Antiracism Discourse: The Ideological Circle in a Child World

Miu Chung Yan
San Francisco State University

Antiracism Discourse:
The Ideological Circle in a Child World

MIU CHUNG YAN

Assistant Professor
San Francisco State University

Antiracism is a dominant discourse in contemporary societies. The understanding of antiracism, however, varies. Government, through its own textually mediated organization of apparatus, tends to homogenize the discourse. This paper is to demonstrate, by employing institutional ethnography, how a child's act can ignite the socially organized textual engine to include the children's world in the ideological circle of antiracism discourse dominated by the government. Institutional ethnography, as demonstrated in this paper, is a useful tool for social workers to deconstruct the textual condition in which social work practice is embedded. The ideological circle is a powerful concept to help social workers to understand our social location in the ruling relations of the society.

Introduction

Antiracism is a dominant social discourse in contemporary societies. The state with its control apparatus, a powerful player, tends to homogenize this discourse by containing the politicization of social discontentment rising from racism within a social administration paradigm. The intention is to maintain the existing power balance among different racial groups (Steinberg, 1997). However, as many scholars have pointed out, the understanding of race, racism and antiracism is far from homogenous (e.g. Bulmer & Solomos, 1999; Gilroy, 1999). In fact, different understandings of antiracism are always in competition. For instance, Payne (1997) notices that the pluralists' and radical structuralists' understanding of social work anti-racist practice conflict. Therefore, Gilroy (1999) contends that strategies against racism need not be homogenized either.

This paper will not discuss the actual meaning of antiracism nor will it address which strategies are more useful. Instead, the purpose of this paper is to demonstrate how the governmental discourse of antiracism trickles down as a bureaucratic response to a racist incident in the children's world through a textually mediating process, and ultimately how governmental discourse homogenizes the social understanding of antiracism within its administrative parameter.

The analytic approach of this paper is based on institutional ethnography developed by Dorothy Smith, a Canadian feminist sociologist. O'Neill (1998) has demonstrated how institutional ethnography can be useful in understanding social work. In O'Neill's (1998) article, he discusses a few major concepts of institutional ethnography, such as texts, ideology, social relations and discourse. Yet the concept of an ideological circle, which is the major analytic tool to be employed in this study, has not been fully explored. Ideological circle is largely a textually coordinated circular process, through which governmental ideology is filtered down to all levels of the society. Social service practitioners, who are a part of the ensemble of the governmentality of the state, i.e., means of control (Johnson, 1993; Popple, 1992), inevitably become actors who (very often unintentionally) help complete the ideological circle. Indeed, the social control function of social service practitioners is always intertwined with the ideological circle embedded in governmental policies.

The Case Study

The ideological circle of antiracism to be studied in this paper was triggered by an incident in the childcare center (the Center) of a multi-service community agency (the Agency) in a city of southern Ontario, Canada. One day, a girl about eleven to twelve years old came to the center to visit her stepbrother. The girl was black-white bi-racially mixed. A black child about four years old went to her and said, "I don't like your face." The incident was seen by a childcare worker who thought it childish behavior and ignored it. However, the girl shared the remark with her stepmother at home, who felt that it was a racist incident. She came to the childcare center and talked to the workers there. The

alarm bell was rung. The center found themselves caught in a situation that they did not know how to deal with.

Our society always has an ambivalent but generous attitude towards children's wrongdoing. Some of the assumptive attitudes of children's wrongdoing can be summarized as they are a.) so ignorant that they do not know what they are doing; b.) in a learning process so everything they do wrong is a result of the inadequacy of their significant others and of the socialization process; and c.) deserve more education rather than punishment. Under such assumptions, wrongdoing in the children's world is forgivable and can be ignored if it is interpreted as meaningless. Racist behavior is one of those debatable acts of children, despite the fact that children can also be racist. When children call each other names, which may be negatively inferred to issues of color and culture, adults' responses vary, depending on how they understand the children's world. They may see it as childish and ignorant behavior and just ignore it, or they may treat it as a serious mistake and take action to stop it. Generally, concern with children's inappropriate behaviors is normally treated as an educational issue.

In this case, racism is a major complaint that may politically be detrimental to the Center's reputation. Also, the Center must react responsibly to a formal complaint from a parent; therefore, instead of taking the issue back to the children's world, the Center is required to resolve it in a formal way. Nonetheless, the Center has no policy for appropriate reactions to this incident because the Agency's policy on anti-racist behaviors is only set to govern the behaviors of adults, that is, staff and parents. However, a s an organizational response, the Center decided to develop a set of policies, procedure and forms to deal with racial incidents among children. These texts were closely related to a set of criteria imposed by the municipal Children Service Division and used as a guideline for funding assessment.

Two key players, the childcare center service director (the Director) of the Agency and the consultant (the Consultant) from the Children Service Division, were interviewed. The analysis of this case study is based on these two interviews and all relevant textual materials, including: the center's own policy, procedure and forms, the funding criteria, and a set of guidelines developed

by the municipal government in responding to racial incidents in childcare service.

Theoretical Concerns: The Ideological Circle of Antiracism

As Smith observes, "discourse itself is a textually mediated social organization" (Smith, 1984, p. 65). As O'Neill (1998) points out in institutional ethnography, texts means "not only documents such as legislation, organizational policies, and procedures, but also the social relations which flow from such documents" (p. 132). The state is one of the major actors of this social organization because government, through its apparatus in different levels, is expected to exercise its power to not only endorse anti-racist policies but also monitor their actual practice. To actualize such practice, a set of procedures and methods of thinking and reasoning about social relations and processes in relation to antiracism is needed.

The institutionalized social discourse becomes a type of ideology as understood in a Marxist framework (Smith, 1990, p. 35). To govern appropriateness in social relations and processes, the state has to exercise its monopolized and exclusive power to put its favorable ideology in practice through legislation. A discursive practice is formed through the creation of various documents, such as acts, policies, and reports. Very often this discursive practice not only reifies but also maintains an ideology of the group in power. In Canada, the anti-racist ideology of the state is expressed in the passage of a series of policies and legislation which consolidate a discursive practice of antiracism, such as: Charter of Rights and Freedoms, Human Rights Act, Multiculturalism Act and many provincial human rights codes.

The inter-relation between these documents creates an encompassing effect on social relation regarding antiracism. Social relation, instead of just a set of social relationships, is a step toward understanding how people in different sites are organized which can be used as a tool to do the investigation (Smith, 1995). The reason why social relation can function as a tool for investigation is that, as Smith (1999) suggests, the organization of social relation is regulated by texts. The coherence of each of these texts depends not only on its compatibility with its local context, but

also its consistence with other texts used in different sites for the same ideological purposes. In a hierarchical social relation, texts formulated at superior levels often have a governing effect on texts written in the subordinate level.

This process can be coercive. In anti-racist discourse, many governmental policies and acts have been "trickled down" to the lower level of non-governmental social organizations such as social service agencies, which rely on government funding. This can be done through various channels, such as: mandatory inclusion of the anti-racist (or equity) spirit in organizational policy, funding policies such as direct funding or purchase of services from governments, and workshops and training program to acculturate the anti-racist mentality. However, the humanistic nature of social service agencies itself always favors antiracism as well, obscuring the coercive nature of government policies and making the inclusion of antiracism policy a must-do of all these organizations. In turn, the hidden political implications of governmental discourse of antiracism may not be questioned.

To put policy into practice is problematic. The nature of many governmental policies and legislation may not be directly applicable in a real work/service setting due to their standardized focus and legal rhetoric. Each level of the organizational hierarchy may have its own interpretation of the social policy set in the legislation (Yan, 1998). Lower level organizations have to elaborate these formal documents into their own operational guidelines or organizational policies and procedures intended to regulate the activities of their members—staff, volunteers and service recipients. The actualities in which members of these organizations are living will be framed by these policies and procedures. However, lived actualities are so complex that not all details need to be documented. Forms and guidelines are developed to record/report only those that are relevant.

By applying these forms and standard recording documentation, people's real life become textual material for various purposes, one of which is to sustain the original ideological discourse embedded in these texts. In turn, an inter-textual relation among governmental and organizational policies, procedures and other documents is constructed as an ideological circle (Smith, 1990). A full ideological circle has two phases (Smith,
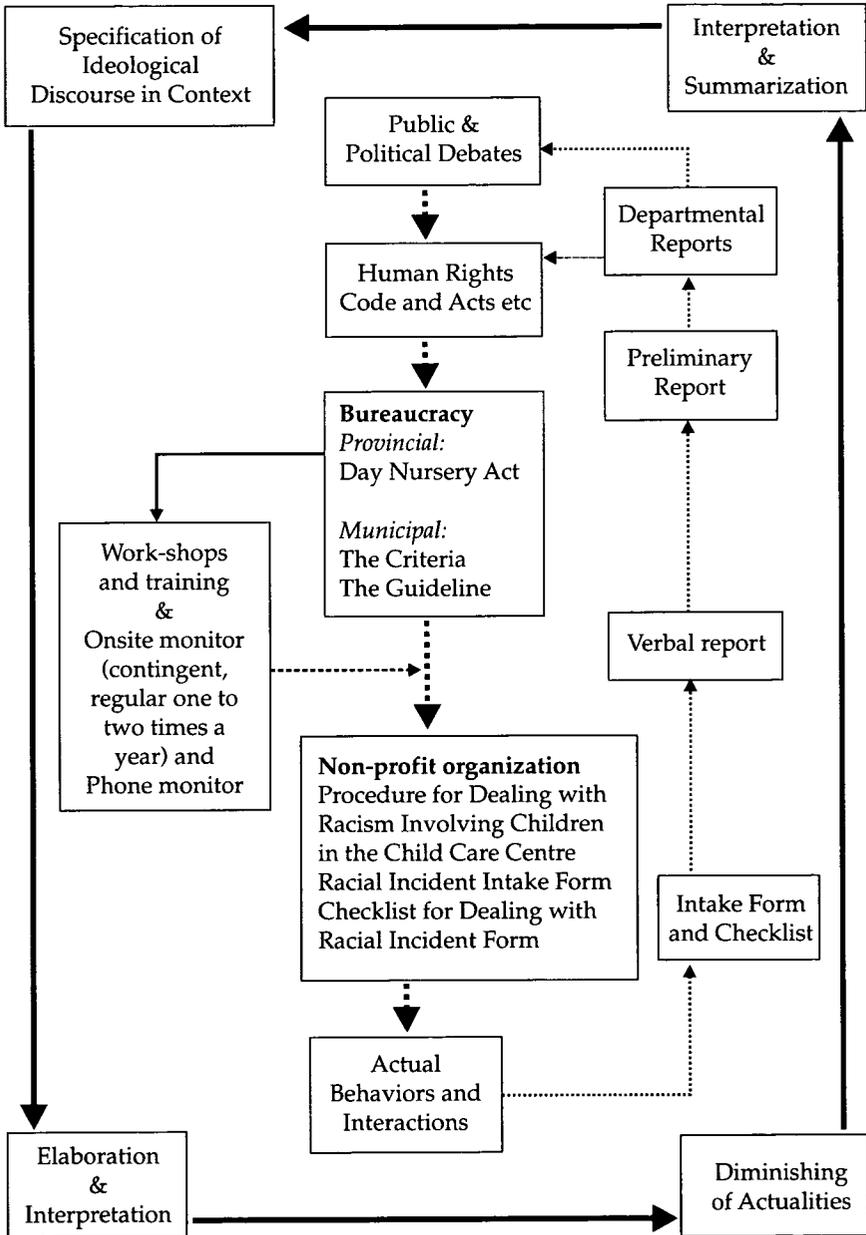
1990): "an interpretive phase where events are analyzed as documenting an underlying pattern originating in a textual discourse" and "where the underlying pattern operates as part of the procedures for selecting, assembling and ordering these 'facts' " (Smith, 1995, p. 173). In an organizational context, these two phases represent two simultaneous processes of the ideological circle (see Diagram 1).

Specification of Ideological Discourse in Context

The first phase indicates the process of Specification of Ideological Discourse in Context. In this process, the social ideological and political debate is trickled down as policy documents organizationally from government legislature to governmental departments. By employing their funding discretion or licensing power, bureaucrats filter the policy into documents that govern the acts of community agencies, which rely on government funding. Community agencies have to interpret the documents in accordance with their operational context and mission when they develop their own policy for their own service's operation, regulating the acts of the frontline staff as well as the service users. Each of these organizational levels has to interpret the policy documents within a context that fits their operation as well as the ideology embedded in their service contracts with the government.

The Agency has already had a set of antiracism policies and procedures; however, they are never written to guard against the behavior of children. Hence, alternative resolution is needed to deal with children's racist behaviors. Any alternative must comply with several requirements other than the laws of the society-at-large, which are always controversial concerning the treatment of children. In this case, both the provincial and municipal governments regulate the operation of childcare centers. For instance, to obtain a license of operation from the provincial government, centers have to comply with the Day Nursery Act, which contains no direct anti-racist clause. Since childcare centers are funded by the municipal government, they must follow a set of operational criteria (the Criteria), which have just been revised. According to the Consultant, two major revisions were included in the new Criteria.

Diagram One: Ideological Circle

Specification of
Ideological
Discourse in Context

Interpretation
&
Summarization

Public &
Political Debates

Departmental
Reports

Human Rights
Code and Acts etc

Preliminary
Report

Bureaucracy
Provincial:
Day Nursery Act

Municipal:
The Criteria
The Guideline

Work-shops
and training
&
Onsite monitor
(contingent,
regular one to
two times a
year) and
Phone monitor

Verbal report

Non-profit organization
Procedure for Dealing with
Racism Involving Children
in the Child Care Centre
Racial Incident Intake Form
Checklist for Dealing with
Racial Incident Form

Intake Form
and Checklist

Actual
Behaviors and
Interactions

Elaboration
&
Interpretation

Diminishing
of Actualities

First, a new five-level scale measurement of childcare center performance is established as one of the reference to consider the subsidy status. The third level is the minimum requirement. Although it is a five-level scale, the Consultant clarifies that there is no intention to push up centers' performance in accordance with this scale. Instead, it is a tool to help centers to set goals and develop policy to go further. However, the Consultant claims that "I would be concerned if they (centers) didn't want to go to the next step, but they certainly don't have to." This view is also shared by the Director who said, "If you are really committed to providing quality, then you are interested in doing it, right? You get serious about it. If you don't care, then it becomes one of those where you check out the number three because that is what you need to have minimally. Some centers don't care so they would do it that way. We really care." Apparently, the scale unintentionally performs as a hidden incentive for centers to improve their quality of services. In this case, the Director sees the new policies and procedures as an effort in proving the excellence of the childcare center service of the Agency.

Second, with the prevalence of Antiracism ideology, four new articles related to Antiracism were added to the Criteria. In the meantime, to promote anti-discrimination in daycare centers, a guideline for daycare service (the Guideline) was developed by the Access and Equity Branch of the municipality, which is the watchdog of Antiracism in the municipal government. The Criteria and the Guideline are seen as supplementary to each other. The Criteria only offers general principles, while the Guideline provides extensive suggestions of actual anti-racist practice in daycare centers. According to the consultant, both the Criteria and the Guideline have major input from the Access and Equity Branch, which also organized most of the antiracist workshops for childcare center personnel.

In Canada, antiracism is an ideology embraced by all levels of government, despite the fact that people constantly criticize governments as not being committed to antiracism. Understandably, the Guideline endorses all anti-racist legislation and policies of the federal, provincial and municipal governments. Although the municipality does not have a bylaw on antiracism, the Guideline states clearly that "the City's commitment to combating racism

and ensuring ethno-racial equity is outlined in the City's Strategic Plan, the Social Development Strategy, the Employment Equity Policy and the Ethno-Racial Access to Municipal Services Policy." Recently, the city has also incorporated a "Declaration of a Non-Discrimination Policy" in the contract for any organizations who supply goods and services to the city.

To formulate an alternative policy on children's racist behaviors, the Agency decided to develop a new set of policies and procedures, which also includes a "Racial Incident Intake Form" and a "Checklist for Dealing with Racial Incident Form." As the Director explained, this new set of policies, procedures and forms is based on the Guideline and the Criteria of the city. Centers are required to report any racial incident to the municipal Children Services Division within 24 hours. To report an incident requires a reporting structure because it is the Director who reports to the Children Service Division, but the Director is not always on the scene when the incident happens, and therefore a standard reporting format is needed for accuracy and future reference. The reporting system should fit well with the organizational structure, as well as be consistent to what the Criteria and Guideline propose. It can be systematically linked to the municipal's internal reporting system. Consequently, standard texts, which can be used in different sites, are needed. The Racial Incident Intake Form provides the workers a replicable text to record incidents that have occurred in the lived actualities of the children in different childcare centers. This Form can be used in every site of the agency by every staff for every racial incident.

The Criteria also requires that "centers must have a posted written procedure in place to handle reports of racist incidents." A written procedure should be specific to ensure a proper handling of the incident. To ensure minimum deviation, a checklist of steps to be taken is needed. As the Director said, "we can make sure all the steps are being followed because with racist incident, it can be so broad. What you do—and not to say those things are wrong—but you could forget to do something, because you don't think of it. So it just makes sure that everybody knows these are all the steps." When asked, the Consultant was also positive to the existence of the Checklist because it serves the purpose of leading the process in a correct direction. To follow the proper steps

of handling the incident is as important as the documentation. However, this step is not isolated from the incident report because it is part of the construction of the incident that will be reported to the consultant by the director. More importantly, to develop a standard step is part of the conformity to the Criteria, which expects centers to "have an established antiracism protocol."

Diminishing of Actualities

The second process is the process of Diminishing of Actualities. The notion of public accountability demands a reporting system from the subordinate level to the superior level within an organizational hierarchy, i.e., between the government and community agencies, between levels of operation within a community agency, and between levels of operation within the bureaucracy. Each level has a different contact with the service users' lived actualities, which are used as the primary narrative for future interpretation (Smith, 1990, p. 159). The primary narrative seldom goes directly to all levels of the organization. Due to the social and organizational division of labor, each level has to rely on some standardized measure to report activities and observations of service users' actualities to the immediate superior level. The contextual and positional demands imposed on each level of actors in this process inevitably lead to a simplification of information as the primary narratives pass from bottom up. However, the simplification (or summarization) cannot fall out of the originated ideological discourse. Therefore, the whole textual system, including policy and procedures and forms, is framed as the ideological discourse defines it. Standardization of texts for reporting is crucial for collection of data from one level to the other, particularly when data collection involves multiple sites.

Consequently, the data and information generated from this reporting system simplify incidents that actually happened while sustain the ideological framework that is used for this simplification. The ideological circle is self-fulfilling, when the lived actualities, particularly those of everyday activities in the lower strata of the social organization, are being encoded into explanatory accounts forming the interpretative schema. The circle is completed when the interpretative schema is applied back to the system as

the frame for actors in the process to extract the actualities back to the interpretation process (Smith, 1990). In turn, a taken-for-granted documentation system is established which reflects an "ordered world" of organizations, and even the ordered world of the society-at-large (Zimmerman, 1969).

These two processes not only complete the ideological circle but also put the unmanaged into a manageable format. With all the activities of different actors operating together, but mostly, in different sites at different times, standard texts are essential for coordinating, concerting and ordering their relationships. An inter-textual coordination becomes possible. Each stratum develops its own textual environment according to both the prevalent ideological discourse and the contextual concern. The inter-textual relation of different texts used to regulate actors from different sites makes ruling relations possible. The ruling relations are defined as "relations that rule, and people rule and are ruled through them" (Smith, 1999, p. 82). "The ruling relations form a complex field of coordinating activities" and "they are activities in and in relation to texts, and texts coordinate them as relations" (Smith, 1999, p. 79).

People develop texts to regulate others; the texts in turn regulate all people including those who develop the texts. Through the texts, the ruling relations hiding behind the texts exercise the will of the powerful in terms of pursuing an ideological discourse. Most inter-textual ruling relations do not start merely as a form of voluntary participation of participants at different levels of this organization process, but very often through engineering the reward and sanction mechanism by the state, which is in most cases funding. The textually mediated ruling relations actualize the embedded ideological discourse in people's real life. To achieve an effective inter-textual coordination, all texts that are developed and used in different levels have to fulfill two functions. First texts need to provide information for the immediate superior's own reporting function; and second, they need to maintain a coherence between the actualities and the ideological discourse. The first function is particularly important to satisfy the accountability of the actors in that particular level, while the second is used to help completing the ideological circle.

Interpretation is inevitable. People modify the policy when

they interpret the policy (Yan, 1998). Here, the meaning of interpretation is problematic. Different interpretations are possible in the process but two are particularly important. Firstly, interpretations framed within the ideological discourse initiate and then maintain the development of this process. The texts developed and used in the process are measures to ensure compliance of all interpretations with the ideology. Secondly, interpretations are positional-situated. People in different positions have different responsibilities, which demand a certain kind of perspective of seeing things. Also, the use of information is also different. As a result, people in different positions may see things differently, however slightly it may be. Nevertheless, the positional differences are manageable because of the commonalities of the ideology they share. This is particularly important in the investigation of organization of knowledge. The position that people take gives meaning to the action of the people in the inter-textual process and also confines but not necessarily determines the interpretation that people can make. Situating in different positions and levels, people encounter different actualities, the results of which may affect the specification and summarization processes. All actualities will eventually become part of the process of the ideological circle.

The incident and the follow-up activities are all about the lived actualities of people. However, it is difficult and unnecessary for the Agency to report the whole incident to the Consultant in full detail. Only part of the information will be selected for reporting. This information serves not only for the sake of reporting but also other purposes, such as to justify: a.) the compliance of the center with the Criteria requirement; b.) the actualization of the antiracism policy upheld by the municipal government; and c.) the quality of service that the agency is pursuing. The three texts developed by the agency are interrelated. The Intake Form tells what happened and who have been involved, which in turn, defines who should be followed up. As one of the questions of the form, the worker is to recall, "to your knowledge, has the child who received the mistreatment been subjected to similar mistreatment before? By the same children?" This kind of question also brings up historical facts that may be related to this incident. It

coordinates not only the activities of the current event, but also any past events.

According to the Checklist, the Director will call the program consultant (duty officer) taking serious occurrence report in the Children Service Division who takes down all information and disseminates it to the responsible Consultant. The preliminary report is always verbal. The incident will be classified into a type of incident and will be punched into the database of the Division. A brief report will be written. The Consultant, upon receiving the information, will contact the agency to further understand the incident. In the meantime, the preliminary report from the duty officer will be sent to responsible consultant and unit director for comments. Through this process, the living incident that took place in the center has already been simplified firstly by the worker who wrote the incident report; secondly, by the director who verbally reported to the intake officer; lastly, by the duty officer who wrote the preliminary report. However, no matter how simply they wrote, the story must be in line with the antiracist theme. Otherwise, the incident will never get to the top of the command and be recorded statistically.

The incident will be classified as a type of activity and a numeric meaning will be given for statistic purposes. It is not the nature of the incident but the number of incidents that matter in a governmental bureaucracy. Once a certain type of incident is shown numerically significant enough, action will be taken. However, action normally is mild. The Consultant emphasizes her role as an advisor rather than a sanction/reward giver. She also mentions that in previous history, the Division always took a supportive role to deal with this type of incident that is statistically significant. Workshops will be given to enhance the capability of agencies and staff in handling these incidents. Her responsibility is to help centers resolve the incident that they report and to upgrade their administrative capability for future incidents. The Consultant feels reluctant to imagine any negative sanction such as funding cuts.

Supposedly, the Consultant will be informed if any racist incident happens. However, the report to the Consultant should be selective. There is a hierarchy of incidents. Although the Consultant would like to be made aware of all incidents at the centre, only

issues involving adults will actually be reported. The incidents reported are ones that may be seen as social issues that need to be dealt with in a social domain. An incident involving only children may be treated as local issue and therefore, dealt with in a local context. The children's world and the adult world are never separate but, unlike children, adults have more roles to play in the social world, for instance, in this case, by bringing a "children's incident" to the public domain. The stepmother took the incident to the Center and might therefore generate a broader political debate from the local community to society-at-large if the incident was not handled well and brought to the attention of other community advocacy organizations. The consequence can embarrass both the Agency and the government and the impact can be disastrous to them.

However, it is exactly through the adults' involvement of bringing these issues to the social domain that the ideological circle of antiracism is reinforced. For instance, to this particular Agency, this incident not only demonstrates their commitment but also strengthens its mandate and stand on antiracism. As a result, the Agency tightens its own control on racist behaviors among its staff and service users. The same logic can be applied to the government engine. In order to protect the interest of the agencies and the governments, documentation is required in a format consistent with ideological discourse and organizational demands. The ideological circle is a form of self-protection for social organizations, from community agencies to the state. In turn, the inter-textual organization not only creates but also sustains a ruling relation of a particular ideology.

Although standardization has been promoted and institutionally built in, how to interpret racist behaviors can be problematic because no definition of racial incident can be absolute. According to the Criteria, a racial incident is defined as "prejudice or discrimination against people of different races and cultures manifested in the following ways: banter, racist jokes, name-calling, discourteous treatment, graffiti, threats, insults or physical violence. Racist attitudes can be subtle, covert, overt, and sometimes even unconscious." With all the policies and procedures and definitions, both the Consultant and the Director agreed that the interpretation of racist incident is difficult.

The Director relies on the frontline staff to scrutinize the actualities of the incidents and make a professional judgement on the nature of the incident. From the incident, we learn that such professional judgement is not easy. Any racist act depends not only on the manifested act but also on how people who involve in it perceive the incident. However, perception is not only positional but also personal. It is difficult to predict where personal perception will lead to the development of the event. With the policies and procedures in place as in this case, we may be sure that once someone, for instance a parent, activates the organizational process, all actors have to react correspondingly to their own organizational position. In turn, the textual engine of the social organization of antiracism will be ignited and run on its own course.

Discussion and Conclusion

To apply antiracism discourse to the children's world is not a moral issue of good or bad. The need to uphold antiracism is un-questionable in contemporary society; yet, the understanding of antiracism can be varied. Apparently, the state tends to dominate the discourse and frames it within its administrative parameter. Through the intertextual process, the incident becomes not only a childish racial incident but also a social incident. The "racist" behaviors of children are dealt with no longer as a business of the children but of the adults, who then control, monitor and respond to children's behaviors. Ultimately, through the textually medi-ated process, the ruling relation that governs antiracism in the adult world is diffused to all members of the society, including the children. The ideological discourse of antiracism is realized in the children's world through the connective power of these texts. Through the new policies and guidelines, the children's behaviors can no longer be ignored or forgiven without a systematic scrutiny by the adults who are responsible to take actions intervening in the children's world. Each of the actors in this case, i.e., the parent, the worker, the Director, the Consultant and some other adults, activates this textual process with an intention of stopping some evils (in this case racism) from happening. Consequently, the children's world becomes problematic in view of the ideological

discourse of antiracism. The actualities of children's interaction become a subject of surveillance under the gaze of the state's antiracist lens.

Three implications of this study emerge. First, it is easy to problematize the children's world and impose a social control on it. The way to see the children's world can always be problematic if we see it through the adults' ideological lens. However, to decide what is to be problematized, we cannot ignore the fact that children may have a different world that needs to be respected. It is, therefore, important to engage the children in the process; their motive and understanding of racist acts should be understood from their own perspective. Education is the key for preventing racist behaviors and attitude.

Second, social workers and other social service practitioners all intend to do good, especially in relationship to our clients. As a profession with a mandate of social justice, it will be inconceivable for any social work practitioners to object to our role in combating racism. Nonetheless, if there is no homogenous understanding of antiracism, it is essential that we critically question the political implications of government policies that we are bounded by and implementing. The hegemonic nature of the state-controlled discourse of antiracism requires a critical mind to detect. The "liberal retreat" nature of the governmental discourse of antiracism is problematic (Gilroy, 1999; Steinberg, 1997). It ignores the power imbalance status quo and tends to conflate multiculturalism and antiracism. As Margolin (1997) reminds us, under the cover of kindness, with our inherent controlling nature, social work may turn good will into the opposite.

Third, to deconstruct has become a powerful analytic paradigm in postmodern welfare (Leonard, 1997). There are many ways to deconstruct the taken-for-granted conditions in which social work is practiced. Institutional ethnography offers a sociological tool for us to deconstruct one of the major unquestioned conditions of social work practice, i.e., textually mediated social organization. Policies, procedures, forms, and recordings are important to social work practice particularly in an era that so emphasizes legal accountability. To be accountable, it is important for social workers to follow policies and guidelines and to document our work. Zimmerman (1969), in his classic study,

however, demonstrates how social workers reinforce a stigmatization process embedded in the intake process through documentation. Therefore, while being accountable, social workers need to beware of their institutional role in the formulation of governmental ideological circle, which is tightly knit into the textual process. To break the circle, we need to understand it. As demonstrated in this study, with its emphasis on understanding textually mediated social relations, institutional ethnography is an effective tool for social workers to understand, evaluate and emancipate from the web of ideological control. As Yan (1998) argues, as autonomous professionals, social workers always have institutional space in the social policy process to modify policies to benefit our clients. Such optimistic view is possible only if social workers can critically understand where they are located in the ideological circle dominated by governmental discourse.

Reference

Bulmer, M., & Solomos, J. (Eds.). (1999). *Racism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Gilroy, P. (1999). The end of antiracism. In M. Bulmer & J. Solomos (Eds.), *Racism* (pp. 242–250). Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Johnson, T. (1993). Expertise and the state. In M. Gane & T. Johnson (Eds.), *Foucault's New Domain* (1st ed., pp. 139–152). London: Routledge.

Leonard, P. (1997). *Postmodern Welfare*. London: SAGE.

Margolin, L. (1997). *Under The Cover of Kindness: The Invention of Social Work*. (1st ed.). Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia.

O'Neill, B. J. (1998). Institutional ethnography: Studying institutions from the margins. *Journal of Sociology and Social Welfare, XXV* (4), 127–144.

Payne, M. (1997). *Modern Social Work Theory* (2nd ed.). Chicago: Lyceum.

Popple, P. R. (1992). Social work: social function and moral purpose. In N. P. Reid & P. R. Popple (Eds.), *The Moral Purposes of Social Work: The Character and Intention of a Profession* (1st ed., pp. 141–154). Chicago: Nelson-Hall Publishers.

Smith, D. (1984). Textually mediated social organization. *Social Science Journal, 36* (1), 59–75.

Smith, D. (1999). *Writing the Social: Critique, Theory, and Investigation*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.

Smith, D. E. (1990). *The Conceptual Practices of Power*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.

Smith, G. W. (1995). Accessing treatments: Managing the AIDS epidemic in Ontario. In M. Campbell & A. Manicom (Eds.), *Experience, Knowledge, and Ruling Relations: Explorations in the Social Organization of Knowledge* (pp. 18–34). Toronto: University of Toronto Press.

Steinberg, S. (1997). The liberal retreat from race since the Civil Rights Act. In M. Guibernau & J. Rex (Eds.), *The Ethnicity Reader: Nationalism, Multiculturalism and Migration* (pp. 302–318). Malden, MA: Polity Press.

Yan, M. C. (1998). Towards a complete view of the social policy process: an integration of policy formulation and implementation. *Canadian Review of Social Policy, Winter 1998* (42), 37–53.

Zimmerman, D. H. (1969). Record-keeping and the intake process in a public welfare agency. In S. Wheeler (Ed.), *On record: Files and dossiers in American life* (pp. 319-354). New York, NY: Russell Sage Foundation.