

Number 2/2015

ISSN 2382-2228

THESES

REVIEW SERIES



**The Manifestation of Race
in Everyday Communication
Interactions in New Zealand**



Reviewed by
Donna Henson

ePress



THESES REVIEW SERIES 2/2015

Thesis Review: The Manifestation of Race in Everyday Communication Interactions in New Zealand by E. Revell

By Donna Henson



Thesis Review: *The Manifestation of Race in Everyday Communication Interactions in New Zealand* by E. Revell by Donna Henson, is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International License.

This publication may be cited as:

Henson, D. (2015). Thesis review: The manifestation of race in everyday communication interactions in New Zealand by E. Revell [Review of the Thesis *The manifestation of race in everyday communication interactions in New Zealand* by E. Revell]. ePress Theses Review Series (2). Auckland, New Zealand: ePress Unitec. Retrieved from <http://www.unitec.ac.nz/ePress/>

About this series:

Unitec ePress periodically features overviews of recently completed, unpublished postgraduate research in a wide variety of disciplines. Reviews provide a summary of the author's main arguments, the conceptual and theoretical framework in which the author operates, and the main source bases for his or her research. The reviews also assess how the research will advance or challenge our understanding of major issues in the field. All papers are blind reviewed. For more papers in this series please visit: <http://www.unitec.ac.nz/ePress/index.php/category/publications/theses-reviews/>

Cover design by Penny Thomson

Contact:

epress@unitec.ac.nz
www.unitec.ac.nz/ePress/
Unitec Institute of Technology
Private Bag 92025, Victoria Street West
Auckland 1142
New Zealand

ISSN 2382-2228

THESIS REVIEW

The Manifestation of Race in Everyday Communication Interactions in New Zealand by Elizabeth S. Revell

Unpublished thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of International Communication

Permanent link to Research Bank version:
<http://hdl.handle.net/10652/2064>

Reviewer Author

Donna Henson
Assistant Professor in Communication
Bond University, Australia

Tami Spry (2001) describes a good autoethnography as a provocative weaving of theory and story. In this rather non-traditional thesis, Elizabeth Revell accomplishes just that. This thesis presents an interesting and thoughtful autoethnographic inquiry into the manifestation of race in everyday communication interactions in New Zealand. An uncommon choice of both topic and method in the local communication disciplinary context, Revell presents a partial collaborative autoethnographic approach to the study that entails the reflexive analysis of qualitative data drawn from solicited participant diaries, semi-structured interviews and focus groups. The resultant thesis presents a methodologically compelling and theoretically significant contribution to the field of communication research generally, and the discussion of race in the local context specifically.

From the very beginning, the author shows a confident and imaginative use of her chosen research method. The vignette technique employed throughout the thesis proves an effective means of transitioning between the narrative elements derived from the data and the more traditional qualitative analysis that advances formal knowledge as we (academically) know it. This layering of traditional inquiry with the more personal autoethnographic voice, and the reflections and stories of the lived experiences of both Revell and her nine co-participants serves to story the study into significance. Positioning the thesis between the evocative and analytical extremes of autoethnographic research (see Holman Jones, Adams, & Ellis,

2013 for a recent review), and by pre-empting the more traditional critique of such 'experimental' work, Revell has managed to explicitly validate the chosen approach and mark the work as a unique contribution to the literature.

The thesis is notable for the author's meticulous attention to detail. Revell's self-described tendencies towards comprehensiveness and perfectionism (p. 95) are demonstrably advantageous in this respect and serve her well as she navigates the intricacies inevitable to a discussion of race in the bicultural, multicultural context of everyday Auckland. The layered accounting of participant positionalities and emergent themes is effectively accomplished, and subsequent discussion and analysis of these emerging themes embodies a sophisticated capability in terms of the 'craft' of research. Integrating personal reflection into the analytical narrative is no easy task, particularly given the sensitivities of the topic, yet the researcher generally realises this in a manner that is both empathetic and engaging. Revell further navigates the complexities of the framing literature in a manner that is both coherent and inclusive, with theoretical and conceptual influences ranging from critical theories of race to social constructionism and the social psychology of contemporary racism.

Rather paradoxically, in answering her main research question regarding the manifestation of race in everyday communication interactions in New Zealand (or, more accurately, Auckland), Revell observes the extent to which race is deemed a taboo topic in public New Zealand contexts. In disrupting this insidious silencing herself, Revell's stated intention is to contribute to a broader critical conversation that potentiates the breaking down of "divisive racial walls by understanding the socially reproductive processes that create them" (p. 31). Toward this end, this thesis contributes significantly to the discussion by identifying a variety of ways in which subtle racism is manifested and socially legitimated in everyday interaction.

The consequence of this work centres on the conclusion that “because of the subtlety and variedness of the everyday manifestation of race, racism becomes insidious in New Zealand, making it difficult to identify and challenge” (p. 221). She describes overt racism as akin to “social suicide” for the young, educated, middle-class Auckland demographic, yet simultaneously reveals the pervasiveness of unconscious and internalised racism as New Zealanders negotiate their experience of everyday diversity. Ultimately, the real strength of this thesis lies not only in the quality of the scholarship and its identification of the subtle manifestations of race in the

everyday context, which remain unquestionable, but also in the inevitable engagement with the topic that it necessitates on the part of the reader. Irrespective of the positionality of the individual reader on the issue of race in New Zealand, the authenticity of the author’s experience and that of her co-participants, as told through story *and* theory in this remarkable thesis, compels personal reflection on the issue and invites one into the broader conversation. And *that*, is what makes for a good autoethnography.

References

- Holman Jones, S., Adams, T. E., & Ellis, C. (2013) *Handbook of Autoethnography*. Walnut Creek, CA: Left Coast Press.
- Spry, T. (2001). Performing autoethnography: An embodied methodological praxis. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 7 (6), 706-732.

Review Author bio:

Dr Donna Henson is an Assistant Professor in Communication at Bond University on the Gold Coast, Queensland, Australia. Donna's research interests centre on communication with a focus on autoethnography, narrative, and close relationships. Additional interests include meaning-making, rumination, gender communication and emotion. Her current work tends to employ autoethnographic methods, and reflects a general interest in narrative writing and storytelling as methods of inquiry. Trained in quantitative and qualitative methods, her research is both interdisciplinary and methodologically diverse. Irrespective of topic, she maintains an interest in and enthusiasm for understanding lived communicative experience.

Contact: dhenson@bond.edu.au

Thesis Author bio:

Elizabeth Revell (nee King) moved to Germany for her European OE after graduating from Unitec in 2013 with her Master of International Communication. Since then she has worked in a number of roles in language coaching, strategic business research and e-commerce. Her enthusiasm for communication issues and qualitative social reflection prevail in her general interest in observing the world around her. She currently lives and works in Berlin.

Contact: elizabeth.s.revell@gmail.com