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

Kimberly Smith
University of Notre Dame Australia, Fremantle.

The construct of identity has been explored by numerous disciplines over time and has engaged scholars such as Piaget, Eriskon, 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, concientisation (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.

"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. Disciplines including Sociology and certain fields in the Behavioural Sciences extend upon the psychology of the individual by incorporating the multiplicity of social and institutional influences on identity construction. The Bachelor of Behavioural Science at The University of Notre Dame Australia's Fremantle campus dissects the multiplicity of identity contributors, encompassing the historical, political, economic and cultural contexts in which an individual develops. My education journey in Behavioural Science has made me conscious of my white ethnicity and of its unspoken reality, which is the impact of whiteness on non-white *and* white people (McIntosh, 1989). Consequently, I explain how I came to understand that by reproducing whiteness, I have been unconsciously racist. In this paper, I take the reader on my journey of learning how the dominant white culture I am situated within benefits me whilst it perpetuates the social disadvantage and oppression of non-white people. I have learned that whiteness denies liberation for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and for non-white people, which prohibits reconciliation and authentic cultural diversity in the contemporary Australian society (Green & Sonn, 2005, 2006). Furthermore, my education has unravelled the micro- and macro-level social forces that have shaped my life and views about other people. Throughout the discussion, the links between identity, moral exclusion and oppression are revealed by connecting common language practices and images in politics, media and social realms with Opotow's (1990a) Scope of Justice theory, and Deutch's (2006) oppression framework. Education and being reflexive (reflecting on my words and actions, and their consequences) has made me critically conscious (Friere, 1974) of my white ethnicity and role in perpetuating white dominance. In addition, the method of transformative education (Darlaston-Jones, Owen, & Lee, 2009; Freire, 1973) in the Bachelor of Behavioural Science has demonstrated that education alone is

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 as a child, through listening to how adults, authority figures such as teachers and politicians and news reports spoke about, positioned and treated non-white peoples in a negative way. The teachings of early sociologist Mead (as cited in Crotty, 1998) highlight that the process of adopting the standpoint of others begins in childhood; the adoption of a standpoint is what shapes us as social objects. Connolly's (1998) research and book further outlines how the socialisation process occurs in young people, instilling dominant views and reinforcing cultural and social norms by adopting the language practices used to describe and discuss certain issues (Hall, 1997; Potter et al., 1993).

As a young person, my reality was that white people were 'better than' non-white people because of superior intelligence (Branch et al., 1995; Sternberg, 2012; Witty & Garfield, 1942); ability (Dafler & Callaghan, 2005; Eddy, 1969); merit (Lipsey, 2014); and biology (Darity, Royal & Whitfield, 2010), because these were the messages I received from the white culture around me. The discriminatory attitudes that I learnt as a child are evident in Pedersen, Griffiths, Contos, Bishop and Walker's (2000) research, which outlines the prevalence of prejudice and false beliefs in an Australian city and in my home town. Additionally, I was taught the history and ideology of the British 'settlement' in primary school, in terms of it being beneficial to Australia and First Nation's Peoples, the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. However, since being educated about, and reflecting on, my cultural context and its biases, I now understand there are multiple realities and knowledges that are very different to what I was brought up with (Crotty, 1998; Dudgeon, Wright, Paradies, Garvey & Walker, 2014). As an example, I had believed and repeated the (white person's) assumption that the Stolen Generations (a government-endorsed forced child removal program) was a benefit to Indigenous people as it brought education and a better (white) future for Aboriginal peoples (Dafler &

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

respectful 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

Augoustinos, M., Rapley, M., & Tuffin, K. (1999). Genocide or failure to gel? Racism, history and nationalism in Australian talk. *Discourse and Society, 10* (1), 351-378. doi: 10.1177/0957926599010003004

Australian Bureau of Statistics. (2014). *Prisoners in Australia: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Prisoners.* Retrieved from http://www.abs.gov.au/ ausstats/abs@.nsf/Lookup/by% 20Subject/4517.0~2014~Main% 20Features~Aboriginal%20&%20Torres% 20Strait%20Islander%20prisoner% 20characteristics~10007

Australian Government Department of Immigration and Border Protection. (2009). *Fact Sheet 8 – Abolition of the "White Australia" Policy.* Canberra: DIBP. Retrieved from http:// www.immi.gov.au/media/fact-sheets/08abolition.htm

Australian Human Rights Commission. (1997). *Bringing them home: Report of the national inquiry into the separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children from their families.* Retrieved from https://www.humanrights.gov.au/ publications/bringing-them-home-report-1997

Australian Human Rights Commission. (2005). *Social justice report.* Retrieved from https://www.humanrights.gov.au/ publications/social-justice-report-2005-home

Australian Human Rights Commission. (2013). *Social justice and native title report.* Retrieved from https:// www.humanrights.gov.au/publications/ social-justice-and-native-title-report-2013

Billig, M. (2002). Henri Tajfel's 'cognitive aspects of prejudice' and the psychology of bigotry. *British Journal of Social Psychology, 41*(2), 171-188. doi:10.1348/014466602760060165

Branch, C., Brooks-Gunn, J., Broughton, J. M., Deutsch, M., Ginsburg, H. P., Greene, M., & Passow, A. H. (1995). Statement on race differences in intelligence: Occasioned by the bell curve. *Peace and Conflict: Journal of Peace Psychology, 1* (1), 99-100. doi:10.1207/ s15327949pac0101_11

Clayton, S., & Opotow, S. (2003). Justice and identity: Changing perspectives on what is fair. *Personality and Social Psychology Review, 7*(4), 298-310. doi:10.1207/S15327957PSPR0704_03

Clyne, M. (2005). The use of exclusionary language to manipulate opinion: John Howard, asylum seekers and the re-emergence of political incorrectness in Australia. *Journal of Language and Politics, 4*(2), 173-196. doi:10.1075/ jlp.4.2.03cly

Collins, K., & Clément, R. (2012). Language and prejudice: Direct and moderated effects. *Journal of Language and Social Psychology, 31*(4), 376-396. doi:10.1177/0261927X12446611

Connolly, P. (1998). *Racism, gender identities, and young children: Social relations in a multi-ethnic, inner-city primary school*. New York; London: Routledge.

Cornwall, D. (2014, August 23). Prime Minister calls for team Australia 'divisive' and 'counter productive', former PM Malcom Fraser says. *ABC News*. Retrieved from http://www.abc.net.au/news/2014-08-23/malcolm-fraser-calls-abbotts-team-australia-divisive/5691550

Crotty, M. (1998). *The foundations of social research: Meaning and perspective in the research process*. St Leonards, NSW: Allen & Unwin

Dafler, J., & Callaghan, G. (2005). Social Darwinism and the language of racial oppression: Australia's stolen generations. *Et Cetera, 62*(2), 137. Retrieved from http://search.ebscohost.com.ipacez.nd.edu.au/login.aspx?direct=true&db=pbh&AN=16813390&site=ehost-live&scope=site

Darity Jr, W., Royal, C., & Whitfield, K. (2010). Race, genetics and health: An introduction. *The Review of Black Political Economy, 37*(1), 1-6. doi:10.1007/s12114-009-9054-2

Darlaston-Jones, D., Herbert, J., Ryan, K., Darlaston-Jones W., Harris, J., & Dudgeon, P (in press). Are we asking the right questions? Why we should have a decolonisation discourse based on conscientisation rather than Indigenising the curriculum. Accepted in *Canadian Journal of Native Education*.

Darlaston-Jones, D., & Owen, A. (2011, October). *A collaborative learning and critical reflexivity model of anti-racism education*. Paper presented as part of the symposium: From theory, through evidence to practice in psychology education at the 46th Annual APS Conference, Canberra, ACT.

Darlaston-Jones, D., Owen, A., & Lee, A. (2009). *Transforming Higher Education through Transformative Practice*. 11th Trans-Tasman Community Psychology Conference. Retrieved from http://researchonline.nd.edu.au/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1010&context=arts_conference

Davidson, H. (2015, January 22). Aboriginal Hepatitis C rising, prompting calls for improved services. *The Guardian*. Retrieved from http://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2015/jan/22/aboriginal-hepatitis-c-rising-prompting-calls-for-improved-services

Desmond, M., & Emirbayer, M. (2012). To imagine and pursue racial justice, *Race Ethnicity and Education, 15*(2), 259-289. doi: 10.1080/13613324.2011.578124

Deutsch, M. (2006). A framework for thinking about oppression and its change. *Social Justice Research, 19*(1), 7. doi:10.1007/s11211-006-9998-3

Dudgeon, P., Milroy, H., & Walker, R. (Eds.). (2014). *Working together: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander mental health and wellbeing principles and practice*. Retrieved from http://aboriginal.telethonkids.org.au/kulunga-research-network/working-together-2nd-edition-(1)/

Dudgeon, P., Wright, M., Paradies, Y., Garvey, D., & Walker, I. (2014). Aboriginal social, cultural and historical contexts. In P. Dudgeon, H. Milroy, & R. Walker (Eds.). *Working together: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander mental health and wellbeing principles and practice*. Retrieved from http://aboriginal.telethonkids.org.au/kulunga-research-network/working-together-2nd-edition-(1)/

Dunn, K., Klocker, N., & Salabay, T. (2007). Contemporary racism and Islamaphobia in Australia: Racializing religion. *Ethnicities, 7*(4), 564 - 589. doi: 10.1177/1468796807084017

Dutta, M., & De Souza, R. (2008). The past, present and future of Health Development campaigns: reflexivity and the critical-cultural approach, *Health Communications, 23*(4), 326-339. doi: 10.1080/10410230802229704

Eddy, L. (1969). Education and social Darwinism. *Educational Theory, 19*(1), 76 -87. doi:10.1111/j.1741-5446.1969.tb00376.x

Edley, N. (2001). Unravelling social constructionism. *Theory & Psychology, 11*(3), 433-441. doi:10.1177/0959354301113008

Erikson, E. H. (1968). *Identity, youth, and crisis* (1st American ed.). New York: W. W. Norton & Co.

Every, D., & Augoustinos, M. (2008a). Constructions of Australia in pro- and anti -asylum seeker political discourse, *Nations and Nationalism, 14*(3), 562-580. doi:10.1111/j.1469-8129.200800356.x

Every, D., & Augoustinos, M. (2008b). 'Taking Advantage' or fleeing persecution? Opposing accounts of asylum seeking. *Journal of Sociolinguistics, 12*(5), 648-667. doi: 10.1111/j.1467-9841.2008.00386.x

Flynn, M., & LaForgia, R. (2002). Australia's Pacific Solution to asylum seekers. *Law Asia Journal,* 31-43. Retrieved from http://search.informit.com.au.ipacez.nd.edu.au/fullText;dn=20031714;res=AGISPT

Freire, P. (1973). *Education for critical consciousness*. New York, NY: Seabury Press.

Freire, P. (1974). Conscientisation. *Cross Currents, 24*(1), 23. http://search.ebscohost.com.ipacez.nd.edu.au/login.aspx?direct=true&db=rfh&AN=ATLA0001449185&site=ehost-live&scope=site

Friedman, B. (2011). Managing fear: The politics of Homeland Security. *Political Science Quarterly, 126*(1), 77-106. doi: 10.1002/j.1538-165X.2011.tb00695.x

Gale, P. (2004). The refugee crisis and fear: Populist politics and media discourse. *Journal of Sociology, 40*(4), 321-340. doi:10.1177/1440783304048378

Gatt, K. (2011) Sudanese refugees in Victoria: An analysis of their treatment by the Australian Government, *International Journal of Comparative and Applied Criminal Justice, 35*(3), 207-219. doi: 10.1080/01924036.2011.591904

Green, M., & Sonn, C. (2005). Examining discourses of whiteness and the potential for reconciliation. *Journal of Community and Applied Social Psychology, 15*(6), 478-492. doi:10.1002/casp.843

Green, M., & Sonn, C. (2006). Problematising the discourses of the dominant: Whiteness and reconciliation. *Journal of Community and Applied Social Psychology, 16*(5), 379-395. doi:10.1002/casp.882

Griffiths, E. (2014, August 6). Government backtracks in Racial Discrimination Act 18C changes; pushes ahead with tough security laws. *ABC News*. Retrieved from http://www.abc.net.au/news/2014-08-05/government-backtracks-on-racial-discrimination-act-changes/5650030

Hall, S. (1997). The work of representation. In S. Hall (Ed.), *Representation: Cultural representations and signifying practices*. London, England: Sage, in association with the Open University.

Hatchell, H. (2004). Privilege of whiteness: Adolescent male students' resistance to racism in an Australian classroom. *Race Ethnicity and Education, 7*(2), 99-114. doi:10.1080/1361332042000234240

Herman, E. S., & Chomsky, N. (2002). *Manufacturing consent: The political economy of the mass media, (2nd ed.)*. London, England: Vintage.

Hodgetts, D., Masters, B., & Robertson, N. (2004). Media coverage of 'decades of disparity' in ethnic mortality in Aotearoa. *Journal of Community and Applied Social Psychology, 14*(6), 455-472. doi:10.1002/casp.792

Kathrani, P. (2011). Asylum law or criminal law: Blame, deterrence and the criminalisation of the asylum seeker. *Jurisprudencija, 18*(4), 1543-1554. Retrieved from http://search.ebscohost.com.ipacez.nd.edu.au/login.aspx?direct=true&db=sih&AN=70883308&site=ehost-live&scope=site

Kingston, B., Regoli, B., & Hewitt, J. (2002). The theory of differential oppression: A developmental-ecological explanation of adolescent problem behavior. *Critical Criminology, 11*(3), 237-260. doi:10.1023/B:CRIT.0000005812.05228.78

Kirkwood, S., Liu, J., & Weatherall, A. (2005). Challenging the standard story of Indigenous rights in Aotearoa/New Zealand. *Journal of Community and Applied Social Psychology, 15*(6), 493-505. doi: 10.1002/casp.837

Klocker, N. (2004). Community antagonism towards Asylum Seekers in Port Augusta, South Australia. *Australian Geographical Studies, 42*(1), 1-17. doi: 10.1111/j.1467-8470.2004.00239.x.

Klocker, N., & Dunn, K. M. (2003). Who's driving the asylum debate?: Newspaper and government representations of asylum seekers. *Media International Australia, Incorporating Culture & Policy,* (109), 71-92. Retrieved from http://www.uq.edu.au/mia/2003-issues#109

Lawrence, C. (2006). *Fear and politics*. Carlton North, Victoria: Scribe.

Lawrence, C. (2012). Mind the gap: Why the rising inequality of our schools is dangerous. *The Monthly*, 32-37. Retrieved from http://www.themonthly.com.au/issue/2012/july/1344475666/carmen-lawrence/mind-gap

Lipsey, D. (2014). The meretriciousness of meritocracy. *The Political Quarterly, 85*(1), 37-42. doi:10.1111/j.1467-923X.2014.12062.x

Love, T., & Tilley, E. (2013). Temporal discourse and the news media representation of indigenous- non-indigenous relations: A case study from Aotearoa New Zealand. *Media International Australia, Incorporating Culture & Policy,* (149), 174-188. Retrieved from http://search.ebscohost.com.ipacez.nd.edu.au/login.aspx?direct=true&db=ufh&AN=92695875&site=ehost-live&scope=site

Marr, D., & Wilkinson, M. (2003). *Dark victory*. Crows Nest, N.S.W: Allen & Unwin.

McCallum, K. (2011). Journalism and Indigenous health policy. *Australian Aboriginal Studies,* (2), 21-31. Retrieved from http://search.informit.com.au.ipacez.nd.edu.au/documentSummary;dn=822752773835304;res=IELIND

McCallum, K. (2013). Distant and intimate conversations: Media and indigenous health policy in Australia. *Critical Arts, 27*(3), 332-351. doi:10.1080/02560046.2013.800667

McCallum, K., & Waller, L. (2013). Indigenous media practice. *Media International Australia Incorporating Culture & Policy,* (149), 67-69. Retrieved from http://search.ebscohost.com.ipacez.nd.edu.au/login.aspx?direct=true&db=ufh&AN=92695865&site=ehost-live&scope=site

McDonald, M. (2005). Constructing insecurity: Australian security discourse and policy post-2001. *International Relations, 19*(3), 297-320. doi:10.1177/0047117805055408

McDonald, M. (2011). Deliberation and Resecuritization: Australia, Asylum-Seekers and the Normative Limits of the Copenhagen School. *Australian Journal of Political Science, 46*(2), 281-295. doi: 10.1080/10361146.2011.568471

McKay, F. H., Thomas, S. L., & Kneebone, S. (2012). 'It would be okay if they came through the proper channels': Community perceptions and attitudes toward asylum seekers in Australia. *Journal of Refugee Studies, 25*(1), 113-133. doi:10.1093/jrs/fer010

McIntosh, P. (1989). White privilege: Unpacking the invisible knapsack. *Independent School, Winter,* 31-36. Retrieved from http://nationalseedproject.org/images/documents/Knapsack_plus_Notes-Peggy_McIntosh.pdf

Mullen, A. (2010). Twenty years on: The second-order prediction of the Herman-Chomsky propaganda model. *Media, Culture & Society, 32*(4), 673-690. doi:10.1177/0163443710367714

Nelson, J. K. (2013). Denial of racism and its implications for local action. *Discourse & Society, 24*(1), 89-109. doi:10.1177/0957926512463635

Nielsen, A., Stuart, L. A., & Gorman, D. (2014). Confronting the cultural challenge of the whiteness of nursing: Aboriginal registered nurses' perspectives. *Contemporary Nurse: A Journal for the Australian Nursing Profession, 48*(2), 190-196. Retrieved from http://search.informit.com.au.ipacez.nd.edu.au/documentSummary;dn=886398891864036;res=IELAPA

Opotow, S. (1990a). Deterring moral exclusion. *Journal of Social Issues, 46*(1), 173-182. doi:10.1111/j.1540-4560.1990.tb00280.x

Opotow, S. (1990b). Moral exclusion and injustice: An introduction. *Journal of Social Issues, 46*(1), 1-20. doi:10.1111/j.1540-4560.1990.tb00280.x

Opotow, S. (1995). Drawing the line. Social Categorization, Moral Exclusion and the Scope of Justice. In Rubin, J. Z., Bunker, B. B., & Deutsch, M. (Eds.), *Conflict, cooperation, and justice: Essays inspired by the work of Morton Deutsch* (pp 347-369). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Opotow, S. (2011). How this was possible: Interpreting the holocaust. *Journal of Social Issues, 67*(1), 205-224. doi:10.1111/j.1540-4560.2010.01694.x

Pedersen, A., Griffiths, B., Contos, N., Bishop, B., & Walker, I. (2000). Attitudes toward Aboriginal Australians in city and country settings. *Australian Psychologist, 35*(2), 109-117. doi:10.1080/00050060008260332

Piaget, J., & Inhelder, B. (1969). *The psychology of the child.* New York, NY: Basic Books

Potter, J., Edwards, D., & Wetherell, M. (1993). A model of Discourse in Action. *American Behavioural Scientist, 36*(3), 383-401. Retrieved from https://dspace.lboro.ac.uk/dspace-spui/bitstream/2134/9427/6/Potter%20et%20al%20-%20A%20model%20of%20Discourse%20in%20Action%20ABS%201993.pdf

Prilleltensky, I., & Gonick, L. (1996). Polities change, oppression remains: On the psychology and politics of oppression. *Political Psychology, 17*(1), 127-148. Retrieved from http://www.jstor.org/stable/3791946

Prilleltensky, I., & Nelson, G. (2002). *Doing psychology critically: Making a difference in diverse settings.* Basingstoke, England: Palgrave.

Rice, S. (2014, March 26). Race act changes are what you get when you champion bigotry. *The Conversation.* Retrieved from http://theconversation.com/race-act-changes-are-what-you-get-when-you-champion-bigotry-24782

Roberts, R. G., Jones, R., & Smith, M. A. (1993). Optical dating at deaf adder gorge, Northern Territory, indicates human occupation between 53,000 and 60,000 years ago. *Australian Archaeology,* (37), 58-59. Retrieved from http://australianarchaeology.com/our-journal/journalcontents/volume-37/

Rowe, E., & O'Brien, E. (2013). Constructions of asylum seekers and refugees in Australian political discourse. In Richards, Kelly & Tauri, Juan Marcellus (Eds.), *Crime Justice and Social Democracy: Proceedings of the 2nd International Conference, Queensland University of Technology*, p 173-181. Brisbane: Queensland.

Saxton, A. (2004). Whiteness and reconciliation: A discursive analysis. *Australian Psychologist, 39*(1), 14-23. doi:10.1080/00050060410001660407

Smith, C., & Ward, G. K. (2000). Globalisation, decolonisation and Indigenous Australia. *Australian Aboriginal Studies, 1*(2), 3-11. Retrieved from http:// search.informit.com.au.ipacez.nd.edu.au/ documentSummary;dn=131514067155251 ;res=IELAPA

Smith, L. (1999). *Decolonising methodologies: Research and Indigenous peoples*. Dunedin, New Zealand: University of Otago.

Sternberg, R. J. (2012). Intelligence. *Dialogues in Clinical Neuroscience, 14* (1), 19-27. Retrieved from http:// www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/ PMC3341646/?tool=pmcentrez

Stevens-Long, J., Schapiro, S. A., & McClintock, C. (2012). Passionate scholars: Transformative learning in doctoral education. *Adult Education Quarterly, 62*(2), 180-198. doi:10.1177/0741713611402046

Suchet, M. (2007). Unraveling whiteness. *Psychoanalytic Dialogues, 17*(6), 867-886. doi:10.1080/10481880701703730

Summers, A. (2014, August 23). Tony Abbott's Team Australia entrenches inequality. *Sydney Morning Herald*. Retrieved from http://www.smh.com.au/ comment/tony-abbotts-team-australia-entrenches-inequality-20140822-106sdk.html

Tajfel, H. (1974). Social identity and intergroup behaviour. *Social Science Information, 13*(2), 65-93. doi:10.1177/053901847401300204

Tuffin, K. (2005) *Understanding critical social psychology*. London, England: Sage.

van Dijk, T. (1992). Discourse and the denial of racism. *Discourse and Society, 3*,87, doi: 10.1177/0957926592003001005

Weimin, M. (2007). Cogito: From Descartes to Sartre. *Frontiers of Philosophy in China, 2*(2), 247-264. doi:10.1007/s11466 -007-0016-0

Witty, P., & Garfield, S. (1942). Trends in discussions of intelligence: race differences. *Journal Of Educational Psychology, 33*(8), 584-594. doi:10.1037/ h0056705.

Young, M. (1990). *Justice and the politics of difference*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press

Address for correspondence
kim.smith@outlook.com.au

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.