

What is White Privilege and How Does it Affect Racism
Toward Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander People?

Submitted by

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Statement of Authorship

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

<i>ABSTRACT.....</i>	<i>6</i>
<i>CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION.....</i>	<i>8</i>
<i>Declaring Positionality</i>	<i>10</i>
<i>White Australia has a Black History.....</i>	<i>13</i>
<i>Colonisation and Racism</i>	<i>14</i>
<i>Research Aims.....</i>	<i>16</i>
<i>Methodology.....</i>	<i>17</i>
<i>Ethics</i>	<i>18</i>
<i>Recruitment.....</i>	<i>18</i>
<i>Participants.....</i>	<i>19</i>
<i>Question Design</i>	<i>19</i>
<i>Interview Process</i>	<i>20</i>
<i>Data Analysis.....</i>	<i>21</i>
<i>CHAPTER: 2 WHITENESS</i>	<i>23</i>
<i>The Social Construction of Whiteness</i>	<i>23</i>
<i>Construction of Culture</i>	<i>26</i>
<i>Spatial Segregation</i>	<i>28</i>
<i>White Privilege and White Fragility.....</i>	<i>31</i>
<i>CHAPTER 3: INVISIBILITY OF WHITENESS</i>	<i>35</i>
<i>Invisibility.....</i>	<i>38</i>

<i>Structural visibility of whiteness.....</i>	<i>39</i>
<i>The Australian flag</i>	<i>40</i>
<i>Invisibility through Silence.....</i>	<i>41</i>
<i>The Media.....</i>	<i>43</i>
<i>Government and Institutional Discrimination</i>	<i>44</i>
<i>Government Paternalism</i>	<i>47</i>
<i>White History Hides Structural Racism.....</i>	<i>48</i>
<i>The Role of Denial</i>	<i>53</i>
<i>From Racism to Harmony – The Introduction of Multiculturalism</i>	<i>54</i>
<i>CHAPTER 5: REPRESENTATION IN THE MEDIA</i>	<i>57</i>
<i>Media Ownership in Australia.....</i>	<i>58</i>
<i>All News Media</i>	<i>59</i>
<i>Print Media.....</i>	<i>60</i>
<i>One Sided Reporting.....</i>	<i>60</i>
<i>Television Media.....</i>	<i>61</i>
<i>Cartoons</i>	<i>63</i>
<i>Women’s and Lifestyle Magazines.....</i>	<i>66</i>
<i>Film.....</i>	<i>67</i>
<i>CHAPTER 6: WHITE PRIVILEGE, WHITE FRAGILITY.....</i>	<i>69</i>
<i>Individual White Privilege</i>	<i>69</i>
<i>Individual White Fragility</i>	<i>70</i>

<i>National White Fragility</i>	71
<i>Development of Beliefs</i>	73
<i>Ambivalence</i>	76
<i>Cultural ignorance</i>	77
CONCLUSION.....	80
REFERENCES	85

ABSTRACT

This paper examines the role of individual white superiority and privilege in the continuation of racism toward Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander people in Australia.

White superiority and structural racism were introduced into Australia with colonisation and have been sustained to the present day by successive governments. The role of structural racism and white privilege is denied nationally. This national silence perpetuates the invisibility this privilege affords white Australians, simply by being a member of being a member of the dominant white culture.

This examination focused on individual white Australians' unconscious racism and knowledge about white privilege in the (re)production of systemic racism. Nine white participants took part in this longitudinal ethnographic study: three males and five females, from inner urban Melbourne and West Gippsland in regional Victoria. The study involved two semi-structured interviews conducted six months apart. Interview analysis indicates that limited personal interaction between white study participants and Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander people has resulted in the spatial segregation of communities. Consequently, white Australians develop their understanding of Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander people from second-hand sources, mainly mainstream and online media. The findings also indicate that white Australians are ignorant of the structural privileges afforded them as a result of the dominance of a white culture. While individual privilege was acknowledged by most participants, the research question was able to ascertain that they associated this privilege with private school education or financial advantage rather than a comprehensive recognition of the disadvantage this brings to Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander people. The data shows that current perceptions of Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander people have been shaped by

two significant sources: white history as currently taught throughout the Australian education system and selective media reporting.

Unless and until white Australians develop the skills to talk about white privilege and are invested with the tools and the tolerance, they need to face uncomfortable truths, racism toward Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander people will continue in Australia unchecked and unchanged. These next chapters will examine the structure and the denial of individual white privilege and white fragility and its role in (re)producing racism toward Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander people.

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

'What is it you want

Whiteman?

What do you need from me?

You have taken my life

My culture

My dreams

You have leached the substance

Of love from my being

You have leached the substance

Of race from my loins

Why do you persist? ...

What do you seek?

Why do you destroy me

Whiteman?

Why do you destroy that

Which you cannot hope to understand' (Gilbert, 1979, p 48).

Aboriginal poet, activist, playwright and printmaker, Kevin Gilbert is speaking to the brutality, dispossession and disrespect Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander people have endured since white superiority and domination was embedded into this country as part of colonisation of this country.

The research question: *What is white privilege and how does it affect racism toward Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander people?* examines how the denial, white privilege, and white fragility influence, sustain and perpetuate individual beliefs currently held by white

Australians toward Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander people. White Australians were identified due to the potential for intergenerational connection to early settlers and the legacy of the White Australia Policy 1901 (NMA n.d.) and the benefits afforded them as members of the dominant culture of whiteness in Australia. White privilege in this thesis is defined as the liberties and advantages white Australians benefit from by being born white in a culture that advances white values and knowledge. White fragility is defined as the sensitive and defensive response to conversations or discussions about race and racism, as written about by DiAngelo (2021). DiAngelo is an American educator in Whiteness Studies and Critical Discourse Analysis with over 20 years' experience on issues of racial and social justice, exploring how whiteness is reproduced in everyday narratives. While her research is focused on white privilege and racism in America, many of her insights and critiques on white privilege and white fragility are replicated within an Australian context as a colonised country colonised by the British through the introduction of white superiority and privilege. Her insights influenced the question on white privilege and white fragility.

This question was also designed, based upon my experience of witnessing unconscious racism, a lack of connection to the structural benefits of white privilege and the general assumption that racism is an individual act or the actions of a small group of individuals. This assumption is consistent with public commentary and media reporting, which tend to focus on individual incidents involving Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander people whilst ignoring the counter analysis of systemic and structural racism and/or the role of white privilege. The results find the denial, invisibility and silence surrounding racism in the national discourse influences the attitudes of white Australians', and their recognition of the racism experienced by Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander people. These findings stress the need to find strategies that encourage conversations with white Australians about racial discrimination and the benefits of white privilege without triggering a defensive response. It

determines that until white Australians understand the impact of denial, silence and invisibility of structural racism and are prepared to turn their gaze towards the role of white privilege in perpetuating racism, structural disadvantage of Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander people cannot and will not change.

Declaring Positionality

This research was undertaken by a white Australian researcher within a university institution framed by settler colonisation on the unceded lands of the Bunurong/Boon Wurrung people of the Kulin Nation. As an auto-ethnographic researcher I incorporate my own experience as a white Australian influenced by the same social context as the participants and therefore must remain alert to my own unconscious bias and white ignorance. According to Madden (2017) researchers must remain alert to their own etic positionality and their assumptions that informs the research questions.

Whilst the results will be of interest to both Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islanders and white Australians, the focus of this examination is the intersection between white privilege, white fragility and the racism experienced by Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander people. Some language in the data may be viewed as confronting, however, it provides insight into the unconscious racism by white Australians, and the impact of invisible white privilege on individual beliefs and perceptions. This data highlights the importance of research that increases white Australians' understanding of white privilege and white fragility.

As white Australians, the researcher and the research participants have been subject to the historical denial and silencing of the brutal invasion and colonisation of this country. Simpson (as cited in Carlson, 2016) holds the position that for academics to be true allies "they must be willing to step outside of their privileged position and challenge research that conforms to the guidelines outlined by the colonial power structure and root their work in the

politics of decolonisation and anti-colonialism” (p. 501). In other words, academics must recognise, reflect on and account for their position and privilege.

The impetus for this inquiry arose from the many personal encounters with unconscious racism I experienced from well-intended white Australians over more than three decades. Drawing on my own auto ethnography I interrogated my journey in becoming conscious of my own racism. The turning point for me was when I first read about the massacres of the Aboriginal people in Lutruwita/Tasmania in the 1970s. This coincided with the release of a book by Dee Brown (1970), called *Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee*. This book described the displacement, relocation, and colonisation of the First Nations people in America's West by British colonisers. These histories on the impact of colonisation led me to question the history I had been taught and what I thought I knew about the colonisation across of this country. This sharpened my political sensibilities, then I learned about the Freedom Rides (AIATISIS, 1965), the Aboriginal Tent Embassy, (Reconciliation Australia, 1972) and other political actions led by Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander activists. The next significant period of understanding followed a move to the far north coast of New South Wales in the late 1980s. This was the first time I met an unexplained anxiety walking down the street toward visibly Aboriginal men, who were simply walking down the same street. It was many years before I understood that this anxiety was formed over decades via images of warriors and the representation of Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islanders people in the media. During this period, I commenced work in a women's emergency housing and began to hear the word 'racism' from colleagues, along with hearing and witnessing incidents of racism and discrimination toward by local Aboriginal people.

On returning to Melbourne in 2000 with this insight, I noticed the lack of knowledge about or concern among white Australians regarding racism experienced by Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander people. These white individuals were committed to social justice issues

and identified as non-racist. Yet they were disconnected from and/or in denial of the history of massacres and dispossession due to colonisation. Additionally, the issue of racism appears invisible in a large city compared to a regional town with a strong Aboriginal population. They were also ignorant and/or in denial about their individual white privilege and unconscious racism. Jungkunz (2011) observed:

Not only have there existed many dynamics that silence racial minorities regarding their experiences of racial oppression and contemporary forms of racism, but there have also been powerful silences among white subjects regarding their whiteness as power and privilege (Jungkunz, 2011, p. 4).

Reflecting on the development of my own understanding of racism, the individuals who self-identified to participate in this research would have viewed themselves as non-racist. However, the findings highlight the insidious ways in which white privilege is implicated in continuing the disadvantage and systemic racism towards Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander people. I now recognise and understand that I have been influenced by this national denial and silence and the inconspicuousness of white superiority in systemically and structurally maintaining racism. This is a national failing. As white Australians, we must challenge the national culture of denial and turn our gaze to our white privilege and our lack of awareness around our sense of white superiority to understand how to become not only non-racist but anti-racist. The distinction between non-racist and anti-racist, is illustrated by Bonilla-Silva (2014):

Being an antiracist begins with understanding the institutional nature of racial matters and accepting that all actors in a racialised society are affected materially (benefits or disadvantages) and ideologically by the racial structure (Bonilla-Silva, 2014, p. 12).

Over the past two years the national conversation about racism increased because of the Albanese Government's response to the Uluru Statement of the Heart, and the announcement of a referendum to include a voice to parliament for Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander people in the Australian Constitution. It is critical to note that the discourse during this time remained silent on the role of systemic and structural racism, white superiority, and white

privilege in Australia. It is this silence around whiteness and privilege that I seek to examine, and its invisibility.

White Australia has a Black History

The whitening of this country began with the violent and bloody invasion and colonisation by the British around two hundred and fifty years ago. The resultant racial dehumanisation of the country's Indigenous inhabitants and concurrent advancement of white superiority was then embedded in the 1901 Australian Constitution (Parliamentary Education Office & Australian Government Solicitor, n.d.), which identified Aboriginal people as flora and fauna. The advancement of white superiority was further institutionalised through the 1901 White Australia Policy (Parliamentary Education Office & Australian Government Solicitor, n.d.). These two documents were drafted by elite white colonialists from the then six self-governing colonies and approved by King Edward VII of England. The White Australia Policy, primarily aimed to restrict Chinese migration exposed the fear that non-white immigrants would threaten Australia's racially insular white society. The White Australia Policy was enforced until the end of World War II. This change occurred due to the need to increase the nation's population. Australia's restrictive racial policies had also become increasingly out of step with the more liberalised migration policies of the United States and Canada exerting a pressure on Australia to relax their migration policies (Tavan, 2004). Tavan (2004) notes that despite this international pressure, Australian bureaucrats and politicians were concerned that such changes would result in a white backlash. Even though Australia's immigration policies have evolved, Dunne et al. (2004) noted that the "White Australia Policy has had a lasting impact on the nation's social development and allowed the construction of a national white identity which excludes and marginalises different groups" (p. 418).

It was not until the 1970s that increasing migration and growing ethnic populations resulted in a new policy direction for Australia, multiculturalism. This new policy direction celebrated the richness brought by different ethnic communities, and promoted equality and participation across social, cultural, economic, and political life (Berman & Paradies, 2008). Lentin (2005) challenged this shift, arguing that the potentially liberating term culture and multiculturalism was harnessed with the aim of bypassing ‘race’ and the real effects of racism (p. 395). Berman & Paradies, (2016) further argued that in shifting the discourse towards culture instead of race, multiculturalism maintained the national silence on racism and further distanced the unique position of Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander people as the original inhabitants of this country, the First Nations people.

The repositioning of Australia’s immigration policy towards multiculturalism ignored systemic and structural racism in the Australian Constitution and the influence of the White Australian Policy on the national identity. In speaking to the racial legacy of this policy, Forrest & Dunn (2007) stated: “More than one-in-eight Australians believe in some form of racial supremacy” (p. 705).

Despite Australia’s black origin, 81% of the population now identify as having British or Australian British ancestry (Australian Bureau of Statistics, Census 2021). In contrast to the Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander population which is fewer than 4% of the population (Australian Bureau of Statistics, Census 2021). These figures represent the impact and the enormity of the impact of dispossession, genocide, and discrimination on the original inhabitants of Australia.

Colonisation and Racism

Colonisation in the Australian context is an act of white racial superiority. According to Lester (2022) “the colonisers believed in their superiority and enacted powers that ensured the white settlers were protected, benefited from free or cheap land and labour, and

maintained a superior status” (pp. 22-24). The colonisation of Australia achieved this outcome, with white settlers and their families protected and their wealth supported and maintained to the present day. In today's Australia, it is widely believed colonisation belongs to the past and that everyone has the same opportunities. Systemic racial discrimination has become increasingly invisible to the white cohort in this country. The 2022 Australian Reconciliation Barometer bi-annual survey challenges this reality. The survey of 532 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, and 1990 general community members across the country, found:

- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are disadvantaged today because of past race-based policies and Australia's colonial legacy, and notably, there has been an increase in the general public of those who strongly agree this is the case since 2022 (p. 87).
- First Nations Australians are increasingly indicating at least one experience of racial prejudice since 2014. While it is not possible to determine if this is due to more instances of racism occurring, or more awareness (for example, of subtle forms of racism), or simply more reporting of this happening, this has been a very unacceptable trend over the past eight years (p. 80).

Furthermore, since 2020, there has been a marked increase in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people witnessing most forms of race-based prejudice. Most notably, First Nations respondents have witnessed the following:

- refused service in a shop (33%), physical violence (35%) and verbal abuse (49%) than two years ago.
- 20% of First Nations respondents have experienced discrimination from healthcare staff in the past year, compared with only 5% of the general community (p. 86).
- Experienced racial discrimination recently from police (17%) and real estate agents (11%) than the general community. (p. 88).
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people more widely feel that 'white' people (typically colonial-descendants with Anglo-European heritage and values) have social and economic advantages throughout society in Australia (33%) because of their race or skin colour, compared with the general community (28%) (p. 90).

Further support of these racist attitudes in Australia were confirmed by Shirodkar (2018) via results from the implementation of the Implicit Association Test, which determined systemic racial discrimination. Shirodkar. (2018) found that “the bias against Indigenous Australians occurs without awareness of prejudice amongst the majority, meaning the bias is implicit, inherent and unacknowledged, seeping seamlessly into the everyday decision-making of societal actors, including those in positions of power” (p. 5). These findings are relevant, given this investigation aims to understand how attitudes held by white Australians toward Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander people are formed, recognised, and addressed.

Research Aims

This research aimed to critically examine the influence of white privilege and white fragility on unconscious bias and racism by white Australians toward Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander people. Specific attention was given to the influence of the national denial of racism, the legacy of the White Australia Policy, and conversations within white families around settler heritage and history. This thesis also examines the influence of a dominant white culture and the sanitised Australian histories of discovery/invasion and colonisation/settlement, and the role of media on the formation of white Australian beliefs about their place and privilege in Australian society. Unless these beliefs and unconscious biases are included in interrogations of racism, racism will remain denied and unchallenged. As DiAngelo (2021) observed:

In not thinking critically about our racial positions and how they shape our experiences, we do not develop skills for navigating a sensitive conversation, nor do we develop the emotional capacity to withstand the discomfort of the conversation (p 8).

Methodology

This inquiry aimed to explore the potentially sensitive topic of racist attitudes and unconscious biases held by white Australians, and how these influence individual attitudes and understanding of the racism experienced by Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander people.

A research methodology must be linked to the research question. Therefore, through careful consideration, ethnography was identified as the appropriate research method for this study. Ethnography is a qualitative research method that explores how people interpret their world. The interviews were conducted in a non-threatening conversational environment that allowed a flexible and responsive approach by the researcher, including observations of nuance. This project did not include long-term participant observation; however, it did involve participants being interviewed twice over a period of six months. As per standard ethnographic interviews, the interviews in this study included a set of base questions, reflexive practice, and transcribing and coding conversational data to identify the themes.

Spradley (1979) argued that ethnography is a process which allows the researcher to see the world through other people's eyes, thus gaining insight into their attitudes and beliefs. Ethnography provides the necessary informal environment for listening to participants and witnessing the formation of their beliefs. Madden (2017), in agreement with Spradley (1979), argues that ethnography is a valued qualitative social science research practice that involves talking, listening to, and observing people within their own cultural or societal location. In this study, the cultural and societal location is modern-day regional Victoria and inner urban Melbourne, Australia.

Reflexivity is a critical component of ethnography. Cunliffe (2003) observes reflexivity is perfectly integrated into the ethnographic methodology, and that critical reflexivity is revisiting to the data to reveal what is hidden, unconscious or invisible. Braun and Clarke (2012) argue that critical reflexivity is central to ensuring a research project's robust, ethical,

and moral framework. This occurs through the continual questioning of the researcher's existing assumptions and proving that the evidence comes from the data. Madden (2017) and Spradley (1979) identify the process of reflexivity as vital for a researcher to understand their relationship with the social world and how, as an individual, they understand this experience when conducting this type of research. Madden (2017) recognises that the researcher is not separate from either the research participants or the research subject. As a white Australian researcher who is the descendant of early Irish and Scottish settlers, and being from the same cohort as research participants, Madden's (2017) observation is pertinent to this study.

Ethnography requires the researcher to maintain a focus on the questions that brought them to the research in the first place, their 'etic'. This ethnographic term highlights the researchers understanding and bias they bring to the interpretation of the data. The further term 'emic' considered the experience of the researcher being both familiar with the topic but also an observer in the interviews. (Madden, 2017, p. 20). Inclusion of these practices was important in the project as the researcher is both a white Australian and the researcher. The analysis of the conversational data using thematic analysis was essential to support rigorous analysis.

Ethics

The proposal was developed under the supervision of Dr Raymond Madden and Professor Juile Andrews. The proposal was approved without any amendments.

Recruitment

Recruitment was undertaken through the production and distribution of flyers. The flyers invited white Anglo-Saxon/Anglo-Celtic Australians between the ages of eighteen and seventy-five to talk about white privilege, white fragility, and racism toward Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. The age range was set to allow for generational differences in

belief and attitude. White Australians were chosen due to my assumptions about potential generational links to settler families, inherited wealth and attitudes that may have been passed down through the family and as a consequence of the White Australia Policy. Flyers were distributed in metropolitan locations via the La Trobe University network, the inner-city northern library network, and several online newsletters. Regionally, flyers were distributed through several Bass Coast networks, Southwest Gippsland and Wonthaggi Libraries, and the Phillip Island Community Facebook page. The flyers were widely distributed throughout the university community to encourage responses across generations.

Participants

Nine participants responded to the flyer and consented to an interview. Six participants were female, and three were male. Seven respondents were older than sixty. I actively sought out a participant under forty years of age. Two of the respondents who had previous experience as a researcher responded to this rather than a specific interest in the research topic. There were no responses from the flyers distributed throughout the university network. The concentration of participants in the over-sixty age meant the data was limited in reflecting generational differences. The participants determined the interview location, and the length of their response to the questions determined the interview timeframe. The duration of most interviews was approximately one hour.

Question Design

The questions were formed in consultation with my supervisors, Dr Raymond Madden, and Professor Julie Andrews. Considerable thought was given to questions that would provide insight into white Australians' understanding of unconscious racism, white privilege and white fragility, and their knowledge of racism experienced by Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islanders. The participants agreed to two interviews with a six-month interval. It was

reasoned this study design would demonstrate whether the first interview triggered new insights or further conversations in the intervening six months. The interview questions were designed to deliver conversational responses. As such, they were exploratory and non-confrontational. All participants were asked the same questions, ensuring the data was comparable and analytically rigorous. The interview style enabled spontaneous questions and extended conversations to reveal, as observed by Madden (2017), relevant peripheral information.

The questions in the first interview explored the identification of Australian culture and participants' recognition of white as a socially constructed race; the identification of whiteness and privilege; and participants' knowledge of racism and discrimination experienced by Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander people. The starting point for the questions in the second interview was developed from the initial data. It included questions designed to reveal participants' unconscious bias and knowledge of Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander people and understanding of racism.

Interview Process

Participants were offered the opportunity to meet in person or online via Zoom. Five participants chose to be interviewed in their homes, two opted for Zoom, and two selected a café. All interviews were recorded, supporting a relaxed, conversational environment, enabling me to focus on their responses, spontaneously ask further questions and remain alert to nuances or discomfort elicited from the questions.

Spradley (1979) and Madden (2017) identified the imperative of asking questions in interviews, listening instead of talking, taking a passive role rather than an assertive role, expressing verbal interest in the other person and showing interest by eye contact and other nonverbal means. The interviews began with a friendly chat, which included clarifying the process and purpose of the inquiry. Each participant was sent an electronic copy of the

transcript of their first interview prior to the second interview. Most participants did not read their transcripts. Eight of the nine participants completed the second interview. The ninth participant, a female in paid work and raising young adults, did not respond to my follow up emails.

Data Analysis

Data analysis was undertaken via thematic analysis. This included transcribing interviews, coding conversations, identifying themes, and interrogating themes in relation to various academic theories. The initial assumption that the data from the first interviews would reveal a level of unconscious racism was not realised. However, even though the data from first interviews initially appeared unremarkable and did not meet the expected assumptions, it was rich with insight once my expectations shifted. Braun & Clarke (2021) and Cunliffe (2003) affirmed the value and rigour of this process. Once my initial assumptions were challenged, and I revisited the data afresh, I was able to identify the trio of themes that underpin the findings: silence, invisibility of white privilege and racism.

Analysis and Codes

Data analysis and coding involves the systemic process of working through the interview transcript of each conversation and identifying underlying themes. This systematic practice is essential in delivering accurate analysis of data, and the identifying themes in relation to academic theories. During the data coding process, I found revisiting the transcripts and re-listening to the interviews to be invaluable. Revisiting the data facilitated rigour in these research findings. The transparency of this process ensures the research can be repeated and either confirmed or challenged.

This chapter summarised the life experiences that brought me to this question. It explained why ethnography and thematic analysis were chosen for this inquiry and outlined the study

design. The following chapter develops the research findings and interrogates the theme of whiteness.

CHAPTER: 2 WHITENESS

Drawing on the research data and academic theories, this section will explore the relationship between the dominant culture of whiteness, and the attitudes held by white Australian toward the Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander population.

The colonisation of Australia resulted in the dispossession of the oldest living culture in the world and changed this country from a black nation to one dominated by white Anglo-Saxon Anglo-Celtic cultures and values. This included replacing the original land with towns and cities modelled on British Architecture, social structures, laws, values, monuments, and place names. According to Withers (2017), the culture of whiteness is conveyed through material objects and cultural practices and is spread through discourse and ideology emphasising material culture. It is through the construction of a society based on white values and aspirations that it becomes normalised, and in this its dominance becomes invisible or every day. (p.8) Richard Dyer (1997) writes about this dominance saying. "Whiteness takes up the position of being the ordinary, just the human race" (Dyer, 1997, p. 1).

The Social Construction of Whiteness

White society is constructed systemically and conveyed through material and cultural objects and practices. This results in the construction of an unequal racial hierarchy. This unequal hierarchy becomes normal and every day convincing a white nation and its population of the rightness of that culture, the cultural aspirations, and values. This racial dominance is acknowledged and analysed throughout academic institutions and theories of power, racism, invisibility, and denial. Withers (2017) argues "that whiteness as a system continually (re)produces itself through elements such as values, worldviews, and narratives,

normalising a culture of whiteness (p. 8). Moreton Robinson ((2004), in supporting the theory of normalisation, says, “whiteness continues to be enshrined and conveyed in curricula, television, films, newspapers, novels, museums, performing and visual arts, songs and other material cultural” (p. 79). Alison Ravenscroft (2014), an Australian academic, in her post-colonial study on whiteness along with Sarah Ahmed (2005), advance the argument of normalisation, and through that, its invisibility, saying it is hard to see whiteness; it is everywhere and nowhere, making it hard to define for those who are white. Frankenberg (2005) an American academic argues that “Whiteness as a cultural space is represented here as amorphous and indescribable, in contrast to a range of other identities marked by race, ethnicity, region and class” (p. 196). This normalcy and superiority become absorbed into the national discourse and its white population. The normalisation of whiteness was reflected in the data in response to the questions: *Do you see yourself as part of a race? Do you see yourself as part of a culture?*

Lisa, an artist living in regional Victoria, who had early in her career as a community worker in an Aboriginal community organisation, said:

“I think being white isn't a term that is really used, and being white Anglo is less used by white Australians, and we need to use it, and we need to own it, we need to define it”.

Deb an active member in her regional community said:

“Gosh, that's a hard question; well, Anglo-Celtic, if that's...I don't know, would French be Anglo-Celtic?”

Mike, retired and a member of the local Landcare group, said:

“Part of a race! Well, I suppose sort of, you know, white Australian”.

Pauline, an academic and member of an eco-village, said:

“Yes, I see myself as part of the human race, but obviously, I'm a white Australian woman with privilege...I don't like the term race; it's pejorative”.

Robert, a retired international food consultant and organic farmer in regional Gippsland, said:

"A race...I'd probably identify as Australian if someone were to ask me, but in a sense, I don't need to identify myself".

And as Renee, a strong, opinionated professional woman, said:

"White culture is aspirational; white people are so obsessed with their own superiority, with rules, like gender and things like that."

This normalcy and invisibility of race are supported by in these comments evidence by the fact that the respondents failed to connect with the need to identify themselves as part of a race other than Australian when completing the many different forms required for both statistical and administrative sources in Australia (ABS, Australian Standard Classification of Cultural and Ethnic Groups (ASCCEG)). This however is different for people from other racial or ethnic backgrounds who are familiar with responding to this classification request.

While the participants failed to recognise their own cultural group or race, they proudly identified their connection with people from other races or ethnic groups. It appeared this connection confirmed their status as non-racist however the racist nature and power of a dominance white culture continues to be invisible.

Robert: *"Well, we would cope because we have a lot of ethnic people in our family – there's not a hint of racism – there's a tendency to give them greater prominence." 'Look, I think the positives would...um, I would learn; I could certainly, I think probably...learn from them".*

Stratton (1998) in identifying the systemic construction of this dominance, in his writing argued that dominant values are expressed through and, most importantly, reproduced by a unified education system, print media including books and newspapers and the mass media" (p. 34). This position on the reproduction of these beliefs through the education curriculum was reflected in the data. The participants had almost no recall in learning about the impact of the invasion, massacres, dispossession, and colonisation from an Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander perspective.

William: *“Very little, it would have been a stereotypical thing...history books that barely cover the first paragraph...It wasn't until I got to university...I was taught by Geoffrey Blainey when he was writing about nomads”.*

Deb: *“Nothing*

The dominant culture of whiteness determines how a society functions and how history is taught which places white Australians history and values as dominant.

Construction of Culture

A nation's culture influences the population. Moreton-Robinson (2004) said “culture is an invisible regime of power that secures hegemony through discourse and has material effects in everyday life. (p. 75). Australia's cultural story is constructed through the accounts of heroic folk tales overcoming hardship and men's survival in a harsh, sunburnt country. This narrative has only recently been challenged. Our national story has whitewashed the brutality of the invasion on Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander people. Bain Attwood (2017), an Australian historian, claims, "Historical narratives play a vital role in ensuring that people feel that the nation to which they belong is a moral community and so worthy of their love" (p. 29). Like other colonised nations, Australia's national storytelling focused on the heroic journey of discovery by the settlers, overcoming the harsh environment and founding of new settlements. In the words of Attwood (2017),

they could tell a story by which the new nation acquired its legitimacy from the exemplary acts of those who had discovered the new land, founded a settlement, conquered the aboriginal people, or conciliated them (ideally by a treaty) (p.29).

In the national narrative, the history of Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander and oral storytelling were silenced. As Attwood said,

This dismembering of the nation's past was abetted by the fact that the Aboriginal people had been robbed of the cultural capital that was vital if they were to be able to make their story of pain and suffering heard in the national domain" (Attwood, 2017, p.39).

However, the 1960s and 1970s, brought a new breed of historians, such as Henry Renyolds who challenged the dominant white narrative and began telling and writing a different history, such as *The Other Side of the Frontier* (Renyolds 1981), *The Making of the Aborigines* (Attwood 1989) and *Why weren't we told?* (Renyolds 1999). These stories are now being told by Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander people through stage performance, dance, writing, photography, painting, music, protests, and films, creating a more truthful history for those who choose to see and listen.

Despite the emergence of this more truthful history, the dominant culture of whiteness and its invisibility prevails, again highlighted in the response to a question in the first interview: *What do you like most about or what do you particularly notice about Australian culture?* the participants said,

Deb: "We are a multicultural society...trying to define one culture in a multicultural society is inherently difficult".

Susan's response revealed her connection with the concept of Gondwana as a supercontinent (NRE Tasmania n.d.) She exclaimed:

"I like the opportunities we have to be generous in acknowledging the history of this place and the people that have formed this place, and so that starts for me in Gondwana.

Susan supports the local Aboriginal community and has worked in an Aboriginal community organisation early in her life which is reflected in this perspective.

Renee was clear and definite:

"Aspirational, judgemental...Australian culture is overlaid...shallow, poorly thought out, and it doesn't have sophisticated systems. It's also so dominant in our minds. It's like it's right there, so I can't explain it".

Fred a retired professional and committed to social justice and equality said:

"It's such a difficult question for me to directly answer; I can't say I like this or that really, who's included, who's excluded, what values does it speak to, that sort of stuff comes up in my mind".

Hannah:

"I find it really hard to describe a race or a culture, and I feel like I don't have something to ground myself to. I think that where there is that strong sense of culture, I think you do see it in a lot of Indigenous cultures".

Lisa:

"Oh.... that's such a hard question! What do I like most about it? I could tell you a lot of things I don't like about the culture. I don't like the...fierce male dominance of women particularly and the level of physical violence and coercive control...and the whole way in which federal and state politics is really dominated by men. What do I love? It's the way of life. I love the country, the countryside itself and the native fauna and flora and landscapes and the seascapes... and I like a certain quality of irreverence and playfulness, that larrikinism when it doesn't end up being ... some sort of sexist thing, which unfortunately it often does".

These varied responses indicate that the interpretation of is also individual, and the dominant culture is accepted and aligned with the argument of invisibility.

Spatial Segregation

The process of invading and settling this country involved the removal and segregation of the Aboriginal population, and towns and cities were developed based on proximity to resources, along with the needs and social status of the white colonisers. This segregation of s has continued to influence the developed of suburbs which are now identified by social status and ethnicity, making this seglregation normal. This segregation and the exclusion of others ensures it residents are not confronted by racial difference. This segregation also inhibits the potential fertilisation of friendships across racial boundaries. The data confirmed the effect of this segregation. Only one of the participants had connected with Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander people in adulthood. This lack of personal connection means individuals are not witness to incidents of racism and discrimination or actively seek out Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander stories and history. Eduardo Bonilla-Silva et al. (2006), in their article '*When Whites Flock Together: The Social Psychology of White Habitus*', highlighted that racial segregation occurs within the suburbs people choose to live, determined by the level of privilege and the dominant racial mix. They say of this self-selecting segregation, "White

habitus promotes racial isolation... maximises in-group interaction and minimises interaction with members of out-groups, tends to develop similar views about out-groups and strengthens the in-group sense of "solidarity- groupness" (Bonilla-Silva et al., 2006, p. 230).

When the participants spoke of their childhood suburbs, they said:

Susan, who grew up in a Melbourne suburb renowned for their golf courses and beaches, said,

"I grew up in the sand belt in Melbourne. So, I grew up in Chelsea, Edithvale, Chelsea Heights, Patterson Lakes, that sort of area".

In response to an additional question: *Did you have any contact with Aboriginal people when growing up?*

Deb said:

"No! I wouldn't have known one if I fell over them in the 1960s, Chadstone".

Withers (2017) said more educated and financially secure people selected more acceptable areas, and the less educated and poorer white families are usually relegated to different locations by the cost of housing or rent. Confirming this argument Deb who grew up in the Eastern suburbs and was aware of her privilege and private school education. said:

Deb:

"I've always been aware about my incredibly privileged place in this society, I've always known that".

Interestingly, Hunt et al. (2000, as cited in Bonilla-Silva et al., 2006) found that:

Little attention had been given to the impact of unacknowledged social segregation of communities and suburbs, finding the bulk of the sociological and social-psychological literature has remained curiously silent on this in regard to matters of racism (p. 230).

Phillips and Lowery's (2018) paper on 'Herd Invisibility: The Psychology of Racial Privilege' also agreed that limited attention has been given to exploring the influence of individuals' social networks and the understanding of their privilege. This lack of connection

is consistent with the data and my auto-ethnographic experience of witnessing individuals and committed non-racists, either dismissing or ignoring their white privilege. The segregation within suburb means the population can avoid any personal responsibility or the need for self-reflection, which according to behavioural research by Knowles & Lowery et al. (2014) found that individuals prefer to see themselves positively and protect their and their neighbours' innocence and privilege. (p. 159).

Roberts, a resident of regional Victoria, reflect this disconnection saying:

"Look, there's not a big, I mean...where we live here in south Gippsland, it's fairly white, there's not even a big Asian presence".

While social status still influences the choice of suburbs this race segregation enables the residents to either ignore or shut out uncomfortable situations because they do not impinge on their daily lives.

This segregation and lack of connection was evidenced in the findings in the response to the question in the second interview *Would you be happy to accept a friendship with an Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander person, or have an Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander person marry into the family?* These are a sample of the responses:

William: *"I wouldn't err, be too unhappy; I mean, it depends on the person. I'd be guessing to say a different expectation, but that could be anybody".*

Deb: *"Challenges... of course... I would be... I can't imagine any group that I would not be happy to be friends with, philosophically, yes – it would depend on the person".*

Gartner and Dovinda's (2005) study, which looked at the relationship between white people and people of colour in America, found that individuals who saw themselves as having a positive attitude toward people of colour and a desire to be 'good' non-racist white people still had a lack of awareness around their unconscious bias and negative attitudes (p. 625). The study found that the participants were more likely to convey mixed messages in their interaction with black or people of colour, resulting in the interaction being interpreted

with guardedness and underlying mistrust. It is also likely that these individuals would either dismiss or explain away these unconscious racist thoughts rather than recognise them for what they are. In addition, they found that the white participants' impression of their own friendliness was connected to how they interpreted their own racial attitudes and, therefore, how these would be received. Whites who reported that they were less prejudiced behaved in a more friendly manner during the interracial interaction, "however they missed the impact of their implicit and nonverbal behaviours" and "In contrast, when asked their impressions of how friendly the white person's behaviour toward them was, black partners judgments were predicted by the white person's nonverbal behaviour, not their verbal behaviour" (p. 625).

In this study, the participants saw themselves as very welcoming to Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander people, as either a friend or a member of their family. However, they failed to consider the experience of the racism and discrimination experienced by Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander people, and the racial barriers they faced accessing the same services or opportunities such as education, housing, health, and employment.

White Privilege and White Fragility

White privilege is the structural advantage available to white people simply by being born white and white fragility is the reaction by individuals to uncomfortable conversations about racism, privilege, and prejudice. Unfortunately, the examination of white privilege and its role in (re)producing racism has not received substantial academic focus in Australia. Significantly, the term white privilege and white fragility are not part of the common vernacular among the population.

While the participants were able to define the term white privilege once they heard it was not a term they commonly heard, and interestingly, one participant first heard it when studying for their PhD overseas.

Pauline: *"I was in Holland when I was doing my PhD... so I hadn't until that point heard of the term white privilege or white studies or any of these things".*
In response to the question: Have you heard of the term white privilege, and what does it mean to you?

Robert: *"Not until I saw it in the flyer... well, basically, if you're white, you get access to better conditions in society compared to other people who are not white".*

Susan: *"I do understand white privilege...my lay interpretation...because I am white...I know the dominant white culture is privileged purely because they are white".*

William: *"I haven't really heard that. Look, I think I've probably heard the words. What it means to me is that it's just...a case of control, and most of the laws are obviously made by white people. Most of the people in parliament...mainly whites.... The judiciary tends to be mainly, sort of white...even the police. You know, it's skewed towards certain whites. The power obviously sits with whites. There's obviously a power imbalance".*

Moreover, in response to the question: *Do you have privilege?*

William said: *"Yeah, because I'm white...I'd include myself in that because I've been given opportunities that non-whites probably wouldn't have had".*

Susan: *"Yes... it means my assumption is because I'm white ... sometimes I can actually recognise it in myself...white privilege...a transparent belief system, where you don't even realise that you have it as a belief; you just think that's how it is, but I'm because of who I am and how I look, and all of the richness of my family background and education and so forth".*

Deb: *"Well, yes, as I come back to the concept...I think we are a class society, and white people have more privileges, and white people expect more privileges, I think".*

While the term white privilege was self-explanatory, white fragility was not mentioned. In a recent group discussion with committed group of non-racist activists' privilege was seen as associated with private school education or home ownership which, is more linked to financial status and wealth rather than the everyday privileges of whiteness and white fragility was avoided. Despite their commitment to challenging racism they were not able to interrogate their own white privilege and the conversation quickly moved onto other actions such as art or volunteering in Aboriginal communities, rather than staying with their structural privilege or how the family may have achieved this wealth status. I would argue that this allows them to retain their non-racist status without any significant confrontation.

Deb: *"I mean, there are obviously inequities in white Australia, but white middle-class Australia is just so privileged. I guess I like the privilege ... we are a class society, and white people have more privileges, and white people expect more privileges, I think". "I wasn't born with the silver spoon in my mouth, I had the whole cutlery set in there".*

The question designed to explore the understanding of white fragility which was: *How would you feel if you were accused of making a racist comment?* resulted in these interesting comments:

Deb: *"I can't remember any, but again, I suspect if there was one...it would be in the context of something else happening. I come back to that mental health and drug abuse situation; I can't imagine just sitting on a park bench and an Aboriginal, who has no mental health or drug problems, walking up and abusing me".*

Sarah: *"I think I'm more armed for that these days but, having said that, I do let stuff slide sometimes, well because sometimes...it's not worth it with this person...it's often my own courage, rather than actually judging the situation and saying this isn't worth it or this isn't safe for me, and sometimes I feel like I don't necessarily have enough information to ... follow through with it, but I just know it's not right and I think I'm learning from that. But with sexism, I can talk to about it from my own experience, with racism and I can't, I can't talk about it from my own lived experience".*

William: *"I'm fairly confident that I'm not racist. I've been in situations where I've been virtually the only white person in a black environment. I think that if I made some comment...which wasn't, you know, 100% politically correct, but something which I felt...it wouldn't upset me because I'm quite comfortable in my skin. I don't feel that I'm sort of racist, I'm not going to lie. I feel I've got a fairly broad world view, and I mean, it's a very easy thing to slip into".*

These responses indicate that conversations about individual racism or prejudice are not every day, and therefore, the reactive response of white fragility was not clearly identified in this data. Most of the participants live in white suburbs and rarely, if at all, face a situation that challenges them, allowing them, like William too comfortably affirm a non-racist position. This position was also confirmed by their support of the arts, purchasing Aboriginal or Torres Strait art or donating to Aboriginal organisations, such as:

Deb: *"I've always been aware of how privileged (I am), which is why I've always given and donated a fair bit of money to different things".*

Alternatively, Pauline: *"I always go to Bangara performances or art exhibitions in Melbourne".*

Deb: *"I think the only way we'd see it here is in art, or I would come across it in art. I noticed yesterday they had done a new pedestrian crossing... it looks like they've got aboriginal art in the ground, you know ... the classic semi-circles and the dots, and I thought that was interesting, and that's the only way I'd see it here."*

Comments such as these are seen as confirming their nonracist status and reveals their ignorance of the racism experienced by Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islanders. DiAngelo (2018) argues this means that they fail to recognise the dominance of white socialisation. She further highlights that "not thinking critically about our racial positions shapes our experience and individually we don't develop the skills for navigating a conversation with someone from a different culture or the emotional capacity to withstand the discomfort." (p. 8).

One of the participants, Hannah, provided a different response,

Hannah: *"I can't quite remember the topic we were talking about, but my husband had said something...I can't quite remember...she made a bit of an arcane comment, insinuating that all Aboriginals are sort of criminals. My husband called her on it, and she said, "Well, you didn't grow up with them...I didn't at that time say anything, and the conversation moved on...I didn't know what to do, and I do think that, maybe, you know...I do have the luxury of having that privilege of being able to let it go". "I'm also aware that you can't challenge every single situation and is there value...but I do wonder if there was value in me saying something".*

Hannah identified the lack of confidence and how an aggressive response silenced her and her husband. She did recognise that her privilege enables her to walk away. Getting angry, defensive, resorting to tears of denial, or raising one's own challenging childhood experience are strategies that end a conversation (Saad, 2020, p. 42).

The theories and data support the argument that denial, normalisation and invisibility of whiteness influences white Australians' recognition and understanding of the systemic and structural racism experienced by Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander people. In the following chapter, I will develop and examine the invisibility of whiteness in more detail.

CHAPTER 3: INVISIBILITY OF WHITENESS

Whiteness in Australia, is now normal and every day, making the ongoing structural discrimination invisible in modern Australia if you are white. The invisibility of whiteness was one of the first themes to emerge in the coding of the data from the first interviews. This theme is consistent with the discipline of critical whiteness theory which analysis and defines how power is defined and maintained. In the context of this research critical whiteness theory provides some explanation as to why the invisibility of whiteness is the invisibility of racism and the failure to recognise how race and discrimination shapes the life of people of colour and in this instance Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander people.

The study of critical whiteness theory defines who is in power and how this power is maintained. In Australia there are many ways dominant white power and control is maintained, including the invisibility of discussion in the public arena. Whiteness in Australia defines who we are as a nation, who is in power and how this dominance impacts on discrimination and racism toward Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander population. Understanding how this power and control is maintained is critical to understanding racism in Australia.

Applebaum (2016) defines the aim of critical whiteness theory is to “reveal the invisible structures that produce and reproduce white supremacy and privilege”. She argues that until this invisibility is challenged, and white people learn to acknowledge whiteness and develop an understanding of how their privilege is complicit in maintaining racism, discrimination and disadvantage racism to non-white people will not change. (2016). Work by Ravula (2024) further supports critical race of whiteness theory as a tool with which to analyse its impact across a vast range of disciplines and experiences.

Therefor to understand racism in Australian like other white western countries the institutional nature of racism and its invisibility of whiteness and privilege must be considered. This included the lack of recognition regarding the benefits of whiteness and the different advantages for people other than white. (Bonilla-Silva. 2014 p.12)

Ravenscroft (2011) also argues that whiteness is structurally constructed to maintain the social and cultural power of the white population and embedded through systems and structures introduced as part of the colonisation of Australia making it elusive, normal, and invisible to white Australians. (Ravenscroft, 2004 2011 in Morten Robinson p 3). This normalisation and invisibility conceals the role whiteness plays in the (re)production of racism toward Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander people and people from other non-white ethnic cohorts.

This white social superiority embedded into systems, institutions, and the national story maintain the power, privilege, and wealth of white Australians. While not all white Australians have equal access to this power their whiteness provides benefits within their social class. (Sriprakash, et al. 2022)

This statement from Fred, one of the research participants, highlights his understanding of the benefits his whiteness has offered in his life%.

"I understand it in terms of what it has given me, coming from a farm, I haven't inherited much money, but by gosh I've inherited a place in life, security and stuff like that, so white privilege in a way is tied up with that, it means a lot more than that of course, but we have to be careful with it."

This belief in the superiority of whiteness is historically linked to global colonisation, specifically British colonisation which involved the dispossession of the original population, including stealing their lands for the benefit and wealth of the settler colonisers. Any change or challenges to this superiority creates a fear which can be expressed by racial discrimination

national and individual defensiveness which is expressed as white fragility. This phenomenon was witnessed during the 2023 Voice to Parliament referendum.

While Fred, one of the participants, was able to identify the benefits of white privilege in his life, most of the white population can find it hard to comprehend or know how to change this. This normalisation and invisibility of whiteness was revealed in the data when the participants were asked about their race. While this question could have been phrased differently, the participants response to the question *'What race do you identify as?'* indicates its invisibility.

William: *"The question is too open-ended".*

Deb: *"No. I see myself as having an ethnic background if you like. English, Irish, Scottish, and back beyond that to Germanic, I suppose, but no, not a race".*

Sarah: *"What does race mean – we are all one species...we are an eclectic bunch of conquerors who tramped around the world presuming the right to take over countries, cultures, and resources to decimate and destroy them. Does that make us a race - No! I do not think so!"*

Pauline: *"No! I don't like the term race, and I really object to it when it's used - race is a concept, it's something that's been manufactured... we are all part of the human race... race is used academically as a proxy for social class".*

Fred: *"Pejorative term – if you think about race, you are a racist".*

Susan: *"Unexamined part of their life'. 'Not a topic of conversation' 'of course racially white...Caucasian, but I tend to think of my heritage as English and Welsh, that sort of extraction, rather than think of myself as a race".*

These responses indicate a vague recognition about belong to a particular race, which is distinctly different for individuals from a different ethnic background or someone who identifies as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander. Individuals from a non-white ethnic background are more familiar with responding to the question on one race in the completion of the many different forms. This invisibility and failure to recognise English, Welsh Irish or Scottish as part of race was one of the first themes to emerge in the coding of the data from the first interviews.

Invisibility

The visual culture of a nation sends a silent yet strong message about the values and aspirations it aspires to. In Australia the culture of whiteness was introduced by the colonisers two hundred and fifty years ago. The introduction of this white culture was initially highly visible, however, today it is now the dominant culture and, in that dominance, invisible especially to white Australians. This change has been achieved by making and replacing sixty thousand years of Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander civilisation and with markers of European occupation. This has been achieved through the introduction of European style buildings, trees, gardens, and monuments along with renaming of areas including cities, towns and streets with names linked to British explorers and white heroic men. This action arrogantly trampled over the traditional markers of Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander life.

An example of this is the suburb Fitzroy, one of the first suburbs developed around 1839 on the land of the Woiwurrung people. This area is now lined with shops and cafes and to white eyes, its original history as a gathering place is invisible. (Aboriginal History Heritage Walking Trail). However, it is still known as a gathering place by Aboriginal people in Victoria and as a result was the location of the first Aboriginal Health Service.

A further example is Dights Falls in inner Melbourne, Victoria. This area is now paved and commonly used by joggers and walkers, its traditional history as a natural river crossing, a place to trap fish and a meeting place for the local Woiwurrung Aboriginal people is invisible (City of Yarra, n.d.). Today, the visual markers of whiteness and privilege, send a silent but loud message that Australia is a white society, obscuring its history prior to colonisation.

A recent example of this disregard is the 2020 dispute between the Djab Wurrung people over the removal of a birthing tree near Ararat, Victoria. This tree was identified for destruction as part of rebuilding the highway. The Djab Wurrung challenged this action

through the legal system. While the highway rebuild was stopped during the legal process which argued the cultural value of the birthing tree, an attempted to poison the tree exposed the blatant disregard of Djab Wurrung culture and the births that occurred under this tree over many years (The Guardian 2023).

Ironically this invisibility of Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander culture in the current white culture of Australia also means that the dominance culture of whiteness is also invisible to white Australians in its dominance.

William a participant from South Gippsland spoke about the name of their town since colonisation. As a member of a local community group exploring the name of their town have uncovered it was named after an explorer who was responsible for the violent dispossession of the Boonwurrung/Bunurong people. They are seeking the renaming of the town connected to its Boonwurrung/Bunurong name. In speaking on the invisibility of whiteness William's remark below is revealing. He said,

"Where we live here in south Gippsland, it's fairly white, there's not a big presence...certainly there is a small Aboriginal community, but I wouldn't think it's all that strong; it's not that visible, not here...it might be further in other parts of West Gippsland around Warragal, Drouin, you...rarely come across any".

This building over of the country as part of colonisation denies sixty-five thousand years of Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islanders history replacing it with dominant white representation.

Structural visibility of whiteness

The values and aspirations of whiteness are embedded in the structure of Australian institutions making it normal and invisible unless you are a non-white Australian.

Along with the replacement of traditional lands with white architecture, culture, and lifestyle a number of other symbols promote and normalise whiteness. Some of these outlined in this thesis include the Australian flag, structure of institutions and all forms of the media.

The Australian flag

A nation's flags provide a symbolic reflection of a national identity and are part of reinforcing the power of whiteness. The Australian flag which includes the British flag is a symbol of colonisation by the British and the image of the southern cross, a star constellation visible in the Southern hemisphere's night sky. Research by Fozdar et al (2015) found that the Australian flag has come to stand for 'exclusionary nationalism and white Australia.' (Fozdar, et. al 2015 p. 317). The Australian flag has also been used as a symbol of white Australians. On Australia day 26th January each year it is common to see residents fly the Australian flags or carrying the flag as a statement of nationalism and whiteness alternatively the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander flag is also flown to make a statement about the invasion and colonisation of the country and the recognition that Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander have not ceded sovereignty.

During the Cronulla riots in 2005 in Sydney several thousand Anglo-Australian young people wore or waved the Australian flag while chanting, 'we grew here, you flew here', referring to the middle eastern migration of the opposing group. This slogan ignored that fact that as white Australians we all arrived here at some time by boat or plane.

Cathy Freeman's controversial unfurling of the Aboriginal Flag after her win in the 1990 Commonwealth Games in Auckland highlighted the significance of which flag was flown. Freeman's action caused controversy and the then chef de mission, Arthur Tunstall, attempted to ban her from carrying the Aboriginal flag insisting all Australians must compete under a single flag, the Australian flag. (Commonwealth Sport n.d.)

It wasn't until July 1995, when the Aboriginal Flag and the Torres Strait Islander Flag were declared to be a flag of Australia under the Flags Act 1953. It was few years later before they were seen either side of the Australian flag, challenging the invisibility of the Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islanders. Flying the Australian or the Aboriginal & Torres Strait

Islander flag on the 26th of January can be seen as a statement of white nationalism or a statement recognising Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander people and the history of invasion. (AIATSIS The Aboriginal Flag n.d.)

The flying of the three flags along with the introduction of a Welcome to Country or acknowledgment of Country first introduced into Federal Parliament in 2008 challenged the invisibility of Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islanders. A Welcome to Country is a ceremony performed by a traditional owner at many national and state events. An Acknowledgement of Country recognised the traditional owners of the land the event is being held and can be performed by Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander people not from the country or by other non-Aboriginal people.

While these ceremonies and the flying of the flag have increased the visibility of Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander history, they are also controversial to supporters of white nationalism. The challenge by right wing journalist Andrew Bolt is an example of divisive and racist attitudes. Bolt challenged the acknowledgement of country and welcome to country arguing it is welcoming people who are already part of the country. Recently the Opposition leader of the Federal Government has pledged that if he is elected Prime Minister in the 2025 election, he will only stand in front of the Australian flag arguing that the Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander flag is divisive. He is also declaring he will have the Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander flag removed from the Sydney Harbour bridge. These actions reveal the threat the visibility of Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander history and current politics is leading to the ongoing denial of this nation's history and a challenge that might change to dominant of whiteness for some of the white population

Invisibility through Silence

Silence around whiteness and privilege emerged as the first theme in the data through the absence of any evidence from the original hypothesis of individual unconsciousness around

racism. This invisibility is link to the wilful silence nationally and reflected in the participants lack of identification of whiteness, their privilege, and its role in the invisibility of racism. In 1968 Stanner attempted to expose this wilful silence and denial of racism through the Boyer lecture series 'After the Dreaming'. He called out this silence and named it 'the great Australian silence' and the "cult of forgetfulness". In these series of lectures. He said:

Inattention on such a scale cannot possibly be explained by absentmindedness. It is a structural matter, a view from a window which has been carefully placed to exclude a whole quadrant of the landscape". "What may well have begun as a simple forgetting of other possible views turned under habit and over time into something like a cult of forgetfulness practised on a national scale. We have been able for so long to disremember the Aborigines that we are now hard put to keep them in mind even when we most want to do so. (pp. 24–5).

Fifty years later, again in the 2022 Boyer Lectures, Noel Pearson, a leading Indigenous lawyer, academic, land rights activist, and founder of the Cape York Institute for Policy and Leadership, spoke to this same silence and lack of recognition:

The half-century since 1967 broke the silence in Australian history, and various reforms and improvements were made due to legislative power by the Commonwealth Parliament. Nevertheless, the original failure of recognition still needs to be remedied. Let me point out what is incontrovertible: Australia does not make sense without recognition. Until the First Peoples are afforded our rightful place, we are a nation missing its most vital heart (Pearson, 2022).

The research findings reflected the impact of this national silence embedded in Australia's history and the reluctance to own and the true history of the colonial invasion and the entrench and structural racism introduced as part of colonisation. If Australia's history included the Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander history of resistance through the Frontier Wars, the truth about the massacres and included memorials at massacre sites, statues acknowledging Indigenous warriors alongside the explorers and white settlers, public acknowledgement of the petitions presented to the state and federal governments and the protests over the past 250 years, a more truthful story would be known. If this history was

known arguably there would be a greater respect toward the strength, resilience, and wisdom of Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander people and a more recognition on the impact of colonisation on them as the First Nations people of this land.

The Media

All forms of media promote and maintain the normalisation of white superiority and the wilful denial of racism.

While the Australian Broadcasting Commission (ABC), both television and radio, and Special Broadcasting Service (SBS and NITV) have incorporated the naming the Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander country the broadcast is being produced on and increased Indigenous programming, this recognition is not broadly adopted across all areas of the media nor in the representation of presenters and programs. The dominant markers promoted across all media are still white western markers of success and aspiration.

Zembylas (2018) identified that the social and political construction and maintenance of white colonial structures and the ongoing practice of settler colonisation create invisibility and build a national mindset of superiority and aspiration (p. 86).

The next chapter examine the some of the structures designed to advantage the knowledge and values of white Australians, including government policies and paternalism, the influence of the curriculum developed to inform and education young Australians and the denial of white privilege.

CHAPTER 4: STRUCTURAL DISCRIMINATION

This chapter will interrogate structural racism to understand how it effects individual prejudice and attitudes held by white Australians. The research data will be examined alongside academic theories to determine how structural discrimination, toward non-white people, specifically Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander people influences white privilege, the invisibility of whiteness and unconscious racism. The media's influence as part of structural racism will be address in more detail in the following chapter.

Government and Institutional Discrimination

Successive state and federal Australian governments have developed policies, laws, and institutions that maintain structures that conform with British values that promote the superiority of whiteness. The 1901 Australian Constitution and the White Australia Policy embedded this white racial hierarchy that continues to shape Australia today. The only mention of Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander people in the 1901 Australian Constitution was to exclude them.

Clause 51 (xxvi) of the Australian Constitution states: The Parliament shall, subject to this constitution, have the power to make laws for the peace, order, and good Government of the Commonwealth with respect to the people of any race, other than the aboriginal people in any State, for whom it is necessary to make special laws.' (Australian Constitution, Part V. p. 51).

Clause 127 of the Australian Constitution stated: In reckoning the numbers of the people of the Commonwealth, or of a State or other part of the Commonwealth, aboriginal natives should not be counted.' (Australian Constitution, Chapter 5, p. 31)

These clauses continued to influence Australian policy development until the 1967 referendum, which called for the repeal of Section 127 and the removal of discriminatory words from Section 51 (xxvi). The 1967 Referendum called for the changes to include the role of government to make laws on behalf of Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander people and

include them in the census count. In other words, the vote was to recognise Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander people as part of the population, and for them to be counted as people, not as flora and fauna. This referendum also called for changes to the legislation and the role of the Federal Government to include Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander people in their plans and policies around housing, education, and employment (AIATSIS), (n.d.). This referendum received a decisive 'Yes' vote for these changes. Despite these changes the Australian Constitution still retains the superiority white Australians, in complete disregard of sixty-five thousand years of First Nations people occupation, knowledge and values.

The policy direction and frameworks were developed by colonisers and white men until the first women Enid Lyons entered the Federal Parliament in 1943. It was not until 1960 that Neville Bonner AO, a Jagera man born on Ukerebagh Island, at the mouth of the Tweed River in New South Wales, entered parliament. He was initially appointed as a casual senator, however, he successfully won five elections following that appointment. While Bonner had little formal education, his political interest began in 1960 through his involvement with the One Peoples of Australia League. He actively campaigned during the 1967 referendum and later joined the Liberal Party. His political successes included moving and carrying the Aboriginal Development Commission Bill. In the second reading of this speech, Bonner said, “This is doubly a historic occasion, I believe, not only because of the importance of the Bill itself for Aboriginal people, but for the first time in history, an Aboriginal is introducing a government measure into the Parliament” (Australian Government Indigenous.gov.au).

While there is now a greater representation of women in parliament it is still predominantly white males. one of the participants said,

Pauline: "If we look at all the institutions in Australia, so the parliament, the media, the church, all these are dominated, they are dominated by white, generally men".

Since Neville Bonner there have been a further fifty-two Indigenous members across the different State and Federal parliaments. As of 2023, Indigenous Australians make up 10.5% of the Senate and 1.9% of the House of Representatives and their representation is now 4.8%, which is above their representation in the total population 3.3%. (“Indigenous Australians”, 2025). However, like Bonner they are elected to represent their electorate, not just their people. Positively since 2017 three Aboriginal members of parliament have been appointed to the role of Minister of Indigenous Affairs, beginning with The Honourable Ken Wyatt, The Hon. Linda Burney and currently The Honourable Malarndirri McCarthy. While these figures reflect the beginning of a shift, the Australian Federal, State parliaments and Territories are still governed by a white racial hierarchy and the failure of the 2023 referendum to include an Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander Voice to Parliament continues to deny the voice of Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander people in the birth certificate that continues to frame this country.

Reflecting on the different political positions that influence a government, the Victorian State Government challenged this voicelessness, structural inequality, and injustice toward Victorian Aboriginal people through the establishment of the Yoorook Commission (2023). The Yoorook Commission was established to investigate past and ongoing injustices experienced by the First Peoples in Victoria across all areas of life since colonisation. It is the first formal truth-telling process into historical and ongoing injustices in Victoria. The Yoorook Report released in July 2023 revealed that Victorian Aboriginal women and men have higher levels of incarceration than white Australians, and Aboriginal children aged between 10-17 are 11 times more likely to be under youth justice supervision or compulsory supervision (Yoorook for Justice Report 2023, p. 25). Further findings found an over-representation of Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander children in the child protection system is a direct result of the laws and policies introduced during colonisation. Additionally,

the report highlights the violence, racism, original lies of occupation and denial of justice grounded in the current legal system and the intergenerational trauma as a result of this. (Yoorook for Justice Report, 2023, p. 50). Significantly, this report confirms that systems function to separate, punish, control and harm Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander people and their families and admits racism and bias persist in contributing to the injustice of high rates of removal of Aboriginal children (Yoorook for Justice Report, 2023, p. 46 & p.156)

This report names the ongoing structural discrimination that continues to (re)produce discrimination against the Victorian Aboriginal population.

Government Paternalism

Like most countries colonised by the British, Australia a paternalist approach is taken certain policy directions. Classic paternalism is the belief that the state or an individual needs to be defended or protected by decisions made on their behalf. Research by Clara Treger (2023) identified two different policy types: classic libertarian and classic paternalism. Her research indicated that the public responded differently to policies that were at odds with their moral convictions, such as abortion, prostitution, and voluntary assisted dying. However, paternalist policies designed to prevent self-harm or promote individual or health benefits, such as the banning of advertising on cigarette packages and rules around alcohol consumption, are more likely to be accepted. (p. 210).

The 2007 Northern Territory Intervention is an example of classic paternalism directed at certain Northern Territory Aboriginal communities. The Intervention, as it was known, was determined necessary to protect Aboriginal children from child sexual abuse following the release of the Little Children are Sacred report or Ampe Akelyernemane Meke Mekarle (2007). The Intervention introduced a raft of classic paternalist policies, including income management, compulsory lease of Aboriginal-owned land, and blanket bans on alcohol, gambling, and pornography, irrespective of evidence of its existence. Behind the scenes, the

intervention ended the longstanding permit system, enabling the community to control who came onto their land. (AHRC, 2007). Ponder (2008) said, “The state...was cast as a (non-Indigenous) saviour who would assume complete responsibility for the welfare of Indigenous children” (p. 3).

An article by Brennan (2009) in the Melbourne University Law Review reported on the legal challenge by the Maningrida community on the constitutionality of the government’s action. The community challenged “the amendments to provisions regulating entry onto Aboriginal land (the permit system), which widened public access and also resulted in the just acquisition of property”, was constitutionally invalid (p. 959). While this challenge was unsuccessful, it revealed the government's paternalist politics regarding this intervention.

A further example of community opposition to the Intervention in a report by Amnesty International highlighted action by Aboriginal people which included the Amperlatwaty people's walk-off. They walked off as an act of self-determination through the establishment of a bush camp protest. Richard Downs Alyawarr, the leader of the walk-off, said, “We had tried to engage with the Intervention, the Government... They pretty much shut us out. They didn't even want to listen to me or the old people here”. Downs compares conditions under the Intervention with "the old welfare days ... when they used to put Aboriginal people under the 'dog license', where they had to grovel to the Government for permission to do all kinds of things” (Amnesty International p. 18).

The intervention is an example of paternalist policies aimed at the certain northern territory Aboriginal communities.

White History Hides Structural Racism

We are not born knowing the history of our country or our society. We learn this history from the stories we are told by our family, through our education, public discourse, the media and in adulthood, through our government policies. If part of this history is silenced,

distorted, or whitewashed, we are susceptible to that story and ignorant of the parts that are silenced. Like many colonised countries, Australia as a nation has found it challenging to acknowledge the true journey of colonisation. (Attwood, 2005). Additionally, history is also written by the victor, and in Australia, this is the white Australians settlers who have told the stories through white eyes. Ravenscroft, (2012) and Clarke, (2022). Attwood (2017), a current historian and author on Aboriginal history, agrees with Ravenscroft (2012) and Clarke (2022) in recognising that Australia's early history has been concerned with the colonial past and the white story since the invasion. Attwood (2017) said in the widely used textbook *Social and Political History of Australia*, published in 1955, "Aboriginal people were rarely mentioned, and when they did appear, they were usually consigned to prehistory and caricatured as simple natives or inferior savages, just as they were in museums." (p. 33). This is consistent with the data from the research participants who said in response to the question *What did you learn about Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander people at school?*

William: *"Very little, it would have been a stereotypical thing...history books that barely cover the first paragraph...It wasn't until I got to university...I was taught by Geoffrey Blainey when he was writing about nomads".*

Susan: *"Nothing, not a thing. I hated history".*

Renee: *"I knew nothing".*

Robert: *"Probably nothing at all...It wasn't until I went to University, I suppose, there was the land rights issue, the Gurindji stuff".*

William: *"Anything which I would have learnt... I would have learnt from myself".*

Susan, who completed a Bachelor of Australian History in the 1970s, responded to what she learned about Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander people when completing this degree.

Susan: *"Nothing, and what did I learn when I did Australian history at University – nothing...it wasn't until I was the Director of an Art gallery, working in London ... and we were doing a lot of work dealing with prints... old copper engravings and of course all of the explorers who came to Australia had artist travelling with them...and they made engravings to illustrate their journals and diaries ...beautiful engravings of artefacts, of spears, spear throwers. My university history degree, which I would have done in the early seventies, started in 1788, and just the white [history], there*

were just a few illustrations and things up on the lecture halls, both drawings of the early convicts, the early military, jailors, and some of the sailors with Aboriginal people doing things".

The irony of Susan's story is that she had to leave the country to learn about Aboriginal people in Australia.

Renee was at primary school in the early eighties; she said:

"Nothing, nothing"

And when asked the follow-up question *When did you start to hear about Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander people?* She said,

"When I started to listen to 'Not another Koori' [radio] show on 3CR, I only listened to that because I was in the studio afterwards. So, we would sit outside and listen to this show, and I remember going, what are these Torres Strait Islander people? Where's the Torres Strait, and what is it? But, also, even imagining Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander people were the same or in the cities or going to university was a really big stretch, because in my mind they were in loin clothes and up in my holiday place, when we would go to Bermagui, just living off the land. It was just a really ignorant view, which, as you know, it's the view the Government wants us to have".

Further on in the interview, Renee spoke about how her understanding has changed since childhood and her early encounter,

Renee said, "It's just really complicated, and sometimes, I really feel at a loss at the intersection when I meet Indigenous people about how to behave or how to act."

Renee's quotes also highlight how ideas can be formed in the absence of actual history, with the shifting of the blame onto Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander people rather than the country taking responsibility for what they have done. Renee's understanding changed once engaged with an Aboriginal person. Notably, her comment about people just living off the land is a perfect example of the lack of knowledge about the dispossession of Aboriginal people from their own country and their relocation to reserves and missions. If Renee had been taught about Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander history, she would have known about Torres Strait Islander people and proudly been told about their history through stories of dance, art, and culture.

In an internet search on the current resources available for primary school teachers. A set of Australian history teaching guides currently promoted on the Australian Curriculum Supplies has eight books covering different historical topics. One was titled First Contact, which includes some content on Indigenous Australians. In that text, the sections are Indigenous Australians, World Navigation Before 1800, Departure and Arrival of the First Fleet, Indigenous People and Others. An online look at the content seemed to indicate it was more focused on a romanticised presentation of Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander people (Australian History Supplies 2023).

As Beeman (2019) says, curriculum changes are important, but that depends on what corrections are made to past teachings. In writing about the history that is taught, she said:

The institution of Education is tied to these public histories as well... These silences on women and people of colour shape what students pay attention to and, for those who move further into academia, what they will then teach in the classroom and outside of it (p. 336).

The Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA) are responsible for the curriculum. They are an independent statutory authority that sets the expectations for what all young Australians should be taught, regardless of where they live in Australia or their background. This curriculum is then passed by the Federal Ministers for Education, who make the final decision. As recently as two years ago, in 2022, the then Federal Minister for Education challenged how much true Aboriginal history should be told and which stories should be prioritised. In an article in The Sydney Morning Herald, reported by Visentin and Baker (2022), the Federal Education Minister Alan Tudge, a member of the conservative Liberal National Party Government, said, “he's concerned by the level of emphasis given to teaching First Nations perspectives in the draft national curriculum... the proposed changes have also been criticised by some Christian groups”. The Federal Minister for Education also said:

“That presenting our history from both sides should not come at the expense of dishonouring our Western heritage, which has made us the liberal democracy we are today. We have to get the balance right, and I'm concerned that we haven't in the draft that's been put out (Visentin & Baker, 2022)”.

Alex Hawke, the Federal immigration minister and a committed Christian, weighed into the debate, saying, "We must continue to teach our culture, history and values...Australia's Judeo-Christian and Western values were fundamental to our society's ongoing success" (Visentin & Baker, 2022). Finally, Barnaby Joyce, leader of the conservative right-wing National Party, is reported to have savaged the changes as “driving history through the guilt-ridden lens of revisionism”. In a final statement by the Minister for Education, Mr Tudge said he would be "looking for some changes before he would be prepared to give it his approval” (Visentin & Baker, 2022).

These responses highlight the challenge still faced in Australia today in teaching the complete history from both a black and white perspective and reflects national defensiveness and denial.

In contrast to the Federal position, the Victorian Andrews Government, a progressive left-wing government, has taken a different position and is committed to rectifying the sanitised history by developing the Marrung Aboriginal Education Plan 2016-2026. This plan promotes the acknowledgement and respect of Koori culture (Koori is the term used by Aboriginal people from southern New South Wales and Victoria), history, and knowledge. Carey (2022) reported in *The Age* a comment by Tiriki Onus, a Yorta Yorta and Dja Dja Wurrung man in his article 'How students will be taught Victorian history through Aboriginal perspective', Onus recalls his year ten teacher telling the class, “That the Aboriginal people of south-east Australia were extinct...That was the word that was used”. Onus was at school during the same years as many of these research participants.

The Victorian Government now has a resource for teachers called *Aboriginal Change Makers*, which is history told through the eyes and experiences of Indigenous people who

fought against long odds to keep their culture and language alive. (Carey The Age, 2022).

While these small steps, they highlight the influence of the history taught and the role it can play in the national understanding of the role of colonisation, white superiority, and privilege in (re)producing racism.

The Role of Denial

The national denial and silencing of systemic and structural racism disguise's the benefits white superiority offers to white Australians. Jacqueline Nelson (2013), in her paper on the Denial of Racism, outlines how this occurs across different levels of society, including politically, institutionally, and personally (p. 2). The following academics in their various articles on denial, invisibility, silence, and white privilege recognise how these influences of the nation's population, contributing to an ambivalence or defensiveness around talking about white privilege and racism. Carr, (2016) notes that the concept of race cannot be discussed without addressing the denial and silence around race (p 642). Moreton-Robinson, (2011) spoke of the Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander people's experience of racism which is usually invisible to; and denied by those who practise it, especially when it is exercised with a reliable self-calibrated moral compass (p. 171). Zembylas, (2018) identified the unwillingness of individuals to scrutinise their personal advantages and privileges, (p. 87) and Applebaum (2016) spoke on white comforting, which becomes the mechanism by which white women avoid confronting their complicity in racism and whereby power inequities in the organisation can be maintained. (p. 8645).

During this project, I have repeatedly met this lack of courage and willingness to scrutinise individual advantages other than the most obvious white or affluent privileges, such as private school education or ability to have independent choice.

Paul Carr (2016), in his analysis of Whiteness and White Privilege, raises another point arguing against the right to ignore or deny responsibility, saying "Racism is like sexism. It

involves everyone, those who are the recipients of sexism/racism; those who are the instigators; those who develop the rules, structures, and frameworks and those who permit and attack sexism/racism" (p. 54). In extending this analysis, Teun van Dijk (1992) also recognises that denial of racism and individual responsibility in its various forms is a crucial feature of modern racism. Consistent with the above arguments, he acknowledges that this denial "is structured to ensure the avoidance of personal and institutional responsibility and the need to reflect on unconscious bias or the benefits of privilege (p. 4). Van Dijk's (1992) arguments gave meaning to the response from the participants in this research and those that I have witness from my peers.

As I delved more deeply into the analysis of whiteness, white superiority, and structural racism, the depth of my understanding increased my awareness about the insidiousness of the invisibility and denial entrenched in all institutions and Australian society's political and social spheres.

These scholarly accounts on the denial of race are consistent with the findings from this investigation, while there is a readiness to acknowledge racism, it seems more confronting to acknowledge white privilege and the benefits it afforded the participants other than a token reference to it, for example Deb's earlier reference to being born into a privilege family, was almost worn as a badge of honour.

From Racism to Harmony – The Introduction of Multiculturalism

Holding racist attitudes, making racist comments and jokes about Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander people were considered normal and acceptable in Australia until the introduction of the Race Discrimination Act in 1975. This Act legislated "equality for all people regardless of race, colour or national or ethnic origin" (*Race Discrimination Act 1975*, Part IIA). Previously acceptable (racist) attitudes toward Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander people became "unacceptable and racist" (Hollinsworth, 2006, p. 15).

The introduced focus on multiculturalism reflected a structural change designed to influence the national culture. In 1999 the Howard Government decided to rename the United Nations Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, a global event, to Harmony Day in Australia. This name change shifted the emphasis from racism to multiculturalism and away from the tension of racism toward harmony, a concept that made universal support more acceptable. In making this national change, the issue of racism was replaced with a celebration of food, although not the traditional food of this land. Alana Lentin (2016) says multiculturalism can be seen “as an institutional policy that replaced an analysis of the link between racism and capitalism, [to] a focus on the importance of cultural identity, depoliticised the state-centred anti-racism of the racialised in postcolonial societies (p. 380)”. Harmony Day enables members of the population to feel good about their acceptance and ignore structural racism and disadvantage (Rear Vision ABC Radio broadcast www.abc.net.au).

Tasco's (2008) research findings also confirmed the shift of focus to multiculturalism. She said:

While the policies of multiculturalism in the 1970s attempted to create a more inclusive society and had for the participants in this research transformed into a nation-defining narrative, making race irrelevant in the public domain because the concept is something we can all accept (p. 257).

Consistent with Tasco's (2008) findings, Jon Stratton (1998), earlier argued that “the significant problem with multiculturalism is that it does not challenge or confront race and racism, and it maintains the premise that the core culture of Australia is white” (p. 206).

This chapter focused on structural systems promote visibility or invisibility of discrimination or privilege and the way the government policies, the legal system, and the education system execute practices that (re)produce racism and promote white superiority and privilege. The next chapter will examine the powerful influence of the media, including the dominance of white representation and the lack of analysis of white superiority.

CHAPTER 5: REPRESENTATION IN THE MEDIA

This chapter takes up the examination of the print, television, and cinematic media to examine how the dominant representation of whiteness influences the national culture and to examine the representation of Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander people. In considering critical race theory the role of media is one of the structures that maintains a framework of white power and the invisibility of racism.

As I stated in the previous chapter the influence of the media became more obvious as my ethnographic reflexive practice developed and my insight into the penetration of whiteness by the media into the homes across the nation, influencing the national culture. To examine this influence, I will draw on existing scholarly sources, mass media, and my auto ethnographic experience.

I support the position by Meadows (2001) who states, “the media works both consciously and unconsciously, silently or invisibly reinforcing ideas and assumptions through constant repetition of selective images or ways of thinking (p. 64)”. This has also been identified earlier by Bullitmore (1999) who acknowledged the media influence identifying its “negative representation on issues affecting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders (p.72)”. Both quotes align with my auto ethnographic reflective practice.

While social media as a highly expansive and complex area it is beyond the scope of this thesis and, therefore, will not be examined other than to recognise its influence on how people shape their views.

While the influence of the media was not strongly identified in the initial development of the questions other than to ask the participants what media they watched; its influence became more apparent to me during this project. All the participants nominated the ABC and SBS and in the print media The Age and The Guardian.

Media Ownership in Australia

In Australia it is critical to recognise that we have one of the most concentrated media markets in the world. Apart from the national broadcaster, Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC), Special Broadcasting Service (SBS) and National Indigenous Television Channel (NITV), the media consists of major private for-profit commercial media players. These are News Corp Australia, Fairfax Media, Seven West Media and ARN Media, formerly Here, There & Everywhere, APN News & Media. (Lidberg, 2019, p. 143). Nine Entertainment is the largest publicly listed media company, owned and controlled by News Corp Australia, a subsidiary of the American-based News Corp owned and controlled by the Murdoch family. News Corp's global dominance and influence are immense, especially when all of News Corp's outlets run the same editorial and storyline in multiple countries.

One example which provides evidence of the media's dominance, even if a few years ago, was cited in Lidberg (2019) during the lead-up to the 2003 Iraq war. In this situation all of Murdoch's media across different countries spoke in support of the war and the weapons of mass destruction held by the Iraqis, which was later proved to be misinformation. A second example is the reporting on climate change which, despite repeated and overwhelming global scientific consensus on the subject of climate change, the Murdoch media continued to publish misinformation, half-truths and sometimes outright lies on the reality of this global threat (Lidberg 2019).

A further example was the 2005 Cronulla Riots in Sydney. These riots were the culmination of a media frenzy following an incident between three surf lifesavers and four young men of Lebanese appearance. This was initially reported as a male youthful tussle in which two members from the white Australian group were assaulted. In the following week the media reporting escalated including the Daily Telegraph, owned by Murdoch. This masthead according to an article by Poynting (2005) embarked on one of its classic morally

outraged campaigns, along with radio shock jocks Steve Price on commercial radio station 2UE and Alan Jones on 2UB calling for a community show of force.” (p. 86). This call to action by the media resulted in a huge gathering on the beach the following weekend. (Poynting, 2005 p. 86). A more recent example of Murdoch's global influence was his admission to endorsing the publication of lies about election fraud and sidestepping the truth for his financial benefit during the 2020 elections in America. (Smith, 2023). A report released by lawyers for the Fox company said that while Fox knew the truth, they still “used the power and influence of its platform to promote that false story” (Di Stefano. 2023).

All News Media

The reporting across all media during the Voice to Parliament Referendum significantly influenced the results. This referendum was calling for Constitutional change to include an Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander Voice to Parliament. The intensity across the different media increased closer to the referendum date. Carson & Starting (2023), in an article reporting on data collected by Meltwater, a global media monitoring company, identified more than 1.7 million mentions of the Voice to Parliament referendum in traditional and social media globally in three months, including 887,000 mentions across Australia reflecting its influence. (Carson & Starting, 2023). The reporting was frequently vitriolic and included lies and misinformation promoted by the No Campaign without a counter argument. The headlines frequently focused on the negative poll numbers which individuals saw unless they chose to go to a FactCheck website to independently verify the reports. Furthermore, the simplistic slogan adopted by the right-wing conservative Liberal/National Party, particularly the opposition leader Peter Dutton and opposition minister for Indigenous Affairs, ‘If you Don’t No Vote No!’, was catchy and adopted by the public.

An article published by ABC News online challenged Dutton’s promotion of lies and the misrepresentation of a conversation with members of an Aboriginal Community (Wellauer et

al., 2023). Collard (2023) in The Guardian also reported on this incident, and included statements from James Calyun, a Martu man from Meekatharra (Western Australia) and his partner, Samantha Banks, a Wongatha woman (Western Australia), who said, “No one has actually spoken about the voice to us in those visits from Peter Dutton”. The pair claimed the visit was not about finding out what people thought about The Voice, but the main topic was the Indue card (Cashless Welfare Card) and social issues. (2023, April 14)

Andrea Carson in an article in the conversation on the influence of the negative reporting said, "It seems that the negative messaging and the fear that's coming from the No camp have been able to pick up Australians' attention." (The Conversation, 2023). In these examples the choice of media influenced the integrity of the reports.

Print Media

While accessing print media has declined since the introduction of a range of electronic options such as news feeds, Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter, surveys produced by Roy Morgan for ThinkNewsBrands in January 2021-2022 indicate the continued significance of this media. Their survey data revealed the reach of the media,

- 20.6 million Australians over the age of 14 engage with news every month.
- 97% of Australians aged 14+ read news across printed newspapers or online in any given month.
- 97% of the population reads and sees stories that support white superiority and privilege, making race and racism invisible and denied or at least a non-issue. (Media Release, 2022, ThinkNewsBrands).

One Sided Reporting

Critiquing the story's content, what is told, and what is ignored, is essential. In July 2023, an incident of racism toward Willie Rioli, an Indigenous AFL player, received considerable attention. The Age's report called out individual behaviour, the community and society, saying, “We have to be better as a society and as a community, and we'll do whatever we can

to use our platform to call out this reprehensible behaviour”. This line of response was continued by the Port Adelaide Football Club Chief Executive Officer, Matthew Richardson, who said.

Clearly, it hurts. And it is not just Willie; it’s his family and it’s the broader family and all the First Nations players and their families. Football should unite, shouldn’t divide, and the focus after last night really should have been one of the great games of the season (Gleeson et al., 2023).

7News.com.au, reported “there is no room for racism in our game... and our Club [Port Adelaide Football Club] is committed to playing a role in educating as many members of the broader community as possible (2023, July 23).

Despite these strong statements, the reports failed to critique the embedded culture of whiteness, power and superiority in all AFL clubs and the silence regarding the supporters and other players.

Television Media

Television media is still one of the most influential mediums in Australia, infiltrating our homes and lives, subtly influencing our unconscious bias. In 2017 a Nielson survey revealed that “82.6% of the population watched broadcast TV (free-to-air and subscription channels) on in-home TV sets during the survey week in 2017” (Nielsen, 2017). These figures demonstrate the significance of this medium and its unconscious influence on most of the population and call into question the significance of the narrative and the content.

The dominant representation in media is stories about white values and aspiration, reflecting to back the community their whiteness and superiority. While there have been some attempts at engaging journalists and presenters from different ethnic backgrounds, particularly by the national broadcasters, the ABC and SBS this white representation continually reinforces white superiority, values, and aspirations. This fact is confirmed in a report released in 2020 by the Media Entertainment Arts Alliance (MEAA), which

established that white, Anglo-Celtic Anglo-Saxon faces still dominate Australian television news. The key findings from a survey of 300 television journalists were,

- 75% of presenters, commentators and reporters have an Anglo-Celtic background, while only 4.7% have a non-European background and 1.2% are Indigenous, as measured by frequency of on screen in news and current affairs broadcasts.
- 70% rated the representation of culturally diverse men and women in the media industry as either poor or very poor.
- 77% of respondents with culturally diverse backgrounds believe their backgrounds are a barrier to career progression.
- 35 out of 39 board members of Australian free-to-air television are Anglo-Celtic” (MEAA, 2020).

National Indigenous Television Channel (NITV) challenges this. All their presenters, journalists and content are delivered by, produced by, or told by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Unfortunately, none of the research participants identified watching NITV and most of the participants were unable to name an Indigenous presenter even though ABC Breakfast sports journalist Tony Armstrong was the winner of the most popular new talent at the 2022 Logies, and Karla Grant, a proud Arrernte woman, who has been a presenter, producer, and journalist for over 30 years, working primarily in Indigenous news and current affairs for NITV and SBS (LinkedIn: Karla Grant). While there has been an increase in Indigenous content with the broadcasting of the 2023 NAIDOC Award night and the State Funerals for singer, songwriter, artists and performers like Uncle Archie Roach and Uncle Jack Charles, these are still delivered by the National broadcaster ABC, SBS and NITV and seen by a more select audience.

Conversely, indicating the institutional nature of structural racism and unconscious bias discussed in early chapters, Stan Grant, a Wiradjuri man and senior Aboriginal broadcast journalist and international affairs analyst for over thirty years, has alleged claims of racism and lack of management support following the broadcasting of the King's Coronation in 2023. During the ABC media coverage of the Coronation of the King, Grant was a panel

member with presenters Jeremy Fernandez, Craig Foster, Australian Republic Movement, Julian Lesser, Liberal MP, and Julia Baird. Grant reflected the perspectives of many Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander people. In Stan's print article, "When the Queen died", he said "I felt betrayed by a nation that mourned her death with barely a word for the deaths of my people under her crown, under her rule" (ABC News 2023, 5, 6). As a result of taking this different position, he experienced a racial attack on social media. He felt he was not being supported by ABC management, which resulted in Grant temporarily stepping down from his role in the ABC national program Q & A. In August 2023, he announced his resignation (Meade, A. 22.8.2023)

For Grant and many other people, the media domination of this event ignored the post-colonial impact that is still occurring in Australia and the republicans.

Cartoons

Cartoons are another way the print media conveys a satirical or mocking message about current political issues. Cartoons condensing a range of meanings into a single image or scene, in very few words. Levette (2018) highlights the power of cartoons, saying, "Political cartoons can reflect ideologies or events at the forefront of public discourse or debate in a "snapshot," and be effective in capturing incongruences in political rhetoric through satire and caricature" (p. 243). Driscoll (2015) agrees with Levette (2018) and makes the point: "Political cartoonists have a special relationship with political deliberation and public controversy. It is the nature of their work to comment on and respond to the public and political issues of the day" (p.1). Political cartoons are used to make critical statements about events and political or social commentary on the politics of fear, invasion, detention, and stopping the boats. For example, this cartoon that was printed during the 2023 referendum campaign inferring a voice to parliament for Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander people was threatening to the rest of the population.

Driscoll (2015) says that “political cartoons are themselves political both in their treatment of particular antagonisms and in their status as a legitimate and accepted part of democratic politics” (p. 8). El Regaie & Horschelmann also support the position that “political cartoons are usually presented as one condensed panel that visually captures the essence of a social issue or political event and may contain captions or speech bubbles” (El Regaie & Horschelmann, in Lenette 2015, p. 344).

The cartoon by Bill Leak in the to an ABC report on the treatment of youth at the Don Dale detention centre in the Northern Territory where most of the youth in the detention centre are Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islanders. (<https://www.abc.net.au/news/2016-08-04/cartoon-an-attack-on-aboriginal-people,-indigenous-leader-says/7689248>) Leak’s cartoon is an attempt to vilify and denigrate all Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander fathers, inferring they are absent, disengaged, and uncaring of their children, feeding into the negative story told of Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander fathers (Conor, L. 2018). Watego (2016) also argued this is an example of racial whitewashing by using an image of an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander police officer. Watego said, “Casting an Aboriginal man in the cartoon as the police officer with a baton was no misstep on Leak’s part - it sought to absolve white responsibility and restore white virtue.” (Watego 2016). While this cartoon was loudly criticised and resulted in a response from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander men and fathers creating the tag #IndigenousDads in retaliation. Watego said:

As a daughter of an Aboriginal man and the wife of an Aboriginal man, I know that Bill Leak's claim that Aboriginal fathers are neglectful is not representative of Aboriginal family life. Instead, this cartoon represents a white man's imagining of Aboriginal men (The Conversation, 2016, August 05).

A more recent example of political comment is a cartoon published in the Australian Financial Review on July 6, 2023. This cartoon demonstrates ambiguities and a cartoon's political influence. This political cartoon was paid for by Advance Australia, a group

supporting the No Campaign and linked to a conservative Christian Lobby, a group supported by conservative Christian and former Prime Minister Tony Abbot and Jacinta Nampijinpa Price, a prominent spokesperson for the No Campaign, a Country Liberal Party Senator for the Northern Territory and Shadow Minister for Indigenous Australians. The image published on the front page of the Financial Review 6.7.2023 inferred that Thomas Mayo, Director for the 23YES Campaign, could be brought off, therefore questioning his integrity. Alongside the image of Mayo, is the image of Independent Western Australia Member of Parliament Kate Chaney sitting on her father's knee (he is the head of Westfarmers), questioning her integrity as an independent and inferencing her subservience to her father through the representation of an adult woman sitting on her father's knee and infantilising Chaney. The criticism of this campaign resulted in Murdoch's Nine Entertainment Company apologising for printing an advertisement paid for by Advance Australia, a group campaigning against the Voice to Parliament (Mellroy, 2023). The next three cartoons are targeted to the racial controversy experienced in the AFL. A further cartoon in the Herald/Sun 25.5.2013, infers the innocence of bystanders or their lack of responsibility for the racist comments by supporters, inferring the responsibility sits with the victim of racism absolving the bystanders. A cartoon in the West Australian Newspaper 28.7.2015 featuring an image of Adam Goodes an Indigenous footballer about to kick the ball with a bystander saying, "get back to the zoo", and lastly an image published in the Eureka Street Magazine 15.8.2015 also absolving the bystanders of any responsibility. These images reinforce the message that racism is an individual act while denying the role of white privilege in (re)producing racism.

Driscoll (2015), in her thesis, says that while it is difficult to ascertain the influence of political cartoons, they matter because they ridicule, deride and critique public problems. (p. 355).

These cartoons are indicative of the ridicule and derision of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, arguably influencing white Australians' perceptions.

Women's and Lifestyle Magazines

Women's and lifestyle magazines are exemplars of white-western culture, aspiration, and privilege. The images represent the traditional gendered roles for women, youth, beauty, family, and homemakers with features on topics such as fashion, image and beauty, celebrity lifestyles, aspiration, food, fitness, and gardening. According to research by Tebbel (2000), she concluded that,

The Australian women's magazine industry is structured by race and whiteness.

Appearing to uphold their own version of the 'white Australia' policy, Australian women's magazines remain steadfastly pro-white. This is especially evidenced by magazine covers, which rarely — if ever — stray from depicting a white face” (Tebbel cited in Sweeney p. 99).

Reviewing a range of magazines through the local library revealed that ten out of ten of 'Hello' covers had images of the British Royal family and other white celebrities, promoting heterosexuality, couples, and mothers, and nine out of ten 'Marie Claire magazine' covers promoted women and whiteness.

Sweeney (2005) outlines that the “ubiquitous nature of the white racial ideal is a physical reality, a racial preference that is distinctly visible both on the magazine covers and as a continuing theme within the advertising and editorial content” (p. 107). She highlights that images of women from culturally different backgrounds are represented as more exotic, artfully created and within an acceptable framework. She notes that when exotic images are used, whiteness is accentuated by the lighting, soft peach, or a misty colour backdrop, (p. 101). Images on page p.87 and page 101 June 2023 in the Hello magazine are examples of

this stylisation within the advertising and editorial content. It also illustrates that the white ideal is a subtle but nevertheless aggressively pursued standard (Sweeney, 2005, p.1)

Reflecting on the cartoons and images I have presented gives rise to complex emotions. It is difficult not to feel anger at the lack of analysis and the promotion of comfortable images and stories avoiding significant political issues influencing a broad section of the community by silence and invisibility. These findings align with Meadows (2001), who claims journalism adheres to practices that provide simplistic stories.

Film

The findings from this desktop research reveal that most films coming out of the mainstream Western commercial film industry, mostly from the United States, maintain the representation of white superiority and privilege and the wilful denial of its relationship to racism. As Kellner (1995) asserts, “Popular culture creates, as well as represents, cultural meanings and ideological understandings about race, gender, class, and sexuality” (p. 524).

Of the top 10 movies nominated for best pictures in the 2023 Oscars, one film was a Chinese production, with six out of the eight main cast members being of Chinese or Chinese descent, making it unusual. Of the female actors nominated for awards, three of the five were white Western women, and of the nominations for male actors, five out of five were white Western men, reinforcing the dominance of whiteness (Oscar Nominations, 2023).

In Australia, the development of the Indigenous Film industry has challenged this focus by introducing Indigenous stories and content. Films such as *Samson & Delilah* (2009) and *Sweet Country* (2017), produced by Warwick Thornton, present a raw and realistic representation of Aboriginal stories. Iven Sen’s work includes his popular television series *Mystery Road* (2013) and *Goldstone* (2016). Rachel Perkins, an early producer, and director of Indigenous films founded her Blackfella Film Company in 1992 and has produced and directed films, television, and documentaries on Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander stories.

Some of her productions include *One Night the Moon*, (2001) *Bran Neu Dae* (2010), *Jasper Jones*, (2017) *Drovers Wife* (2021) and the award-winning documentary series *First Australians* (2008) providing an authentic account of invasion and colonisation. Her television series *Redfern Now* (2012) depicted current issues for Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islanders and exposed everyday racism.

The 2022 Australian Academy of Cinema and Television Arts Awards, included nominations for three multicultural film themes and stories, including a documentary produced in collaboration with Indigenous songwriter, storyteller and songman Archie Roach and Emma Donovan, ‘Wash my soul in the Rivers Flow’ (2021), two documentaries on topical issues, one animation and two general stories. While these indicate a cultural shift, these are not mainstream commercial films, but shown in smaller Independent Cinemas, attracting a different audience.

This chapter highlighted the repetition of single stories of whiteness. This dominant representation unquestionably influences white stereotypes and the population about what is important. Recognising the representation of whiteness and privilege across the different media represented a critical moment for me when its invisibility suddenly became hyper-visible (ref?). The next chapter will examine this influence of individual unconscious bias and racism for individual White Australians.

CHAPTER 6: WHITE PRIVILEGE, WHITE FRAGILITY

White privilege is the advantage afforded white Australians simply by being born white. White fragility is the defensive response to conversations about racism and individual unconscious bias. The previous chapters have examined, the culture and invisibility of whiteness, structural racism, and the influence of the media in (re)producing systemic and structural racism in Australia. This chapter examines the individual attitudes of nine well-intentioned white Australians, all of whom perceived themselves to be ‘non-racist’, yet they failed to recognise the embedded structure of racism, recognise their white privilege and superiority in the development of their beliefs. Harvey (2015) noted that:

Superiority and privilege sustain this white racial domination and the individual benefits it affords white people; she claims that it is white people who create and maintain white supremacy and more insidiously, we benefit profusely from the prevalence of racial injustice, even as we are spiritually, psychologically, and morally malformed by it (Harvey, as cited in Moreton-Robinson, 2015, p. 173).

DiAngelo (2018, 2021) argues white patriarchal superiority shapes human beliefs and values in Western societies from birth, creating a world of racial familiarity and ready pathways for white people.

Individual White Privilege

For this study the term ‘white’ in an Australian context refers to Australians of British ancestry. The term ‘white privilege’ is defined as a set of institutional benefits which advantage white people relative to those who experience racism (Kendall, 2002). Whilst the term ‘privilege’ is more commonly associated with social class and financial privilege, white privilege as a term is not commonly used.

Robert: *“I hadn't heard it, but it would be the privilege that people like me have.”*

Pauline: *"I think it's something that everyone needs to think about because I think sometimes white people don't acknowledge their privilege, and even talking with my husband, I think he was quite affronted with the idea of privilege. ... It's uncomfortable to think about it because if you actually interrogate yourself and you come to a conclusion, then maybe you have to do something about it, and it's very comfortable to sit in your privilege."*

Individual White Fragility

White fragility is the defensive response triggered by a conversation about race and racism (DiAngelo, 2018, 2021). DiAngelo's work challenged my own 'non-racist' beliefs, revealing my unconscious white superiority and privilege. A recent encounter provided me with an personal encounter provided an unexpected example of a white fragility defensive response. This occurred during a conversation with a local member of my community. This person had inquired about my research. As I was recounting the findings particularly related to white privilege and our unconscious sense of white superiority their body language changed mid-sentence with this person reacting and asking if I was accusing them of being superior, at which they walked off saying they couldn't talk any longer. I was initially shocked but on reflection I realise that what had been an obvious and straightforward conversation for me was challenging and confronting for others, even those who consider themselves non-racist.

Hollinsworth (2014) also found in his work that students "often resist recognition of their own racial position associated with privilege and the impact of racism on Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander people" (p. 2). He found that: "moving from the passive notion of privilege to the role of white supremacy can attract an even more determined resistance among some students" (p. 2). DiAngelo (2021) confirms Hollinsworth's experiences, observing that defensive responses are revealed when challenging individuals which then trigger suppressed (racist) beliefs by accusing them of being confrontational. She stated such situations provoke "white shame" (p. 125). This experience of reactiveness cited above is aligned with this defensive response. One of the participants Hannah recounted her experience of a friend's

defensive response in a social situation and how a defensive response stopped the conversation:

Hannah: *"I can't quite remember the topic we were talking about, but my husband had said something ... I can't quite remember ... and [this family friend] made a bit of an arcane comment ... insinuating that all Aboriginals are sort of criminals and [my husband] did call her on it and she goes, well you didn't grow up with them ... it really stuck in my head and I didn't at that time say anything ... it just kind of sat with me ... it's one of those situation where I do have the luxury of having that privilege of being able to let it go."*

These incidents support the need for further research to develop strategies to initiate these uncomfortable conversations.

National White Fragility

White fragility in Australia was exposed during the 2023 referendum on the inclusion of a Voice to Parliament in the Australian Constitution. This referendum question exposed the unconscious fragility of the nation and its population, resulting in the conversation dividing the nation in two sides, one supportive of the question and the other objecting to the inclusion of a Voice to Parliament for Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander people. The rhetoric of the 'No' campaign mobilised unconscious fears in the white Australian community about the potential of the Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islanders to have increased power. The No campaigners utilised fear-based tactics claiming that such constitutional change would threaten white dominance in Australia. Figure 5, the cartoon presented in Chapter 5, is an example of such rhetoric, which ignores the reality that Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander people comprise less than 4% of the Australian population. This is compared with 81% of the population who identify as white Australians of Anglo-Saxon and/or Anglo-Celtic heritage (Census, 2021).

In challenging the 'No' campaign rhetoric, King (2023), a Yued Noongar man from Western Australia, stated in a podcast interview: "It's like we are back in 1992 and the Mabo

decision, people are scared that Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander people are going to come for your backyard, come for your sheep station or wheat farm" (Williams & Kelly, 2023, September 20). King's point was reinforced by Allam (2023), in an opinion piece in The Guardian: "It is not a communist plot. It will not result in Aboriginal people getting free home loans or cars or university degrees". She observed the 'Yes' campaign was acutely aware it was competing with racism, misinformation, and negativity as well as apathy and disengagement.

Despite the outrage and distress expressed by many white Australian 'yes' voters about the referendum outcome, their privilege and superiority mean the result do not affect them personally, they could walk away from this result as their life continues as usual. However, this was very different for Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander people who could not walk away from this outcome, with many calling for a week of mourning and silence (ABC News, 2023, September 1). It also meant that Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander children learned that 60% of their peers' parents had voted against their right to have a voice in the Australian Constitution, an outcome observed by Catherine Liddle CEO Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander Child Care (SNAICC) in an interview with Brennan (2023).

Pauline, in response to the interview question regarding attitudinal shifts in racism nationally, stated:

Pauline: "No, I don't think there is (a shift). I think that we can even see that in the last few years with the Uluru Statement from the Heart. If people weren't racist, they would embrace this with open arms and say 'yes, of course'. We need to acknowledge the First Peoples of this country and give them a voice for their own self-determination. They are the people who should be advising the government."

Irrespective of how open-minded and socially progressive white Australians believe themselves to be, we all hold prejudices and beliefs developed during childhood, through our families, the political discourse of our times, the education system, and the media. Gartner and Dovinda (2005) found that "people who see themselves as educated and progressive are

more likely to exhibit (aversive racism). It exists under the surface of consciousness because it conflicts with consciously held beliefs of racial equality and justice" (p. 43). This is supported by Kessariss (2006), an Australian Indigenous academic, writing about the normalisation or invisibility of racism. She says it "means that large numbers, in fact, the majority of nice decent regular Muunuga (white) people can and do routinely participate in everyday kinds of casual racism, so ordinary that they do not even recognise it" (p. 349).

Recognising the invisibility of unconscious racism and is the first step for white Australians including questioning the development of our generalised prejudices and core beliefs. Lopez (1998) lists three points essential to dismantling white fragility, racial superiority, and the invisibility of white privilege:

First, Whites must overcome the omnipresent effects of transparency and the naturalisation of race to recognise the many racial aspects of their identity, paying particular attention to the daily acts that draw upon and, in turn, confirm their whiteness. Second, they must recognise and accept the personal and social consequences of breaking out of a white identity. Third, they must embark on a daily process of choosing against whiteness (cited in Jungkunz, 2011, p.19).

Development of Beliefs

Our beliefs are developed by stories we are told and the values we are encouraged to hold as we grow. If we live in a predominantly white environment, our attitudes and prejudices will be influenced our neighbourhood, our predominantly white education system, and the white representation in our media. These prejudices, as discussed throughout this paper, are mostly individually unacknowledged or denied. Regardless of how unconscious we are of our prejudice, privilege, and fragility they surface in different and unexpected moments such as in the sporting arena, on the sports field, and during social occasions standing around the barbeque via a casual throwaway line, which if challenged, can be dismissed as 'a joke', or a comment such as 'I'm not really racist'. Kessariss (2006) wrote that such unconstrained throwaway lines are "one of the most insidious forms of racism that Blekbala [Aboriginal]

people have to deal with because it is so frequent, unpredictable, and utterly dismissive of us” (p. 355).

Pearson (2022) acknowledgement that most Australians had not met an Aboriginal person, which is consistent with findings in this research. The absence of personal connection results in people forming their understanding of Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander people from secondary sources.

Robert and William are current residents of West Gippsland who were raised in urban Melbourne. When asked about connection or friendship between themselves and Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander people reflect this experience. They said:

Robert: *“Probably nothing at all, because we never had any interaction with them. Basically, we lived in a suburban environment, Preston...there weren't any Aboriginal people that I mixed with.”*

William: *“Look, they wouldn't have...had much contact there, anything which I would have learned from them... I would have learned from myself.”*

Consistent with Pearson's (2022) insight, William stated:

William: *Look, I haven't had a lot of ...look, there's not a big, I mean where we live here in South Gippsland...it's fairly white.”*

In a study by Miklikowska (2017) in the examination of the effect of parents and intergroup friendships on the development of racial prejudice. She highlighted the direct long-term impacts of parental attitudes and prejudice in developing empathy, and the relationship between empathy and democratic thinking and understanding. Edmonds & Killen (as cited in Miklikowska, 2017) found "that adolescents with prejudiced parents are rarely exposed to the targets of prejudice and their problems, that is, to the empathy-inducing experiences. The finding also suggested that empathy might help to explain the conditions and mechanisms underlying prejudice socialisation" (p. 639). Hagerman (2014) also noted in the study about the development of family culture found, it embeds specific patterns that

shape understandings and beliefs, highlighting how the domination of whiteness in neighbourhoods impacts residents' understanding of race and their capacity for tolerance of difference.

At the time of the interviews, all participants lived in white neighbourhoods with little or no connection to or friendship with Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander people. Six of the participants grew up in the leafy eastern suburbs of Melbourne. These suburbs are predominantly white, heterosexual, and middle-class. One grew up in a working-class northern suburb. When participants were asked about childhood conversations within their families about Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander people their responses bore an unsettling similarity. Deb, for example, described "silence" and "total ignorance" during childhood about Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander people. She connected this silence to the atrocities of the Stolen Generation:

Deb: "When I look back on it, and I think I was in secondary school and children were still being removed from their families... I was born in 1954, so 1960s' (in) Chadstone, Glen Iris, Melbourne."

Deb's sense of dislocation from space and time is revealing:

Deb: "I had no sense of history or a place in history, and I had a very privileged white private school education."

Robert, Fred, and Susan are current residents of West Gippsland; however, all were raised in urban Melbourne. When asked about connections to or friendship with Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander people, they said:

Fred: "I don't have any recollection at all. I would have been sixteen when the referendum was on, and that would have been important, but I don't remember the family explicitly talking about it...I don't think there was a specific family discussion about it."

Robert: "Probably nothing at all because we never had any interaction with them. Basically, we lived in a suburban environment, Preston...there weren't any Aboriginal people that I mixed with."

These experiences are reinforced by DiAngelo (2018), who stated: “Even when race is not explicitly discussed, children internalise both implicit and explicit messages about it from their environment” (p. 78).

One participant, Pauline, did recall conversations about Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander people during childhood. She was raised in a political family, and conversations about politics occurred around the kitchen table. These conversations focussed on social justice:

Pauline: *“I think that I was very fortunate because my parents were much more inclusive and quite political, so... we were exposed to everything.”*

However, her experiences at school challenged the messages she received at home.

For example:

Pauline: *“I was in grade 4. We had to write a story... I was about 8, we had to pick a newspaper article, and we had to write about it, so going through the newspaper with my mother, it was the Wave Hill strike and...I think it was the Gurindji elders walk off because they found they weren't being paid the same as the other people from that pastoral company. I wrote about that, and I got a fail because my teacher, who was a Catholic nun, said I was much too young to understand those concepts, but I wasn't because that's what our family.... around tea the discussions were about...politics.”*

The participants' experiences expressed above reflect how the normalisation of whiteness in suburban Australia results in the absence of debate about race in families and communities.

Ambivalence

Alongside white fragility is the expression of ambivalence. Many of the comments by the participants also reflect an ambivalence. These quotes reflect the conflicted and contradictory feelings associated with privilege and an ambivalence around change:

Susan: *“I'm very aware of that, but then well...how do you become less privileged? I can't unprivileged myself in a way, I can't, not be white or not be educated.”*

Fred: *“It touches me emotionally, yeah, but it's also a thing that something's wrong with the system, like deaths in custody and that type of stuff... but solving the problem is a bit more difficult than being aware there is a problem.”*

Ambivalence as identified Brogaard & Gatzia (2021) is an expression of a range of “contradictory emotions or attitudes” (p. 131). This offers an explanation to individuals who are drawn toward an action or issue yet are disconnected from further action which is only possible if it does not impact on them personally. White privilege enables white Australians to express their concern about racism; yet avoid any personal action. Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander people are not able to avoid the consequences of race and racism.

All participants in this project missed the connection between their privilege and racism. Two participants, for example, responded with expressions of pride in attending a rally during their university days as an example of support for the rights of Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander people. This action was seen as supportive; however, the issues did not impact either participant personally, and their lives were unaffected or disrupted in any way other than taking time to join a rally:

Robert: *"It wasn't until I went to university...there was the land rights issue, the Gurindji stuff, and I do remember sitting in a demonstration in Bourke Street or supporting the Gurindji Aboriginal lands rights issues."*

Fred: *"I went to university in New England...a lecturer in Agriculture Economics took us out to Guyra...I don't think we met people, but she just wanted to show us the living conditions at the time. I marched down the main streets of Armidale for freedom or national days. I can't remember what year."*

Cultural ignorance

Questions for second round interviews were designed to explore views on friendship and marriage between Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander people and white Australians. All participants stated they would welcome such friendship or marriage in their families, and none could identify potential problems with such. Some participants said they would welcome friendship or marriage as an opportunity to learn more about Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander culture, in a ‘safe’ and ‘non-confronting’ environment. Bonilla-Silva et al.

(2006) determined that white spatial segregation means that “people who do not significantly interact in school, on the job, or in their neighbourhood are unlikely to engage in interracial unions with blacks” (p. 248). The participants seemed ignorant to any cultural differences or the possible experience of past racism affecting them in a white environment. None of the participants identified the need for them to personally change.

The response by some of the participants potentially expressed the unconscious anxiety I mentioned in chapter one.

William: *“I wouldn’t, err. be too unhappy. I mean, it depends on the person... I’d probably embrace that, and also...I could have somebody, who was a lot more intimate with their customs and their different worldview. I’d take it as an opportunity to learn from them.”*

William's assertion that he 'wouldn't be too unhappy' at the prospect of inter-racial and inter-cultural friendship or marriage in his family speaks to this. Fred, however, was less worried by the prospect, indicating greater exposure to and acceptance of inter-racial experiences within his family:

Fred: *“Yes, of course, yeah, well...well, I’ve two daughters-in-law from different cultures. The positives are it just enriches your thinking, you get to experience the other culture in a way”.*

Fred however failed to recognise the power differential. Susan was less confident in her initial assessment, qualifying her statement:

Susan: *“Well, I think that’s a very hard question to answer because it depends on who they are and their circumstances, so I don’t think I can make a generalisation about that unless you know... ‘of course, I would be. I can’t imagine any group that I would not be happy to be friends with.”*

Deb shared Susan's caution, yet was more specific in her position:

Deb: *“Challenges would depend on the person – I’d be guessing to say a different expectation, but that could be anybody.”*

Pauline: *“It would be...okay...the skin colour is the biggest signifier, and then of course they would need to tick all the boxes...I still think for some people there would be a degree of suspicion.”*

Comments such as 'depending on the person' reveal the potential for greater comfort if the newcomer was 'more like them'. These responses critically reflect the failure to appreciate the racialised structure of whiteness and privilege.

For racism to be genuinely addressed in Australia the nation must lead the discussion in recognising sixty-five thousand years of occupation by First Nations people and promote equality in the nations culture.

This study shows that one of the first next steps individual white Australians must take to combat racism is to challenge our privilege and shine a light on our unconscious racism. However, this need to be led by a culture shift in the nation with the full recognition of the true history of the brutal invasion and dispossession of Aboriginal & Torres Strait people. The national culture must challenge the denial and silence to support a change in the attitudes of individual white Australians.

CONCLUSION

This research sought to understand how white privilege and white fragility influenced the discourse on racism toward Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander people. White Australians were identified due to the potential social, cultural, and intergenerational influence from early settler families, the impact of the White Australia Policy and previously accepted racist attitudes toward Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander people.

Nine white Australians from inner metropolitan Melbourne and regional Victoria, Gippsland, self-identified to participate in two semi-structured interviews conducted six months apart, seventeen interviews in total. While the participant number was small, the findings provide new insight into how the national denial and silence on racism and white privilege influences individual white Australians' unconscious racism. The interviews were transcribed, thematically analysed, and compared against race, whiteness, and privilege theories. The term race used is based on the social construction of race. Direct quotes were used to link attitudes with themes and theory.

All the participants saw themselves as open-minded and progressive people. One participant was unavailable for the second interview. Seven participants were over the age of sixty, limiting generational-related differences. All the participants were committed to the respect and recognition of Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander people and had an intellectual understanding of racism. Two of the participants had previous contact with members of the Victorian Aboriginal population. Two of the participants had been involved in protests as university students, and one participant had direct contact with an Aboriginal community organisation in Alice Springs during this research, which increased her knowledge and awareness about racism and the role of white privilege. The process of self-selection meant the participants were more likely to have an interest in the topic or to see themselves as

holding a non-racist perspective. Despite their interest or commitment to being non-racist, the findings revealed they were disconnected from the role of structural racism and, significantly, the role of white privilege in (re)producing racism.

The research questions were influenced by the speculation that racism is the result of an individual act of discrimination or the racist actions of a group of people, which is how it is commonly reported in the media. The hypothesis that influenced this question became even more pertinent during the 2023 Voice to Parliament referendum, which sought to change the Australian Constitution to include a clause to give Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders a voice to Parliament. The debate that emerged during this period exposed the embedded racism in Australia, which resulted in 60% of the population voting against this change.

The findings, rather than confirming the original hypothesis, reveal that the national culture of denial and silence on racism and structural white superiority, influenced individual white Australians attitudes to and understanding of racism experienced by Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander people. The findings indicated that Australian culture is not uniformly defined, and individual white Australians do not recognise themselves as part of the social construction of race, the white race. The questions for the second interviews were developed to validate, challenge, or extend the initial data. For example: *Why do you think the participants did not identify themselves as part of a race?*

The invisibility of whiteness as part of a race was correlated to the segregation of society in Australia. All the participants reported growing up in white-dominated suburbs, mostly in the eastern suburbs of Melbourne. They did not have any personal connection with Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander people during their childhood. Five of the participants had not personally met with any Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander person in adulthood. This lack of personal connection meant their knowledge and understandings were developed from secondary sources, which is mainly through the different forms of media. Significantly the

dominant representation of whiteness in all media and the media's dominant representation of white aspiration and values, influence and distort the reporting on racism led to a specific chapter. The influence of the media is significant and most definitely needs further investigation.

This lack of personal connection has implications for understanding racism and the role of individual white privilege. The data that highlighted this disconnection was found in the answer to the question: *Would you be happy to accept a friendship with an Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander person? Would you be happy to have an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander person marry into your family?* The data revealed that all participants would be happy to have a friendship or have an Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander person marry into their family. However, the findings revealed that despite this willingness, their lack of personal experience meant they failed to consider the impact of past racism and how that might impact a sense of cultural safety when engaging in a dominant white environment. Additionally, the findings indicated a failure to consider any changes individual white Australians or families might need to make to recognise the impact white superiority and privilege that comes from structural racism.

The distorted history taught throughout the education system denies the brutality of colonisation and the truth about the stolen land and denial of Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander people of their culture, arguably supporting the culture of denial. While there are significant changes in the reporting by the national broadcaster and the naming of the Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander country the program is produced on, the Welcome to Country ceremonies and the Acknowledgement of Country at the beginning of many events, more effort must be made to incorporate this into the national culture. The current denial of white privilege enables the nation and its white individuals to avoid any responsibility.

Vital research is needed to interrogate how the denial and silence of structural racism, the impact of the Australian history taught throughout the education system, the dominant representation of whiteness in the media influence individual attitudes about Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander people. All further research on racism should interrogate the role of whiteness within their study.

For individual white Australians these research findings reveal the need for further research to understand how to initiate conversations about racism, white privilege, unconscious bias, and prejudice without triggering a reactive, defensive response. Unless we, white Australians develop the emotional stamina to examine our privilege, other than a conversation about private school education, and to scrutinise how this is linked to disadvantage and racism toward Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander we, white Australians will continue to be complicit in perpetrating racism.

NEXT STEPS

Social Cultural

Education system:

- The curriculum needs to be continually reviewed to ensure Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander history is taught alongside white Australian history. This should occur throughout all levels of education including pre-school, primary, secondary, and tertiary levels.
- A specific subject should be developed to educate students on the influence of structural white superiority and privilege, incorporating the structural influence of the 1901 Australian Constitution, the White Australia Policy and the 1975 Race Discrimination Act.

Media:

- All Broadcasters should adopt the national broadcaster practice by naming the Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander country the program was produced on. This action will bring the sixty thousand years and more of continuous culture into everyone's homes and lives.
- All reports on incidents of racism should incorporate an analysis on how structural racism and white privilege has influenced the situation.

Individual white Australians

These next steps feed into the socio-cultural recommendations

- All future research on racism, multiculturalism, discrimination, decolonisation should interrogate the role of white superiority and privilege.
- Specific research should be conducted to examine the generational influence on attitudes, and racism prejudice by white Australians.
- Specific research should be conducted to develop strategies to enable white Australians to understand the influence of their privilege enabling a conversation without triggering a reactive response.

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