

Racism in Australia: findings of a survey on racist attitudes and experiences of racism

KEVIN M. DUNN

*Senior Lecturer in Geography
Faculty of the Built Environment
The University of New South Wales*

National Europe Centre Paper No. 77

Paper presented to conference entitled
*The Challenges of Immigration and Integration in the European
Union and Australia,*
18-20 February 2003, University of Sydney

Abstract: There is a general dearth of concrete evidence as to the extent of racism in Australia. This paper reports on research into the extent and distribution of intolerant attitudes in Australia, as well as data on the reported experience of racism. A telephone survey of residents throughout the states of Queensland and NSW generated a completed sample of 5056. The constructs of racism that were tested included: tolerance of cultural difference, perceptions on the extent of racism, tolerance of specific groups, ideology of nation, perceptions of Anglo-Celt cultural privilege, and racialism, including separatism and hierarchy. Findings suggest a substantive degree of racism in Australia. Anti-Muslim sentiment is very strong. There is a persistence of intolerance against Asian-, Indigenous and Jewish Australians. Most Australians recognise the problem of racism, yet less than half recognise the cultural privileges that racism accords. Racist attitudes are positively associated with age, non-tertiary education, and to a slightly lesser extent with those who do not speak a language other than English, the Australia-born, and with males. About 15 percent of Australians have experienced racism within institutional settings like the workplace and in education. About one-quarter of Australians report the experience of 'everyday racisms'. Reporting experiences of racism was higher among indigenous Australians, those speaking a language other than English, those born overseas (excluding UK and NZ), and males. While racism is quite prevalent in Australian society its manifestation is everywhere different. Locally sensitive anti-racism initiatives are required to engage the racisms within Australian society.

Aims

The principal aim of this research was to refine the theory for understanding the geographic variation of racism, with particular emphasis upon advancing a social construction approach. However, it became clear to us that there is a general dearth of concrete evidence as to the extent of racism in Australia as a whole. The Federal Government's commissioned inquiries into racism in Australia have not been released. So quite quickly a second intention became to fill that information gap by producing data sets on the extent and variation of racism in Australia and to place that information in the public domain. The collaborators on this project are Kevin Dunn and Ian Burnley (both of UNSW) and Jim Forrest from Macquarie University.

Method

Sample

An attitudinal telephone survey of residents throughout the states of Queensland and NSW generated a completed sample of 5056. The sample was area stratified at statistical local areas to enable regional variation to be examined. Sixty-four per cent of the sample were from NSW, roughly in proportion to the relative sizes of the two states. Because of the relative sizes of the two state capitals, the sample was dominated by Sydney and Brisbane respondents. Every second post-code was sampled. The survey was undertaken between October and December of 2001, which you may recall involved a Federal Election and campaign. Despite our best efforts the sample is a little under-representative of those who speak a language other than English (LOTE), over-represents women, and under-represents indigenous Australians (see Appendix 1 on sample comparison to census data from Mid-2001).

Indicators

Our survey questions were adapted from existing work in this field. This included attitudinal questions that gauge a respondents' tolerance (or discomfort) with specific (out) cultural groups, as well as their opinions on the desirability of cultural diversity. We also introduced new question formats to test support for the so-called 'old racisms': belief in racial separatism (differentiation) and racial hierarchy (inferiorisation), and belief in racial categories (racialisation). We also asked respondents to self-diagnose themselves as racist or not. New question formats were also introduced to operationalise issues arising within contemporary theories of racism. These included questions on perceptions of white (Anglo-Celtic) cultural privilege, and ideologies of nation. Finally, experiential questions (experience of racism) were also piloted. Respondents were asked to comment on how often, if ever, they had experienced racism within a limited range of activity spheres.

Racist attitudes in Australia

1. Out-groups

Contemporary racism in Australia, and intolerance of specific cultural groups, is likely linked to historic constructions of Australian national identity. Asian-Australians, Muslims, and Indigenous people have long been key Others to the Australian national imaginary (Hamilton, 1990; Rajkowski, 1987; Rizvi, 1996:176-7). Intolerance of these groups, as states in attitudinal surveys, has been detected in previous studies (see McAllister & Moore, 1989:6-9). We asked two sets of questions that delivered data on who might be the current out-groups of Australian society. Firstly, we asked respondents whether they believed that there were any cultural or ethnic groups that did not fit into Australian society? Respondents could then name three such groups if they liked. By far the most common groups mentioned were Muslims and people from the Middle East. At least 635 respondents said Muslims, and 641 said people from the Middle East. Quite a lot of cultures and groups from Asia were also mentioned by respondents (746 mentions in all). Fifty-eight people even said that Indigenous Australians did not fit into Australian society.

To measure the degree of intolerance of specific out-groups we asked respondents for the extent of their concern, or none, they would have if a close relative were to marry a member of specific groups. There was a lot of stated concern regarding Muslim Australians. Only 46.0 per cent replied they would not be concerned at all if a relative married a Muslim. Interestingly, while women were generally more relaxed about out-marriage to all groups, they were more concerned about out-marriage to a Muslim than were men. This suggests that Muslims suffer quite dramatically from the stereotypes of Islamic misogyny / sexism. Older people had greater intolerance by this measure, especially regarding Muslims, and also Indigenous Australians. Generally the results clearly indicate an expanding Islamophobia, no doubt linked to recent geopolitical events, media representations of Muslims, and an accumulating heritage of western antipathy to Islam. Aboriginal, Asian- and Jewish Australians remain as significant out-groups, if not to the extent of Muslims. Anti-Aboriginal and Anti-Jewish sentiments appear to have relentless longevities in Australia. Cross-tabulations and Chi square testing demonstrate a strong positive association between age and intolerance of Muslim Australians, Aboriginal-Australians, Asian-Australians and Jewish Australians. This is suggestive of the possibility of substantial generational change in regards to intolerance of specific cultural groups.

Table 1: Concern regarding out-marriage of a relative, to specific groups

Level of concern*	Muslim %	Aboriginal %	Asian %	Jewish %	Italian %	Christian %	British %
Not at all	46.0	70.5	71.8	74.9	87.3	90.7	91.8
Slightly	16.1	13.8	13.0	12.0	7.2	4.6	4.6
Somewhat	12.3	7.7	7.9	6.5	3.3	2.3	1.9
Very	9.7	3.5	3.3	3.0	0.9	0.8	0.7
Extremely	14.7	3.9	3.2	2.5	0.8	1.2	0.7
Don't know	1.2	0.7	0.8	1.0	0.5	0.4	0.4
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

*Question wording: In your opinion how concerned would you feel if one of your close relatives were to marry a person of ...

2. Tolerance of cultural diversity

We asked questions aimed at gauging support for cultural diversity, and also the respondents' own comfort with the experience of cultural difference. The results indicate that very few people are anti-cultural diversity (only about seven per cent), and just over one-in-ten feel insecure when in the company of people of a different ethnicity than their own.

Table 2: Support for diversity, and concern with difference

	Cultural diversity is good* %	Feel secure with ethnic difference** %
Strongly disagree	1.9	2.3
Disagree	5.4	8.4
Neither disagree / agree	7.7	13.6
Agree	51.0	49.8
Strongly agree	33.5	24.7
Don't know / Not sure	0.4	1.2
Total	100.0	100.0

*Question wording: It is a good thing for a society to be made up of people from different cultures?

**Question wording: You feel secure when you are with people of different ethnic backgrounds?

3. Ideology of nation: Australian-ness and racism

A number of researchers of racism have pointed to the ideology of nationhood as important to understanding racism (Hage 1998:27-55; Goodall et al. 1994:16,188). Racism is likely to be linked to dominant ideas about what the nation is, where it is, and who is popularly considered to be a citizen (what is an Australian?) (Rizvi, 1996:174). We tested links between racism and ideologies of nation. There was quite strong support in Sydney for the proposition that cultural diversity weakens nationhood in Australia. Forty-five per cent of Sydney respondents agreed that Australia was weakened by people of different ethnic origins 'sticking to their old ways'. This contradicts the pro-diversity responses just outlined, but it also indicates the widespread belief that strong societies and communities can only be constructed in circumstances of cultural sameness.

Ghassan Hage (1998) has persuasively suggested the utility of the binary concepts of spatial managers and the spatially managed. The spatial managers are those who feel empowered to express an opinion about the country, and about who belongs, and who should be allowed into the national space. The spatially managed are those who have opinions expressed about them, where they should be put, what they're doing, where they should be sent back to, etc. Just under half of the respondents (44.9%) felt able to say that some cultural groups did not belong in Australia. The percentages for indigenous people (35.7%) and those who speak a language other than English at home (37.2%) were much lower. In other words, almost half of the respondents, and Anglo-Australians more so than others, felt able to make judgements about who does fit, and who does not, in Australia. Age was strongly and positively correlated with the ability to make such a judgement (Chi square: 335:573; p:.000), as was non-tertiary education (Chi square: 114.762; p:.000).

4. Normalcy and privilege

Researchers have commented on what they have called the normalcy of racism (Kobayashi and Peake, 2000, pp. 394-6). It has been argued there is a privilege of Whiteness, and that it is associated with a way of life and perspective from which racism is unseen or is considered an exceptional aberration (Kobayashi & Peake 2000, pp. 393-7). We decided to examine the extent to which respondents recognised there to be a problem of racism, and the extent to which they recognised that there was a White (Anglo-Celtic) cultural privilege in Australia.

Table 3: Recognition of racial prejudice and Anglo-Celtic privilege in Australia

	There is racial prejudice in Australia?* %	British Australians enjoy a privileged position?*** %
Strongly disagree	1.6	9.8
Disagree	6.9	32.8
Neither disagree or agree	7.7	16.0
Agree	52.9	31.2
Strongly agree	30.2	7.7
Don't know / Not sure	0.6	2.5
Total	100.0	100.0

*Question wording: There is racial prejudice in Australia?

**Question wording: Australians from a British background enjoy a privileged position in our society?

Four-fifths of respondents (83.1%) recognised that there was a problem with racism in Australia, leaving about 8.5 per cent in denial of racism. However, the denial of Anglo-Celtic privilege was much higher at 42.6 per cent. Older people and men were more likely than younger respondents and women, to deny racism and privilege. Only 4.8% of indigenous respondents denied there was racism, and a third denied there was Anglo privilege. And only 35.7% of respondents who could speak a Language Other than English denied there was privilege. So, while there is a healthy recognition of racism, the recognition of 'winners' is much lesser. And while that recognition is stronger among indigenous Australians and those of a non-Anglo-Celtic background, the extent of variation is not as marked as one would have imagined.

5. Belief in 'race', racial hierarchy, and racial separatism

It has been argued that belief in natural categories of humankind called 'races', is a core ideology on which racism draws (Anderson 1998, pp. 125-7; Bonnett 1996; Kobayashi & Peake 2000, p. 393; Miles 1989). Without the notion of separate and distinct 'races', racial discrimination would have little force. Following this theoretical advice we made racialism a core component of our racism survey. About 78 per cent of respondents believed that human kind could be sorted by natural categories called 'races'. Clearly, the belief in natural categories is quite prevalent. Just over 13 per cent of respondents are racial separatists, specifically in the sphere of marriage. And 11.7 per cent felt that there was a racial hierarchy of some form.

Table 4: Racialism, racial separatism, and racial hierarchy

	Belief in 'races'*	Sexual separation**	Racial equality***
	%	%	%
Strongly disagree	5.6	31.4	3.1
Disagree	9.5	44.1	8.6
Neither disagree / agree	6.2	10.6	4.8
Agree	48.8	10.5	44.6
Strongly agree	28.8	2.8	38.5
Don't know / Not sure	1.1	0.7	0.4
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0

*Question wording: Humankind is made up of separate races?

**Question wording: It is NOT a good idea for people of different races to marry one another?

***Question wording: All races of people ARE equal?

6. *Self-identification as racist*

Respondents were asked if they themselves were prejudiced against other cultures. This was an indicator of the respondents' preparedness to self-identify as racist. About 12 per cent of respondents self diagnosed their own racism. This is a hard-core body of racists, they are also those most likely to believe in racial hierarchy (Chi-square = 190.353; $p = 0.000$) and racial separatism (Chi-square = 128.826; $p = 0.000$). There is a hard core of Australian racists, extrapolating from our results, we are talking about just over one-in-ten Australians who are racist by even the narrowest of definitions. This suggests dramatic scope for inter-communal relations tensions in Australian society.

Table 5: Self-identification as a racist

	I am prejudiced*
	%
Strongly disagree	39.3
Disagree	40.9
Neither disagree / agree	7.5
Agree	9.4
Strongly agree	2.6
Don't know / Not sure	0.3
Total	100.0

*Question wording: You are prejudiced against other cultures?

The experience of racism in Australia

Collection of data on the experience of discrimination is the most innovative approach to developing indicators on the extent of racism. This approach has been developed and applied by a research team based at the University of Michigan, USA (The University of Michigan, Institute for Social Research, 2001 and in the Eurobarometer). This form of indicator on the extent of racism has not yet been systematically applied in the Australian circumstance. We tested a handful of such questions in institutional circumstances (workplace, education, housing and policing), and in everyday settings (shops, restaurants, sport, etc).

The experience of racism in institutional settings

Sixteen per cent of respondents reported having experienced racism within their workplace, and the reports for other institutional spheres were lesser. This indicates that the experience of racism impacts upon almost one-in-five Australians. The rates of racism experienced by Indigenous Australians were much higher (Workplace 29%; Education 36%; Housing 21%; Policing 23%), and also for those respondents who speak a language other than English (Workplace 36%; Education 30%; Housing 16%; Policing 16%). Those born overseas (excluding UK and NZ) and those who speak a LOTE at home reported the highest rates of workplace racism, whereas Indigenous Australians reported the highest rates of in the other institutional spheres. Men consistently reported higher rates of racism.

Table 6: Experience of racism in institutional settings (work, education, housing & policing), by ethnicity & gender

Experience of racism*		In the workplace	In education	In housing	In policing
LOTE	Yes	35.6	29.9	16.3	15.8
	No	13.0	12.4	4.9	4.9
Born	Overseas	35.2	24.5	15.9	15.0
	UK/NZ	21.7	10.8	6.3	5.6
	Australia	11.9	13.6	4.6	5.0
ATSI	Yes	28.7	36.2	21.3	23.4
	No	15.9	14.5	6.1	6.0
Gender	Male	20.8	17.1	7.4	8.7
	Female	12.8	13.5	5.8	4.8
All (n: 5056)		16.1	14.9	6.5	6.4

*Question wording: How often have YOU experienced discrimination because of your OWN ETHNIC ORIGIN in the following situations? LOTE (Language Other Than English) ATSI (Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander)

We also asked respondents to tell us about everyday forms of racism, suffered in restaurants at sport, in the streets and in other everyday transactions and activities. The frequencies of these racisms were higher than for the institutional forms. The experience of racism at shops and sporting events is higher than for the institutional contexts. But most noteworthy are the generally higher levels of racism experienced in the form of dis-respectful treatment, lack of trust and name-calling. Extrapolating from these results almost a quarter of Australians experience everyday racisms.

The reported rates of these racisms experienced by Indigenous Australians, those born overseas, and those who speak a LOTE are often double the non-indigenous, Australia-born and non-LOTE respondents. Generally, those who spoke a Language Other than English at home, and Indigenous Australians, experienced much higher rates of all types of racism. Those findings support the anecdotal evidence collected by the HREOC's 'Consultations with Civil Society' (2001:16-8). These findings have demonstrated the fecundity of research on the experience of racism, and our intention in the next three years is to undertake a national, comprehensive and subtle analysis of the experience of racism across Australia.

Table 7: Experience of everyday racisms, by ethnicity & gender

Experience of racism*		In Shop or restaurant	At Sport or public event	By way of Disrespect	By way of Mistrust	By Insults & name calling
LOTE	Yes	30.9	27.7	42.5	33.0	44.3
	No	14.1	12.7	18.8	10.9	21.4
Born	Overseas	29.5	26.1	39.1	29.1	41.4
	UK/NZ	11.4	15.6	20.5	9.3	30.4
	Australia	14.8	12.6	19.2	11.8	20.9
ATSI	Yes	33.0	29.8	42.5	30.9	37.2
	No	16.2	14.4	21.6	13.7	24.4
Gender	Male	19.0	20.2	26.1	17.9	29.2
	Female	14.7	10.9	19.3	11.3	21.4
All (n: 5056)		16.5	14.9	22.0	14.0	24.7

*Question wording: How often have YOU experienced discrimination because of your OWN ETHNIC ORIGIN in the following situations?

Further work and other analyses

While racism is everywhere, it is also likely that it is 'everywhere different' (Kobayashi & Peake, 2000; Vasta & Castles, 1996:14). This variation is likely to be related to the different cultural make-up of each and every region of Australia, to the different needs and resources of the cultural groups in each place, and to the different problems and tensions in each locality (Dunn & McDonald, 2001). There is little substantive evidence of a straightforward urban/rural differentiation of racist attitudes. This finding corresponds with the conclusions of recent geographical research in Australia that has questioned the simplistic notion of a 'city – bush dichotomy' which is often prevalent in media and political discussions (Davis and Stimson, 1998; Dunn and McDonald, 2001; McManus and Pritchard, 2000). Many rural areas are less racist than parts of the metropolitan centers. Some of the most 'racist regions' are located within Sydney and Brisbane, especially in more working class districts. Finally, there is considerable variation among rural regions, as well as across the major cities.

International research has indicated the importance of locally developed and locally owned anti-racism initiatives (Pedersen et al., 2000:116; Vasta & Castles 1996: 15-6). Kobayashi (1994:78) advocated the need to confront the discourses of racism "on the very sites where they are produced and nourished". These variations have been largely ignored by the 'anti-racism project' in Australia. Our research interest is premised, therefore, on the conviction that locally sensitive anti-racism initiatives are required to engage everyday racisms within Australian society. Local organisations that develop anti-racism initiatives (such as local government, lands councils, and grass roots organisations) depend largely upon anecdotal evidence on the nature and extent of local racisms. Our current project is overtly

aimed at generating decision making support tools for central and local government agencies, as well as community groups, to aid their development of anti-racism strategies.

Finally, in two neophyte research projects (experience of racism, transnationalism among migrants) it is my intention to investigate the asserted links between belonging (to the nation, or to the locality) and the experience of racism. This forms part of my on-going interest in the culturally and spatially uneven nature of citizenship in Australia. Citizenship is socially constructed. Like culture, citizenship is not naturally accorded to all, and neither is it evenly distributed. The possession and deployment of citizenship rights and duties are uneven. Belonging is a core component of citizenship. An emergent key concept of the social sciences in the 1990s was that of "belonging". In Australia, theorists like Ghassan Hage (1998) have explained the cultural unevenness of belonging (see also Butcher and Thomas, 2001). A recent survey of 3501 Australians (of which more than half were Australians of a non-English speaking background) found that only 60 per cent of respondents identified themselves as "Australians". For long-present Australians (principally Anglo and Indigenous Australians) the proportion was 74 per cent, while for those of a non-English speaking background the proportion was only 10 per cent. Of the 400 Vietnamese-Australians surveyed only 3 per cent felt prepared to identify as 'Australian' (Ang, et al., 2002:40). In geographical terms, this proscribes a sense of place. The research question to empirically test, is whether and how the experience of racism (in its multiple and dynamic forms) corrupts belonging and ultimately citizenship.

References

- Anderson, K. (1998) 'Science and the savage: the Linnean Society of New South Wales, 1874-1900', *Ecumene* 5(2), pp. 125-143.
- Ang, I., Brand, J.E., Noble, G., & Wilding, D. (2002) *Living Diversity: Australia's Multicultural Future*, Special Broadcasting Services Corporation, Artarmon.
- Bonnett, A. (1996) "Constructions of 'race', place and discipline: geographies of 'racial' identity and racism", *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 19(4), pp. 864-883.
- Butcher, M. & Thomas, M. (2001) *Generate: Youth Culture and Migration Heritage in Western Sydney*, Centre for Cultural Research UWS and the Migration Heritage Centre NSW, Sydney.
- Davis, R. & Stimson, R. (1998) "Disillusionment and disenchantment at the fringe: explaining the geography of the One Nation Party vote at the Queensland Election", *People and Place* 6(3), 69-82.
- Dunn, K.M. & McDonald, A. (2001) "The geography of racisms in NSW: A theoretical exploration and some preliminary findings", *Australian Geographer*, 32(1), 29-44.
- Eurobarometer (1997) *Racism and Xenophobia in Europe*.
- Goodall, H., Jakubowicz, A., Martin, J., Mitchell, T., Randall, L. & Seneviratne, K. (1994) *Racism, Ethnicity and the Media*, Allen & Unwin, St Leonards.
- Hage, G., (1998) *White Nation: Fantasies of White Supremacy in a Multicultural Society*, Pluto Press, Annandale.

- Hamilton, A. (1990) 'Fear and desire: Aborigines, Asians and the national imaginary', *Australian Cultural History* 9, pp.14-35.
- Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission (2001) *I Want Respect and Equality: A Summary of Consultations with Civil Society on Racism in Australia*, HREOC, Canberra.
- Kobayashi, A. & Peake, L. (2000) "Racism out of place: thoughts on Whiteness and an antiracist geography in the new millennium", *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 90(2), 392-403.
- McAllister, I. & Moore, R. (1989) *Ethnic Prejudice in Australian Society: Patterns, Intensity and Explanations*, Office of Multicultural Affairs, Canberra.
- Miles, R. (1989) *Racism*, Routledge, London.
- Pedersen, A., Griffiths, B., Contos, N., Bishop, B. & Walker, I. (2000) "Attitudes toward Aboriginal Australians in city and country settings", *Australian Psychologist* 35(2), 109-17.
- Rajkowski, P. (1987) *In the Tracks of the Camelmen*, North Ryde: Angus & Robertson.
- Rizvi, F. (1996) "Racism, reorientation and the cultural politics of Asia-Australia relations", in Vasta E. & Castles, S. (eds) *The Teeth are Smiling: The Persistence of Racism in Multicultural Australia*, Allen & Unwin, Sydney, 173-88.
- The University of Michigan, Institute for Social Research (2001) *The National Survey of American Life: Coping with Stress in the 21st Century*, The University of Michigan.
- Vasta E. & Castles, S. (eds) (1996) *The Teeth are Smiling: The Persistence of Racism in Multicultural Australia*, Allen & Unwin, Sydney.