

# The Denial of Racism

The Role of Humor, Personal Experience, and Self-Censorship

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*Informed by discursive psychology, this study aimed to identify and explicate those rhetorical maneuvers that function to introduce the issue of race into conversations in the presence of an interracial couple (the first two authors) in the "new South Africa" and to negotiate "race talk" in their presence while distancing the speaker from inferences of racism. Over a period of 2 months, conversations of people with whom the first two authors came into contact were tape-recorded in a variety of social settings without their knowledge. The study revealed that humor, personal experience, and self-censorship were rhetorical maneuvers drawn on extensively in conversations about race. Two possible reasons for this are suggested. First, the conversations involved the interracial, heterosexual couple and other persons of different races, rather than only White speakers, as in many previous studies. Second, unlike previous studies, conversations occurred in naturalistic settings and not in contrived settings.*

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