

Exploring the career experiences of South Asian men in Aotearoa, New Zealand

Rory Chacko

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Abstract

This study explores the career experiences of South Asian men in Aotearoa, New Zealand. It does so by viewing their experiences within a broader historical context and using qualitative critical inquiry to situate those experiences. Broadly informed by social constructionism, this thesis uses the theoretical lenses of othering, hegemonic whiteness, racial neoliberalism, and model minority theory to construct a narrative that helps explain some of the barriers South Asian men experience in the employment market. The social construction of hegemonic whiteness is key to explaining the portrayal of South Asian men and how that is weaponised against other racialised peoples as well as other members of the South Asian group.

This study interviewed ten South Asian migrant men with tertiary qualifications and various career experiences. It uses a semi-structured question format, and analysis of participant narratives follows Braun and Clarke (2022) reflexive thematic analysis. The findings suggest that barriers to employment faced by South Asian men in Aotearoa, and the strategies employed by participants to overcome them, are intersectional and situated within a wide range of factors.

Keywords: colonialism, hegemonic whiteness, neoliberalism, social construction, reflexive thematic analysis

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I would like to take the opportunity to thank everyone who got me to this point; this has been a transformational experience, and possibly the hardest thing I have ever done. My partner, kids, friends, supervisors, and participants contributed to making this a roller coaster ride that hopefully adds some knowledge to the world. The project has irrevocably changed how I see myself, and for that opportunity, I am grateful to everyone who has supported me on this journey. Whilst I have no idea how this thesis will be received, it is my sincerest hope that participants were able to take something from the experience, and that my learning journey helps me become a better person.

Many times, during the journey, I felt I was not good enough to complete it. In those dark periods when self-doubt crept in, there was a song that helped: Black Tie by Grace Petrie reminds me that we can push back against social constructions that try to put us into little boxes, and in doing so, we help those who do not have the power to push back.

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Attestation of Authorship

I hereby declare that this submission is my own work and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, it contains no material previously published or written by another person (except where explicitly defined in the acknowledgements), nor used artificial intelligence tools or generative artificial intelligence tools (unless it is clearly stated, and referenced, along with the purpose of use), nor material which to a substantial extent has been submitted for the award of any other degree or diploma of a university or other institution of higher learning.

Chapter 1: Introduction and Theoretical Approaches

Introduction

At first glance, exploring the career experiences of South Asian men in Aotearoa would seem to be a straightforward affair. I held a naïve assumption that there were only two important stereotypes to consider: those that revolved around the overqualified Uber driver and those that centred on the small business owner, typically a dairy. However, as will become evident, the experiences and identities of the men I interviewed in this project are produced within various sociocultural resources, intersections and realities. Their accounts are produced within a set of resources that include these stereotypes and are answerable to them, as much as they also drew on ideas that provided them with a much wider range of possibilities.

Already, I have betrayed my biases; I am guilty of applying the stereotype of South Asian men and treating them as a homogenous group when, in fact, their reality is a contested space of which the stereotype is just one aspect and is influenced by time, space and circumstance. In Chapter Two, I will explore the concept of othering and the formation of the South Asian stereotype. Broadly, othering is the construction of the self, or in-group, as opposed to the other or out-group, where the other has undesirable characteristics or is suitably different from the 'in-group' (Brons, 2015). Othering can be a multifaceted phenomenon, where both groups often see non-members as other, but group membership is not always straightforward. Consider neighbours supporting different sports teams, or people of different races and classes united by support for a common political party. In these cases, othering can be relatively benign; however, othering can also create poor outcomes for any group that is in a less powerful social position. The construction of the South Asian stereotype in Aotearoa is an example of this.

South Asian men in Aotearoa (or anywhere, for that matter), despite what contemporary media and discourses suggest, are not a homogeneous group. There are no typical South Asians. Nor do all South Asian men face the same challenges in Aotearoa. Through various forms of social construction, contemporary stereotypes of the South Asian man have widened to include both

positive and negative representations. Whilst none of the following can be used to sum up an individual they do include common media representations which influence how society in different circumstances reacts to South Asian men, it is not uncommon for them to be portrayed as either the bumbling dairy owner, the turbaned taxi driver, the South Asian doctor, or the shadowy terrorist. Media coverage plays an important part in influencing public opinion in matters a person may not have personal experience (Kearns et al., 2019). As an example, Indra (1979) carried out a historical analysis of Canadian newspaper articles referencing South Asians, often portraying them poorly, creating a socially acceptable narrative of South Asians being 'dirty' or as 'sexual predators' in comparison to the British majority. This thesis explores some stereotypes in detail and helps identify how they have become prevalent.

Stereotypes are a specific type of social construction explored in this thesis; I refer to Gergen (1985) and his discussion of how we understand the world through social artefacts, historically situated through interchanges between people. Or in the context of socially constructed realities created through the products of power relations (Giacomini, 2010). The factors in its creation and ongoing maintenance are complex and difficult to pin down. To do so, I will explore some of the antecedents of these dominant ideas by reviewing the effect of European colonialism on South Asians, discussing a brief history of South Asian discrimination in Aotearoa, reviewing contemporary forms of discrimination, discussing South Asian proximity to whiteness, reviewing the concept of racial neoliberalism, and the model minority myth. These combine to affect participants in inconsistent ways.

Positionality, Reflexivity, and the Development of this Research Project

I consider myself a participant in this research journey. I share many demographics with the participants; however, I am aware of my position as an insider and outsider in the research process. Hayfield and Huxley (2015) discuss various aspects of insider/outsider research, recognising that the researcher's position to participants is complex and important because it impacts how the process is undergone and how the data is interpreted and reported. In my case, I visibly identify as an insider, but many of my experiences differ from those of the participants; my role as a researcher bound by the university's rules further complicates the relationship. This is

neatly expressed by Piedra (2023), stating, “Even researchers who share many of the demographics or life experiences with those observed or interviewed inhabit a different social space through research” (p. 612). Writing this thesis somehow strips away my old identity and has allowed me to re-envision who I am, or, as Braidotti (2002) suggests, becoming. This phenomenon applies to both the participants in this study and me, where the contemporary body is “a complex interplay of highly constructed social and symbolic forces” (Braidotti, 2002, p.21). I use this concept throughout the thesis to make sense of who I am in relation to the analysis and to situate participant stories. This has led to parts of this thesis appearing to be autobiographical in nature, which is indeed the intention. My career experiences mirror those of the participants; I am them, and in some ways, they are me.

The research journey has forced me to remove my rose-tinted glasses and see the world afresh. This thesis takes a broad-brush approach to describing the career experiences of South Asian men in Aotearoa. It takes complex intertwining factors and uses them to interpret participant experiences, exploring historical and culturally specific factors in interpreting participant dialogue (Gergen, 2009). Whilst the journey has irrevocably changed me and how I think of my place in the world, reflection has allowed me to examine aspects of my life and how it has been (and continues to be) influenced by social constructions of masculinity, race, ethnicity, and gender. Other factors include my expanded view of colonialism and how British imperialism's exploitation of the Indian subcontinent has helped construct contemporary perceptions of South Asian men. The dichotomy I live with starts with where I was born (United Kingdom) and raised (Aotearoa) and the privilege that goes with being an English-speaking brown male versus being brown in a land that privileges whiteness.

This dichotomy is reflected throughout the research. Often, it is in the contrast between the experiences of participants and my own, and sometimes between how we see ourselves as a society and the lived experience of participants. With my journey as a reference point, this thesis explores the career experiences of adult South Asian men who have come to Aotearoa. With a wealth of literature to draw upon, I explore the intersections of two theoretical lenses, social

constructionism and othering, and within them hegemonic whiteness, racial neoliberalism and model minority theory, in the context of Aotearoa.

Positionality can be described as “... a concept used to indicate the social location of the researcher – in terms of gender, race, ethnicity, class, religion, age, ability, citizenship status, and more” (Jackson et al., 2023). Understanding the positionality of the researcher is important for the reader in interpreting the research, and for the researcher in understanding their relationship with participants (Jackson et al., 2023; Massoud, 2022). Positionality as described by Piedra (2023) “is often discussed in terms of reflexivity; that is, the researcher’s thoughtful evaluation of their own subjectivity and its impact on the research process”(p. 612). Reflecting on one’s positionality is a key part of qualitative research where the researcher is intrinsically linked to their analysis.

My statement, thus, is biographical and utilises Jackson et al. (2023) questions as a prompt to explore my relationship to the research.

Sharing demographics with my participants, I found similarities with their life experiences, with differences appearing to relate to whether participants are part of a historic diaspora. As a South Asian man born in the United Kingdom (UK), I have a Kiwi accent tinged with British inflections. If you were to speak to me on the phone, there would be no indication of my ancestry. An Irish Christian name helps with the disguise. My career challenges in Aotearoa are similar but different from those experienced by participants. I have benefited from living in Aotearoa for most of my life. My formative education and work experience were primarily undertaken here. The networks I have cultivated over the decades allow me a certain amount of detachment from the South Asian stereotype.

I remember a time when it was acceptable to reproduce overtly racist acts and rhetoric within society. My family emigrated to the United Kingdom from Guyana as part of the UK’s drive to bring in labour from their former colonies. In what I can only imagine was an attempt to assimilate into the dominant culture, my family dropped virtually any reference to our Indian heritage. For all intents, I had considered myself to be British. This continued until very recently. I distinctly remember an event in the 2000s when an Indian friend called me a coconut (brown on the outside

but white on the inside). The revelation (along with this research) has caused me to rethink my relationship with England and my identity. Overall, I am a brown man with no strong religious beliefs; my financial situation and employment place me firmly in the middle class, and I am a left-leaning voter.

In embarking on this research project, I approached it from a position of privilege and a sense of superiority. With a Bachelor of Business, an English accent, and being relatively successful (in my mind, compared to my imaginary participants), I sought to give voice to an unheard societal group. This mindset helped inform and develop the research questions and the questions used in my interviews. Suffice it to say, my view changed both by necessity and through the reflexive process, where I started seeing myself in the experiences of each participant. On reflection, were I started the interview process in a position of power, I finished the interviews more collegially, with the process being more of a conversation between equals.

My role brings me into contact with a wide range of stakeholders, and the genesis of this project was in *seemingly* random conversations that I have had with South Asian men working in service industry-type roles. I say seemingly, but upon reflection, I gravitate towards people who look like me, and a natural conversation starter tends to be, "Where are you from?". I understand that this interaction and how I initially viewed my participants is one of unequal power dynamics, somewhat ameliorated through the ethics process, including utilising the concept of informed consent. A recurring concept from those conversations was of them coming to Aotearoa with tertiary qualifications or as a student getting a degree but unable to get a job in their chosen career. Ultimately, this forces them to assume roles that do not fulfil their original career goals.

In my own experience of coming to Aotearoa in the 1980s, racism seemed to change as society's tolerance for overt racism changed. In my teenage years I experienced a relaxing of overt racism, I no longer faced threats of physical abuse, and so (in hindsight) I experienced it differently, ostracised by some, verbally abused but in a quiet 'let's not make a fuss' sort of way, and any romantic interracial relationships would draw stares.

Although I understood that there have been South Asians in Aotearoa since the 1800s (Leckie, 2007), the 20th century certainly felt like we were a rare phenomenon. I grew up in a time when there were few South Asian people around. I did not meet another in school till I was in my 6th form year, and it took two years to meet another South Asian man in the workplace. Mild socially accepted racism existed in the same way that the comedian Billy T James was able to caricature Māori in his comedy; the Indian stereotype of owning dairies and playing cricket was the cultural norm.

Over time, this has reduced, but few would argue that we live in a society free from racism. As a researcher, I bring my experiences of this changing face of racism to the analysis.

Theoretical Approach

Perhaps the most challenging part of this project (at least in its initial stages) revolved around deciding on a topic that resonated and would add value. Trial and error led me to realise that the topic changed as my understanding of what was possible developed. Initial topics were influenced by thoughts on my career and how a master's in a specific field could help me climb the corporate ladder. A crisis was reached, leading me to seek advice on how to leave the program with recognition of the work to date. This resulted in an online meeting with the Director of Research, who convinced me that the research project need not be a career step but could indeed be something I had a passion for. My original thesis ideas were influenced by a need to further my career and consideration of what I thought was acceptable in a business school master's thesis.

At this point, I considered topics that held meaning beyond what the project could do for my career. A change in supervisors led me to think about discrimination in the workplace. This, in turn, led to me trying to understand my place in the research world. Informed broadly by social constructionism, this thesis uses critical theory such as racial neoliberalism, hegemonic whiteness, model minority theory, and othering as lenses to analyse participant data.

Social Constructionism

Broadly, social constructionism asks us to consider why we view the world as we do. It asks what historical and societal forces are in play, normalising how we act and respond to our

environment (Gergen, 2009). Examples of how this lens will be applied include the exploration of the antecedents of the model minority stereotype, what social conditions have led to this stereotype, and how it affects participants today. The thesis will explore South Asians in a historical context, touching on European colonialism, reaction to South Asian immigration into Aotearoa, and the changing face of discrimination, including media portrayal of South Asian men. I will utilise these factors to interpret how participants navigate through career challenges in Aotearoa.

Othering

The research concerned with other is complex and nuanced. Somewhat linked to social constructionism, how we categorise other resides in how we experience difference or how different someone is from us. At an individual level, this might be as simple as phenotype differences or how we react to people from different backgrounds. At a societal level, this may result in a bias towards one race or gender over another, potentially leading to systemic inequalities.

Specifically related to this thesis, I will explore the othering of South Asian men in the context of Aotearoa's existing hegemony, I refer to racialised other as anyone that is not white. Simply put, hegemony is the concept of leadership based on the consent of those being led through the popularisation of the worldview of the ruling class (Bates, 1975). In referencing Gramsci, Connell (2005) describes hegemony as a cultural dynamic where one group "claims and sustains a leading position in social life" (p. 77). In practice hegemony is where one group makes a successful claim to authority through cultural and/or institutional power (Connell, 2005). As I will explain in later chapters, this worldview is not necessarily an easily articulated phenomenon. Rather, it is a confluence of many factors leading to a socially constructed reality in which we all play a part.

The following meme summarises the complexity of this concept by articulating a societally normalised view of how people are treated differently by the state (and arguably each other) based on the colour of their skin. This was sent to me via personal text communication and so is not referenced)



Whilst mildly amusing, this meme subtly pokes fun at society's underlying power structures and illustrates the nature of the hierarchical relationship in which South Asian men find themselves. The concept references state-controlled power through the implication that this traffic officer can decide the fate of a driver based on their skin colour. Many would dispute that colour, or ethnicity has any effect on life outcomes and that we live in a post-race world suggesting that we currently live in a colourblind society; however, participant narratives suggest that this is a contested area of understanding, with some being able to point to discrimination and others appearing to be unconscious of how their ethnicity affects their career chances.

Research Questions

Piedra (2023) suggests that a researcher must pay reflexive attention to one's social position and the fact that, as a researcher, even though we may share many of the demographics with participants, we inhabit a different social space by being the researcher. This has led me to question my assumptions when designing the research and interview questions. The development of my research questions did not involve a straight-line route; it evolved as understanding of my place in relation to the research evolved.

My initial research questions were influenced by what I thought would be pertinent to the careers of South Asians in Aotearoa. It referred to historical references to South Asian masculinities; the British used the concept of the 'effeminate babu' versus the 'manly Englishman'

to marginalise some Indian men in the eyes of those Indians they were trying to court and their colleagues in the UK (Sinha, 1995).

Original research questions:

- A) How does the way New Zealand masculinities are conceptualised frame racism towards South Asian men in Aotearoa?
- B) To what extent do intersecting dimensions of masculinity, gender, race, and ethnicity affect the ability of South Asian men to flourish in workplaces in Aotearoa?

The reflexive process allows for research questions to evolve during the research process (Braun & Clarke, 2022), and in this case, I have replaced masculinity as a theoretical lens with the concept of hegemonic whiteness. I also imagined that career theory would heavily influence analysis. It took me a period of circling back to the data to realise that it steered me away from both theories, although the former is still somewhat applicable.

Thus, a reimagined set of research questions are:

- A) How does hegemonic whiteness frame racism towards South Asian men in Aotearoa?
- B) To what extent do intersecting dimensions of hegemonic whiteness, gender, race, and ethnicity affect the ability of South Asian men to flourish in workplaces in Aotearoa?

Chapter Overview

This thesis is split into five chapters. This chapter, an introduction, discusses researcher positionality, giving you, the reader, some insight into the determinants of this research project and how those factors have influenced the analysis. Broadly informed by social constructionism, I use critical theory to analyse participant data. Specifically, I situate participant narratives within the frameworks of racial neoliberalism, hegemonic whiteness, and model minority theory. Broadly, I will explore the relationship between race and neoliberalism, described as racial neoliberalism, which recognises the dynamic relationship between global labour and ethnicity, a relationship that tends to exploit the racial other for economic gain (Ratuva, 2019). Hegemonic whiteness can be described as a broad framework in which inter- and intra-racial hierarchies are maintained through dominant ideologies and practices (Miller, 2022). In Aotearoa, although a contested area, hegemonic whiteness defines social hierarchy and requires races to self-select within that

hierarchy, with borders enforced by various actors within. Exploring model minority theory relates to constructing various stereotypes that rank races against each other. Traditionally, it related to the idea that Asian Americans were hard-working and model citizens (Kiang et al., 2017). However, the concept is situational and can include any race considered to be doing well in society. In the case of this thesis, I will explore the effects of the model minority phenomenon on participants and how it positions them within society and the employment market.

Chapter Two details results from a scoping literature review that explores concepts such as social constructionism, othering, hegemonic whiteness and some historical contexts surrounding South Asians, including European colonialism and life in early Aotearoa. The chapter discusses the racial contexts of neoliberalism and model minority theory.

Chapter Three is the methodology section, detailing research methods, relevant theory, analysis and the theme development process.

Chapter Four is the results section, articulating the analysis of participant stories. It discusses the dominant themes crafted during the analysis process and how they can be used to understand the underlying barriers that South Asian men experience in Aotearoa.

Chapter Five brings together a summary and conclusion and suggests further areas of exploration.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

This chapter is an exploration of three intertwined concepts: hegemonic whiteness, racial neoliberalism and the model minority myth. Each concept, placed within a historical context and broadly informed by social constructionism, helps to make sense of the societal forces influencing participants' career experiences in Aotearoa. These concepts help construct the societal view of South Asian men and influence how participants react to the employment market; equally, potential employers are influenced by this construction, sometimes resulting in less-than-ideal outcomes for either party.

The following details a brief overview of colonising history from around the 19th century onwards, primarily focused on European colonialism of the South Asian sub-continent and Aotearoa, New Zealand. Specifically, the focus is on the exploitation of the sub-continent through the East Indian Company and the abolishment of slavery in the UK, which led to South Asians being shipped to the far-flung corners of the Empire (Dalrymple, 2019). This is followed by an overview of the history of South Asians in Aotearoa, primarily focusing on the overt historical oppression they have faced here. In exploring the treatment of South Asians in Aotearoa, I also draw parallels to the way the State has treated both Māori and Pacific peoples.

It is important to situate contemporary Aotearoa society in relation to its British past. Wetherell and Potter (1992) argue that social relations in Aotearoa “was, and remains, an intensely British concern.” (p. 4). How the British have viewed and treated the racialised other is important, given that British migrants have historically populated Aotearoa. A British sense of superiority in relation to the racialised other is a phenomenon described throughout this thesis. It can be summarised by Winston Churchill’s submission in a closed session to the 1937 Peel Commission, a commission set up to decide on the creation of a Jewish state. Roberts (2019) quotes part of the Churchill submission:

I do not admit that the dog in a manger has the final right to the manger, even though he may have lain there for a very long time. I do not admit, for instance, that a great wrong has been done to the Red Indians of America or the black people of Australia. I do not admit

that a wrong has been done to those people by the fact that a stronger race, a higher-grade race, or, at any rate, a more worldly-wise race, to put it that way, has come in and taken their place. (p. 415).

The statement broadly describes British attitudes to historic colonialism and their disdain for the racialised other. The 'dog in a manger' refers to Arab people living in the region planned for the new Jewish state. Churchill's attitude that the British are a 'stronger / higher grade race' explains the subtext behind many of the actions described in the following section and somewhat explains contemporary attitudes towards the racialised other in Aotearoa.

Later in the chapter, I will explore the relationship between colonialism, neoliberalism, and racism. It is important to point out that British colonialism, influenced by attitudes of being a stronger / higher grade race, has led to manufactured social hierarchies based on economic and social class (Dalrymple, 2019). Similarly, referencing the work of Robert Miles and colleagues in a study of racism in Britain, Wetherell and Potter (1992) link the concepts of capitalism and social class and global conditions that influence migration patterns; Miles states "that the history of racism is in part intertwined with the history of colonisation" (p. 22).

The argument I will be making is that, influenced by our colonial past, we embrace the strategies of colonialism and choose to re-enact them ourselves, recreating and reinforcing colonial societal norms. In the preface to 'The Wretched of the Earth' (Fanon, 2001) Sartre describes the process, "Thus Europe has multiplied divisions and opposing groups, has fashioned classes and sometimes even racial prejudices, and has endeavoured by every means to bring about and intensify the stratification of colonised societies" (p. 11). The following section briefly discusses instances of European colonialism that help situate the racialised other within the contemporary social hierarchy.

A Brief History of European Colonialism and South Asians in Aotearoa

British Colonialism

This exploration of the career experiences of South Asian men in Aotearoa is viewed within a brief overview of their historical context. It does so to situate South Asia as the subject of British

imperialism and its people living with the ongoing effects of that imperialism. South Asia has long been positioned as other. A place of spiritualism, splendour and an object of desire. This is neatly expressed by the German philosopher Hegel:

From the most ancient times downwards, all nations have directed their wishes and longings to gaining access to the treasures of this land of marvels, the most costly which the Earth presents; treasures of Nature – pearls, diamonds, perfumes, rose-essences, elephants, lions, etc – as also treasures of wisdom. The way by which these treasures have passed to the West, has at all times been a matter of World-historical importance, bound up with the fate of nations. (p. 1) (as cited in Bose & Jalal, 1998)

Historically, the colonisation of the Indian subcontinent was broadly an economic and military struggle between the European powers of the time (Ballantyne, 2006, as cited in Bandyopadhyay & Buckingham, 2018; Bose & Jalal, 1998). The British Crown authorised the foundation of the East India Company to further its economic and political goals by attempting to monopolise goods from various locations around the world. The company did so in dramatic fashion, pitting South Asians against each other, destroying the local economy and extracting a terrible toll on its people (Bose & Jalal, 1998; Dalrymple, 2019). The history of how Britain manipulated the resources of the subcontinent for its economic gain is littered with momentous events that influence how South Asians are viewed both as a ready labour source and a potential threat today.

The story of modern South Asia, from the 19th century onward, is intertwined with colonialism, not only on the subcontinent but also across the world. Primarily, this involved the British Empire's use of the subcontinent as a form of revenue and then as a military resource in various imperial campaigns and wars (Leake, 2013). After World War II, the British government decided that it could no longer rule the subcontinent, so it became a problem to be solved. In 1947, the solution was to Partition the subcontinent, transferring power to two new governments (India and Pakistan), and (at the time) creating two new countries (Fitzpatrick, 2024). Much has been written about this Partition, the haste with which it was carried out, the millions of people displaced and killed, and the arbitrary nature of the drawn boundaries, the legacy of which has ramifications

today (Bose & Jalal, 1998; Brass, 2003). Whilst India and Pakistan gained independence in 1947, the relationship between the two has been fractious, with two wars over the northern state and ownership of Kashmir, and a third war in 1971, which saw the breaking away of Eastern Pakistan (Partition split Pakistan in two, separated by India) and forming the country of Bangladesh (Bose & Jalal, 1998).

Another momentous historical event that had a profound impact on South Asians at the time (and arguably to this day) was the United Kingdom's abolition of slavery with the Slavery Abolition Act of 1833. This Act affected the subcontinent, primarily through the UK's mass use of South Asians to replace slave labour in UK colonies. Much is made of the abolishment of slavery as a method of emancipation; however, for South Asians, the resultant use of the indentured labour system potentially replaced one form of slavery with another (Allen, 2024). The Slavery Abolition Act of 1833 made slavery illegal, whilst ushering in an indentured labour system, but it also rewarded slave owners in what Manjapra (2019) describes as: "... fundamentally, a *financial* document—a document that defined the credit instruments and financial arrangements to be put in place in order to liquidate, relocate and securely preserve the assets embodied in enslaved people after the end of slavery." (p. 172)

The Act allowed the UK government of the time to compensate slave owners to the tune of £20 billion. A loan that was only paid off in 2015, the total value of the final bond issue came to £218,388,715.22.10 (Manjapra, 2019). The sheer scale of this compensation reflects the dichotomy that the United Kingdom experiences when addressing historical inequality; it must be noted that former slaves did not receive compensation.

Whilst this did not end the torment of slaves in the empire, it did herald the widespread use of South Asians leaving India under the UK-sponsored 'indentured' labour system, working in colonial plantations all over the British Empire (Allen, 2018). Ballantyne (2006), as cited in Bandyopadhyay and Buckingham (2018), suggests that the wealth and security of the British imperial system relied on its ability to move groups of people around the empire to fill gaps in the labour market, administration, and coercive instruments. This historical reliance on highly skilled,

geographically mobile South Asians to 'fill gaps' is prevalent today and is a fundamental tenet of the contemporary neoliberal marketplace, which I will explore later in the chapter.

The United Kingdom has a long, turbulent history with its former colonies, a common theme being that it used people from those colonies as economic units when it was expedient and discarded them when they were no longer useful. A contemporary example of this phenomenon concerns a group of West Indians and their descendants arriving in the United Kingdom between 1948 and 1971, named the 'Windrush generation' (Wardle & Obermuller, 2019). Later, as the 'Windrush scandal', the basic idea was that West Indians were invited to the United Kingdom as members of the British Empire in recruitment drives to work in Britain's industries; they were already British citizens because they were from a colony. However, in 2009, sentiment in the UK turned to an anti-immigrant stance, and the government of the day enacted a plan "to create a really hostile environment for illegal immigrants" (Hewitt, 2020, p. 108), many of whom were elderly West Indian-born migrants legally allowed to be in the UK. As part of the scandal, they were denied access to their bank accounts, healthcare and other state benefits (Hewitt, 2020).

State legislated hierarchy in South Africa

Between 1884 and 1885, European powers under the guidance of German Chancellor Otto von Bismarck met to discuss European control of the African continent; the event, formally known as the Berlin Conference, also became known as the 'Scramble for Africa' (Pakenham, 1991 as cited in Oliver & Oliver, 2017). Ultimately, the Dutch and British were able to occupy South Africa between 1652 and 1961. Though South Africa became its own Union in 1910, it was still considered a British colony until 1961 (Oliver & Oliver, 2017).

An outcome of the South African Union was the deliberate stratification of South African society through the legislative creation of apartheid. Brown (2000) describes the three pieces of legislation that provided a legal framework for apartheid, the 'Race Classification Act', also known as the 'Population Registration Act'. The Act segregated the population into four racial classifications: White, Indian, Black, and Coloured. Interestingly, Indians received their own classification, although the rules and privileges surrounding the various racial others (other than for

the Black category) were not always clear. The second legislative Act, the Group Areas Act, governed the property types and locations that the various racial classifications could own, deliberately to help 'police' the legislated social hierarchy. A third Act, the Reservations of Separate Amenities Act, empowered people who oversaw public spaces to restrict access to those spaces based on race (Brown, 2000).

The South African apartheid example may appear to be an extreme form of social stratification formalised as it was through legislation. However, as Brown (2000) suggests the various Acts only legitimised the previously informal social hierarchy, with a white minority at the top and racialised others at various levels below them.

South Asians in Aotearoa

South Asians have also faced social and state-sanctioned discrimination in Aotearoa. As an aside, there are parallels between the way the state has treated both South Asians and Māori in Aotearoa. As discussed later in this chapter, both have historically been subjected to discriminatory legislation, despite, in the case of Māori, being subject to a partnership described by Te Tiriti o Waitangi and South Asians being members of the British Empire with all the (theoretical) privileges that entail. The following briefly explores the history of South Asians in Aotearoa, along with the use of immigration policy and some of its antecedents used to discriminate against South Asians.

South Asians have been settling in Aotearoa since the 19th Century, with the earliest recorded Indians being Bir Singh Gill and Phuman Singh Gill, who arrived around 1890 (McLeod, 1984, as cited in Leckie, 2007). Rather than coming as indentured labourers as was happening elsewhere in the empire, early South Asians came here as 'free men' to seek their fortunes and picked up roles as hawkers, rural labourers and domestic workers (Leckie, 2007). South Asians were never required to come to Aotearoa under the indenture system (Tiwari, 1980).

However, life was not always easy for Indians in Aotearoa, and despite being British subjects, there was resistance to Indians being in Aotearoa. The 1890s saw the beginning of anti-Asian sentiment that positioned both East and South Asians as providing 'unfair economic competition' and as a moral and sexual threat to Aotearoa society; there was "an outcry in

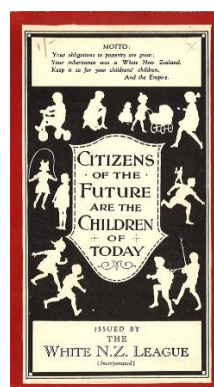
parliament over the menace of itinerant ‘Hindoo’ hawkers” (Leckie, 2007, p. 66). Around 1925/6, South Asians started settling in South Auckland and working as market gardeners, which provoked hostility from white farmers in the region. The farmers, supported by a local newspaper, the Franklin Times, spread anti-Asian sentiment and banded together to form the ‘White New Zealand League’ (Leckie, 2007; Tiwari, 1980). Historically, the area of the Waikato and the Franklin district has also been contentious for Māori, when in 1863, British troops marched across the Mangatāwhiri River to start what has been named the Waikato wars (O’Malley, 2013). The early 20th century saw the creation of an apartheid like state in the Pukekohe region, where, as well as resources and land being stripped from Māori, services and support systems were often designated as ‘whites only’ (Hunziker, 2022).

While it is difficult to gauge the effectiveness of the short-lived White New Zealand league, its creation demonstrates an opposition by white New Zealanders to the racialised other, despite, in this case, the other being members of the British Empire. Although there was little public or governmental backlash for the group and its rhetoric, at the time, the Government did fall short of legislating against South Asians in the same way they did for East Asians (Leckie, 2007).

Figure 1 is an example of a pamphlet produced by the League.

Figure 1

White New Zealand League pamphlet



[Alexander Turnbull Library](#)

Reference: White N.Z. League. *Citizens of the future are the children of today*. Auckland: 1926

In what is a recurring historical pattern, South Asians come to Aotearoa to seek a better life, and although there had been sporadic visits prior to this, around 1914, many South Asians who came here started small retail businesses like fruit and vegetable shops in both Auckland and Wellington Central, thus birthing the well-known stereotype of the 'Indian dairy owner' (Bandyopadhyay & Buckingham, 2018). A point of difference between racialised other, in this case, South Asians and East Asians is that despite a certain amount of discrimination, being subjects of the British empire afforded South Asian men privileges that East Asians did not possess. Being from a British colony and having fought alongside the British in the First World War was certainly one argument Indians used to differentiate themselves from the racialised other. South Asians could expect to demand all the privileges to which British subjects were entitled (Tiwari, 1980).

By 1921, despite relatively low numbers of South Asians in Aotearoa, South Auckland farmers, fearful of the success of South Asian market gardeners, led the Returned Soldiers Association to claim that "Indian and Chinese migrants were taking jobs from ex-soldiers" (Roche & Venkateswar, 2018, p. 130). This spurred Prime Minister W.F. Massey to pass the Immigration Restriction Act 1920, a de facto White New Zealand Policy (Roche & Venkateswar, 2018).

In demonstrating the changing face of discrimination, Noon (2017) suggests that modern forms of racism are a result of societal norms that no longer accept open or overt forms of racism, and this change is supported by legislation such as the Human Rights Act of 1993. Although the face of discrimination in Aotearoa has changed, anti-South Asian rhetoric still exists. The competition for global labour talent has meant that, on the one hand, the racialised other is a much-needed resource for the economic well-being of the country, but on the other hand, it still carries some of the negative aspects of the stereotype. With respect to historical immigration into Germany, Bauder (2008) describes both cases, firstly, migration as a necessity for economic growth, whilst also being "a challenge to civil order and social cohesion" (p. 59).

Similarly, in Aotearoa, contemporary views of Asian immigration and investment are broadly positive (Butcher et al., 2017). However, a similar dichotomy occurs where immigration is seen as an economic good and can also be used as a political tool. The 1990s saw Asian immigration weaponised by Winston Peters (leader of the NZ First party) in a successful political campaign

referencing the so-called 'Asian Invasion', allowing them to enter parliament (Butcher et al., 2017; Simon-Kumar, 2014). Both the Asian invasion and the relative value of the racialised other narrative support the idea that, rather than living in a post-race world, we are experiencing a shift in how discrimination is acted out in contemporary Aotearoa society.

Contemporary forms of discrimination in Aotearoa

There is a commonly held view that Aotearoa is an egalitarian society, which is at odds with participant experiences, and data such as that in the *Gender and ethnic pay gaps report*, showing aggregate gaps between racialised others and European workers ranging from 14.6% for Māori to 18.8% for Pacific peoples (Lusitini et al., 2024). Economic inequality is not the only form of discrimination faced by the racialised other. Twentieth-century Aotearoa has many instances of state-sanctioned discrimination milestones that have helped inform how society relates to those not in the dominant Pākehā group. The following examples do not specifically relate to South Asians; however, they have helped create a social climate that ranks the racialised other (including South Asians), a concept captured in the term 'hegemonic whiteness' discussed later in this chapter.

Furthering the concept of the racialised other being used to supplement labour shortages, post-war Aotearoa encouraged people from the Pacific Islands (and elsewhere) to come to Aotearoa for work, however, when global economic conditions declined in the 1970s, their presence was weaponised for political ends where they were constructed as a 'drain' on the Aotearoa economy (NZonscreen, 2005). Almost as an extension of the activities of the white New Zealand league, this saw societal actors create a 'moral panic' for political gain, which developed into the infamous 'Dawn Raids' in which members of minority Pacific communities were raided by the police and deported from Aotearoa (Bartley et al., 2004, as cited in Simon-Kumar, 2014).

The infamous Springbok tours of 1981 split Aotearoa into two distinct camps: those against the apartheid regime rugby team tour and those who believed that politics and sport should not mix, and so were pro the tour. Historically, there have been other tours (1921, 1937, and 1949), but opposition in 1981 reached a scale not seen before (Pollock, 2004). The 1981 protests signified a division in how Aotearoa society viewed and responded to racism. Pollock (2004) discusses the

multi-issue circumstances that led to the protests, including a pushback against the concept that Aotearoa had ‘the best race relations in the world’. Important here is that a significant part of Aotearoa society had decided that overt forms of racism (in this case, apartheid) had no place here. The following year, in 1982, the Privy Council ruled that because those born in Western Samoa were treated by Aotearoa law as ‘natural-born British subjects’, they were entitled to Aotearoa citizenship when it was first created in 1948. However, the National Party-led government under Prime Minister Robert Muldoon removed that right with the introduction of the Western Samoa Citizenship Act 1982, which overturned the Privy Council ruling (Fotheringham, 2024).

Lastly, the Foreshore and Seabed Act 2004 witnessed as Phelan (2009) states, “a defining moment in the evolution of the post-colonial relationship between the Crown – i.e. the New Zealand State – and the indigenous Māori people” (p. 217). The Act sought to reinstate Crown ownership of the foreshore and seabed, extinguishing customary claims by Māori. A complex and discriminatory issue that is relevant today, broadly, the introduction of the Act signified racial tension in Aotearoa and brought into question the earlier expressed idea that Aotearoa has ‘the best race relations in the world’.

Although not directed at South Asians, these milestones describe an evolution of Aotearoa society's view and response to discrimination. Particularly useful in exploring this changing face of racism is academic work critical of the post-racist or the colour-blind society. The assertion that society has become colour-blind because the instances of overt racism have significantly diminished (Bonilla-Silva, 2014; Bonilla-Silva et al., 2003) impacts how we view, respond to, and empower systemic racism today. This manifests itself in contemporary Aotearoa society through a narrative that suggests the state's historic discriminatory actions are a ‘thing of the past and people should just get over it’. Ideas that support this narrative and that are inextricably linked to discrimination in Aotearoa involve the neoliberal labour market, model minority theory, and the following section describing hegemonic whiteness.

Hegemonic Whiteness

This section sits within the broad concept of hegemony. A concept defined by Gramsci that relates to the ruling group within society exercising ideological dominance whilst incorporating the interests of subordinate groups (Lears, 1985). Bates (1975) states that hegemony is “political leadership based on the consent of the led” (p. 352), whilst Connell (2005) talks about it in terms of the cultural dynamic where “one group claims and sustains a leading position in social life” (p. 77). Specifically, hegemony refers to domination that occurs indirectly through culture and discourse. In this theorisation, “dominant groups exert power through consent instead of by force” (Gramsci, 1992 as cited in Miller, 2022, p. 13).

Broadly speaking, as a society, we are governed through explicit means, that is - regulation and laws which we (overall) sign up to, and implicitly through hegemony or social convention, for example, when people go to university (in general a voluntary act) we abide by the organisational structure and agree to be governed by it. The following sections describe social conventions where power is ‘given’ to a group that conforms to a certain ideal; those that do not conform but who tacitly support the dynamic through efforts to be ‘like’ the ideal (referred to as complicity) or actively push back against it (referred to as alternative or resistant).

Hegemonic theory can be used to analyse power dynamics in a variety of situations, a common example being studies in the field of masculinity, where hegemonic masculinity can be defined as gender practice (in society) that explains the legitimacy of patriarchy, which guarantees the dominant position of men and subordination of women (Connell, 2005). A hierarchal, but relational orientation to gender, constructs masculinities as multiple. The currently most valued form of masculinity is understood to be dominant, but it is not necessarily the most common form. Other masculinities are marginalised from the power made available to this hegemonic position, often through features of the body that distance them from the ideal (e.g., race/ethnicity, disability, class). Sexuality is considered to be the most marginalising quality within this theoretical framework, with gay men’s masculinity constructed as subordinated (Connell, 2005).

Connell (2005) uses complicity/resistance to describe men on the margins of hegemonic masculinity. The central concept being that few men actually approach the masculine ideal, and so there are those who support (complicit) the hegemony through taking advantage of the patriarchal benefits without having to perform masculinity, and those that are subordinated (resistant) to the ideal, for example, effeminate homosexual men. Interestingly, the construction of resistance (whether conscious or not) helps to maintain hegemonic masculinity through being 'other'.

A useful concept linked to hegemonic masculinity is Karla Elliott, margin-centre open/closed masculinities framework, which can be used to position masculinities along a continuum rather than as a binary (Elliott, 2020). The idea is that hegemonic or complicit masculinities are closed and thus closer to the centre, whereas subordinated or resistant masculinities sit at the margins (Elliott, 2020). The fact that the framework is a continuum demonstrates that many factors are involved in placing men closer to the centre or margin, and those factors are not static, with men moving across the continuum as they negotiate environmental factors.

Combining Elliott's work with critical whiteness theory allows the margin-centre framework to be applied to race in a concept called hegemonic whiteness. Lewis (2004) explicitly mentions the links between hegemonic masculinity and whiteness, suggesting that both can operate together and independently: "In any particular historical moment, however, certain forms of whiteness become dominant." (Lewis, 2004). For clarity, hegemonic whiteness can be defined as "a framework that explores how inter- and intra-racial hierarchies are sustained via dominant ideologies and practices..." (Miller, 2022).

Just as masculinities can move across the margin-centre continuum, the racial other can move from the margins closer to the hegemonic centre. Echoing Sartre's comments on colonising practice and the forced stratification of society, racial others through hegemonic action are forced to jockey for social position that occupies the area around the centre, on the understanding that proximity to the centre is a key driver to economic and career success. The concept of hegemonic whiteness supports the criticism of colourblind rhetoric that implies that we live in a post-racist society.

Considering the 'practices' part of the Miller quote, whiteness in Aotearoa can be considered an all-pervasive ideology, where its normative nature can be seen in:

- The stereotyping of the racial other in media, for example, television programs that portray South Asians as minorities alongside majority-white actors or using South Asians as stand-ins for Arab and Muslim characters (Thakore, 2014) (explored further below).
- Colourblind rhetoric in Aotearoa, for example, the lobby group Hobson's Pledge, which opposes Te Ao Māori (the Māori worldview) on the basis that giving Māori 'special' status violates equality (*Hobsons pledge*, n.d.). At the time of writing, the current coalition government includes a minor partner, the ACT party, which has led a concerted effort to remove Māori names from government buildings and legislation and has put forward a bill to reinterpret Te Tiriti o Waitangi (Seymour, 2025).
- Society valorising one type of racial other over another. A recent example experienced in the Aotearoa political arena is a recorded conversation released by the former National Party MP Jami-Lee Ross with the then-leader of the party, Simon Bridges, after talking about dinner with businessman Zhang Yikun and discussing a \$100,000 donation, the pair talked about potential candidates.

"Two Chinese would be nice, but then, you know, would it be one Chinese and one Filipino? Or, you know, what do we do?" Mr Bridges said.

Mr Ross replied: "Two Chinese would be more valuable than two Indians, I have to say."

"Yeah, which is what we've got at the moment, right?" Mr Bridges said (RNZ, 2018).

- In employment statistics, well-paid people with better health outcomes tend to be white (Lusitini et al., 2024).
- Neighbourhood segregation: South Auckland, a traditionally poorer part of Auckland, tends to be where the non-white neighbourhoods are, and the North Shore is where the white neighbourhoods are. South Asians and poorer people live in West Auckland, and middle-class white people and Asians live in East Auckland.

Hegemonic whiteness is a racial hierarchy or a stratification of society along the lines of race. However, it is also intersectional in nature, including (but not exclusively) class, gender, religion, and a willingness to integrate into a colourblind ideology (Miller, 2022).

Hegemony as a concept is enabled 'through culture and discourse' and 'through consent instead of force' (Miller, 2022). The former refers to 'how we do things around here' or cultural normativity and the various activities we undertake that support this, with the latter suggesting that we are all complicit in this process. It must also be noted that these concepts are points of negotiation where notions of what is acceptable may change year after year or as different societal sectors become seen differently. For example, the societal perception of South Asians in the US has changed and continues to do so over time. Prior to the events of 9/11, the South Asian stereotype broadly fell into two categories that are those who were highly educated and brought into the country after the passing of the 1965 Immigration and Nationality Act and then later, less educated family members of the earlier immigrants who took up positions in the service industry (Prashad, 2000). After the events of 9/11, the South Asian ethnic group, through media portrayal, appeared to absorb Arabs and the associated acts of terrorism. My own experience of terrorist jokes being made about my passport photo and the perceived difficulties I have with border security when I travel internationally is just one example of this.

Hegemonic whiteness is, therefore, a societal hierarchy or stratification that privileges whiteness with a decreasing level of privilege based on the colour of your skin (Thakore, 2014). However, even that brief explanation is more nuanced. In considering unacknowledged (by men) male privilege, McIntosh (1988) recognises white privilege as a similar unacknowledged phenomenon: "... I realized that since hierarchies in our society are interlocking, there was most likely a phenomenon of White privilege which was similarly denied and protected" (McIntosh, 1988, p. 278). Hartmann et al. (2017) echo this unacknowledged privilege: "Whiteness is thus a sense of self and subjectivity that is unaware of its own social foundations" (p. 406). On the other hand, Applebaum (2008) elaborates on this with the idea that race is a socially constructed phenomenon created and normalised through social actors (you and I). It advantages one group and creates a situation where all other groups are measured as either deviant or different (Applebaum, 2008).

This articulation of otherness is in part related to the concept of ethnocentrism, defined as "... a view in which one's own group is the center of everything, and all others are scaled and rated with reference to it" (Sumner, 1906, as cited in, Chakraborty, 2017).

Hegemonic whiteness defines the borders of not only whiteness but also the borders of other races within society or, more specifically, where those other races sit within the hierarchy. This categorising of people within the social hierarchy is often based on phenotypical signifiers (Miller, 2022). As often as not, hegemonic whiteness is bolstered not only by the extent of complicity by all actors but specifically through the stratification of racialised others and those within this group that claim superiority over the margin so they may approximate the centre.

The exploration of hegemonic whiteness is a complex area with many moving parts. For the purposes of this thesis, the following will explore how it simultaneously positions South Asians as a homogenised group and disaggregates South Asians based on religion and the ability to perform colour blindness within Aotearoa's social hierarchy. Nominally, this is the narrative that situates South Asians as good for the economy and being good corporate citizens, alongside the idea that South Asian men are alternately considered to be terrorists and/or sexually deviant.

Model Minority Myth

The model minority myth can be considered another form of social stratification that fits within the hegemonic whiteness, margin-centre framework. Model minorities are commonly used as a racial stereotype to define Asian Americans (including South Asians) and can be applied to perceptions of South Asians in Aotearoa. Broadly, this myth creates an artificial hierarchy amongst racialised others. The myth homogenises groups of racialised others and attributes capability or achievement, ranking them against other racialised others. As an example, in the US, it is used to valorise Asians (including South Asians) to the detriment of African Americans and enables sectors of society to refute claims of systematic racism (Osajima, 2000, as cited in Kiang et al., 2017; Poon et al., 2016). The model minority myth applies to the margin-centre framework, where the valorised racial other would be considered closer to the centre than those against whom they are pitted.

This phenomenon can be viewed as a method of social stratification defined as “an unequal distribution of valued resources across social groups” (McLeod, 2013, p. 229). Where social stratification is an important concept when considering model minorities, because the myth is often used as a tool to maintain that stratification and as McLeod (2013) notes, “Systems of stratification are maintained through institutional and interpersonal processes by which dominant groups assert and maintain control over valued social resources” (p. 229). In the same way that hegemonic whiteness maintains its power and control.

In the context of this thesis, the phenomenon points to society being a stratified hierarchy with whites at the top, a group of model minorities somewhere in the middle, and other minorities below that (Kim, 1999) somewhat akin to apartheid South Africa. Or whiteness in the centre, with model minorities approaching the centre and all other minorities at various times on the margin. However, this view is not static; even the definition of ‘white’ has changed over time. Poon et al. (2016) point out that in the US, Irish and Jewish groups were not considered to be white until they acquired status and wealth. Equally, South Asian proximity to the hegemonic centre can vary over time and circumstance; Muslim South Asians are perceived and treated wildly differently from Christian or Hindu South Asians (Robinson, 2005).

As a stereotype, the model minority image can be damaging in several ways; it is often used as a tool in racial wedge politics (Poon et al., 2016). It serves the advancement of colour-blind ideology (Bonilla-Silva, 2014), and it serves to reinforce social stratification (McLeod, 2013). The use of ‘good’ racialised others to ‘demonise’ ‘bad’ racialised others is a common tool used by media and politicians alike (see earlier reference to media portrayal and the value of different races). Rather than society taking responsibility for systemic racism, it is easier to point to (in this case) South Asians and say, ‘Why can’t Māori or Pacific peoples be more like them?’. The common refrain is - “...failures are under their control – even perhaps their choice” (McGowan & Lindgren, 2006 p. 338). They go on to echo another trope within the model minority profile, that other racial minorities would be successful if only they would follow the example of Asian Americans (McGowan & Lindgren, 2006).

While there is some evidence that middle-class Asian Americans embrace the model minority label, this can lead to an inability to recognise and make sense of the oppression experienced by some Asian Americans (Gee, 1998, as cited in McGowan & Lindgren, 2006). In reference to Asian Americans, Poon et al. (2016) discuss the model minority myth and its subsequent use in upholding white supremacy and how it is used in the racial disciplining of people of colour not included in the model minority category. Specifically, how the model minority myth narrative de-emphasises systemic racism and creates a wedge or buffer zone between whites and non-model minorities (Kim, 1999). Alternatively, as Mudambi (2019) suggests it helps privileged groups deny racism to legitimise prejudiced discourse.

Importantly, where various racialised others embrace the model minority myth, they do so due to the real and perceived benefits of being associated with the hegemonic centre. The myth helps create stratification within the group; as discussed earlier, not only are Muslim South Asians treated wildly differently to other South Asians, but other markers of proximity to the centre are prevalent, for example, being educated in a non-Asian University and (as discussed in the next section) being accent less or having a non-racial accent moves you away from the margins.

The following section considers an interrelated concept which can be used to demonstrate the effects of hegemonic whiteness.

Racial Neoliberalism

Here, I will provide a brief overview of where South Asians are situated within the Aotearoa social hierarchy using the lens of neoliberal ideology. Broadly, neoliberalism is defined as political and economic practice proposing that human well-being is best achieved by encouraging individual entrepreneurial activities; fundamental tenets include strong private property rights, free markets and free trade (Harvey, 2007). The general idea is that it reduces State intervention and allows the market to self-regulate, removing or reducing State-sanctioned safety nets such as unemployment benefits and public health services. This creates what Brown (2015) described as “today’s homo oeconomicus, an intensely constructed and governed bit of human capital tasked with improving

and leveraging its competitive positioning and with enhancing its (monetary and nonmonetary) portfolio value across all its endeavours and venues” (p. 10).

In this context, neoliberalism is considered to be colourblind as discussions of “race lack substance because in order to operate effectively, neoliberalism rejects identity” (Davis, 2007, p. 349; Roberts & Mahtani, 2010). The ongoing understanding under neoliberal theory is that racial identity and racism have been replaced by meritocracy and that hard work will be rewarded. Ultimately, any failures are attributed to personal flaws rather than systemic or societal discrimination (Davis, 2007; Roberts & Mahtani, 2010; Simon-Kumar, 2014).

Neoliberalism can be critiqued in several ways; for example, Theodore (2007) points to neoliberal policy as weakening labour market insurance schemes and job protection legislation and often seeks to undermine trade unionism and worker collective action as a form of identity politics. Skilling (2016) discusses the dichotomy of public opinion on neoliberalism, where participants believe in equitable outcomes but see no other option than a market that reproduces inequality. It is important to note that when neoliberal ideology drives governmental policy, it normalises ideas of individual responsibility and becomes the “commonsense of the times” (Peck & Tickell, 2002, p. 381).

In part, the racialisation of South Asians is a neoliberal action that portrays them as good economic units. In the US and several predominantly white countries, this framing has been fluid to serve political or social interests, such as those that valorise hard-working immigrants or demonise them when it is politically expedient (Thakore, 2014). The view that neoliberal policy is separate from race can be explored through the changing face of immigration policy in Aotearoa. South Asians have faced institutional racism through discriminatory immigration policy since the late 1800s. Putting this in context, Leckie (2007) describes a series of immigration laws banning South Asians from other major powers at the time. In 1897, the flow of South Asian immigrants into South Africa was significantly reduced, and in 1913, the Immigrants Regulation Act prohibited immigration. In 1910, the Canadian government passed a law requiring South Asians to pay a \$200 bond, with subsequent changes making it virtually impossible for South Asians to enter Canada by 1914. The US also severely restricted South Asian immigration by introducing the

Naturalisation and Immigration Acts of 1917. In Aotearoa, the 1899 Immigration Restriction Act made it possible to exclude Indians from entering Aotearoa; ironically, an earlier bill in 1896, the 'Asiatic Restriction Bill', failed because it would have prohibited British Indians from entering (Leckie, 2007). The rhetoric behind these bills tended to coalesce around the threats that South Asians were taking white jobs. The various restrictive immigration policies were enacted in response to a type of 'moral panic' created amongst white settler populations, predominantly when the demographics changed through the effects of bringing in cheap South Asian labour to service the colonial economy (Bandyopadhyay & Buckingham, 2018).

Although the poor treatment of South Asian immigrants eased after the First World War (Leckie, 2007), it was not until the 1970s that immigration policy changed from the traditional approach of providing preferential treatment and automatic entry rights to British citizens and some Pacific people to tightening entry criteria and increasing the focus on identifying overstayers for deportation (Bedford, 2003). Since 1987, immigration policy has been used to attract migrants with specific skills and business migrants who could inject capital into the economy and fill skills shortages across the country (Ip & Friesen, 2001). However, public opinion polls in the mid-1990s revealed elements of xenophobia exhibited in the rhetoric around the 'Asian invasion' (Spoonley & Bedford, 2012, as cited in Simon-Kumar, 2014) and eventually led to policy changes that restricted the flow of non-English-speaking migrants (Ip & Friesen, 2001). Then, in 2003/4, a two-tiered system was introduced that appeared to favour migrants with English-speaking backgrounds, such as the UK and South Africa (Simon-Kumar, 2014). This shift was short-lived as, in 2009, the main source of permanent/long-term migrants was from Mainland China, India, and finally, Britain (Statistics New Zealand, 2010, 7, as cited in Simon-Kumar, 2014). The shift in focus was created by policy amendments that encouraged high-income migrants while regulating low-income migrants (Simon-Kumar, 2014).

These changes in immigration policy describe a regulatory framework that has been used to manipulate the type of immigrant coming into Aotearoa; it signifies a disconnect between the stated concept of a race-free economic marketplace suggested by neoliberal dogma and the reality experienced by racialised others. Broadly, this implies that there are societal understandings of

'desirable', i.e. those that 'fit in' or are close to the hegemonic centre, and less 'desirable' migrants, those that are in the margins.

This is reflected by viewing media (both news and popular) portrayals of South Asian people. News media is in a powerful ideological position to shape our reality (Indra, 1979) and often does so in an effort to maintain and improve their base audience. Media portrayal of South Asian men can alternatively be as viewed as valuable economic resources by society or a menace. An example of research into the portrayal of immigrants in Canadian print media, Roberts and Mahtani (2010) found that immigrants were seen as "a way to solve many of Canada's pressing concerns from low fertility rates and an ageing population, to the growing demand for skilled labor and doctors..." (p. 251). Their research found that immigrants fill the position of both the "good guy" because of the potential benefits to the economy and the 'bad guy' by society at large, defined as being "deviant, criminalized and tarnishing the supposed Canadian way of life" (Roberts & Mahtani, 2010, p. 252). This type of media narrative is an example of what Hsu-Ming (2013) described as orientalism discourse, where racial groups understand their place in society based on the availability of ideas in circulation at any particular historical moment. The social narrative defines their reality, often constraining dissenting views.

A specific example is the reporting of mass shooting events in the US. Morin (2016) reviewed the media narrative around two very similar incidents carried out by an African American and an American Muslim. The study demonstrated that the media overwhelmingly represented the African American as having mental health issues, whereas the American Muslim was linked to terrorism. The latter was individualised, and the former was homogenised as a member of the wider Muslim community (Morin, 2016). This example demonstrates the contested nature of hegemonic whiteness, where, in this instance, the African American man not only 'benefits' from mental health discourse, but is considered closer to the hegemonic centre when compared to the American Muslim.

Regarding popular media (television programmes and movies), Thakore (2014), points to the increasingly polarised representation of South Asians. They demonstrate the evolving nature of this increase from the tertiary non-speaking background characters in the 1980s to the model

minority character of the early 2000s. They point out that the casting of South Asian characters is usually carried out by producers who favour casting attractive women, and when it comes to women of colour, that usually means their proximity to the white phenotype, which typically reinforces a white view of what an attractive South Asian can look like (Thakore, 2014). South Asian men, when portrayed favourably, tend to be cast in comedic roles or portrayed unfavourably, the tendency is to cast them in the role of a terrorist or emasculated sidekick to a masculine (white) main character (Muffuletto, 2018). The negative portrayal of South Asians in the media has the potential to negatively affect South Asians in their attempts to obtain employment, rent accommodation, and tertiary education, and in the case of the Muffuletto (2018) study, romantic interest.

Neoliberal doctrine, coupled with media portrayal, has the potential to adversely affect the public opinion of South Asians. Butcher et al. (2017) describe the effects of the 1980s and '90s neoliberal reforms, which included significant changes to the labour market, including a drastic reduction in employment by the state and the manufacturing sector. These changes adversely affected Māori when, between 1987 and 1989, one in five Māori had lost their jobs. The changes coincided with changes to immigration policy that prioritised 'economic migrants' after 2000. Public opinion polls between 1997 and 2000 showed that Māori, on average, were 63% less likely to agree that Asia was important to Aotearoa's future (Butcher et al., 2017).

Potentially as a consequence of our geographical isolation (in terms of exporting goods) and our national sense of egalitarianism, Aotearoa is a signatory to many international conventions that nominally protect against discrimination (Ryan et al., 2014). Resulting in Aotearoa having in place a legal framework that supports those conventions (Adamovic, 2022; Adams, 2016; Ryan et al., 2014). Pringle (2009) suggests that the legislative environment acts as an indicator of society's aspirations, with this in mind Ryan et al. (2014) provide a key summary of Equal Employment Opportunity legislation dating back to 1971, implying that Aotearoa society disapproves of overt racism, which has led to an understanding that we live in a society that does not see race as a limiting factor. The common thread revolves around neoliberal rhetoric that the marketplace negates race and gender in favour of skill and experience, because this has become the

commonsense of our times, we are all complicit through our actions in supporting this phenomenon (Peck & Tickell, 2002; Skilling, 2016).

On the one hand, this complicity manifests itself in us upholding racial stereotypes in the movies we watch or the news articles we consume, by misgendering people we meet, or assuming the man who just pulled up to the curb in a hybrid vehicle is an Uber driver. A good example discussed earlier is the concept of the model minority, where we wrongly attribute phenomena to a person based on a racial, or social construction or stereotype.

The following sections examine two specific instances of discrimination that migrants may experience in their career journeys; they both relate to the oppression that South Asians experience despite being viewed as a model minority and having valuable skills that the market desires.

Discrimination in the Hiring Process

Research suggests that discrimination occurs in the hiring process, and is often ethnically motivated, leading to detrimental occupational outcomes for professional immigrants (Bertrand & Mullainathan, 2004; Lancee, 2019; Mace et al., 2005; Zschirnt & Ruedin, 2016). This section outlines a small number of manifestations of that discrimination, along with actions that racialised applicants undertake to help mitigate discrimination in the hiring process.

Broadly, this discrimination falls into two categories, the first being 'taste-based' discrimination, where the employer has racial or ethnic preferences and is willing to forgo the benefits of better skills and experience to cater to those tastes (Becker, 1957, as cited in Zschirnt & Ruedin, 2016). The second category is 'statistical discrimination', where employers may discriminate against racial others (over whites) if they feel that they are less qualified or reliable or because of a lack of information about that group, where the cost of gaining information about an individual applicant is considered excessive (Phelps, 1972). This 'statistical' discrimination is explained by Cornell and Welch (1996) as a matter of numbers, where employers make conditional assessments at the screening stage based on a candidates proximity to their own backgrounds,

and from that group are more likely to employ applicants from a similar cultural background, primarily because that is easier than taking a risk on the unknown.

In the latter case, racial stereotypes allow employers to discount skills and qualifications on a resume because the applicant's ethnicity is a proxy for that lack of information (Zschirnt & Ruedin, 2016). Similarly, a US-based research project investigating discrimination in the hiring process between White and African American candidates demonstrated that applicants with African American names get far fewer callbacks for each resume they submit compared to their white counterparts, improvements in observable skills or credentials (for example college degrees) do not significantly increase the number of callbacks (Bertrand & Mullainathan, 2004). Gaddis (2015) describes the phenomenon in the US, where Black applicants from elite universities are only as successful as white candidates from less prestigious universities for the same kinds of roles. In Aotearoa, migrants have similar experiences; a common explanation for rejecting highly qualified racial others is that they are overqualified or that their qualifications are either not recognised or evaluated at a lower level, resulting in them being devalued (Yugendran, 2024). The corollary is that employers are more likely to hire applicants closer to the hegemonic centre despite the potential economic loss this may cause.

There is evidence to show that racial others are not passive in the hiring process and undertake a variety of activities to overcome this somewhat hidden form of discrimination. Whilst there is a wealth of research regarding the benefits to applicants of using their existing networks to find work (Fernandez & Weinberg, 1997; Lin et al., 1981; Trimble & Kmec, 2011), these theories are based on the relative value of an applicant's social network. Trimble and Kmec (2011) suggest that the value of social networks disproportionately advantages white men over women and racial others. Immigrants to Aotearoa do not necessarily have access to high-value social networks and potentially use a different approach. Pager and Pendulla (2015) describe two such tactics. The first is targeted, where applicants apply to organisations that they know are less likely to discriminate, or the opposite is a broad-brush approach, where applicants abandon the idea of getting their ideal job for getting the best job available, casting a much wider net.

Other tactics employed by racial others are those described by Kang et al. (2016) as changing how they present themselves for jobs, focusing on omitting racial cues that indicate their margin status. The intention is for applicants to downplay the relevance of racial cues that might adversely affect their application. An example of this includes the concept of 'resume whitening', such as using a 'white' first name in place of or alongside their actual names or whitening their experiences, such as including hobbies like hiking or snowboarding (Kang et al., 2016).

Lastly, another form of discrimination is one that affects South Asian men at the interview stage but also has some ramifications in the stratification of South Asians along the lines of the model minority myth and proximity to the centre. Accent bias is deeply related to stereotypes and how we perceive those who have accents that differ from the hegemonic centre. It is a difficult phenomenon to measure where traditional forms of protection are not necessarily appropriate. For example, the Human Rights Act 1993 prohibits overt discrimination based on various criteria, including (but not limited to) colour, race, and ethnic or national origin. However, Zschirnt and Ruedin (2016) field experiments show anti-discrimination legislation to be inefficient in combating modern forms of employment discrimination. Especially where contemporary forms of racism are more covert and subtle (Pager, 2007). In a society where overt forms of racism are no longer accepted, it is difficult for an applicant to determine the reasons why they are unsuccessful for a role. This is especially true when at the screening stage, hiring managers can often distinguish and screen out racialised other applicants through phenotype attributes or can be assumed through the type of name people have or the location of their primary education, which they place on their resume (Kang et al., 2016).

Here, I explore the concept of accent bias, where some accents are given more status than others and, as a result, negatively affect those with lower-status accents. As an example, Cargile et al. (2010) research looks at the data concerning North Americans attributing higher status to non-native English spoken by Europeans over non-Europeans. This leads to a form of discrimination called 'symbolic racism' where it is publicly unacceptable to state a dislike for a race of people, but it would be ok to complain about immigrants from a racially other country (Cargile et al., 2010). Equally, this form of discrimination has knock-on implications for hiring managers who are faced

with applicants with equal qualifications and experience but who are from European or non-European countries.

Similar biases occur within the judicial system, Lippi-Green (1994) describes discrimination cases brought under the US Civil Rights Act of 1964, “The courts clearly have brought the argument that in broadcast media language-trait focused (LTF), discrimination is nothing more than good business practice” (Lippi-Green, 1994, p. 183). In the US, courts are unlikely to uphold complaints of accent-based discrimination if the employer can show (in this case, without proof) that a person's accent is detrimental to sales.

When considering this in relation to the margin-centre framework, the phenomenon suggests that racialised others with a distinctive non-European accent will be positioned at the margins. It is not unreasonable to draw the conclusion that South Asians with a European type of accent will be seen more positively than South Asians with ‘Indian sounding’ accents. Some participants in this study demonstrate an awareness of this phenomenon and take advantage of it to (perhaps unconsciously) move closer to the centre. It is not unrealistic to believe that this phenomenon also reinforces hierarchical differences within the South Asian community. Applying this to the model minority myth suggests that South Asians with a European-type accent are considered ‘more valuable’ and thus closer to the centre than those with a strong non-European accent. It would be difficult to prove that a hiring manager's perception of the type of accent a candidate has may be enough to negatively affect their chances of successfully navigating the application process.

The previous section explored a form of discrimination that potentially many migrants experience in their careers. A common problem with regulations designed to protect against discrimination is that, although symbolically important, they lack practical enforcement mechanisms and so do little to combat workplace discrimination (Adams, 2016). The possibility that name and qualification discrimination occurs in the hiring process (Bertrand & Mullainathan, 2004; Lancee, 2019) requires applicants to develop strategies that maximise their chances. Some strategies include an approach to job applications that favours the quantity of applications (Zschornt & Ruedin, 2016), with some participants describing sending out hundreds of job applications. Other popular

strategies include the removal of ethnic cues from resumes, for example, not attaching photographs, and anglicising names (Derous & Ryan, 2018).

In wrapping up this chapter, I have detailed a flow of historical events involving British imperialism that have significantly impacted South Asians. The events describe a British sense of cultural superiority that influences the contemporary portrayal of South Asians. This portrayal attempts to place South Asians in the role of either the ideal worker (model minority) or imminent threat, depending on the political need at the time, indeed, contemporary portrayals are contested and move along a continuum. This continuum draws together theory on hegemonic whiteness and the work of Karla Elliott, using a margin/centre framework (Elliott, 2020). The premise being that hegemonic whiteness is a continuum where dominant groups occupy the centre and racialised others the margins. This concept is important as it helps frame the actions of employers and participants, the role of legislation, and the historical/contemporary treatment of racialised others in Aotearoa. Finally, the margin/centre framework helps to demonstrate the complicated relationship that South Asians have with other people of colour and the white hegemony.

Chapter 3: Methodology, Method, and Analysis - a Reflexive Process

Methodology (Critical Qualitative)

This chapter provides a broad overview of my critical qualitative study, including theoretical perspectives, ethics and reflexive practice, and the methods used. It takes a critical inquiry approach (Braun & Clarke, 2013; Braun & Clarke, 2022) to explore the career experiences of South Asian men in Aotearoa. This is done by critically analysing participants' narratives using semi-structured interviews and reflexive thematic analysis. It incorporates both findings and discussion.

Methodology is the broad framework within which research is conducted; it consists of theories and practices guiding the researcher (Braun & Clarke, 2013). It can be considered the procedure by which researchers acquire knowledge. A researcher's methodology is often informed by what they want to achieve and by understanding their ontology and epistemology (Braun & Clarke, 2013). In critically exploring the social construction of reality, I needed a methodology that would fit well with a constructionist epistemology. A critical qualitative inquiry sits well with a constructionist approach to exploring an underrepresented social group (Braun et al., 2024).

Exploring ontology and epistemology took time, the development of a suitable topic and theoretical framework, alongside personal reflections, ultimately added to the overall project in what Deane (2018) would term axiology or "what's good (or bad) in life and what do we find worthy" (p. 1). Choosing an overall research paradigm was also not straightforward; Brown and Duenas (2020) advise choosing a research paradigm before starting research; however, this requires some guidance and meant that I spent considerable time getting my thoughts in order before settling on a paradigm, a process that has continued throughout the project. A paradigm is defined as a cluster of beliefs that includes what should be studied, how research should be done, and how results should be interpreted (Bryman, 2012). Given that Brown and Duenas (2020) also point out that the building blocks of a research paradigm consist of axiology, ontology,

epistemology, and methodology, it was important that I understood my ontological and epistemological position before committing to a particular paradigm.

Theoretical perspectives

This section describes the ontology and epistemology I bring to the research project and demonstrates congruence between the theoretical perspectives and their role in the research design. Using critical inquiry helps to situate participants' narratives and the power relations between the oppressed and the privileged (Koro-Ljungberg & Cannella, 2017).

Ontology

Ontology refers to how we understand the nature of reality (Brown & Duenas, 2020; Grant & Giddings, 2002; Moon & Blackman, 2014). Alternatively, as Braun and Clarke (2022) state, “ontology is about *what* we think we can know” (p. 166). Ontological perspectives broadly cross a continuum from realism to relativism (Moon & Blackman, 2014). There are a variety of ontological stances between realism and relativism, and at times, the line between them can blur. Realism, most often related to the scientific method, is a perspective that posits that the ‘truth is out there’ ready to be discovered and is often independent of the method by which it was obtained (Braun & Clarke, 2022). On the other hand, relativism broadly frames reality as only being knowable through socially constructed meanings (Snape & Spencer, 2003).

In this research project, I take a relativist approach to understanding participant narratives, as this considers the multiple realities of both participants in this study and my own. A relativist approach supports critical inquiry in that it is interested in meaning-making rather than finding a single truth, and it helps understand how participants make sense of not only their reality but also their actions in bringing their realities into being (Braun & Clarke, 2022).

Epistemology

Intertwined with ontology is a person's epistemology, concerned with “how people create knowledge and what is possible to know” (Moon & Blackman, 2014, p. 1170). As Braun and Clarke (2022) state, “... what modes of information do we trust as real, true, valid sources of information? And how can such knowledge be generated?” (p. 176). Similarly to ontology, epistemological

perspectives broadly cross a continuum – in this case, from empiricist/objectivist to constructionist viewpoints. On the one hand, empiricism is predicated upon the understanding that knowledge is discovered and only valid when gained through the scientific method (as in unbiased) and is accurate and true (Moon & Blackman, 2014). At the other end of the spectrum, constructionist viewpoints are that truth and meaning are created by the subject's interaction with the world, where knowledge is produced by the researcher rather than uncovered (Gray, 2018). In this research project, I take a constructionist approach, which has a critical stance on what is 'taken for granted' knowledge and recognises that how we understand the world is usually historically and culturally specific (Burr, 2015).

Positivism vs Constructionism

The distinction between positivism and constructionism will become important when relating participant experiences to the concepts of post-racialism and neoliberalism. Bryman (2012) explains that "positivism is an epistemological position that advocates applying the methods of the natural sciences to the study of social reality and beyond" (p. 28). It is an understanding that 'reality' is 'out there...' waiting for the researcher to find it. Whereas a constructionist epistemology is a theory that all realities are produced, reproduced and interpreted through language and subjective experience (Braun & Clarke, 2013). This is an important concept because social construction is a central tenet of this thesis, because how participants situate themselves in society is often a response to how they make sense of the world.

A qualitative approach resonated as it allowed me to explore people's experiences deeply, rather than a shallow view of their perception of facts. With social constructionism in mind, I have used reflexive thematic analysis (TA) as a method to analyse participant data. Reflexive TA is flexible enough to allow me, as the researcher, to use my experience, knowledge, skills and insights to make sense of participant data, whilst also considering that my own experiences are socially constructed and influence the position I take when analysing the data. I needed a method that was flexible enough to change as my learning, through reading literature and understanding participant narratives, changed my understanding of the topic.

In contemplating my ontological and epistemological stance for this project, I believe that participant reality is a socially constructed phenomenon, resulting in their reality being formed through interaction with the world around them. Ontologically, the project sits within a relativist field of thought, and epistemologically, it subscribes to constructionism or, more specifically, social constructionism in understanding the ways in which participants create their reality. Understanding both helps identify a suitable methodology, defined somewhat as abstract theoretical assumption(s) that supports a research approach that is often discipline-specific (Grant & Giddings, 2002).

Social Constructionism

Virtually any discussion of social constructionism concerns the nature of reality or, perhaps more specifically, how we understand the world. Burr (2015) suggests that "...social constructionism argues that the ways in which we commonly understand the world, the categories and concepts we use, are historically and culturally specific" (p. 4). I will broadly use social constructionism as a framework to interpret participant accounts. I do this knowing that participants' reality comprises various factors that would be impossible for me to understand in their entirety. In their book on social constructionism, Burr (2015) discusses the concept of 'macro-social constructionism', which draws a derivative relationship between the constructive power of language and the social structures/relations and institutionalised practices, which we experience daily. I will use this understanding of social constructionism to interpret participant accounts in the context of the effects of colonialism on South Asians, their place in Aotearoa society today, and portrayals of South Asian men in the media.

The reflexive process also requires that I understand my place in this interpretation, and this positionality is discussed in Chapter 1. Echoed by Gergen (1985) when discussing psychologists' understanding of social constructionism, "How can the psychologist step outside cultural understandings and continue to 'make sense'?" (p. 1). Gergen (2009) develops these ideas further, making historical connections between individualism and 'othering'. He briefly sketches the relationship between Descartes' 'I think, therefore I am' and modern views of the education system, which creates individuals who can think for themselves. The argument is that "if what is most

central to me is within – mine and mine alone – then how am I to regard you?” (Gergen, 2009, p. 84). The result is that because you are not ‘me’, then you must be ‘other’.

Othering

The modern concept of othering is broadly defined as a phenomenon of stereotyping and racialisation (Thomas-Olalde & Velho, 2011). When specifically applied to postcolonial conversations, the term may refer to using power to dominate and subordinate the other (Canales, 2000). Certainly, Thomas-Olalde and Velho (2011) suggest that othering is a process through discursive practices that creates hegemonic subjects, with some social actors being in positions of power over the subjugated other.

Related to Edward Said’s concepts of Orientalism, South Asian otherness is another example of social construction where the phenotype and historical narrative surrounding South Asians are used to stereotype. However, other forms of stigma include attaching meaning to non-European sounding surnames, undervaluing qualifications from universities in the South Asian sub-continent, or the perception of poor language skills.

There is a possibility that researchers carrying out research with participants of different ethnic backgrounds can unconsciously other their participants. Whilst I share many of the demographics with participants in this study, it would be easy for me to do the same. My positionality statement in Chapter 1 addresses this. However, positionality statements do invite criticism. Criticism of positionality is generally around the understanding that researchers must be unbiased about their research, the dangers of positionality statements in centring the researcher, or even the ability of positionality statements to absolve the researcher of any issues involving inequality in the relationship (Gani & Khan, 2024). Crucially, the latter critiques generally refer to positionality statements used by white researchers in researching non-white issues, and whilst some of the criticism can be applied to my work, the reflexive process has allowed me to bypass some of that criticism and recognise where my thinking has othering tendencies and allows me to correct or utilise those instances in the analysis.

As a reflexive piece, I am conscious of Berger's view on how the researcher should recognize their own situatedness within the research and the effect that may have on the process and those being studied (Berger, 2015, as cited in Braun & Clarke, 2022). My experiences and political views influence how I see participant experiences. This research project synthesises participant experience and relevant theory with my own experiences, making my story an important part of this process.

Methods: Recruitment Approach, Participants, Data Generation and Transcription, Data Analysis

The following sections describe the processes and challenges encountered. In this study, I undertook ten individual, semi-structured interviews with South Asian men who are migrants to Aotearoa and have a tertiary qualification from outside of Aotearoa. The interviews were intended to understand participant career experiences and how those experiences have helped construct their responses to job-seeking.

Recruitment

The recruitment process initially involved specific participant criteria – South Asian men new to Aotearoa, with tertiary education from outside of Aotearoa. I then proceeded to advertise for participants. The only caveat was that, given my employment, they could not be participants who work directly or indirectly for/with me to avoid additional power differentials and allow candid conversations. This requirement discounted several of my colleagues who would have been prime candidates.

The process involved posting recruitment posters (see Appendix D) on student notice boards, Facebook, and LinkedIn groups; I visited the West Auckland Indian Association and spoke to dozens of people, handing out miniature versions of my advertising poster to drum up support for the project. This process could be categorised as convenience sampling, which is the least rigorous of the sampling techniques, and whilst it may also be the least costly (in time, effort, and money), it may produce poor data in some circumstances (Marshall, 1996). This approach did not produce the desired results. I had hoped to recruit participants who met the stereotype of the PhD

Uber driver, but this proved impossible due to the intersection between my social and professional network which does not include South Asian Uber or taxi drivers. Additionally, the stereotype does not actually reflect the diversity of possible expressions of this idea of being 'looked over' due to otherness.

At this point, I decided that a demographic change was needed, widening the possible participants to any South Asian male and removing the requirement for participants to have tertiary education outside Aotearoa, although, in hindsight, this would have only excluded a single participant. The lack of success also suggested a move from convenience sampling to one that would be more effective, a purposive sampling strategy. Where purposive sampling "is used to select respondents that are most likely to yield appropriate and useful information." (Kelly, 2010, p. 317). This change entailed more extensive use of my network to identify and reach out to potential participants, easing the process by widening the search criteria. I could approach South Asian men without explaining the requirements for a tertiary degree. Indeed, after the change in criteria, the first participant approached and was interviewed on the same day.

To be included in this study, participants needed to be linked to the South Asian sub-continent either by birth or descent. They needed to be male, and of course, they needed to have been in Aotearoa for some time to be able to draw on their employment experiences. Eligibility criteria are summarised in Table 1:

Table 1

Eligibility Criteria for Participants

- Identifies as a man.
- Is South Asian by birth or descent.
- Is a migrant to Aotearoa.
- Has a tertiary qualification.
- Has spent enough time in Aotearoa to have gained employment experience (greater than 2 years)

In terms of exclusion criteria, I chose to relax the earlier iteration, which stated that I would exclude any South Asian man with whom I was currently working or who had recently worked with me. Although I did not specify the length of residency, I would have excluded any prospective participant who had not experienced the Aotearoa job market.

Participants

Recruitment started in October 2022 and continued until I had reached ten participants in December 2023. Once participants had responded and supplied completed consent forms, a convenient time was organised for the interviews, which were conducted online with the average length of time being about 60 minutes. Demographic details were provided for seven of the 10 participants in this study; participants 1, 4, and 5 did not submit a demographic form. Following ethics guidelines, I did not reach out to participants who did not send through their demographic forms after a second request.

Table 2 summarises participants self-reported demographic details.

Table 2.

Pseudonym	Age	Length of time in NZ	Ethnicity	Children?	Qualifications	Achieved where?	Sexual orientation	Class?
Mikey	No data returned							
Max	29	6	Indian	No	Bachelor of Technology in Civil Engineering Master of Engineering Studies (endorsed-Construction Project Management).	India / NZ	Heterosexual	Middle Class
Peter	25	7	Indian	No	Bachelor of Computing Systems	India	Heterosexual	Middle Class
Matt	No data returned							
Clive	No data returned							
Alfie	46	12	South African - Indian descent	Yes	Qualified Trade Tested Fitter (mechanical South Africa)	South Africa	Heterosexual	Middle Class
Clark	34	21	Indian	No	Diploma in Aeronautical Engineering Bachelor in Engineering Technology (Mechanical) Master of Construction Management (Honours and Summa Cum Laude) Bachelor of Medicine and Bachelor of Surgery (MBChB) – Currently Studying	NZ	Heterosexual	Working class
Joseph	54	20	South African - Indian descent	Yes	Bachelor of Applied Management Diploma in Applied Communications Diploma in Personnel Training Management Diploma in Theology	NZ / SA	Left off form	Middle Class
Nathaniel	49	22	Indian	Yes	Bachelor of Commerce Post-grad degree in hotel and food administration and technology	India	Heterosexual	Middle Class
Sherlock	39	6	Indian	No	BS MSc PgDip	USA / NZ	Heterosexual	Middle Class

Video Conferencing Software

Participants were encouraged to join me via video to allow for increased flexibility. Video software allows participants and researchers to disregard any location differences and saves both parties travel time (Gray et al., 2020). Several added benefits include having an initial interview transcription automatically available for both parties to keep a copy of the recording. Online interviews do have weaknesses, including difficulties in the researcher's ability to see and interpret participants' body language and the tendency to talk over one another (Cater, 2011). This is largely offset through forced silences (in an effort not to talk over the other person), which allow time for both parties to contemplate a response.

In considering ethics requirements, two recordings were made; the first required me to read through the questions on the oral consent form and have the participants respond positively. The second is a recording of the interview itself. The video conferencing software automatically transcribed the audio track and creates a separate Word file which can be downloaded by both parties to the call.

Interview Questions

Data were generated using semi-structured interviews following a pre-prepared guide (see Appendix E). Using the semi-structured interview format allows the researcher and participant to guide the process towards areas they see as both relevant and important. This allows the interview guide to respond to important ideas in participant narratives without being tied to a strict format (Charmaz & Belgrave, 2012).

The interview guide was modified early in the interview process as it became apparent that some questions needed adjustment to enhance the interview flow. For example, I found myself having to explain the term masculinity and, in doing so, lead the participants in their responses rather than the response being their own words. Another example of the iterative and reflexive nature of the interview process revolves around my expectations of what I would find. My readings around this topic led me to believe that I would see general themes

as interviews developed. However, I was taken by surprise when the most influential and counterintuitive (to me at the time) concept was the overwhelming discounting by participants of racism as a factor for where they are in their careers. This resulted in a slightly different approach in subsequent interviews.

A specific benefit of early reflections of participant data involves confronting my naivety around some of the interview questions. Informed by these reflections and the literature, I modified question number three because participants were often confused about what it was asking. The question - “How do you see your role as a male – what does this mean to you?” was modified to “What are some of the traits of being a man in New Zealand, as opposed to your country of birth?”

Interview Process

Initial questions were designed to build rapport and allow the participants to find their own rhythm and narrative, starting broadly by exploring their various family, education, and work experiences, then narrowing in on their understanding of key traits of the typical Kiwi man, including those of leaders in the workplace. Where participants choose to discuss racism or discrimination, we explore this in the context of the protagonist's attributes and the effects on the participant. Because the semi-structured interview format has a tension between flexibility and focus, the interviewer must take care to use ‘normal’ interpersonal interaction (active listening, reflection, tact) while managing the data quality by ‘keeping on track’ (Kelly, 2010). I did this using positive affirmation sounds, delving deeper into subjects that participants appeared to think were important and returning to the guide if the interview drifted too far away from the previous question. The final question invited participants to add anything else they wanted to explore and was designed to provide a natural conclusion to the interview.

Transcription

A key part of qualitative semi-structured interviews is the transcription (refer to Phase 1 in the reflexive process below). This starts the data familiarisation process; it takes the conversation between participant and interviewer and reduces it to words on a page. Transcripts in qualitative research represent the data and are one step removed from the interview itself (Braun & Clarke, 2013).

During the interview process, two videos and a transcript file were created for each interview following the university's consent protocols. I took advantage of the technology available to me and used the auto-transcription service offered by Microsoft Teams. The process of tidying up the transcription started familiarising me with the data because the auto transcript is imperfect and does not meet the standards of orthographic transcription methods (Braun & Clarke, 2013). This process highlighted that sometimes I talk too much or should have delved deeper into certain areas. In hindsight, tidying up the transcriptions as I went rather than waiting till the end would have allowed me to adjust my interview style on the fly. An error that came about because I treated transcription as a discrete step, one that needed to happen once all the data was in, rather than the iterative process that would have supported ongoing improvements.

Table 3 shows the transcript guide I have used to aid in the transcription process, ensuring consistency across participant data.

Table 3.

Top of each new page	Has a timestamp
Headers	Pseudonym
Page numbers	Ensure each transcript has a page number
Formatting	Deep right margin and double space lines

Identity of the speaker	The speaker's name is followed by a colon. (e.g. Anna:) Use a new line for each time a speaker starts.
Laughing, coughing etc	((laughs)) or ((coughs))
Pausing	((pause)) – significant pause (a few seconds or more), ((long pause)) for anything longer.
Spoken abbreviations	Use the speaker's abbreviation if they do (e.g. TV, or WHO) otherwise verbatim.
Overlapping or inaudible speech	((in overlap)) ((inaudible)) if the sounds cannot be made out, or Use a single bracket for your best guess – e.g. (ways of life)
Nonverbal utterances	Phonetically – e.g. urmm, or ummmm
Spoken numbers	Spell out numbers
Use of punctuation	Care was taken to minimise punctuation to capture nuance where necessary, and where possible, only added to aid the reader in the final report.

Ethics and Reflexive Practice

The Auckland University of Technology's code of conduct for research (2019) was used to guide the design and implementation of this research project. Participant informed consent was obtained before the interview process and reiterated through the Oral consent protocol (see Appendix B), which involves the interviewer recording the prospective participants' agreement to the interview by asking questions from the protocol and obtaining affirmative answers. Participants were also sent a copy of the Participant Information Sheet

(PIS, see Appendix C), which explained the process of removing themselves from the study, how their data would be stored, and where they could seek further information, along with support services if required. Identifying information was removed from the transcripts, and the original video files are kept in a password-protected folder.

Originally, participant pseudonyms numbered Jurors one through ten, as I had planned on a sample size of 12, which would have coincided with the numbers on a jury. Partly, this was a homage to the play *12 Angry Men*, which is a courtroom drama that explores the trial of a Latino youth accused of murder. The play offers commentary on societal scapegoating of the racial other whilst attempting to valorise the judicial system as belonging to a liberal and just state (Wilson, 2024). Given the length of time it took to achieve ten participants, I stopped there. I asked participants if they would like to choose their pseudonym for readability reasons. Those who did not reply or indicated no preference were randomly assigned a male name. This was a dilemma, as I was concerned about assigning a European name when I would later refer to examples of participants anglicising their names as an employment strategy.

Following the formal university processes, I should be able to say that the project is ethically compliant and safe (Approved by the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee on 24/10/22, AUTEK Reference number 22/295). However, there are more factors to consider. For example, Chapter 1 details a positionality statement articulating the power disparity between the interviewer and participant. In this sense, researcher reflexivity is important as it recognises that the researcher is a part of the (in this case) racial group being studied. It also reminds the researcher that participants are 'subjects, not objects' (Lumsden et al., 2019, p. 1). Reflexivity is important because it contributes to producing knowledge and offers insight into how this knowledge is produced (Pillow, 2003).

In the case of my reflexive practice, the positionality statement in Chapter 1 gives the reader insight into my motivations and background. The reflexive process of understanding

my own background, influences and the recursive nature of thematic analysis has meant that I bring a lot of myself to the research project.

Analysis

Thematic analysis (TA) is a term used to describe a ‘family’ of analytical methods used in qualitative research to construct, analyse, and interpret patterns across a qualitative dataset. It involves a systematic data coding process to develop themes that help explain the data; it is, in essence, a method for data analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2022). It is a method that encourages the analysis of participant data in terms of “what is said, rather than how it is said” (Howitt, 2019, p. 149).

Reflexive TA

This research project uses reflexive TA. This type of TA acknowledges that researcher subjectivity is integral to the analytical process, including understanding the power dynamics involved and embracing researcher reflexivity (Braun & Clarke, 2022). It recognises and embraces the value of researcher knowledge, skills and subjectivity and how these combine in the analysis process. The recursive and reflexive nature of the analysis process allows the researcher to critically engage with both the data and the process to produce meaningful analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2022).

The value of reflexive TA in this project is that it allowed me to draw on a wide range of theoretical frameworks in the analytical process; it is flexible enough to allow the researcher to draw on any number of theoretical lenses to inform analysis. More importantly, the method encourages reflexivity in oneself, the method and research design, all of which shape knowledge production (Braun & Clarke, 2022).

A concept I’ve come to understand through the reflexive process is that I share (at least partially) insider status with this group of participants. Where insider/outsider status involves the degree to which a researcher is located within or outside the group they are researching (Gair, 2012). I share various demographic attributes with participants in this

research project, enabling advantages such as developing research questions and interview schedules. This 'insider' status also allows insight into participants' lives that a researcher of a different ethnicity may not have (Hayfield & Huxley, 2015).

This analysis broadly follows Braun and Clarke (2022) six phases of reflexive thematic analysis. Briefly, these are:

- 1) Familiarisation - involves getting to know the data (deeply and intimately), transcribing audio, re-reading and taking notes of key data points, this is a recursive process that I went back to throughout the research project,
- 2) Coding - involves systematically categorising the data in specific ways that are relevant to the research questions and assigning code labels,
- 3) Theme construction – the process of gathering or organising coded data together to form candidate themes,
- 4) Review and further construction – a review of the proposed themes in relation to the central organising concept, the coded extracts and the data set as a whole,
- 5) Refining, defining and naming the themes – a review of themes to ensure each theme is demarcated from others, is built around a strong central concept and makes sense in relation to the overall story I wanted to tell about the data,
- 6) Writing up – finishing up the writing process, weaving together data, theory, and researcher experience to produce a compelling narrative for the reader.

Reflexive TA, however, is a recursive and iterative process. Rather than stepping through each phase, they can often blur into one another, with the researcher often going back to earlier phases to review earlier incarnations of an idea or concept, which in turn influences future thinking and development.

The Art of Getting to Know the Data (Familiarisation)

I spent considerable time getting to know the data in the familiarisation phase, which is where the researcher immerses themselves in the research material, critically treating it as

data rather than words on a page and developing a deep understanding of the dataset (Braun & Clarke, 2022).

While the formal process of familiarisation started here, manually editing the transcripts described in the previous section started the process. As part of this process, I read hard copies of the transcripts a second and third time, making notes in the margins. After the initial note-taking rounds and on advice from my supervisors, I also listened to the audio track of each participant interview whilst deliberately doing something else (typically walking somewhere). This was to get a sense of the data without the urge to grab a pen and paper to make notes, and it allowed me to get a sense of the underlying meaning of each transcript and what each participant stressed was important.

Reflection on the familiarisation process also helped identify a type of confirmation bias that can occur when one or two participants are more engaging or more in line with my ideas. For example, I felt that Clive was a tough transcription to analyse, and at times, it felt like we were talking at cross-purposes. It would be easy to discard their data as immaterial, but the familiarisation process has meant that I needed to spend more time with Clive's transcript to understand some of the key ideas in the conversation. This included occasionally returning to the original video to understand the context. This phase primed me to see beyond my initial expectations of the data, starting to allow the data to influence my thinking rather than forcing the data to tell the story I wanted it to tell.

The Importance of Following Process (Data Coding)

Data coding is a systematic process of tagging data segments relevant to the research project, using code labels that will later help develop themes. This is a recursive process, where the researcher will often parse the data several times to take note of its meaning. Coding the data for me was perhaps the most intensive part of this research project; cognitively (and practically), it was a recursive exercise involving a fair amount of self-doubt, deep thought and Post-it notes. This step in the process saw me working with the printed hard copy of each transcript and finding a quiet place to go through them.

The first transcript took slightly longer than the rest to make detailed notes of virtually every utterance. I was reminded that this was the first iteration of the process and, by necessity, needed to be a quicker overview. The next nine went much quicker with me making notes, highlighting key text and limiting myself to one page of notes for each participant. In practice, I highlighted interesting text and categorised that text with short codes to help capture relevant ideas, although a short phrase was sometimes used to capture more complex concepts. This involved both a semantic and latent view of the data, categorising the surface meaning and my view of the underlying meaning described by participants.

In an iterative process, codes evolved at each reading; I noticed patterns across the dataset that allowed me to group common ideas together under the same code. Next, I reviewed the proposed codes and transferred them to a clean Microsoft Word document, highlighting the text and placing likely codes in a comment field connected to that text. As a memory aid, I gathered the codes I had created from the first transcript and placed them in an Excel sheet with a small explanation of what I had meant by each code, which allowed me to refresh my memory throughout the process. Extracting the coded narrative from the transcripts involved using a macro that pulled out the participant's written narrative, and code that I had assigned as a comment and placed into an Excel document. The first version of this extract helped with the following step.

Once the data set was coded, I went through a process of revising the codes to remove duplication or codes that encompassed too large a topic. The process of disaggregating the original codes involved reading through the code labels to understand if they could be broken down into smaller units or more granular meanings. In some cases, codes were removed altogether when it appeared they were not related to the data or where there was duplication with other codes. Finally, some codes were renamed to make them more meaningful to me for the next stage.

The disaggregated (and final) set of codes was used to recode the data set, starting at Participant Five and working back towards Participant One, then from Participant 10 to Participant Six. This method is recommended by Braun and Clarke (2022) as it helps ensure that the earlier participant data does not get an inordinate amount of attention and breaks up certain thinking that the coding order might influence.

Theme Generation

Theme generation is the process of bringing together a wide range of data united by a shared idea or concept. It is a synthesis of theory, participant story and the meaning-making that the qualitative research journey encourages. To start theme generation, I wrote out the codes on physical Post-it notes and then, using a wall, I grouped and regrouped them in ways that eventually led to cohesive proto-themes (see Appendix C).

Then, as the physical Post-it notes became ineffective (due to the need to link ideas across larger physical spaces), I began using the online digital ideas board Miro, which allows users to use virtual Post-it notes and flowcharting concepts to help visually link concepts together (<https://miro.com>). This allowed me to move notes around virtually and connect codes in ways that are difficult to do in the physical world. The Miro board became the repository for all my exploratory ideas and allowed early collaboration with my supervisors. The visual aspect of the board(s) meant moving ideas around to create and re-create groups, which was invaluable, and I used it throughout the analysis process.

In my enthusiasm to achieve a result in harmony with my thinking, I prematurely jumped to creating an overarching theme that heavily influenced the proto-themes that were to follow. The overarching theme, “Sahib to servant: a relationship that persists”, was pithy and made complete sense at the time. The theme was discarded as part of the iterative process of refining. The theme led to a raft of proto-themes such as, “We normalise unconscious bias, the normalisation of exploitation, the tertiary education system as part of the economic machine (perpetuating inequality), Uber driver or professional (two stereotypes

we live with) which was a reflection of my earlier thinking on potential participants, the economy relies on discrimination, better off in a feminised industry, your proximity to whiteness, continual learning the perceived panacea for career growth, the benefits of class, are South Asian men masculine enough to climb the corporate ladder, and finally South Asian men and their relationship to Māori and Pacific peoples.”

The iterative nature of theme generation requires a self-reflective approach, and in this case, letting the data guide the process, after a flurry of communication with my supervisors, conversations with my partner, and agonising moments spent with the data, I was able to distil the proto-themes into a more manageable (and meaningful) set of themes that enabled me to tell participants' story.

The Light at the End of the Tunnel (Review and Further Development)

The idea for this phase is to check whether the proto-themes from the previous phase make sense when seen in relation to the coded data extracts and the dataset. This was done by re-engaging with the individual coded data extracts and checking that the proto-themes still made sense, with a similar process carried out with the entire dataset. This is an opportunity to explore whether there are opportunities for better, more nuanced pattern development to address the research questions. There is also an opportunity to make sure that each theme is distinct and does not merge into one another, whilst still telling a compelling story. This phase is particularly recursive, requiring the researcher to return to previous phases to check that the developing analysis is still on track and tells a compelling story.

There is a certain amount of difficulty in articulating the complexity of travelling between Phases three, four and five. It was not a linear progression; the reflexive part of the analysis often resulted in me spending a significant amount of time dwelling on aspects of the thesis which may not actually produce content or, at best, a seemingly insignificant part. The transition between Phases three, four, and five (and, in many cases, back again) took

significant time and led to incremental changes that produced a much tighter final set of themes.

In this phase, I went about proving the quality of the proto themes from the previous phase. This involved matching the corresponding codes to each theme and extracting the participant narrative that specifically related to those codes into a single document. In a task reminiscent of the coding exercise, I went through each narrative piece to confirm that it fit within the central organising concept of the theme; whilst there were pieces of the coded narrative that did not necessarily fit within the theme, many codes worked with little adjustment required.

By necessity, there is a fair amount of repetition, but repetition is important as it ensures that participant data supports the generated themes, with this phase proving the link between the two.

Theme Refining, Defining, and Naming

Rather than being a separate phase, this part of the process is closely related to the previous. It involved thinking deeply about the proposed themes from Phase four and further refining them. This phase includes being clear on the central organising concept, defining the boundary of the theme, ensuring that the theme is unique and does not blend into the other themes, and how the themes contribute to the research project (Braun & Clarke, 2022).

To help this process, I defined each of the proposed themes in a few sentences to clarify and ensure they are organised around a central concept that relates to the research questions. In this way, Phase five merges with Phase six in that the definition of each theme allowed me to frame a structure for Phase six, or in some ways, the refining process influenced both the theme and the way in which I have developed the narrative. Within this phase, I discarded an earlier idea related to immigrant exploitation. I also modified the theme names to describe the central organising idea more and ordered them to provide a logical

series of steps. As an example of the recursive and iterative nature of this phase, with only five days before the thesis was due to be submitted, I decided to discard a third theme which I felt lacked enough depth to be a discrete theme and incorporated the main points into the remaining themes.

Writing Up

The last phase wraps up the process by weaving together the various strands that have come before. It forms the final step in refining the analysis process and producing a coherent narrative that justifies the time and effort participants gave to this research. For the purposes of this section, *writing up* as a phase is not complete until the final version is handed in for assessment. The process of revising and returning to various concepts and sections carries on beyond this section and is the sum of the thesis. A recurring theme within the research project is its recursive nature, adjusting language and concepts to ensure that there is theoretical congruence between ontology, epistemology and the theoretical frameworks.

This chapter describes a key part of the research process. It explores a critical qualitative methodology through the application of method and theory. Informed by a relativist ontology and a constructionist epistemology, analysis is guided by theories of social constructionism, specifically othering. The remainder of the chapter details the recruitment process, gathering data, and analysis using Braun and Clarke (2022) six phases of reflexive thematic analysis, including the process's recursive nature, frequently require the researcher to return to the original data to seek congruency between themes, data and theory.

The following sections describe the themes constructed as a result of analysis supported by participant narratives, and finishes up with a summary and conclusion to this research project exploring the career experiences of South Asian men in Aotearoa.

Chapter 4: Results / Findings

I had originally anticipated that my thesis findings would tell a tale of woe. Instead, each participant has described overcoming visible and invisible barriers to get where they are today. The accounting of their drive to seek tertiary education or to start a successful business has been, in part, a response to those barriers. Their stories have emphasised a drive to live well, perhaps start a family, buy a house, or become financially independent. Broadly, participants appear to have succeeded with their goals despite (and in part because of) the way that society treats them. Participants talked throughout about actions they have taken to advance their career, the general 'busy-ness' and variety of which can be described as the 'hustle', where their search for career success often requires a sustained herculean effort.

The barriers they describe are culturally and historically contingent and not in keeping with Aotearoa as an egalitarian country. As described in Chapter 2, when viewed in the context of the margin/centre framework as it applies to hegemonic whiteness, the barriers are there to privilege the centre and disadvantage those on the margins (Miller, 2022). Generally, spawned through European colonialism and reinforced today by legislation and media portrayals of South Asians. The place of South Asians in society is a convenient tool for the state to use as a foil against claims of racism or to demonise them to score political points. This is neatly summarised by Sartre, as cited in Fanon (2001):

The European elite undertook to manufacture a native elite. They picked out promising adolescents; they branded them, as with a red-hot iron, with the principles of Western culture; they stuffed their mouths full with high-sounding phrases, grand glutinous words that stuck to the teeth. After a short stay in the mother country they were sent home, whitewashed. (p. 7).

With a rich history, the Indian subcontinent is a melting pot of different cultures, languages, and religions. Where once this area was an economic powerhouse, with riches sought after by the West, the area was pillaged by European powers and brought under British control (Dalrymple, 2019). As discussed in Chapter 2, through economic necessity, the British, in poorly managed haste, split the Subcontinent by religion. Partition, wrenched apart people who once lived together in religious tolerance and forced them into adversarial positions that endure today (Bose & Jalal, 1998). It is entirely possible that contemporary views of South Asians have their genesis in how the British categorised various peoples within their domain.

Despite South Asia comprising several countries, media portrayals of the area and its citizens are homogeneous. Depending on the circumstances, the homogeneity manifests in the stereotype of the bumbling dairy owner, turbaned taxi driver, South Asian doctor, or shadowy terrorist. The stereotyping puts South Asian men firmly in the category of racialised other unless proven otherwise. Consciously or not, being other in Aotearoa locates South Asian men within a racialised hegemony, where they can never be in the hegemonic position, but can, in certain circumstances, approach it. The hegemonic centre is a contested space, for the racialised other to approach that centre necessitates competition with other minorities. It requires them (consciously or not) to undertake strategies to improve their social capital and prove their worthiness. An added complexity is the neoliberal framework we all live in, described as the common sense of our time (Skilling, 2016). When considered in the context of careers, the neoliberal marketplace not only pits South Asian men against 'other' minorities but, importantly, pits everyone against each other with claims that merit is the only measure of success (Roberts & Mahtani, 2010). The battle for career progression is one everyone faces within the employment market; the difference for South Asians is that the stigma we face through the applicable stereotype is an additional hurdle. The challenge for most is proving that we are a better employment prospect than the 'other guy', often

portraying themselves as good citizens, hardworking and aspirational, contrasting themselves against undesirable racial others (Jaskulowski & Pawlak, 2020).

Introducing themes

The following two themes are my analysis and interpretation of participant data using the lenses of social constructionism, hegemonic whiteness, othering, racial neoliberalism, and model minority theory:

South Asian Men and their Proximity to Whiteness, Māori, and Pacific Peoples.

This theme reflects the social hierarchy in Aotearoa, utilising hegemonic whiteness (Miller, 2022) as a theory to explore how South Asian men position themselves in relation to other races within Aotearoa. The theoretical lenses of model minority theory (Poon et al., 2016) and hegemony are influenced through the forced stratification of Indian society by colonial practices, creating a hierarchy primarily based on how well South Asian men practise whiteness.

Strategically Engaging with a System of Oppression

This theme explores some of the oppressions experienced and the resultant strategies that South Asian men utilise to engage with hegemonic whiteness. Described by one participant as the 'hustle', this theme details the effort that participants expend to achieve career success. Within this theme, I explore the relative value of a degree, the difficulties South Asian men face in getting an interview, the centrality of tertiary education in Aotearoa, and a phenomenon linked to neoliberal practice where failure in the marketplace is attributed (simplistically) to failure of the individual (Davis, 2007).

South Asian Men and their Proximity to Whiteness, Māori, and Pacific peoples

Aotearoa has a long history of Pakeha enforcing their will on racialised peoples, whether by force of arms, the legal system or through manufactured cultural norms (Terruhn, 2019; Turner, 1999). The way Pakeha have historically treated Māori and Pacific peoples has positioned South Asians as model minorities. Despite this, and being members of the British Empire, thereby entitling them to some benefits relative to those from non-British nations, South Asians have had a tumultuous time in Aotearoa (Leckie, 2007).

South Asians are no strangers to this mistreatment. The colonisation of the sub-continent and subsequent diaspora have meant that South Asians have been (and continue to be) used as convenient (and sometimes indentured) cheap labour around the world (Keval, 2024). This has led to South Asians worldwide having to *negotiate* the social hierarchies of their host countries, with Aotearoa being no different. The result is a social hierarchy, with whiteness positioned as the default or norm and minority groups, including the Indigenous peoples of Aotearoa, being subordinated (Elers & Jayan, 2020).

Drawing on some of the effects of model minority theory (Kiang et al., 2017; McGowan & Lindgren, 2006; Poon et al., 2016), this theme focuses on three attributes of this negotiation by South Asian men: (1) the effects of accent, (2) the anglicisation of names, and finally, (3) the positioning of participants relative to Māori and Pacific peoples.

The Effects of Accent in Approximating Proximity

In general, there is a societal expectation that people will act in ways that show them in their best light, this is connected to the concept of self-enhancement, which refers to individuals' motivation to improve their self-worth (Shepperd et al., 2008). This is closely linked to a concept named self-serving bias, which results in individuals taking personal responsibility for things that go well and attributing external factors when things do not go well (Campbell & Sedikides, 1999; Shepperd et al., 2008). Recognition of how accents are received is one way that participants without a strong South Asian accent distinguished

themselves from the stereotype, a self-serving bias. Unprompted, participants with non-Indian accents would mention their lack of an Indian accent, signalling their proximity to whiteness, whereas those with a noticeable Indian accent did not.

This awareness suggests that participants understood the benefits of navigating Aotearoa society without an Indian accent and potentially attempting to distance themselves from the stereotype. A stereotype neatly described by Sivanandan (2008) “Once we wore our passports on our faces – now we also wear them in our beards and headscarves” (p. 97). These participants are aware of the benefits accrued through closely approximating whiteness, which becomes more accessible closer to the hegemonic centre (Connell, 2005). Supporting this is a statement by Lippi-Green claiming “not all foreign accents [are denigrated], but only accent[s] linked to skin that isn’t white, or which signal a third-world homeland” (Lippi-Green as cited in Cargile et al., 2010, p. 63). Thus, it behoves those who can differentiate themselves from the stereotype to do so. It is not inconceivable to think that reducing differences indicated by accent will allow a person to grow closer to the unmarked ‘New Zealander’ or ‘Kiwi’ accent.

Explored here are two forms of this accent-related differentiation: the first is recognising the benefits of a non-Indian accent and utilising it to your advantage, and the second is recognising the privilege that society attaches to a non-Indian accent and attempts to push back against the unfairness of this construction. In both cases, participants who were cognizant of accents identified accented South Asians as other, understanding the hierarchical effects of this otherness and how this socially positions them.

In his role, Nathaniel described having to de-escalate tense situations; he framed this as disrupting the stereotype his racialised body evokes in others. To challenge the thought processes of a potential antagonist, Nathaniel described deploying his non-Indian accent as a tool in his day-to-day work. Here, Nathaniel also indicated some bias towards South Indians, further disaggregating the idea of South Asian homogeneity and placing himself

above South Indians within the social hierarchy. Being considered 'Kiwi-born' provides an advantage in negotiating tense situations.

Uh to somebody who doesn't know me and who's arguing, has a bone to pick with me. For all they know, I'm Kiwi-born because my English is good, if I may say so myself. Like there are stereotypes, isn't it? When you think of Indians, and you think of South Indians. But that stereotype and that mental image, especially if you have a bone to pick and you are angry, and you suddenly are faced with an Indian-looking manager, who opens his mouth and speaks fluent English to you? You might be thrown off. I don't know if that was the case, but then if you're angry enough, it probably doesn't matter...

There are two factors at play here: Nathaniel suggests that his English language skills are good, which helps in negotiation; later, he talks about the importance of articulating ideas clearly to help prevent escalation. Secondly, he argued that speaking English without an Indian accent is an additional tool in that de-escalation. Research that supports this concept involves attitudes reported in the US toward different accents, suggesting that European accents are considered 'good' whilst Asian and Latin American accents are considered 'bad' (Cargile et al., 2010). Although the research does not mention South Asian accents specifically, accents have social currency and being heard as being without an accent – or more accurately, as having the right (white) accent is an important tool in negotiating the social and organisational hierarchy.

In response to a prompt regarding South Asian representation at the CEO level of organisations, Clark responded with:

Okay. Um, I guess I try to have more rose-tinted glasses on about, you know, that not being a limiting factor. One of the things where I've been very fortunate is that I may look like an Indian, but I don't sound like it, which has been very helpful.

Although I did not explore this in much detail, it was clear that Clark understood the value of a non-Indian accent and, to some degree, utilised it to his benefit. The dialogue above demonstrates a dichotomy in how Clark views progression to senior management. His account suggests that he does not believe that race is a limiting factor but reiterates like Nathaniel, that having the 'right' accent counters the impression his body evokes.

Sherlock came from a country that exemplifies hegemonic whiteness; he has a distinctively non-Indian accent and articulated his awareness of the subjective power this gives him. He described being hyper-vigilant in situations where the impression of his body on other people's perception of him was then transformed by his accent, often waiting to see how his outward appearance affects potential relationships.

But the moment I speak, they're like, oh. And then they immediately change your entire demeanour. And it's like, nah, sorry for the language, but fuck you, I actually go out of my way not to speak that much. Just to kind of pick up on, let me see how you actually are.

Sherlock described his awareness and pushback as allowing him to use the privilege his accent brings to challenge the stereotype. However, it also contradictorily moved him closer to the hegemonic centre.

Distinguishing oneself from the other is another form of hegemonic negotiation (Connell, 2005; Terry & Braun, 2013). Nathaniel offers up a plausible argument for what I would deem to be a racist response to someone who speaks with an accent. In what is potentially a justification for adverse behaviour caused by accent difficulties, he suggested that the accent of racialised others can exacerbate tense situations. Nathaniel suggested that discrimination can occur due to miscommunication, normalising the discriminatory effect of accent, contributing to the negative construction of South Asian men in Aotearoa.

If you're somewhat different from everybody else, let's say and, and you cannot speak or you cannot get your point across, it's easy for someone to, you know, kind

of dump on you. But as I said, I was in my uniform as a manager, and I'm dealing with an angry customer, and I opened my mouth and speak fluent English, and I can understand what he's saying and he can understand what I'm saying. I can make my point clearly to him. I can explain the rules. I can offer solutions I can offer.

Alternatives.

By using the right accent to negate the stereotypes that their bodies suggest, participants can position themselves positively within the social hierarchy of Aotearoa. Some participants use other strategies, such as in the following sub-theme, which describes the anglicising of their names to position themselves positively in the hegemonic order.

Anglicising Names to Avoid CV Discrimination

Some participants spoke of being cognisant of the potential for CV discrimination based on the perceived foreignness of their names and described taking steps to mitigate this. In the case of Clark, the only NZ-raised participant (although he was not born here), he articulated his first (conscious) experience of stereotype discrimination based on his name:

So, the first job I applied for when I was 16. I remember I printed out 60 copies of my CV, and I went to every single shop at the mall and I handed them all out, didn't get a callback, and then I went to Papatoetoe. They had a little mall there, I handed them out there, didn't get a call from anyone. And then last, literally, the last CV I handed was to Kmart. And the person I handed it to happened to be the person who does hiring. And the comment she made was. Oh, you speak English just fine and so that's how I knew that okay. This is the reason why I'm not getting callbacks.

Although research suggests that name discrimination is prevalent in hiring (Bertrand & Mullainathan, 2004; Lancee, 2019), only a few participants discussed strategies to mitigate this phenomenon. However, due to the nebulous nature of name discrimination (given how difficult it is to prove why you are not getting interviews), it is not easy to know if those who do not take steps to address it are otherwise adversely affected.

Those who are convinced that the phenomenon exists often take measures to mitigate against it; Clark pointed out, “Yeah, so I definitely do not put that (his full name) on CVs”. Clark uses a hegemonic positioning strategy, where a European sounding name distances him from the stereotypical other, moving him closer to the hegemonic centre, at least during the initial CV screening in the hiring process.

Whilst Clark got by using a nickname to fit in, Joseph, due to a series of employment setbacks over multiple years, decided that his birth name was holding him back. He took what could be considered by some to be a radical approach to mitigating name discrimination through changing his name by deed poll:

... I've gotta play a game. And so that that was probably more 2004, 2005, but in 2006, I just thought, yeah, I'm, going to change. So that's the kind of back story. So, with all of that, I changed my name. What blew me away was how people who couldn't see me were wanting to talk to me.

Joseph noted that a direct result of this change was a significant increase in employment opportunities. With what could be described as a ‘posh’ upper-class (non-Indian) accent and now a European-sounding name, Joseph described significantly increasing his chances of disrupting the stereotype that his racialised body suggests and, in turn, increased his chances of being employed at the level his experience and education indicate. A non-Indian accent combined with a European-sounding name allows Joseph to move closer to the hegemonic centre, giving him access to the privileges that come with it.

For some participants, this understanding prompted actions such as those taken by Joseph and unwittingly supports the hegemonic nature of the employment market. Those who change their names are caught in a catch-22 – complicit with the existing social hierarchy to improve employment prospects or resist and stay subject to the racialised constraints enforced by hegemonic whiteness.

To some participants, name bias did not seem important; Matt argued that he had not experienced it, potentially due to the industry he worked in, but once again, the nebulous nature of name discrimination makes it virtually impossible to know for sure. Here, Matt dismissed any link between job applications and getting interviews, even though he had applied for 'a lot of jobs':

My name is my actual full name. So, nothing short and no English name or whatever. And I would say I did apply for a lot of jobs out of which at least eight people had a personal interview with eight different organisations. So, I didn't experience anything of those kinds of things.

Interestingly, Matt articulated this position despite having vicariously experienced name bias when a South Asian colleague chose to anglicise his name:

That's what actually happened with Jason (a pseudonym), like when he had his original name written on a CV. He was getting rejections, but I remember when he changed from his original name to Jason, at least people started calling him for phone interviews.

What might be considered further evidence of South Asians deliberately orienting towards whiteness is the situation where South Asian men (me included) already have anglicised names, and in the case of one participant, because he comes from a part of India that the Portuguese colonised. Those of us who have been in Aotearoa and elsewhere for a while, perhaps, then perpetuate this phenomenon by giving our children Western names. This may not necessarily be a deliberate effort to mitigate name bias, but the effect remains the same.

This is not far removed from the historical treatment of Māori by the British, where, through conversion to Christianity, Māori were baptised with English first names (Head, 2006); and the state's attempt to eradicate the Māori language through legislation and state school intervention (Ka'ai-mahuta, 2011). In the case of both Māori and South Asians in

Aotearoa, anglicising names could be viewed as a valid strategy to minimise mistreatment at the hands of the hegemony, even while it upholds it.

These State actions create an environment that normalises European names and encourages the continued anglicisation of Māori names. Although there has been a resurgence of Māori culture, it is not uncommon today for parents to worry about the effect of embracing their culture that stands in opposition to the manufactured norm, or as Waitoki (2019) states: “I have brown siblings, brown children, and brown nephews and nieces. I worry about them: will they get a job with their Māori names and Māori faces?” (p. 140).

One could assume that such shared experiences might bring South Asians and Māori together into something akin to allyship rather than the othering that sometimes occurs by both parties, as evidenced in the next section. As I explore in the following section, the forces of hegemonic whiteness act to prevent solidarity and promote a jockeying of positions within the Aotearoa social hierarchy.

Our Relative Positions to Māori and Pacific Peoples

As a reaction to colonialism and the neoliberal marketplace, there can be a societal expectation to maintain or increase our social capital to increase our financial capital. Or as Roberts and Mahtani (2010) describe, neo-liberalisation is considered a socioeconomic process. As discussed in Chapter Two, the neoliberal society is an economic hegemony forcing racialised others to ‘perform’ whiteness to ‘fit in’ to succeed economically. This phenomenon creates subject positions of the ‘good’ South Asian and ‘bad’ South Asian, thereby strengthening hegemonic whiteness. Sherlock seemed aware of this and described a phenomenon I, too, have experienced:

It’s like, oh, you’re one of the good ones, and the second, like, I don’t know if you’ve ever heard that phrase or been told something as nonsensical before, but it’s like no, man, my skin tone doesn’t impact anything.

This uncomfortable conversation attempts, through using a white lens, to pit one person against the stereotype of their race, dividing and conquering. In Chapter Two, I described the concept of hegemonic whiteness, of which the 'good/bad' South Asian is a key example. This dichotomy is not unique to South Asians in Aotearoa; Wetherell and Potter (1992) describe how racial discourses in Aotearoa construct Māori as "the theatrical figures of the 'good Māori', the 'extremist', the 'cannibal', 'the gentlemanly Māori' and so on." (p. 78). They reference Edward Said's work in the Western creation of Orientalism as the West using 'dramatic' figures to help define the Orient. These figures are not dissimilar to how Sherlock describes being 'one of the good ones', where 'good' South Asians are categorised as being closer to the hegemonic centre and are therefore more acceptable than 'bad' South Asians.

Elliott's margin/centre framework helps to understand the intertwined racialised nature of hegemonic whiteness, the model minority and the neoliberal marketplace (Davis, 2007; Jaskulowski & Pawlak, 2020). Here, 'good' migrants are model citizens and are held up as examples for 'bad' migrants, or in the case of Aotearoa, Pacific peoples, and even Māori, despite their tangata whenua status (Allen & Bruce, 2017; Ross, 2020; Simon-Kumar, 2014). Model minorities are those who are perceived to work hard without complaint, improve themselves for the sole benefit of improving their career prospects (and that of their children), and, more importantly, are used as an example to demonstrate that we live in a post-racist society despite evidence to the contrary (Bonilla-Silva et al., 2003). The jockeying of position in relation to the hegemonic centre enables some South Asian men to position themselves as 'good' in relation to not only 'bad' South Asians but also Māori and Pacific peoples. This theme reflects explicitly the social positioning that South Asian men undertake in relation to Māori and Pacific peoples. It explores negative and positive approaches and the benefits, which are not necessarily financial but often relate to social capital.

Unprompted, some participants describe their understanding of the relationship between Māori and society. Reflecting on his experience in South Africa, Alfie demonstrated an opinion that Aotearoa is following a similar approach to the post-apartheid regime in his

home country, where race-based legislation has been enacted as a reparative response to the apartheid era.

Everything's now directed towards the indigenous local. It's modified. If you want a government contract, you've gotta have a Māori director. South Africa went through a phase (Where you had to have) locals or blacks in as directors or made up more than 30% of your hierarchy. I don't believe it's fair in any respect, no matter where you are. Basing a job or a qualification on the colour of your skin.

The irony in the latter statement is that the legislation, both here and in South Africa, is a reparative reaction to race-based legislation. In South Africa, segregation and discrimination were enshrined in law, whereas in Aotearoa, discrimination is/was socially sanctioned, and discriminatory legislation is slowly being relaxed (Moewaka-Barnes & McCreanor, 2019). The State's relationship with Māori has changed over time, often influenced by the government of the day. At the time of writing, the current government has used legislation and rhetoric to roll back Te Tiriti embeddedness (Walters, 2024). Prior to this, recent history has seen, in some cases, a requirement for government contracts to be weighted towards Māori or Pacific peoples as an attempt to meet their obligations under Te Tiriti o Waitangi and to correct historical instances of socially sanctioned discrimination. This response by participants to these mitigations, positioning them as 'special' treatment of Māori and Pacific peoples, echoes Sartre's sentiment regarding the artificial stratification of society and how hegemonic whiteness forces all people of colour into roles that divide us. Such responses also demonstrate a misunderstanding of colonisation and Te Tiriti.

Continuing this theme, Clark argued that Aotearoa privileges Māori and Pacific peoples to the extent that other racialised peoples are disadvantaged:

So what one of the one of the problems I have with the way that they're approaching racial issues in New Zealand is that they're only approaching racial issues from a Māori and Pacifica perspective. So, Indians, and you know what I'll give, I'll throw my

Asian friends a bone here us we're really bottom of the barrel. Even today it is okay to say that Asian driver and it's still okay to make fun of Indian accents. No one will bat an eyelid.

Whilst this sentiment may seem understandable within a neoliberal, supposedly meritocratic framework, it is difficult to equate the health and income inequalities faced by Māori (Tobias & Yeh, 2007) with derision of Indian accents.

In the next statement, Clark compared two types of discrimination reinforced by his experiences at high school in Aotearoa. His comments suggest that Māori and Pacific people experience privilege at various levels of society:

Um, I also got told at school at high school that I was the wrong kind of brown for New Zealand, which implied that I was not Māori or Pacific Islander. Therefore, I was not going to be good at rugby, and if I'm not the right kind of brown for here. So yeah, it was all very surprising man and very harrowing.

Both situations described by Clark here sit within the broad framework of hegemonic (male) whiteness, and the jockeying of social position that South Asian men often do to approach the centre; rather than comparing one to the other, both can be linked back to a wider racist system.

The narrative that Māori and Pacific people somehow get preferential treatment is one perpetuated by various groups within society, such as Hobson's Pledge, which argues that policies aimed at Māori are discriminatory, granting preferential treatment based on race (Terruhn, 2019). This argument, taken out of historical context, ignores the health and economic inequalities that Māori and Pacific peoples face today (Tobias & Yeh, 2007) and is a version of reality that appears to be an easier concept for some participants to accept rather than confronting wider issues involving systemic discrimination. It is possible that the misplaced neoliberal ideology of meritocracy and the concept of the model minority combine to make it easier to scapegoat Māori and Pacific peoples rather than consider the disparity

between our perceptions of an egalitarian society and the realities experienced by racialised people in Aotearoa.

Counter to the idea that Māori and Pacific people somehow get preferential treatment was the narrative in participant accounts, recognising that all racialised others experience some sort of discrimination. Within these accounts was recognition that Māori have historically (and currently) been treated unfairly. Whilst the interviews did not explicitly explore the historic treatment of Māori in Aotearoa, the phenomenon occasionally came to the fore; the following extract reflected Joseph's expectations of life in Aotearoa and whether they had been met:

I remember one of the first conversations that I've had with somebody back in South Africa, and they said so what's it like? And I said genuinely it feels this is 2003 and not knowing some of the kind of you know under current issues and, sorry, I was going to say Urewera raids, but the Urewera raids happened later. But I said, oh, it feels quite egalitarian.

Coming from South Africa, Joseph had been exposed to what can be considered extremes in racial politics. Here, he simultaneously refers to his impression of Aotearoa as an egalitarian society and hints at understanding the complex social reality that discriminates against Māori and, in many ways, portrays them negatively unless serving neoliberal interests. By referencing the Urewera raids in this context, Joseph points to understanding the complex and subtle nature of state power and its discriminatory practice. The reference to 'under current issues' points to the complexity involved in calling Aotearoa egalitarian. In the following statement, Joseph relates a situation where he interviewed for a role which required an understanding of the Māori worldview. "And the woman who was there - Mana Kura, and she asked me some questions because I wasn't Māori enough." There did not appear to be any bitterness in retelling this experience, and ultimately, he was successful in being appointed to the role.

A certain amount of animosity would be understandable if Joseph had been unsuccessful due to not being 'Māori enough'. He recognised the positioning that diasporic South Asians find themselves in, having to constantly navigate their position in society:

But it's an interesting place because I understand it from South Africa, you know, pre apartheid, we weren't white enough, and then post-apartheid in this environment, we're not black enough. So, we're in the middle and the filling in the sandwich.

Some participants appear to be cognisant of the potential for discrimination based on ethnicity when the competition is other racialised people, reinforcing the activities that support hegemonic whiteness.

The recognition that Māori are disproportionately affected by discrimination was shared by Sherlock, who likens the way Māori are treated as a combination of Native Americans and African Americans.

Māori, people like I was telling one of my friends back home that the best way I can equate what I see with like that demographic is the equivalence of social issues that, forgive the term, but Native Americans experience back in the US as well as with the combination of what African Americans experience. It's kind of like some of the worst part about what both of those groups experienced in one group, which is kind of disheartening to see. But yeah, like a lot of social nuances.

For some, who initially experience trepidation with regards to Māori, positive interactions have led to shared relationships. In response to a question about relationships with Māori and Pacific Island people, Max describes finding a way to relate:

Up employees and approach them instead of being scared. I yes, I used to feel scared at first when I came here because of saying Māori are built quite different to us and they're huge. And yes, I used to get little scared from them at first, but I have a few Māori friends as well and they're quite nice and they're really good. So my presumption or I was being judgment at first, which is even like basic human nature

to presume same things. Yeah. So yeah. But as I got to know them, they were quite different and friendly and a lot of my Māori friends, they helped me out to settle here.

In response to questions that I had about changing names to make them easier to say, Max described how his Māori friends would make the effort to learn to say his name properly, contrasting with what might be thought of as a European tendency to whiten our names to fit in:

So, like I've said, I have few Māori friends, and they do tell me that. No, you keep your name because that's your identity. And yes, yes. And if you don't have to change yourself because Māori names are quite difficult for me to learn as well. But I'm willing to learn.

The views about Māori and Pacific people's place in society expressed by some participants lean towards South Asians accepting the manufactured hierarchical nature of society through their actions and thinking, reinforcing those artificial, yet tangible divisions that Sartre suggests come about as tools of the coloniser (Fanon, 2001). The alignment with whiteness or, at the very least, distancing oneself from the 'bad-other' helps move these participants closer to the hegemonic centre, accruing some of the benefits of both increased social and financial capital. The framing of these participants as 'one of the good ones', even if it is only a self-designation, reinforces the model minority myth, further demonising those minorities that do not measure up.

The latter examples demonstrate a 'pushing' back of that narrative where participants position themselves as looking for ways to ameliorate these issues. Whilst this does not exclude those participants from moving towards the hegemonic centre, it does demonstrate a nuanced understanding. The idea that they share similarities with other racialised peoples in Aotearoa might be seen as an act of resistance to the model minority myth and is more in keeping with the unrealised dream of Aotearoa as an egalitarian society.

Strategically Engaging with a System of Oppression

The previous theme discussed hegemonic whiteness, and some strategies participants use to locate themselves within it. This theme explores specific barriers to career advancement that participants navigate in Aotearoa and some of their strategies to overcome them. Barriers include minimising or not seeing discrimination in the employment market, the employment market devaluing tertiary qualifications from racialised countries, the ability to get job interviews, the discriminatory nature of the Aotearoa tertiary education system, and the neoliberal discourse surrounding individual achievement.

If it is not Overt, it does not Count

It is interesting to note that participants, in essence, did not recognise some forms of discrimination in the Aotearoa context, possibly because of their exposure to more overt forms of racism in their home countries. Although I deliberately avoided asking participants about racism, there were several instances where participants wove it into the conversation. In the first instance, it was a comment about caste, a concept I had not factored into the interview questions; later, it became a prompt if the conversation warranted it. As an example in response to a question about the future, Max posits a potential move to Australia. In exploring some of the societal differences between Aotearoa and Australia, I mentioned that I felt Australia had a history of race issues, to which Max responded:

That's one of the things that I want to just this quick one line. India's more racist compared to Australia; you don't hear that. So, I've been into the worst, I've been to the worst. Australia would be a piece of cake for me.

By comparing his experiences of overt racism in India to any potential racism faced here or in Australia, Max inadvertently minimises and normalises contemporary systemic racism. In turn, minimising systemic racism (or at least the effects on you) encourages movement toward the hegemonic centre because ill effects in the employment marketplace disproportionately affect the racialised other.

Unprompted, some participants referred to social hierarchy and how it had influenced their lives. Matt expands on the complexity of life in India and potential discrimination based on intersections of religion, caste, and class, and interestingly places himself apart from that discrimination:

It's just that over here it is with different countries, back home it's about different religions and different culture background, or even like if you are from different states or something. Yes. Again I have not experienced but I've seen it.

I think yes, you can differentiate clearly in India whether if you like, you know from upper caste or lower cast or whatever. It's also the jobs people do. I think it's a tradition as well, like if you're on from upper caste, there are certain jobs you do. If you're from lower caste then you only do like low level job, join your level jobs and these kind of things.

The normalisation of overt job discrimination by caste, religion, or class potentially allows for a perverse phenomenon for participants in Aotearoa, where some participants appeared to be unaware that discrimination might have affected them or accepted it as the norm. This behaviour can potentially perpetuate and reinforce the tenets of the neoliberal marketplace; it dismisses racism as a factor in career success and potentially demonises anyone complaining about racism. By accepting the neoliberal norm, participants in this study, who are in good economic and social positions, move closer to the hegemonic centre and inadvertently push anyone who does not conform out to the margins.

In Clive's case, both accepting that racism exists and dismissing that he may have been affected by it, "I think it's everywhere. It's everywhere. It's just not even in India, you'll have bias. That's human nature. I'm not denying that I might not have what I'm saying is it's not been very, very prominently out here."

By accepting that bias exists and normalising its effects, participants are placed in a position where they must uphold the tenets of the neoliberal marketplace or suffer the danger of being pushed closer to the margins and losing social capital. The effects of sunk cost are potentially at play here, where if one were to admit that they are affected by racism, they would then have to admit that the effort to reach this point had been wasted.

Clive concedes that discrimination, or bias, may be a factor in career progression, and due to the nebulous nature of the hiring process, we never know if we are affected by discrimination. However, his understanding is that he has not experienced the phenomenon.

A deciding factor. It might have been, which perhaps I may not have been aware of because certain things when you apply, you don't know what's going on in the other person's head and what other deciding factors. I don't think perhaps it may have been, but I have not experienced it.

New Zealand Work Experience is more Important than Education

A proportion of participants articulated the opinion that New Zealand work experience was more important than education when finding a job. This is despite the research discussed in Chapter 2 indicating that tertiary education increases both candidates' chances of employment and their economic well-being (Gaddis, 2015).

This perspective has most likely been brought about by early adverse experiences in the participants' job-hunting journey. For many participants, the value of their tertiary experience appeared to be discounted through discriminatory hiring processes, making it difficult to get an interview. Participants describe experiences where their tertiary education became more relevant once they acquired New Zealand experience. Reflected in Mikey's comments, "I realised. And you know, uh, it's more than education. You know, your skills are important in the New Zealand market."

The understanding that New Zealand-specific skills are more advantageous than those from South Asia is a symptom of selective hiring practices, were in the CV screening

process, hiring managers select candidates with familiar cultural backgrounds or points of connection (Cornell & Welch, 1996), or where they perceive congruence between a candidate (potentially indicated by local work experience) and the role or organisation (Derous & Ryan, 2018). The fact that participants' non-New Zealand education requires an offset of Aotearoa experience for them to succeed is in direct opposition to the stated ideals of the neoliberal marketplace.

And it was hard. I mean, I was finding it hard to get my first job. Which I was already aware of before joining this course, like to find your first job is quite hard. But after that, when you have experience, it becomes quite easy. So, I was looking for jobs, and you won't believe it. I applied for like 150 jobs across the country. Max

The discounting of Max's education from a South Asian University, along with his South Asian work experience, demonstrates how this happens. In this case, he applied for 150 jobs around the country and was willing to relocate, making him an ideal neoliberal employee, but this did not guarantee his success.

I think that was the difference which I noticed in New Zealand and is education qualification is not that important when you go for interviews like I know when people go to India and like for interviews; they'll take all their mark sheets from their high school and the university and then this certificate and that certificate. Whereas over here, you just submit your resume and, on the day, just go empty-handed; all they care about is your attitude and work experience. Matt

Employers' focus on New Zealand-specific experience further marginalised these participants. Within their accounts, participants spoke about their situation changing after getting enough New Zealand experience, where they became more employable and their education became acceptable. This signified a shift within their stories of moving from the margins closer to the hegemonic centre.

Participants' claims to Aotearoa employers' requirements for local experience was often bolstered with stories of friends who experienced similar rejections.

I initially struggled to get a job here because of the rejections I kept getting. It is that you do not have local work experience, and the same thing happens with my friends now as well. One of our friend's wives is here, and she's into marketing, and she's applying for jobs. The negative feedback she's getting is because she doesn't have a local experience. Matt

The idea that New Zealand work experience is more important than education is perhaps an understandable stance by employers. Employers want to recruit someone they believe is likely to 'fit in' or will be culturally congruent with the organisation (Derous & Ryan, 2018). Recruitment is a resource-intensive process, and the consequences of getting it wrong will likely be detrimental to the organisation. The neoliberal marketplace is predicated on the free movement of labour worldwide, where skills, education and experience are constructed as driving factors. Here, the previous three participants described their advanced education as going unrecognised or having a minimal effect on their employment chances. This seemed to lead to poor initial employment outcomes for the South Asian men in this research. Many participants, through economic necessity and a need to obtain New Zealand work experience, took what would be considered entry-level positions despite holding advanced degrees. This phenomenon is not uncommon; research involving the US employment market suggests that tertiary education from elite universities has unequal employment outcomes for Black Americans versus whites, with Black graduates from elite universities only doing as well as white graduates from lesser universities (Gaddis, 2015).

Participants' experiences give credence to the research that racial others are hindered by the stereotype linked to their phenotype, regardless of their qualifications. Participants in this study demonstrated that local work experience appears to mitigate risk for employers, resulting in incrementally better employment opportunities. Arguably, local work experience also acts to move them from the margins closer to the hegemonic centre.

With a Bachelor of Commerce and a Diploma in Food Technology from an Indian university, Nathaniel applied for an entry-level position at a large New Zealand company with intense competition. Arguably, Nathaniel was successful because of his tertiary education. However, the employment market was such that to enter the industry he wanted to work in, he was required to take an entry-level position despite his level of education. “I was one of 400 people at the interview, and yeah, kind of had that sinking feeling.”

The strategy of applying for entry-level positions whilst holding an advanced degree was successful and arguably the right choice for a migrant competing with the local workforce. This is an ideal neoliberal outcome - the market gets a highly educated person applying for an entry-level position. The illusion of the right choice is a result of a marketplace that devalues South Asian qualifications and experience, giving participants limited options or a limited number of right choices. The discrepancy lies in our expectations and what we are led to believe the opportunities an advanced degree should give us. Neoliberalism is presented as colour-blind, yet lived experience demonstrates otherwise.

Participants sometimes acknowledged that the employment market is competitive, and any additional skills, experience, or qualifications might lead to career success. Clive was pragmatic about the future, “I’ll have to get some skills under my belt more, and next year, see what it brings and then hopefully you know. Progress”

The idea that the neoliberal employment market rewards hard work, skills and qualifications pushes us all to monetise and/or take advantage of learning opportunities to increase our social standing. The ‘hustle’ participants described suggest they must work much harder than others to achieve the same employment rewards. The expectation that one more degree, course, or more local experience will achieve better outcomes benefits the neoliberal market and pushes people who comply closer to the hegemonic centre. However, as discussed in Chapter Two, racialised people must exert more effort in the hiring process than their white colleagues with similar qualifications.

The Hustle as a Strategy

The research is clear: bias is part of the hiring process (Lancee, 2019; Mace et al., 2005). As previously discussed, some participants recognise this and tailor their CVs to suit. Other strategies include a scattergun approach to sending out CVs, where participants apply for many jobs, even those they are not qualified for. Participants discussed that with relatively little effort, applying for many roles increased their employment chances. Mikey, Matt, and Alfie each had a story to tell about their job-hunting:

Then I had that idea. All right, so now something is there. Then I started searching for jobs. I started applying for an administrator role. I applied almost eight or nine times in Open Polytech. 9 times, I got rejected. 10th time they call me for an interview.

Mikey

And I had applied for about 50 other jobs prior to that. And I got all no's. Alfie

Oh, there were a lot. I don't remember how many I applied for, but some were quite senior roles as well. But you know there's no harm in trying these kinds of things.

Matt

In the case of Mikey's experience, repeatedly applying for roles with the same organisation is a strategy that worked. Whether it be a timing issue or hiring managers becoming familiar with the candidate's details is unclear. The descriptions provided by all three indicate that the job application process is more than just a numbers game. It required time and effort on behalf of the applicants to find suitable jobs, follow the application process, and have the mental fortitude to power on despite rejection. Their actions appear predicated on the idea that the application process is fair and transparent, and that hard work will win out, with contrary evidence ignored or explained away. This is evident in Matt's comments in previous sections regarding the requirement for New Zealand work experience.

A cycle of behaviour is created in the screening process where hiring managers, confronted by hundreds of resumes, will likely respond bluntly, taking the smallest

opportunity to discard applications. Hiring managers' tactics or practices somewhat explain the research results on blind CV testing or devaluing non-Western qualifications (Adamovic, 2022; Derous & Ryan, 2018). This compounds issues faced by South Asian men entering the Aotearoa employment market, justifying the scattergun approach. US evidence suggests that ethnic minorities must complete 50% more job applications to get the same number of job interviews as an equally qualified ethnic majority (Zschirnt & Ruedin, 2016, as cited in Derous & Ryan, 2018).

A further example is Joseph's case; with South African diplomas in theology and personal training management, he applied for what he thought was a training manager role (it turned out to be a vacuum cleaner sales position), "So, the job was for a training manager, and in my desperation, I took it. I was just hustling."

The drive to work (partly because his partner had got the first job she applied for) meant that Joseph was looking for any opportunity that fit within his skillset, or in his own words, hustling! The vacuum cleaner sales role lasted a week, leading to a call centre role that did not last long either. When another of the many roles he had applied for came through for the local church, he was at first reluctant but, "And my initial response was not on your life. I don't want to touch that with a barge pole, but I just thought, man, nobody's offering me a job. I've got about 60 rejection letters."

Although we did not explore his reaction to working for the local church, the illusion of choice is pertinent; he had applied for various roles despite some not being acceptable, and choice was a luxury he did not have.

For Joseph, the 'hustle' meant looking for opportunities and, in some ways, modelling the 'good' neoliberal worker by taking on more work:

So, as you do, you go looking for other stuff to supplement that. I found a training company that had a 20-hour role on offer. And I thought, yeah, great. So, in total,

there'll be 50 hours. It's just up my alley. You know, who wants to do a 37 and 1/2 hour week?

Although Joseph's early employment in Aotearoa pre-dates the widespread advent of digital platforms, the hustle he talks about and, to one degree or another, each participant experiences demonstrates similarities with the gig economy. Defined by Woodcock and Graham (2020) as "labour markets that are characterised by independent contracting that happens through, via, and on digital platforms" (p. 10), the hustle reflects a response to the precarity of employment that participants have faced. Applying for multiple roles and, in Joseph's case, being employed by multiple employers helped with getting Aotearoa experience, making participants more employable and, in turn, continuing the cycle.

The inequalities that most people, and particularly those racialised, face in the employer/employee relationship encourage participants to hustle and make employment decisions they may not have had to make in their home country. For example, Mikey tried applying for roles he felt were commensurate with his qualifications and experience, which was not unreasonable given that he was a lecturer at an Indian university in his chosen field. In this case, rather than being subject to discrimination, local conditions in the Aotearoa tertiary sector prevailed, meaning he was underqualified to teach in a university. In the end, he aimed much lower to get into his chosen industry and planned to climb once he was there, "Yeah, but if you want to work with the university, you must have a PhD degree. So, don't apply for the university role; concentrate on Polytech's. You apply for an admin coordinator kind of role."

In this case, understanding the rules or conventions required local advice, forcing a pivot to a role he believed would develop his prospects. Despite the injustice of being unable to secure a job in your chosen career or at the level you would expect, there can be benefits to widening your field of Aotearoa experience. In reference to migrants and the precarity of digital platform work, it is common for migrants to take up opportunities that can improve prospects (van Doorn et al., 2023). Although no participants related experiences working for

a digital platform, the idea of getting work experience stands, even if it is not in your field. Alfie took a role unrelated to his mechanical engineering qualifications, “So, I ended up becoming a property manager for apartments here in Albany,”. This role eventually allowed him to build a successful business servicing properties across Auckland, indicating to him that the hustle is a valuable strategy for not only making ends meet, but also potentially for later financial and entrepreneurial success.

Getting Aotearoa work experience through low-barrier-to-entry roles is an essential tactic of the hustle. Participants use these as stepping stones to better roles and, in some cases, to bolster their careers, as in the case of Max with working in an industry not strictly aligned with his qualifications, “Uh, I was not learning enough. I was just doing the repetitive work; I was also missing my side of doing engineering. So, I was constantly looking for another job”.

The hustle is partly fed by participants who struggle with the cost of living, especially when working in low-barrier-to-entry roles, which may not pay well. Taking on extra jobs or jumping to another role is not uncommon. Clark’ described this “Yeah, I'd say the cost of living is probably the biggest thing, but also it's a, you know, there's not, there's lack of opportunities and to get ahead is very difficult here, whereas it isn't as much in Australia.”

There was an assumption that ‘the grass is greener, over there’, which was potentially the driver for Clark migrating to Aotearoa in the first place, which fits the neoliberal ideal that the marketplace self-regulates because employees go where they can achieve the best economic and social outcome. Max expressed similar ‘gig economy’ sentiments “So I used to work some extra like side job as well. To earn some money so that it shows good in my. Bank account and I'm saving for the future to get a house”.

The drive for self-improvement sat alongside a drive to increase income so participants could bring family to Aotearoa, as in Mikey’s case:

But with my current role, you know, I won't be in a position to bring them. So that really made my move to [employer]. Luckily, I got the offer. With working with [employer], you know I could bring my family.

Changing jobs to seek better roles and an increase in salary is not unique to South Asian men; it is a common strategy. The problem faced by South Asian men is that their starting point is much lower than their education suggests, and the opportunities to be discriminated against are high. These factors result in a complex set of conditions, making the 'hustle' essential to their ideas of self and financial security. Another hustling strategy that stood out was engaging with the tertiary sector in Aotearoa to further approximate their closeness to the hegemonic centre.

Tertiary Education in Aotearoa

For non-citizens, the tertiary education system in Aotearoa can be costly; not only are participants paying full price for their education, but as a condition of their visa, they tend to be limited in the amount of paid work they can undertake. Full fees mean that some migrants are forced to enrol in tier two or three tertiary providers, education providers whose qualifications are not rated as highly as those of established Aotearoa universities. This often incurs debt that the qualification may not justify, which hinders future job prospects.

Rather than being part of the solution to ameliorating discriminatory practices in the Aotearoa marketplace, some participants describe cases where tertiary education providers embrace the neoliberal ideals, providing higher education services at full price that do not serve the needs of immigrants in Aotearoa. One participant (Peter) astutely pointed out that international students have an important yet largely invisible part to play, "We are basically sponsoring the education of every university.". Peter's experiences indicate that the tertiary education system contributes to unequal outcomes. As an example of the hustle, he was working 12-hour shifts and studying for a second Aotearoa qualification at the time of the interview. His first tertiary qualification was from a tier two tertiary institution, where he paid

full price for a course that did not help him in his career. In hustling for a better financial outcome, Peter undertook a tertiary qualification and contributed to the economic well-being of Aotearoa, only to experience a neoliberal marketplace that devalued his qualifications. His experience might have been different if his qualification had been from one of the eight Aotearoa universities. He goes on to relate this view of the neoliberal marketplace and dismisses racism as the cause of the gap between the stated tenets of neoliberalism and the lived experience of participants.

Oh, things are quite hard here, like, in terms of job prospects.

I won't say it's because of racism, but just because the thing is, it's a different culture, right? And also, when we come to New Zealand, we don't get the best education because we have to go to secondary third, second-tier or third-tier colleges. Oh, and then when we don't get the best education, we don't get the best opportunities. So yeah, things are a bit hard.

The corollary to this point of view is that universities support and help their students, with a few participants leaning on their connections within the university to ease the transition to a new country or provide career advice post-qualifications. In what appears to be a shift towards the hegemonic centre, Max's experience with the university was exemplary, where the university facilitated virtually every part of the process of coming to Aotearoa:

I think he liked me and that's why I got into this course and I was also given a scholarship. So that was a cherry on top. So yeah, that was really nice for a student and most of the things that like student visa. Getting sorted out for New Zealand like opening a bank account and all that. That helped me, and that representative helped me out.

When Mikey was struggling to get into his chosen industry, friends suggested he approach his university advisor:

Why can't you meet your Massey advisor? You know just be with them. Just book an appointment. So, I booked an appointment and went back. I got an appointment two days later. I went to him. He was such a nice person. We had a conversation, I had just finished my study. I just wanted to apply for an I wanted to have a full time work opportunity.

At this point, the advisor talked him through a strategy that enabled Mikey (through perseverance) to obtain a role within a tier-two tertiary organisation. With the neoliberal marketplace in mind, tertiary institutions are compelled to support their students in the job market; what is apparent here is that Aotearoa qualifications carry more weight than South Asian qualifications.

Although critical of the effectiveness of tertiary qualifications, Clive had positive views of the skills you can obtain, "It doesn't teach us anything. It just makes us critical thinkers. That's the intention of education, anyway. So, it's kind of critical thinking and perhaps adding okay, why is this happening, and what can I do?".

For all, bar one of the participants, tertiary providers played a critical role in their lives, and whilst acceptance of their overseas qualifications by Aotearoa employers appears to be arbitrary, there is little doubt that participants would be worse off without it. However, Aotearoa tertiary institutions could do more to recognise the neoliberal forces experienced by racialised students and help equip those students with tools to help in a racist employment market.

It's Probably my Fault

As discussed in Chapter Two, one of the underlying lies of the neoliberal marketplace is that it is a meritocracy. With meritocracy being the dominant narrative, individuals who experience failure or are not 'successful' within this system have limited choices. They either work harder (the hustle), blame someone else (model minority theory) or blame themselves. This section focuses on the latter 'choice'.

A common mantra of neoliberal rhetoric is that we live in a post-racist world and work in a race-blind marketplace. This rhetoric can lead participants to underestimate or minimise the employment barriers in front of them, thinking that if they have the right qualifications, the way will be open to them. When we internalise neoliberal thinking, any failure of the individual to succeed can be considered a personal failure rather than a failure of the system (Jaskulowski & Pawlak, 2020).

In the case of Clive, who has multiple degrees, including a Master's, he described his perception of a lack of barriers to progression. Here, he reproduces neoliberal rhetoric to explain his place in the employment hierarchy, internalising the situation as being his 'choice'. In response to a question about progression, he stated, "Nothing is stopping me in terms of progress, and that's totally my choice and my liking. Which path I'd like to take, and I believe I can go into leadership roles when I'm ready. So, there's nothing stopping me.".

This illusion of choice is not only a response to the broader neoliberal discourse of individual responsibility but also links to the idea that South Asian men have agency in the employment marketplace. It is a response to living in an individualistic culture that encourages individuals to be "independent of influence from others, society, or social norms in their decision-making processes or choices" (Terry et al., 2017, p. 288). A culture that, in this case, normalises acting in a way that should bring career success (multiple degrees) but does not. Potentially, Clive's response is linked to the idea of 'sunk cost' where people invest in an unprofitable activity to the extent that it becomes unpleasant to acknowledge that they have made a mistake (Friedman et al., 2025), resulting in cognitive dissonance.

Harking back to a previous theme, the act of applying for hundreds of jobs makes you an ideal neoliberal actor, where hard work (the application process) is proof that you are working hard to overcome barriers in the employment marketplace. The neoliberal marketplace is predicated on working harder, making the right contacts, or some other nebulous activity that will get them to where they deserve to be. This manifests itself in

participants shouldering some of the responsibility for where they are now, demonstrated by Peter and Nathaniel:

I think you know, I think I should have done more for myself and my career.” Yeah, but I need to work on it myself. I need to go out of my comfort zone and work on this. It's like no one can help me do this. It's on me. The onus is on me. Peter

I guess the Sky's the limit if you for what you want to do, you have to be willing to put in the effort and everything else. But, you have to be willing to put in the effort and have the talent or capability of doing what you want to do. Nathaniel

The tendency to blame oneself for a lack of career progress is a narrative supported by neoliberal ideals that individualise success and failure. The internalising of blame instead of looking to systemic causes also allows individuals to blame the economic failure of others on their lack of work ethic, which is reflected in the previous theme exploring participant relationships with Māori and Pacific peoples.

In an interesting example of self-serving bias combined with the neoliberal mantra of individual responsibility, Peter references a quote attributed to Jim Rohn, “You are the average of the five people you spend the most time with”. Regardless of whether the quote holds any validity, Peter uses this statement to blame his network and himself (for not having a better network) for his lack of career success:

And they have their own ideas of success and failure and stuff like that. And when you mix with them a lot, You sort of. Like you know how they say you are the average of five people around you.

On the surface, this is a common thread of having to improve yourself, and so if you are not successful, it is likely because you are not ready:

What I have found is you need to be out there. To sell yourself. Clive

You know, some people give up easily, and you have to put in the, you know, effort to you know it's not an Asian kind of attitude one should come with. You know. Clive

This theme relates to structural discrimination in the employment market. It centres around some of the barriers that participants experienced and some strategies they used to overcome those barriers. The idea that the neoliberal marketplace is colourblind, because neoliberalism rejects identity (Davis, 2007), is explored and ultimately rejected through exploring participant narratives. The neoliberal discourse encourages individuals to blame their lack of success on their own inability to succeed, rejecting any suggestion that systemic discrimination is at work. Activities or strategies participants use to engage with the system, inadvertently support it, for example, where participants apply for low-barrier-to-entry jobs, they reward employers who are able to employ highly skilled migrants at a much lower rate of pay.

Admitting that systemic racism affects South Asians, conceivably gives up proximity to the centre and potentially categorises South Asians as other, which is at odds with the model minority stereotype. For the South Asian men in this study, the narrative has been that either a lack of individual effort is to blame for a stalled career, or they need to work harder to achieve career success.

When the contemporary narrative is that Aotearoa is an egalitarian society, the absence of overt racism experienced by participants can imply an absence of racism, and so the only variables in their control are hard work and study; it is easy to see that failure to succeed can be internalised as a failure to work hard enough or get the right education.

Chapter 5: Summary and Conclusion

Summary

Broadly informed by social constructionism within a contemporary and historical context, this research project has used the theoretical lenses of hegemonic whiteness, othering, racial neoliberalism, and model minority theory in conjunction with Karla Elliott's margin/centre framework to analyse the career experiences of South Asian migrant men in Aotearoa, New Zealand. Using Braun and Clarke (2022) six-phase approach to reflexive thematic analysis, I constructed two themes that go some way to answering my research questions. Which were:

- A) How does hegemonic whiteness frame racism towards South Asian men in Aotearoa?
- B) To what extent do intersecting dimensions of hegemonic whiteness, gender, race, and ethnicity affect the ability of South Asian men to flourish in workplaces in Aotearoa?

South Asian Men and their Proximity to Whiteness, Māori, and Pacific Peoples

This theme explored the relationship between participants and Māori / Pacific peoples. Informed by historical context, this theme considers the influence on South Asian men of the colonial practice of forced societal stratification of colonised lands (Fanon, 2001). In the Aotearoa context, societal stratification can be broadly described as being along the lines of hegemonic whiteness, which describes how inter- and intra-racial hierarchies are sustained as the dominant ideology (Miller, 2022). Analysis of participant narratives, in relation to hegemonic whiteness, and the margin/centre framework, helped place their job-hunting activities and how they made sense of barriers to employment. A key concept in understanding participant narratives relative to hegemonic whiteness is the hegemonic negotiation to distinguish oneself from (in this case) the racialised other (Connell, 2005; Terry & Braun, 2013). Participants described this negotiation in several ways: 1) some with

European accents (unprompted) pointed out the benefits of looking Indian but not sounding like it, 2) having an anglicised name helps with the CV screening process, and 3) some described negative attitudes towards Māori, suggesting that Māori experience preferential treatment by the Aotearoa government.

A final component for consideration is the inextricable link between race, neoliberal dogma, and hegemonic whiteness, which raises concerns about the widespread normalisation of the neoliberal agenda and the harm it does to anyone racialised as other. By suggesting that neoliberalism is positioned as the 'common sense of our time' and that the market is in control (Skilling, 2016) suggests that people tend to remove agency, thereby allowing injustice. Society allows a similar phenomenon when people subscribe to the construction of the model minority stereotype, and how it conflicts with other common South Asian stereotypes, such as the overqualified Uber driver, the menacing terrorist, or the entrepreneurial small business owner. Stereotypes affect how we are treated, and for participants, become a site for contention in the margin/centre framework.

Strategically Engaging with a System of Oppression

This theme explored specific barriers to career advancement that participants navigate in Aotearoa and some of their strategies to overcome them. Firstly, minimising or not seeing discrimination in the employment market. This minimisation is partly because mainstream Aotearoa does not tolerate overt racism, and partly because most participants have come from countries that do experience socially acceptable overt racism. The unseen discrimination barrier encouraged participants to respond in ways, such as being flexible in location (moving to where the jobs are), and taking low-barrier-to-entry roles to gain local experience, resulting in future opportunities to work in their chosen career at a level that their skills and experience suggest.

Secondly, the employment market tends to devalue tertiary qualifications from racialised countries and those of racialised others (Yugendran, 2024). Participants' experiences

suggest that their qualifications are less valuable in the absence of local work experience; however, once they get local experience, employers appear to be more ready to accept those qualifications and hire appropriately.

Thirdly, participants would share strategies for increasing their job interview chances. It was not uncommon for participants to take a scattergun approach to job applications, applying for hundreds of roles on the off chance of getting an interview. Other strategies included anglicising their names and persistently applying for roles at the organisation they want to work for.

Next, the discriminatory nature of the Aotearoa tertiary education system as it applies to international students is such that they must pay full price for tertiary education with no guarantee that the qualification will achieve the economic benefits they had hoped. This is especially true when, for various reasons, international students have to apply to tier two and tier three tertiary institutions, where the qualification may not be as valuable as a qualification from the tier one universities.

Lastly, the neoliberal discourse that suggests the employment market is a meritocracy that does not see race, and valorises individual achievement, had the effect of personalising failure to achieve, with some participants blaming themselves for a lack of career success.

Theoretical Implications

Bringing together hegemonic whiteness and Elliott's margin/centre framework enabled the analysis to avoid using generic binaries. The ability to think about actions on a continuum helped understand the contestation that participants described in their Aotearoa career journey. Understanding that there is no single method for overcoming stereotypes, which may be founded in historical events or manufactured for political gain, will require flexibility in theoretical understanding that takes an intersectional approach to future projects that seek to understand this phenomenon.

Practical Implications

Understanding the potential barriers to employment allows applicants to control for those barriers, anglicising names, whitening CVs, and obtaining local work experience (through low-barrier-to-entry roles) are valid interventions. They do not, however, improve employment chances for future applicants. Therefore, some consideration must be given to systemic interventions that address stereotypes and the hegemonic nature of Aotearoa society. Given employers' important role in economic outcomes for South Asian men, some tangible action to address hiring manager bias is called for. Understanding the drivers that maintain neoliberal rhetoric as it relates to race, and then designing interventions to address those drivers, would go some way toward reducing the harm that South Asian men face in the Aotearoa employment market.

Limitations and Future Research

This research project was designed to help understand an under-researched social group that is economically doing well but remains on the margins. It is common to hear about the career experiences of the white majority in a positive manner, whereas the racialised other is often reported in deficit. Some of the limitations of this research involve my role as a partial insider (of South Asian descent and a migrant to Aotearoa), but acting mainly as an outsider, being culturally white. Future research projects could be vastly different by having a different relationship with the South Asian community in Aotearoa. Any future work in this field would benefit from a more participatory approach, perhaps embedding the researcher within a South Asian community group.

The corollary to this is that, while it can be viewed as a limitation, my proximity to whiteness allowed me to draw parallels with my own experience, and I also came to the research project without truly understanding the historical divisions within the South Asian community (including caste and religion), allowing an inquisitive naivety to participant

conversations. Arguably, participants opened up to me in ways that they would or could not do with a white or younger researcher.

I would also like to see future research explore the concept that South Asians, regardless of their social or economic status, continue to serve imperial desires, something echoing an earlier theme iteration along the lines of '*Sahib to servant, a relationship that persists*' - exploring internalised racism that has come about through imperialistic colonisation, as opposed to the settler colonisation in Aotearoa. In doing so, I hope that societal views of South Asians will change to allow an equitable approach to careers and how South Asians are perceived in Aotearoa society.

Lastly, I believe that developing a framework to bring together hegemonic whiteness, hegemonic masculinity and neoliberalism as an analysis tool to understand the lived experience of racialised others would vastly benefit the understanding of how the masculine racialised other navigates contemporary society.

Conclusion

South Asians have been (and continue to be) adversely affected by a myriad of stereotypes that place us at the margins alongside a neoliberal marketplace that encourages us to push towards the hegemonic centre regardless of how it affects us and those around us. South Asian men are seen alternately as valuable labour units and a scourge on society, which is a duality that is reflected in popular media; it forces South Asian men to perform whiteness or suffer the consequences. A valid tactic for both economic and social success is for South Asians to be better at performing whiteness, but to do so perpetuates the margin-centre narrative and ultimately maintains the centre as white.

Participants (including myself) in this project have demonstrated that they can and do succeed despite and in part because of the barriers arrayed against them. The nature of critical theory suggests that even though South Asian men are effectively damned if they do,

and damned if they do not, their actions and further understanding of the issues move society in a generally positive direction.

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Appendix A



Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee (AUTEC)

Auckland University of Technology
D-88, Private Bag 92006, Auckland 1142, NZ
T: +64 9 921 9999 ext. 8316
E: ethics@aut.ac.nz
www.aut.ac.nz/researchethics

AUT

TE WĀNANGA ARONUI
O TĀMAKI MAKĀU RAU

4 November 2022

Irene Ryan
Faculty of Business Economics and Law

Dear Irene

Re Ethics Application: **22/295 Masculinity and racism: Exploring the career experiences of South Asian men in Aotearoa**

Thank you for providing evidence as requested, which satisfies the points raised by the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee (AUTEC).

Your ethics application has been approved for three years until 4 November 2025.

Non-Standard Conditions of Approval

1. Please resend the advertisement in A4 format.

Non-standard conditions must be completed before commencing your study. Non-standard conditions do not need to reviewed by AUTEC before commencing your study.

Standard Conditions of Approval

1. The research is to be undertaken in accordance with the [Auckland University of Technology Code of Conduct for Research](#) and as approved by AUTEC in this application.
2. A progress report is due annually on the anniversary of the approval date, using the EA2 form.
3. A final report is due at the expiration of the approval period, or, upon completion of project, using the EA3 form.
4. Any amendments to the project must be approved by AUTEC prior to being implemented. Amendments can be requested using the EA2 form.
5. Any serious or unexpected adverse events must be reported to AUTEC Secretariat as a matter of priority.
6. Any unforeseen events that might affect continued ethical acceptability of the project should also be reported to the AUTEC Secretariat as a matter of priority.
7. It is your responsibility to ensure that the spelling and grammar of documents being provided to participants or external organisations is of a high standard and that all the dates on the documents are updated.
8. AUTEC grants ethical approval only. You are responsible for obtaining management approval for access for your research from any institution or organisation at which your research is being conducted and you need to meet all ethical, legal, public health, and locality obligations or requirements for the jurisdictions in which the research is being undertaken.

Please quote the application number and title on all future correspondence related to this project.

For any enquiries please contact ethics@aut.ac.nz. The forms mentioned above are available online through <http://www.aut.ac.nz/research/researchethics>

(This is a computer-generated letter for which no signature is required)

The AUTEC Secretariat
Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee

Cc: rory.chacko@gmail.com; Gareth Terry

Appendix B



Participant Information Sheet

Date Information Sheet Produced: 11 September 2022

Project Title: Exploring the career experiences of South Asian men in Aotearoa.

Hi, my name is Rory Chacko, and I am a South Asian migrant man. I would like to invite you to participate in research that contributes to the completion of a Master of Business. You may choose to participate or not, and if you choose to participate you may change your mind at any time without needing to give a reason. This research is entirely voluntary and will neither advantage nor disadvantage you.

What is the purpose of this research?

I am exploring the ways cultural ideals of masculinity and racism have impacted South Asian men when seeking employment in New Zealand. I would like to interview you to explore some of your life experiences both in your country of birth and in New Zealand. I want to discuss specific issues facing South Asian men.

Together we will explore your experiences of work and community in the country of your birth, and how different that may be from your experiences in New Zealand, reflecting on topics like work history, masculinity, and family life.

The findings of this research may be used for academic publications and presentations.

How was I identified and why am I being invited to participate in this research?

Recruitment for this study is restricted to English speaking men of South Asian descent. You have likely responded to an advertisement or someone who has read the advertising poster has suggested that you

take part. You are being invited because I believe that you will have valuable insight into the experiences of South Asian men in New Zealand.

How do I agree to participate in this research?

If you would like to participate, please email me at rory.chacko@gmail.com. There is a consent form that you will need to complete before we meet, which I will send to you once you email me.

Your participation in this research is voluntary (it is your choice) and whether or not you choose to participate will neither advantage nor disadvantage you. You are able to withdraw from the study at any time. If you choose to withdraw from the study, then you will be offered the choice between having any data that is identifiable as belonging to you removed or allowing it to continue to be used. However, once the findings have been produced, removal of your data may not be possible.

By signing the consent form you will be indicating that you are happy to take part in the study.

What will happen in this research?

This research project involves an interview between you and I, in a mutually agreed location. We may choose to carry out the interview online, this will require you to have read this information sheet and to give a recorded verbal consent prior to the interview proceeding. The interview is likely to take between 60 and 90 minutes, and it will be recorded for later transcription. The data will be used in my research thesis, and potentially for academic publications and presentations.

What are the discomforts and risks?

We will be exploring your experiences of migrating to New Zealand, concepts of masculinity, and obtaining work in your field of expertise. The interview allows you to share the experiences that you are willing to share, anything uncomfortable can be completely avoided. Specifically, you do not need to answer any question that may make you feel uncomfortable.

How will these discomforts and risks be alleviated?

In the first instance both of us are aware of the potential for an uncomfortable and trauma experience and will do our best to steer the conversation away from any topics that are causing distress.

Secondly, there are several free community-based counselling services including AUT's student counselling services as follows:

Lifeline Aotearoa - 0800 543 354 (0800 LIFELINE) or free text 4357 (HELP)

Youthline – 0800 376 633, free text 234, or email talk@youthline.co.nz or online chat at

<https://www.youthline.co.nz/web-chat-counselling.html>

Counselling services – 1737 Refugees as Survivors – 09 620 2252.

AUT Student Counselling and Mental Health is able to offer three free sessions of confidential counselling support for adult participants in an AUT research project. These sessions are only available for issues that have arisen directly as a result of participation in the research and are not for other general counselling needs. To access these services, you will need to:

- drop into our centre at WB203 City Campus, email counselling@aut.ac.nz or call 921 9998.
- let the receptionist know that you are a research participant and provide the title of my research and my name and contact details as given in this Information Sheet.

You can find out more information about AUT counsellors and counselling on

<https://www.aut.ac.nz/student-life/student-support/counselling-and-mental-health>

What are the benefits?

The benefits to you as the participant are mainly through the opportunity to have your story heard and acknowledged. The benefits to me as the researcher are twofold, the first is that this contributes to the completion of a Master of Business qualification along with any subsequent publications, and secondly hearing your story and stories of other South Asian men helps put my own story into perspective.

How will my privacy be protected?

Everything that we talk about will be held in strict confidence. All data that I gather will be used in my written work, with any identifiable information changed including names and locations, although generic place names will remain unchanged.

What are the costs of participating in this research?

This project will not cost you anything, other than your time for the interview.

What opportunity do I have to consider this invitation?

You will have a month to consider the invitation before you need to sign up, and during this time you are welcome to discuss as many questions or concerns you may have. I will send one reminder 2 weeks after I have sent this information sheet.

Will I receive feedback on the results of this research?

You will be fully informed throughout the process; I will share progress with you and ask for comments. At the end, you will receive a summary of the research project should you be interested.

What do I do if I have concerns about this research?

Any concerns regarding the nature of this project should be notified in the first instance to the Project Supervisor, Gareth Terry, gareth.terry@aut.ac.nz, (+649) 921 9999 ext 7764.

Concerns regarding the conduct of the research should be notified to the Executive Secretary of AUTEK, ethics@aut.ac.nz, (+649) 921 9999 ext 6038.

Whom do I contact for further information about this research?

Please keep this Information Sheet and a copy of the Consent Form for your future reference. You are also able to contact the research team as follows: rory.chacko@gmail.com

Researcher Contact Details:

Rory Chacko – rory.chacko@gmail.com

Project Supervisor Contact Details:

Gareth Terry, gareth.terry@aut.ac.nz, (+649) 921 9999 ext 7764.

Approved by the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee on **24/10/22**, AUTEK Reference number **22/295**.

Oral Consent Protocol

Project title: Exploring the career experiences of South Asian men in Aotearoa.

Project Supervisor: Dr Gareth Terry, and Dr Marcus Ho

Researcher: Rory Chacko

The participant joins the videoconference

Do you agree to my recording your consent to participate?

If they agree, then the record function will be activated, and they will be asked the following:

Have you read and understood the information provided about this research project in the Information Sheet dated 11 September 2022?

Do you have any questions about the research?

Do you understand that notes will be taken during the interviews and that the interview will also be audio-recorded and transcribed?

Do you understand that taking part in this study is voluntary (your choice) and that you may withdraw from the study at any time without being disadvantaged in any way.?

Do you understand that if you withdraw from the study then you will be offered the choice between having any data that is identifiable as belonging to you removed or allowing it to continue to be used? However, once the findings have been produced, removal of your data may not be possible.

Do you agree to take part in this research?

Do you wish to receive a summary of the research findings? (please tick one): Yes

No

Do you want me to send you a copy of the audio recording for this consent? Yes

No

Please confirm you name and contact details

Participants Name :

.....

Participants Contact Details (if appropriate) :

.....

I will now turn off the recording of the Consent and then will start a separate recording for the interview.

Approved by the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee on 24/10/22 AUTEC

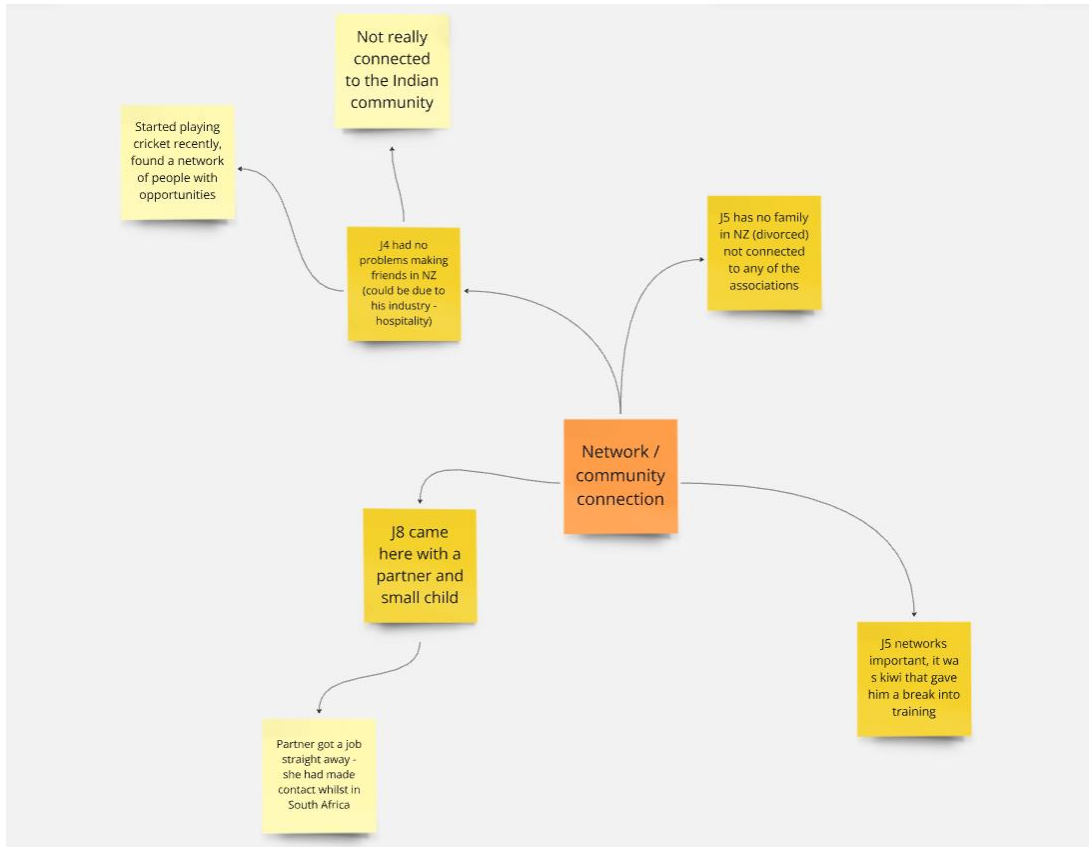
Reference number 22/295

Note: The Participant should retain a copy of this form.

Appendix C

Sample codes

Old Code	1	Disagregated codes 30/05/24	Code labels
Bureaucracy	2	Agencies actions that help/hinder	Agencies or actions by agencies that help the participant navigate bureaucracy
Career/qualification match	3	Employment that's congruent with qualifications	Situations where the participant is working in the career they trained for or not
	4	Low barrier to entry roles	Situations where the participant is working in a role that has a low barrier to entry because they are unable to get a role in their chosen career
	5	Employment at their level of education/experience	A judgement call as to whether participants roles are at the level they should be given their education and experience
Cost of living	6	Replace with Economically living differently	
Culture shock	7	Living in a small town	Articulated differences between where participants have come from and here, mainly from a cultural and opportunity point of view
	8	Economically living differently	This is based on differences in how they lived in their home country and how circumstances force them to live differently in NZ. Somewhat a placeholder for cost of living. Overlaps discussions around relative wealth.
	9	Acculturation	Conversations around the degree to which participants assimilate into NZ culture. Includes references to moving to Oz
CV whitening	10	Anglicising names	This relates to instances where participants have anglicised their names to make it easier for Kiwis to say it
	11	CV whitening	This relates to instances where participants have anglicised their names in recognising it will be beneficial in getting interviews. Or in some cases deliberately not changing their names or not concerned that it will make a difference.



Appendix D



ARE YOU AN ADULT MALE OF SOUTH ASIAN DESCENT?

WOULD YOU LIKE TO CONTRIBUTE TO A
MASTER'S THESIS AND MAKE A
DIFFERENCE?

Do you want to talk about what it is like getting a job in New Zealand?

I'm looking to interview South Asian men to learn more about your career experiences in Aotearoa.

For more information on the interview process please contact Rory Chacko, rory.chacko@gmail.com

Participants will be asked to participate in one-on-one interviews ranging from 60 – 90 minutes.

rory.chacko@gmail.com

AUTEC approved: 24/10/2022
AUTEC Approval number: 22/295



Appendix E

1) Tell me a little about your history, where do you come from, and how did you come to be in New Zealand?

Prompts

- What made you want to come to New Zealand?
 - Whereabouts in New Zealand do you live?
 - What challenges did you face prior to coming to New Zealand?
 - How have your expectations compared with reality?
- 2) I'm keen to hear about your family, where are your parents, brothers and sisters?
- 3) How do you see your role as a male – what does this mean to you?
- Prompts**
- Are there differences between being a man in New Zealand and being a man in your own country?
 - What is it that influences this view,
 - Do you see this being different in New Zealand?

4) Tell me about your formal education:

Prompts

- What were your favourite subjects at school?
- What formal qualifications do you have?
- How have you found your qualifications are accepted in New Zealand?
- Do you plan to continue your education in New Zealand?

5) Do you use a different name from the one you were born with?

Prompts

- If yes, can you tell me why?

6) Tell me about your work history:

Prompts

- What was the best job you worked in?
- Tell me about the people you worked with, and what where they like?
- What have your New Zealand work experiences been like, have you made friends with New Zealanders?

7) Tell me about getting your first job in New Zealand.

Prompts

8) Is there anything in New Zealand that you find hard to do?

Prompts

9) What are your plans for the future?

Prompts

- What sorts of things do you wish for your children?
- If you had unlimited money, what would you?

10) Is there anything else you would like to add or comment on?