

When inclusion means exclusion:

SOCIAL COMMENTARY AND INDIGENOUS AGENCY



COVER ARTWORK

'Re-written without Consent...'

The very colourful portion of this artwork represents the flow, strength, tenacity and resilience of Aboriginal culture and all the beauty, learning, relationships and groundedness that grows from it...the oldest living culture on earth. The black and white part represents the re-writing of us as a people, the misrepresentation of our voice, racism, stereotyping, marginalisation and distorted view of Aboriginal culture that gets reported and aired for public opinion through mainstream media on a daily basis. In essence, it is as though our black voices, stories and culture get erased, to be substituted to appeal to a white audience, but also at the same time it condemns a culture that is truly magnificent, spiritual, beautiful and open to sharing.

De Greer-Yindimincarlie
[Yindi Artz](#)



Like all of our work at All Together Now, this report was researched and written on unceded Aboriginal Land. We acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of Country throughout Australia, and recognise their continuing connection to land, waters and culture. We acknowledge their Elders past, present and emerging, and acknowledge that Australia was, is and always will be Aboriginal Land.

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Executive summary

All Together Now's report *When inclusion means exclusion* is an inquiry into social commentary that inclusively portrays Indigenous people and communities in Australian mainstream media. Our findings indicate that opinion articles that portray Indigenous people inclusively through content and language still deny agency to Indigenous people and communities in their discussion and portrayal of Indigenous people and their issues.

All Together Now analysed 20 opinion articles published between 2019 and 2020 in five leading newspapers: *The Sydney Morning Herald*, *The Australian*, *The Daily Telegraph*, *Herald Sun* and *The Courier Mail*, and found that Indigenous voices, points of view and sources are routinely

under-represented, while the relevant historical and cultural context is regularly overlooked. Adding to that, the over-representation of non-Indigenous elite voices in media that cover Indigenous issues helps continue a paternalistic and disempowering attitude towards Indigenous people in Australia.

Inclusive stories about Indigenous people are important and much needed in mainstream media. Indigenous communities have long called for a shift in media representation and for Indigenous people to be participants in social commentary, rather than merely subjects of it.

This report makes five key recommendations:

1 Mainstream media agencies need to have a diversity of Indigenous voices at all levels, and both empower and trust Indigenous people to do the work.

2 Non-Indigenous media and commentators need to seek out and listen to Indigenous voices, especially when discussing Indigenous matters.

3 Non-Indigenous media should engage with Indigenous-run media. This can improve how non-Indigenous media receives and engages with Indigenous stories.

4 Mainstream media needs to recognise its historic role in shaping racist and deficit-based discourses and representations of Indigenous people, and seek to actively address its own past and ongoing racist practices.

5 Mainstream media needs to commit to the inclusion of Indigenous people and perspectives when reporting on Indigenous issues and concerns, and more generally across reporting.

Note on the language used in this report

'Indigenous' is an umbrella term used throughout this report, which is common practice when referring repeatedly to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. While these are the most common umbrella terms, others include 'First Nations', 'First Australians', 'Indigenous Australians' and 'first peoples/First Peoples'.¹



WHEN INCLUSION MEANS EXCLUSION:

a comment by Rachael Hocking

The idea of analysing “inclusive commentary” is an interesting and important approach. We know that well-intentioned writings on First Nations communities can still cause harm and reinforce stereotypes, as well as strip agency from those communities.

As the authors of this report note, we need to move beyond surface level inclusivity and scrutinise how language, context and positioning of First Nations peoples in the media can still contribute to the power imbalance between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people.

The framing concepts (representation through agency, voice and orientation as well as sources and framing through point of view, appropriate context and language) go to the heart of Black media ethics. The concepts speak to how Black media operate on a daily basis, and therefore provides a Black lens through which to analyse the selected opinion pieces.

Black media values culturally appropriate and empowering coverage of our communities. We can see in this analysis that mainstream media commentary on First Nations communities does not hold itself to the same standard. The coding helps to break down commentary which has the appearance of inclusivity. Writing which, to the unformed reader, presents itself as speaking authoritatively on Indigenous issues, without Indigenous input. In this way, the coding helps us to understand where well-intentioned commentary is not as inclusive as it seems. Hollow commentary. This framework allows us to think critically about the commentary we consume, rather than accepting that because it was published in a major masthead it is a valid and accurate reflection of First Nations experiences, histories and aspirations.

Analysis of the indirect use of biased language and the ‘White Mastery narrative’ gives us useful framing of media which appears inclusive, like the SMH article ‘Indigenous Voice Must speak Loud in Captain Cook Commemorations’. This example, though a minority finding in the report (10% found presence of racially biased ideas, tones and feelings), speaks to a common framing of Indigenous issues. It was an editorial for the SMH, and therefore even more concerning that the appropriate historical context of our communities’ experience of invasion was sidelined as a “predictable partisan debate”. When editors



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Rhett Wyman

of major mastheads position our histories in this way, it makes me wary of the editorial direction and instruction at that paper.

Another important finding was the absence of conflict and separation narratives – while potentially seen as a shift towards more positive portrayals, it omits narratives which challenge the status quo, which push for First Nations sovereignty, and which reject mainstream aspirations. These narratives are important for non-Indigenous people to gain a deeper understanding of the diversity of First Nations experiences. An example would be prioritising opinions from the ‘Change the Date’ movement, rather than the ‘Abolish Australia Day’ movement in mainstream coverage of January 26.

On Elite Voices

.....
This analysis is particularly important to those working in Black media.
.....

We know the value of our community’s voices; our media is regularly seen to prioritise an Elder’s or Traditional Owner’s voice on an issue affecting not just First Nations communities, but their community (i.e. Speaking to the Puutu Kunti Kurrama and Pinikura People when the destruction of Juukan Gorge occurred). Challenging the language of ‘experts’ commonly taught at journalism school by framing those ‘experts’ (police, academics etc.) as ‘elite’ goes to understanding the power imbalance of whose knowledge is valued in Australian society.

To see that only 50 per cent of articles gave prominence to diverse voices is concerning but unsurprising. We need to start challenging the way ‘secondary’ and ‘primary’ sources (commonly seen as police, academics, etc.) are understood to create a better appreciation for First Nations communities’ knowledges and protocol.

On the recommendations

The issue of a lack of diversity in the media is obvious. Findings by Media Diversity Australia, as well as countless anecdotes from Black journalists in non-Indigenous newsrooms reinforce this. When you have more Black voices in a newsroom, you will gain greater trust from First Nations communities, you will be able to access and publish a wide range of Indigenous voices, particularly those who don’t have access to the same spaces some of us hold. With more First Nations people employed at executive and editorial levels within major mastheads – particularly people who have been grounded in Black media - we could shift the way elite voices are prioritised over our own, and ensure the title of ‘expert’ is not just given to non-Indigenous academics (and others), but to First Nations knowledge holders.

While more partnerships between mainstream media and Indigenous-run media would benefit the former, we need to ensure any partnership does not result in overburdening Black media and journalists with the labour of educating.

.....
Mainstream media and social commentators should take it upon themselves to consume Black media and understand the foundations on which it was built to have a better appreciation for why our approaches are different, and how they more accurately reflect our communities’ aspirations.
.....

Recommendation number 4 seems especially poignant, considering recent admissions from major publications about their role in “shaping racist and deficit-based discourses and representations of Indigenous people”. My thoughts go to National Geographic’s well-publicised 2018 apology for decades of racist coverage, particularly of this continent’s First Nations peoples and cultures. At the time their apology was welcomed by some First Nations people who saw it as a step in the right direction, but it is worth asking what the magazine has done beyond a public apology to rectify decades of racist coverage. And – will we see similar admissions from Australian media?

Introduction

Media content not only impacts how the public perceives Indigenous communities and individuals; it also informs how different groups in society perceive each other. When Australian mainstream media represents Indigenous people and issues from a non-Indigenous perspective, and without regard to Indigenous agency, Indigenous voices are drowned out. This means that Indigenous communities continue to be portrayed and perceived through the views and voices of non-Indigenous people.

Minority voices are limited from engaging in their own narratives within news media.² Research shows that damaging stereotypes of Indigenous communities are still perpetuated within mainstream media and covert and overt racism remain a feature of news stories relating to Indigenous individuals and communities.³ Previous studies have identified three main ways in which Australian mainstream media has misrepresented Indigenous people:

1. through distorted reporting of Indigenous histories and behaviours;
2. through the marginalisation of Indigenous voices;
3. through the prioritisation of non-Indigenous perspectives on Indigenous issues.⁴

Media organisations' lack of diversity contributes to the presentation of news stories and social commentary⁵ about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples from a white standpoint primarily concerned with appealing to their white audience.⁶ Social commentary and news reflect the world back to their audiences, and in the process, help shape the ways Indigenous people and politics are understood and engaged with across society. That means the media has a responsibility to meaningfully engage with Indigenous perspectives and concerns if it is to play a constructive role in Indigenous-settler relations. To do so requires truth-telling: grappling with Australia's settler-colonial character and the associated history of racist, deficit-based⁷ misrepresentations of Indigenous people that have upheld discriminatory laws and systems. The Black Lives Matter movement has prompted a variety of media outlets to engage with their own legacy and reconsider their ways of telling minority stories. Rather than seeing the media's role as passively reflecting public opinion, the media can acknowledge and take responsibility for its role in shaping the conversation around Indigenous issues. This will require a substantial shift in media representation of Indigenous issues and in the media's commitment to centering Indigenous viewpoints.



Presenting a novel analysis, *When inclusion means exclusion* focuses on inclusive portrayals of Indigenous people to answer questions around whether inclusion really means fair representation of Indigenous agency and viewpoint. All Together Now's previous research found that a large amount of the social commentary about Indigenous matters published in mainstream media is inclusive by analysing it against at least one of the following criteria:

- **defying racial stereotypes, for example by providing an alternative representation of that person or group promoting racial equality;**
- **condemning racism;**
- **giving a voice to a minority group on a racial matter that affects their community.**

All Together Now decided to look deeper into the last aspect of inclusiveness after we analysed the columnists' backgrounds in partnership with the Cultural and Indigenous Research Centre Australia (CIRCA). The results showed that only 16% (29) of all newspaper opinion pieces about First Nations people (179 in total including neutral, inclusive and negative ones) were authored by Indigenous columnists. Sixty-nine percent (123) of all newspaper opinion pieces that mentioned or discussed Indigenous people were authored by people of Anglo-Celtic and/or European backgrounds. The statistics were similar when it came to inclusive opinion articles: 20% of authors had an Indigenous background, while 50% of articles were written by authors of an Anglo-Celtic background.⁸ This report emerges from a need to understand whether inclusive portrayals do the work required beyond inclusive language, which involves centering Indigenous voices and prioritising Indigenous perspectives on Indigenous issues.

Using discourse analysis⁹ on a sample of 20 randomly selected inclusive opinion articles, we found that almost half of the analysed opinion pieces marginalised Indigenous voices. The opinion pieces were often written from non-Indigenous and Anglo-European perspectives, demonstrating a continued practice of excluding Indigenous perspectives on Indigenous issues. One third of the opinion articles analysed for this report did not engage with relevant Indigenous historical and cultural contexts, although they discussed sensitive topics that usually require contextualisation. This denial of agency, even in the inclusive coverage of Indigenous affairs, as this report shows, has led researchers to declare that mainstream media has 'failed' Aboriginal communities.¹⁰

.....

This report demonstrates how inclusive opinion pieces can create a surface-level inclusive representation of Indigenous communities and makes a new contribution to our current understanding of mainstream media and inclusive portrayals of Indigenous communities. Mainstream media needs to transition away from Indigenous representations narrated through Anglo-European viewpoints and cultural frameworks. We need fair representation that is inclusive of Indigenous voices and considers the legacy of assimilationist and paternalistic policies in Indigenous affairs.¹¹

.....

Looking deeper into inclusive social commentary

All Together Now monitors the mainstream media for racialised commentary and analyses opinion articles and current affairs television segments using a framework designed in collaboration with the University of Technology Sydney.¹² Through this framework, our team looks at the content of race-related opinion pieces to determine whether they involve a negative, neutral or inclusive depiction of race. From 2018 to 2020, ATN collected and analysed 724 race-related opinion pieces and found that 53% of these involved negative depictions of race.

Muslim communities, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, African and African Australian communities, and Chinese and Chinese Australian communities were among those frequently depicted negatively.

Building on these findings, All Together Now set out to conduct a deeper analysis of media pieces coded as 'inclusive'. The definition of inclusive in our primary research is based on content, mainly language around race (for example, condemning racism or presenting a negative issue

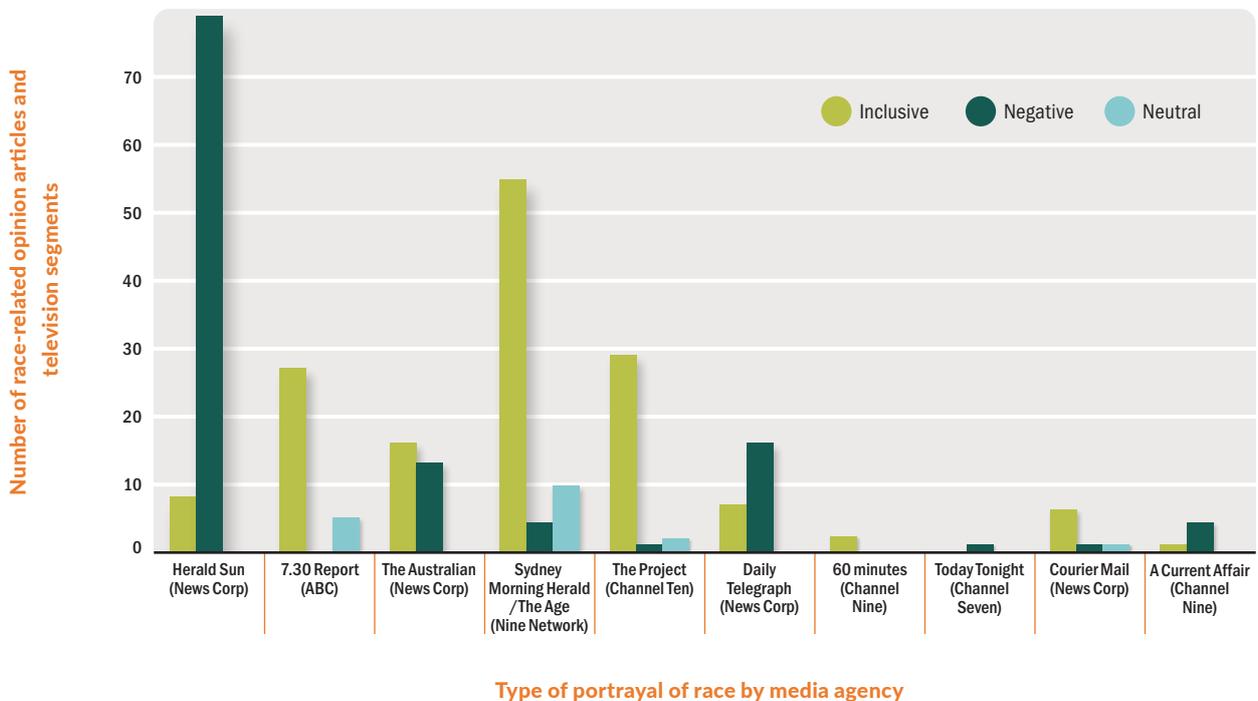


FIGURE 1: Portrayal of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander peoples by media agency

without employing a stereotype). In the sample of 724 media pieces that All Together Now collected between 2018 and 2020, 288 discussed Indigenous communities. Of these 288, 151 were categorised as involving inclusive depictions while 18 involved neutral depictions of race and 119 involved negative depictions of race (Figure 2). For a comprehensive understanding of our primary research methodology and findings, visit our website [here](#).

Most inclusive opinion pieces (151 in total) were published or broadcast by Nine Entertainment Co's *The Sydney Morning Herald* and *The Age*, and Channel Ten's *The Project*, while most of the negative social commentary (115 in total) was mainly published in News Corp-owned agencies. News Corp's printed newspapers "commanded more than twice the total audience of those owned by Nine Entertainment" in 2020.¹³

However, with the inclusive data outnumbering the negative data, All Together Now decided to investigate more closely a sample of inclusive media pieces using a discourse analysis approach, where we analysed the ways language, voice and non-linguistic features such as sources and point of view were used to represent and frame Indigenous communities and issues. While content analysis, used in our primary methodology, plays an important role in understanding broad trends, it is necessary to look beneath the surface of these findings. As

Thomas et al.¹⁴ suggest in *Does the Media Fail Aboriginal Political Aspirations?*, content analysis, which usually grades media's representations as positive, negative and neutral, cannot always capture the nuances and impact of media representations of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, and in particular how these may support or undermine Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander political aspirations. For this, we need to step outside of the original inclusive definition, based on language, and scrutinise the inclusive opinion pieces more closely.

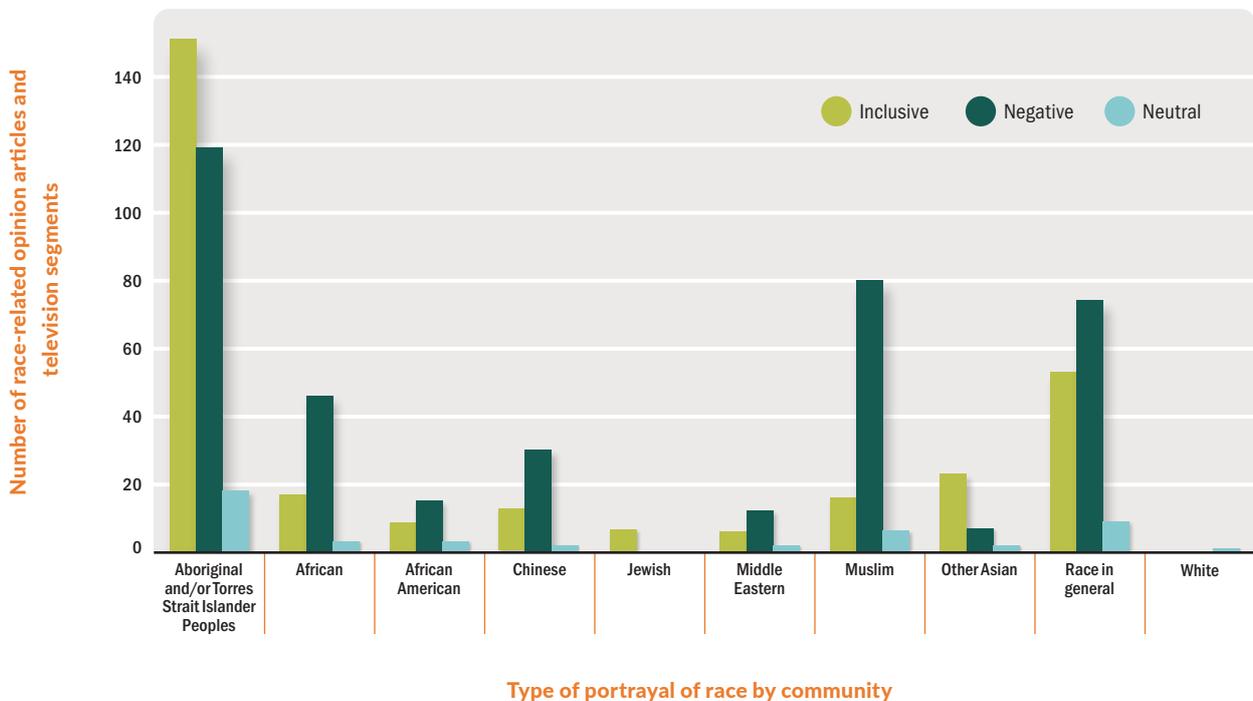


FIGURE 2: Portrayal of race by community

Methodology

All Together Now designed a conceptual framework to conduct a fine-grained analysis on a sample of inclusive opinion pieces published in mainstream news media. Our conceptual framework draws on five key concepts: agency, sources, point of view, consideration of historical and cultural context, and the use of language, which previous research into media and Indigenous studies has identified as important elements of media representation and framing (Figure 3).¹⁵ The conceptual framework was reviewed by two external academics, Professor Yin Paradies, an Aboriginal-Asian-Anglo Australian who conducts interdisciplinary research on the health, social and economic effects of racism as well as anti-racism theory, policy and practice, and Amy Thomas, an experienced researcher and consultant with expertise in Indigenous education and Indigenous media. This research was conducted within All Together Now (coding assistance provided by Megan Daly) and this report was co-authored by Umesha Weerakkody, Deliana Iacoban and Amy Thomas.

For this report, we selected a random sample of 20 opinion pieces from *The Sydney Morning Herald/The Age* (n=10), *The Australian* (n=4), *The Daily Telegraph* (n=2), *Herald Sun* (n=2) and *The Courier Mail* (n=2), published between March 2019 and June 2020, that had been identified as having an inclusive portrayal of Indigenous people and communities by satisfying at least one of the following criteria:

- defying racial stereotypes, for example by providing an alternative representation of that person or group promoting racial equality;
- condemning racism; or
- giving a voice to a minority group on a racial matter that affects their community.

The number of articles selected from each newspaper is proportional with the total number of inclusive articles counted in our data collection, so the analysis gave us a good insight into the overall inclusive data we collected. We chose to focus on newspapers rather than television because the highest number of inclusive media pieces were newspaper articles. We then coded the content in the selected 20 opinion pieces using the concepts shown in the conceptual framework in Figure 3. Each opinion piece was coded to identify key aspects of inclusivity or non-inclusivity: voice (elite/diverse), orientation (conflict/negotiation/collaboration/separation), sources (Indigenous and non-Indigenous), point of view (white/Indigenous/non-white and non-Indigenous), use of Indigenous historical/cultural contexts and use of language (racially biased ideas, tone or feelings).

The data resulting from the coding were analysed in SPSS, a statistical analysis software. Using descriptive statistics, we identified several important patterns that are discussed in-depth in the following sections of this report.

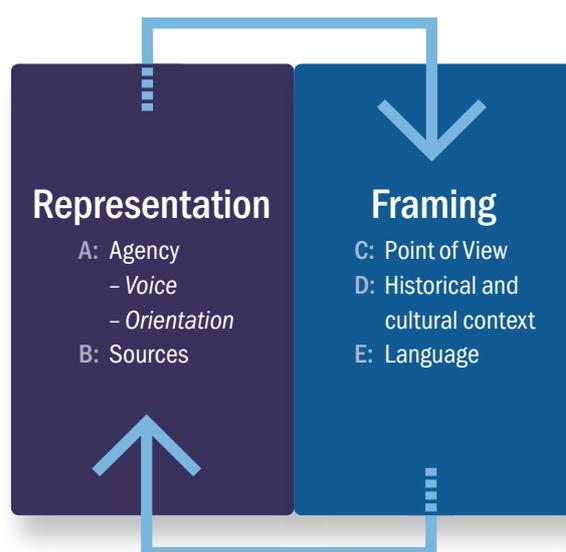


FIGURE 3: Conceptual framework used to analyse inclusive opinion articles about Indigenous people and/or communities

Are inclusive representations superficial?

Mainstream media organisations have the potential to accurately and empathetically present Indigenous communities and issues and provide a voice and platform to Indigenous voices that have been either silenced or ignored.¹⁶ This section looks at ‘use of language’ and the ‘orientation’ of Indigenous people and issues in inclusive opinion articles.

Use of language: a step in the right direction

Language plays an important role in processes of racialisation mainly because it is one of the most important means we have to distinguish ourselves from other individuals around us.¹⁷ In Australia, language has been used as a tool to directly and indirectly undermine Indigenous issues for years.¹⁸ We did a fine-grained analysis into the use of language in the opinion pieces in our sample to examine if the writers have used language that is indicative of conveying racially biased ideas in their use of tone, word choice and overall expression of ideas and feelings. Ninety percent of the articles did not include the use of language conveying racially biased ideas, tone or feelings (**Figure 4**), which validates the original findings of All Together Now’s earlier research.

The two articles that represent 10% of our sample contained indirect uses of biased language that perpetuates colonial narratives, such as the White Mastery narrative, which “sees Aboriginal absorption into the wider body politic and the dissolution of an Aboriginal polity as either having been completed, or in need of completion”.¹⁹ This sentiment was present in one opinion piece that discussed Indigenous voice in Captain Cook commemorations. Here

the language used was dismissive of Indigenous communities’ experience of invasion and colonisation, showing a stronger concern for the white public’s understanding of past misunderstandings described as “predictable partisan debates”:

... the year ahead, free from the predictable partisan debates on our history, will help build awareness that Indigenous people did not just passively accept Cook’s arrival but tried to understand what was going on and respond in accordance with their culture. Telling this story together can help heal the wounds.²⁰



FIGURE 4: Presence of racially biased ideas, tones and feelings

This perspective on 'healing' that does not fully acknowledge the invasion of the Australian continent is not uncommon, as is an avoidance of mentioning Indigenous historical context at all, when discussing Indigenous matters. We discuss the presence or absence of historical context in inclusive social commentary on page 16 of this report.

Orientation

In this study, orientation refers to the way the opinion pieces positioned Indigenous peoples' attitudes, actions and feelings in relation to non-Indigenous society and systems. The orientation can be towards conflict, negotiation, collaboration or separation. Orientation is important because it paints a general picture about the way Indigenous people react to non-Indigenous society and value systems. Through orientation, media articles can reinforce or question myths about the relationships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people, communities and systems.

Most of the articles analysed indicate either a collaborative or negotiation orientation when talking about Indigenous issues (Figure 5). For example, one opinion piece that discusses Indigenous communities and businesses states that:

We know that for every dollar that's invested in Indigenous businesses, four dollars are created in social returns. These businesses are more likely to employ Indigenous people, and more likely to reinvest back into communities.²¹

Similarly, demonstrating Indigenous communities' and peoples' orientation as one towards negotiation, one opinion piece on unpaid wages talks about the results of a negotiation between Indigenous communities and the Queensland State Government:

The class action led by Mr Pearson and the Palaszczuk government's move now paves the way for resolutions in NSW, Western Australia and the Northern Territory.²²



FIGURE 5: Aspects of orientation

The conflict and separation orientations refer to the positioning of Indigenous people in clash with non-Indigenous institutions and people, or wanting to disassociate with non-Indigenous actors and value systems. The absence of depictions through conflict or separation lens could be interpreted in at least two ways. One is that this suggests a positive development in media representations of Indigenous communities. The second option is to interpret conflict and separation as narratives used to fight for sovereignty, and their absence in this sample is merely a reflection of the few Indigenous perspectives given visibility by mainstream media.

Who is telling Indigenous stories?

Going back to the premise we set for this study, our analysis shows that inclusive language in media representations is not always paired with centering Indigenous voices and prioritising Indigenous perspectives on Indigenous issues. The mainstream media's failure to give voice to Indigenous people in telling their own stories makes the opinion pieces' portrayal of Indigenous communities less inclusive than it first appeared to be.

Power imbalance: elite versus diverse voices

In this report, we use the term 'voice' when referring to the opinions, comments and thoughts the writers used to bolster the arguments they make in the opinion piece. We analysed the role of elite and racially diverse voices because research shows that when 'minority voices' are featured in news media, they are often seen as less credible than their supposed 'elite' counterparts and are regularly moderated by said elite actors.²³ 'Elite voices' are people with power who comment and contribute to news media relating to minority communities and individuals. This category includes members of government, the police and academics who are commonly white and present matters from their own limited perspective.²⁴ Diverse voices, including community Elders or representatives, are rarely approached by the media.

Our findings indicate that 50% of inclusive articles gave prominence to diverse voices (Figure 6). The prominent voices coming from individuals with racially diverse backgrounds included recognised Indigenous Elders, storytellers and sports players. The elite voices belonged to politicians, references coming from police reports, as well as the authors themselves, who were mostly from non-Indigenous backgrounds. One example is the opinion piece 'Time to deal with dysfunction so First Australians can heal' on the over-representation of Indigenous people

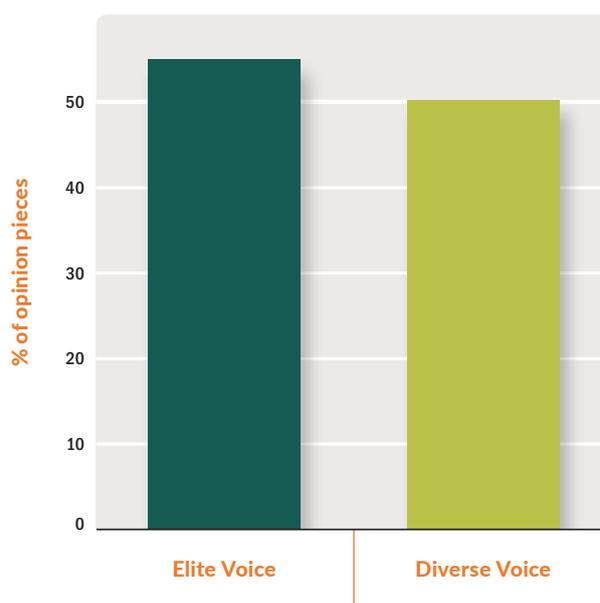


FIGURE 6: Voice

in prison and Black Lives Matter movement, written by an Anglo-Celtic writer.²⁵ This opinion piece exclusively recounts the treatment and experiences of Aboriginal and Torres Strait people from the author's perspective. Although it includes a comment made by The Cape York Institute, an Indigenous think-tank founded by Aboriginal lawyer Noel Pearson, its credibility and effect are drowned within the author's perspective and voice. Opinion pieces are not held to the same standards of objectivity and use of sources as news pieces. However, when minority voices are routinely under-represented or minimised in the media, it results in the public coverage of important Indigenous matters being framed and presented from an outsider's perspective.²⁶

Indigenous sources

Sixty-five percent of the opinion pieces analysed indicated having used Indigenous sources. While this number looks promising, considering that we are looking exclusively at inclusive social commentary, there is room for improvement. Just as diverse voices are less likely to be featured, our findings indicate that Indigenous sources too are not always sought by inclusive social commentary (Figure 7). This finding echoes Thomas et al.'s analysis of media coverage on Indigenous political aspirations (2019), which found that prominence was given to non-Indigenous sources while Indigenous sources were quoted infrequently.

The longstanding problem of misrepresentation prompted the growth in the number of news media agencies organised and run by members of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. In addition to their focus on gaining control over the messages and discourse being conveyed within the Indigenous public sphere, Indigenous -controlled media agencies focused on the outward education of the wider Australian public on issues of Indigenous affairs.²⁷

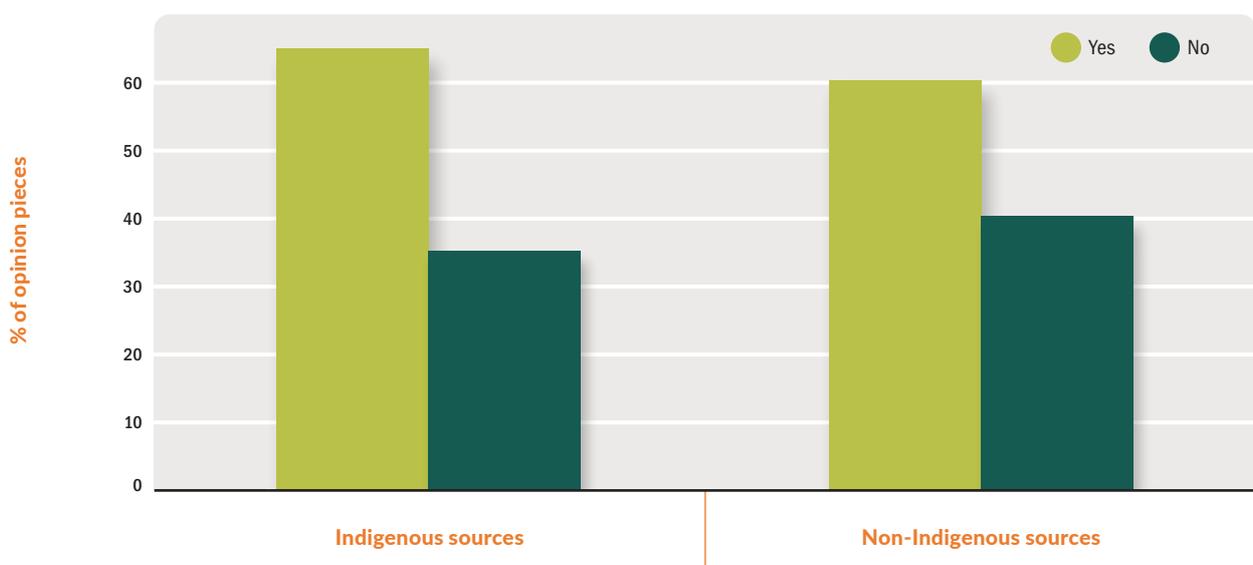


FIGURE 7: Sources used in opinion pieces



Indigenous-controlled media

Indigenous-controlled media channels have a long history and were established to preserve and promote Indigenous languages and cultures, while also countering the persistent misrepresentations prevalent in mainstream media.

The beginnings of Indigenous press go back to the 1830s when the first identified mission-sanctioned publication by an Indigenous organisation, *The Aboriginal*, or the *Flinders Island Chronicle*, was published. *Abo Call: the voice of Aborigines* was the first 'advancement movement' newsletter to be published in 1938 in Sydney.²⁸ Later, in the 1970s, community initiatives were undertaken to establish Indigenous-produced radio programs and TV shows. Since then, Indigenous media production has come a long way, with multiple Indigenous media organisations in Australia such as the *Koori Mail*, National Indigenous TV, National Indigenous Radio Service and Goolarri Media.²⁹

Indigenous media is primarily aimed at Indigenous people and plays an important role within the media landscape for several reasons. As outlets for Indigenous voices and viewpoints, Indigenous media ensures that Indigenous voices are recognised and heard. Within a media environment that is oriented towards calming 'white' anxieties, Indigenous media has the capability to counter stereotypical representations and tell Indigenous stories in a fair and inclusive manner. Indigenous media has the power to strengthen and empower Indigenous identities by showcasing Indigenous culture and value systems and celebrating Indigenous success stories.

Cultural context: how (not) to address Australia's history

Indigenous issues are firmly anchored in the historical, political, cultural and social legacies of Australian settler colonialism. As such, any fair representation of Indigenous communities must be situated within an appreciation of Australia's settler-colonial context.

Sixty-five percent of inclusive articles made references to the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' historical and cultural context (**Figure 8**). The other third did not, though these articles discussed issues including police brutality and higher incarceration rates of Indigenous people; racism in sports; the continued disregard for Indigenous lives; Indigenous sovereignty; and an Indigenous voice in parliament. To counter deficit-oriented media representations, it is particularly important to situate social issues in their historical context to understand how colonial politics, racism and exclusion perpetuate Indigenous disadvantage. Otherwise, even sympathetic articles can unwittingly assign blame for disadvantage on individuals and communities.

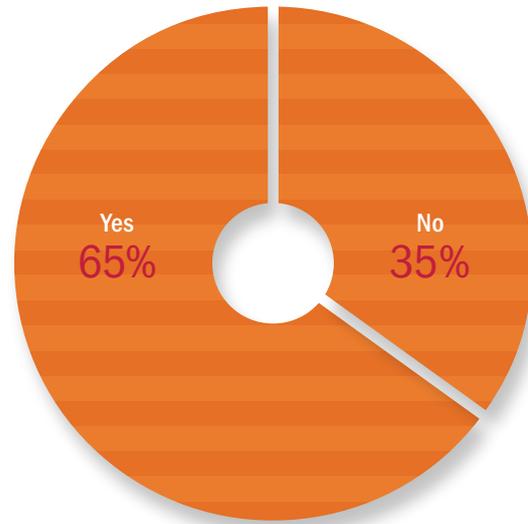


FIGURE 8: References to Indigenous historical and cultural contexts

“I published my first book 15 years ago, and Australian readers are still asking me the same questions: ‘Why don’t we know? Why were we never told about intergenerational trauma and the stolen generations, reform schools, missions, black birding? Why don’t we know that white Australia has a Black history?’ [...] What has been so effectively hidden is that whole story of Australia – by the education system, by the media, by the façade we’ve grown up with.”

TARA JUNE WINCH, *THE GUARDIAN* ³⁰

Whose point of view matters?

Point of view refers to the perspective that the writer has used, or the particular position from which the issues discussed in the article were observed. Only 35% of opinion pieces in our analysis contained an Indigenous point of view, compared to the 45% of opinion pieces that were written using a white point of view (Figure 9). In our analysis, we observed that in certain opinion pieces, the authors' 'white' point of view was accentuated, for example by presenting the article within an 'us' vs. 'them' dialogue, or by presenting the ideas as a white person coming to terms with their responsibility to provide support for Indigenous people. We see a prevalence of 'white' points of view combined with the lack of Indigenous historical contexts and sources when discussing Indigenous issues. This is not surprising, considering the authors' ethnicities.³¹ In the sample of opinion pieces we analysed, only 20% of authors had an Indigenous background, while 50% of articles were written by authors of an Anglo-Celtic background (Figure 10).³²

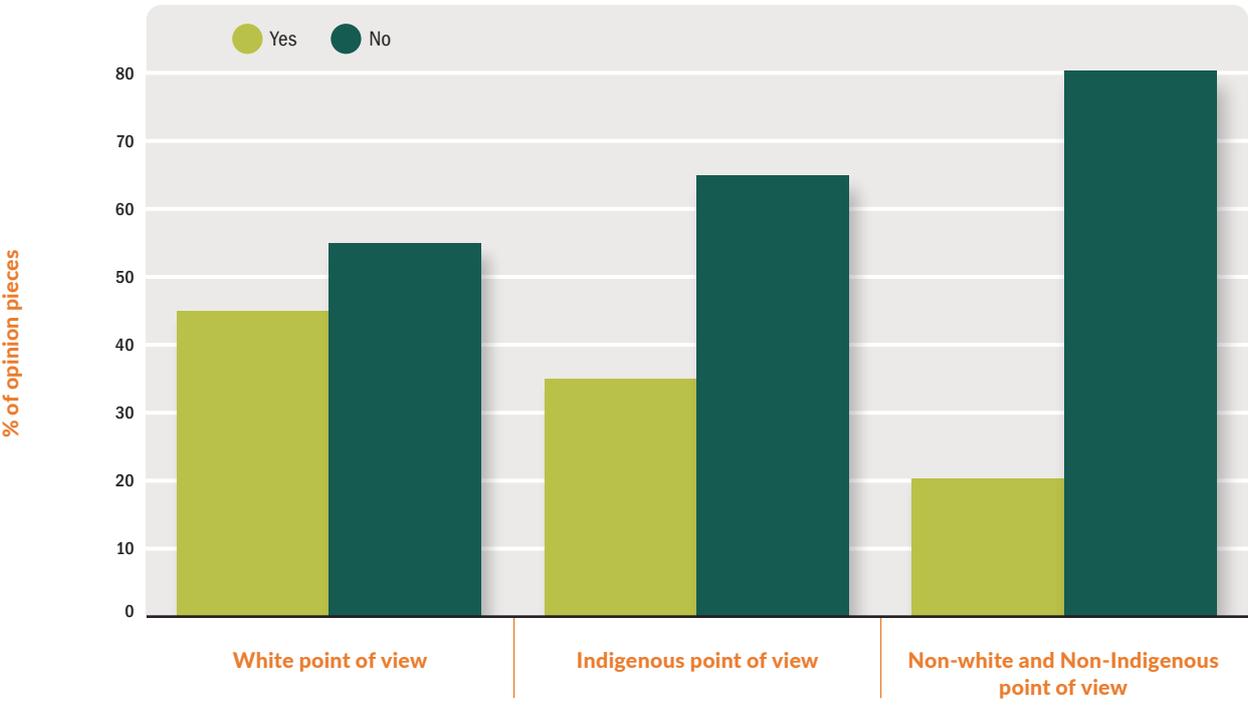


FIGURE 9: Point of view

While representation of Indigenous communities within news media has improved over time, the continual favouring of elite voices and the repetitive lack of Indigenous sources, voices, and historical and cultural context obscures the actions and views of Indigenous people in the political debates that matter to their communities. This speaks to the sustained denial of Indigenous agency and knowledge that is “suppressed by a climate of racism, active denialism and colonial myth”.³³ Opinion pieces that discuss Indigenous matters inclusively can improve by centering Indigenous perspectives, otherwise they will continue to reproduce existing colonial and racist power imbalances.

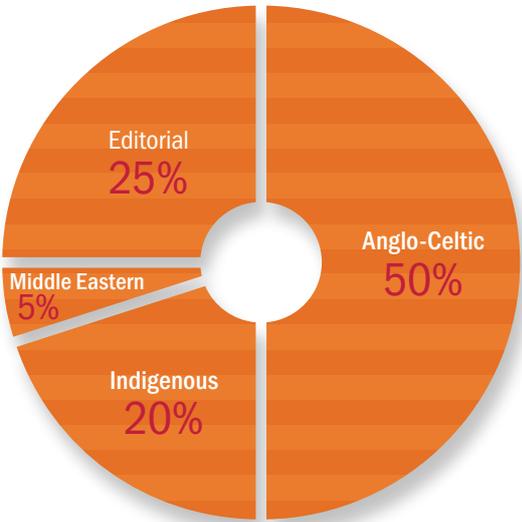


FIGURE 10: Author ethnicity

Recommendations

1

Mainstream media agencies need to have a diversity of Indigenous voices at all levels, and both empower and trust Indigenous people to do the work.

2

Non-Indigenous media and commentators need to seek out and listen to Indigenous voices, especially when discussing Indigenous matters.

3

Non-Indigenous media should engage with Indigenous-run media. This can improve how non-Indigenous media receives and engages with Indigenous stories.

4

Mainstream media needs to recognise its historic role in shaping racist and deficit-based discourses and representations of Indigenous people, and seek to actively address its own past and ongoing racist practices.

5

Mainstream media needs to commit to the inclusion of Indigenous people and perspectives when reporting on Indigenous issues and concerns, and more generally across reporting.

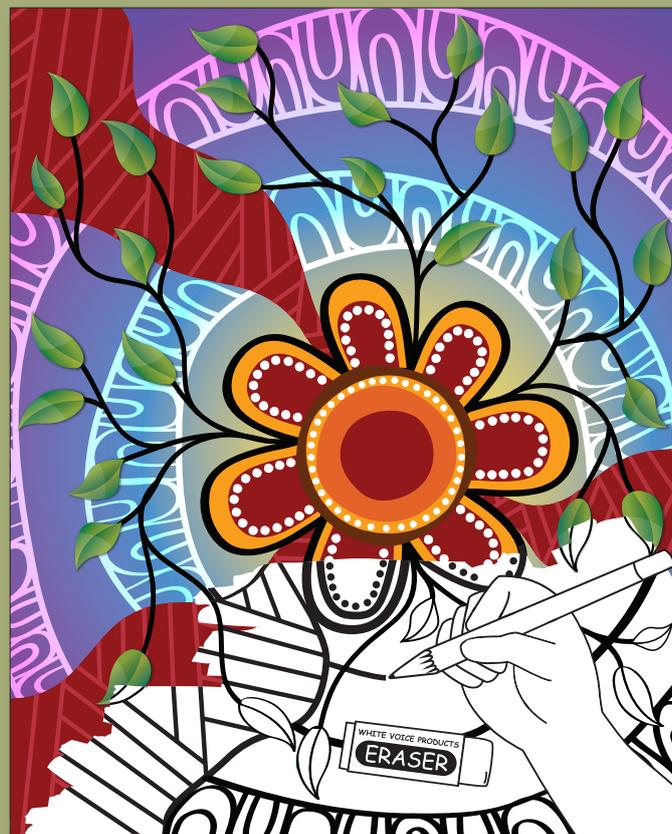
Endnotes

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When inclusion means exclusion:

SOCIAL COMMENTARY AND INDIGENOUS AGENCY



Like all of our work at All Together Now, this report was researched and written on unceded Aboriginal Land. We acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of Country throughout Australia, and recognise their continuing connection to land, waters and culture. We acknowledge their Elders past, present and emerging, and acknowledge that Australia was, is and always will be Aboriginal Land.

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