“Awareness of injustice is a precondition for overcoming it.” (Deutsch, 2006, p 23).

Psychological theorists and philosophers such as Piaget (Piaget & Inhelder, 1969), Erikson (1968), Tajfel (1974), Descartes and Sartre (Weimin, 2007) have contributed to understandings of identity construction with their perspectives on cognition, learning and development. Extending upon these, the Bachelor of Behavioural Science at The University of Notre Dame Australia’s Fremantle campus examines the array of factors contributing to identity formation, including the historical, political, social, economic and cultural contexts in which an individual develops. In this paper, I articulate the process of discovering my white ethnicity and its consequences through the unit Culture and Society. While highlighting the discursive mechanisms which have influenced my social understandings, the links between identity, prejudice and oppression are examined. Education, becoming conscious of whiteness and looking critically at myself was paramount to understanding my role in perpetuating discrimination and eliminating racist behaviours. As such, I argue that education, conscientisation (Freire, 1974) and critical reflexivity are the crucial elements for promoting a just, pluralistic society. As I expand on this journey I acknowledge that I am a white woman, and pay respect and show gratitude to the traditional owners of the land where I live, the Wadjuk Noongar Aboriginal people, especially as I identify as part of the group that has colonised Australia.

Transforming my white identity from an agent of oppression to an agent of change through education in contemporary Australian society

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The construct of identity has been explored by numerous disciplines over time and has engaged scholars such as Piaget, Erikson, Tajfel and Descartes with their perspectives on cognition, learning and development. Extending upon these, the Bachelor of Behavioural Science at The University of Notre Dame Australia’s Fremantle campus examines the array of factors contributing to identity formation, including the historical, political, social, economic and cultural contexts in which an individual develops. In this paper, I articulate the process of discovering my white ethnicity and its consequences through the unit Culture and Society. While highlighting the discursive mechanisms which have influenced my social understandings, the links between identity, prejudice and oppression are examined. Education, becoming conscious of whiteness and looking critically at myself was paramount to understanding my role in perpetuating discrimination and eliminating racist behaviours. As such, I argue that education, conscientisation (Freire, 1974) and critical reflexivity are the crucial elements for promoting a just, pluralistic society. As I expand on this journey I acknowledge that I am a white woman, and pay respect and show gratitude to the traditional owners of the land where I live, the Wadjuk Noongar Aboriginal people, especially as I identify as part of the group that has colonised Australia.
insufficient to combat racism, prejudice and discrimination towards marginalised peoples (Darlaston-Jones et al., in press; Darlaston-Jones & Owen, 2011; Green & Sonn, 2005; Saxton, 2004). As it was only when I was critical of my white identity and my actions that I could see their consequences and thus commit to promoting social change by shifting what I believe, say and do.

Through my education journey in Behavioural Science and specifically in the unit Culture and Society I have become acutely aware of my position in Australian society, and more broadly throughout the world. In addition to its academic challenges, the difficulty arose in the need to question and challenge my reality (ontology), ways of knowing (epistemology), being and doing (Crotty, 1998). Decolonisation involves “the overturning of colonial assumptions and the reversal of colonial processes” (Smith & Ward, 2000, p 3). As such, I needed to critically assess my position and roles in society and most difficult of all, my role in perpetuating the marginalisation of non-dominant groups of people. The process was very confronting and I posit that this type of ‘hard’ is the most difficult for any student, or person who is undertaking transformative learning (Stevens-Long, Schapiro, & McClintock, 2012). This method of learning and teaching pioneered by Freire (1973) involves having to self-assess how your language and behaviours affect others, both as individuals and as collectives (Prilleltensky & Nelson, 2002). It requires critical reflexivity, which is to look at the role and position of self in context, and to challenge how you came to ‘know’ certain knowledge and make assumptions about groups of people (Darlaston-Jones et al., in press). Reflexivity was necessary for the in-depth class discussions and in the unit assessments, which were four Critical Reflexive Analyses (CRA’s).

CRA is a valuable learning tool for critical psychology methodology, promoting decolonisation and for anti-racism education (Darlaston-Jones et al., in press; Darlaston-Jones & Owen, 2011). This is because it requires social actors to analyse their role in social matters to self-discover one’s position within the issues and how this position impacts others (Dutta & de Souza, 2008). The CRA’s enabled me to explore my social identity and life experiences and understand them in relation to psychological theories, in particular Critical Whiteness theory and theories of oppression and moral exclusion (Deutsch, 2006; Green & Sonn, 2005, 2006; Opotow, 1990a, 1990b; Prilleltensky & Gonick, 1996; Prilleltensky & Nelson, 2002; van Dijk, 1992). In my own way and in my own time I wrote about what I thought, felt and had researched about these issues without restriction, which was an extremely valuable process. Additionally, the CRA’s allowed me to explore the contributions of global collective-level forces such as politics, economics and mass media in the construction of my ‘knowledge’ and assumptions about certain groups (Clyne, 2005; Gale, 2004; Herman & Chomsky, 2002; Love & Tilley, 2013; Rowe & O’Brien, 2013; van Dijk, 1992).

Social Constructionist theory outlines that the social world is formed by the language and images, or discourse, used to give meaning to a social construct and thus create a certain reality (Edley, 2001; Hall, 1997; Potter, Edwards & Wetherell, 1993). The discourses have meaning and produce knowledge, which influences what people say and do (Hall, 1997). Discourse analysis is therefore useful to detect the mechanisms of knowledge construction, revealing power relationships and how certain truths are manufactured (Hall, 1997). What I have discovered throughout this process is that identity is inextricably linked to moral exclusion via the language that is used to construct and position groups and their individual members (Clayton & Opotow, 2003).

Common discursive practices and images in the Australian media, politics and social settings construct certain non-white groups as less intelligent, unhealthy and more likely to engage in socially unacceptable behaviours (Hodgetts, Masters & Robertson, 2004; Love & Tilley, 2013). Being that most white people experience non
-white ethnic events through the media (van Dijk, 1992), political rhetoric and media reporting of issues affecting minority groups can be discursively negotiated in such a way that it influences mainstream public opinion (Clyne, 2005; Dunn, Klocker & Salabay, 2007; Gale, 2004; Gatt, 2011; Klocker, 2004; Klocker & Dunn, 2003; Lawrence, 2006; McKay, Thomas & Kneebone, 2011; Mullen, 2010; McCallum, 2011; McCallum & Waller, 2013; van Dijk, 1992). Furthermore, Van Dijk (1992) highlights that political discourse and public discourse are inextricably linked and mirror each other, which is due to the media’s role in disseminating information and the language used to do so. Aboriginal people’s health issues have been identified in news headlines, such as ‘Aboriginal Hepatitis C rising, prompting calls for improved services’ (Davidson, 2015). Headlines like these position Aboriginal peoples as having particular ownership of certain diseases, and are thus in need of additional help, however the systemic power imbalances causing such disparities are overlooked by the media (Australian Human Rights Commission [AHRC], 2005, 2013; Hodgetts et al. 2004; Love & Tilley, 2013; McCallum, 2013; World Health Organisation, 2008).

Through analysing my common beliefs in my CRAs and by reading academic literature, I realised that the impression non-Indigenous people receive from news reports, political figures and social interactions is that Indigenous peoples are a social ‘problem’ and are in need of assistance or punitive measures (Green & Sonn, 2005, 2006). However, I have learnt that it is white culture, its ideology, systems and institutions which have created, and continue to perpetuate, these unjust conditions (Augoustinos, Rapley & Tuffin, 1999; Love & Tilley, 2013; McCallum, 2011, 2013). Therefore it is the discourses, systems, institutions and ideology embedded in whiteness which need to be challenged in order to create systemic change and promote equality (Green & Sonn, 2005, 2006; Potter et al., 1993; van Dijk, 1992).

I had learned white ideology implicitly...
Callaghan, 2005). However, with education, I now understand this to be an assimilation program that has decimated cultural and familial ties for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, with ramifications spanning generations (Australian Human Rights Commission [AHRC], 1997; Dafler & Callaghan, 2005).

I understand that I believed these assumptions because I was acculturated into white ideology and was grounded in the white education system and social structures, which are inherently biased towards white people, and white knowledge (Green & Sonn, 2005, 2006; McIntosh, 1989; Saxton, 2004). Realising this through class discussions and writing the CRA’s helped me to comprehend that I am positioned within an ethnicity that dominates non-white people and gives unearned privileges to whites (McIntosh, 1989). I realised I have a white ethnic identity that I was unaware of because being white and living by white systems and institutions is positioned as the ‘normal’ and ‘natural’ way of being in mainstream Australia (Deutsch, 2006).

I came to understand through reading Deutsch’s (2006) oppression framework that the process of cultural imperialism is how whiteness has become the dominant ideology in Australia. Cultural imperialism is the ‘universalisation’ of the dominant culture (Deutsch, 2006). It involves alienating the dominated ‘other’ by representing itself as the normal state of being, thus infuses itself as the undefined, natural state in a society (Deutsch, 2006). ‘Others’ who are ‘different’ from the dominant majority are defined by their differences and are therefore positioned as deviant or inferior (Deutsch, 2006; Young, 1990). ‘Other’ are forced to interact with the dominant culture which provides stereotypical views about them, causing pressure to conform to the dominant social norms, and the internalisation of the dominant viewpoint (Deutsch, 2006; Prilleltensky & Gonick, 1996). Whiteness is the cultural imperialism that has diffused itself into Australia, which for around 60,000 years has been owned by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples (Dudgeon, Milroy & Walker, 2014; Roberts, Jones & Smith, 1993). Whiteness disseminates as the silent ‘norm’ of being; being a white person, knowing white histories and knowledge, understanding and negotiating ‘white’ processes, systems and social structures, using ‘white’ language, and conforming to white social norms is the standard by which all else is compared and judged (Deutsch, 2006; Green & Sonn, 2005, 2006; Saxton, 2004). Subsequently, anyone who is not white or afforded nominal white status is delineated as either deviant (thus detrimental to white) or exotic (thus beneficial to white) (Green & Sonn, 2005, 2006; Saxton, 2004).

I had unknowingly engaged in white cultural imperialism, as I defined people by their nationality and ethnicity, but had never defined myself as white, nor had I ever been required to. Hence, whiteness remains hidden as it identifies the ‘other’ whilst it does not classify itself (Suchet, 2007). Yet regardless of how whiteness attempts to hide itself, it is only invisible to (the majority of) white people (Suchet, 2007), which became apparent to me during a class discussion with my non-white student colleagues. The students were hesitant to speak of whiteness, but as they became more comfortable with voicing their experiences, they made it very clear to me that the only people who do not see whiteness (and its consequences) are white people. I realised after this discussion that my ethnic identity benefits me because I am white, but it negatively impacts upon people who are non-white, and in particular in the Australian context, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. My student colleagues helped me to understand that people who are oppressed by whiteness have a sophisticated knowledge and understanding of its mechanisms, because they experience its negative effects and hear its discourses on a daily basis (Hatchell, 2004; Green & Sonn, 2005, 2006; Nielsen, Stuart, & Gorman, 2014; Suchet, 2007).

My education has taught me that there exists an acute nexus between the way in which an identity is constructed and the experience of injustice (Clayton & Opotow, 2003). Regardless of how a person may
identify themselves, the identity a person has in the eyes of the dominant group can cause them harm and injustice by being morally excluded (Clayton & Opotow, 2003).

Traditional social psychology has produced theories of social identity and group interactions, which centre on social cognition (Tuffin, 2005). Put briefly, social cognition generalises that people simplify information such as social groups into categories, and make discriminations between these categories accordingly (Tuffin, 2005). Social categorisations may lead to assumptions that all people in the group are the same, resulting in stereotyping, prejudice and the construction of ‘in-groups’ and ‘out-groups’ (Billig, 2002; Tuffin, 2005). For example, asylum seekers who arrive by boat in Australian waters have been constructed as ‘illegal queue jumpers’ and assumptions have been made about their legitimacy (Every & Augoustinos, 2008a, 2008b; Klocker, 2004; Rowe & O’Brien, 2013). Consequently, the identity of ‘asylum seeker’ is portrayed negatively in Australia, due to the assumptions they are criminals who are breaking the law (Every & Augoustinos, 2008b; McDonald, 2011). This example highlights how group categorisations can be used to positively represent one social group over another, as the category the ‘other’ is placed enables the legitimisation of harm (Clayton & Opotow, 2003; van Dijk, 1992).

Positive self-representation is also a feature in group comparisons outlined in Social Identity Theory (Billig, 2002; Tajfel, 1974), which proposes that a person’s self-esteem is linked with comparing their social group (the ‘in-group’) with other groups (‘out-groups’). The positive self-representation of the ‘in-group’ whilst negatively positioning the ‘out-group’ creates feelings of superiority, thus the self-esteem of the individual increases (Billig, 2002; van Dijk, 1992). Social Identity Theory outlines a person’s desire to increase self-esteem by using negative behaviours of discrimination towards, and stereotyping of, the ‘other’ and regards prejudice as an outcome of information processing, likening it to social cognition (Tajfel, 1974; Tuffin, 2005). These traditional psychological theories propose that mental shortcuts create categories in which an individual uses to make sense of their social world (Billig, 2002; Tuffin, 2005). However, the theories actually support and legitimise prejudice, because they reduce group interactions down to neurological processes and assume they are automatic, instinctual and cannot be changed (Billig, 2002; Tuffin, 2005). Neither do the theories offer solutions to counter prejudicial behaviours (Tuffin, 2005).

The theories are further limited as they do not explain the mechanisms of how social categories are included or excluded from the moral boundaries of the ‘ingroup’ (Billig, 2002). These mechanisms are linguistic, highlighting the power of language in the practice of prejudice (Billig, 2002; Potter et al., 1993; Tuffin, 2005). To reiterate the effect on asylum seekers, it is not merely the social category of ‘asylum seeker’ that individuals reject; it is the use of language that positions asylum seekers in a negative way which creates the desire to accept or reject them (Every & Augoustinos, 2008a, 2008b; Gale, 2004; Klocker, 2004; Klocker & Dunn, 2003). Therefore, people do prejudice by discursive negotiations, as it is the language which individuals use to construct similarities or differences between groups, legitimising moral inclusion, or exclusion (Billig, 2002; Clayton & Opotow, 2003; Opotow, 1990a, 1990b; Potter et al., 1993). Van Dijk argues these language practices usually have two features: in-group reinforcement and out-group derogation.

Van Dijk (1992) further elucidates the discursive “double strategy” individuals use to positively self-represent whilst subtly positioning the ‘other’ in a negative way to legitimise prejudicial attitudes. This strategy is employed in denials of racism; by denying that one (or a group) is being racist, one positively represents ‘self’, whilst excusing their derogation of ‘other’. Van Dijk (1992) argues that the most blatant racist discourse features forms of denial. The denial of racism defends the person (or in-group) and their views, which are portrayed as common sense, fair and reasonable whilst undermining other accounts, effectively
Delegitimising and silencing them (Kirkwood, Liu & Weatherall, 2005; Potter et al. 1993; van Dijk, 1992). Denying racism defends one’s position and allows for the social acceptance of racist views (van Dijk, 1992). This contradiction is discursively negotiated with the word ‘but’; for example, “I’m not being racist, but….” is a common expression (van Dijk, 1992). Discursive forms of denial are identified by van Dijk (1992, p 92) and re-iterated by Nelson (2013, p 90) as ‘act-denial’: “I didn’t say that at all”; ‘control-denial’: “I didn’t say that on purpose”; ‘intention-denial’: “I didn’t mean that, it was taken out of context”; and ‘goal-denial’: “I was trying to explain that…..”.

Such forms of denial function as excuses for racist discourse and make accusations of racism problematic as it is difficult to prove intent (van Dijk, 1992). Additionally, denial discourses which position addressing the past (the British colonisation of Australia) as ‘not constructive’, excuse contemporary colonisers from acknowledging their role in addressing the legacies of colonisation, which are white dominance at the expense of Indigenous peoples rights (Green & Sonn, 2005, 2006; Saxton, 2004).

Another common rhetoric is “it’s got nothing to do with me, I didn’t take away their lands and steal their children”, which is a deferral of responsibility (van Dijk, 1992). I am ashamed to admit that I used to engage in this rhetoric. I used to believe that because I was born in New Zealand and had no family history of colonisation in Australia that I had nothing to do with ‘what happened to them’. I now understand that being a white person in Australia or New Zealand means that I am a coloniser, and therefore I have a role and responsibility in de-colonisation (Smith & Ward, 2000). Nelson (2013) further highlights that denials of racism are also employed by people who are oppressed by racism. This is disturbing because to survive white dominance and avoid further persecution, individuals deny they have experienced racism, or live in a racist space (Nelson, 2013). In these cases, denials of racism become a survival mechanism for those who are on the receiving end of it (Deutsch, 2006; Nelson, 2013).

Denials of racism by elites (politicians, business and community leaders) have a macro-level social and political function (van Dijk, 1992). When elites and authority figures legitimise prejudicial views, it becomes unnecessary for citizens to justify, excuse or deny their racist views, and so they are exonerated for prejudiced speech (van Dijk, 1992). The attempted changes to Australia’s Racial Discrimination Act, section 18C, in 2014 would have allowed this exoneration (Griffiths, 2014). The proposed changes attempted to remove the protection from harm done by racial vilification by narrowly redefining what vilification is (Rice, 2014, March 26). However, the Abbott Government abandoned the measures in order to ‘unite the nation’ (Griffiths, 2014) as it was causing ‘complications’ with sections of the public after an outcry against the proposed changes. Former Prime Minister Abbott stated “I don’t want to do anything that puts our national unity at risk at this time and so those proposals are now off the table” (as cited in Griffiths, 2014). Rather than being a genuine attempt at addressing racism and admitting the changes were granting impunity for bigotry (Rice, 2014), the Government’s abandonment of the bill was discursively negotiated under nationalist rhetoric (Griffiths, 2014). Using these contemporary examples, it is evident that denying racism helps maintain dominance, but once resistance becomes out of the control of the dominant, nationalist rhetoric is adopted to suppress the concerns of marginalised peoples whilst maintaining white hegemony (Augoustinos et al., 1999; Every & Augoustinos, 2008a).

Nationalism discourages ‘other’ identities on the basis they will divide the nation and positions all citizens as the same, thus none should have privileged rights over others (Augoustinos et al., 1999; Kirkwood et al., 2005). Desmond and Emirbayer (2012) argue that unifying people under a national banner and denying differences is assimilation. Common negotiations of nationalism in the media and social settings...
include phrases such as ‘we are all Australian’ (Cornwall, 2014), and the Abbott Government used the term ‘team Australia’ (Summers, 2014). This similarities discourse blames people for the disadvantage they experience, because its meritocratic assumptions position everyone as having the same opportunities (Lipsey, 2014). Meritocracy further permits victim-blaming as it assumes those who do not capitalise on the available opportunities must be inadequate, lacking or lazy (Lipsey, 2014). However, it is the inequitable social and systemic factors, such as inadequate education (Lawrence, 2012), that create inequality and people’s inability to capitalise on opportunities (Green & Sonn, 2005, 2006; Lipsey, 2014; Saxton, 2004). Additionally, if disadvantaged groups are unable to avoid oppressive conditions, the dominant characterise the oppressed as inferior and inadequate, thereby confirming the belief that they ‘deserve’ their circumstances (Deutsch, 2006).

I have learnt that the underlying factors of oppression are the use of language to negatively construct the identity of another, leading to moral exclusion which can occur on individual, relational and collective levels (Collins & Clement, 2012; Opotow, 1990a, 1990b, 1995, 2011; Deutsch, 2006). Power is central, as one group desires to maintain power, or gain it at the expense of another (Deutsch, 2006; Prilleltensky & Gonick, 1996). Those who hold power also control the inequitable distribution of resources, the unjust procedures and biased social systems (Prilleltensky & Gonnick, 1996). Consistently reinforced social disadvantage and legitimised harm ultimately results in the oppression of ‘other’ and thus they are placed into a position of inferiority (Opotow, 2011). Unjust treatment can result in self-oppression when a person believes that they deserve what they get (Deutsch, 2006). This is the ‘just world ideology’, which as a self-fulfilling prophecy, is another mechanism of moral exclusion (Deutsch, 2006; Prilleltensky & Gonick, 1996). As people experience oppression, they may begin to feel and behave in ways that are congruent with the oppressor’s constructions of them, thus confirming the legitimacy of such treatment to both oppressor and oppressed (Prilleltensky & Gonick, 1996). Oppressed individuals and groups can feel a heightened vulnerability and may be perpetually defensive (Deutsch, 2006; Prilleltensky & Gonick, 1996). If they resist, lash out and possibly end up breaking the law or social norms, they may be punished for disobedience and/or jailed (Deutsch, 2006; Prilleltensky & Gonick, 1996). Consequently, the disobedience and resulting punishment are what keep oppression in place (Deutsch, 2006), which is evident in the disproportionate percentage of Indigenous people in the Australian prison system (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2014; AHRC, 2013).

On the relational level, people are oppressed by family members, friends or colleagues due to a struggle for power and superiority (Deutsch, 2006). This is evident in bullying, teasing or joking behaviours which function to humiliate the other (van Dijk, 1992). It is evident in family relationships where verbal, emotional, psychological and physical abuse are used to maintain power and control over family members – generally women and children (Deutsch, 2006; Kingston, Regoli & Hewitt, 2002). Having the freedom to reflect on this in my CRA’s, I was able to pinpoint how this occurred in my own family as a child, which helped me to identify with the pain and suffering people face. I came to understand oppression on an intimate level, rather than seeing it as a macro-level phenomenon that is removed from my own experience. On a collective level, systemic oppression is evident in social policy that privileges wealthy people, while providing inadequate resources for underprivileged groups (Desmond & Emirbayer, 2012; Lawrence, 2012).

Institutional oppression manifests in under-resourced schools and inadequate health care facilities in poorer areas, creating large gaps between wealthy and disadvantaged populations (Desmond & Emirbayer, 2012; Deutsch, 2006; Lawrence, 2012; AHRC, 2005, 2013). On a macro-scale, oppression occurs as a result of a
collective removing another group from their moral boundary, such as the exclusion of Jewish people during World War II (Opotow, 1990a, 2011), which led to the ultimate and most dire form of oppression, genocide (Opotow, 2011). It is necessary to reiterate here the role of political rhetoric and the media’s role in perpetuating certain discourses which influence individuals’ opinions (Every & Augoustinos, 2008a; Gale, 2004; Klocker & Dunn, 2003; Mullen, 2010). As one collective ostracises the ‘other’ policy is formed by governments to reinforce and maintain the exclusion (van Dijk, 1992; Opotow, 2011). This is historically evident in Australia, as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples were excluded from the moral boundaries of non-Indigenous Australians, which legitimised having their lands stolen from them, their children stolen and abused and their culture destroyed (AHRC, 1997; AHRC, 2005, 2013; Dudgeon, et al., 2014). All of this was legislated and therefore declared just by the Australian Federal Government and the law (Australian Government Department of Immigration and Border Protection, 2009; AHRC, 1997), which highlights how oppression occurs with impunity.

It has been confronting to learn the mechanisms that enable governments, dictators, leaders and groups to act with impunity while violating the human rights of others. I had discovered whilst researching for an assessment that the former Howard government had used political and psychological impunity (Prilleltensky & Gonick, 1996) to justify punitive measures taken against asylum seekers from 2001 through to 2007 (Clyne, 2005; Flynn & LaForgia, 2002; Klocker & Dunn, 2003; Marr & Wilkinson, 2003; Williams, 2002). Securitisation (McDonald, 2011) and criminalisation (Kathrani, 2011) discourses were used to reinforce public fear in the wake of the 11 September 2001 attacks, by outlining potential threats to Australia’s security, its people and territory by ‘illegal’ asylum seekers (Friedman, 2011; Gale, 2004; Klocker & Dunn, 2003; Lawrence, 2006; McDonald, 2005). The former government’s emphasis on the need for security due to terrorism successfully created fear amongst the (majority of) public, who subsequently supported government policy to detain asylum seekers who arrive by sea in offshore ‘processing centres’ (Clyne, 2005; Dunn, Klocker & Salabay, 2007; Flynn & LaForgia, 2002; Kathrani, 2011). Using the language of fear and securitisation the former government managed to gain impunity for the inhumane treatment of vulnerable people (Clyne, 2005; Marr & Wilkinson, 2003). These examples highlight how the use of language can influence what individuals do, say and believe, therefore perpetuating the status quo of certain groups having power and others being subject to control and oppression (Herman & Chomsky, 2002; Lawrence, 2006).

In summary, I understand that the language used to construct the identity and inferiority of other groups can promote moral exclusion, and lead to oppression. White cultural imperialism, its discourses, institutions and systems, racism and the denial of harm underpins and maintains white group dominance in Australian society. This has led to the oppression of First Nations Peoples, non-whites and those who do not adhere to white norms of behaviour. Although it has been confronting to learn that I have been an agent of oppression, becoming conscious of the mechanisms of power, moral exclusion and oppression is necessary to arouse the desire to change (Deutsch, 2006; Freire, 1974). As such, the Bachelor of Behavioural Science and Culture and Society has inspired a deep desire within me to promote social change and work for equity (what is fair) and equality for marginalised groups in my professional career, and personal endeavours.

The decolonising approach (Smith, 1999) to Culture and Society has achieved this through its transformative learning process (Freire, 1973), and fostering my critical consciousness (Freire, 1974). By teaching me to be critical of my actions and behaviours, the unit has also promoted my...
responsible and sensitive interactions with others. Additionally, I recognise and accept the realities and knowledges that are different to my own, and respect these as equal. Although Culture and Society has deconstructed, and managed to decolonise my knowledge bases and my reality, it has given me the tools to challenge the dominant white culture of my upbringing in order to promote the interests of those it disadvantages. As highlighted by McIntosh (1989), I can use my unearned privileges to weaken dominant systems by recognising and speaking out against racist and oppressive acts; use my time and energy to advocate for change; increase people’s awareness about the mechanisms and negative impacts of white dominance; and share my unearned assets with others to increase their power. However, I feel that larger-scale social change will require a greater public interrogation of whiteness, as not doing so will leave dominant discourses and white power unchallenged, which are the core of racism and the oppression of First Nations and non-white peoples (Green & Sonn, 2005).

References


Transforming my white identity


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**Biography**
At the time of writing, Kimberly Smith is an undergraduate student at The University of Notre Dame Australia, studying a Bachelor of Science (Human Biology) and Bachelor of Behavioural Science at the Fremantle campus. Kimberly grew up in Wangkatha country, in the Goldfields of Western Australia after migrating to Australia as a young child from New Zealand with her family. As such, Kimberly acknowledges she is a Pakeha New Zealander and Wadjella Australian citizen, and pays respect to the traditional owners of both countries, the Maori and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.