

[MUSIC PLAYING]

INTERVIEWER: Hi and welcome back to Student Connections. Well, you've just seen a video in which somebody mistakenly identifies somebody for somebody else. And I asked you to vote on this, but I wasn't very clear about how you should vote. And this is what I would like you to vote on.

Do you agree or disagree-- so you can see the interactive widget or interactive tool that comes up with a little scale on it. And I would like you to say whether you agree that this is a racist action. So do you think it was a racist one, in which case, agree with it. And if you don't, then disagree. And I'd be very interested in knowing your thoughts on that.

So I'm here in the studio with David Kaposi. We've just had a really interesting discussion about the psychology curriculum and here, I'm hoping we can do a bit of psychology. And of course, you're from the side of social psychology, aren't you, despite the fact that we were talking about not having all these dichotomous areas? But you're really interested in the social world and prejudice and racism and this sort of thing. So could you tell us a little bit about why you found this particular clip very interesting?

DAVID KAPOSI: I found it interesting because when you watch it, you will feel uncomfortable. I'm pretty sure everyone who watched it felt uncomfortable. But perhaps or sometimes, we express that by sort of laughing. We find it is hilarious. It's so funny. In fact, the guy, the anchorman, he was laughing, wasn't he? He found it really funny.

INTERVIEWER: A very nervous laugh.

DAVID KAPOSI: Well, yeah, it was a very nervous laugh. Yeah, that's the point. So he was laughing, but still, he was very uncomfortable and I think we all feel that. So when I first watched it, I was like, oops, what's going on here? And in a way, that's still how I feel about it. What's going on here? And I'm sort of trying to find out what's going on here.

And I feel that because we have that anxiety, the easiest way to sort of get rid of that anxiety is to ask the question, actually, is it racist or not? Because the moment we find the answer, we can stop being anxious. Or well, we can start being anxious about other things, but at least we have an answer. And I think this is a temptation which social psychologists perhaps-- it's useful sometimes to resist that temptation and not to find the answer immediately, but try to engage

with what I think is the complexity in this video.

And I think to even begin to answer the question whether it's racist or not, we have to acknowledge the complexity, which consists, for instance, of the speaker's intentions. Did the guy intend to be racist or not? I'd be inclined to think that he didn't. And that's obviously an important thing, whether you want to hurt people or not. It is important, isn't it? It's not all that there is, but it's important.

But then, we have another thing, which is the kind of feelings of the person on the receiving end. And it's fair to say that he did get hurt. He became angry. So that's again something we can't just say, oh, that's irrelevant. So there is that. So there is a mismatch. And then, of course, I think there is at least a third other element, which is the response on television. So there are all sorts of people watching it, all sorts of people who know that racist stereotype which has been enacted. Perhaps it had been enacted in their own life or in their parent's life. And we can assume that this act had hurt them, as well.

So I think it's a very complex issue. And our answer to the question whether it's racist or not will depend on which of these sort of viewpoints we prioritise. But I think it is very important to say that although the meaning of this act depends at least on these three things, possibly many others, as well, but it's important to see that it's not just a simple error. I think it's closer to something like sort of stumbling into something. And I guess the anchorman did stumble into a racist stereotype. Whether that's an act of racism or not is, I think, a slightly different question.

INTERVIEWER: So I hear that the people are sort of quite indecisive then about the widget. And I'm wondering if whether some of the things that you're saying, it may be swaying their opinion, because you're clearly saying, well, I'm not really sure. It's obviously a lot more complex than this. And so maybe in the Chat Box, you could tell us what you think the main issue is.

I remember when I watched that clip for the first time, I was thinking about the power dynamics and I was thinking actually, you're being really mean to this poor guy. He can't do anything. He's obviously surrounded by people. He's on live television. You're using your celebrity status to ram something home that maybe isn't kind or fair when, like you were saying, motivation is really important. So I remember when I was watching that.

So maybe in the chat, if you can let us know what you think some of those questions are--

maybe for you, it's not about race. Maybe it's about something else. So that will be very interesting. We'll feedback on all that in a minute. But I wanted to touch on this idea you mentioned about anxiety and about how asking a question and having an answer to it may then alleviate some anxiety around something.

And clearly, the question is racist. You're saying it could be any sort of question. Why in social psychology do you think that it's important to have that, to sort of shell that off and say, well, I can explain it in that way. Therefore, I don't need to worry about it. I can go be anxious about something else. Why is this aspect of anxiety important to you?

DAVID KAPOSI: Well, I think it's important to me because it's everywhere. And I think quite often, what we do is to try to get ride of that anxiety. And in fact, I think in this case, it's quite manifest because we all feel that anxiety when we watch this video. And that's why we really want an answer. Just give me that bloody answer. I think not necessarily verbalising, but I think there is that aspect. I think it sort of highlights what I think happens often in everyday life, that we are anxious so we try to find an answer.

And I think this is why often, social psychologists or other psychologists are sort of recruited as the expert people. We will tell people what to think so people, they won't have to be anxious about what to think, because thinking is quite anxiety-provoking, because it can--

INTERVIEWER: It can go in all sorts of places.

DAVID KAPOSI: Exactly. When you start thinking, when you start reflecting or thinking, in as much as you do your thinking, you don't really know where you will end up. And that quite anxiety-provoking, because on the train, I like to think that I'll end up in London. I don't want--

INTERVIEWER: And obviously as a social psychologist, you would, I guess, be complying with the group. So it would be less anxiety-provoking to comply with something that was the way the everyone saw it. So if we could sort of say, well, this is clearly racist and everyone would think so, we can alleviate that anxiety and move on to other things.

So I'm interested because I'm going to show you the results from the widget now, where we asked people whether or not they thought it was racist. And we're going to have a look at that and then I think we're going to have a look at it. Now, what we can see here is that we've got only a few people are agreeing and a lot of people are disagreeing. So 32 disagree with that statement, which may or may not be because we have primed them in some way, shape, or

form to think about it differently. How would you expect people to react to this?

DAVID KAPOSI: But I think part of the reason is that the reaction of Samuel L. Jackson is important, as well. And he's a bit arsey, isn't he? He becomes angry. He sort of slags off the--

INTERVIEWER: Anchorman, yeah--

DAVID KAPOSI: The anchorman. Yes. So I think what we feel about the situation is coloured by that, as well. It's also a kind of a judgement on the character. And perhaps we feel that he-- well, he's quite aggressive, actually, isn't he, Samuel L. Jackson? Samuel L. Jackson undercuts the anchorman nine times I think in the first couple of minutes. And undercutting someone is a very aggressive act. So I guess the fact that there are so many people who disagree with this statement might reflect on that.

INTERVIEWER: Yeah. HJ and Rachel, I'm going to come to you now and see if people have been saying some of the reasons about maybe why they voted the way they did or what they felt.

HJ: Yeah. Well, just picking up on the point that you just made, Rowena said that she agrees with you that Samuel L. Jackson made it into something that it wasn't and it was one of those things that could have just been dropped and he was going at it very aggressive.

But some people just think it's an honest mistake. That happens. We've mistaken people for other people. Some people, like me, are terrible with names and get people mixed up. But Ora thinks that as a person in that position, he shouldn't have got it mixed up and maybe that it was racist due to that. But yeah, a lot of interesting thoughts.

RACHEL: Cathy also questions whether Samuel L. Jackson's response and reaction shows he might have internalised racism himself. Another question-- another point whether definitions of racism and how those definitions are interpreted by the person who the act happens to. And then, we have a question here about, would there be racism if there were no sociologists? So there's a lot of debate going on here in the chat, quite different.

INTERVIEWER: Interesting. So this idea there are parameters-- what makes something a racist act? You mentioned motivation. What would you say then in terms of-- how do we define something as racist?

DAVID KAPOSI: I think these comments actually show, again, how complex this issue is. I think perhaps not all of them, but most of them were very intelligent and they are all pointing out very important

aspects of the problem. And I guess this video is so interesting because those aspects or those considerations sometimes go against each other. So like I said, yes, the motivation of the speaker is important but so is the perception of Samuel L. Jackson and all those other people who we can imagine watching it.

So I think motivation's important but it works on both sides. And well, I wonder what does it mean when we call it an honest mistake? Does it mean that he didn't intend it? Yes, perhaps, but does it also mean that he didn't hurt people? I think he did hurt people.

And I think that's the very tricky thing about racism. As long as racism belongs to Adolf Hitler or the Ku Klux Klan, where action and intention sort of matches each other, we don't have an intellectual or emotional problem with racism. We might have a political problem but emotionally, we don't have a problem. But we do have a problem when we can stumble onto racism, which might be what happened here.

And I think what's really tricky there is to be able to acknowledge that we hurt people unintentionally. I think that's very difficult to sort of entertain that tension between intention and act, that we can actually do things which will hurt people without intending it. It feels that for us humans, definitely around this room, it's difficult to acknowledge that we can hurt people if we don't intend it. So when they say they're hurt or when the act that they're hurt, our reaction is to say, but I didn't intend it.

INTERVIEWER: It's like saying, no offence. Well, actually, that often is a deliberate thing. No offence, but-- and then saying something offensive. So what do we do then as social psychologists when this is happening? What's interesting for you in times of studying that side of things? Because obviously, these actions are happening. They're very difficult to measure, very difficult to gauge in terms of the intentions and motivations, et cetera.

What makes that interesting for you to study and how do you then I guess make this into an academic or put it in an academic context. There's so much going on, so many issues. How do you clarify them? What's important, what isn't, and who means what and what the effect is?

DAVID KAPOSI: Well, I think one important and interesting issue is how difficult it is for us to keep both motivations as sort of valued and genuine and not to say either that well, that doesn't really matter or that that doesn't really matter. So I think that's quite an interesting issue. The other interesting issue here is the interaction itself and for instance, how social norms, social standards have an impact on this interaction, because I think another very important issue

here is that I think a taboo is being enacted sort of.

The guy stumbles into something and it becomes a kind of a hot potato. It happened. They can't pretend that it didn't happen, but they cannot quite name it. The word "racism" is nowhere near the studio and nowhere near the anchorman's apology on the internet. It cannot be named. So something happened, which all of them are aware, but they can't name it. And I think that adds to the tension, that yes, something happened but we can't really say what it is.

And I feel that that's a very important thing here that a social norm or taboo is enacted. So that's one way a social psychologist can come into these kind of interactions to see how certain social norms which either perhaps cannot even be named, which they are or they aren't aware of, how they have an impact on the interaction.

And it can also be interesting to look at the interaction in terms of how these two people are trying to argue for their own position. Clearly, the anchorman is trying to recategorise it as a mistake, as an honest mistake, and also Samuel L. Jackson's position as a kind of a hurt celebrity ego. And it's very different when you are hurt as a celebrity ego or when you are hurt as a member of an ethnic minority.

And I think that's partly also what's happening in the interaction, that the anchorman is trying to formulate what happened as if it was an honest mistake and as if Samuel L. Jackson is just a kind of big celebrity ego who was mistaken with another celebrity. So he's just throwing the-- what's that-- toys out of the pram?

INTERVIEWER: Oh, toys out of the pram, yes. Yes.

DAVID KAPOSI: Whereas Samuel L. Jackson is trying to formulate what happened as a kind of no, that was actually something more. He's trying to invoke racism, but he didn't say it and the other guy didn't say it.

INTERVIEWER: All very implicit.

DAVID KAPOSI: Yes and that's why I think it enacts a taboo, which I think is as much, if not more important, again, than simply answering the question of whether or not it's racist, because it sort of shows that this is an issue which is very, very difficult to talk about.

INTERVIEWER: No, absolutely. Well, let's see what everyone thinks at home. HJ and Rachel?

RACHEL: Loads of comments-- such difference of opinion. There's comments supporting about the celebrity status, as well, but we have two quite poignant points, one suggestion that it was a presenter who is incompetent and not racist and Cathy, which is quite an interesting point. Cathy thinks it's hard to recognise prejudices in ourselves. So I think that's quite an interesting point that adds to the discussion a little.

DAVID KAPOSI: Hmm.

INTERVIEWER: Hmm.

DAVID KAPOSI: Yeah, I think that's interesting. Is it possible even to recognise, genuinely recognise-- we can sort of regulate our self and say, well, I'm sorry. But really, is it possible at all to recognise prejudice in ourselves?

INTERVIEWER: And also, I think it's this thing that we were talking earlier about how we're so context-bound and you can't actually objectively look at anything. Everything is coming from a certain time and a place. We aren't machines. There will always be an element of subjectivity of our experiences and that will influence things. Indeed, cognitive psychology, they would argue that the way that we process things, we're more used to seeing similar things that we're familiar with. So our facial recognition processes will often recognise similar people compared to different people because this is the way that we process things.

So psychology has a lot to offer in terms of I guess different takes on all of this, but also that we are individuals and that's something to both be celebrated as well as not. But how much introspection, I guess, people can have in terms of knowing and acknowledging whether there is prejudice there and also what that then means-- like you were saying, motivation, if you're trying to hurt someone or if you aren't.

And if you do something-- this is almost bordering on the philosophical now, isn't it-- if you do something that'll hurt somebody, where is that responsibility lying?

DAVID KAPOSI: Yeah, exactly. I tend to border on the philosophy. Is it possible to acknowledge responsibility without acknowledging intention? Can we hurt someone without intending it? It is difficult. In theory, yes, of course, but it's very difficult to own that responsibility, where we feel that, well, I really just didn't intend it.

INTERVIEWER: No, exactly. Exactly. And I just sort of-- we're coming towards the end of the session and this has thrown up so many different things. And what I'd like to sort of conclude with is talking a bit

about social psychology and some of the methods that we use. You touched on the various ways that we might look at and construct the aspect of a problem that we would explore.

But say sitting there and sort of thinking how we develop this further-- you've talked about how we could define taboos, where that sort of bridges the gap between that and then maybe something that isn't a taboo. So having parameters and things like that, what other sorts of methods or ways would social psychologists go around investigating the world? Can you tell us a bit about some of those sorts of-- we've obviously got a lot of questions here, but how might we then sort of construct that into some sort of way of researching the world and adding to the bank of knowledge around that?

DAVID KAPOSI: Well, I tend to do qualitative research and I think I like that precisely because of this, because there are these sort of moments in the world. And you don't have that every day. It's not like you can count them and then, I don't know, do a t-test or something, because it's not very often that they happen. But at the same time, you still feel that it's really revealing, that it's very complex and it can sort of provide insight into so many areas of our social and personal world.

So I think qualitative methods and methods which sort of analyse human interaction-- discourse analysis for those who are familiar with the term-- they can be very useful, I think, to look at the relationships between sort of society and interaction and the mind.

INTERVIEWER: Excellent. So again, the sort of quality, looking at the experience of people. And you've mentioned discourse analysis is one way of I guess looking at texts and things and how words make sense.

And of course, if you are studying psychology and you do get to your project and want to focus on social psychology, there are lots of other methods that we can use, ethnography and grounded theory and all these sorts of various techniques that can be used to I guess provide a framework to look at something very complex and say, how can we look at that and how can we explore it?

And I think that's what appeals to so many people about social psychology is that there is this complexity. You could go off anywhere, but also that it's quite nice to be held in by something like discourse analysis, where then you have a framework and you can say, right, big as it is, I'm only approaching it like this. And I think that's the best of both worlds, isn't it?

DAVID KAPOSI: And the good news is that we are working on that module.

INTERVIEWER: Yes.

DAVID KAPOSI: Here, we can talk about it. So DDS 317, which I think we'll first be in presentation in 2017, October. And it's called "Advancing Social Psychology." It will be a core module in the social psychology clarification and optional in the BS in psychology.

And that's exactly what we are trying to do in that module, to look at sort of contemporary social and political problems and also to look at how social psychology can address those problems, because we feel that quite often, social psychology is the kind of, yeah, what Milgram did, what Zimbardo did. But we believe that social psychology is relevant. It can address relevant contemporary issues with contemporary methods.

INTERVIEWER: Absolutely. Well, thank you so much. That has been really, really interesting. David, thank you for coming along today and letting us all do some psychology. Hopefully, that's given you a flavour of some of the ways that we might look at some of these very common issues.

We're now going to break the live stream and have a short interval break. So if you do disconnect from us, just reconnect as you did before and we'll see you very soon. We're going to watch a short video, as well, during this little break, which is inside the comments. We saw Richard Heffernan earlier talking about his new module and he was involved in producing one of these programmes for television, which incidentally, a lot of OU academics are behind the scenes on.

So we'll see you back in five minutes and grab a cup of coffee. Don't forget to send us your selfies, #SCC15. We'll see you soon.

[MUSIC PLAYING]