

# The modern racist ideology and its reproduction in “pseudo-argument”

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**ABSTRACT.** A discourse analysis of conversations between American undergraduate students discussing issues of race on a university campus reveals a well-defined speech activity which shares many features in common with argumentative discourse. However, the data are quite distinct from ordinary argumentative discourse on structural and functional grounds. The kind of discourse involved in the data is called “pseudo-argument” because participants employ features of ordinary argumentation in order to shield themselves against potential negative attributions, and thus, by making their talk appear argumentative, participants are able to appear rational, unbiased, and nonracist in what is essentially a one-sided discussion in which controversial beliefs and attitudes are continuously put forward and go unchallenged. Pseudo-argument is a collaborative activity in which participants jointly construct arguments (in the sense of to “make” an argument), and also simulate arguments (in the sense of to “have” an argument) in which the views of an absent antagonist are imported into the conversation and jointly disputed. It is this collaboration within the organizational framework of pseudo-argument which allows participants to diffuse, reinforce, practice and validate their beliefs and values. It is argued that the study of pseudo-argument may contribute to our understanding of discursal processes of reproduction of the “modern racist” ideology in everyday talk.

**KEY WORDS:** argumentation, collaborative discourse, discourse analysis, ideology, modern racism

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This work attempts to carry out a discourse analysis of natural language data which involve conversations between American undergraduate students about issues of race. Many of these conversations about race reveal recurrent identifiable underlying structures and functions which lead to the conclusion that what is involved is a fairly well-defined speech activity. This speech activity shares many features in common with argumentative discourse. In particular, both types of discourse involve sequences of the same underlying ideational units (positions, supports and disputes) which are configured within larger units (arguments). On the other hand, despite this superficial resemblance, the data to be analyzed in this work are quite distinct from ordinary argumentative discourse on structural and functional grounds. The kind of discourse involved in the

data is called “pseudo-argument” (PA). This is because the resemblance between the two discourse types is more than coincidence—it is argued that participants in PA borrow elements of ordinary argument in order to shield themselves against negative inferences which might arise among the participants. To put it another way, by making their talk appear argumentative, participants are able to appear rational, unbiased, and nonracist in what is an essentially one-sided discussion in which nonnormative beliefs and attitudes are continuously put forward and go unchallenged.

Pseudo-argument arises in talk about delicate issues (such as race) in which all participants are allied in their nonnormative beliefs and at the same time are mindful of countervailing social norms and therefore work to forestall the negative impressions which can result from holding views that may not be entirely acceptable to the larger society. Pseudo-argument is a collaborative activity in which participants jointly construct arguments (in the sense of to “make” an argument), and also simulate arguments (in the sense of to “have” an argument) in which an absent antagonist is imported into the conversation and subsequently disputed. It is this collaboration within the organizational framework of PA which allows participants to diffuse, reinforce, practice and validate their beliefs and values, and for this reason it is claimed that the study of PA may contribute to our understanding of discursal processes having to do with the reproduction of the “modern racist” ideology in everyday face-to-face discourse.

#### MODERN RACISM

The conversations analyzed in this work show characteristics of what has variously been called “modern racism” (McConahay, 1986), “aversive racism” (Gaertner and Dovidio, 1986) and “symbolic racism” (Kinder and Sears, 1981) by social psychologists. Unlike “old-fashioned racism”, which may be characterized as the straightforward, open expression of hostility in both word and deed, “modern racism” involves a mix of conflicting values, beliefs and feelings:<sup>1</sup>

In our view, aversive racism represents a particular type of ambivalence in which the conflict is between feelings and beliefs associated with a sincerely egalitarian value system and unacknowledged negative feelings and beliefs about blacks. (Gaertner and Dovidio, 1986: 62)

According to Gaertner and Dovidio, because of their strong egalitarian values, modern racists in the United States support public policies which in principle promote racial equality. They may identify with a liberal political agenda and think of themselves as nonprejudiced. On the other hand, modern racists possess unacknowledged negative feelings and beliefs about Black people. In addition, modern racists are said to avoid expressing overtly anti-Black opinions, instead preferring to express their views in more subtle, sophisticated ways which may be defended by appeal to seemingly universally accepted egalitarian values and principles.

According to McConahay (1986), the ideology of modern racism in the United States includes the following tenets:

1. Discrimination is a thing of the past because Blacks now have the freedom to compete in the marketplace and to enjoy those things they can afford.
2. Blacks are pushing too hard, too fast and into places where they are not wanted.
3. These tactics and demands are unfair.
4. Therefore, recent gains are undeserved and the prestige-granting institutions of society are giving Blacks more attention and concomitant status than they deserve.

McConahay adds two more tenets adhered to by modern racists:

5. Racism is bad and the other beliefs do not constitute racism because these beliefs are empirical facts.
6. Racism, as defined by modern racists, is consistent only with the tenets and practices of old-fashioned racism: beliefs about Black intelligence, ambition, honesty, and other stereotyped characteristics, as well as support for segregation and support for acts of open discrimination. (pp. 92-3)

Thus, aversive or modern racists in the United States are ambivalent or conflicted between strong egalitarian values and negative feelings and attitudes towards African-Americans and other minorities. This ambivalence helps determine a set of beliefs which compose what may be called a modern racist ideology, which is characterized mainly by the conviction that discrimination and racism no longer exist, and therefore that any "advantages" given to African-Americans are unfair and undeserved.

American culture has historically been a racist one, and the continued presence of anti-Black sentiment in the United States is well documented (see reviews of Crosby et al., 1980; Dovidio and Gaertner, 1986; Katz et al., 1986). Although racial attitudes and beliefs in this country have progressed beyond the "old-fashioned" kind (Schuman et al., 1985), issues of race and discrimination are highly salient ones in contemporary American culture. The institutional and interactional mechanisms underlying the current forms of racism in the United States are less obvious and more subtle, often masked by appeal to values defensible on nonracial grounds. Therefore, the question of how modern racism is reproduced at different levels is one which is worthy of consideration. One facet of this question is how modern racism is reproduced at the level of face-to-face verbal interaction, since this activity seems to be a prominent venue for the diffusion and reinforcement of beliefs and attitudes associated with the modern racist ideology.

Little attention has been given so far by scholars to how modern racist beliefs are diffused and reinforced in day-to-day face-to-face verbal interaction by members of the dominant White majority. With the exception of a few studies (e.g. Van Dijk, 1987; Essed, 1991; Wetherell and Potter, 1992; Verkuyten et al., 1994), there appears to be little known about how the ambivalence involved in modern racism becomes manifest in everyday discourse. That is, few scholars have addressed the questions of

how the conflict of egalitarian values and anti-Black feeling shapes discourse in talk about race, and conversely how that particular discourse may serve as a vehicle for the reproduction of modern racist beliefs and attitudes in face-to-face interaction.

It becomes apparent in the investigation to follow that the data of this study give strong evidence for the modern racist orientation described by social psychologists. In particular, the content of many of the conversations repeatedly involves appeals to egalitarian values in the face of “unfair advantages” given to African-Americans. In addition, the conversations show subtle evidence of the negative feelings attributed to modern racists by the social psychologists mentioned earlier. Further, participants in the conversations often explicitly make statements such as “Racism is in the past”, “They get all the advantages”, “It’s so unfair”, “They’re always whining and complaining . . .”, etc.—all of which serve to confirm McConahay’s summary of the tenets of modern racism. Finally, the data provide evidence that participants are extremely concerned about avoiding the appearance of being “racist”, and that much of the organization and content of their talk is geared towards forestalling this impression.

#### DATA COLLECTION

The data were collected in the fall of 1994 as part of a project designed by Professor Dennis Preston at Michigan State University, which aimed to examine the interrelations between the structure of a discourse and its content. More specifically, it was presumed that modes of argumentation employed by students in discussions about issues of race on the university campus could shed light on the nature of their beliefs and attitudes towards other groups. Furthermore, it was hoped that such an investigation would ultimately deepen our understanding of the discursal mechanisms through which such beliefs and attitudes are diffused in everyday talk.<sup>2</sup>

The initial pool of respondents was drawn from a humanities course taught by Professor Preston, entitled “The roles of language in society”. Of the 300 students attending the course, 76 volunteered to participate. The students (data gatherers) were instructed to get together with two or three friends in a relaxed setting (e.g. a dorm room) and to tape-record at least 15 minutes of conversation. The topics of the conversation were to be proposed at the discretion of the data gatherers following a prepared script which included questions having to do with issues of race on the Michigan State University campus (such as “Do you think that there is racism on this campus?”, “Do you support ‘minority only’ scholarships?”, and “Is there too *little* or too *much* interaction between Black and White students?”). Data gatherers were instructed to initiate topics and then to allow the discussion of each issue to take its course. In addition, the data gatherers were encouraged to participate actively in the discussions.

The students and their respective friends who participated were undergraduates, most of whom were White, presumably middle class and young.

All of the conversations recorded were between ethnic sames. That is, all conversations were either all-White or all-Black (and in a few cases all-Asian). We requested this because we wanted to record the most uninhibited, spontaneous speech possible, and mixing races (ethnic groups) would probably result in a (no less interesting but) less honest, less forthright discussion of the issues. Our method of having students interview their friends was deliberately chosen for the same reason. That is, this method allows for a minimizing of observer’s influence on the speech behavior of participants. Without the presence of an authoritative outsider as interviewer, we hoped that the conversations would approach more closely the natural, less self-conscious level of ordinary talk among friends. We hoped to capture spontaneous behavior, natural discourse and honest beliefs.

These hopes were not disappointed—the conversations were surprisingly open and spontaneous. It seems that despite the presence of a tape-recorder, the groups of friends engaged in the kind of sincere, animated, heartfelt discussions which only take place behind closed doors. There are very few references in the transcriptions to the tape-recorder, and while the influence of recording cannot be ignored, it seems safe to say that the speech of the participants reflects their ordinary way of carrying on in similar situations.

Each of the 76 recorded conversations was summarized for topical content. As a result, we have a comprehensive description and categorization of the most commonly discussed topics and participants’ positions regarding those topics. After the topical analysis was completed, the tapes with the best quality recording as well as the richest content were transcribed. Tapes were chosen with the hope of being representative of a wide range of views, from the most ardently anti-racist to the most (modern) racist conversations. Six of the tapes were fully transcribed, resulting in about 150 pages of transcription (see Appendix for transcription conventions). Although the corpus overall reflects a broad spectrum of beliefs and attitudes by White college students about issues of race on the University campus and beyond, it should be noted that the excerpts presented and analyzed here are representative of many, if not most, of the conversations in the larger corpus both in terms of their content and form.

#### THE STRUCTURE OF PSEUDO-ARGUMENT

Schiffrin (1985: 45) defines argument as “... a discourse genre through which individuals support disputable and disputed positions”. She distinguishes between ‘rhetorical’ argument and ‘oppositional’ argument (which parallels O’Keefe’s (1977) distinction between ‘argument<sub>1</sub>’ and ‘argument<sub>2</sub>’). She defines ‘rhetorical’ argument (O’Keefe’s argument<sub>1</sub>) as “discourse through which a speaker presents an intact monologue supporting a disputable position”, and defines ‘oppositional’ argument (O’Keefe’s argument<sub>2</sub>) as “an interaction in which an opposition between speakers creates an extended polarization that is negotiated through a conversation”.

Most contemporary definitions by argument theorists make reference to two or more participants who must be present for an argument to occur. For those definitions which explicitly distinguish the two senses of argument (for example, Schiffrin's), this condition applies to arguments<sub>1</sub> as well as to arguments<sub>2</sub>. Second, all of the definitions refer in one way or another to the condition that there be some opposition or disagreement between the participants: "It may seem trivial to say that arguments require dissensus, but this claim is one of the few points of agreement among Argumentation theorists" (Willard, 1989: 53).

It is shown here that although the conversations which comprise the data resemble argumentation, they clearly deviate from ordinary argumentation in many respects. While the conversations give evidence for the continuous presence of positions, supports and disputes, there is no opposition or disagreement between participants—the disputes which occur are aimed not at other (allied) participants, but rather at an imagined nonpresent antagonist whose positions and supports are imported into the conversation. In addition, unlike ordinary arguments<sub>1</sub> where positions and their respective supports must be provided by the same speaker, in the data of this study, a single position may be collaboratively supported by two or more participants. It is argued in this section that PA deserves to be treated separately from ordinary argument (OA) in part at least because it has different structural properties. With the aim of distinguishing PA from OA, it is shown that although these types of discourse share the same underlying units (positions, supports and disputes), they differ in how these units are configured and distributed among participants.

Following Schiffrin (1987) and Preston (1993), it is assumed here that positions, supports and disputes are the underlying (ideational) units which serve as the building blocks of argumentation in discourse. Moreover, treating positions, supports and disputes as the minimally necessary underlying units of argument structure does not help to distinguish OA from PA since both contain these units (it is on this point that they overlap). It is shown that distinguishing these types of discourse on structural grounds requires reference not only to the ideational units, but also to how these units are configured in the sequential organization of the discourse and how they are distributed among the participants. In what follows, it is argued that the data give evidence for two distinct configurations or patterns of ideational units in PA, neither of which is found in OA. The first configuration, called collaborative argument<sub>1</sub> (CA1), shows features of argument<sub>1</sub>, whereas the second, called collaborative argument<sub>2</sub> (CA2), resembles but is clearly different from argument<sub>2</sub>. More specifically, the first pattern of ideational units involves the collaborative support of a single position, whereas the second involves the collaborative dispute of an absent antagonist's imported position and support. It is shown that these two configurations are recurrent in and indicative of PA, and allow the analyst as well as participants to identify the talk as such.

*Collaborative arguments<sub>j</sub>: making a case together*

I call the first configuration CA1 since participants ally themselves in making an argument by collaboratively supporting some mutually accepted position. Consider the following simple sample in which the participants discuss minority-only scholarships:<sup>3</sup>

**Sample 1**

- 1 A: OK. How bout,—how bout the uh—how bout  
 2 minority only scholarships. What do you—what do  
 3 you think about that.  
 4 C: Uh I think they’re a great idea, in that- that  
 5 all of like—you know, if they get like a two-  
 6 suppose like—a Black individual,—uhm, suppose  
 7 they get like a—two point two or two point five,  
 8 they get a full scholarship, whereas, you need like  
 9 a—four point zero, if you’re like a White dude to  
 10 get a scholarship.  
 11 B: Ummmm:  
 12 C: [ I think it’s ridiculous.  
 13 B: Yes I think it’s ridiculous too. When I,—was a  
 14 freshman, I lived in McCollum ( ) McCollum. ALL the  
 15 scholarships were for—African-American:s,  
 16 minoritie:s, whatever:—(Now), Asian-Pacific,— =  
 17 A: [ Asian-Pacific islanders.

In this excerpt, the position taken by both B and C is that there should not be minority scholarships. C’s answer (in line 4) to A’s question is clearly sarcastic, and this interpretation is supported by C’s negative evaluation in line 12. What follows in his response (lines 4–10) is a support for the position which implicitly appeals to the unfairness involved in the supposed procedure involved in determining who receives scholarships—C claims that Black students need a far lower grade point average than White students do in order to qualify for a scholarship. In line 13, B shows agreement by seconding word for word C’s evaluation (“Yes I think it’s ridiculous too”), and then provides another support (in lines 13–16) for the main position by arguing that “ALL” of the scholarships were awarded to minority students in her dormitory, invoking the presumed unfairness involved in granting all of the scholarships to certain individuals based solely on their minority status.

There are several features of this example worth noting. First, participants are in agreement and appear to collaborate in supporting a single position. Second, the example gives evidence of the modern racist ideology, since participants decry the granting of privileges to Black students and other minorities by appealing to the unfairness of this practice. Further, implicit in their argumentation is the assumption that the granting of such privileges to minorities is no longer justified, presumably because minority groups now stand on equal footing alongside Whites.

Now consider a more complex example of a CA1:

**Sample 2**

- 1 K: Why should they be coming to—a top ten uni—  
 2 a big ten university, getting like ALL the money,  
 3 you know and I know people that get these checks, =  
 4 ?:  
 5 K: = and don't even need everything they need. And  
 6 the thing that I really don't like is how—I mean  
 7 this is something minor, but like—they get this  
 8 government money it's like to pay for books, but  
 9 they return the books at the end of the year and  
 10 they keep that money. They don't have to return  
 11 it. You know what I mean? They're getting like =  
 12 ?:  
 13 K: = all this free money and all this stuff when  
 14 like—here I am taking out loans that—the  
 15 interest is just adding up, and I'm going to  
 16 eventually have to pay it all BACK. You know, not  
 17 saying that I'm WORried about it, cause I know—  
 18 that I'll be successful with MY job, but it's just  
 19 not fair that  
 20 B: But they're getting a free ride AND =  
 21 K:  
 22 B: = they could be successful in THEIR job TOO. AND  
 23 plus they get this stupid point five increase in  
 24 their GRADES, so now they're going to be graduating  
 25 with-  
 26 C: PLUS they have a better chance  
 27 of getting a job, so they're—going to be—more  
 28 successful (  
 29 B: So it's just- i- their advantages just keep  
 30 adding UP! Their—their advantages totally keep  
 31 adding UP. Their grade advantages,  
 32 C: Yeah that's true. They do have—more  
 33 time to relax because—they don't have to WORK.  
 34 You know, like everybody else does to  
 35 pay off their loans.  
 36 B: They'll be under less STRESS,  
 37 C: They- cause they're just getting money.

This excerpt involved three White female participants. One first obvious observation regarding this excerpt is that it is replete with positions and corresponding supports. Since there appear to be no disputes present in this stretch of talk, it would be incorrect to claim that an argument<sub>2</sub> (in the sense of “having an argument”) was occurring. Clearly participants are actively



involved in taking positions and justifying them with supports, and in this respect it would be fair to say that arguments were being made (arguments<sub>1</sub>). However, closer inspection reveals that unlike ordinary arguments<sub>1</sub>, which are accomplished by only one speaker who provides both the position and its support(s), the argument<sub>1</sub> put forward in this sample, as in Sample 1, is the product of a collaborative effort on the part of two or more participants who jointly provide supports for some position.

For example, although it is not explicitly stated, the larger position (POS) which seems to run through Sample 2 is that Black students receive unfair advantages. There are a variety of supports (SUP) which are provided throughout by participants K, B and C, some of which are repeated or simply endorsed by others. In addition, the main position is returned to several times. A reconstruction of the CA1 of Sample 2 is as follows (where ‘r’ indicates repetition):

- (K) POS: Black students receive unfair advantages (“all the money” and stuff)
- (K) SUP 1: They get checks that they don’t need (3, 5)
- (K) SUP 2: Keep the money from the books bought by the government (6–11)
- (K) SUP 3: I have to take loans with interest, and pay it all back (13–17)
- (B) POS r: They’re getting a free ride (not fair) (20)
- (B) SUP 4: they could be successful too (22)
- (B) SUP 5: they get 0.5 increase in their grades (23–4)
- (C) SUP 6: better chance of getting a job (26–8)
- (B) POS r: advantages keep adding up! (29–31)
- (B) SUP 5 r: grade advantages (31)
- (C) SUP 7: more time to relax (32–5)
- (B) SUP 7 r: under less stress (36)

The reconstruction of positions and supports illustrates that this excerpt contains seven distinct supports for the one position that African-American students receive “unfair advantages”. All three participants provide at least one support. In lines 1–2, K uses a rhetorical question indirectly to take the position that Black students receive unfair advantages in the form of “ALL the money”. She supports this position in lines 3 and 5 by claiming that people (presumably Black students) receive checks that they do not need. This is followed by another support in lines 6–11 which claims that Black students receive money from the government for books but then exchange the books for cash when they are done with them. In lines 13–17, K provides a third support for her position by stating that unlike Black students, she has to take out loans which she has eventually to pay back.

In line 22, B joins in by providing another support for the position that Black students receive unfair advantages by stating that Black students could also be successful in their jobs, implying that they could afford to pay back loans as easily as anyone else. B then adds another support (in lines 23–4) for the main position by claiming that Black students automatically receive a small increase in their grades. In lines 26–8, C joins the argument with her own support—she claims that Black students have a better chance of getting employment, presumably because of affirmative action, a topic discussed earlier in the conversation. Finally, C provides another support

(in lines 32–5) for the main position that Black students receive unfair advantages by asserting that they have more time to relax since they do not have to work to repay loans.

Although the reconstruction of positions and supports is subject to the interpretation of the analyst (given the available linguistic evidence), it is argued here that even a very rough reconstruction of the excerpt is sufficient to clarify certain points. First, participants collaborate in supplying supports for the same position, and therefore they are jointly building an argument. Second, there seem to be no constraints on which participants may contribute supports for a position at any particular moment (other than perhaps ordinary turn-taking rules). We may incorporate these points into a structural schema for CA1 as follows:

A: Position  
X: Support 1, 2, 3 . . . ,  $n$

This schematization attempts to represent the configuration of ideational units in CA1 in relation to the various interactional possibilities (who may contribute what and when). A position in a CA1 is provided by a specific speaker (represented by A), and must be followed by one or more supports, any of which may be provided by any participant (represented by X), including the original speaker. In the data this pattern is found again and again, and on this basis it seems justified to claim that CA1s play an important role in PA.

It should be apparent that CA1s are not found in ordinary argumentation, and are distinct from ordinary arguments<sub>1</sub> not in terms of the configuration of ideational units, but rather in terms of the interactional possibilities. Ordinary argument<sub>1</sub> may be schematized as follows:

A: Position  
A: Support 1, 2, 3 . . . ,  $n$

Note that the only difference between this schema and the one for CA1 is the constraint in ordinary argument<sub>1</sub> that the position and the supports be provided by the same speaker (A).

Finally, note that the content of Sample 2 reveals several characteristics of the modern racist ideology. In particular, participants disclaim the “advantages” granted to African-American students by prestige-granting institutions (in this case, both the government and the university). Implicit in the discussion is the premise that such advantages are unfair and undeserved. Participants portray themselves as victims of a system which favors African-Americans and other ethnic minorities who in their view receive a “free ride” to success.

*Collaborative arguments<sub>2</sub>: importing and disputing the antagonists*

The second configuration of ideational moves which recurs in the data is called CA2 because it resembles ordinary argument<sub>2</sub> in several respects. In both types of argument, there is open opposition in that there are disputes of opposing positions and opposing supports, and these disputes are

themselves supported. The main difference is that in ordinary arguments,<sup>2</sup> arguments are held between present participants who assume the roles of protagonist and antagonist with regard to some position, whereas CA2s are held not between present participants but rather between the present participants (protagonists) on the one hand, and some absent antagonist(s) on the other hand, whose positions and supports are imported into the talk and then disputed. Consider the following example from the data:

**Sample 3**

- 1 B: They totally have this- y- Exactly. And- You  
 2 know with Asians, you don't see Asians like =  
 |  
 3 K: ( )  
 4 B: = pulling an attitude, and I don't think I- I  
 5 have like Asian friends and—I- I don't think I've  
 6 Ever seen an Asian—pull- you know and like- Black  
 7 people bring up like “Well—you owe it to us  
 8 because—you know—you had us as slaves—=  
 |  
 9 K: Yeah but  
 10 how long:  
 11 B: = thousands of years ago, and blah blah blah,  
 12 and you OWE it to us. Blah Blah” Well what about—  
 13 what about when we took like during what was it  
 14 World War Two, when we took all the Japanese, and  
 15 stuck them in prison camps in California. I mean  
 16 what about THAT? You don't see Asian people still  
 17 all fired up about THAT,—I mean it is totally =  
 |  
 18 K: Yeah and if that IS the  
 19 case,  
 20 B: = WRONG but- Just- I mean it was a mistake in  
 21 the PAST, and it shouldn't—like—I don't know,  
 22 it- it- YEAH it does affect us, and YEAH it was  
 23 WRONG, but—it wasn't ME, it wasn't even my DAD.  
 24 It wasn't even my GRANDpa. It was like-  
 |  
 25 C: And they're-  
 26 now they're STILL—you know basically treated =  
 |  
 27 B: ( ) ago.  
 28 C: = not just equal, but they get a- the advantage  
 29 of—you know in a lot of situations so they can't  
 30 complain that they're not treated equal now.

This stretch of talk occurs prior to the talk of the previous excerpt and involves the same participants K, B, and C. A few significant points emerge from an examination of this excerpt. First, participants do not just present their own positions and supports, but they also import the presumed arguments<sub>1</sub> (positions and supports) of an absent antagonist (in this case, “Black people”). For example, using direct quotation (in lines 7–8, 11–12), B imports the presumed position of Black people that White people owe them

some compensation, accompanied by the presumed support that this compensation is due because of the injustice of slavery. Second, participants do not dispute each other, but rather they collaboratively dispute the imported position and supports of the absent antagonist. For example, the participants in this conversation collaboratively dispute the imported position and support of the absent antagonist by arguing that although slavery was wrong, it occurred long ago, and therefore White people now are not responsible.

Consideration of the configuration of ideational units in relation to the interactional possibilities suggests a schematization as follows:

A: POSo/(SUPo 1, 2, 3... , *n*)  
 X: DIS of POSo/(SUPo)  
 X: SUP 1, 2, 3... , *n* of DIS

This schematization illustrates that an “other-authored” position (POSo) and any number of optional corresponding supports (SUPo 1, 2, 3... , *n*) may be presented by one participant (A), and that subsequently any participant (X) may issue a dispute (DIS) of the “other-authored” argument, followed by any number of supports (SUP 1, 2, 3... , *n*).

To illustrate this schematization of CA2, Sample 3 may be reconstructed as follows (where ‘r’ indicates repetition, and other-authored positions and supports are underlined):

- (B) POSo: “you owe it to us” (7)
- (B) SUPo 1: “because you had us as slaves ...” (8)
- (K) DIS/SUP 1: It occurred long ago (9–10)
- (B) SUP 2: Japanese-Americans don’t ask for compensation (12–17)
- (B) SUPo 1 r: Slavery is wrong (17, 20)
- (B) SUP 1 r: Slavery was a mistake in the past (20–1)
- (B) SUPo2: It does affect us (22)
- (B) SUPo 1 r: Slavery was wrong (22–3)
- (B) SUP 3: White people living now are not responsible (23–4)
- (C) SUP 4: Black people have been compensated already (25–6, 28–30)

In this example of CA2, the antagonist’s argument (position and support) is imported, and then collaboratively disputed by the three participants. While the presumed antagonist’s support is repeated twice by B (this time in the form of “Slavery is wrong”), and an additional support is invoked (“It does affect us”) and agreed to, the relevance of these supports to the position of the antagonist is disputed. Here, although the content of the supports might in themselves be acceptable, they are not deemed acceptable or relevant within the argument. Indeed, Preston (1993) notes that it is the case that “... disputes of supports often deny their relevance rather than their contents” (p. 205).

Here again, in Sample 3, there is ample evidence of the (American) modern racist ideology. In particular, there is the belief among participants that racism and discrimination are “in the past”, and thus it is claimed that African-Americans are unjustified in their demands for compensation for past injustices. Furthermore, implicit in their discussion are the beliefs that racism is consistent only with the tenets and practices of old-fashioned racism (i.e. various stereotyped characteristics, support for segregation,

support for acts of open discrimination, etc.), and that racism so defined is “wrong”. Finally, there is the belief that “advantages” granted to African-Americans are unfair and undeserved.

Now consider a more complex example of CA2:

**Sample 4**

- 1 C: Do you remember—like  
 2 a few years back, there was like this big thing  
 3 where the Blacks were getting upset at- at Nike  
 4 corporation? because they didn't have enough =  
 [
- 5 B: No.  
 6 C: = vice-presidents that were Black? whereas the  
 7 three highest paid um people in the company, were  
 8 like Michael Jordan, Charles Barkley and some =  
 [
- 9 A: Michael Jordan  
 10 C: = other—some other basketball player dude. -  
 11 And Michael Jordan was making over ten million  
 12 dollars a year, for Nike?  
 [
- 13 B: And the vice-presidents are  
 14 probably making like a hundred thousand a year.  
 [
- 15 A: Well what =  
 [ ( ) =
- 16 C:  
 17 A: = about-  
 18 C: = and the Black community was complaining and  
 19 whining- whining—oh “We d- we don't have enough  
 20 ah Black vice-presidents”—whereas the three- the  
 21 three- the three guys probably made- made more =  
 [
- 22 A: guys  
 [
- 23 B: guys made the biggest-  
 24 C: = than anybody in the whole corporation  
 25 B: Right  
 26 C: It's got to  
 27 B: Right  
 28 C: You know what I mean? It's riDICulous.  
 29 A: How bout the AT&T thing last year.  
 30 B: OKAY ( )  
 [
- 31 C: How bout the O.J. SIMPson thing. I mean—  
 32 he's—he's Black yet he made ALL this money off  
 33 the press. You know what I mean? He was like—you  
 34 know famous reporter now: da da da—and now the  
 35 NAACP is getting upset that he's getting too much—  
 36 press, now that he murdered somebody?  
 37 B: It IS interesting, I mean—say who's another- =  
 [
- 38 A: Especially s-

- 39 B: = like Joe Montana. If Joe Montana w- supposedly  
 40 killed his wife, or ex-wife—it would be the same  
 41 big story—but aren't we supposed to be talking =  
 42 C: [ ( ) ]  
 43 B: = about education,  
 44 C: [ Okay I'm sorry. ( ) ]  
 45 A: Yes,  
 46 B: [ You probably need the conversation =  
 47 A: [ Well that's- =  
 48 B: = in that way.  
 49 A: = that's why I brought up the: thing about—  
 50 AT&T last year is- i- all th- the Black students =  
 51 B: [ Oh the monkey thing?  
 52 A: = wanted—wanted to drop AT&T because of the—  
 53 because they had a monkey on th- on their  
 54 advertisement? You didn't know about that?—It's  
 55 ridiculous. It's so stupid.  
 56 B: But you know if- if they had a kangaroo for  
 57 Australia, nobody w-  
 58 A: [ Nobody would ( ) anything  
 59 C: [ See th- tha- tha- that's the  
 60 funny thing though. I mean—it's as if the Blacks  
 61 think that everything about- everything is against  
 62 them. It's like- you know what I mean?  
 63 A: [ y- Well they're- it's like  
 64 they're constantly battling. If they wouldn't =  
 65 C: [ exACTly  
 66 A: = bring issues up—then—nobody would think =  
 67 C: [ It's like they WANT =  
 68 A: = about it.  
 69 C: = racism to exist. You know what I mean?  
 70 A: So that they can get ahead.  
 71 C: ExACTly.  
 72 A: ((snicker))  
 73 B: [[I don't know.  
 74 A: [[ It's so stu:pid.  
 75 C: [[ It's such a joke. I don't—I think it's a  
 76 joke, I think th- it's a big joke.

((pause))

This excerpt, which involves another set of participants (A, B, and C), is similar to the previous one in that participants are actively and enthusiastically involved, and they appear to be allied with respect to the positions put

forward. In addition, the participants present positions and supports which they attribute to some absent party and then dispute. This episode involves the presentation of three distinct instances in which African-Americans are said to have complained about some apparent injustice. In each instance, the imported complaint (in the form of an argument that some injustice occurs) is collaboratively attacked by the participants. In the final part of this episode, conclusions are drawn by the participants to the effect that African-Americans have no cause for complaint, and further, these complaints are attributed to a larger strategy (“to get ahead”).

In the following reconstruction of Sample 4, there are four distinct parts, the first three of which are distinct CA2s. The final part seems to serve as a kind of resolution in that it summarizes the points which fall out of the first three parts (repetition has been omitted, and other-authored positions and supports are underlined):

**(1) CA2 (“Nike”):**

- (C) POSo1: The Blacks were getting upset at Nike corporation. (3-4)  
 (C) SUPo1: Because they didn’t have enough vice-presidents that were Black. (4-6)  
 (C) DIS/SUPa: The three highest paid people in the company were Michael Jordan, Charles Barkley and some other basketball player dude. And Michael Jordan was making over ten million dollars a year. (7-8, 10-12)  
 (B) SUPb: And the vice-presidents are probably making like a hundred thousand a year. (13-14)

**(2) CA2 (“NAACP”):**

- (C) POSo2: Now the NAACP is getting upset (35)  
 (C) SUPo2: because he’s (O.J. is) getting too much press now that he murdered somebody (he’s getting singled out because he’s Black). (36)  
 (B) DIS/SUP: If Joe Montana supposedly killed his ex-wife, it would be the same big story (he would be singled out too, so it’s not because O.J. is Black, but it’s because he is a famous football player). (39-41)

**(3) CA2 (“AT&T”):**

- (A) POSo3: All the Black students wanted to drop AT&T (50, 52)  
 (A) SUPo3: because they had a monkey on their advertisement? (53-4)  
 (B & A) DIS/SUP: But if they had a kangaroo for Australia, nobody would say anything. (56-8)

**(4) Conclusion/Resolution:**

- (C) POS4: The Blacks think that everything is against them. (60-2)  
 (A) POS5: They’re constantly battling. (63-4)  
 (A) POS6: If they wouldn’t bring issues up then nobody would think about it. (There wouldn’t be a problem then.) (64, 66, 68)

(C) POS7: They WANT racism to exist. (67, 69)

(A) SUP of POS7: So that they can get ahead. (70)

First, let's consider the three CA2s found in Sample 4. It is apparent from the reconstruction that three cases are presented in which African-Americans have supposedly complained about something. We might gloss the three parts as "Nike", "NAACP", and "AT&T". In each case, the supposed position and support (argument<sub>1</sub>) of the absent antagonist is imported, and then disputed. In the first case, C imports the antagonist's position that "the Blacks were getting upset at Nike corporation", which is followed by the antagonist's purported support: "Because they didn't have enough vice-presidents that were Black". After presenting the absent antagonist's argument, C attempts to dispute it by pointing out that there are very highly paid employees (professional basketball players) working for Nike (the obvious weakness of C's support for his dispute is not at issue here). After this, B contributes a second support for the dispute by saying that the vice-presidents at Nike do not make nearly as much as the professional basketball players.

In the second CA2, C imports the antagonist's position that "the NAACP is getting upset", followed by a support; "that he's (O.J. Simpson) getting too much—press, now that he murdered somebody?" In other words, C presumes that the NAACP (National Association for the Advancement of Colored People) became upset because O.J. Simpson was being singled out mainly because he is Black. This interpretation is strengthened by B's support of the dispute of the imported argument: "If Joe Montana supposedly killed his ex-wife, it would be the same big story". In other words, Joe Montana (a White professional football player) would be singled out too, and so it's not because O.J. Simpson is Black, but rather it is because he is a famous football player.

In the third case, it is A who initiates the CA2 by presenting the position of the antagonist that: "All the Black students wanted to drop AT&T", which is followed by the presumed support: "because they had a monkey on their advertisement?". Here again, B enters to dispute the absent antagonist's argument: "But if they had a kangaroo for Australia, nobody would say anything". In other words, B's claim is that there was nothing offensive intended by associating Africa with monkeys in the same way that there is nothing offensive in associating Australia with kangaroos, and therefore the complaints by Black students were unfounded (the weakness and offensiveness of B's support/dispute are irrelevant to the point at issue here).

Therefore, in Sample 4 there are three distinct CA2s which have identical structure:

A: POS<sub>0</sub> and SUP<sub>0</sub> (argument<sub>1,0</sub>)

X: DIS/SUP of (argument<sub>1,0</sub>)

In each case, the position and support (argument<sub>1</sub>) of the absent antagonist are presented and followed by a dispute of the imported argument<sub>1</sub> with some support for the dispute. In addition, the three CA2s have similar



content which ties them together—all three involve instances drawn from media stories in which African-Americans complained or were upset about mistreatment (not enough executives, too much press about O.J. Simpson, vicious stereotypes in the media).<sup>4</sup> By disputing the imported arguments, the participants in each case attempt to remove the justification for complaint.

Given this connection between the three CA2s, it may be argued further that each of these serves as support for a higher level position which is implicit from the start—that Black people have no cause for complaint. This interpretation is confirmed in the fourth part of the excerpt in which a string of conclusions appears to be drawn from the three CA2s:

- (C) POS4: The Blacks think that everything is against them. (60–2)
- (A) POS5: They’re constantly battling. (63–4)
- (A) POS6: If they wouldn’t bring issues up then nobody would think about it. (64, 66, 68)

With the justification for complaint cleared away in each case, an underlying motive is consequently attributed to the antagonist—Black people complain because they want to get ahead:

- (C) POS7: They WANT racism to exist. (67, 69)
- (A) SUP of POS7: So that they can get ahead. (70)

In this way, the three CA2s are connected in a chain and serve as supports for a higher level position. Van Eemeren and Grootendorst (1984) acknowledge that within their speech act model arguments may be combined to form larger structures: “One argumentative act complex may support or complement another, and it may be only together that they constitute a complete attempt at justification or refutation” (p. 76). Similarly, it is argued here that CA2s may be embedded within even larger argumentative structures and are not necessarily ends in themselves. That is, CA2s may serve as intermediate level argument structures (i.e. supports) which are combined within even larger argument units (such as larger CA1s). This may be illustrated with reference to the previous excerpt as follows:

- CA1 = A: POS
- X: SUP 1 (CA2),
- X: SUP 2 (CA2),
- X: SUP 3 (CA2).

In this case, X may represent more than one participant in that a single support (a CA2) may involve the work of more than one person.

Finally, it should be noted that the content of the previous excerpt serves as further evidence that pseudo-argumentative discourse carries beliefs and attitudes associated with the modern racist ideology. By showing that the various complaints by African-Americans about discrimination are unfounded, it is concluded by participants that these complaints are actually tactics employed to gain unfair advantages (“so they can get ahead”). Implicit in the discussion is the assumption that racism no longer exists in American society. Rather, participants appear to view the invocation of

racism as nothing more than a ruse by African-Americans for gaining compensation.

#### PSEUDO-ARGUMENT VS ORDINARY ARGUMENT

Although positions, supports and disputes occur in ordinary arguments, neither CA1 nor CA2 occur in ordinary arguments. In PA, participants are busy collaborating either in building cases for their own positions (CA1), or else in identifying and destroying the antagonists' arguments<sub>1</sub> (CA2). These collaborative activities are analogous to what happens in OA where an individual presents his or her own arguments<sub>1</sub> (position and supports) and attempts to destroy his or her opponent's arguments (argument<sub>2</sub>): "... when two individuals dispute each other's positions in oppositional argument, their talk is directed not only to making their own points but also to challenging their interlocutor's points" (Schiffrin, 1985: 45).

Several prominent treatments of conversational argument are briefly mentioned here. Working within a speech act approach, van Eemeren and Grootendorst (1984), as well as van Eemeren et al. (1993), treat argumentation as a compound illocutionary act composed of a constellation of statements which are ordinarily assertives. Furthermore, this constellation of statements constitutes the illocutionary act of argumentation if certain felicity conditions are fulfilled (propositional, essential, sincerity and preparatory). Van Eemeren et al. (1993) propose the following preparatory conditions, where conditions (b) and (c) are omitted; S=speaker, H=hearer, O=opinion, and A=assertion:

- (a) S believes that H will not or does not accept O at face value.
- (d) S believes that either the propositions expressed in  $A_1, A_2, \dots, A_n$  are not already obvious to H, or  $A_1, A_2, \dots, A_n$  constitute a justification of O that is not already obvious to H, or both.

However, we have seen from the previous excerpts that speakers and hearers in many of the conversations are in accord from the beginning with regard to positions put forward (violation of condition (a)). Furthermore, participants appear to be familiar with many of the positions and their respective supports which are provided (violation of (d)). In other words, in the data examined earlier, it is not the case that S believes that H will not accept O at face value, and there is no indication that participants are hearing these positions and their respective supports for the first time. Therefore, although the excerpts examined earlier have the appearance of argumentative speech acts, they are defective (or 'infelicitous') in that preparatory conditions (a) and (d) are not respected. Van Eemeren and Grootendorst state that if preparatory condition (a) is not met, then the speech act is 'superfluous', and further: "... in that case, S's performance of that illocutionary act complex is in fact a waste of time and effort and both S and L know beforehand that it is" (1984: 45). It becomes apparent later that this conclusion is too strict—other secondary functions may be served by argumentative structures (e.g. identity work), and so the violation of

certain preparatory conditions does not necessarily constitute a waste of time and effort.

A second influential treatment of conversational argument is the work of Jackson and Jacobs (1982) and Jacobs (1987) within the framework of conversational analysis. The essential insight of this approach is that conversational argument is a kind of repair mechanism where participants attempt to achieve a realignment with each other: "Argument is a way of managing the practical problems presented by the actual or potential withholding of an agreement response and by the failure to withdraw or suppress the kinds of acts that elicit disagreeable responses" (Jacobs, 1987). Jackson and Jacobs propose that argument in conversation is the sequential expansion of an adjacency pair which results from the actual or anticipated inability to provide a preferred second-pair part. Argument is seen as a regulatory device or procedure which may be employed to avoid overt disagreement in the service of the preference for agreement (Pomerantz, 1984) and cooperation between interlocutors.

Although there are various types of expansion discussed by Jackson and Jacobs which are available for avoiding overt disagreement and achieving realignment between interlocutors (presequences, embedded sequences, postsequences, etc.), most relevant to the purposes of this paper are 'within-turn expansions'. 'Within-turn expansions' are supports which are built into first-pair parts in which disagreement or doubt from another party may be anticipated. That is, if a speaker anticipates disagreement, he or she can provide supporting arguments which could avert that disagreement. One important outcome of the presumption of the preference for agreement is that supporting arguments will not be proffered unless there is some real expectation of disagreement or doubt, hence the enthymematic nature of conversational argument: "Speakers do not offer arguments for their acts unless they have reason to anticipate some particular objection or unless they are challenged" (Jacobs, 1987: 234).

The data of this work present a problem for the presumed enthymematic character of conversational argument in that participants provide supporting arguments for positions (first-pair part assertions) where there is no apparent expectation of disagreement or doubt. In many of the conversations that were analyzed, participants were in complete accord throughout, and further, collaborated in providing supports for *the positions of others*. There is no indication that participants are defensive in the stances that they take—on the contrary, they express enthusiastic support for each other at every opportunity. Indeed, in the samples which have been analyzed so far, there was not a single instance of disagreement between participants, and yet participants liberally supplied supports for positions. Thus, the data show 'within-turn expansions' in the form of supporting arguments in which there is no expectation of doubt or disagreement. Supports are supplied freely, apparently as a matter of course, without respect for the presumed enthymematic nature of conversational argument. However, the intransigence of the data of this study does not prove that the approach of Jackson and Jacobs is defective so

much as indicate that something other than prototypical argument is occurring.

To summarize, neither model of conversational argument briefly presented here can account for the data. This appears to follow from several sharp differences between PA and OA; first, in PA, all present participants are allied throughout, whereas in OA, at least two participants are in open opposition. Second, in PA, participants collaborate in supporting certain positions, whereas in OA, participants do not support each other's positions. Third, in PA, participants must import the arguments of the absent antagonist, whereas in OA, the antagonist is present to speak for himself or herself.

#### THE FUNCTION OF PSEUDO-ARGUMENT

The kind of structural analysis offered so far in this paper does not address the central (functional) question of why such structures occur in the first place. That is, what is it about the context, topic, and the goals and motives of participants which combine to produce such structures? It is argued that much of the structure of PA (including the structure of CA1 and CA2) is due to identity work on the part of participants in an effort to forestall negative inferences by others, and to project an image of rationality, objectivity and fairness. That is, argument structures are employed by participants in PA primarily for the purpose of face-work and only secondarily for the instrumental purpose of persuasion (as in OA). It is later argued that beyond this facade of fairness and rationality is an activity whose main purpose is to allow participants to simulate, exchange, reinforce and practice beliefs and arguments in a nonhostile environment.

Goffman (1967) observed that individuals do not just go about serving their own instrumental goals in interaction, but at the same time maintain a vigilant concern for the "face" of themselves and others. According to Goffman, there is a preference for maintaining a positive public image ("face") in interaction, both for ourselves and others, while pursuing overt objectives. Brown and Levinson (1987) elaborated Goffman's notion of "face" in their theory of politeness which embodies the notion that interactants use linguistic politeness as a form of social currency in the carrying out of sometimes face-threatening actions. The works of Goffman (1967) and Brown and Levinson (1987) illustrate that the prevalent, universal concern of individuals for protecting their own self-image and the image of others plays into every interaction and is a powerful force in the minutiae of everyday discourse.

That particular discursal strategies may be employed to satisfy competing instrumental and identity (face) goals has been noted by Kline (1987), with respect to (ordinary) argumentative discourse:

Since both parties simultaneously pursue both instrumental and identity aims, agreement on situational identities is constantly negotiated and reaffirmed. Thus a crucial problem for communicators becomes one of using

strategies that allow for the accomplishment of instrumental goals while simultaneously actualizing a desired identity for oneself and other. (p. 243)

The work of Kline shows that in OA, which is inherently face-threatening, a variety of rhetorical strategies is employed by arguers which allows them to balance their conversational goals (to alter the adversary's beliefs) with identity goals (to avoid affront, to present a positive self-image, etc.).

I would like to propose that it is this concern for identity and self-image that motivates the structures of PA. It is argued in what follows that the structures of PA stem primarily from a strategy by participants which allows them to achieve their instrumental goals while at the same time forestall negative inferences by others. This functional explanation will appeal to the nonnormative nature of the content of the conversations coupled with strong social pressures against expressing what might be considered "racist" views. PA structures are designed to allow participants to put forward their ideas without incurring negative inferences.

Following Van Dijk (1987), it is assumed here that higher level discourse strategies are routinely employed in discussions about race which allow a speaker to balance competing instrumental and identity goals. Van Dijk (1987: 86) frames the issue as follows:

... prejudiced talk about minorities, among other things, has the overall goal of negative other-presentation, while at the same time preserving a positive impression (or avoiding the loss of face). These goals are sometimes in conflict, for instance, when social norms do not allow uninhibited negative talk about minority groups. Therefore, expedient strategies are in order to reconcile these real or apparent inconsistencies. These strategies are accomplished by sequences of moves that try to realize both goals as effectively as possible, for instance, with a maximum of negative other-presentation and a minimum of negative self-presentation. In other words, speakers persistently try to manage or control the social inferences the recipient is bound to make about them on the basis of what they say ...

I follow Van Dijk (1987: 76) in claiming that higher level argument structures themselves may be used to ward off negative attributions:

The expression of delicate or controversial social opinions in conversation is routinely expected to be backed up with arguments ... Within the combined strategies of positive self-presentation and negative other-presentation, such arguments have the fundamental function of protecting the speaker against unwanted inferences about his or her ethnic attitudes.

In this way then, according to Van Dijk, the provision of supports for positions in talk about race is fundamentally to protect the face of the speaker.

#### THE FUNCTION OF COLLABORATIVE ARGUMENT<sub>1</sub>

Why do participants in CA1 bother to contribute supports for a position that all participants already accept? Supports are given because arguments ward off negative inferences about the speaker. There is ample evidence in

the data that the participants are anxious to avoid the attribution of “racist” given the content of their talk. Consider the following exchange which immediately follows the particularly passionate CA1 of Sample 2, the end of which is repeated here:

**Sample 5**

- 29 B: So it's just- i- their advantages just keep  
 30 adding UP! Their—their advantages totally keep  
 31 adding UP. Their grade advantages,  
 [
- 32 C: Yeah that's true. They do have—more  
 33 time to relax because—they don't have to WORK.  
 34 You know, like everybody else does to  
 35 pay off their loans.  
 [
- 36 B: They'll be under less STRESS,  
 37 C: They- cause they're just getting money.  
 38 K: I feel really BAD about all this, because like we  
 39 sound like RAcists or whatever, and I really don't  
 40 think I am,  
 [
- 41 B: I don't think I'm being- I don't know—I  
 42 really don't think I'm racist, I just think that  
 43 K: It's just a very unfair society that we're living  
 44 in today. Especially on THIS campus and on =  
 [
- 45 B: ExACTly. I-  
 46 K: = other college campuses,

Here K abruptly changes the topic (in line 38) to announce that the content of the previous talk has made her “feel really BAD”, since “we sound like RAcists or whatever”. That K bothers in the first place to step outside of the talk to discuss explicitly the negative inferences which could arise from it is powerful evidence that she is aware of and oriented towards antiracist norms. Clearly she has become uncomfortable with the talk and seeks directly to dispel any negative inferences which might arise among the participants by saying: “and I really don't think I am”. By shifting footing from the first person plural pronoun “we” in “we sound like racists or whatever”, to the singular “I”, in “I really don't think I am”, K perhaps unintentionally implicates that the other participants might be racist, to which B immediately responds: “I really don't think I'm racist”. Here B joins K in showing her orientation towards antiracist norms and her concern to avoid negative attribution.

The tendency to explicitly dissociate oneself from potential racist attribution is a common element of modern racism (Gaertner and Dovidio, 1986; Billig, 1988). According to Gaertner and Dovidio, since, for modern racists, negative feelings and beliefs about minority groups are usually excluded from awareness, “When a situation or event threatens to make the negative portion of their attitude salient, aversive racists are motivated to repudiate or dissociate these feelings from their self-image . . .” (p. 62). This

accounts for why the statement of repudiation made by K in lines 38–40 in the previous excerpt occurs at a moment in the interaction where the preceding talk appears to have become openly hostile and pejorative (see Sample 2).

In sum, the function of CA1 is to balance both instrumental and identity goals—the provision of supports allows the expression of nonnormative positions while at the same time protecting those involved from their own negative attributions.

#### THE FUNCTION OF COLLABORATIVE ARGUMENT<sub>2</sub>

Why do participants bother to import the positions and supports of an absent antagonist? That is, what function or functions are served by bringing in the views of “the other side” within CA2? I would like to suggest that a similar motive of identity management is involved for participants—by presenting the views of an absent antagonist, participants project an image of fairness, balance and objectivity, and therefore shield themselves from negative inference. A CA1 has the undesirable effect of appearing one-sided and biased since there is no opposition to balance the unified stance of the participants. Importing the supposed views of an antagonist thus helps to dissolve the appearance of bias and unfairness, and so gives the impression that participants are simply seeking objectively arrived at conclusions, tested by a fair consideration of both sides of the issue at hand.

By presenting the “other side”, participants in PA attempt to dissolve the impression that they are simply airing their negative attitudes. However, the CA2s in the data hardly involve unbiased presentations of an antagonist’s arguments. Rather, the presentation of the antagonist’s arguments amounts to no more than a minimal token more aimed to serve impression management than objectivity. Consider once again Sample 3, which involves a CA2.

In this excerpt, the argument of the antagonist is indeed presented, in reported speech: “Well—you owe it to us because—you know—you had us as slaves—thousands of years ago, and blah blah blah:, and you OWE it to us. Blah Blah”. It would be difficult to make a case that B’s presentation of the antagonist’s position is unbiased here. On the contrary, the direct quote itself is loaded with negative evaluation. So although the speaker bothers to supply an argument on behalf of the conjured antagonist, it does not appear to be done with the aim of neutral, objective consideration. Rather, it is a token gesture which functions to ward off the attribution of one-sidedness. Note that in this case, and in all cases found in the data, the provision of the antagonist’s argument is minimal, that is, it rarely goes beyond giving one or two supports, although certainly other supports are available. An objective presentation would more likely present more than one or two supports for each position. In addition, the supports provided are not necessarily the most persuasive or effective ones which could have been selected; it is often the case that the imported supports are transparently weak and stereotypical.

Thus it seems that although the views of the antagonist are supplied, they serve some purpose other than the pursuit of objectively arrived at conclusions. The data suggest that participants import an antagonist's argument in order to set up a straw man which can be collaboratively disputed. That is, just as in OA in which one tries to destroy the antagonist's arguments in order to win, CA2s set up and destroy the imported antagonist's arguments. Furthermore, the antagonist's arguments are presented in such a way that they are designed to be destroyed in order to allow the participants to "win". To put it another way, in CA2, the imported arguments are selected for their weakness so that the participants may win the PA. In addition, it is likely that the participants select imported arguments to which they already have in advance some ready-made attack—there are no cases in the data in which an imported antagonist's argument is given and no retort/dispute is immediately provided.

In sum, there appear to be two main functions of CA2s. The first has to do with identity work—by presenting the views of the antagonist, participants ward off the potential impression that they are biased and simply airing negative attitudes. By giving the point of view of the other side, the discussion appears fair, balanced and objective. The second has to do with an instrumental goal—setting up the antagonist's position in order to dispute it. Despite appearances, CA2s are designed to defeat the antagonist from the start; weak, stereotypical imported supports are selected with ready-made disputes. Winning an argument (whether real or pseudo-) includes not only presenting one's own arguments, but also destroying the arguments of the opponent.

The simulation of an argument<sub>2</sub> in PA allows participants the benefit of having considered the views of the antagonist and therefore shielding themselves from the appearance of bias. It appears that the goal of each participant in CA2 is not to change the opponent's view (the opponent is absent), but rather to reinforce the "rightness" of their own side's views. This is accomplished by jointly disputing each and every argument presented on behalf of the antagonist—there are no instances in the data where the absent antagonist "wins" in PA. Also, unlike in ordinary argument<sub>2</sub> in which very often no resolution is reached (Willard, 1989), in PA resolution is reached in every case, with the victory of the protagonists and the vanquishment of the antagonist.

In sum, PA earns its name because it simulates OA in various ways in order to borrow certain appearances which derive from ordinary argumentative discourse. In other words, PA looks like OA (and is meant to), since the use of argument structures (including argument<sub>1</sub> and argument<sub>2</sub>) lends the appearance of fairness, objectivity and rationality, and wards off negative inferences about the participants. In addition, PA is "pseudo" in the sense that despite these appearances, the discourse is anything but fair and objective. It has been argued that participants engage in PA not primarily for the purposes of persuasion, but rather in order to reinforce their mutually held nonnormative beliefs and perhaps more importantly to reassure each other of their (perhaps threatened) ideological alliance and solidarity.



The use of argument structures in pseudo-argumentative discourse then is "pseudo" in that it accomplishes something other than what it purports to accomplish on the surface. Rather than actually providing fairness and objectivity, it mainly functions to control negative inference in an essentially one-sided, attitude-laden discussion. PA is, in sum, a type of discourse which allows participants to secure their alliance and strengthen mutually held beliefs in the face of strong social pressures which threaten those beliefs.

#### CONCLUSION

Now I would like to suggest a few ways in which an understanding of PA might make a contribution to our understanding of the discursual processes involved in the transmission, reinforcement and reproduction of modern racism. Earlier works which pioneered the study of the reproduction of racism in everyday discourse (e.g. Van Dijk, 1987; Wetherell and Potter, 1992) based their conclusions on data which unfortunately provided a distorted and incomplete view of such discursual processes because they did not reflect the actual interactive settings in which such processes normally occur.<sup>5</sup> In addition, because of their data (which involved interviews between strangers), they missed an opportunity to recognize PA as a significant, common component in the reproduction of modern racism. The data of the present work overcome at least two of the problems faced by the earlier studies.

First, the conversations which compose these data occur between friends. This means that the participants had interacted with each other before and probably knew a good deal about each other's backgrounds and beliefs. In addition, given that they are friends, it can probably be safely assumed that they have certain things in common with each other. I would argue that actual, everyday talk about minority groups occurs between people who have this sort of relationship. Certainly it is doubtful that such talk commonly occurs between strangers. In American culture at least, it can generally be said that talking about delicate issues such as religion, politics or race with a stranger or even an acquaintance is somewhat taboo. Thus, such talk ordinarily is reserved for conversations between people who know and are close to each other. Conversations between friends satisfy this criterion.

Second, the conversations analyzed in this study did not occur in the presence of a researcher. Obviously, actual talk about minority groups does not ordinarily occur in the presence of a researcher, let alone any outsider. Thus, the powerful influence of (even a passive) researcher was avoided in these data. One might object that the tape-recorder indirectly represented the researcher for participants and therefore influenced their talk. However, there is no indication in the data that the participants oriented themselves towards either the recorder or the absent researcher. Whatever the effect of the recorder, it can minimally be claimed that its influence was

less than what would be the influence of an actual researcher present in these conversations—so this represents a methodological improvement over earlier studies.

Thus, based on these conditions, it is argued that the data for this work sufficiently resemble spontaneous, naturally occurring conversations, and therefore do warrant the conclusions arrived at with regard to everyday talk about minority groups. Although it is not claimed that the data collected for this work are authentic everyday talk about minority groups (since they were elicited, recorded, etc.), it is claimed that they closely resemble such talk and represent an improvement over the data of earlier studies. This change (improvement) in data is significant because it suggests the possibility that the data used in earlier studies may not have been able to capture important characteristics about discourse on race. PA flourishes in discussions (not interviews) between people who maintain an ongoing relationship and share certain beliefs, values, etc. (and not between strangers or near-strangers). Perhaps the reason why PA has not been noted previously in the discourse literature is the difficulty of providing the appropriate methods which allow it to be captured on tape. Also, it may have escaped attention since it is a type of talk which presumably occurs only in private places between people who are close to each other.

In any event, I believe that the study of PA could make a significant contribution to our understanding of discursal processes having to do with the diffusion and reproduction of attitudes and beliefs about minority groups. The data presented in this work involved content which embodies what has been called the modern racist ideology. Participants return to the same themes again and again, including the beliefs that African-Americans are unjustified in their demands and complaints, that racism and discrimination no longer exist, and that any “advantages” given to African-Americans are unfair (to Whites).

I contend that pseudo-argumentative discourse plays an important role in the reproduction of the modern racist ideology in everyday talk, since it provides for its users a suitable staging ground for the practice, diffusion, and reinforcement of beliefs and arguments about minority groups, and further allows for the balancing of both instrumental and identity goals. That is, it is a type of discourse which allows participants to exercise nonnormative beliefs with relative impunity. Modern racist beliefs and arguments are rarely expressed and carried out in real-life oppositional situations. Rather, more often they are rehearsed between people who are close to and similar to each other in a nonhostile environment, where positions and supports can be shared, honed, evaluated and reinforced.

Finally, one might object that given the limited amount of data analyzed in this article, there is no assurance that PA is not just a local phenomenon, limited to talk between college students about issues of race on a particular college campus. Indeed, it does not seem justified at this early stage of research to make any general claims about how often, where, and with regard to which topics PA takes place. Future studies might attempt to reduplicate the conditions under which PA may arise, in different locations, between

different kinds of participants, and with a variety of topics. In addition, an investigation of where PA does *not* occur could also lead to significant results. For example, one might predict that PA structures would not occur in conversations where participants share anti-racist beliefs, and such conversations could be analyzed to test this prediction. Thus, while this work has attempted to establish the existence of a type of discourse called “pseudo-argument”, it is admitted that much more work needs to be done to confirm it and to determine its details and limits. It is hoped that this article has at least pointed out that these avenues of research are worthy of pursuit in the future.

## APPENDIX

## Key to transcription conventions

.	Falling intonation followed by pause
,	Continuing intonation
?	Rising intonation followed by pause
—	Pause
!	Exclamation
CAPS	Emphatic stress
:	Lengthening
-	An abrupt cut-off or self-interruption
=	Unbroken continuity between a speaker’s talk which has been separated due to limits on space
[	The starting point of some overlap
]	The ending point of some overlap
()	Unintelligible material
( )	Text in parentheses Uncertain transcription
(( ))	Text in double parentheses Extralinguistic feature of context
[[ ]]	Text in double square brackets Simultaneous talk

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## NOTES

I would like to thank Dennis Preston, Barbara Abbott, David Dwyer, Grover Hudson and Teun van Dijk for their valuable comments and advice.

1. This is not to say that “old-fashioned” racism is no longer a force in the United States, but rather it seems more accurate to claim that it is no longer the rule or norm in mainstream society.

2. This project was funded by an AURIG (All University Research Initiation Grant) from the Office of the Vice President for Research and Graduate Studies, and was approved by UCRIHS (University Committee on Research Involving Human Subjects), both of Michigan State University.
3. The content of the data to be presented and discussed in this paper may be offensive to readers. I would like to say that I do not subscribe to the views put forward in the excerpts which follow, and personally find the tone and content of the talk extremely disturbing and alarming. Nevertheless, with the sincere aim of preserving objectivity in this work, I refrain from expressing my own feelings towards the participants and the content of their talk. Instead, I prefer to allow their words to speak for themselves.
4. The media are important players in discourse on race and ethnicity. Van Dijk (1987) notes that "Because the media provide the daily discourse and attitude input for most adult citizens, their role as a prevailing discourse and attitude context for thought and talk about ethnic groups is probably unsurpassed by any other institutional or public source of communication" (p. 41).
5. Verkuyten et al. (1994) recognized this methodological problem as well, but their methods and data also suffer from similar problems. In particular, although their data involved talk between participants rather than between a single participant and a researcher, and although an effort was made to allow participants to get acquainted with each other, participants were not involved in an ongoing relationship (friend, family, neighbor, etc.) and researchers were still present during the recorded discussions.

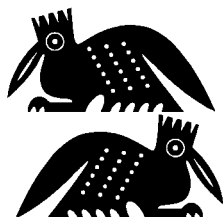
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