Demanding respect: The uses of reported speech in discursive constructions of interracial contact

Richard Buttny, Syracuse University
Princess L. Williams
Demanding respect: the uses of reported speech in discursive constructions of interracial contact

ABSTRACT. This investigation examines discursive uses of respect in talking about interracial contact. In discussing the documentary, Racism 101, the most frequently quoted portion by African-American and Latino participants was a segment on demanding respect from Whites. Our first study analyzes such discourse—reported speech—for what is made relevant from the original documentary segment. The participants’ reported speech conveys little of the exact wording of the original, but does capture its spirit through using similar structural features: the repetition of ‘respect’, a contrast between respect and liking, and addressing this to Whites. These uses of reported speech are participants’ way of performing the power of another’s words, in the sense of being able to articulate a compelling discursive position on an interracial problematic. Our second study employs focus-group interviews to further explore the meanings of respect for African-Americans. We examine narratives of disrespect during interracial contact in public places, such as during service encounters in stores. Participants’ narratives told of being disrespected by being overly monitored, not receiving service, or being treated in a derogatory fashion, in short, the perception of being treated differently than Whites. Reported speech was used in these narratives to construct the White service worker’s actions, how the narrator responded, what could have happened, or what in-group members say as an aggregate. Reported speech allows narrators to articulate the subtext to what is being said. Also, the evaluation of these incidents told of the emotional costs of being the recipient of disrespect.

KEY WORDS: discursive constructions, interracial contact, reported speech, respect, talking race

Now if we all want to integrate ‘cause we want to integrate we want to hold hands and everybody wants to love each other, that’s fine. But that’s not the basis of everything. And it’s more rudimentary than, you know, let’s all be friends and hold hands. It’s
about let’s respect each other. I don’t care if you like me, you don’t have to like me, you know. I might not like you either. But as long as we respect each other. For instance, I’m a student, I respect you cause you’re a student, and you’re working hard, trying to do your thing, you respect me for the same reason, and that’s all I can ask for. You don’t have to like me. You can hate me all you want. Just respect me. (African-American college student from the documentary *Racism 101*; Lennon and Bagwell, 1988)

The idea for the present study about respect arose from the fact that this epigram was the most frequently quoted part from *Racism 101* by the African-American and Latino viewers. The activity of quoting a speaker – whether from a documentary or any kind of communication encounter – is called reported speech. Reported speech is used here to investigate the notions of respect and disrespect in talking race.¹

Two studies are pursued on different aspects of the discursive constructions of interracial contact. The first examines the performative aspects in demanding respect through reported speech. A reason why one may report on another’s speech is due to the eloquence or forcefulness of that speaker. Sometimes another person’s words can articulate one’s sentiments better than one can oneself, and thereby make those sentiments more intelligible. The prior utterances of another can be used as a conversational resource for an individual’s expression now. Some participants cited the quoted segment on respect as a way to formulate a kind of solution to the problematic aspects of interracial contact.

A second study was undertaken to further investigate the meanings of respect. We conducted focus-group interviews with African-American participants. From these interviews, narratives about incidents of disrespect emerged as our primary data. Most all of the narratives involved an African-American being the recipient of an act(s) of disrespect embedded within interaction sequences with Whites. The majority of incidents occurred in public settings, such as stores during service encounters. Examining narratives of disrespect and the voices drawn on to tell these stories allows us to become more aware of some of the troublesome features of interracial communication.

**RESPECT**

The discourse of respect is widely used in African-American speech communities (Anderson, 1990), for example, “(E)veryone would feel that you’re equal, you’re a person, treat you with respect”, or “(I)t was a issue again of respect, it’s you’re not hearing me, you’re not listening to me”. Respect has been identified as an African-American norm for friendship (Collier, 1996; Hecht et al., 1993). Everyday moral assessments of respect/disrespect occur throughout the larger North American society in ordinary conversations as well as in mass-media such as movies, popular music, and sports commentary. In our studies, the notion of respect seemed at once obvious to participants, yet eluded an adequate comprehensive definition. Respect seems to be such a protean notion that it resists a singular meaning; instead it is used in multiple ways as part of various discursive positionings.
Participants’ uses of respect are the data for this investigation, but before turning to that we want to consider how respect is employed as an analytic concept in the human sciences. The concept of respect has received some attention in social and political theory. Societal institutions need to give respect to all social groups as a necessary condition for establishing a ‘decent society’ (Margalit, 1996). Disrespect can affect a person’s normative understanding of self and have negative consequences for the social value of individuals or groups (Honneth, 1992). In short, not receiving respect can be humiliating for individuals. The respect that different ethnic groups can be expected to receive can be seen as a political or economic resource since it involves how one’s rights are enforced (Miller, 1993). Respect is necessary for developing connections with strangers because it reduces an individual’s anxiety and uncertainty (Gudykunst, 1995: 36).

On a social communication level, respect can be seen as a basic principle of human interaction. Harré (1980: 24) characterizes respect as ‘a socially marked relation, shown by deference’ to others; it is ‘more than an attitude and not necessarily linked to an emotion’. Respect, and its opposite, contempt, are public displays which are ‘shown and ritually symbolically marked in the course of particular activities of daily life’ (Harré, 1980: 24). So respect is implicitly communicated through persons’ actions.

Penman (1990) develops this notion of respect by connecting it to the concepts of face and facework strategies. Different facework strategies are arrayed along a respect–contempt continuum and can be used to enhance face through respect or depreciate face through contempt (Penman, 1990: 20). Receiving respect supports a recipient’s face, while being disrespected can be a threat to one’s face. Brown and Levinson (1987) distinguish the notion of face into positive face wants and negative face wants. Negative face involves the want that our actions be unimpeded by others, the avoidance of threat or embarrassment. Positive face involves the want that our actions be seen favorably by others, that others’ evaluations enhance our sense of face.

This positive–negative face distinction is reflected in different studies of respect. Research among Samoans (Duranti, 1992), Mexicans (García, 1996), or the Gonja of West Africa (Goody, 1972) show that respect can be conveyed to another through verbal forms as honorifics or formal address terms. Such language choice ‘gives respect’ to the recipient and enhances their positive face.

The second approach to respect is connected to negative face as when an individual fails to receive sufficient politeness or adequate treatment from another. Much of the work on interracial contact falls into this camp. Consider an extreme statement from An American Dilemma: ‘(white opinion) asks for a general order according to which all Negroes are placed under all white people and excluded from not only white man’s society but also from the ordinary symbols of respect’ (emphasis added; Myrdal, 1944: 65). Even today African-Americans report the problem of receiving respect in intergroup contexts (Bailey, 1997, n.d; Hacker, 1992). Most Whites are privileged in that they can take respect for granted throughout the larger society, while people of color have to earn or prove they are...
worthy of receiving respect from Whites (Omi and Winant, 1994; West, 1994). Essed (1991) coined the term ‘everyday racism’, to capture the recurring sleights, abuses, and put-downs which people of color regularly experience (also cf. Pinderhughes, 1989). So in interracial contexts, disrespect can be seen as a way of glossing the experience of being the recipient of everyday racism. Even middle-class African-Americans report incidents of discrimination in public places which present a cumulative burden of dealing with such incidents (Feagin, 1991). Unlike the ‘old-style racism’ expressed in explicit ideologies, such as the quoted passage from Myrdal (1944), most contemporary symbols of disrespect involve subtle and ambiguous acts which can be readily denied as being racist (Billig et al., 1988; Miles, 1989; Van Dijk, 1993a; Wetherell and Potter, 1992).

USES OF REPORTED SPEECH IN TALKING RACE

Our speech . . . is filled with others’ words . . . [t]hese words of others carry with them their own expression, their own evaluative tone, which we assimilate, rework, and re-accentuate. (Bakhtin, 1986: 89)

How is it that we can draw on others’ words and also frame those words for our own purposes? This conversational practice of quoting another, or oneself, is called reported speech (Volišinov, 1971). What we, or another, purportedly said can be reconstructed in our own talk. Reported speech does not necessarily involve an accurate representation of the original speech. The issue of accuracy is bracketed; reported speech is a construction of ‘what was said’ for the reporting speaker’s own purposes. Again invoking Bakhtin, ‘we assimilate, rework, and re-accentuate’ another’s words (Goffman, 1974; Holt, 1996; Sternberg, 1982; Tannen, 1989).

Reported speech can take various forms. To illustrate, in the following extract, C reports the speech of a White student by summarizing it (lines 4–6) and then directly reports her own speech in response (lines 7–8).

Extract 1 (three African-Americans)
3 C: I mean me and another White student talk about this,
4 he say he can look around the room and pick which Blacks are
5 there because of academics and which Blacks are here because of
6 affirmative action by what they say in class
7 and I was like you can’t say that but you can say
8 the same thing some of these White students here

Reported speech can not only summarize what an individual said (as in lines 4–6), but also summarize the speech of an aggregate, e.g. “I’ve heard a lot of White people say the same thing about Black people”. Perhaps the most interesting way to summarize a group is through a quote of the prototypical group member to epitomize that group’s characteristic utterances (arrow):

Extract 2 (four Latinos)
the way the White students reacted was like
===> well I didn’t put it out.
So, we have the main types: (i) direct reported speech; and (ii) summary reported speech. The latter, summary speech, can be divided into three subtypes: (a) of an individual; (b) an aggregate; or (c) a prototypical group member (Payne, n.d.). In addition, a third main type, (iii) hypothetical quotes (Irvine, 1996; Mayes, 1990), involve speech which ‘could’, ‘would’, or ‘may’ be said (lines 22–3):

**Extract 3** (two Whites)

21 B: but if someone comes up to me and says
22 I’m White and proud to be White and everyone should be proud to be White
23 I’m like who the hell is this freak get outta my face ya know

Since quotes are fictitious, strictly speaking, they are not reported speech. But hypothetical quotes bear enough family resemblance to be considered alongside reported speech. These various forms of reported speech work within larger discursive structures, such as narratives (to vividly convey problematic actions through what was said) or within claim–evidence sequences (as a form of evidence to support claims about racial matters). In our materials, the reported speech in Study 1 is used within claim–evidence sequences, while the reported speech in Study 2 occurs within narratives.

Through such conversational practices, the speaker is not merely reporting speech, but also assessing speech – the character of the actions recreated through the quotes. Reported speech is relevantly tied to assessment. Assessment reveals the reporting speaker’s positioning towards the quoted words. Recreating others’ actions through quoting their words is a way of criticizing or resisting troublesome events, or if a positive assessment, through valorizing or supporting such actions. Quoting others’ utterances is a way to hold them socially accountable (Buttny, 1993) because through their own words, or summary thereof, the action in question gets ‘recreated’ through talk. Invoking others’ words can yield conversational power in ascribing meanings to the reported event and building conversational alliances (Álvarez-Cáccamo, 1996).

**Study 1**

**RATIONALE**
The present study grew out of an earlier investigation of reported speech in talking race (Buttny, 1997). In this prior study reported speech was seen to work to reconstruct racial incidents through invoking what others, or the teller, has said. Most of the instances of reported speech quote out-group members to criticize, complain, or challenge them for some problematic acts. Much of the reported speech from students of color tells of experiences of being the recipient of racist notes or comments, being stereotyped in various ways such as being the product of affirmative action, or having their behavior in class overly monitored by White students. In listening to students’ reported speech in talking race, what also can
be heard is what might be glossed as ‘the power of the spoken word’. ‘Power of
the spoken word’ in the sense that participants’ talk criticizes, challenges, or gives
evidence for racialized incidents through narrating problematic events or giving
evidence for claims.

A separate study is warranted, given the importance of respect as a discourse
coupled with the fact that this ‘respect segment’ (quoted at the beginning of this
article) was the most quoted portion from the documentary by African-American
and Latino participants. The present investigation seeks to extend the work of the
earlier study into understanding participants’ discursive positionings on interra-
cial contact through focusing on respect. In addition, we seek to better under-
stand the conversational practice of reported speech. Reported speech allows us
to draw on others’ words of strength and resistance and make them our own.

Study 1 examines (a) how the reported speech on respect presents the students’
discursive postionings on interracial contact; and (b) how reported speech works
as a conversational practice.

SUBJECTS AND ANALYTIC METHOD
Volunteers were given the documentary Racism 101 to watch at home with at
least one other person whom they considered to be a member of their own group.
This documentary investigates the state of interracial contact and racism on
North American university campuses. The group size for watching the document-
tary in the volunteer’s home ranged from two to five participants. After viewing
the videotape, participants were requested via written instructions to discuss
their reactions to Racism 101 in an informal and natural way (the researcher was
not present). Specifically, the instructions read, ‘After the video, please discuss on
the audiotape your opinions about the quality and quantity of interracial com-
munication on college campuses, such as U. For example, problems with interra-
cial friendships, voluntary segregation, and so on’. The participants were given a
tape recorder and asked to record their discussions. Anonymity was assured.

Thirty-eight college students participated in the study: twenty African-
Americans, twelve whites, and six Latinos. These post-viewing discussions ranged
in length from 15 minutes to over an hour, with a median length of approxi-
mately 30 minutes.

The audiotapes were transcribed using a simplified Jefferson format (Atkinson
and Heritage, 1984) (see Appendix). Some participants used a variety of African-
American vernacular English, some of which is preserved in the transcripts.
Those transcripts containing reported speech, and the surrounding sequential
context, were exerted for analysis.

Given the interest in respect and in reported speech as a communicative
practice, we draw on both discursive analysis (Edwards and Potter, 1992) and
social accountability (Buttny, 1993) methods. How do participants use reported
speech to justify, frame or account for their views on interracial contact? The tran-
scripts were read numerous times, and the audiotapes were repeatedly listened to.
From these observations, claims were formulated about what the participants
were doing; these were further checked by re-examining the transcripts and tape recordings. This method involves a tacking back and forth among the transcripts, audiotapes, and claims to check, refine, and better formulate one’s analytic claims.

PERFORMATIVE ASPECTS OF USING ANOTHER’S WORDS

As mentioned, the most quoted part of the documentary, *Racism 101*, by the African-American and Latino viewers involved a segment in which a student calls for the need for respect between Whites and African-Americans. Consider the original documentary segment and then how it is reconstructed in and through the participants’ reported speech. This is a re-transcribed version of the epigram.

**Extract 4** (*Racism 101*: Transcript: 19–20)
1. Now if we all want to integrate ’cause we want to integrate
2. we want to hold hands and everybody wants to love each other, that’s fine.
3. But that’s not the basis of everything. And it’s more rudimentary than,
4. you know, let’s all be friends and hold hands.
5. It’s about let’s respect each other.
6. I don’t care if you like me,
7. you don’t have to like me, you know,
8. I might not like you either.
9. But as long as we respect each other.
10. For instance, I’m a student, I respect you cause you’re a student,
11. and you’re workin’ hard, tryin’ to do your thing,
12. you respect me for the same reason, and that’s all I can ask for.
13. You don’t have to like me.
14. You can hate me all you want.
15. Just respect me.

While there are many observations that a discourse analyst could make about this passage, what we initially want to do is see what the participants have to say about it as reflected in their reported speech. What do the participants draw on and make relevant in quoting it? How does this voice from the documentary enter the participants’ voices?

In the following transcript, A directly quotes a portion from the documentary segment (beginning at line 5).

**Extract 5** (two African-American females)
1. A: Well another thing I wanted to talk about was the boycott of classes on MLK day
2. and that goes back to people- not only Blacks being more unified
3. but Blacks and Whites in an effort to just create a better environment
4. like one of the students said
5. You don’t have to like me but you know we do have to respect [each other =
6. B:]
7. A: = especially being in a campus setting of such a close-knit community
8. you know it’s very important for us to respect each other (.)
9. I may not like what you’re saying
10. I may not like your views
11. you may not like my views [but it’s important that we respect each other =
12 B:]
13. That’s right
In reporting speech, as indicated by the quote marker, ‘like one of the students said’ (line 4), A draws on the student’s discourse from the documentary (beginning at line 5). The notion of ‘respect’ is paramount in this direct discourse. To gloss the discursive positioning A adopts from the documentary: liking me is not required, but respect is. Further, an affect display is hearable here – an assertiveness or defiance, a posture of not caring if you are liked by whites, but demanding respect from them.

One of the interesting features of direct quotes, in contrast to summary quotes, is that the reporting speaker can draw on, not only the content, but also the expression of the original speech. So, how is this expressive demand for respect structured in the participant’s reported speech such that she can partake in the original’s performative power?

Beginning with the issue of the accuracy of the reported speech, the only phrase which is identical to the original is “you don’t have to like me” (line 5 in Extract 5 and line 9 in Extract 4). In this situated context of Extract 5, the accuracy of the reported speech is less salient than A’s capturing the spirit of the original documentary segment. Like the original, the performative aspects of this supposed direct quote gets accomplished by the repetition of “respect” and the contrasting of respect to “liking”. Respect gets contrasted to being liked by Whites. This can be more fully described by considering some of the structural features of the two transcripts. The most striking similarity is the contrast of “liking” to “respect”. Compare: “You don’t have to like me. You can hate me all you want. Just respect me” (Extract 4, lines 13–15) to “You don’t have to like me but you know we do have to respect each other” (Extract 5, line 5).

This contrast between liking and respect gets further articulated in each transcript. Each segment begins with a call for respect which then gets elaborated by a contrast sequence between liking and respect, and is resolved by a final demand for respect (compare Extract 4, lines 5–9 to Extract 5, lines 8–11). These liking–respect–contrast sequences from Extract 4 and 5 can be arrayed into their five parts and placed adjacent to each other to exhibit their structural similarities (see Table 1).

As noted, these sequences each begin with a call for ‘respect’ (1), which then gets elaborated or explained by the respect-not-liking sequence (2–5). These sequences work by the parallel structure of like and not-like across race (2–4) which then gets contrasted with the demand for ‘respect’ in the final part (5). The repetition of the various forms of not-liking (2–4) intensifies that defiant positioning. The call for respect placed in the final part of the sequence (5) serves as a resolution to the repeated relational problematic of not-liking.

The contrast sequence of liking and respect appears in three other cases of
reported speech. Each segment is organized by an initial call for respect which then gets elaborated on by negations of ‘liking’ in contrast to ‘respect’. In the following transcripts, we see a four-part, liking–respect–contrast sequence in the reported speech in Extract 6, a three-part sequence in Extract 7, and in Extract 8 we see two, four-part contrast sequences.

**Extract 6** (two African-American females)
1. A: You know what though? I think the guy in the movie that made
2. the comment about ( ) respect <= 1st part
3. now that- may be one solution,
4. you don’t have to like me = <= 2nd part
5. = I don’t have to like you <= 3rd part
6. but please[::] if we could respect each other for what we do = <= 4th part

**Extract 7** (two African-American males and one female)
1. M: And I was sayin it’s all about respect <= 1st part
2. you don’t have to like what I do:: = <= 2nd part
3. F: > exactly <= 3rd part
4. M: = you just have to respect what I do <= 4th part

**Extract 8** (four Latino females)
1. A: I think it goes beyond: (.) the issue of color ( )
2. it’s a matter of respect <= 1st
3. I may not like ( ) the way you wear your hair <= 2nd
4. it’s parted in the middle, you dress like a hippie
5. I don’t like it I don’t have to like it (.) <= 3rd
6. = I should just respect you as another individual, <= 4th
7. and it’s a matter of respect,
8. you may not like what I stand for <= 2nd
9. you may not like Fidel Castro? <= 3rd
10. but you must understand that it’s a matter of respect, <= 4th

What seems to make the original documentary segment memorable, and thereby quotable, is the idea of cross-racial respect elaborated by the parallelism between respect and liking.

The transition into reported speech may be marked by a quotive frame as seen in Extract 6, “the guy in the movie that made the comment about ( ) respect”
(lines 1–2) (also see Extract 5, line 4 and 13). But in Extracts 7–8, the speakers do not attribute the liking–respect–contrast segment as being from the documentary. Nonetheless their articulation of the notion of respect exhibits a structural similarity to the liking–respect–contrast sequence from the documentary segment. Given that all the participants have just watched the documentary, the speaker’s change of footings into a quotive frame can be taken for granted rather than explicitly marked as a quote. Or, as the earlier quote from Bakhtin (1986) points out, we often adopt others’ words as our own without attribution (also see Becker, 1994). In either case, the importance of reported speech as a conversational practice, whether marked or not, is that it allows us to draw on another’s words and use them for our own purposes.

The line between what are purportedly another’s words and what are our words at times can be ambiguous. For instance, in Extract 8 we can see the elements of the like–respect–contrast structure even though the speaker adds to this some particular relational contentions over a person’s dress and hair (lines 3–4) and Fidel Castro (line 9). The reported speech blends into the speaker’s own views.

RECIPIENT DESIGN AND THE ADDRESSEE IN DOING REPORTED SPEECH

As we have seen, in doing this reported speech participants draw on the performative aspects of the repetition of ‘respect’ and use the liking–respect–contrast sequence. A third structural feature of this reported speech is framing the addressee as White people. The demand for respect, and the contrast with liking, is not presented as an abstract idea, but is addressed to Whites – even though Whites are not present. Addressing Whites constitutes part of the performative power of these speech events.

Returning to the documentary segment, Extract 4, consider who is being addressed by the indexical term, ‘you’, in lines 6–8 and 10–14. In this segment, an African-American student is being interviewed; we do not see or hear the interviewer or know his/her racial identity. One possibility is that the interviewer is White and the African-American student is addressing her/him. The other possibility is that the addressee is Whites in general. Strictly speaking we do not know. Given our interest in reported speech, what matters is what the participants do with this discourse, how the participants shape it in reporting it.

Looking again at Extract 5, as A switches footings and moves into reported speech, she uses the address term, “you”, and its variants, “your” and “you’re” (lines 5, 9–11). In addition to the second-person address term, “you”, she also employs the first-person plural, “we” and “us” (lines 5, 8, 11, 15, 17).

**Extract 5** (two African-American females. Note: “you”, “we” and “us” are in bold type)

4 A: like one of the students said
5 You don’t have to like me but you know we do have to respect each other =
6 Yeah
7 A: = especially being in a campus setting of such a close-knit community
you know it’s very important for us to respect each other.

I may not like what you’re saying.

I may not like your views.

you may not like my views, but it’s important that we respect each other.

That’s right.

A: as he said as students you know.

B: That’s right.

A: We don’t necessarily have to be friends but I think to keep the peace and just you know to maintain a stable environment.

it’s important for us to respect each other.

In the situated context of this extract, A and B are participants talking to one another about the documentary, racism, and related matters. As conversationalists, A and B’s utterances are recipient designed for each other’s understanding. Having just watched the documentary together, A can move to quote it by the indicator, “like one of the students said” (line 4), and B’s assessment, “Yeah”, (line 6) displays recognition of the quoted segment. While A’s reported speech is recipient designed for B as a co-present interlocutor, it simultaneously addresses Whites as an absent, generalized other as indicated by the indexical terms “you” and “we”. Clearly the indexical “you” in Extract 5 is not addressing or referring to the interlocutor, B. Analytically the addressee of the utterance needs to be distinguished from its recipient (Levinson, 1988).4

This use of the second-person address term, ‘you’, is evident in all the respect reported speech transcripts (see Extracts 6–8) and the ‘you’ in each can be heard as addressed to Whites. In all but one instance, the addressee is Whites as generalized other. The exception is Extract 8 in which the speaker addresses a specific White individual by “you” as evident by her description of this White person’s hair and clothing style (lines 3–4).

Prima facie it seems odd to address an absent other. But such an assessment takes speech too narrowly (Goffman, 1974). Just as speakers can draw on multiple voices from those not present, so also the addressees of such speech need not be present. While the addressee is absent, the reported speech is nonetheless coherent and appreciated as displayed by the recipients’ responses (more on this later). Indeed, a significant element in the performative power of this respect, reported speech is due to the fact that Whites are the addressee.

RECIPIENT’S UPTAKE AND RESPONSE TO REPORTED SPEECH

As mentioned, reported speech is commonly used within a larger discourse structure, such as narratives or claim–evidence sequences. The reporting speaker, not only reports speech, but also ‘editorializes’ on that speech – assesses it as favorable or unfavorable, frames it as serious or ironic. What, then, does reported speech sequentially implicate or project? What, if anything, does the recipient do in response to reported speech?

In the following two extracts, after the initial utterance of “respect” in the reported speech, the recipient immediately agrees.
Extract 9 (from Extract 5; two African-American females)
4 A: like one of the students said
5 You don’t have to like me but you know we do have to respect each other =
6 B: Yeah <=

Extract 10 (from Extract 7; African-American males and female)
1 M: And I was sayin’ it’s all about respect yo [u don’t have to like what I do:
2 F: Exactly <=

A recipient can respond in other ways such as by attempting to complete the speaker’s reported speech.

Extract 11 (continuation of Extract 6; two African-American females)
13 A: I think because we’re all college students
14 because we all came here for a purpose to get an education
15 and we all know
16 B: Everyone should respect each other on that basis= <=
17 A: =Yeah and just the struggle of being a student and tryin’- you know (.)
18 to get ahead to get resumes to get this and that
19 that’s at least something we all have in common

As discussed earlier for Extract 6, A marks the notion of respect as being from the documentary. As A continues in this Extract 11, B apparently hears her as quoting another segment from the documentary on being college students as a basis for mutual respect (compare Extract 4, lines 10–13). B displays recognition and agreement of this documentary segment by completing the A’s utterance as reported speech and thereby participating in the call for respect. B is able to complete the third part of this reported speech sequence that A began at line 13. A, in turn, responds with an acknowledgment token, “yeah”, and continues with her point about the commonality of being college students (lines 17–19).

Other recipients respond by extending the notion of respect in other directions. In the following, the recipient, B, agrees with A’s account of respect, but adds the explanation or attribution of Whites “that the lack of respect comes from ignorance” (lines 15–16).

Extract 12 (continuation of Extract 8; four Latino females)
10 A: . . . but you must understand that it’s a matter of respect,
11 I respect your views and please respect me mine,
12 I don’t ask anything other- we can sit down and have a whole
13 ( ) political argument and I would respect all your views
14 ‘I just don’t have to (like) them" and ( )
15 B: I-I-I agree with you
16 but you have to agree (.) that the lack of respect comes from ignorance
17 A: Right right

In Extract 13, the recipient extends the notion of respect by claim–evidence sequences which itself draws on various forms of reported speech.

Extract 13 (continuation of Extract 5; two African-American females)
17 it’s important for us to respect each other
18 B: It would be much different if Blacks were the majority
19 because then whites would be (complaining) that
20 we need to unify you know what I’m saying
21 A: Right exactly
22 B: it would be much different because right now they’re at the point like
23 well why do I have to respect you?
24 you know what I’m saying
25 you go your way and I’ll go mine:
26 but if the tables were completely turned the White people would be like
27 well we have to respect each other we gotta do this we gotta do that
28 and that’s the way it would be

B’s response envisions the possibility of African-Americans being the majority and Whites the minority, to contrast what Whites would say as a minority versus what they do say now as the majority. B gives voice to Whites by using a prototypical quote to articulate Whites’ current position, “well why do I have to respect you?” (line 23) and “you go your way and I’ll go mine:” (line 25). If Whites were the minority, though, they would be saying “well we have to respect each other we gotta do this we gotta do that” (line 27) or “we need to unify” (line 20). These voices or quotes attributed to Whites reflect what Whites would say if they were the minority. Here B draws on the conversational resource of hypothetical quotes (Mayes, 1990), what a speaker would, could, should, or may say. Even though such quotes are fictitious, or contrary to fact, they are interesting for understanding interracial meanings in that they are how B gives voice to Whites.

DISCUSSION OF STUDY 1
None of the White participants drew on this discourse of respect in our data. Given that eleven African-Americans and four Latinos discussed the respect segment, we do not attempt to compare these two groups. Their discursive positioning on respect in interracial contact seemed quite similar.

It is not simply the propositional content of these utterances about respect (as important as this may be), but the way the demand for respect is articulated that displays authority. So we need to attend to the performative aspects of reported speech as a conversational practice. Even though the participants’ direct quotes convey little of the exact wording of the original, their reported speech does hearably capture its spirit. This is because the structural features of the original are captured: (a) the repetition of “respect”, (b) the liking–respect–contrast sequence; (c) which is addressed to Whites.

This discursive positioning on interracial contact – of not caring if you are liked, but demanding respect – resonates strongly among these participants as defiance, affect display, or empowering speech. This is evident not only in the performance of the reported speech, but in the interlocutors positive responses to it. Interlocutors respond to the respect–reported-speech by overlapping agreement tokens, utterance completions, or extensions of the notion of respect.

In quoting the respect-liking sequence from Racism 101, the speakers are not only reporting another’s speech, they are also partaking in the power of another’s
words. Power in the sense of being able to formulate in an eloquent and succinct manner a compelling discursive position on interracial contact. As mentioned earlier, another person’s speech can give insight or voice to one’s own feelings.

**Study 2**

**RATIONALE**

From Study 1, the salience of respect for students of color is clearly reflected in the respect–reported-speech sequences. But more understanding of the meanings of respect is needed. For members of the speech community, ‘what respect is’ may be obvious and can be taken for granted. But given that respect is said to be a source of conflict in dealings with Whites and other out-group members, it seems worthwhile to further investigate the notion of respect.

**SUBJECTS AND ANALYTIC METHOD**

Four focus groups were conducted by an African-American interviewer with 20 African-American participants (13 females and 7 males). Participants included university students and adult members of the community. Volunteers were solicited by a snowball sampling procedure. The session began by showing the videotaped segment from *Racism 101* (transcribed as the epigram introducing this article) and asking participants to discuss the significance of respect in a cross-racial context. The focus-group interviews ranged in length from 30 minutes to over an hour.

The focus-group materials are treated as conversations about race matters (Mishler, 1986; Potter and Wetherell, 1995). These conversations were audiotaped. The tapes were listened to repeatedly and the relevant segments on respect were transcribed for analysis.

**NARRATIVES OF DISRESPECT DURING SERVICE ENCOUNTERS**

The focus-group discussions revealed various uses of respect. When participants were asked what they meant by ‘respect’, their characterizations seemed rather straightforward. More interesting were the narratives participants offered about the perceived lack of respect in their contact with Whites in settings such as stores. Narratives offer a valuable form of data for understanding a notion like respect since the particular events of the story present the phenomena in a more concrete manner. So our analytic strategy is to examine those narratives in which respect becomes problematic. Like the research on face (Goffman, 1967), the significance of respect may be most apparent in situations in which it is noticeably absent.

Reported speech is a common device used in narratives to dramatize events and make them more involving for their interlocutors. Reported speech seems to be used for reconstructing the most crucial actions within the story. The audience is shown rather than told what happened. Reported speech is interesting for how it is employed to represent racialized incidents. It is used as a communicative practice to reconstruct what was said and done so as to convey a version of events and the character of the persons involved in doing them. Reporting speech is not a
neutral, disinterested activity. Reported speech allows narrators to draw on the voices of others, or themselves, in recounting what happened in a particular event. Using the words of others can be a valuable resource to understand how out-group members are discursively constructed. Whether the reported speech is accurate or not is irrelevant since we are interested in the participants’ discursive constructions of race and interracial contact.

Twenty-five narratives of African-American experiences of disrespect were observed from the focus-group data. The majority of incidents occurred in public settings, mostly in stores during service encounters. The magnitude of the disrespectful acts ranged from the seemingly minor or subtle, such as the absence of normal courtesies or politeness formulas from White service workers, to more major incidents involving institutional authorities, such as the police. We select instances of disrespect in stores since they are more frequently cited in our narratives (also in Feagin’s, 1991, and Bailey’s, 1997, n.d., data). Such cases of disrespect are less well known, at least to non-African-Americans, than the news-headline incidents of dealings with police. The mundane aspects of disrespect in stores accords well with Essed’s (1991) notion of ‘everyday racism’. These incidents are identified as disrespect by African-American participants due to their recognition of being treated in a way different than Whites or as deviating from general norms.

Many of the stories involved being in stores and receiving problematic treatment from service personnel. A common narrative involved the amount of attention or service which was received in stores. Some narratives told of receiving too much attention or not enough attention – not being served. The latter, not receiving timely service, is evident in the following narrative.

**Extract 14 (4: 10)**

1  F: I was at Home Depo and I waited about forty-minutes for this White lady,
2    she was taking care of this White couple
3    so I asked her a question and
4    after you’re finished with them you know will you please help me out.
5    She messed around she messed around forty-minutes later she walks off
6    but then she comes back and she starts taking care of someone else
7    and I said to her excuse me I said I believe that I’m next
8    oh well you have to wait your turn
9    I said I do believe I waited my turn (and) somebody else
10   but I felt that because they were White and I was Black
11   she was like telling me
12   well you just have to wait till I get finished
13   and when I get finished with them I’ll take care of you
14   and I started to ah started to get very angry (.)
15   started to ah blow my ( )-blow my head
16   (skip two lines)
17   but I felt very bad about it because I mean I was a customer just like they were
18   and after waiting for such a period of time =
19   I: Uhm
20   F: = and she knew that I was waiting for her
The complication in this story arises when F describes having to wait while a White customer is given priority over her. This gives the events a racialized significance, rather than just bad service. Having to wait is reflective of one’s status – the lower one’s status, the more one has to wait (Hall, 1983; Henley, 1977). Waiting also suggests the invisibility thesis of African-Americans in public.

Often the most important events in narratives are portrayed through reported speech, particularly direct quotations. In Extract 14 we see the reported speech as a dialogue of the narrator confronting the service worker for being slighted (lines 7–9). Reported speech can be used for other purposes than ‘reporting’ what was said. In this case we see the narrator moving from the reported dialogue to what the service worker is ‘really saying’. In other words, we have a text (the reported dialogue, lines 7–9) and a subtext (lines 10–13) of what the service worker means.

(excerpt from Extract 14)

10 but I felt that because they were White and I was Black
11 she was like telling me
12 well you just have to wait till I get finished
13 and when I get finished with them I’ll take care of you

Notice how the narrator gives voice to ‘what is being implicated’ by the White service worker (lines 12–13). Reported speech works as a conversational resource to express the disrespectful subtext of this encounter. Indeed, this difference between text and subtext, between what is said and what is implicated, or between appearance and reality is a discursive structure evident throughout these narratives by African-Americans in dealings with Whites.

Narratives and reported speech do not simply report what happened, they also evaluate these events. One way to evaluate events is to tell how they affected you. In this case we see the narrator avow that she became ‘very angry’ (lines 14–15) and ‘felt very bad’ (line 16). These may be seen as the emotional costs of being disrespected due to race during a service encounter. As will be seen, the emotional impact of being disrespected occurs in other narratives.

This narrative is a ‘complaint story’ which focuses on a complication which lacks an adequate resolution (Van Dijk, 1987, 1993b). F tells of confronting the service worker once she starts to give precedence to White customers. F does not get her way but she does stand up for herself. The lack of an adequate resolution to this disrespect, or everyday racism, makes her negative affect understandable.

Some narratives involved the other extreme, receiving too much attention in stores. Receiving ‘too much attention’ indicated to African-American customers that their actions were being overly monitored by the White workers.

Extract 15 (3: 20)

1 M: so we all walk into the store you know basically
2 and I mean everything could be fine in the store
3 the saleslady could be writing something down, White people-
4 but all of a sudden when you come in the store all of a sudden
5 she’s fixing a coat by where you’re looking at the clothes
6 or just questions like oh can I help you with anything?
The narrative portrays the service worker’s actions as deviating from ordinary norms of shopping. The narrator readily sees through the service workers’ strategies for scrutinizing the African-American’s actions in the store. Again we see the narrator drawing on the disjunct between appearances and reality. In telling his narrative, M offers a three-part list of the service worker’s problematic actions (lines 5–8), the last two of which are conveyed through reported speech. The first reported action (“fixing a coat”) is familiar service worker activity, but it is framed as suspicious by “all of a sudden when you come in the store all of a sudden . . .” (line 4). In the second reported action, the narrator mimics the prototypical, White saleslady’s voice, “oh can I help you with anything” (line 6), suggesting a subtext to this offer—surveillance. By quoting such a familiar service routine, the narrator calls attention to it as really being about something else. What appears to be friendly service is marked in this account as a monitoring activity. The third action, the reported speech, “that’s very expensive” (line 6), is heard for its condescending implications. The White service workers’ reacting to the entrance of African-American customers clearly has negative implications, not only as to their being welcome, but more basically to their dignity and status as full-fledged members of society.

The narrator not only recounts what happened, the events and reported speech, but also evaluates the significance of what happened. After listing the actions, M describes the feelings of being treated in such a way as being “hurt . . . with just the use of language” (line 13) and “frustrated” (line 14). Such descriptions of negative feelings, or affect, work as a shorthand means to capture the tellers’ critical evaluation for those events.

The following narrative conveys an instance of disrespect through the absence of normal courtesies during a service encounter.

**Extract 16** (1. 744–754)

1. E: my White friends they used to think I was tripping about people
2. until I started pulling out instances when they happened
3. for example we bought tickets for a concert,
4. one of my White friends goes through
5. and the woman takes it and says thank you enjoy the concert.
6. I come through she’s just going to snatch my ticket and give it back to me
7. and the other White friend comes back and she’s all nice and jolly
8. I said now did you see that
9. I didn’t do anything different than you did to that woman
10. but she treated me differently
This narrative of the absence of a ticket taker’s politeness routine may seem to be a minuscule event, but given that it contrasts to how her White friends were treated immediately beforehand and afterwards, demonstrates that the event has a racialized significance. In brief, race is made relevant when it would not be ordinarily. The noticeable difference between the treatment received by the narrator’s White friends and herself makes her race the only plausible explanation for how she was treated during this encounter.

The narrator uses reported speech to illustrate how she conveyed this incident to her White friends (lines 8–10). E mentions how her White friends did not believe her about being the recipient of disrespect in various situations. This accords with the notion of ‘everyday racism’ (Essed, 1991) which people of color experience regularly but Whites deny seeing or claim is exaggerated. Her narrative is a ‘proof story’ by showing the contrast in service given to her and to her White friends.

These narratives can be seen as portraying various racist incidents which is glossed by the participants as disrespect. The incident in the story makes relevant a response from the victim to resolve the breach and restore moral order. Given the fact that these racist incidents are presented as unsatisfactorily resolved means that these are ‘problem stories’. In the following we see another such incident. In particular, note the different voices D invokes to tell what happened, could have happened or recurrently happens.

Extract 17 (1, 229–249)

1 D: Well I know what’s important to me when I go inside a store I don’t expect a
2 Caucasian person to hold on to their purse (. ) or what have you,
3 I mean I had one particular incident where here I am at CVS
4 I’m stan- I’m at the cash register and I’m standing next to this woman
5 like any other person would (.)
6 but since I happened to be behind her she’s talking to the desk clerk
7 could you please call somebody else to take care of him
8 I don’t want to have him behind me (.)
9 and then when I addressed her point
10 and said to her why can’t you explain this to me =
11 = if you feel uncomfortable how come you can’t talk to me about this
12 why- how come you have to be sneaky and you know () behind my ba:ck?
13 and she- she was so upset about it,
14 and at the same time I surprised her because I didn’t go to her level you know
15 I- I didn’t raise my voice to the point of (.)
16 oh yeah let’s call the police and >get this guy out of here<
17 but yeah she did call me a trouble maker,
18 I’m a trouble maker because I wanted to correct the situation (.)
19 and that’s something I feel all Black people have said
20 well we can’t go into the store we can’t go into the store without being looked at?
21 we all want to be treated- we all want to have equal treatment or equal share
22 we want to be treated as equally as somebody else who’s not Black

In this narrative, it is interesting how D uses different voices or forms of reported speech to tell his story. Reported speech as conversational practice is
drawn on to reconstruct actions of the narrative, especially the most crucial actions. In his story, having set the context of being in line at a store, D switches footings to the overheard voice of “this (White) woman(’s)” addressing the desk clerk (lines 7–8). What is disrespectful about this is not explicitly identified, but is readily apparent to the other African-American participants in the focus group. The disrespect is implicated through the White woman’s expressed desire to keep a physical and social distance from an African-American as well as a display of White fears of a young African-American male, e.g. clutching a purse; requesting to open another line.

The narrator shows how he responded through the direct speech of addressing this White woman (lines 9–12). In challenging this instance of racism, D explains how he purposefully refrained from raising his voice so as not to give anyone grounds for calling the police. Reported speech generally is used to tell of what did happen, what was said, but it also can be employed to tell of what could or would happen, so-called hypothetical speech (Mayes, 1990). As we see in this transcript, D envisions what could have happened if he raised his voice in confronting the racist incident in the store: he draws on the service worker’s voice, “oh yeah let’s call the police and >get this guy out of here<” (line 16). So hypothetical speech provides a resource to give voice to counterfactual conditions – what ‘could’, or ‘might’, or ‘should’ have been said.

Reported speech can be used to give voice to what an individual said or to what an aggregate or group said or says. Reporting the speech of an individual – the service worker or the narrator – is the most common type in these narratives. In assessing what happened D frames the events, not as an incident that happened uniquely to him, but as part of a larger pattern of disrespect which African-Americans have come to expect. As D explains by drawing on the voice of African-Americans as an aggregate, “that’s something I feel all Black people have said well we can’t go into the store without being looked at? we all want to be treated- we all want to have equal treatment or equal share we want to be treated as equally as somebody else who’s not Black” (lines 19–22). This segment fits with the theme of the emotional costs of being disrespected in predominantly White settings such as stores: being ‘looked at’ and not being treated the same as other people.

Discussion and conclusion

During a recent radio interview in the aftermath of the O.J. Simpson trial, the Irish journalist Connor O’Clarey commented on how he was surprised when he first came to the US to see a White man shining the shoes of an African-American at the airport. From this he surmised that relations between the races in this country are primarily governed by economic considerations. While generally this may be the case, business transactions cannot be reduced to simply monetary exchange for goods and services. As our findings from the narratives in Study 2 indicate, the social interaction during service encounters is the primary area of
African-American complaint about disrespect. Service encounters can be seen for both their instrumental and symbolic dimensions.

The troubling findings of these investigations is that ‘the ordinary symbols of respect’ remain problematic for African-Americans during service encounters with Whites. African-Americans report the recurring experiences of racist incidents and disrespect, particularly in predominately White, public settings. This may not be news to African-Americans but, we conjecture, will be news to many Whites.

These narratives of disrespect from Study 2 converge with Feagin’s (1991) data of African-Americans being the recipient of acts of discrimination in public places. Our narratives chronicle instances of disrespect which involves demeaning acts of both omission and commission. From these narratives, we may characterize disrespect as a moral ascription which glosses a derogatory act(s) based on race which reflects on how the recipient is being treated. These incidents may not be prosecutable as illegal acts of discrimination, but these acts are seen as disrespectful, negatively affecting the recipient’s emotions, and can be seen as threats to negative face. The emotional costs of being disrespected was mentioned by participants. Having a mundane event transformed into a racialized incident can be a troublesome burden especially so when it is recurring (Feagin, 1991).

Participants used reported speech in their narratives as evidence to document instances of deviation from norms or to note different service than that given to Whites. This documenting the incidents accords with Essed’s (1991) study of the reasoning in inferring racism: Black women’s accounts focused on how the act(s) in question were a deviation from ordinary norms or contrasted with how Whites were treated. This is similar to our data from Study 2. The reported speech worked to vividly construct instances of disrespect within narratives, and in some instances, what the narrator said in response. Some narrators used reported speech and a text–subtext device, where the subtext revealed what the service worker was ‘really’ saying or doing. Reporting the speech of the service worker aids in objectifying and accounting for these incidents such that they can be more readily criticized by fellow participants.

The aims of these studies have been to examine reported speech as a conversational practice in talking race and to understand discursive positions on respect/disrespect in interracial contact. Reported speech emerged as a phenomenon of interest due to the fact that the respect–liking segment from Racism 101 was the most frequently quoted portion of this documentary by African-American and Latino viewers in Study 1. A way to talk about the highly charged and troubling issues of racism is to draw on the speech of another, particularly speech which is powerful and compelling. Drawing on another’s words, and making them one’s own through giving voice to them, can help articulate the reporting speaker’s own position.

The news from Study 1 is that we need to attend to the performative aspects in reporting speech. While little of the exact wording was reproduced, the structural features of repetition, the contrast of liking to respect, and addressing Whites allowed the reported speech to capture something like the spirit of the original.
The reporting speakers can be heard as strongly agreeing with the respect–liking segment to which they have given voice. This positive evaluation is displayed through paralinguistic or prosodic cues in performing the reported speech as well as by verbal assessments. The performative aspects frame the reported speech as favorable or unfavorable, serious or ironic (Goffman, 1974). Other studies have examined the performative aspects which frame the reported speech through negative evaluation, such as mocking or parodying the original speaker (Macaulay, 1987; Mitchell-Kernan, 1986). In Study 1, the performative aspects of doing the respect reported speech displays a strong affect (Kochman, 1981) or defiance (Orbe, 1994) for the participants. There seems to be a performative power (Álvarez-Cáccamo, 1996) in giving voice to this speaker’s words of strength and resistance.

Drawing on the reported speech of demanding respect and not caring if liked by Whites displays a discursive positioning which reflects a growing confidence and willingness to speak out among today’s African-American college students (Asante and Al-Seen, 1984; Houston, 1994). The notion of ‘a discursive positioning on race’ fits well with racial formation theory (Omi and Winart, 1994; Winart, 1994). Race is not reducible to underlying structures such as genetic differences or social class, but is itself a discursive construction involving multiple discourses in the process of being defined and redefined. For instance, compare this demand-for-respect discourse to the integrationist discourse of the 1960s (Omi and Winart, 1994). It is through people talking race that social realities such as interracial contact become defined and understood. The project here has been to examine one such conversational practice in which people draw on while talking race (e.g. reported speech) and the various discursive positions which people align themselves with (e.g. respect as problematic in dealings with Whites; not caring if you’re liked but demanding respect).

Appendix

This transcription system is a simplified version adopted from the Gail Jefferson system (see Atkinson and Heritage, 1984: ix–xvi).

Colon(s): Extended or stretched sound, syllable, or word
Underlining: Word said with increased emphasis
Micropause: Brief untimed pause
Timed pause: Silences within or between turns
Double parentheses: Scenic details
Single parentheses: Transcriptionist doubt
Period: Falling vocal pitch
Question mark: Rising vocal pitch
Comma: Continuing intonation with slight downward contour
Equal sign: Latching of contiguous utterances
Brackets: Speech overlap
Hyphens: Abrupt cut off
H’s: Audible outbreaths, possibly laughter
(deg. sign) Extract 12 l. 14
NOTES

1. The notion of ‘race’, and the particular racial categories, ‘White’ or ‘African-American’, are taken as socio-historical constructions, rather than fixed, physiological designations (Hacker, 1992, ch. 1; Miles, 1989; Sanjek, 1994). The concept of race reflects socio-historical and political conditions, not a natural category or scientific grouping of peoples.

2. The commonplace distinction between direct and indirect speech has been found to be inadequate (for a critique of this distinction see Sternberg, 1982).

3. This expression was attributed to Frank Dance by Paul Frey (personal communication).

4. This case of a speaker addressing a not-present other does not fit Levinson’s (1988: 173) classification scheme. We need a category of talk designed for a participating recipient which is addressed to an absent aggregate of others.

5. Other kinds of narratives of disrespectful service encounters involve African-Americans receiving condescending treatment. Some participants commented on being shown the least expensive merchandise or what was on sale, rather than top-of-the-line products. Also, narratives related the perceptions that service workers would avoid discussing ‘the technical capabilities of the product, they assume . . . you’re not going to understand it, they just like underestimate your intelligence’ (Extract 3: 21). As these instances suggest, participants are keenly aware of the implicated stereotypes of being poor or lacking intelligence.

6. Other participants also gave accounts of the negative emotions associated with being the recipient of disrespect: feeling “humiliated”, feeling “bad”, “bombarded”, or “crying” after leaving the scene, though more common were feelings of anger. Honneth (1992: 192) claims that experiences of disrespect are described with metaphors about the body in states of decay.

7. Other participants made a similar observation when confronting an incident of disrespect – they strategically avoided getting loud.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Earlier versions of this manuscript were presented at the Conference on Multiculturalism, Cultural Diversity, and Global Communication, Rochester Institute of Technology, Rochester, NY, 1996, and at the National Communication Association Annual Convention, Chicago, 1997. The authors gratefully acknowledge the comments from Dorothy Pennington, Gary Spencer, Diane S. Grimes, and Jodi R. Cohen.

REFERENCES


Lennon, T. (Producer) and Bagwell, O. (Coproducer and Director) (1988) Racism 101 [Film]. (Available from WGBH-Boston, MA)


RICHARD BUTTNY is a professor of speech communication at Syracuse University. Current research interests include racial discourse, reported speech, and accounts. He has recently published articles in Research on Language and Social Interaction and Human Communication Research. ADDRESS: Syracuse University, 100 Sims Hall, Syracuse, NY 13244, USA. [email: rbuttny@syr.edu]

PRINCESS L. WILLIAMS is an assistant professor of humanities at Suffolk County Community College. Current research interests include communication and technology, and public speaking. ADDRESS: Suffolk County Community College, Selden, NY 11784, USA. [email: williap@sunysuffolk.edu]