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Paul C. Taylor, Linda Martín Alcoff, Luvell Anderson



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Stephanie Patridge

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JOKING ABOUT RACE AND ETHNICITY

Stephanie Patridge

What makes a racial or ethnic joke racist? Some might think that this very question relies on a confusion: jokes can't be racist, because they are a non-serious form of entertainment. When we tell or are amused by a joke, the thought goes, we are *only joking* (Connolly and Heydar 2005: 126). Two features of our practice of telling and being amused by jokes might be taken to support this thought. First, so-called racist jokes are sometimes told by members of the targeted group (e.g., Jewish folks tell Jew jokes, Polish folks tell "Polack" jokes, and African Americans tell black jokes). Second, we sometimes find jokes about racial or ethnic groups to which we don't belong funny, despite the fact that we don't believe that the joke's target is as the joke "says" it is. Consider, for example, the world's shortest joke: *Two Irishmen walk out of a pub*. Clearly, one needn't have any anti-Irish sentiment to find this joke funny. We need only be aware of a stereotype about Irish drinking habits to get the joke and find it funny.

Still, even the most stringent amoralist about jokes acknowledges that sometimes a joke isn't "just a joke" (Connolly and Heydar 2005). Our Irish joke, for example, might be told *because* the joker sees the Irish as a bunch of worthless drunks. Even worse, it might be told to an Irish youth in order to denigrate the youth because they are Irish. Most would agree that in cases like these the "joke" is racist as it is motivated by the joke teller's own personal racism, however we make sense of this, and it is made worse when it is deployed to harm. Observations like this might lead us to think that a particular joke-telling is racist just in case it is an expression of personal racism. In all other cases, a joke is just a joke.

Some philosophers of race will be attracted to a proposal like this because it relies on a conception of "racism" that is tied to an individual's actual attitudes (Garcia 2001) or beliefs (Appiah 1990). But, in our ordinary practice the term "racist" is applied in a more variable way by, particularly by those who are its victims, so as to include actions, social policies, and institutions when they operate to sustain and perpetuate racism (Blum 2002; Zack 1998). On this view, some actions are racist even though the agent is neither themselves racist, nor culpable for their action (indeed there need be no agent). Though I don't have space to argue the point here, I'm inclined to follow this more homely use of the term "racist" and include those activities, both personal and institutional, that perpetuate and sustain it among the things that we can properly call racist, and to reject a search for a univocal, reductive account of "racist" in favor of this more

variegated account. My first goal here is to think through the various conditions under which telling and being amused by a racial or ethnic joke meets our ordinary conception of an act's being racist. I first consider empirical evidence that supports the claim that some tellings of a racial or ethnic joke harms the joke's target. Then, I consider some evidence to support the common suspicion that sometimes our joking and being amused is an expression of implicit bias and so an expression of personal racism. Finally, I'll offer a justification for another common thought, that there are some racial and ethnic jokes that white people simply shouldn't tell because their telling is racist, which is independent of issues of personal racism and harm. In closing, I'll consider a pragmatic objection to the variegated and permissive account of "racist" that I rely on, namely that we should reserve the term "racist" for the most egregious of acts so as to better eliminate all racist activities.

Jokes That Harm

Some claim that jokes aimed at historically oppressed groups promote prejudice and pernicious forms of discrimination (Blum 2002: 20; Carroll 2014: 242). For example, since African Americans have been and continue to be subject to widespread and diverse forms of unjust racial discrimination, both personal and institutional, it stands to reason that jokes that target them will support, sustain, and perpetuate such discrimination. Though some deny our ability to substantiate such claims (Cohen 1999: 9), there is a growing body of literature that shows that sometimes racial and ethnic jokes have this effect. For example, a Canadian study found that subjects rated Newfoundlanders, who are typically stereotyped as "dumb, as significantly more inept, foolish, dim-witted, and slow" after they read a series of "Newfie" jokes (Mail et al. 1934). More recent studies show that jokes about women (Ford et al. 2004, 2008; Romero-Sanchez et al. 2010) increase discrimination in subjects who score high for anti-female prejudice. This same effect has been shown to hold for jokes about Muslims among those who score high for anti-Muslim prejudice (Ford et al. 2014). Researchers hypothesize that this effect holds for any group about which society has "ambivalent attitudes," because prejudice is becoming unacceptable. In the United States, this includes many racial and ethnic groups, as well as sexual and gender groups. When the relevant prejudice is in a state of becoming unacceptable, the thinking goes, those who score high for the relevant prejudice tend to self-censor and not act on their prejudice. And jokes seem to be distinctive here. Similar subjects who read an anti-Muslim statement, instead of a joke, demonstrate no increased willingness to discriminate against Muslims. Jokes have a distinctive power to release prejudice into action (Ford et al. 2014).

Though researchers caution that we should avoid inferring too much from this data, as they don't know how significant or long lasting the effect is, that the subject reads a joke alone in lab conditions seems to give us significant reason to be troubled by this phenomenon. Since humor is mostly enjoyed in groups, among those with whom we are comfortable enough to crack a joke, we might expect to find an even greater effect when the joke is told, say, in the pub among friends, rather than to ourselves in a lab. We might even find that the effect in these conditions holds for those who score lower for the relevant prejudice. Unfortunately, it isn't clear how we would design an experiment to test the effects of jokes in their natural habitat. The upshot of all of this is that we should avoid telling jokes that target certain racial and ethnic groups because

doing so runs the risk of harming members of the joke's targeted group by promoting discrimination against them. To the extent that it is likely that such jokes will issue in these sorts of racial or ethnic harms, telling them is racist. Still, it is clear that there is more work to be done here.

Joking to Ally

Some whites might agree with everything I have said thus far, yet insist that they sometimes tell racial and ethnic jokes that don't express their personal racism, and don't perpetuate it. For example, whites sometimes tell racial or ethnic jokes to members of the targeted group to signal that they are not racist; they are friends and allies. My white students, for example, report telling black jokes to their African American friends with just such an intention. Some philosophers, however, point out that such jokes are likely to offend (Blum 2002; Mills 1987; Phillips 1984; Rodriguez 2014) and that we have a standing moral obligation to avoid sensitive subjects that will offend others unless we have a good moral reason for so doing (Phillips 1984). I'm not so sure. While we do avoid causing others offense, I'm not sure that this is always a *moral* requirement. Standup comedians, for example, consistently offend. Do they do something immoral? I doubt it. I suspect that our standing requirement to avoid offending others is a requirement of etiquette that in some cases becomes a moral one. So, if we are to rely on "causing offense" as a central normative notion here, we'll want to know if these jokes offend in a way that makes them racist. Some have argued that these kinds of offenses are distinctive because they are particularly hard to shake off. Such jokes target individuals *qua* members of a group, which makes them less personal, and more alienating, frustrating, and demeaning. For this reason they are both more harmful than other kinds of denigration humor, and they harm individuals *qua* members of a racial or ethnic group (Mills 1987; Rodriguez 2014). So, this line of reasoning continues, joking about race and ethnicity in multiracial or ethnic contexts is racist because it "perpetuates and sustains racism."

Still, some might insist that even if we accept this line of reasoning, sometimes whites can be fairly sure that no one will be offended. For example, my white students report that their friends of color join in the racial and ethnic joke telling, and this supports their contention that there is no offense in *these* cases. This certainly seems possible. But, we should be cautious about these sorts of inferences as there are powerful disincentives to complaining about racial or ethnic jokes, particularly for those who are members of the targeted group. Such jokes place an offended target in one of two positions: either stop the fun and be a killjoy, or let it go and take the offense "willingly." If the target decides to cry foul, the joker is likely to respond by saying things like "come on, I'm only joking. You know I'm not racist." This shifts the critical burden back to the offended, thereby undermining the legitimacy of their offense by challenging that it is ill grounded. Once the target has been put on their heels by this, they are now responsible for providing a cogent moral justification for the offense that either accuses a friend of racism or demonstrates that the offense is warranted, say, by proving that the joke is racist even if the teller isn't. Those who are commonly the target of denigration humor, for example, members of oppressed racial, ethnic, sexual, and gender groups, know all too well the consequences of complaint, and no doubt, "joining in the fun" is often a calculated decision to "take the offense willingly"; it just isn't worth it. For

these reasons, this sort of joking often undermines the very bond that whites are trying to build. Hence, whites have fairly robust moral reasons to avoid telling racial and ethnic jokes in the presence of a member of the targeted group, as doing so may be racist. And, whatever reasons that whites might think that they have to tell such jokes—for example, it secures their status as allies—may very well be undercut (sometimes unbeknownst to them) as the joke backfires.

Still, even if the joke succeeds and no one is offended some empirical evidence suggests that jokes like this invoke stereotype threat. In one study, for example, blonde women scored lower on intelligence tests after having read a series of dumb blonde jokes (Seibt and Forster 2004) and it seems reasonable to think that a similar effect might hold for racial and ethnic jokes. Here again, however, it isn't clear how widespread or long-lasting the effect is. Still, since, whites cannot be sure that their friends of color are not offended or otherwise harmed by their racial and ethnic joking, they should avoid doing so because it might very well be racist.

Racial Jokes Without Malicious Will or Harm

Now, I'd like to set aside issues of personal racism and harm to ask a different question: are there some racial and ethnic jokes that white people shouldn't tell because it would be racist to do so irrespective of issues of personal racism and harm? To help see our way through this concern, consider the following guiding scenario: a group of white college students entertain each other by telling racial and ethnic jokes about groups to which they do not belong, including Hispanic jokes, African American jokes, and Jewish jokes. Further, consider that they honestly believe that they don't hold prejudicial attitudes toward any of the groups; they believe that they are just riffing on a theme. Moreover, though they think there is nothing wrong with entertaining each other in this way in principle, they would never tell *these sorts of jokes* in the presence of members of the targeted group because they honestly wouldn't want to hurt anyone. Are there resources to support the thought that their telling and being amused by these jokes in this context is racist?

Some might worry that my guiding scenario is at worst impossible and at best highly implausible, because in order to find racial and ethnic jokes funny at all, one must hold the relevant stereotype (de Sousa 1987; Bergmann 1986; Rodriguez 2014). But, our Irish joke suggests that in at least some cases one need only be aware that there is such a stereotype to find a joke funny. And, given that members of the targeted group seem to tell the very same jokes as a genuine expression of irony (Carroll 2014: 242), it seems at least conceptually possible that our white colleagues could do so as well. Still, we should grant that the likelihood of this scenario is lessened given the well-established fact that we live in white supremacist culture that subjects us to implicit biases that reflect its pernicious, racio-ethnic, hierarchical norms. There is overwhelming scientific evidence to demonstrate that we are subject to such biases (see, for example, Kelly and Roedder 2008; Kirwan Institute 2013, 2014). Though they are not accessible to us through introspection, racial and ethnic biases have a measureable and significant impact on our beliefs, affective attitudes, reasoning, and actions. This, no doubt, adds significant weight to the inductive inference that our white students are doing more than just joking. That is, it seems reasonable to suspect, as no doubt many will, that *these* jokers find *these* particular jokes funny (at least partially) because they have implicit, negative

biases against the groups in question, and so what we have here probably isn't the good-natured fun that our white students think.

Little work has been done on the relationship between implicit biases and jokes. However, one study shows that those who score high for implicit racial bias against African Americans laugh harder at jokes about African Americans when told by a white comedian than those who scored lower for such bias (Lynch 2010). Adding to this, there is striking empirical evidence that shows that our implicit biases affect our attitudes and behaviors in other play contexts, such as video games and other virtual activities (Correll et al. 2002, 2007; Eastwick and Gardner 2008; Sadler et al. 2012). Further, given that we acquire implicit biases from cultural cues and messages that we receive via an unconscious process, conjoined with our earlier evidence that suggested that jokes put us in a non-critical mindset (Ford et al. 2013), we might worry that this activity of joke telling, particularly as it is among colleagues, will operate to strengthen implicit biases. So, telling these jokes in this context, unbeknownst to the jokers, may very well be an expression of personal, implicit racism and it may serve to further perpetuate it. Again, more work needs to be done here.

Granting the important role that implicit bias and issues of harm will undoubtedly play in a further developed account of racist jokes, I'd like to return to the question that I articulated at the outset of this section: might the telling of racial and ethnic jokes in the guiding case be racist independent of any connection to personal racism (explicit or implicit) or any attendant harms? That is, might the telling and being amused by these jokes in this context simply be racist? I think that answering this question is important for two reasons. First, it provides a fuller accounting of the normative considerations in play when we joke about race and ethnicity; not only in the context of jokes, but in other contexts where one would be inclined to say things like "I'm only kidding." And, since it is at least *possible*, even if we think unlikely, that our colleagues don't hold the relevant stereotypes even implicitly (again, our Irish joke suggests this) and, even if we could be convinced that they don't have such biases, at the very least I think that we would still have significant reservations about these jokes. I'd like to know why. Second, tracing out this line of reasoning may have a pragmatic benefit. As psychological strategy for evading criticism, whites are likely to acknowledge the empirical evidence on implicit biases and harm, yet underestimate the possibility of harm in their case while over-estimating their own lack of bias and imperviousness to acquiring or strengthening them. *They* are only kidding, and *everyone* knows it. So, if we pursue the issue of racist jokes to reduce the practice, then as a practical matter we should ask whether there is an argument not based in personal racism or harm, as this will be more convincing to whites.

Are there such resources? Philosophers of humor have largely ignored this question. So, we'll have to look elsewhere for normative resources to justify our discomfort with a scenario like this one. One place we might look is to the work being done on slurs in the philosophy of language. For example, we might be inclined toward a kind of prohibitionism about jokes modeled on the work of Luvell Anderson and Ernie Lepore on racial slurs (Anderson and Lepore 2013). Following their lead, we might think that the telling and being amused by a racial or ethnic joke is racist just in case members of the targeted group would prohibit it. While there is a lot to like about a view like this, not the least of which is that it shifts the normative power to the target, I see two worries as it applies to jokes. First is a bad faith worry. We can imagine a group that

doesn't prohibit the relevant jokes because they have internalized pernicious, racialized messages about what kind of treatment is due to them. In a case like this, I doubt that we'd want to say that their mere failure to prohibit alters the fact that the jokes are racist. So, even if prohibitionism is on target, we'll still need more normative resources to capture a case like this. Second, we might worry that members of the targeted group aren't monolithic, and so it is hard to see what exactly is (or would be) prohibited by members of a group, particularly in joking contexts. Remember that some of my white students believe that they have permission, granted by their African American friends, to tell black jokes. And it is at least possible that they have such permission. But, I suspect there is still something to criticize here.

Ted Cohen suggests that these sorts of jokes bother us because they remind us that there are such stereotypes, which is something tragic (Cohen 1999: 80–81). On the basis of this, we might be inclined towards view of racial jokes modeled on the work of Elizabeth Camp on racial slurs (Camp 2013). Following her lead, we might think that the telling and being amused by a racial joke is racist just in case members of the joke telling group are made to “feel complicit in the speaker's way of thinking” (Camp 2013: 333). There is much to like about the resources we get from a view like Camp's, in particular it provides substantive moral reasons to avoid telling such jokes even if they are not told in the presence a member of the targeted group. But, it won't capture the joke-event that we consider here, as in our case no one is bothered. Our students' knowledge of the relevant stereotypes is the very presumption of their attempt at ironic joke telling; it is precisely what they find funny (or, so they claim).

On my view, what makes the telling of these jokes racist is that the activity expresses something like what Blum calls a public meaning (Blum 2002: 16–18), or what I have elsewhere called an incorrigible social meaning (Patridge 2011, 2013). Consider that our acts can be communicative: they can express or signal messages to others. These messages are *social* in that they come as a result of being deployed in a particular social world that has a particular social reality (both historical and current), so are local. They are *incorrigible* in that they cannot be altered by a mere act of will on our part, say by an attempt at ironic deployment. To help see this point, consider, an uncontroversial example, a person from the United States who gives the “A-Okay” gesture (when the index finger and the thumb form a closed circle) in Latin America—as Nixon mistakenly did in the '50s—not realizing that in this context its meaning is roughly that of giving someone the finger in the United States. Upon seeing this mistake, a friend might warn the clueless US citizen “don't do that here, it doesn't mean what you think it does.” The meaning of this gesture is socially local and incorrigible. I take this to point to be perfectly familiar.

The fact that some acts express an incorrigible social meaning might help us to see racism that we might otherwise not. To help us see these resources as they apply to race more clearly, let us consider an example that I have mentioned elsewhere: a political cartoon that simianizes Desmond Tutu in order to criticize him (2013). Such an image is properly interpreted as racist. Obviously there is nothing intrinsically wrong with representing humans in animal form. The image of Desmond Tutu is racist because the context in which it is deployed is one in which Africans, those of African descent, and other disempowered racial and ethnic groups have been systematically demeaned by representing them as monkeys. Were the artist to respond to such charges by claiming that she intended to slight Tutu only personally, not racially, the image would still express a

racist meaning because of the social context in which the image is deployed. The cartoon simply looks too much like images that have operated and continue to operate to systematically oppress those of African descent for this meaning to be resisted. So, we can reasonably say to the artist, “Look, I know you didn’t mean it. But, you shouldn’t depict people of color like that. It’s racist.”

How does this help us see the racism of our college students’ jokes? Well, like the image of Desmond Tutu, some racial jokes express an incorrigible social meaning that is racist. Consider, for example, that white supremacy has been historically maintained, in part, by stereotyping members of racial and ethnic minorities in ways that makes them the proper object of mocking and humiliation, for example, that Jews have big noses, that African Americans are prone to crime, and that Hispanics are lazy. Further, jokes that trade on these sorts of stereotypes have historically played a role in this subjugation: whites have told and continue to tell them as an expression of an attitude of racial superiority. And, these sorts of jokes have historically served to maintain a pernicious, racialized social hierarchy: those who are the proper target for denigration humor on the bottom, and those who are entitled to tell such jokes on the top. Joseph Boskin (1987) helpfully makes a similar point about the Sambo character. When members of a group that occupies a privileged social position on the racio-ethnic social hierarchy, that is, whites, tell racial and ethnic jokes about members of groups that occupy positions on the social hierarchy that make them in the words of Charles Mills “subpersons” (1998), that is, persons of color, then these sorts of historical, contextual facts are relevant for understanding what the joke expresses, means, or is about (Hornsby 2000: 89–91). Like the cartoon of Desmond Tutu and the A-Okay sign in Latin America, our white students’ jokes simply look too much like the perniciously told ones to not express a racist meaning.

Still, one might object that in the guiding case no one interprets the jokes in this way. While, in our A-Okay and cartoon of Desmond Tutu cases, individuals interpreted them as offensive (or, at the very least, warned that in public contexts they will be offensive). But, our jokers have, as it were, created a niche community where there is no one to interpret them as racist. Since, their jokes are not public in the relevant way; they are just jokes. This is, I think, a difficult challenge. Still, I don’t think that what the joke expresses necessarily hangs on how people in fact interpret it. An act can express something pernicious, even when no one involved realizes that it does. For example, a male boss patting a female employee on her rear end might express contempt for women in the workplace, and so be sexist, even if neither of them realizes it because they don’t have the conceptual repertoire of sexual harassment available to them (Hanslanger 2012). And, the case might be strengthened by considering our reactions to recent examples of white college students discovered in blackface. We find these sorts of activities offensive even though we often grant that the students don’t intend to express contempt for African Americans, that is, they are just joking in this sense, and they don’t have the requisite knowledge about the history of blackface to see why others would be offended (which they probably don’t). Still, their wearing of blackface for entertainment has an incorrigible social meaning because it is deployed in a friend group that is situated in a wider cultural context. This cultural context is one that includes that actual contingent, history of racial oppression perpetuated by white actors playing that part of black characters in offensive ways while wearing of black face. Like whites in blackface, whites ironically telling black jokes unintentionally express a racist message, and for this reason their jokes are racist.

While I think that the analogy with blackface is helpful to convince us that appealing to the incorrigible social meaning of an action can help us to see its racism, I also think that much more needs to be said about norms of interpretation to make the case more convincing. Specifically, we need to settle the question of what makes a meaning incorrigible rather than merely reasonable. If it is merely one among many reasonable interpretations, then it might be the case that our white colleges students' interpretation of their joking telling as ironic is also reasonable and hence, their joking isn't racist. I don't have space to fill this account fully, but elsewhere (2011) I have argued that it is the nature of the historical wrong, systemic historical racism, that requires us, due to obligations of sympathy and solidarity with its targets, to interpret the meaning thusly. But, we might follow Hanslanger in relying on what a "fully informed, rational judge" would say that the acts express (2012: 145). However, if we go this route, I'd argue that our ideal judge should have proper social and historical knowledge, and have a properly developed sense of empathy and sympathy with those who are the subject of the historical wrong at play. In fact, I might even argue that any ideal judge should be an actual embodied agent who has had the relevant lived experience of oppression, because this might be necessary to "see things aright." For the purposes of this essay, however, it is enough if we are convinced that the answer ultimately will center on the public or incorrigible social meaning of the telling of these jokes.

It is worth noting that the account that I provide is a socially contingent one that hinges on the particular socio-cultural history of how racial and ethnic groups have been systematically treated in a particular cultural context. But, it also hinges on the current socio-cultural status of a group in a given cultural context. This second feature helps to explain why we see a loosening of moral constraints on some ethnic jokes. In the United States, for example, the Irish have been subjected to pernicious forms of racism. One stereotype that has been deployed against the Irish is that they are a bunch of worthless drunks. However, in the United States the Irish have managed to shift their status from sub-human to human—they are often treated as paradigmatic instances of whiteness. This explains why our "world's shortest joke" seems much less offensive than a similar joke would be if told about, say, Mexicans. It invokes only a historical concern, not a current one. Though, of course, things might be different elsewhere, say, in England.

Appealing to the incorrigible social meaning of some jokes gains further support by the fact that it can make sense of the confusing features of racial and ethnic jokes that I mentioned at the outset of this essay. First, such jokes seem to lose their offensiveness when told by members of the targeted group. When a Mexican tells an anti-Mexican joke, it seems more reasonable to interpret the joke as ironic because the joking event looks sufficiently dissimilar from the historical act of joke telling as a tool of oppression as it is told by a member of the group that the joke targets. Second, it can make sense of the shifting norms around ethnic and racial jokes, as the offensiveness is set in part by considering both the actual history of how racio-ethnic denigration has played out in the a particular culture, and the current status of such groups. The same racial joke might be racist in one time period, and not another. Third, it can explain why a joke is offensive in one cultural context but not in another: telling our Irish joke in a bar in London carries with it a different, likely pernicious, incorrigible social meaning. Fourth, it can help explain why it is that sympathy seems required in some cases, but not in others. Sympathy is required with those who are currently subject to denigrating racial

and ethnic stereotypes; it isn't required for those for whom the relevant racial or ethnic stereotype, even if held, doesn't serve as a tool for racial or ethnic denigration. Fifth, it helps to explain why racial and ethnic jokes are seen as more offensive than other types of denigration humor (though, of course, some non-racial tokens of denigration humor might be similarly offensive). Unlike some racial and ethnic jokes, ordinary instances of denigration humor, say when our friend makes fun of us for being overly analytical, and other types of offensive humor, like dead baby jokes, don't express offensive incorrigible social meanings.

Culpability

In this section, I'd like to pursue the question of culpability that I've largely avoided throughout this chapter. Let us consider the white college students. Have they inadvertently done something racist that, like our friend in Latin America, they are not culpable for? Or, like Nixon, do we think that they are culpably ignorant? I think that our white college students are morally insensitive to the incorrigible social meaning of their jokes, and their insensitivity is due to what Charles Mills calls "white racial blindness," a privileged, but defective, epistemic position that is partly, or even mainly, responsible for the continued perpetuation of white supremacy (2011). This is a feature of our shared, social life that whites have a substantive moral obligation to know about. So, our white students are guilty of a particular kind of moral obliviousness—white racial blindness—that renders them culpably ignorant to both the meaning of their jokes and their respective obligation to not entertain one another in this way. For this reason, our white students exhibit a culpable failure of sympathy and solidarity with the targets of their jokes, targets who know all too well what those jokes signify. A similar story might be told about at least some of the claims about the harm that racial and ethnic jokes can cause that I've considered here.

In light of the considerations I've laid out here, I think that we should follow Ronald de Sousa in identifying some jokes as default-racist (1987), and so reject Noël Carroll's claim that jokes, conceived of as types, lack evaluative properties (2014). In a particular socio-cultural context an otherwise racial joke has an incorrigible social meaning and so the telling of and being amused by it will generally express a racist viewpoint, except in cases where the joke is told ironically by a member of the group that the joke targets (though, even in these cases, bad faith worries loom). This is independent of the particular psychological facts of the jokers. So, some jokes are default-racist in that the telling and being amused by them in a particular socio-cultural context, except in certain narrowly prescribed circumstances, is racist and should be avoided. Further, as I have argued, whites are generally culpable for their failures in this regard.

On Being Racist and Being Racially Insensitive

In closing, I'd like to consider a pragmatic challenge to my acceptance of our variegated and permissive practice of the application of the term "racist." Some will be unhappy with calling many of the activities that I focus on here "racist," as they want to reserve this judgment for more egregious acts (Blum 2002; Anderson 2015). A more permissive use of the term, the practical challenge goes, will undermine our attempts to eliminate racism and white supremacy, and to achieve racial and ethnic justice. But, I think that

we should be cautious about concluding too much by retreating to the lesser charge of racial insensitivity. To the extent that racial insensitivity renders one unable to be a racial ally, and serves to perpetuate, reinforce, and reflect white supremacy, I think that being racially insensitive just is a way of being racist. And, I think that for any of the joking events that I've considered here, we'd do better to say "hey, knock it off, those jokes are racist" than "hey, knock it off, those jokes are racially insensitive." I think is so in part because the worry that we currently face, at least in the United States, is not the undermining of the force of the term "racist" as Blum suggests, but the thought that we are post-racial (Shelby 2003: 125) and so we should all just lighten up about racial and ethnic jokes. But, I agree that if calling acts that are not an expression of personal racism racially insensitive is better able to achieve the dismantling of white supremacy, then I'm for it. If it isn't, then I'm not. I suspect that it isn't. Further, for those who reject the notion of "racist" that undergirds this chapter for what we might call meta-physical reasons, that is, the account is false, there is still something to be gained by attending to the normative resources that I set out in this chapter as they are morally salient and so relevant for thinking about the normativity of racial and ethnic jokes.

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