occurred. During these struggles, a number of different discursive resources were deployed by participants. The constant comparative analysis of coded transcripts (cf. Seale, 1999) yielded three main categories of discursive resources with which participants argued for or against the presence of racism in everyday life situations. These are argumentations that concern the nature,
intentionality and consequences of speech (acts), social practices or representations (see Table 1 for an overview).

**Table 1. Interpretive repertoires for the recognition of racism in ambiguous situations**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Recognition</th>
<th>Denial</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Nature of (speech)act, practice or representation</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative, hostile or disrespectful</td>
<td>Denial</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reflects a known stereotype</td>
<td>The stereotype is accurate/positive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Intentionality</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Repeatedly expressed</td>
<td>Denial- It was incidental</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other people/groups are treated better</td>
<td>Others are treated the same</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No external factors explain behaviour</td>
<td>(Emotional) context responsible</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Consequences</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It is insulting / painful personally</td>
<td>It is should not be taken serious</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It reproduces prejudice or inequality</td>
<td>Other members of the group do not mind</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>It is unrelated to social processes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Each of these three main forms of argumentations in Table 1 could be used sequentially or simultaneously by participants. They could be used both to demand the social recognition of racism or, alternatively and more frequently, to deny the presence of racism. To illustrate the dynamic process of negotiation, consider the following scene in which Youssra attempts to present an everyday experience she has had in a restaurant to her peers in the focus group as a clear cut case of racism.

Youssra: In France racism and discrimination against dark skinned people happens much more than here in the Netherlands. Over there you can very often, like what you will get for example, what happened to me once is that you just get cold coffee [in a restaurant]. At the same time you see a Frenchman, you see the steam coming off of his coffee. So they can still make hot coffee. And then I get my Father because he speaks French and he will let you know what we want.

Like in many other struggles over the recognition of racism, this particular example starts off with Youssra making the case for racist discrimination by presenting its recognition as a matter of fact. She does so in the quote above by announcing first that she will be telling a tale of racism in the first sentence (‘in France racism happens much more’). She follows this with an
account in which she juxtaposes the treatment she received from a waiter with the treatment that a Frenchman in the same restaurant received. She constructs this treatment as an intentional act by arguing that the negative treatment she receives is not caused by external factors beyond control of the waiter (‘they can still make hot coffee’). Furthermore, she provides sensory, and therefore difficult to deny, proof of the differential treatment (the coffee served to the Frenchman was visibly hot as it was steaming). However, in subsequent exchanges with the other participants of the focus group, Youssra acknowledges that her recognition of racism in this particular case is open to contestation:

Marianne: well yeah how does he serve the other customers?
Youssra: did they ever come there before, were they friendly when they came in, because I can sure understand, if I were a waiter, and you are rude, than I am just as rude or even more rude to you. If you are very friendly..
Marianne: or it’s just a rude waiter
Daniëlle: or the customers are rude
Marianne: look if he does treat the rest of the customers normally, and those men just want to be served, and he doesn’t serve them, then I think that is racism yeah (...) if he does that because they are different.

In the above, Jo begins to problematize Youssra’s account by opening the discussion about other aspects of the situation that might give clues about the racist nature of the encounter such as the behaviour of the waiter (‘how does he treat the other guests’). In this particular focus group situation, Youssra is quick to acknowledge that in order to achieve an incontestable recognition of racism other factors would need to be checked and determined. For instance, her account would have to demonstrate that she had done nothing herself to have elicited the bad service from the waiter by being unfriendly or rude. Furthermore, the waiter himself also could be rude for other reasons unbeknown to her. The exchange above illustrates how difficult it can be to achieve the recognition of racism even in a simple everyday event such as bad service at a restaurant. Moreover, the final comment by Jo (its racism if ‘he does it because they are different’) illustrates the centrality of establishing intentionality in the recognition of racism.

The example above is an illustration of a struggle around the recognition of racism that ultimately fails. It is perhaps worth noting here that this analysis purposively does not attempt to arbitrate whether an encounter such as the one described by Youssra, is an instance of racism in any objective sense. Rather, it illustrates how the identification of racism in everyday experiences
is an outcome of negotiations that are enabled and constrained by discursive resources that people have at their disposal. The available resources for this struggle are biased against those wishing to accomplish the recognition of racism as there are many more opportunities to deny the recognition of racism than to establish its recognition in most situations. For example, the focus on intentionality opens up a discursive space to deny racism simply by insisting upon a verbal expression of racist intention on the part of the alleged perpetrator – something that is usually lacking. Although it was also sometimes argued that racist behaviour could be performed subconsciously, this was not a definitive solution to this problem. Unconscious motivation is generally even harder to substantiate than conscious intentional acts. In many everyday situations, it may be very difficult to argue for the presence of racism because a lot of information is simply not available (such as intention and the many contingent factors that might preclude the diagnosis of racism as an intentional malevolent act).

Consequences

In all focus groups, participants negotiated the boundaries within which it was acceptable to claim that racism had occurred. Those who were seen to transgress these boundaries suffered the risk of being disqualified. Such a disqualification was generally not a threat to people who argued against the recognition of racism. A central trope in this regard was the notion of ‘fussing’ which was used repeatedly to set limits to the struggles around the recognition of racism:

Monique (white Dutch background): when you are at the club, and a black guy gets refused entry then it’s immediately racism and they start fussing about everything. That is not fair because a black guy can be refused entry at a club but a white guy just as well.

In the quote above, Monique constructs a hypothetical case of an illegitimate claim for the presence of racism by neglecting to include any argumentation to support it. Hence, a black person who is refused at the door of a disco can be perceived as ‘fussing about everything’ because they have not provided any (convincing) argumentation. Such fussing is disqualified because it is an unfair appeal to people’s willingness to change their behaviour and social practices if they are deemed to violate the basic liberal values of equal treatment for all.

People who repeatedly fail to provide convincing argumentation for their claims to the recognition of racism in everyday life risk being constructed as psychologically damaged.
Interestingly enough, this argument was made not only by majority members but also by some minority members:

Kwame (Surinam/Ghanaian background): I think that that is the most important, if you are really comfortable with yourself you won’t let these kind of things get to you (...) yeah these are the kinds of people that, yeah the way it was at my home, those people with low self-esteem. That’s where it starts at first, they just failed to move on. Just like there are Dutch people, autochtone Dutch people, who just didn’t move on somewhere and are still at ‘all foreigners should leave the county’ and stuff like that.

In the quote above, Kwame makes a distinction between black people that make appropriate recognitions of racism and those that are seen to want to make too many. He describes the latter as having ‘let these kinds of things get to you’, which implies a weakness of character. This weakness is subsequently attributed to the ‘low self esteem’ of people who fuss about racism. In an interesting rhetorical reversal, he then argues that black people who do not succeed in overcoming this psychological impairment risk becoming as bad as the people who express themselves in racist ways. He achieves this by comparing them to white majority members who failed to overcome parochial xenophobic sentiments (‘who just didn’t move on from ‘foreigners must leave the country’).

The struggles around the recognition of racism outlined here present differential consequences for majority and ethnic minority members. As the latter experience more incidents in their daily lives, which they might potentially construct as racism, ethnic minorities were in a position of relative disadvantage. For most ethnic minority members, the risk of such a disqualification is constantly present as they experience many instances in which they feel wrongly treated because of their racial, ethnic or religious difference, which they cannot persuade others to recognise as racist. This dilemma between an excess of ambiguous, possibly racist experiences and a limited ability, and number of times that racism can be legitimately claimed in everyday life produces a dynamic of its own. Ethnic minority members are forced to engage very consciously and carefully with the recognition of racism. In one exchange between three black girls of Surinam descent, this is explicated in the following way:

Alida: yeah, I need, I need, for me I would need a little more background information to say, like, this is, ehh [racism] because otherwise I also have the feeling that I’m taking things to the extreme, and I really want to watch out for that, since here I do not know, (...)

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Interviewer: what do you mean, take to the extreme?
Alida: that you start filling things in and start to see racism everywhere.
Shaniqua: mhmm!
Alida: that is tiring too, for yourself! (...)
Shirley: I always give people the benefit of the doubt, also for the reason that Alida gives, otherwise you go paranoid.

In the first part of this excerpt, Alida accounts for the ways in which she deals with the ambiguities surrounding the recognition of racism by making sure that she only considers things racism when she has sufficient proof. By stating that she wants to avoid to ‘take things to the extreme’ she constructs certain recognitions of racism as illegitimate and dangerous as they may lead her to ‘see racism everywhere’. These unwanted recognitions of racism should be avoided for both social and individual reasons. Socially, they are not based on ‘proof’ and hence produce the risk of being perceived as someone who fusses over racism. Individually, however, focusing on proof puts a check on the mind, which can easily see racism in many more experiences that can actually be proven. This contains a cost, not only socially, but it also requires a lot of energy (‘it is tiring’). It also risks losing touch with social reality (‘going paranoid’) and no longer being able to function in society. Ethnic minorities are thus somewhat forced to ‘give people the benefit of doubt’.

The ambivalences and struggles surrounding the recognition of racism also have important consequences for the participants with a white Majority background who felt they had never been a victim of racism. Taking up a position on the extreme end of the spectrum between ‘racists’ and ‘non-racists’, these participants often appeared aware that their own ‘non-racist’ position was a discursive accomplishment that carried certain risks. Despite the bias against the recognition inherent in the discursive resources with which these need to be made, many participants felt that they were quite powerless and vulnerable against accusations of racism.

Daniëlle: you try so hard (...) to not be racist,
Youssra: I think Dutch people, they are so afraid, so vulnerable, they get really easily, ‘racism, discrimination’, even though it sometimes isn’t at all. But who is the easiest victim? It’s true someone won’t say ‘you are racist’ to me as quickly as they would to Daniëlle. Even though I might be much worse. Then I would be a Moroccan but I hate Moroccans. Or I hate Negros. Or I hate Turks. They won’t think that with me but they will with her.
By stating that she ‘tries so hard’ to avoid being racist, she emphasises the conscious effort that she exerts to avoid accusations of racism. Youssra, herself a Moroccan, takes the side of Daniëlle by arguing that (white majority) Dutch people are afraid of and sensitive to accusations of racism even when they actually did not do anything racist. Their status as privileged white Majority members appears to make them suspect and produces the feeling of being an easy target for accusations of racism that need to be actively avoided or denied. In one discussion, this sentiment was clearly expressed in the following way when a traditional Dutch celebration called ‘Saint Nicolas’ was being discussed. This tradition involves members of the white Majority painting their faces black and their lips red and pretending they were ‘black Pete’. As black Pete, they play the role of servant to a white saint who visits the Netherlands each year to bring presents to the children. All participants were aware of the controversies that had already raged around this particular racialized social practice. Often they vehemently opposed proposals to change the tradition by, for example, changing ‘black Pete’ into ‘Pete’ and painting him in various bright colours. This opposition is insightful for a number of reasons and is illustrated in the following excerpt:

Naima: and would you want to change something about it?
Monique: I think that makes absolutely no sense at all, because then you start admitting to the fact that you also think it is racist, and I think that we should just argue that it is not racist, because we don’t mean anything negative with it. And if you start giving them another colour then you start admitting to the fact that it indeed could be racist, and I think that is not good.
Interviewer: what happens when you give in to that?
Monique: well, then they will swamped you in accusations, naturally!
Interviewer: Like what?
Monique: well, ‘negro kisses’, there are more, just name it. If you admit to this, I think that they will start fussing about every, they will fuss about everything they come across. Maybe it will start appearing even more in the media and then it will start to become more of an issue. And especially with the black people among us. Right? If you start admitting to that.

In response to the question by Naima, Monique dismisses any changes to the ‘Saint Nicolas’ tradition as completely ridiculous. She then argues that agreeing to the recognition of racism in this longstanding Dutch tradition amounts to a simultaneous agreement with the implicit accusation that the people who celebrate this day (including herself) are racist and therefore deny her own sense of innocence (‘but we don’t mean anything negative by it’). In the
second half of the excerpt she makes the fears underlying this position explicit as she argues that such a recognition of racism might set a precedent that would certainly lead to many other illegitimate accusations (‘they will swamp you with accusations, naturally’). Moreover, giving in to certain claims for the recognition is constructed in this account as irresponsible towards ethnic minority groups, as it will stimulate them to start fussing about ‘everything’ in their daily lives. As such, the ambivalence to the recognition of racism of the white majority forms a tight fit with that of ethnic minorities who themselves also seek to avoid fussing and eventual paranoia that might result from perceiving too many incidents in their everyday life as racism.

**Conclusion**

Based on the results above, the following answers can be given to the three sub-questions formulated earlier. First, the analysis shows that common sense contains various constructions of racism that all centre around the core belief that racism involves the negative perception and treatment of ethnic or racial minorities as different and inferior. They diverge to the extent that they also allow for unconsciously expressed racism, non-intentional racism and institutional racism. Moreover, non-offensive reproductions of essentialist biological discourses and positive stereotypes of ethnic and racial minorities therefore go unrecognised as part of the problem of racism.

Second, the recognition of racism in everyday life can usefully be conceived as the outcome of an interactional struggle that is fought out with the discursive means afforded by common sense. Common sense definitions of racism allow people to construct certain experiences or acts as racist. In order to be accepted by their peers, these constructions need to prove the racist intentions behind certain acts or social practices or demonstrate the racist consequences of these actions. Moreover, they need to be constructed in such a way as to exclude alternative interpretations. Consequently, the recognition of racism in more ambiguous situations generally takes the form of a discursive struggle in which arguments are exchanged for or against the recognition of racism. The recognition of racism is subsequently achieved once arguments for the recognition are socially accepted and counterarguments have been successfully rebutted.

Third, an analysis of the outcomes and consequences of the dynamic struggles around the recognition of racism in everyday life shows that the discursive resources deployed in this struggle are biased towards the denial of racism in everyday situations. Many kinds of ‘proof’ appear to be extremely hard to produce in everyday contexts (such as intentionality, lack of other
factors that can explain negative behaviour). As a result, the recognition of racism is often very hard or even impossible to achieve. A failed attempt to get an experience recognised as racism may backfire and produce counter accusations of ‘fussing’. Thus, people with an ethnic minority background may leave many ambiguous experiences untested out of the fear or the awareness that they cannot be successfully recognised as racism.

These outcomes suggest that the recognition of racism is a social process that is deeply interrelated with power. At first sight, it seems that the bias towards the denial of racism serves to reproduce the conservative interests of the dominant white Dutch majority. Many racialized discourses and practices indeed go unchallenged or even unnoticed as they can not be addressed with the discursive resources available in everyday life. However, the dynamics of power appear to be more complex. Common sense also offers possibilities for successful contestations of everyday racism. Many ethnic minorities expressed appreciation for the ways in which racism could be addressed. Moreover, all of the participants with a white Dutch majority background in this study indicated a willingness to discuss the problem of racism in society and a desire to avoid being racist themselves. Their preferred position as ‘non-racist’ was also a social accomplishment that needed to be constantly reproduced and defended through avoiding certain kinds of behaviour and discourse. As such, power may be usefully conceptualised here as suffused with knowledge in the ways described in the work of Michel Foucault (1978). Foucault has shown how institutionalised forms of knowledge shape people’s self-understandings. These self understandings in turn govern the thoughts and behaviours of people in ways that serve certain societal interests. With regard to the recognition of racism, a similar phenomenon can be witnessed. The discourses through which racism is understood situationally affect the ways in which people perceive themselves and their experiences as either racist or non-racist. Because of the contradictory and fragmented nature of these understandings, an uncertainty is created that demands that individuals continuously exert efforts to take up positions in these discourses that are considered of moral worth (i.e. as ‘non-racist’). The negotiations and struggles over the recognition of racism in everyday life do not reveal a power that presses down upon and marginalizes ethnic minorities in a straightforward way. Instead, power penetrates the ways in which both the white Dutch majority and ethnic minorities understand themselves and their experiences of everyday racism.

It is perhaps important to reiterate that this paper has remained somewhat agnostic as to the ‘objective’ racist nature of certain experiences brought up by the participants in the study.
The analysis underscores the point that for many practical purposes, such an approach may be more valuable than trying to arbitrate what should be ultimately regarded as racism and what should not. Of course, this should not be taken as a denial of the fact that legislation and the enforcement of constitutional rights remain crucial to challenging social exclusion. However, certain forms of speech or behaviour first need to be recognised as racist before these rules can be enforced. Everyday negotiations are currently biased against this recognition and consequently undermine the effectiveness of legislation. They are therefore an equally important area for anti-racist interventions.
CHAPTER 2

Accidental racists
Experiences and contradictions of racism in local Amsterdam soccer culture.¹

Introduction

Soccer fan cultures around the world are renowned for their potential to bring people together and produce a positive sense of collective identity. Paradoxically, their potential to function as a public arena for the expression of racism has become equally notorious. At first glance, some recent statistics seem suggest that this notoriety is increasingly unjustified. In the Netherlands, for example, only 2.2% of all reports of racist incidents made to the official anti-discrimination agencies were related to soccer and other forms of ‘sports and recreation’ (LVADB, 2004).

It would, however, be premature to conclude that soccer racism is gradually disappearing. Many authors writing on racism in soccer have started to adopt new paradigms that define racism in much wider, cultural terms and to document racist aspects of soccer culture that were previously ignored. It is now increasingly accepted that expressions of racism can take many forms in the various domains of soccer culture: collective racist chanting on the terraces is only the most visible (Back, Crabbe & Solomos, 1999 & 2001, Garland & Rowe, 2002, Jones, 2002). Racism, it is argued, often insidiously structures the interactions and decisions in soccer culture from the terraces, locker rooms and playing fields up to the boardrooms, soccer media and patterns of financial endorsement. From this perspective, a (temporary) decrease in collective forms of racism during soccer matches cannot be taken as a straightforward indication that racism is retreating from soccer culture as a whole. Moreover, the low numbers of complaints and lack of discussion about daily racism at soccer clubs and matches might be an indication of processes

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