

Race Reporting Handbook

Summary Guide

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This summary guide was created to complement the Race Reporting Handbook - An In depth report by Media Diversity Australia



Australian Human
Rights Commission



THE WHY

Every decision the media makes about which voices, images and words to include OR exclude impacts how the public and policy makers perceive and act when it comes to negatively racialised groups.

Many who are tasked with the job of writing on issues surrounding race, do not necessarily have lived experience of racism and marginalisation and those who do, face a cultural burden of becoming the go-to person. Enhancing the racial literacy of a sector that informs and shapes the health of our democracy can result in more nuanced and inclusive reporting, wider audience reach, and a more cohesive society.



What does the research tell us?

All Together Now's Media monitoring research conducted in partnership with UTS has been assessing race-related media coverage since 2017.

- They classify negative coverage on issues related to race to include things like negative stereotyping, othering through the use of 'us versus them' framing, unnecessary racial descriptors, generalising a negative trait of a group based on isolated incidents and personal attacks based on race.
- They concluded that the racialised identities most often discussed negatively in the media included Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islanders, Muslim Australians and African Australians.
- Of the 281 race-related pieces that were analysed, 57% discussed racialised individuals or groups negatively and 70% of those media pieces used covert forms of racism.
- MDA's flagship research highlights that a significant percentage of journalists in Australia do not come from First Nations or Non-European backgrounds meaning that the lived experience and potential racial literacy isn't always present in Australian newsrooms.



THE HOW



When is race still relevant?

Ask yourself, if the person or groups were of a dominant racial group and not of a minority and negatively racialised group, would you reference their race in the coverage? And if not, why not? Avoid mentioning a person's race or ethnicity unless it is directly relevant to the story.



What kind of reporting can be problematic?

"African Gangs" narrative: In 2018, the Australian Press Council found that several media outlets published headlines and articles that were misleading and inflammatory in their coverage of crimes involving individuals of African descent. These articles often exaggerated the involvement of the African community in criminal activities, leading to unwarranted fear and prejudice.

For example, one headline "African gang violence," was found to perpetuate harmful stereotypes and racial bias without sufficient evidence to support the claim that these crimes were predominantly committed by African Australians.

First Nations narrative: In 2021, The Australian Press Council found that there were a number of articles published that were factually inaccurate and perpetuated negative stereotypes about First Nations people.

For example, one article titled "Aboriginal kids kept from school for fear of being taken away" was found to be misleading and failed to provide a balanced view, contributing to a negative portrayal of First Nations communities.

"Lebanese Gangs" narrative: The media portrayal of "Lebanese gangs" in Sydney has often been criticised for focusing on ethnicity rather than the broader issue of gang activity. The Australian Press Council's findings in these cases emphasise the importance of responsible journalism that avoids racial stereotyping and inflammatory language.

By comparison, the media's coverage of the "Bra Boys," a gang from Maroubra, was significantly less ethnically charged despite their involvement in serious crimes. The Bra Boys were often depicted as a group of "board riders with a hooligan element," downplaying the severity of their actions compared to the narrative around Lebanese gangs.



● Check Your Bias

- Unconscious attitudes can significantly influence media decision-making processes.
- Be mindful of your own implicit biases and their influence on reporting, especially on race-related issues.
- Recognise these biases to make conscious language choices that avoid perpetuating stereotypes and instead promote an authentic portrayal of multicultural and Indigenous communities.

● Acknowledge Racism

Approach discussions on race with an understanding that racism is not a debate but an evidence based reality affecting many Australians. Educate yourself and your team on its origins and impacts and engage in inclusive reporting on race related issues.



Tips for making headlines more inclusive

HEADLINE TIPS	COMPARE THE PAIR		EXPLANATION
	NEGATIVE	INCLUSIVE	
Avoid Generalisations	<i>"African Gangs Terrorise Melbourne"</i>	<i>"Community Concerns Rise Over Youth Crime in Melbourne"</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focus on the issue without attributing it to a racial group. • This prevents stigmatisation and fosters a more balanced narrative.
Use Neutral Language	<i>"Aboriginal People Struggle with Alcoholism"</i>	<i>"Community Initiatives Aim to Combat Alcoholism in Regional Areas"</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Frame the issue in terms of community efforts rather than attributing it to a specific group.
Focus on Issues & Actions, Not Identities	<i>"Lebanese Gangs Control Sydney's Streets"</i>	<i>"Authorities Address Rising Gang Activity in Sydney"</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shift the focus from ethnicity to the broader issue of gang activity. • Provide a broader context for criminal activity, showing it as part of a wider societal issue rather than an ethnic trait.

DO'S AND DON'T'S OF REPORTING

Context

DO

DO contextualise stories within a broader societal framework rather than isolating incidents. Explain the historical and socio-economic background that might influence the events being reported. If it relates to criminal activity, contextualise it as part of a wider societal issue rather than an ethnic trait.

DO

DO balance coverage by highlighting positive contributions of negatively racialised communities alongside reporting on challenges. Move beyond one-dimensional portrayals to reveal the layered realities of identity.

DON'T

DON'T make sweeping generalisations about any racial or ethnic group. Instead, focus on individual actions without implying that these actions are representative of an entire community.

DO

DO recognise that intersectionality requires us to look and report beyond single aspects of one's identity as people have multiple identities such as race, gender, identity, religion, age, sexuality, disability, class, which all intersect and influence lives.

DO'S AND DONT'S OF REPORTING

Language

DON'T

DON'T use pejorative or derogatory terms when describing individuals or groups. Avoid any slang or terms that have historically been used to demean certain groups.

DON'T

DON'T write headlines that try to sensationalise or distort facts when it comes to race. Headlines should reflect the content of the article without being misleading or perpetuating harmful stereotypes and misinformation.

DON'T

DON'T use terms like "invasion" or "flood" when describing immigration. Avoid using sensationalist language that can incite fear or prejudice. Focus on reporting the facts.



DO'S AND DONT'S OF REPORTING

Visuals

DO

DO use images and captions responsibly, ensuring that they are respectful and accurately represent the subject matter. Use images that reflect the diversity and dignity of communities rather than reinforcing stereotypes.

DON'T

DON'T use stock images of violence or poverty when reporting on racial communities as they can perpetuate stereotypes.

Perspectives

DO

DO try and source perspectives that challenge entrenched stereotypes and interrogate power structures when reporting on negatively racialised communities.

DO

DO educate yourself on the diversity within communities and ensure that no single narrative is positioned as representing a whole group or community as it can cause harm within those communities.

DO'S AND DONT'S OF REPORTING

Fact-Checking

DO

DO ensure that all facts are thoroughly verified and sourced from credible entities. Misreporting can have severe repercussions on marginalised communities.

DO

DO recognise that unconscious bias can influence how information is gathered, interpreted, and presented. Attend training that helps you recognise and address these potential biases.

DO

DO ensure consistent reporting on race related matters to ensure that similar crimes are reported in a consistent manner, regardless of the racial background of those involved.



DO'S AND DON'T'S OF REPORTING

Power Imbalance

DO

DO recognise that by engaging in and advocating for inclusive reporting on issues related to race, you're not privileging one community over another, but rather acknowledging and seeking to level the playing field when it comes to historical and systemic power imbalances which have resulted in some communities becoming negatively racialised.

DON'T

DON'T assume that no complaints means no issues. It is crucial to understand that negatively racialised communities might not always report about offensive reporting or engagements. Be mindful of the harm caused by inflammatory portrayals, as these communities may lack the political power or lobbying ability to challenge the media effectively.

Engagement

DO

DO consider implementing a Talent Care Plan which creates a robust support system for talent who have lived experiences of discrimination. This might include providing access to mental health resources, peer support groups, and debriefing sessions.

DO

DO build connections not only in times of crisis but as an ongoing relationship.




TIPS FOR LEADERS

Acknowledge your privilege: If you don't have lived experience yourself and are not from a First Nations or negatively racialised community, consider your own potential biases to uncover areas of unfamiliarity and take the initiative to self-educate.

Incorporate Lived Experiences in Newsrooms: Consider the importance of lived experience in newsroom voices, content, and leadership at all levels, not just as tokenistic inclusion but as an integral part of all narrative constructions. A plurality of backgrounds and experiences is crucial in identifying and confronting inherent biases, enhancing objectivity, and enriching journalism's quality and depth.

Appoint Cultural Liaison Team: Leaders can enhance inclusivity by inviting current and former journalists and content creators to serve as cultural liaisons, offering confidential channels to address content-related issues and industry concerns. These roles could foster remunerated cultural support, provide valuable insights to management, and help bridge gaps between staff and community.

Embed Cultural and Psychological Safety: Encourage an open-door policy where First Nation and negatively racialised staff feel safe to voice concerns or report incidents without fear of retaliation.



Seek professional development: Recognise that unconscious bias can influence how information is gathered, interpreted, and presented. Anti-racism training and initiatives are essential for an editorial process that aspires to fairness and objectivity.

Allocate resources to building relationships: Fund opportunities for journalists to build relationships and engage with various communities well before a deadline or the need for specific talent arises.

Advocate for Industry Change: The media doesn't do a great job of holding up a mirror to itself so support organisations like Media Diversity Australia who do help provide necessary industry wide solutions. Use the collective voice to push for systemic changes within the media industry that support diversity and equitable representation.

INCLUSIVE REPORTING CHECKLIST

Does the report provide sufficient background information for readers to understand the issue fully?

Is race mentioned only when relevant?

Have the pronunciation and/or spelling of names been checked?

Is the language used neutral and respectful and reflect ethical journalism standards?

Have the potential impacts on marginalised or vulnerable groups been considered?



Are staff trained to recognise and address unconscious biases?

Are editorial teams culturally diverse, and afforded cultural safety to ensure they are providing a range of perspectives on content?

Are the editorial and production teams reflective of the diversity they aim to report? If not, what steps are taken to minimise the potential risk this can pose to the final outcome?

Are the potential consequences of the language considered?

Are diverse viewpoints from the community included? Are the subjects of the story able to express their own perspectives?

Has the writer portrayed the individuals and issues with complexity and depth, avoiding oversimplification?

Do the stories provide the necessary context around potential systemic and individual nuances of power and privilege?

Is the coverage of negatively racialised communities done with respect, depth & frequency?

This resource has been put together in collaboration with Media Diversity Australia as part of community consultations and submissions in the scoping work of the National Anti-Racism Framework. The Framework identifies the need for more cultural safety, regulation and representation in Australia's media landscape and launches in 2024.

For more information visit www.humanrights.gov.au



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