

Anti-Racism Toolkit

Types of Racism

Microaggressions

Microaggressions towards Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples are subtle, everyday forms of racism that reinforce harmful stereotypes and inequality. They are often expressed through “casual” comments or behaviours that may seem harmless, but can be offensive and invalidating.

Examples include asking a First Nations person “Where are you really from?”, expressing surprise at their education or professional success, or questioning whether they are “really” Aboriginal because of their appearance. [i]

These behaviours reflect an underlying racial bias that can make First Nations peoples feel excluded, stereotyped, and unsafe.



Unconscious Bias

Unconscious bias refers to the social stereotypes, attitudes, and perceptions people hold about certain groups subconsciously.

A 2020 study by Australian National University, involving over 11,000 people, found that 75% of Australians hold a negative implicit bias towards Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. [ii] These biases can influence everyday behaviour, including differential treatment towards First Nations peoples in workplaces, schools, healthcare, and public settings.

While often unintentional, unconscious bias further contributes to discrimination and unequal outcomes for Indigenous Australians.



[i] Andrea Fernandez, “5 microaggressions I experience as an Aboriginal woman. Including ones you might’ve said.”, Mamamia, July 9, 2021, <https://www.mamamia.com.au/indigenous-microaggressions/>

[ii] Kate Midena, “Three in four people have an implicit negative bias against Indigenous Australians, study finds.”, ABC News, June 9, 2021, <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2020-06-09/three-in-four-negative-bias-against-indigenous-australians-study/12335184>

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White Privilege

White privilege refers to the social and institutional advantages experienced by White Australians, compared to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples who face systemic racism and disadvantage.

These inequalities stem from colonisation, race-based policies, and systems built on Indigenous dispossession. Today, white privilege is reflected in higher levels of representation, cultural normalisation, and lower experiences of discrimination. [iii]

It also means White Australians are more likely to benefit from institutions such as health, education, and the justice system, which are largely shaped by Western cultural norms.



Systemic Racism

Systemic racism refers to the racism and discrimination embedded within the structures, institutions, laws, policies, and practices that shape society. For Indigenous Australians, systemic racism is an ongoing consequence of colonisation, exclusion, and disempowerment. It is reflected in unequal outcomes across areas such as health, education, employment, child protection, and the justice system.

Examples include the over-policing and over-incarceration of First Nations peoples, deaths in custody, disproportionate rates of child removal and out-of-home care, and barriers to culturally safe healthcare and education. [iv]

Despite some progress, systemic racism remains deeply entrenched and continues to impact the daily lives, opportunities, and long-term wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.



[iii] Marcus Woolombi Waters, "Whether you're listening or not, Australia is a nation of white privilege.", SBS, November 17, 2015, <https://theconversation.com/whether-youre-listening-or-not-australia-is-a-nation-of-white-privilege-49565>.

[iv] Melissa Compagnonis, "Time for truth-telling: Understanding Indigenous disadvantage in Australia", SBS, August 20, 2021, <https://www.sbs.com.au/language/english/en/article/time-for-truth-telling-understanding-indigenous-disadvantage-in-australia/7nsi95mn7>.