



TASA The Australian
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TITLE: Neoliberal discourses and young people's attitudes towards addressing disadvantage

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This paper explores young people's attitudes toward higher education equity schemes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander (ATSI) Australians and illustrates how their opinions are influenced by neoliberal discourses.

Drawing on interviews with 38 Year 9 students from four schools in Melbourne, I argue that young people use discourses of merit, ability and individualism to justify their beliefs that equity schemes are unfair because everyone should be treated equally.

Claiming that individuals must be judged on merit rather than their membership of any particular race, evokes both neoliberal and colourblind discourses. By ignoring race, however, young people also adopt stances which further entrench structural racism and cement existing privilege (Goldberg 2009).

This research derives from a larger qualitative longitudinal study utilising an intersectional approach to examine how individuals' biographies and school contexts influence their take up of neoliberal discourses.

Most Australian universities have admissions schemes for ATSI Australians allowing entry into courses with a slightly lower Australian Tertiary Admissions Rank (ATAR). This research sheds light on how young people perceive such schemes and the disadvantage they seek to redress, and also how equity schemes can be interpreted as either unnecessary or even discriminatory when viewed through a neoliberal lens.