Social commentary and racism in 2019

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This research was conducted on the sovereign lands of the Gadigal People of the Eora Nation. All Together Now acknowledges the Traditional Custodians of country throughout Australia and recognises their continuing connection to land, waters and culture. We pay respect to Elders past, present and emerging and acknowledge that Australia was, is and always will be Aboriginal land.

List of figures

Acronyms

ACMA: Australian Communications and Media Authority

APC: Australian Press Council

CIRCA: Cultural and Indigenous Research Centre Australia

MDA: Media Diversity Australia

MEAA: Media, Entertainment and Arts Alliance

PwC: PricewaterhouseCoopers

UTS: University of Technology Sydney

Glossary

Burqa: loose enveloping garment that covers the face and body and is worn in public by certain Muslim women.

Dog-whistling: In the context of racism, a writing technique that relies on stoking racial fears in particular sections of the audience, without using explicit language.

Hijab: The traditional Islamic garment worn by women, which covers the hair, neck and shoulders.

Inclusive portrayal: A portrayal that promotes racial equality, condemns racism, defies racial stereotypes, gives a voice to a minority group, or has an equivalent intent to any of the previously mentioned characteristics.

Negative portrayal: A portrayal that is reasonably likely to offend, insult, humiliate or intimidate another person or a group of people because of their race, colour or national or ethnic origin, or religious intolerance motivated by racist considerations.

Neutral portrayal: A portrayal that does not satisfy the negative or inclusive definitions provided above.

Niqab: A veil for covering the hair and face except for the eyes that is worn by some Muslim women.

Race: While there are no valid biological criteria for dividing people into distinct racial categories, the term "race" is often used to describe a person's physical features, such as skin colour, hair type and/or colour, body shape or facial features, which can lead to conclusions about their racial background.

Racial background: A person's racial background comprises "race", ancestry, nationality, accent and cultural background, which includes religion, food, arts and crafts, clothing and other cultural practices.

Racism: Unjust covert or overt behaviour towards a person or a group on the basis of their racial background. This might be perpetrated by a person, a group, an organisation or a system.

Overt racism (in the media) uses explicitly and negatively racialised language or framing.

Covert racism (in the media) is more difficult to identify as it uses implicit or intertextual meanings. For example, it uses techniques such as dog-whistling, irony and de-contextualisation.

Stolen Generations: Generations of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children who were removed from their families and communities by government and non-government agencies in order to enforce integration into white society.

Executive summary

In 2016, All Together Now sought to better understand race-related social commentary in the Australian media by investigating ways in which newspaper and television opinion-makers portray race. In December 2017, we released a report of our analysis and findings, calling for stronger media regulations around race-based reporting.[1]

Over the 12 months to April 2019, All Together Now again monitored mainstream Australian media for racialised reporting. Out of 281 media pieces sampled during that period, 57% were negative when discussing race. Unfortunately, the findings are strikingly similar to those in the 2017 report: that Muslim women are most often targeted by negatively racialised social commentary, and that the perpetrators are primarily mainstream newspapers.

While topics of public debate changed over time, the narratives in these negative media pieces did not follow suit. When talking about race, 70% of pieces used covert techniques such as dog-whistling, irony and de-contextualisation. Given that the media industry's codes of conduct consider overt forms of racism only, media regulators cannot prosecute media agencies that perpetrate subtle forms of racism, leaving targeted Australians without an "independent" avenue for complaint.

Out of the 281 media pieces we looked at over the year, more than one third spoke inclusively about race. These pieces were written and produced by journalists from a variety of cultural backgrounds. In contrast, of the 57% of media pieces that were negative when discussing race, 96% were written or produced by media commentators with an Anglo-Celtic or European cultural background. This suggests that by increasing the cultural diversity of media commentators to reflect the cultural diversity of Australian society, social commentary will become more inclusive.

The tone and content of the comments sections accompanying negatively racialised articles published on the websites of mainstream newspapers suggests that these articles solidify the views of readers who already agree with such views. Peucker & Smith found the same to be true[2] in their empirical research that links media coverage and far-right recruitment drives.

Multiple media regulatory frameworks provide a means for audiences to make complaints about racist reporting. These frameworks are not perfect, and there have been calls to start again to create a single new regulatory framework.[3] Such reform is politically charged and unlikely to occur in the short term given the roadblocks these reform initiatives have encountered. In the meantime, existing media regulatory frameworks must be strengthened by applying the relatively minor refinements outlined in our recommendations to ensure that social commentary published by media agencies contributes constructive debate that is in the public interest.

1   All Together Now, *Who Watches the Media? Race-related reporting in Australian mainstream media,* All Together Now, Sydney, 2017, viewed 16 July 2019, <https://alltogethernow.org.au/media-monitoring/2017-race-related-reporting-in-australian-mainstream-media/>.

2   M Peucker & D Smith, 'Conclusion: Making Sense of the Far-Right in Australia', in M Peucker & D Smith (eds), *The Far-Right in Contemporary Australia*, Palgrave Macmillan, 2019, pp. 215–26.

3   H Finkelstein & M Ricketson, *Report of the Independent Inquiry into the Media and Media Regulation – Report to the Minister for Broadband, Communications and the Digital Economy*, Commonwealth of Australia, 2012, viewed 16 July 2019, <http://www.abc.net.au/mediawatch/transcripts/1205_finkelstein.pdf>.

THE AGE
The Sydney Morning Herald

A CURRENT AFFAIR

PROJECT

Courier Mail
Herald Sun

60 MINUTES

SUNDAY NIGHT

THE AUSTRALIAN
Daily Telegraph

7:30

today tonight

Racialised opinion pieces in Australia's mainstream media

1 in 5

people experienced racism last year*

Racialised identities most often discussed negatively in media:

- Muslim Australians
- Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islanders
- African Australians

Cultural background of Australian population #

58% Anglo-Celtic

3% Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander

21% non-European

18% European

281 race-related pieces were analysed

0% of racialised articles are about Australians of Anglo-Celtic or European background
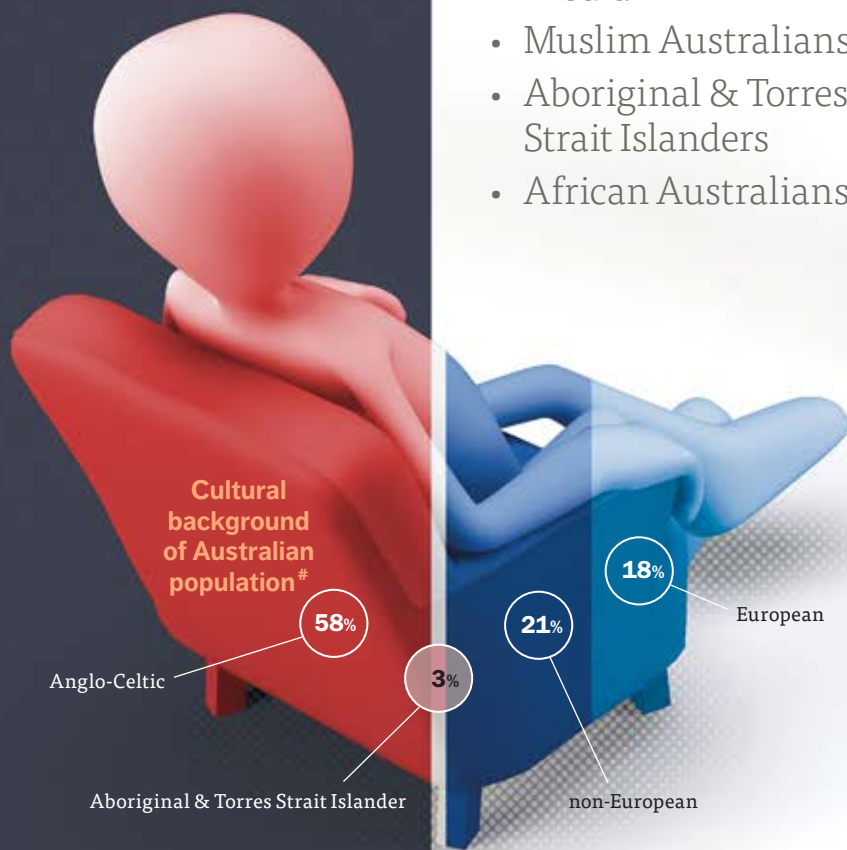
12 newspapers and TV shows were monitored

57% discussed racialised individuals or groups negatively, and ...

70% of those media pieces used covert forms of racism

96% of authors of negatively racialised newspaper articles have Anglo-Celtic (**72%**) or European (**24%**) background.

60% of these were men

* SOURCE: Mapping Social Cohesion 2018 report | # SOURCE: Leading for Change 2018 report

Recommendations

Based on our findings, we present two sets of recommendations: one focusing on strengthening Australia's media regulatory frameworks, the other on increasing the cultural diversity of journalists working for mainstream media agencies. We made a number of these recommendations in our December 2017 report[4] and continue to call for change in this area.

Strengthen media regulatory frameworks

Current media regulatory frameworks – while not perfect – enable audiences to make complaints about racist and other problematic reporting. These frameworks cover different media platforms and range from external regulation to opt-in self-regulation. They include the Australian Press Council (APC) Statement of General Principles[5] (for newspapers), Commercial Television Industry Code of Practice[6] (for television) and Media, Entertainment and Arts Alliance (MEAA) Journalist Code of Ethics[7] (for any journalists who are MEAA media union members).

Media regulatory frameworks, including codes of conduct, have long attracted the attention of anti-racism activists. In 2002, Dr William Jonas AM, former Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner and Race Discrimination Commissioner, called for "a more rigorous media code of conduct to ensure the media positively promotes cultural diversity".[8] He consulted with many people and concluded that:

Dr William Jonas AM " There was consensus on the need for a more rigorous media code of conduct to ensure the media positively promotes cultural diversity. The code of conduct should include more effective and transparent complaint and enforcement provisions be implemented by a body that includes community representatives."

More recently, questioning the effectiveness of these frameworks in a changing media landscape has led to the Finkelstein report[9] calling for a new platform-neutral regulatory framework to be established.

Such reforms are unlikely to occur in the short term as they have been shot down by critics in the past. It will take time for the conversation to mature and the proposed amendments to be adopted by all sides. In the meantime, the existing media regulatory frameworks must be strengthened by applying the relatively minor refinements outlined below.

Include binding standards on racism

The **Australian Press Council** needs to update its binding Statement of General Principles[10] to include a general principle that requires publications to not place gratuitous emphasis on race, religion, nationality, colour, ethnic origin and country of origin. Such a general principle previously existed, but was removed from the current version of the code for reasons that remain unclear.[11] There continues to be a non-binding advisory guideline on the reporting of race.[12]

Regulate against all forms of racism

The **Australian Press Counci**l's Statement of General Principles[13] and the **MEAA**'s Journalist Code of Ethics[14] need to be updated so that forms of covert racism are prevented in the same way that forms of overt racism are. Historically, only overt racism has been considered through requirements not to place gratuitous emphasis on race, religion, nationality, colour, ethnic origin and country of origin. In contrast, covert racism, which does not place gratuitous emphasis on race but alternatively uses techniques such as dog-whistling, irony and de-contextualisation, has not been covered.

All Together Now argues that covering overt racism alone is not enough. Our research shows that racial discrimination increasingly comes in covert forms, and therefore the media regulatory frameworks should be updated and extended to address racism in all of its contemporary forms.

Extend the timeframe for lodging complaints

Currently, complaints to the **Australian Press Council** (addressed by its Statement of General Principles) and **Free TV Australia**'s Commercial Television Industry Code of Practice must, under most circumstances, be made within 30 days of the first publication or broadcast of the relevant media piece unless special consideration is sought. We believe this timeframe should be extended.[15,16], While a 30-day timeframe may have been appropriate before online news was available, media pieces are now often accessible online for lengthy periods after being published or broadcast.

Increase the cultural diversity of media agencies' workforce

Media organisations have increasingly recognised that diversity is important.[17] In Australia – a multicultural country – media diversity makes good business sense.[18] Despite this evidence, our investigations demonstrate that the racial background of journalists authoring negatively racialised pieces is either Anglo-Celtic or European. Similarly, consultancy firm PricewaterhouseCoopers (PwC) found that the cultural diversity of media organisations does not reflect that of the broader Australian population:

> **PwC** " Similar to the world we see depicted by media, entertainment and media businesses do not reflect an Australia that's becoming more diverse by the day. It's a case of chicken and egg and means the industry is not as well equipped for growth as it should be."

All mainstream media organisations need to increase the cultural diversity of their workforce across all parts of their organisations so that it is representative of the wider Australian population. Our investigation, conducted in partnership with the Cultural and Indigenous Research Centre Australia (CIRCA), found that most of the pieces we analysed were authored by people of Anglo-Celtic and European background. People's lived experiences shape how they engage in social commentary, so increasing diversity among opinion-shapers in the media is necessary to reflect the wide-ranging views of our multicultural Australia.

We acknowledge and support Media Diversity Australia's ongoing work to make our news media more reflective of all Australians.

Media Diversity Australia

Media Diversity Australia (MDA) is a not-for-profit organisation run by journalists working to make news media more reflective of all Australians. MDA is currently researching diversity in Australian media, has produced an Indigenous reporting handbook, and this year introduced a Media Diversity Australia Award as part of the Walkley Awards for excellence in journalism.[19]

4   All Together Now, *Who watches the media? Race-related reporting in the Australian mainstream media*.
5   Australian Press Council, *The Statement of General Principles*, APC, 2014, viewed 16 July 2019, <https://www.presscouncil.org.au/statements-of-principles/>.
6   Free TV Australia, *Commercial Television Industry Code of Practice*, Free TV Australia, 2018, viewed 16 July 2019, <https://www.freetv.com.au/resources/code-of-practice/>.
7   Media, Entertainment and Arts Alliance, *MEAA Journalist Code of Ethics*, MEAA, 2019, viewed 16 July 2019, <https://www.meaa.org/meaa-media/code-of-ethics/>.
8   W Jonas, 'Racism and the fourth estate: free speech at what cost?', a seminar presented by Dr William Jonas AM, former Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner & Acting Race Discrimination Commissioner, at the invitation of the Office of Multicultural Interests, Western Australia, on 12 August 2002, Australian Human Rights Commission, viewed 31 July 2019, <https://www.humanrights.gov.au/about/news/speeches/racism-and-fourth-estate>.
9   H Finkelstein & M Ricketson, *Report of the independent Inquiry into the media and media regulation*.
10   Australian Press Council, *The Statement of General Principles*.
11   *ibid*.
12   Australian Press Council, *Guideline: reporting of 'race'*, APC, 2001, viewed 16 July 2019, <https://www.presscouncil.org.au/document-search/guideline-reporting-of-race/>.
13   Australian Press Council, *The Statement of General Principles*.
14   Media, Entertainment and Arts Alliance, *MEAA Journalist Code of Ethics*, MEAA, 2019.
15   Free TV Australia, *Viewer feedback and complaints*, Free TV Australia, 2019, viewed 16 July 2019, <http://www.freetv.com.au/content_common/pg-viewer-feedback-and-complaints.seo>.
16   Australian Press Council, *Making a complaint*, APC, 2011, viewed 16 July 2019, <https://www.presscouncil.org.au/making-a-complaint/>.
17   H Vatsikopoulos, 'Friday essay: diversity in the media is vital – but Australia has a long way to go', *The Conversation*, 21 June 2019, viewed 16 July 2019, <https://theconversation.com/friday-essay-diversity-in-the-media-is-vital-but-australia-has-a-long-way-to-go-116280>.
18   PricewaterhouseCoopers, *Who's the fairest of them all? Australian entertainment & media industry needs diversity to grow*, PwC, 2016, viewed 19 July 2019, <https://www.pwc.com.au/press-room/2016/media-outlook-jun16.html>.
19   Media Diversity Australia, Media Diversity Australia website, n.d., viewed 16 July 2019, <https://www.mediadiversityaustralia.org>.

Why racialised reporting matters

All Together Now defends the notion of a free press. We believe it is vital that journalists have the ability to inform citizens about public affairs without fear or favour. However, we also note that this freedom comes with the responsibility to present information fairly and accurately. All Australians should be equitably represented by the media, regardless of their racial background. Our research indicates that opinion pieces published on some mainstream newspapers are failing to do this.

The media plays a crucial role in forming and shaping public perceptions of race. These perceptions then affect how some people interact with people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds.[20] One role the media plays is normalising behaviour, and consequently racism perpetrated by media agencies has harmful ramifications.

The Christchurch mosque attack in March 2019 is an extreme example of racism. Microaggressions and forms of "everyday racism" are much more common and have a cumulative effect.[21] In everyday life, one in five Australians experienced racism last year.[22] Targeted Australians are more likely to have mental health problems.[23] Experiences of racism degrade belonging; everyday racism, including that by the media, creates a sense of exclusion among those targeted.[24]

Dr Jacqueline Nelson
Chancellors Postdoctoral Fellow, University of Technology Sydney

"The way the media represents all Australians is of critical importance. Problematic representation of particular cultural groups, whether covert or more blatant, reinforces white dominance and can undermine a sense of belonging for those targeted."

Our analysis shows that covert racism is more prevalent than overt racism in media opinion pieces. This indicates that language is evolving along with the changing media landscape to accommodate racist attitudes and language in mainstream media. Regulatory bodies need to develop at the same pace with new online technology and adapt to the demands and needs of an increasingly diverse Australian society.

By strengthening the media's regulatory frameworks to better deal with racist discourse, we can shift the societal conditions so that non-racist and anti-racist attitudes may become normalised.

20 J Downing & C Husband, *Representing 'race': racisms, ethnicities and media*, Sage, London, 2005.
21 K Blair, K Dunn, A Kamp & O Alam, *Challenging Racism Project 2015-16 National Survey Report*, Western Sydney University, Sydney, 2017.
22 Australian Human Rights Commission, *No place for racism*, AHRC, 2019, viewed 16 July 2019, <https://www.humanrights.gov.au/our-work/no-place-racism>.

23 Y Paradies, 'A systematic review of empirical research on self-reported racism and health', *International Journal of Epidemiology*, 2006, 35(4): 888–901.
24 JK Nelson, KM Dunn & Y Paradies, 'Australian racism and anti-racism: Links to morbidity and belonging' in F Mansouri & M Lobo (eds), *Migration, Citizenship and Intercultural Relations: Looking Through the Lens of Social Inclusion*, Ashgate Publishing, 2011, pp. 159–76.

Why diversity in the media matters

The Australian media is not representative of the Australian population[25], and this affects the way in which some social commentators discuss current affairs.

Nearly one quarter of Australians (24%) are from a non-European background.[26] In contrast, a 2016 PwC report found that the media industry is ethnically homogeneous, with the average Australian media worker being a "a 27-year-old white male who lives in Bondi".[27]

All Together Now sought to investigate whether there was a correlation between negatively racialised articles and the cultural background of the author. Our team collaborated with the Cultural and Indigenous Research Centre Australia (CIRCA) to ascertain the cultural background of all authors who wrote or produced inclusive or negative racialised pieces during the period of this research study. The process we used is outlined on page 34.

Out of the 281 media pieces we looked at over the past year, more than one third spoke inclusively about race, and around 10% were neutral. The inclusive media pieces were more likely to come from *The Sydney Morning Herald/The Age (37%) and Network Ten's television show* The Project (21%). The inclusive newspaper pieces were written by both male and female journalists from a variety of cultural backgrounds, particularly females with a non-European background (32%). Given the relative under-representation of females with a non-European background in the media, these writers appear to be writing proportionately more racially inclusive social commentary. *The Project*, the television show with the most inclusive media pieces, famously has a Muslim Australian co-host, Waleed Aly.

These inclusive media pieces show that it is possible to be inclusive rather than negative in a race-related media piece. These media pieces covered both "good" and "bad" news stories on topics as diverse as sport, crime, immigration, politics and art.

In contrast, we found that of the 57% of media pieces that were negative when discussing race, 96% were written or produced by a media commentator with an Anglo-Celtic (72%) or European (24%) cultural background. Sixty per cent of these media commentators were men. The subjects of these negatively portrayed media pieces were commonly Muslim Australians, Sudanese Australians and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

Currently, the Australian media is not representative of the Australian population.[28] Stories that represent the experiences of Australians from a culturally and linguistically diverse background, as well as stories that may be of interest to such Australians, are less common in mainstream media, with the exception of the Special Broadcasting Service (SBS).[29]

25 P Ryan, 'Average media worker is a male hipster, report warns lack of diversity is harming industry', *ABC News*, 7 June 2016, viewed 16 July 2019, <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2016-06-06/media-diversity-report-average-worker-is-male-hipster/7481678>.

26 Australian Human Rights Commission, *Leading for Change: A blueprint for cultural diversity and inclusive leadership revisited*, AHRC, 2018, viewed 16 July 2019, <https://www.humanrights.gov.au/sites/default/files/document/publication/Leading%20for%20Change_Blueprint2018_FINAL_Web.pdf>.

27 P Ryan, 'Average media worker is a male hipster, report warns lack of diversity is harming industry'.

28 P Ryan, 'Average media worker is a male hipster, report warns lack of diversity is harming industry'.

29 Federation of Ethnic Communities' Councils of Australia, *Telling stories for all Australians – Diverse reporting, representation and the transformation of the media*, FECCA, 2016, viewed 16 July 2019, <http://fecca.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2016/09/FECCAMosaic-44.pdf>.

How we monitor the media for racialised reporting

Our research into social commentary and racism began in 2016 through a collaboration between All Together Now and the University of Technology Sydney (UTS). Sociology Emeritus Professor Andrew Jakubowicz highlighted to us the need for a research project that classifies race-related media reporting. All Together Now's team collaborated with Dr Christina Ho from the School of Social and Political Sciences at UTS to create a framework enabling us to monitor the media. This collaboration continues with the aim of regularly improving the framework.

Dr Christina Ho
Senior Lecturer, Social and Political Sciences, University of Technology Sydney

"The Social and Political Sciences discipline at UTS has been proud to work with ATN [All Together Now] on this media monitoring project over the last three years. Each year, we have helped with designing and refining the framework, and identifying and analysing media stories. It has been a fantastic collaboration between UTS and ATN."

Research process

We read and watched thousands of media pieces from newspapers and television between April 2018 and April 2019, and selected 281 that related to race (for specifics about how we did this, please refer to our methodology section on page 31). We looked at whether these media pieces portrayed race inclusively, neutrally or negatively. Specifically, we analysed media pieces from the opinion and editorial sections of newspapers with the highest readership, and the highest-rating television current affairs shows. We looked at opinion, editorial and current affairs because these can have a disproportionate impact on public debate.

The newspapers and television shows we monitored were:

NEWSPAPERS
- The Age
- The Australian
- The Courier Mail
- The Daily Telegraph
- Herald Sun
- The Sydney Morning Herald

TELEVISION SHOWS
- 60 Minutes (Nine Network)
- The 7.30 Report (ABC)
- A Current Affair (Nine Network)
- The Project (Network 10)
- Sunday Night (The Seven Network)
- Today Tonight (The Seven Network)

When assessing whether a media piece portrayed race inclusively, neutrally or negatively, we:
- looked at the *content and context* of the media piece rather than looking for any negative or inclusive words, or keywords;
- looked at race-related media pieces – these could be on topics as diverse as sport, crime, immigration, politics, business or art – rather than media pieces on the topic of racism;
- were not concerned with whether the media piece was a "good news" story, or a "bad news" story. This is because a good news story (e.g. about sport) could portray race negatively, and a bad news story (e.g. about crime) could portray race inclusively.

A snapshot of the framework

Our media monitoring framework, developed in conjunction with UTS, assesses the content and context of a media piece. We use the following definitions to see if a media piece portrays race inclusively, neutrally or negatively. The definitions are based on wording from the *Racial Discrimination Act*, the UNESCO Declaration on Race and Racial Prejudice and our previous research.

- **Negative:** A portrayal that is reasonably likely to offend, insult, humiliate or intimidate another person or a group of people because of their race, colour or national or ethnic origin, or religious intolerance motivated by racist considerations.
- **Neutral:** A portrayal that does not satisfy the negative or inclusive definitions.
- **Inclusive:** A portrayal that promotes racial equality, condemns racism, defies racial stereotypes, gives a voice to a minority group, or has an equivalent intent to any of the previously mentioned characteristics.

Please refer to page 31 for a complete explanation of the methodology we used.

Findings
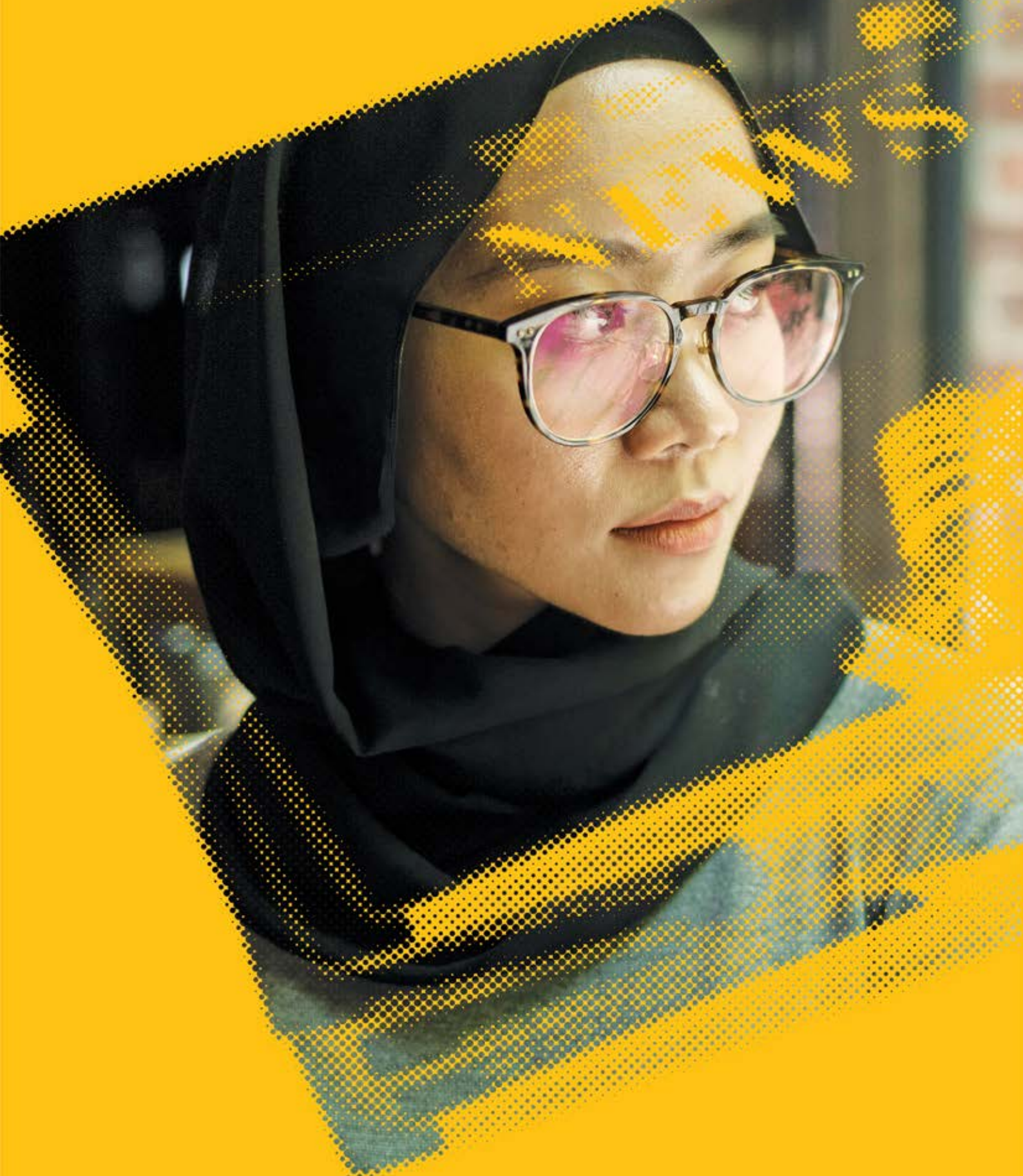
General findings

This research demonstrates that more than half of the racialised pieces in our sample portrayed one or more of Australia's culturally diverse communities in a negative light. To shift this dynamic, Australia's media regulatory frameworks must be strengthened to adequately deter and prosecute media agencies that perpetrate racist commentary.

As illustrated in Figure 1, of the 281 media pieces we assessed, 159 portrayed race negatively (56.6%), 24 were neutral (8.5%) and 98 portrayed race inclusively (34.9%).

These results build on our 2017 report.[30] In 2017, we looked at 124 media pieces collected in the first half of the year and we found a slightly lower percentage of negative content (50%). There were larger variations for neutral and inclusive media pieces, with less inclusive media pieces in 2017 (15%) but more neutral media pieces (35%). In 2018, we refined our neutral and inclusive categories, which may account for the lower number of neutral pieces in this report.

Our results are broadly comparable with research conducted by Deakin University in 2018,[31] which found that more than 50% of editorials and commentary pieces portrayed minority communities negatively. The research also looked at straight news stories (i.e. reportage), over a third of which were negative towards cultural and religious minority communities.

FIGURE 1
Portrayal of race
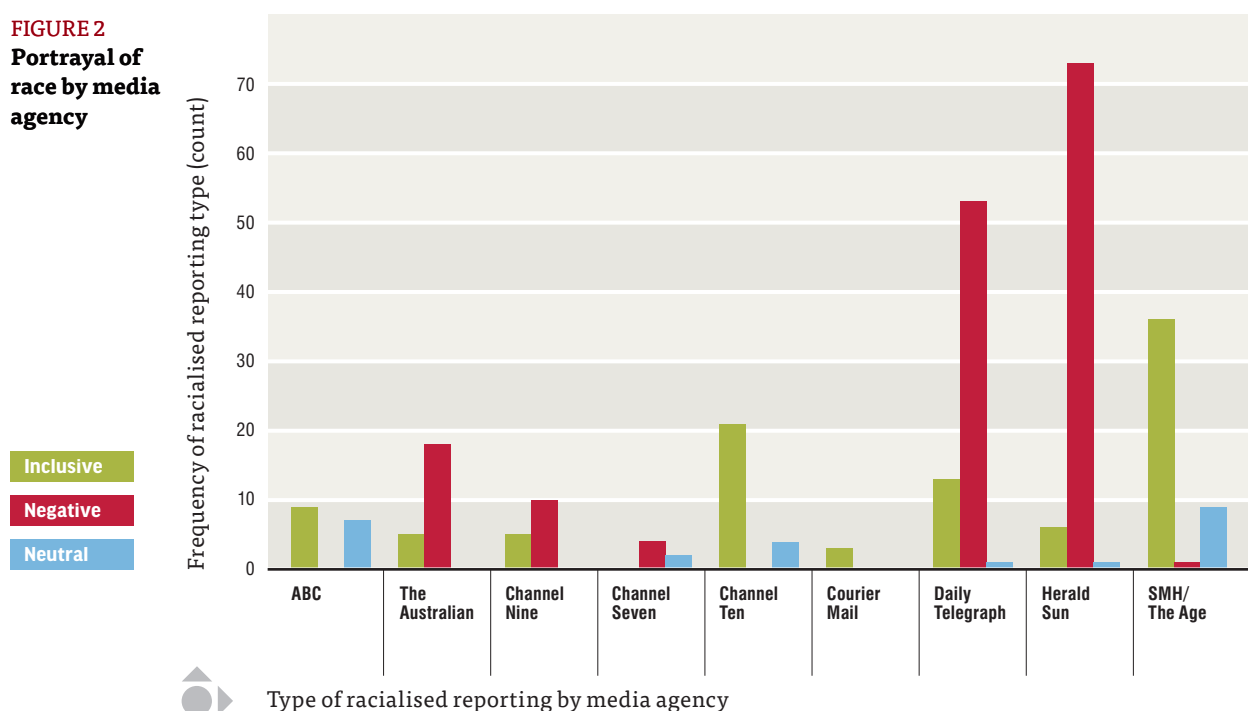

Inclusive

Negative

Neutral
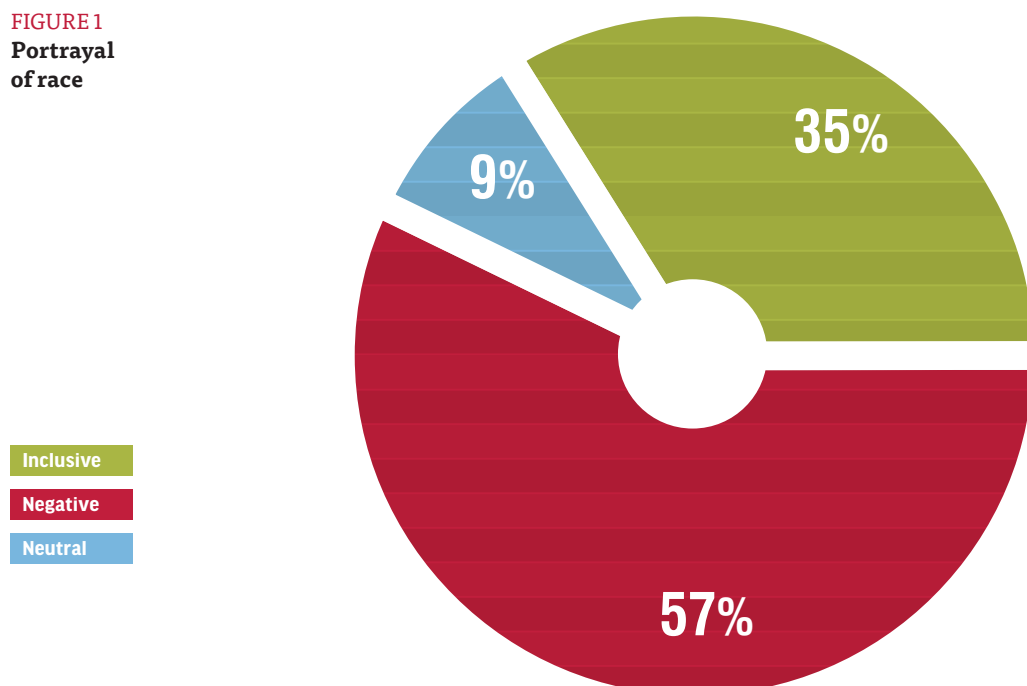
Collectively, these results demonstrate that negative racial portrayals in the media occur frequently. This must be addressed due to the effect that media commentary has on solidifying racist views and normalising racist hate speech (see our case study on page 25). Consequently, media regulatory frameworks need to be strengthened to deal with such reporting.

Portrayal by media agency

As in our 2017 report, we did not include the names of journalists and commentators in our results. All Together Now does not believe that "naming and shaming" individual perpetrators will result in a substantial change to the way racism is discussed by mainstream media, as one perpetrator can be easily substituted with another. Instead, by challenging the legitimacy of racially biased social commentators in the system, we aim for permanent and systemic change. We do this by pointing out the use of negative racial framing and language in mainstream opinion pieces, work with impacted communities to draw attention to the societal harm this causes, and facilitate solutions.

Most (91%) of the 159 negative race-related media pieces were published in three newspapers: the *Herald Sun*, *The Daily Telegraph* and *The Australian* (see Figure 2) *The Herald Sun* had 46% of all negative media pieces we identified, followed by *The Daily Telegraph* and *The Australian*, with 33% and 11% respectively. These outlets also had the highest percentage of

FIGURE 2
Portrayal of race by media agency

Type of racialised reporting by media agency

Inclusive
Negative
Neutral

negative media pieces compared to the total number (all negative/neutral/inclusive) of their media pieces we sampled.

Representation of Australian communities

Most race-related media pieces were about Muslim Australians (63), Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples (49) and African Australians (44). These communities also had the highest number of negative articles, with Muslim Australians at the top of the list (52).

Our results about Muslim Australians are broadly consistent with OnePath Media's 2017 *Islam in the Media* report.[32] OnePath Media looked at how five of Australia's biggest newspapers reported on Islam, and found almost 3,000 articles that referenced Islam or Muslims alongside words like violence, extremism, terrorism or radical, as well as 152 newspaper front pages that were negative about Islam. It analysed opinion pieces from six newspaper columnists and found that 31% of the opinion pieces were on Islam, "with the overwhelming majority of them being negative and divisive in nature".

Newspapers versus television

There were more race-related media pieces in newspapers (218) and less on television (63). Most newspaper pieces were negative (66%), while most television pieces were inclusive (56%) (see Figure 4). These findings strengthen our recommendations in respect of the Australian Press Council, which regulates newspapers.

Negative portrayals of Muslim Australians, African Australians and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples highlight the need for media regulatory frameworks to be strengthened in order to deal with such reporting.

30 All Together Now, *Who watches the media? Race-related reporting in the Australian mainstream media*.

31 U Rodrigues & Y Paradies, *Transnational news and multicultural Australia: cultural diversity and news in Australia*, Deakin University, Melbourne, 2017, viewed 16 July 2019, <https://www.deakin.edu.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0019/1311337/altman-transnational-news-and-multicultural-australia.pdf?_ga=2.40145894.551712118.1538878478-1521923401.1537187425>.

32 OnePath Network, *2017 a year in review: Islam in the media*, OnePath Network, 2018, viewed 16 July 2019, <https://www.onepathnetwork.com/islam-in-the-media-2017>.
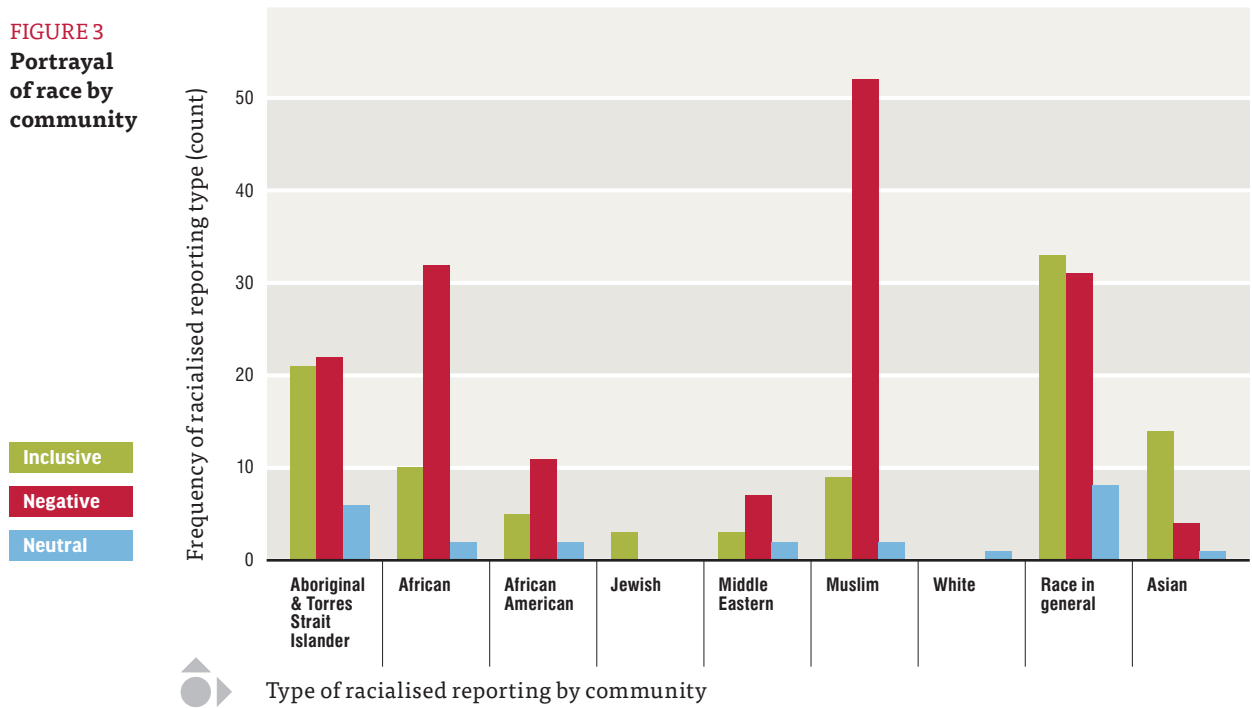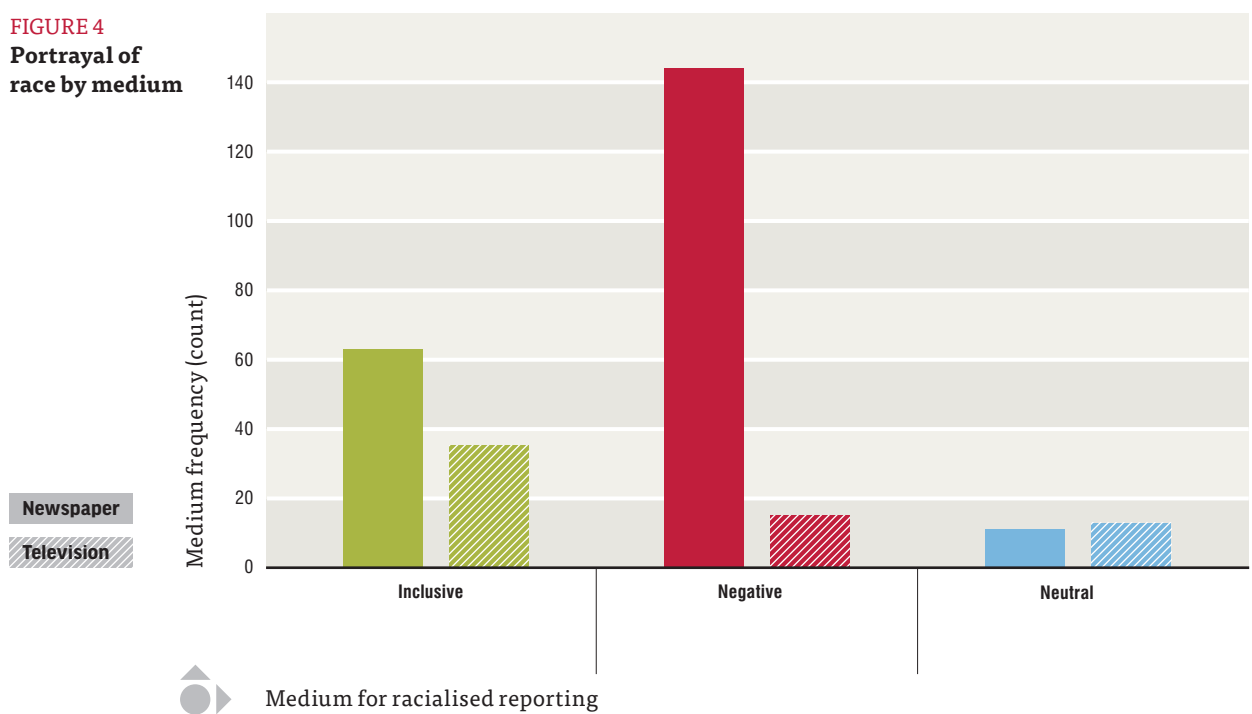
FIGURE 3
**Portrayal
of race by
community**

Type of racialised reporting by community

FIGURE 4
**Portrayal of
race by medium**

Medium for racialised reporting

Detailed findings

This section looks at the three Australian communities that had the most negative race-related media pieces written or produced about them: Muslim Australians (63), Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples (49) and African Australians (44).

How to approach our detailed findings

The detailed findings lead our recommendations for strengthening existing media regulatory frameworks and media organisation policies. The media regulatory frameworks include the APC Statement of General Principles, the Commercial Television Industry Code of Practice and the MEAA Journalist Code of Ethics. Some key points about the media regulatory frameworks and media organisation policies to keep in mind:

- they don't fully cover racism in opinion pieces;
- they don't take into consideration covert racism;
- some of the existing media regulatory frameworks on racism are not binding.

The detailed findings highlight where the media regulatory frameworks are falling short of keeping media organisations accountable for negative racial framing or racist language.

In this section we look at how the negative media coverage of each community was delivered. We are guided by our negative definition, which is aligned with the *Racial Discrimination Act* and the UNESCO Declaration on Race and Racial Prejudice (see *A snapshot of our Framework* on page 11). Our analysis classifies and explains the techniques used in racist reporting and serves as evidence of racist discourse proliferation in sections of the opinion media. We are using this evidence-based approach to make recommendations for strengthening existing media regulatory frameworks and policies (see our *Recommendations* on page 5).

One of the most important findings is the prevalence of covert racism. Out of the 159 negative media pieces we identified, 70% used covert techniques when commenting about race, either in isolation or in combination with overtly negative language or framing.

- **Overt racism** is easier to identify in a media piece due to explicitly and negatively racialised language or framing.
- **Covert racism** is more difficult to identify as it uses implicit or intertextual meanings. For example, it uses techniques such as dog-whistling, irony and de-contextualisation.

We will discuss the overt and covert characteristics in detail in the following section.

FIGURE 5
How negative media pieces promoted racist notions
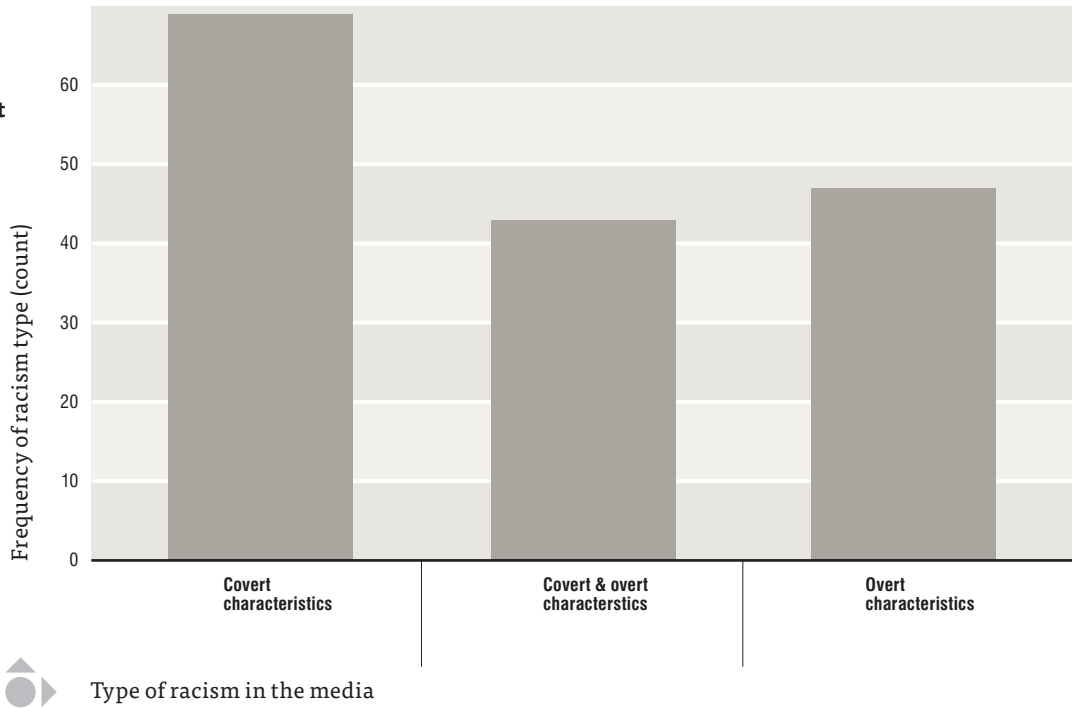
Overt racism

In summary, our analysis shows that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples were represented with negative stereotypes. African Australians were often identified through descriptors such as "of African appearance" in association with crime and violence. Muslim people were portrayed negatively in many different ways, particularly through stereotyping, generalisation of negative traits to all Muslims and promoting the belief that they don't belong in Australia ("us" vs. "them").

FIGURE 6
Type and frequency of overt racism
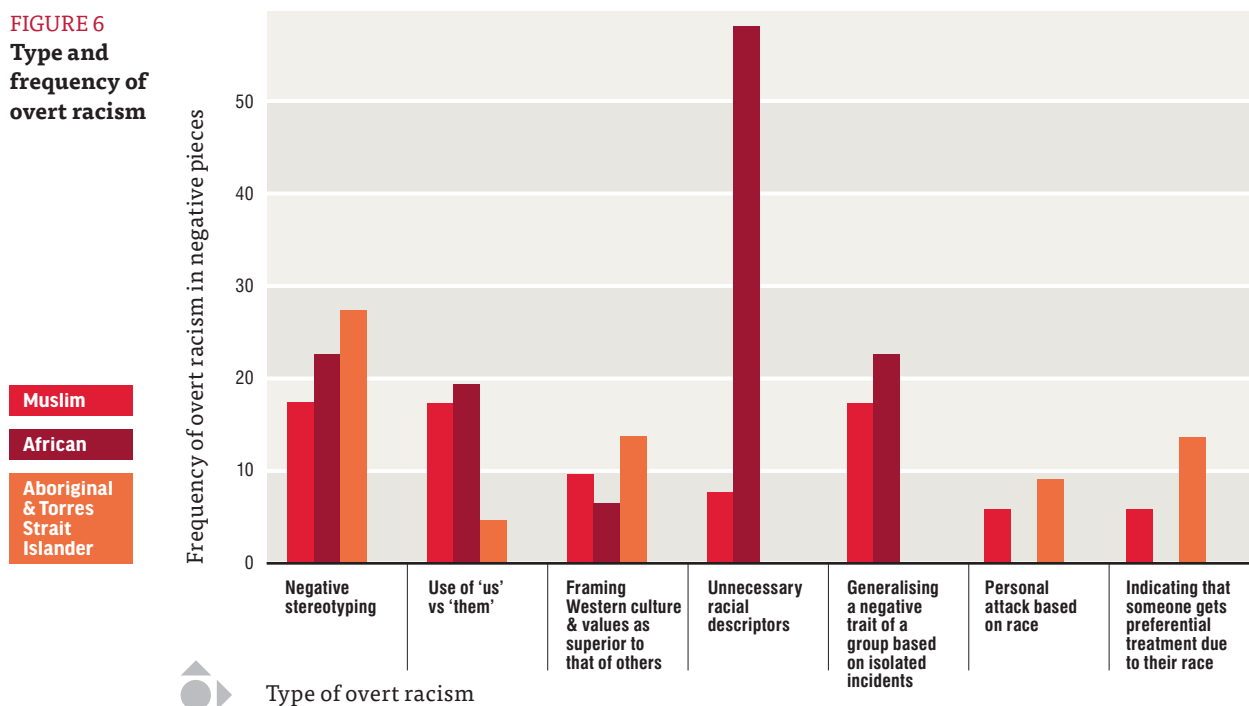
Muslim Australians

Muslim Australians were targeted in both overt and covert ways by media. In the overt category, numerous forms of negative framing (for example, generalising a negative trait to the whole community, personal attack or indicating someone received preferential treatment based on their ethnic background) and language (for example, stereotyping, use of "us" vs. "them", use of invalid racial descriptors) were used when discussing Muslim Australians. In contrast, for other communities, only selected forms of racial bias stood out (as seen in Figure 6). The tendency to generalise negative traits to the whole population – "the problem we all face is the not knowing who is and who is not a terrorist"[33] – was most often seen in relation to Muslim Australians, thereby conflating Muslims with terrorism.

African Australians

We analysed the coverage of Sudanese Australians, which the media pieces usually referred to as "African". We acknowledge the diversity of the African continent and, implicitly, of the people with African ancestry who live in Australia.[34] For the purposes of this report, we referred collectively to the community groups discussed as "African Australians". We used the label "African" by itself only when we needed to replicate the language used in the media for analysis clarity.

Our research shows that African Australians have been heavily reported on in relation to crime through fearmongering instead of a contextualised, balanced portrayal of facts. In the past 12 months, some columnists and current affairs shows have used the "African gangs" narrative when discussing crime in Melbourne.[35] In the months before July 2018, various politicians referred to the crime problem in Victoria and media has followed suit. This culminated in the Seven Network's *Sunday Night* special on "African gangs", which breached the Australian Communications and Media Authority's accuracy requirements.[36] The "African gangs" narrative then snowballed in the opinion media for the rest of the year.

Our data shows that in 2018, an avalanche of unnecessary descriptors was used to describe individuals or actions of African Australians. This included gangs, chaos, African crime problem, terrorising, wreaking havoc, ethnic mobs, riots, criminals and lawless gangs. Crime-related terms are not necessarily harmful or racist in isolation, however, they become so when used in association with certain racial descriptors, such as "of African appearance". Most importantly, our data shows that racial descriptors were not used to describe people of Caucasian appearance.

When a person of "African appearance" was involved in an incident, we saw a tendency by some authors to extend or generalise the negative traits of individuals to entire communities. Authors of negative pieces often used this line of thinking as an argument against immigration and multiculturalism in Australia.[37] In other words, "African gangs" has become shorthand for othering people of African descent by portraying them as dangerous and violent.[38]

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples

The overt manifestation of racism against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples was most often negative stereotyping that portrayed First Australians as dangerous and inferior due to their culture. This narrative persists, although claims of scientific evidence proving racial or ethnic superiority between groups have been long refuted, and officially dismissed as early as 1978 in the UNESCO Declaration on Race and Racial Prejudice.[39]

A common idea put forward by commentators was that Indigenous culture causes poor outcomes: "What a deceitful avoidance of the truth – that Aboriginal culture is itself violent and oppressively patriarchal."[40] This argument dismisses all the social factors that contribute to inequality such as the role of colonisation in Australia, intergenerational trauma, institutional racism and systemic disadvantage. It also goes against a wealth of evidence pointing out the link between social factors (including racism) and the negative outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.[41]

The "bad culture" stereotype is also expressed through a more explicitly racist claim that Indigenous cultures are inferior, for example: "We have one law and that is the law of Australia, not the law [...] of the myriad Aboriginal tribes clamouring for recognition."[42] In this example, through the choice of words "law" versus "tribes", the author implies the superiority of one over the other. The juxtaposition of the two words is a familiar colonial framing of Western superiority (law) over the conquered peoples (tribes).

These overt characteristics go hand in hand with the more prevalent covert ways of negatively portraying racial groups. Overt racism can generally be covered by regulatory codes and policies that oversee gratuitous emphasis on race, religion, nationality, colour, ethnic origin and country of origin. Covert racism requires a more nuanced approach, that includes awareness and acknowledgement of the local cultural context and race relations.
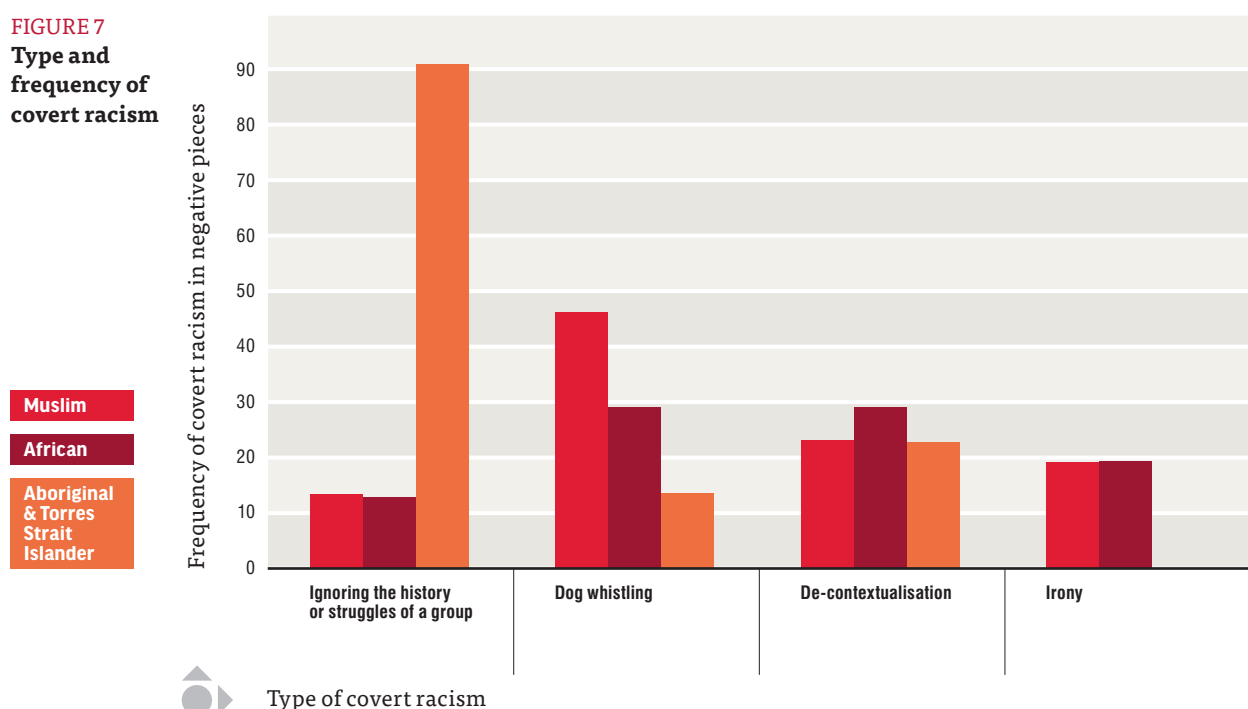
Covert racism

In summary, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples were targeted through a denial of their history and issues, while Muslims and African Australians were subject to dog whistling and de-contextualisation.

The following techniques may not be negative unless used with a focus on racial background:

- **ignoring the history or struggles of a community**;
- **dog whistling** – a writing technique that relies on stoking racial fears in particular sections of the audience, without using explicit language;[43]
- **de-contextualisation** - a writing technique that omits information, which causes the misrepresentation of the person or group discussed
- **irony** – the use of words to express something other than and especially the opposite of the literal meaning.[44]

FIGURE 7
Type and frequency of covert racism

Legend:
- Muslim
- African
- Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander

Y-axis: Frequency of covert racism in negative pieces

X-axis (Type of covert racism):
- Ignoring the history or struggles of a group
- Dog whistling
- De-contextualisation
- Irony

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples

Here are a few examples showing how media pieces ignore the history or struggles of a community.

Denying the existence of the Stolen Generations

Commentators deny the existence of the Stolen Generations through repeatedly referring to this as a myth and claiming that there is no evidence for it:

> Not one court has upheld a true 'stolen generations' claim – someone claiming they were 'stolen' from caring parents just because they were Aboriginal." [45]

and

> Instead, the museum devoted huge space to showcasing Aboriginal culture and alleged white cruelty, even peddling the long-debunked claim that one in three Aboriginal children had been stolen from their parents." [46]

Yet the existence of the Stolen Generations and the wide-ranging extent of the hurt and suffering caused is a fact. [47] Children of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander descent were removed from their families by church missions and Australian federal and state government agencies under Acts of their respective parliaments. [48]

Attributing community problems to a perceived "Aboriginal culture"

> Whilst it is unfortunately true that those identifying as indigenous Australians are more likely to go to jail than they are to go to school and that domestic violence and sexual abuse is far more prevalent within the indigenous community, Ms Boney is ignoring the historical reality that pre-colonial life in Australia was not a bed of roses for the indigenous." [49]

The excerpt is from an opinion article that suggests violence is inherent to "Aboriginal culture". The negative racial angle is implied here through contrasting two communities – Indigenous and non-Indigenous, and highlighting the former as negative. In the first example, the "domestic violence and sexual abuse [...] far more prevalent within the indigenous community" [50] is associated with a pre-colonial historical reality that "was not a bed of roses for the indigenous". Thus, societal issues caused by a variety of social factors, such as intergenerational trauma, poverty, loss of land and culture, and racism, [51] are instead attributed to a pre-colonial dysfunctional culture.

Stating that Indigenous people need to be integrated and assimilated

For example:

> Australia should celebrate the reality that the overwhelming majority of those who identify as indigenous are in marriages or other relationships with people who identify as non-indigenous and successive census surveys show that the proportion of mixed marriages is increasing. This shouldn't worry anyone as it marks the success of integration and assimilation despite the constant pressure from self-serving minority groups pandered to by Labor and the Greens to divide the nation with the politics of discrimination and separatism." [52]

Not only is this perspective problematic because it dismisses any Indigenous-oriented initiative as "politics of discrimination", but it also refers to "mixed marriages" as a sign of integration. The first point is built on the fallacy that addressing Indigenous matters results in discriminating against other groups. The second idea, that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples

have to be assimilated, especially through marriage with a non-Indigenous person, is a dated racist trope based on the assumption that a minority race or culture should be diluted into the dominant culture.

When looking at examples of covert racism, the techniques often overlap, for example, the claim that "Aboriginal culture" is violent can only be made through de-contextualisation and cherry-picking of information. In other words, de-contextualisation and dog whistling feed into ignoring the history of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. This way, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples are painted in a negative stereotypical way that disregards the causes and only focuses on the manifestations of systemic disadvantage.

Muslim Australians

Dog whistling was most common in pieces about Muslim Australian people. Media stories that employ dog whistling base their framing on common existing prejudices and negative narratives about Muslim Australians. Expressions of dog whistling may look innocuous to some audiences, while the message communicates something more insidious either to a part of the audience or "outside of the audience's conscious awareness – a covert appeal to some noxious set of views".[53] These negative views about Muslim Australians perpetuated through dog whistling have been widely documented and analysed by researchers.[54] The most common ones we identified are the conflation of Muslims and terrorism,[55] Islam presented as resistant to secular values and Muslims as dangerous,[56] and a negative view of women who wear the hijab.

Here are a few common examples of easily identifiable dog whistles that hold in place the above-mentioned narratives, though there are many more:

Implying that Muslims adhere to negative practices[57]
Implying is the key word in this case. If the media piece said that all Muslims adhere to negative practices such as genital mutilation, then that would be an example of overt racism based on a generalisation. However, dog whistling in this instance works through the use of language that stands for *negative Muslim practices*: "When multiculturalism means attending a world music festival and drinking kombucha, female genital mutilation, forced marriages and sharia law are generally not front of mind."[58] The last three items in this enumeration are emotional buzzwords often encountered in the media when Muslims are framed negatively. "FGM" (female genital mutilation), "forced marriages" and "sharia law" are cues for anti-Muslim immigration rhetoric. These practices are contrasted with the activity of "drinking kombucha". This creates a tension between "us" – the kombucha-drinking festival goers and "them" – the Muslims who practice forced marriages.

Placing "a lot of people agree that"[59] in front of an anti-Muslim narrative

> A lot of people in Australia – a lot more people than you might at first assume – basically agree with what he had to say about Muslims. […] You can argue about the numbers. You can argue about the stupidity of his generalisations about Muslims. But what you can't deny is that many people have reached the conclusion – from their own observation of events – that more Islam equals more trouble."[60]

The dog whistle element of this text rationalises Islamophobia and it does so through avoiding to express it as a personal view. While the author appears to condemn Fraser Anning's "generalisations about Muslims", the author continues by arguing in favour of the collective anti-Muslim sentiment. He does this through appealing to the wisdom of the wider audience who "have reached the conclusion – from their own observation of events – that Islam equals more trouble".[61] This way, he validates an existing Islamophobic narrative.

African Australians

The covert racism against African Australians is most often expressed through dog whistling by:

Implying that (African) refugees/immigrants are dangerous

A short opinion piece ends with a broad rhetorical question: "BTW: isn't our refugee program meant to save people from danger, not put Australians in it?"[62] The question complements the racial fear instilled through the text: "Last night scores more Africans brawled in St Kilda and Elwood, attacking residents."[63] There are multiple techniques combined in this opinion piece: a generalisation of isolated incidents to suggest refugees are dangerous and a de-contextualisation of the event. This way a blanket, negative statement about refugees can be made. Together, these techniques effectively become a racial dog whistle. In this instance, the question at the end of the article can stoke or validate fear in people who feel threatened by immigrants or other ethnic groups.

Sensationalising crime in videos

The "Guns for hire" segment (starting at min. 15:40), from the Nine Network's 2018 *A Current Affair* episode,[64] portrayed African Australians as dangerous, perpetuating the "African gangs" narrative. It did so through airing several personal stories of mostly white people, while it remained unclear what the facts were. The presenter set the scene for a gang-related story: "They're the sort of armed security seen at banks, but these guards are being paid to protect Frank's house from local gangs. And they'll shoot if they need to."[65] The reporter continued by saying: "Hired armed guards, the latest extreme example of just how far Melbourne residents like Frank are willing to go to, to protect their property from what he calls 'African gangs'."[66] Under the pretence of balance, one African Australian young woman was interviewed for less than a minute (from min. 19:06 to min. 19:46), in the four-minute segment. The ending, which is usually meant to create an impact on the viewer, showed Frank, the protagonist, saying that he would not sit inside his own house as a prisoner, while dramatic music was played in the background.

Dog whistling here is the suggestion of racial tensions between African people and the white (or white-passing) couple in Melbourne, masked in a seemingly objective story about hired guards. It is a questionable, sensationalised portrayal of facts, contrary to what the public expects from current affairs programs: a true representation of the world, according to a 2009 ACMA study.[67]

The "African gangs" narrative is a recent example to illustrate how media uses dog whistling and de-contextualisation to racially vilify a group of people. Based on the pre-existing "ethnic crime" prejudice, once the idea of "African gangs" was introduced into the public sphere, parts of the media contributed regularly with "evidence" to reinforce the prejudice over and over again. They did that through warnings against African immigration, criticism of inferior cultures, cherry-picking crimes committed by people of African background, and saturating the media discourse with crime-related terms when referring to African Australians.

African Australians experienced negative health consequences as a result of this coverage:

Nyadol Nyuon commenting in The Saturday Paper about her experience after giving an interview on ABC TV about the discussion of "African gangs" in the mainstream media

" The online racist abuse [I received] was not a surprise. If anything, it was expected. It's just one consequence of racialised reporting on African crime and the subsequent racial anxiety it generates. The more serious consequences aren't so easy to see: the impacts racism can have on the brain, which look very similar to the patterns of brain activity caused by physical pain; or the havoc it can wreak on the body, damaging the heart, immune system and even DNA."[68]

While overtly racist language is easier to spot and generally included in the codes of conduct, covert racism, such as negative framing through omission of facts, or an unnecessarily racial-ised angle of the story, is not captured by the codes.

This makes it very difficult for the targeted groups to reclaim the narrative or seek redress. The inadequacy of the codes creates a dynamic whereby affected individuals and their allies call out racism, and the media agencies respond by denying wrongdoing. Consequently, this pattern is repeated over and over again without resolution.

Luke Pearson
Founder and CEO
of IndigenousX

" It's a vicious cycle of faux self-victimisation – being offensive, feigning ignorance while completely ignoring the nature of the criticism given, then doubling down by whinging about being the victims, and complaining about the 'Left' and 'PC gone mad'." [69]

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Social commentary case study

All Together Now analysed 2,900 readers' comments using Leximancer, an advanced text analytics tool. The results show that the themes identified in the comments are closely related to the article's subject and – most importantly – they replicate and amplify the negative racial tone rather than question it. We conclude that negatively racialised articles are not in the public interest.

For this case study, we focused on negatively racialised articles written about Muslim Australians between May 2018 and October 2018. We collected 2,900 comments written by readers that were published on the media agency websites, and imputed them into Leximancer software that provided us with a textual analysis of the comments.

The tone and content of the comments section accompanying negatively racialised articles about Muslims suggests that readers who comment on these articles generally agree with the views expressed by the author, rather than questioning or opposing racist sentiments. Most comments approach the problematic narratives of the articles uncritically. They validate the dominant narrative while, arguably, the narrative validates the readers' views.

All Together Now was involved in a world-first study led by Victoria University that found far-right extremist groups in Victoria used media narratives as recruitment tools. This research demonstrates that far-right groups use negatively racialised media coverage as a recruitment tool by creating false credibility for their cause.[70,71]

The tone and content of the comments section accompanying negatively racialised articles published on the websites of mainstream newspapers suggest that negatively racialised opinion pieces solidify the views of readers who already agree with such views, through reinforcing their beliefs. The evidence also points to the existence of regular commenters, whose names keep coming up in the comment section of certain newspapers, in long comment threads. While it cannot be verified if they are different users using the same name, it is more likely that they are regular readers of a newspaper or author, who have formed an online community. "News websites can develop into communities, as people comment not only on the article, but on each other's comments."[72]

Even more problematic is that each of these comments is reviewed by a moderator before the comment is posted publicly. In effect, by publishing these comments, the moderator has endorsed these comments based on the media agency's guidelines.

All Together Now calls for the media regulators to shift this dynamic by strengthening the codes of conduct so that opinion makers and the media agencies they work for act in the public interest.

Findings in detail

Three main themes of interest emerged from the Leximancer analysis:
1. People
2. Women
3. Political disagreement

THEME: people

Concepts in this theme include people, Australia, country, life, need, world, culture, western, down, values, take, politicians, real, hate, government, Islam, become, fact, believe, things, trying, words and system.

- A large number of comments mention the word "people" in sweeping generalisations and strong nationalistic statements about Australia as a country, its values, government and policies:

> " No. It is not the people but the ideology. Germans, for example, can integrate beautifully in Australia, so long as they don't bring the socialism."

> " The Australian people are no more racist than any other countries in the world despite what the leftist quislings like to say. Walk down the streets of western and south western Sydney and wear something that middle eastern men dont (sic) like and you will get real racism."

- Free speech is discussed along with immigration policies that should keep "others" away:

> " So would you rather the English just keep turning a blind eye to the Islamic rape gangs? Are you happy that Tommy Robinson was jailed for free speech?"

- Muslims are seen/portrayed as a group who refuse to integrate.
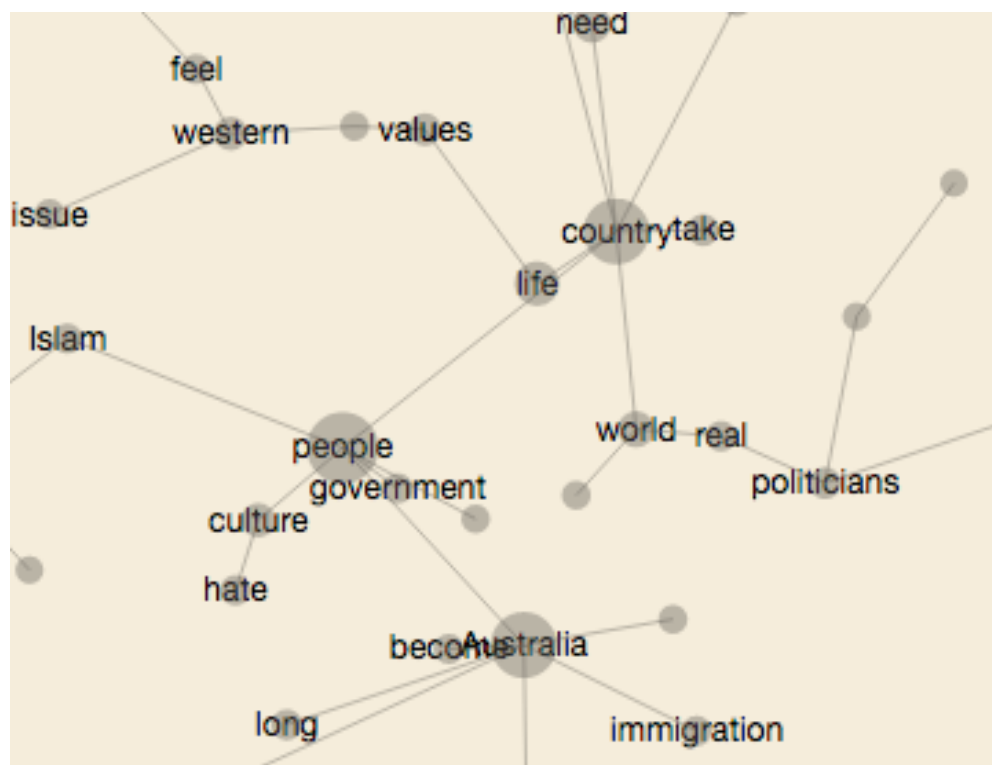
Concepts in this theme include women, wear, freedom, Muslim, speech, society, public, freedom of speech, burka, agree, face, religion, men, support, feel, issue, law, head and look.

Strong criticism of the burqa, hijab and niqab:

> " It is not the various ways that Muslim women cover their hair, but exactly why they do it, and the signal it sends as to their own exceptional virtue. I just want to hear them say it to the rest of us out loud!"

> " TThe Burka has the misogynous effect of erasing a woman's identity: she becomes a non-individual other than one of a number of 'faceless' people wearing a black sheet with a slit."

Commentary about why the veil should not be worn in Australia in relation to Australian values (vs. Muslim values), oppression, and the physical aspect of women wearing a veil:

> " I'm a woman and I don't find women in sacks funny either."

> " I think in this instance, for the sake of Australian women who in reality don't have a choice, the burka should be banned."

> " The Burka, Hijab, Jilbab and Niqab are all signs of medieval and misogynistic oppression. Stop playing with semantics and call it for what it is – oppression. No need for any of this in Australia."

The focus on Muslim women and their appearance seems gratuitous as it is not based on any newsworthy event in the data collection period, aside from comments made by the Prime Minister of the United Kingdom Boris Johnson about women wearing a burqa.
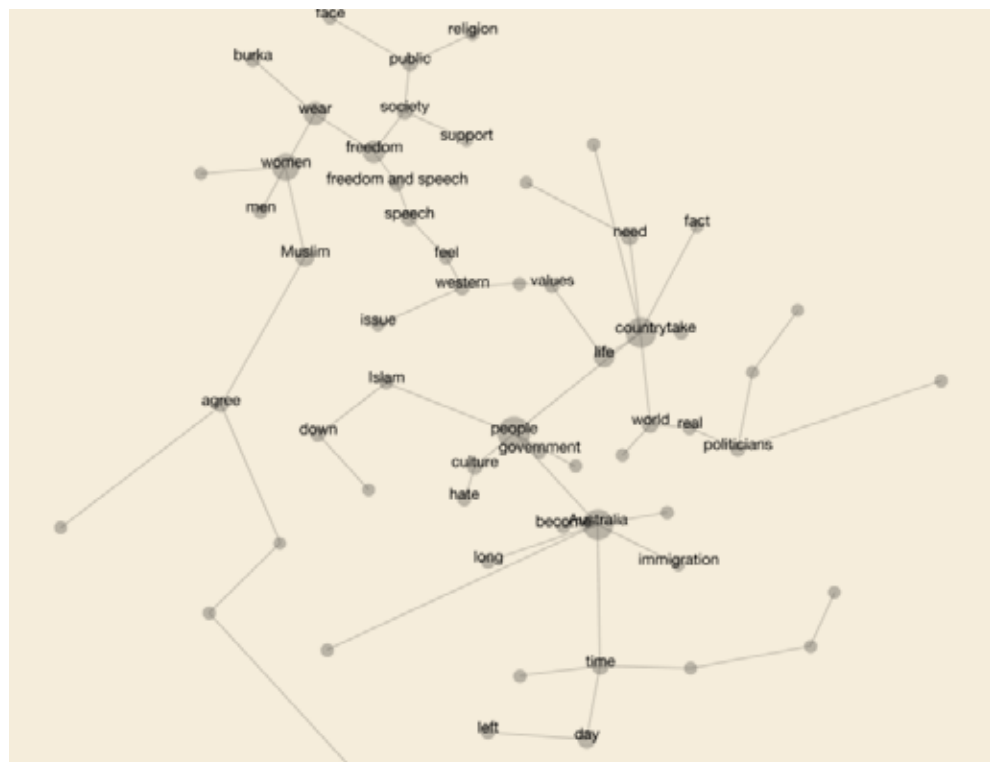
THEME: political disagreement

This was a cluster of minor themes with key words such as Greens, ABC and politicians.

- Discontent with "the left"– a group that includes the ABC, the Greens, other commentators and "social justice warriors". This sentiment is formulated through strong, polarising language that mostly attacks people or parties with progressive political views.
- Distrust in politicians.

A marginal number of comments question the negative racial tone and they are generally responded to with a dissenting view, in line with most of the comments:

> " The very existence of people like Yassmin threatens people like [author's name removed] who clearly yearns for a return to the white Australia of the 1950s."

and the response:

> " That's a whole lot of unverified projection going on there [commenter's name removed]."

Another example:

> " And it could be argued that the burka/niqab gives women freedom because it erases their gender and allows them to walk down the street without men leering at them and commenting on their physicality."

and the response:

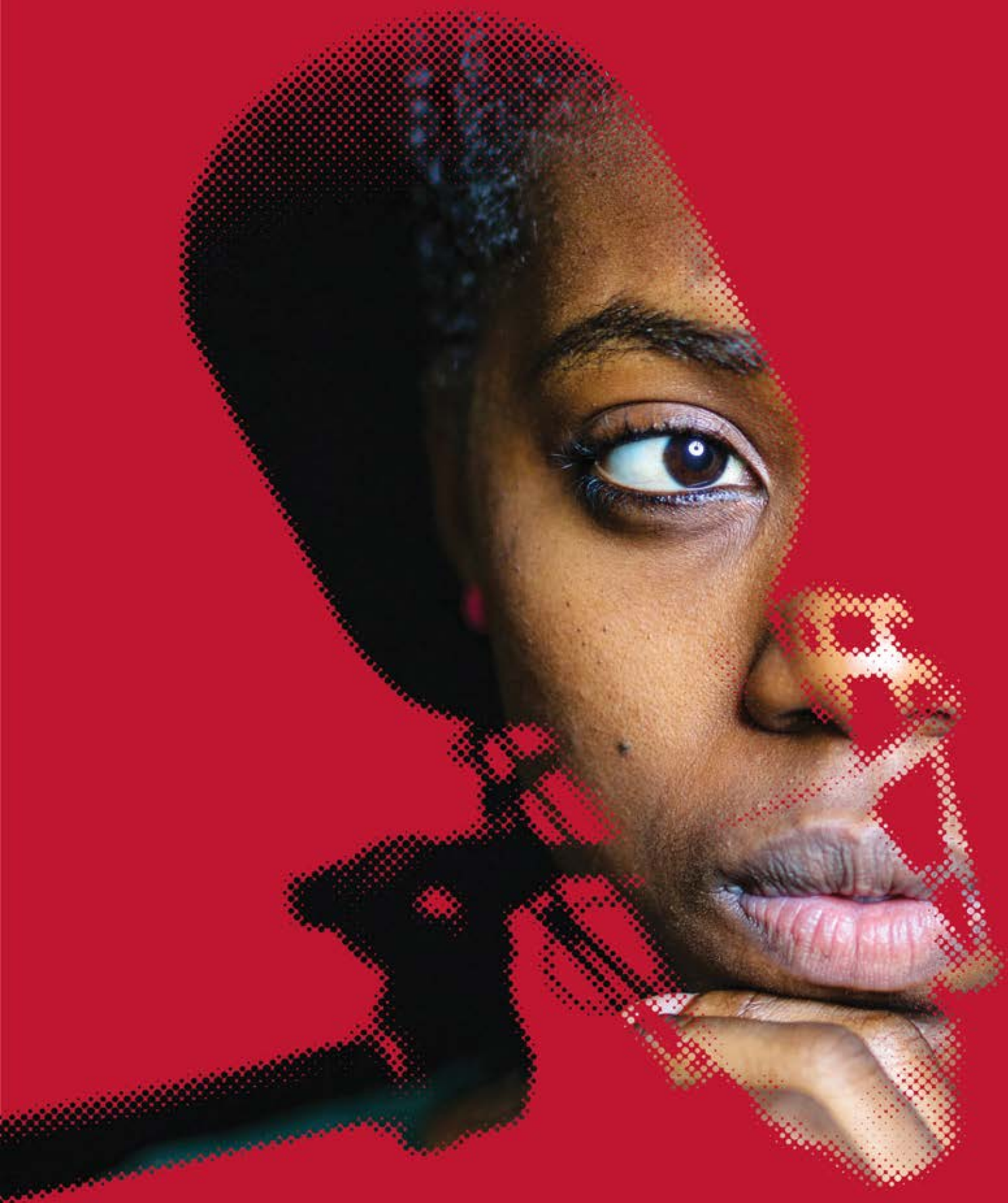> " It also awllow (sic) men to hide weapons and other prohibited articles under it."
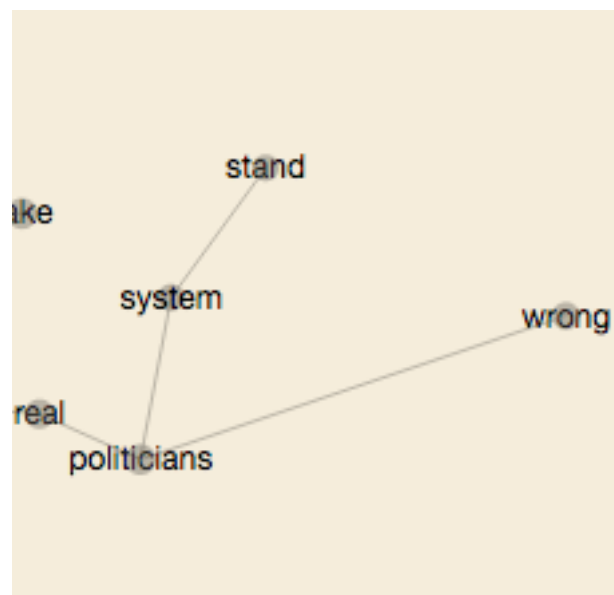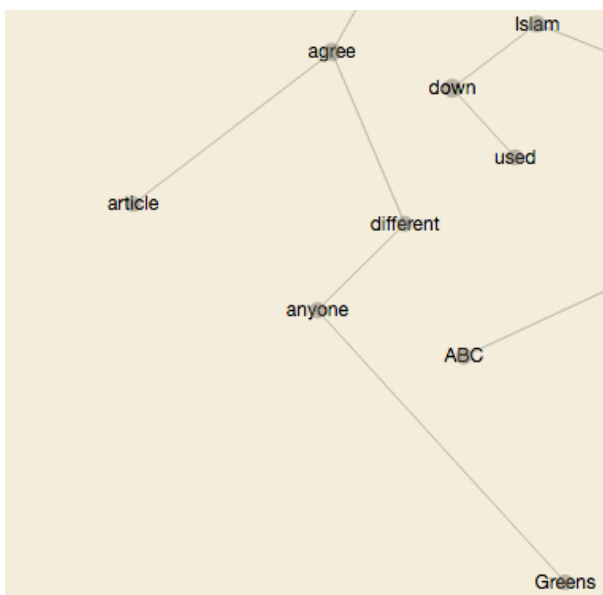
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Method

Methodology

Assessing race-related media pieces

This section outlines the methodology we used to assess race-related media pieces.

Sampling

We used sampling, which involves a consistently taken sample of an appropriate size that will yield results that can be applied to the population as a whole.[73] Based on resourcing, we limited our data population to the top six online newspapers with the highest cross-platform readership (both print and online)[74] and the most-watched current affairs shows.

The newspapers and television shows we looked at were:

NEWSPAPERS
- The Age
- The Australian
- The Courier Mail
- The Daily Telegraph
- Herald Sun
- The Sydney Morning Herald

TELEVISION SHOWS
- 60 Minutes (Nine Network)
- The 7.30 Report (ABC)
- A Current Affair (Nine Network)
- The Project (Network 10)
- Sunday Night (The Seven Network)
- Today Tonight (The Seven Network)

For newspapers, we conducted the sampling weekly over 12 months between April 2018 and April 2019.

We read the opinion section of each newspaper and selected only the race-related stories. *The Age* and *The Sydney Morning Herald* share all their opinion content, so we monitored them as one newspaper. For television, we watched all episodes weekly online. Where the network's homepage presented each episode by story with a relevant headline, we only watched race-related stories.

A general criticism of this type of convenience sampling, as highlighted by Thurman[75], is that the units sampled do not represent adequately what is being analysed. We addressed this through subscribing to the online publications that we monitored, which allowed us access to all the articles, and we could go back one week to read them. This way we guaranteed that no newsworthy events were being left out. *The Age* and *The Sydney Morning Herald* only display three-day-old opinion articles each day, so we checked them twice a week to ensure even monitoring.

The Australian media ownership is highly concentrated, and we monitored all the main outlets, which means that the conclusions reflect the broader trends of the data population.

Coding

Our research began by creating our framework with UTS in 2016, a set of questions designed to code data based on existing literature[76] and legislation on racism in Australia. We continue to work with UTS to refine the framework regularly. Initially, the codes worked as functional, broad categories of explicit, textual racism and were used to categorise and collect race-related stories. The framework's main function is to categorise all race-related stories into a negative, inclusive (formerly called positive) or neutral portrayal of race, along with categorising them by community (racial background) and media agency.

The "negative" category was well structured using existing research, whereas the "neutral" and "inclusive" categories were semi-structured. This allowed us to identify trends and patterns over time through the data collected. Due to the stories' complexity in terms of themes and writing style, some of the data we collected did not fit neatly within the initial categories. Therefore, during the first six months of data collection, we assigned new labels to that data and kept it separate for further refining. Those labels, based on popularity and functionality, became new framework categories in which to capture covert forms of racism. In a nutshell, coding and creating new codes have and will continue to overlap as the research progresses, in a continuous process of refining.

The neutral and positive categories were reviewed at the end of the first six months. The positive category was re-named "inclusive" to better reflect the complexity of the data. We created new functional definitions and new categories based on data observation. For this reason, the positive and neutral categories were initially designed to produce quantitative results, while the negative category produces both quantitative and qualitative data through more detailed categorisations. The focus on the "negative" section of our framework was a conscious choice, in line with the gap in existing research: monitoring racism in Australian media. At the same time, from a methodological point of view, keeping a detailed account of the negative stories' features increases the transparency of the coding process.

The main challenge of our coding method is the researchers' subjectivity in reading texts and creating new codes versus using the existing ones. We addressed this challenge by testing the margin of error by inviting independent analysts to re-code a data sample. The results were compared without significant differences in coding being identified. For pieces that didn't fit well into the framework, at least two independent assessments were done until consensus was reached; if there was no consensus, the sample was considered unfit for our purposes.

Note on "neutral" and "inclusive" definitions

The **neutral** category of our framework does not have a restrictive definition because, unlike news, opinion pieces aren't often neutral in their framing. For a piece to be classified as neutral, it has to be framed in a way that:

- does not place unnecessary focus on the race of a person or community;
- does not single out a person or community based on their race;
- does not vilify a community based on isolated incidents.

The criteria above does not suggest colour-blindness (i.e. it does not propose ignoring racial identity altogether) as a solution for more balanced reporting. As outlined by Race Forward[77], the term colour-blindness describes the disregard of racial characteristics and is a concept "often promoted by those who dismiss the importance of race, to proclaim the end of racism". All Together Now agrees with the view that colour-blindness is a concept that presents challenges when discussing diversity and equity that require being racially aware.

The **inclusive** definition includes the criteria of giving a voice to a minority group to tell their version of the story. However, if an author of a media piece belonged to the racial minority group they were speaking about, but their content satisfied our negative definition, then their media piece was classified as negative.

Assessing social commentary

For the case study, we focused only on negatively racialised articles written about Muslims during May 2018 to October 2018.

Where an article had one or more public comments, we extracted those comments from the web page where the article was originally published (i.e. we did not look at social media comments or secondary publishers). We collected 2,900 comments (comprising a total of 85,526 words) across 15 articles that negatively racialised Muslims.

The articles focused on three themes that were prevalent during the collection period. One topic was Boris Johnson's comments on the burqa and his quip that women who wear it look like letter boxes. The negative commentary in Australia during this news event was in relation to Muslims in Australia and in agreement with Boris's comments. The other topics were about Yassmin Abdel-Magied (a Sudanese–Australian writer and broadcaster who was severely trolled in 2017 and subsequently moved to the United Kingdom) or immigrants and asylum seekers.

These 2,900 comments were imputed into the Leximancer software, which provided us with a text analysis of the comments. Before importing the data in Leximancer, the names of the commenters and the date of the comments were removed.

In Leximancer, an automatic analysis was run without human input. A separate manual analysis was run with minor changes. We merged some words with the same meaning (for example, "woman" and "women") and connected some compound concepts such as "free" + "speech".

In the manual analysis results, there weren't significant differences compared to the automatic analysis. It became clearer on the concept map (Figure 8) what the main themes were after merging the concepts above.

Through comparison of the two analyses, we identified and extracted the main themes, along with all related concepts. We selected a number of comments after reading the top ones as selected by Leximancer for each theme to be included in this report.

Assessing cultural background of authors

All Together Now engaged CIRCA to undertake a desktop review based on the classification method used by the Australian Human Rights Commission and University of Sydney for the *2016 Leading for Change* report. This same method is also used in the United States, Canada and the United Kingdom to identify the cultural background of corporate and senior leaders.

This involved reviewing a set of categories including, but not limited, to:

- publicly available biographical information;
- relevant public statements;
- full name and its origins;
- place of birth (if known);
- images of the individual writer.

The information collected during this desktop review was then categorised further based on current Australian population demographics:

- African
- Anglo-Celtic
- Asian
- European
- Indigenous
- Middle Eastern
- Southern Asian.

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