“It’s ok if it’s hidden”: The discursive construction of everyday racism for refugees and asylum seekers in Wales

Abstract

Wales has a long history of migration, however the introduction of dispersed asylum seekers in 2001 has led to an increasingly superdiverse (Vertovec, 2007) nation with asylum seekers from 75 countries currently living in Wales (Home Office, 2016). Williams (2015) has suggested that Wales has often considered itself to be a ‘tolerant nation’ when compared to England but that the increasingly superdiverse nature of Wales in a UK post-devolution era may now be calling this tolerance thesis into question. Ager and Strang (2004) suggest that a key facilitator in refugee and asylum seeker integration is safety and stability and that incidents of racism play a key role here. Therefore, the research question addressed in the current paper is: how do refugees and asylum seekers living in Wales construct accounts of their experiences of racism? This paper reports the findings from a wider research project that centres on refugee and asylum seeker integration in Wales. 19 interviews were conducted with refugees and asylum seekers who had been living in Wales for between 1 month and 12 years. Each interview was analysed following a discursive psychology approach (Potter and Wetherell, 1987). Previous research from a discursive psychological perspective has shown that refugees and asylum seekers may play down incidents of racism in order to not appear ungrateful for the protection that they have received in their host country (e.g. Kirkwood et al. 2013, Goodman et al. 2013). In this paper, I demonstrate two ways in which interviewees constructed accounts of everyday racism (Essed, 1991) in Wales. Firstly, participants constructed accounts which were ‘not-racism’ by drawing on an interpretative repertoire (Potter and Wetherell, 1987) of a naughty child to explain the incidents which they had experienced as cultural ignorance. Secondly, I show how a number of participants constructed dilemmatic accounts in which ‘hidden’ racism, which they could ‘sense’, was accepted, but more overt forms of racism were, by contrast, seen as problematic for them. The findings not only call into question the ‘tolerant nation’ thesis but support Ager and Strang’s safety and stability domain as a key indicator of refugee and asylum seeker integration.

References


