

Central Material Extract

Title: Racism and Representation through the Pigeonhole: An investigation into the ways in which the misrepresentation of Indigenous Australians within film media perpetuates misinformed cultural stereotypes throughout society

The extract below is taken from Chapter 2: Analyse current stereotypical perceptions of Indigenous Australians in film and explore probable future directions for the social issue.

The ramifications of the continuing barrage of ignorance surrounding Indigenous culture has created a difficult dynamic in which authentically altering these negative perceptions has become almost impossible (36). Non-Indigenous male director Steve Jodrell, in his production of the film *Tudawali* (1988) stated "It is extremely difficult for commercially distributed films to break out of the framed stereotypes and to resist the simple reproduction of stereotyped characters..." (37).

Following this, interviewee Jeff McMullen voiced that "conformity and racial stereotypes are simply a construct of ignorance toward seeing the complexity of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander lifestyle." (38) This allows us to suggest that on the macro level, many non-Indigenous filmmakers are culturally unaware, at times abusing their power to perpetuate stereotypes that have become a conformist set of ideas in contemporary society. When compared, the two forms of research demonstrate the new understanding that the relentless barrage of negativity may not only stagnate Indigenous efforts toward achieving equality through the power of film, but also encourage non-Indigenous directors and producers to continue unethical filmic practices that reinforce cultural stereotypes. In addition Jeff McMullen maintains that "both film and mass media, in a daily sense, convey so much negativity that it shapes the policy making itself" (39). This reinforces the understanding of why negativity in the media has contributed to the lack of change towards stereotyping and appropriation. Aspects of the Bandura social learning theory are clearly illustrated in both research methodologies as society is subconsciously exposed to the consistent misrepresentation of Indigenous Australians in film media. Over time these stereotypes have aided in forging inaccurate perceptions within popular culture and influenced personal and social identity of individuals. With negative values widely persistent in popular culture, individuals have been socialised with these attitudes leading to the continuation of cultural stereotyping and discrimination (40). With this in mind, the assumption is made that the values and attitudes associated with discriminatory stereotypes within an environment will subconsciously be adopted by younger individuals. This, in turn, lends itself to the development of negative values toward Indigenous Australians and the continuation of racial discrimination.

Many social researchers argue that today's younger generations have been socialised by the values and attitudes shared by parents (41). This leads us to assume that they have, in turn, adopted similar negative perceptions on Indigenous Australians abiding by alike stereotypes. An idea as to why this racial prejudice may continue to exist in the future is provided by Margaret Hagerman who believes that younger generations are the leading hope we have in terminating racism all together, yet acknowledges concerns that society may already be too late (42).

Essentially, the research suggests that younger Australian generations may already be corrupted by the derogatory stereotypes implemented in modern film and media. My questionnaire posed toward Generation Z displays that on average, more than 85% of young adults and teenagers, who possess the potential to terminate racism in the future, already possess negative perceptions of Indigenous Australians as 'primitive beings' that are uncivilised (43). Another aspect of this concept is evident through the ideas of Jeff McMullen including: "The younger generations may have the ability to look past appropriation and inturn understand the Indigenous cultures struggle, but only if they have not yet been influenced by the traditional stereotypes set by the past." (44) This confirms the initial idea that without change, upcoming generations will continue the racist values and discrimination against Indigenous Australians. Unfortunately, during my research I consistently found that slow rates of change in both public policy and film may indicate negative representations of Indigenous communities in Australian film in the future. It is arguable that if the continuation of cultural appropriation and stereotyping does not terminate, the continued exclusion of Indigneous Australians as a social group will become an inevitable Outcome (45). Until socially normalised stereotypes are overcome, the overwhelming negativity towards Indigenous Australians will continue, no matter how often society's contextual terrain Shifts (46). If these social values and attitudes are not challenged with the power younger generations possess, the film industry will show a continuum in creating inaccurate representations of Indigenous people in popular culture. In turn, this will create an infinite cycle of racial discrimination on both meso and macro levels until accurate perceptions are voiced within films to change the social values they divulge. If society is to find a way of reconstructing the representation of the Aboriginality in film, it will be through supporting Indigenous storytelling and utilising the power of younger generations to influence social change.

36 Primary Research - Interview with Jeff McMullen, Australian filmmaker and Indigneous advocate on the topic of the stereotyping of Indigenous Australians in the film Industry [conducted on the 26th april 2020]

37 Korff, J., 2018. *Tudawali* (Film). [online] *Creative Spirits*. [Accessed 7 June 2020].

- 38 Primary Research - Interview with Jeff McMullen, Australian filmmaker and Indigenous advocate [conducted on the 26th April 2020]
- 39 Primary Research - Interview with Jeff McMullen, Australian filmmaker and Indigenous advocate [conducted on the 26th April 2020]
- 40 DeBusk-Lane, M., 2016. *Prejudice And Discrimination Is Learned*, Applied Social Psychology (ASP). [online] Sites.psu.edu. [Accessed 7 June 2020].
- 41 Ross, N., 2017. *The Effects Of Family Culture On Family Foundations*. [online] Council on Foundations. [Accessed 19 July 2020].
- 42 Hagerman, M., 2018. *Are Today's White Kids Less Racist Than Their Grandparents?* [online] The Conversation. [Accessed 8 June 2020].
- 43 Primary Research - questionnaire targeted at Generation Z to identify the acceptance of stereotypes by societies younger generation and assess the values and attitudes held Indigenous Australian [conducted on 10th May 2020]
- 44 Primary Research - Interview with Jeff McMullen, Australian filmmaker and Indigenous advocate [conducted on the 26th April 2020]
- 45 Dick, D., 2017. *Social Determinants And The Health Of Indigenous Peoples In Australia*. [online] Humanrights.gov.au. [Accessed 9 June 2020].
- 46 Turner, G., 2020. *Breaking The Frame: The Representation Of Aborigines In Australian Film*. [online] Ro.uow.edu.au. [Accessed 1 June 2020].