THE SEX FACTOR:
MEDIA REPRESENTATIONS OF WOMEN AND MEN IN AUSTRALIA

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1 Introduction: Women as Cause – Media, Gender, Responsibility

Janine Little

By the time Australian Prime Minister Julia Gillard’s parliamentary speech about sexism in the lower house (and the misogynist across the table) had given Australia its fifteen minutes of fame as a hit American news item, it had grown old here.1 How could Australia’s media report that Opposition Leader Tony Abbott was a misogynist, after all, when there were contenders in its own ranks for the taking of that crown? Women journalists knew the Australian media industry for its ‘boys club’ newsroom cultures2 and ‘knitting circle’3 attitudes to their work: some journalists today attest to encountering the same embedded ideology across the corporate and public institutions they deal with in the daily push to work contacts and produce stories for multiple media platforms.4 While this determinedly masculinist culture had a weary repertoire of news frames and language constructs to greet Australia’s first woman Prime Minister, it was not prepared for the public backlash at the radio star who used the death of her father to take a shot at her leadership performance during a Young Liberal Party dinner in Sydney.

Radio 2GB shock jock Allen Jones’ callous reference to PM Gillard’s late father5 had to reign supreme as an example of vitriol hurled her way almost certainly because she was a woman: it is difficult to imagine Mr. Jones being so publicly (yet so personally) offensive to the former Prime Minister John Howard, for example. Or, to cater for preferential party bias, to former PMs Keating or Hawke: nor, indeed, to any or all of Australia’s former Prime Ministers, all of them men. That crunch of numbers would, in itself, be expected to inform at some point the editorializing assessments by any journalist of PM Gillard’s performance. However, as Allen Jones had argued years earlier during the ‘Cash for Comment’ controversy over his free plugs for positive radio commentary about commercial enterprises paying him to do so, he is not a journalist. Jones insisted then that he was an entertainer.6 The Young Liberal Party must have concurred, even if the journalists who surreptitiously recorded Jones’ speech at their dinner saw his comments about

3 This was a term used by some male journalists, senior and junior, in a Brisbane newsroom, where I worked during the 1980s and 1990s. It was a nickname referring to the space mostly occupied by reporters writing the fashion and ‘soft’ features on lifestyle. But some women also covered general news, courts, and police.
the Prime Minister as more a matter of public interest than jocular repartee. The Opposition Leader was there, after all, as were other aspirants to hold public office in Australia.

As PM Gillard pointed out in her internationally lauded and justifiably acerbic parliamentary speech a few days later, it was party bias that had put Allen Jones at the Young Liberals dinner where he made his now notorious comments. Ironically, both Mr. Jones and Mr. Abbott had castigated PM Gillard in the recent past for what they described as her many failings of responsibility. She was mainly responsible, according to Mr. Abbott, for the conduct of the disgraced former Speaker of the House of Representatives Peter Slipper and his text messages to a former staffer. Fortunately, PM Gillard did not attempt to argue the point on Tony Abbott’s turf. Instead, her speech to parliament honed in on exactly this notion of ‘responsibility’, how it is gendered especially in Australian political and media circles, and how it tends to be mobilized by patriarchal interests seeking to assert dominance over women by compelling them to accept responsibility, usually for events or phenomena that are out of their control. Gillard told the Federal Parliament that in doing so Mr. Abbott was:-

Always wonderful about that – everything that I should take responsibility for, now apparently including the text messages of the Member for Fisher. Always keen to say how others should assume responsibility, particularly me.

Well can anybody remind me if the Leader of the Opposition has taken any responsibility for the conduct of the Sydney Young Liberals and the attendance at this event of members of his frontbench?

Has he taken any responsibility for the conduct of members of his political party and members of his frontbench who apparently when the most vile things were being said about my family, raised no voice of objection? Nobody walked out of the room; no one walked up to Mr Jones and said that this was not acceptable.

Instead of course, it was all viewed as good fun until it was run in a Sunday newspaper and then the Leader of the Opposition and others started ducking for cover.

Big on lectures of responsibility, very light on accepting responsibility himself for the vile conduct of members of his political party.

And was not that the point to make, generally, about sexism and misogyny across Australia’s institutional, social and professional spheres?

Substitute the word ‘team’, or ‘newsroom’, or ‘platoon’, or ‘club’, or other nominative institution or group characterised by men’s historic assumptions of power, and the Prime Minister’s speech rings just as true. That is at least what the general public celebration – albeit by women and pro-feminist men – of PM Gillard’s stance tells us about the lived, quotidian experience of women in

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However, the mainstream media reaction and interpretation of the speech was a curious thing; it did not reflect the social network’s luminous support of the Prime Minister taking to Mr. Abbott’s double standard with a blunt instrument. The Australian news media generally acted as though it was not in the same room as others who heard what was said in parliament that day. Words like ‘desperate’ and ‘unconvincing’ peppered the celebrity columnists’ reviews; even the veteran political reporter Michelle Grattan, as the ABC’s Media Watch pointed out, could not acknowledge the significance of the first woman Prime Minister putting her finger on a long Australian tradition in which sexist ideology enabled maneuvers designed to blame women for systemic problems as well as discrete acts of violence or abuse that were, in fact, the responsibility of men. It was disturbing that prominent Australian political commentators took this line and, as host Jonathan Holmes said during Media Watch’s analysis of the media’s coverage of PM Gillard’s speech, also incongruent with public experience. Journalists had plenty serious to worry about, according to Holmes, if they continued to demonstrate how ‘out of touch’ they were with the people they purport to serve; not the least of which was the problem of how they expected people to pay to access irrelevant media content. This was a material threat to the future of newspapers, in particular, but the speeches both acclaimed (Gillard) and infamous (Jones) marked associated sociocultural and historical threats, too.

The media’s own reproduction of sexist ideology through its coverage of some of Australia’s most controversial issues had been an historical given that could no longer be subsumed by the daily scream of news headlines. In a digitized communication landscape, the reification of men in news and current affairs stories as ‘natural’ leaders, stars, heroes and intellects looks increasingly like an ‘old school’ appeal to a new media community. And yet, as the essays in this collection show, the Australian media’s adherence to such paradigms is both historically entrenched and institutionally supported. It is not just the word choices, news frames, source selections and tacit assumptions contained within particular samples of media representation that need to be challenged. These, indeed, have been challenged, through the sustained scholarly work of media and cultural studies scholars (Thornham, 2007, Byerly and Ross, 2006, Lumby, 1997, Bonner and McKay, 2006, Cotter, 2011),(Byerly and Ross, 2006, Thornham, 2007, Lumby, 1997) as well as, more recently, some journalism academics. Studies have focused on some of the more glaring cases of injustice and inaccuracy that have resulted from overgeneralizing the degree to which women’s equal opportunity initiatives have changed things, politically and materially, for the majority of Australian women. In this collection of four essays, what is unique about our approach is our multidisciplinary perspective – two from sociology, two from journalism, and one from


10 ibid.
literary studies -- on a selective set of high profile cases of the media representation of women as cause of not only their own misfortune, but of broader social malaise as well.

In The Pact, Flinders University sociologist and former Australian infantry soldier and military investigatory Ben Wadham focuses on the way that the military establishment deals with scandal. He highlights the case of the female naval cadet who blew the whistle on the Skype sex video incident in which she was filmed having consensual sex with a male colleague. ‘Kate’ did not know about the filming, nor the fact that four other men were in an adjoining room watching the ‘event’ as part of a rite of passage into life in the defence forces. The case made national news headlines when ‘Kate’ went to the media with her story, prompting a full-scale investigation by the Australian Defence Force Academy authorities. But the Australian media has not, as Wadham observes, generally held the military culture that condones the exploitation of women recruits in male bonding rituals to any sustained account. The shared patriarchal interests of the military and the mainstream, corporate media machines temper its questions and pursuits.

As Bob Pease shows in his essay, Holding Men Accountable: Where Are The Men In Media Accounts of Prostitution, the propensity of the Australian media is to hold women responsible for the sexual proclivities of society, generally. However, it is up to women to make ‘lifestyle choices about sex work as a legitimate job’, rather than society’s moral obligation to deal with the actual elements driving the sex industry. Women in prostitution are also represented, according to Pease, as victims to be rescued, meaning that prostitution has become a battleground between women who want to abolish it and those who defend sex workers’ rights. However, in the media coverage of these divisions, the men who drive the demand for the sex trade are rendered invisible. They are not responsible, as it were, for women’s choices nor for their own ‘natural needs’ (which are left unmentioned). Pease’s analysis of newspaper coverage of prostitution shows how competing representations of prostitution in newspapers have contributed to confusion among people about these issues. They focus on the different views by women about whether all forms of prostitution should be linked to sex trafficking and whether prostitution itself is exploitative of women. However, none of this coverage of either side of the debate addresses the demand side of prostitution: specifically, men who pay women for sex. It is as if the men who generate demand, who instigate the transaction, are without agency in the exchange while the objects of the transaction (the women) are invested with it.

This investment of ‘feminine’ agency in the otherwise disempowered subject of media representation is no more ostentatiously evident than in the high stakes world of American child beauty pageants. Cassandra Atherton, a literary theorist and creative writer, approaches the appearance of the child mannequins in the Australian media context with her analysis of the little

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11 ‘Feminine’ here indicates the problematised social construct with material effects for women experienced in multiple areas of life, including economic and emotional.
girl pageants, *Little Miss Perfect* and *Toddlers and Tiaras*. Her article argues that Australians’ investment in American cable television’s ‘full glitz’ children’s beauty pageants is evidence of the way in which Australia takes its cultural cues from the United States. Atherton shows that American beauty pageants, with the support of the Australian viewers of cable television, subversively endorse society’s demeaning stereotype of the perfect woman. Social commentator, Nina Funnell (2011:1) states that, ‘Equating a girl’s self-worth with her appearance is a dangerous and destructive game and one that the media encourages girls to play from a very early age.’ These little girls are women-in-training in a society condoning both the objectification of women and the expectation of women to have docile, pliant and artificial personalities. The final line up of ‘perfection’ on television shows like *Toddlers and Tiaras* and *Little Miss Perfect* underlines lingering gender inequality, with this mediatized idea of a female child as somehow in control of her situation and subjectivity. The same process of inverting the power relation by way of particular forms of media representation can be seen in the way that sex and sport are headlined.

Journalist and sports journalism scholar Peter Lorentzen revisits what is by gender studies as well as news standards now an old chestnut in Australian sporting infamy: his study of the rugby league group sex scandal that (briefly) ended the career of star player-turned-television personality Matthew Johns. In *A League of Extraordinary Gentlemen*, Lorentzen focuses on the significance of this story, its sports sex scandal precursors, and on the attempts by two of the women who encountered the National Rugby League juggernaut of publicity and power, to get the media to portray their side of the story fairly. Instead, the woman at the centre of the Matthew Johns ‘group sex’ scandal, ‘Clare’, was branded a liar and vilified by rugby league fans responding to the Australian Broadcasting Corporation’s *Four Corners* exposé, *Code of Silence* (2009) and a subsequent commercial TV current affairs show interview with Johns and his wife, Trish, by *A Current Affair* host Tracy Grimshaw.

Without the benefits of institutional support or media experience apart from her disguised appearance in ‘Code of Silence’, ‘Clare’ does not rebound from the ‘gang bang’ ritual that occurred in a New Zealand hotel room years earlier, while the Cronulla Sharks were on a training camp. But it is exactly the age of the psychological wound, and the lapse of time leading up to *Four Corners*’ investigation of sexual abuse and male bonding in rugby league clubs, that the commercial media and its very large public audience uses to discredit ‘Clare’, even as she insists that she did not consent to sex with more than one of the players involved. By contrast, the Queensland rugby league fan Charmayne Palavi’s appearance on the program is picaresque and open about ‘many’ sexual liaisons with players and about ‘hooking up’ girls with league stars via her Facebook page. For her candour and sincerity, Palavi is dubbed a ‘cougar’ and a ‘slut’ by Australia’s media and its readers and audiences. While this sexist and offensive reduction is in itself nothing new or noteworthy for a nation that has historical form in condemning ‘bad girls’ and ‘damned whores’.

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12 Lumby, 1999
it still matters because Palavi’s legal attempts to reset the media record continued right up until June this year.

The New South Wales Court of Appeal struck out Charmayne Palavi’s final bid to have a defamation case heard over a reader’s comment in a newspaper blog that labelled her a ‘slut’, because her case against a Sydney radio station had failed two months earlier. Palavi’s reputation, according to the implications that can be drawn from the initial 2010 court decisions dismissing her defamation action, had not been lowered by the particularly derogatory and insulting word. And besides, she had deleted text messages from a mobile phone that related to the cases against Radio 2UE and the Brisbane Courier-Mail. To cap off this quintessential demonstration of how women news subjects fare in relation to scandals of sex and sport, media reports of Palavi’s 2012 court losses were still calling her the NRL ‘Cougar’. Dignity and honesty in sexualized media representations of women in Australia are, as it turns out, tough to hold on to simultaneously. This was the case, too, for one of the women victims of crime featured in my essay in this collection, Passing the Banner: The Australian Media’s Coverage of High Profile Court Cases About Women. Up until just before Christmas 2010, Dianne Brimble was known across the nation and parts of the world as the woman who died taking drugs, drank alcohol and had sex with a group of strangers on a cruise ship. An official Coroner’s Inquest finding that she was drugged without her consent (most likely by a spiked drink) so that a group of men could use her for their own sexual gratification restored dignity to Dianne Brimble’s memory, and some peace to her family.

It was eight years after her awful death on the floor of a men’s cabin on board a cruise ship that Dianne Brimble’s story, one of the biggest in Australia’s media history, was set straight. Reports of her death and the subsequent coverage of an inquest and an aborted criminal trial against one of the men who was with her on the night that she died had until then tended to point the finger of suspicion her way. The essay shows that this penchant for suspecting the victim or the woman who happens to be in the wrong place at the wrong time was at its flashpoint for Australian public opinion with the Chamberlain case. Lindy Chamberlain became, as Ken Crispin, her QC at the Royal Commission into the long, drawn out saga around the disappearance of her baby daughter at Uluru in 1982, the most reviled woman in the country. Media representations of Lindy Chamberlain honed in on her religion, her dress sense, the perceived lack of emotion, and her failure to take responsibility for what had occurred. As Crispin notes of the 1982 Chamberlain trial, those outside the Darwin courthouse wearing T-shirts reading, ‘The Dingo Is Innocent’, represented what Australians, generally, thought of Lindy Chamberlain’s story.

If the bells are ringing by now, it is because they resound, still, in the halls of Australia’s parliament and in the ears of the men who found themselves, oddly, on the Opposition benches of

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13 Summers, 1975; See also Greer, 1970.
Federal Parliament. It is more historical patterning in media narrative rather than substance that makes the criticisms of Lindy Chamberlain and Julia Gillard sound identical and sound so relevant, too, for considerations of how women are treated in media coverage of key issues and events. Responsibility, then, belongs to the mediated woman subject whether she is professing her innocence at her own murder trial, or flushing out misogynists in Australia’s foremost institutions of public influence in 2012. The advent of social media’s 24/7 digital watching brief on mainstream media and current events across Australia is, however, producing some positive signs of subversion of some of the worst aspects of violence and discrimination against women in Australia. The outpouring of public grief and outrage at the rape and murder of Melbourne woman Jill Meagher, as the most prominent instance of late 2012, reflects a positive community-based activism based on non-violent action even as it also carried risks for the traditional processes of justice. But if the national conversation returns to considering the serious issues of criminal justice weighted against the right to a fair trial, then the risks might be worth it. If, via the portals of social media that also celebrated the day Australia’s first woman Prime Minister took a stand against misogyny, women as cause now shifts towards collective responsibility for shared social, cultural and political dilemmas, then the 30,000 people who marched in Melbourne’s Brunswick one Sunday morning, and the 150-odd thousand around the world who watched PM Gillard’s speech on You Tube, might start following the main story. Together, these essays offer a view of how that story has been shaped through Australia’s highest profile institutions and industries as not entirely a shared experience on justice when it comes to the role of gender in determining how women, and girls, are represented in the media, generally. They portray a sense that the experience of social justice is by no means guaranteed by an overarching democratic state and is, instead, patterned historically as gender specific and contested.
2 The Pact: Sex Skype and the Bonds of Men

Ben Wadham

They are a special lot, military personnel. Not like us civilians: but at the same time they come from us. It is about us and them. It was something I learnt very early in my training as a soldier at Kapooka, Wagga Wagga, NSW: “You are no longer a civilian Wadham, if you can cut it, you will join the ranks of Australia’s finest, a member of the Australian Army”. Not sure if I ever really believed that. It was rhetoric designed to cut a distinct line, between me as a civilian and the new me: the Australian Digger. That separation is the crux of military culture, a separation that plays out in manifold ways, from the individual to the unit, the corps to the service, and between men and women. It is the foundation of the relationship between the civil and military worlds, and when it comes into play it is a barometer of the integrity of our democracy.

On March 28, 2011, the barometer reading dropped. The social isobars plummeted at the news of ‘Kate’, as the media named her, an Australian Defence Force Academy cadet (ADFA), had been sexually violated by a group of her male cadet colleagues. She was violated because she was unknowingly filmed having sex with the male cadet while his mates watched on from the next room via Skype. The sex was her choice, the filming wasn’t and she spoke of feeling “sick to the stomach” when she discovered her encounter was distributed among the other cadets by video and still photographs. The sordid incident became known as the Skype Affair, and rode a wave of frenzied media interest for around two months. Kate became a heroine for some, and a ‘jack’ and ‘troubled lass’ for others. She became an embodiment of the split that marks Australian society and the civil and military worlds (Fleming 2010; Rukavishnikov & Pugh, 2006:134; Feaver & Kohn, 2001, Gronke, 2001, Janowitz, 1975, 1971, Huntington, 1957).

Why did Kate and her exploits become the subject of media frenzy? It wasn’t like this kind of depravity was unique: the media had reported on the unique cultural past times of the military for decades preceding. Only the year before the ‘sex and grog’ antics of the HMAS Success had made the Navy look like a pornographic episode of The Love Boat (Bruce, 2010), and since April 2011 more tales of sex, exploitation and male objectification of women have emerged with much less attention. What made this event so different?

To answer these questions requires a historical understanding of the interactions between the media and the military: or in more general terms civil society and the military. It is a fair but simplistic summation of democratic relations in this field. In more sophisticated terms it is important to see the increasingly differentiated and specialized character of each institution: the media and the military. The media is not synonymous with civil society but it is a principal instrument of exposition and communication. The military and civil society blur in so many ways in
today’s society, so much so that we as a civilian populace are inured to the presence of militarism in our lives.

We are a militaristic society in so many ways: our privilege to work, play and raise families is established upon the presence of militarism, the relationship between our consumption, the corporations that feed, clothe and transport us for example have opaque, but strong relationships with the military (see Lake & Reynolds, 2010, Wadham & Hamilton, 2009, Turse, 2008, Enloe, 2007. Our viewing pleasures are clearly marked by a preoccupation with various forms of militarism and the potential of violence, from Rambo, through Platoon, A Few Good Men, or GI Jane and Saving Private Ryan. Our sense of nation and national identity is heavily constructed around notions of the ANZAC, mateship and the Digger.

‘Kate’ and her circumstances, I would argue, brought a historical tension between civil society and the military to life; or more specifically, a tension realized through the media, as a key element of civil society, and military. Because ‘Kate’ came to the media to report her exploitation, fed both a media hunger for military misdemeanour, and created a platform for exposing the incidental abuse that the military are accused of in their institutional practices of managing complaints. Moreover, the interplay and tensions between the media and the military generated a discourse that failed to report in any meaningful way the root of this culture: a culture of men in the military and that is established upon the structural marginalization of women (Agostino, 1997).

A Few Bad Apples?

The debate most clearly expressed a fiery engagement between the civil and military worlds. We don’t get this often in Australia. The Defence establishment usually publicly discusses defence issues. Representatives from the Lowy Institute, the Australian Strategic Policy Institute or the Australia Defence Association speak with unquestioned authority, promulgating various elements of Defence establishment position. The contributors are overwhelmingly male, and often ex ADF Officers or Defence bureaucrats. Either as a consequence of this seemingly closed community, or due to indifference, there is little engagement by non-military elements of civil society with this milieu. The general assumptions about the military, its dominance and legitimacy remain untouched.

But Kate’s decision to go to the media, rather than exploit the avenues of grievance that the ADF military justice system offered seemed to invoke a broad community fervour, one that opened up the discourse between civil society and the military world albeit for a short period of time. The Media, this heterogeneous entity, acted as the conduit for this discourse, and covered the matter from sensational, and heightening terms, to explaining and unpacking the matter from numerous sources and multiple angles.
In this chapter I argue that this civil/military discourse about culture, conduct and complaints failed to move beyond the established dichotomy that the ADF was a regressive culture or either these incidents were the behaviour of a few bad apples. That zero sum discourse, as would be expected, allowed some things to be said, some traditions and practices to be challenged, and a whole lot more to remain silent. That is what I am interested in here, that question about what was left out and how the economy of explanations reproduces margins and centres, voices and silences, and the legitimate and illicit.

For me the question of a regressive culture versus a few bad apples allows the question of broader gender and sexual relations in Australia, and globally, to go untouched, yet it is a broader cultural relations perspective that best explain the cadet’s behaviour, the ADF’s management of the incident and the media, or civil society’s reaction. The key idea I will use to do this is ‘brotherhood’ (Higate, 2012, Flood, 2008; Gailey, 2006, Wadham, ‘2004). Militarism is profoundly masculinist phenomenon, and the ADF is predominantly male. Nearly 87 per cent of military personnel are men, and most of them are white, Anglo Australians. The ADF is a profoundly male domain. Subsequently, it is this context that must be broached in order to understand the Skype incident and responses to it.

The Bonds of Men

The story broke on April 5, 2011. A Royal Australia Air Force cadet turned to the media to address her grievances about being unwittingly filmed while having consensual sex with ADFA Army Officer Cadet Daniel McDonald. The surreptitious broadcasting created a reaction of disgust, and the group of men was quickly described in terms of sexism. But more than sexism, and its disregard for women, this was evidence of the bonds of men. Six men engaged in a group predation of one female officer cadet.

The way that men bond, especially within closed institutions like the military, is best described by the notion of brotherhood. Brotherhood is established upon a common Other, sometimes other men, or people of other cultural backgrounds, or sexual persuasion, and women. Traditionally, in an all male military bastardisation or fagging has been the instrument of brotherhood. Brotherhood generates profound camaraderie, and underlies esprit de corps at its finest. But it is highly culturally specific ideal and a volatile instrument when its homosocial imperatives are hyper-valorised. It must be managed as carefully in the workforce as a weapon on the firing range.

In 1911 Royal Military College was established. The then Commandant General W.T. Bridges was clear that the fagging of cadets would be strictly prohibited. R.M.C. was to be no West Point. By
May 1913 the College had its first scandal reported in a Sydney Newspaper: an initiation ritual, of the sort strictly prohibited. Military historian, and ex-Army Captain Darren Moore explains in his diligent history of R.M.C.:

Upon emerging from the bathroom, the Fourth Class cadets had to climb a greasy rope, while the senior cadets flicked them with wet knotted towels. They were then frog-marched along the verandah of the block to where some tables had been set up. Here they were tried and found guilty of being ‘newcomers’. A quick haircut by an unskilled cadet barber followed... they then had SC (for Staff Cadet) written on their back in tar before being knocked off the table by a fire hose. Next they were seated on a block of ice and forced to sing a song... the next phase consisted of running a gauntlet of senior cadets armed with belts and knotted towels, following which the Fourth Class had to climb up and over a ladder while being fire hosed The ignition culminated with the cadets being duked three time in a bath filled with icy water and numerous other ingredients selected for their pungent aroma. They were then released to go off and clean up (2001:349).

According to the College the Sydney newspaper was completely wrong-headed in their interpretation of this ritual. The College Journal argued the reporting was sensational and misguided and “needless to say everyone at the College was very indignant at this point of view taken by the paper” (Bridges, cited in Moore, 2001: 349). Here begins the longstanding impasse between the media and the military, and indeed I would argue between civil society and the military in Australia. From outside the ritual appeared to be depraved and immature behaviour, bordering on abuse, by a group of young, tribal men. From the inside, according to General Bridges, this was merely boys having fun. What’s more ‘it was nothing different from that which occurred at similar institutions such as universities’ (2001:349).

Move forward 70 years progressing through numerous other incidents and Major General Coates, the commandant of RMC, explained to The Age, ‘with certainty’, after consistent reports of bastardisation at the college, that this behaviour was not of a ‘general or systemic’ nature (Savva 1983).

Only six months later, with the employment of a new Commanding Officer of the Corps of Staff Cadets, Lieutenant Colonel Thorne, the matter came to head again. Australians were once again assured that bastardisation at Duntroon had been resolved:

Bastardisation has been ingrained in the college over many years and there have also been attempts to stop it over many years. It has gone on in a small and diminishing way, but I am now confident that it will not occur again (Balderstone, 1984).

Nearly a decade later amid more allegations of abuse and bastardisation, media officer, Brigadier Adrian D’Hage explained that:

Once or twice a year we get allegations at the various colleges of unfair treatment by senior officers. We spend a lot of time and taxpayers’ money investigating these to
discover they are unfounded. They usually come from disgruntled cadets who don’t
meet the high standards that are set and don’t want to go home to mum and dad with a
failure… (Easterbrook, 1992:17)

Brigadier D’Hage explained that bastardisation was isolated, and most of the claims were of “the
rough and tumble initiation practices that also occurred at universities” (1992:17)

These few examples represent a consistent and enduring story. The story is one about an
institutional culture that is furtive and clandestine; an institution where young people go to
relinquish their civilian status and become military personnel. The military is an opaque and
mysterious institution that captures the curiosity of the civilian world. The media, as a fourth
estate pressures some form of social accountability, but its interest is of heavily market driven.
Representations are subsequently confused and muddied.

Clearly, these incidents, which attract the media, and which the ADF attempts to minimise are a
persistent landmark of Australian civil/military relations. Having said that, there is a clear
contradiction between the ADF rhetoric of equality for all and its practices. Over the past 25 or so
years there has been the significant development of equity machinery alongside the persistence
of the culture in question. In 2005 when Air Chief Marshall Angas Houston filled the position of
the Chief of the Defence Force he promised that abuse in the ADF would be resolved by the
conclusion of his tenure.

In 2011, several months before the retirement of Angus Houston, the Skype Affair emerged. When
the ADF were called to account for the depravity of Daniel McDonald and Dylan De Blaquiere an
uncannily familiar explanation for the depravity was expressed by the then Chief of the Defence
Force:

If you draw comparisons against similar institutions - I am talking about university
campuses - I think the number of incidents of this kind is less at ADFA than any other
campus in the country. Having said that we have (things in) common with a lot of
those institutions (REF).

Although Houston described the behaviour as abhorrent, it remained the aberrant behaviour of a
few.

Are we perfect? No we’re not… We have pockets in the organization where there are
problems in some of these areas, particularly the misuse of alcohol… (But) I think
they’re the exception rather than the rule.

The logical conclusion is that the ADF is not unlike any institution in Australia, each has its
problems, represented by the broad pool of Australian from which the workforce are drawn.

ABC journalist Geoff Thompson questioned this assumption to the Australia Defence Association
(ADA) Executive Director Neil James, himself a 1976 Royal Military College, Duntroon graduate on
the question of culture: “Do you think there has been a reluctance to report alleged abuse within the military?”

James closed ranks:

…the real question surely we’re addressing here is whether these were widespread and systemic problems or just the odd isolated incident, or whether they’re the result of a sick culture. Now my own personal experience and certainly the Defence Association view is that they’re not the result of a sick culture (Thompson, 2011).

James tidily manipulates these matters into simply a question of incidence. The question of a culture is blended, like the way different species colourings can mimic landscape or background, into a question of broader Australian society. The responses reflect either or both a profound lack of awareness about the military institution, and skill in the practice of cultural camouflage (Wadham, 2011; Wadham and Hamilton, 2009, Behrens, 2002). Subsequently, the perspective on what and why in the ADF’s social transgressions is locked into a limited view of the general versus the specific: military culture versus civilian culture, the organisation or the few bad apples? There is no awareness of men and fraternity by the military and this element is described in fragmented terms by the media.

However, it seems to me that the incidents of abuse are one phenomenon that expresses a unique form of fraternity. The explanations by command are another expression of this brotherhood, as is the male dominated character of the Defence Establishment albeit in different milieu and with differing intensity. This furtive demeanour draws the media to the institutional gates like a child drawn to the mystery of wrapped presents beneath the Christmas tree. The military/media discourse draws our attention to illusion of military ‘organisation’ and away from something altogether different: the brotherhood of men.

Brotherhood

So we should have a look at what this question of ‘culture’ and brotherhood promises. Various media stories made some initial headway into this field, but it remained a marginal aspect of the public discussions. In order to make sense of ADF indiscretions we must consider the gendered, or more precisely, masculinist character of this institution, and the public discourse more generally. The notion of fraternity and brotherhood helps us make sense of the limitations of media investigation and reporting. ‘Brotherhood’ helps us to understand the ADF’s refusal to acknowledge -- or camouflage of -- its cultural foundations. These foundations must be addressed

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15 By masculinist I refer to the relations of masculinities, noting that masculinities are multiple, hierarchical, actively and collectively constructed through language and practice, and corporeal – expressed through bodies. While the military institution is a reflection of hegemonic masculinities, it is constituted by complicit, marginalised and subordinated masculinities.
if women are to take up a greater role and representation in this institution.
A starting point for making sense of brotherhood is established by former Chief of Army, General Peter Leahy responded to claims of a defence culture, he argued that the cadets had not been in the service long enough to take on the purported culture:

Members of the press and other commentators should reconsider their unwarranted insinuation that this is “defence culture”. The seven individuals involved have been at ADFA for barely two months [10 weeks in fact]. You don’t learn this sort of culture in that period of time. You bring it with you from your home, your school and the community. Australia as a whole is struggling with actions such as sexting, binge drinking and a general loss of the meaning of privacy, not just ADFA (Leahy, 2011).

Two key points arise from General Leahy’s perspective. Firstly, the question of time in the organisation and culture and the supposition that the ADFA voyeurs behaviour is drawn from broader society. Military personnel are drawn from broader society, they do bring their cultural heritage with them to the service, however, military training is also the most profound and complete form of resocialisation of any organisation in Australian public life. It is worth turning our attention to this element, to understand how this training reshapes people, how it is itself high masculinized and how it generates the stalwart of military culture: brotherhood.

When I think back to my own submersion into the Army at Kapooka, in Wagga Wagga, New South Wales, I remember the intensity of those early weeks of training. For the often-quoted Erving Goffman (1961), with an ethnographic eye, this is submersion into the total institution. One’s life is immediately handed over to the routines and practices of the institution (see Wolfendale, 2007; Woodward, 2004, Winslow, 2004; Wadham, 2004; Foucault, 1977; Van Gennep, 1960). Military life is 24/7. General Leahy forgets, or deflects our attention away from, seeing that the principal aim in those first few weeks is to separate the cadet, recruit or equivalent from their civilian past. Recruit training for example, was for many years a 12-week course, these cadets where at ADFA for 10 weeks. This is probably the most intense period of re-identification that new personnel go through, and is a time of profound group bonding. Some are more lecherous than others in their performance, yet it is a foundational imperative of the transition from civilian to combatant.

These men were I’d argue partaking in a ritual of military performativity. The emphasis on fraternity or brotherhood is particularly strong in the early process of training, as the civilian is sheared apart from their earlier life and subsumed into a group identity. That separation generates disruption of the civilian self-generating a profound search for re-identification within this new milieu. Reports allege that these men were engaging in the practice known as the ‘trifecta’, that is, achieving your green, white and blue wings, by sleeping with a women from each service. Damien McDonald was sitting for his blue wings, so to speak. In contrast to the argument these soldiers were not part of any culture long enough to display military identity, conversely these soldiers were in a period of acute military and masculine identification. The secret broadcasting entitled a small brotherhood, or group of mates, to share a clandestine event and to use that as an instrument of bonding at the expense of ‘Kate’ or women more generally.
This formative bonding of recruit or cadet training exists through a great separation, from the past life as a civilian to the new identity as a member of the ADF (Goffman, 1961, Wolfendale, 2007, Moore, 2009). Upon arrival at the training establishment these processes begin immediately. On my arrival at 1 RTB, Kapooka, NSW along with other members of my ‘batch’ the manufacturing process began. Taking the raw material of the civilian and turning it into military personnel involved giving everyone the same short haircut, a uniform, a group routine and the reallocation of an identity. I became ‘recruit’ or ‘454951’. I was accommodated in a dormitory, in a room with four strangers. We were ordered to regiment our bed, desk and wardrobes. It was a requirement to make our ‘socks smile’: shirts ‘stand up by themselves’ and our brass shine. As a group we were to shit, shower and shave together, eat and train, struggle and most significantly bond.

Through these processes the potency of the recruit is conflated with the potency of the group. That potency is expressed through the ideal of mateship. Mateship is a form of camouflage (see Behrens, 2002, Wadham, & Hamilton, 2009). It is argued to be the great leveller, a uniquely Australian democratic principle. It is a pillar of white Australian identity. The dazzle of sacrifice, teamwork, and looking after your mates turns our attention away from the exclusive, hierarchical and sometimes abusive mechanisms of bonding. Mateship is fundamentally a masculine ideal, an expression of brotherhood (Pease, 2001, Page, 2001). Others, for example women, may be allowed to participate, but they remain at best guests in this environment. Hence, cultural diversity remains an ongoing concern for the ADF.

As a young recruit I was taught the saying “this is my weapon this is my gun, this is for shooting, this is for fun”. The potency of the Australian Digger is mobilized through men’s sexuality, between the recruit’s penis and his gun. Women are central to this construction of potency. We were taught to treat the weapon as an appendage and as a very sacred one - just as sacred as our penis. There was lots of emphasis on both. Potency and masculinity were inextricably linked: the capacity to both kill and prey upon women – the ability to perform – was paramount. Apocryphal stories about gangbangs and sexual adventure acted as the glue that bonds brothers together.

Flood (2008) explains in his research on Australian Defence Force Academy that cadets bond through shared sexualisation of, and sex with, women. His interviews with Australian Defence Force Academy recruits highlight how young men develop mateship bonds through all-male nude parties, pornography nights, picking up women on ‘mogan hunts’ or sharing women among mates, through rituals such as ‘the rodeo’ (Gailing, 2006).

The bonds of men, in these arms-corps environments, are galvanised through the sexualisation of others. It is of course, this ‘us and them’ disposition that underlies the masculinity of the military across the ranks, and in particular the young men who joined together in a kind of homoerotic
voyeurism to watch Daniel and ‘Kate’ have sex. There are terms in the military, defined by men, for men, about women, sex, and others of all kinds. Bicycle racks, blowrags, frontbums, sperm banks, mattresses, schlong holders and wanking machines historically describe women (Moore, 1993), and offer an insight into her position within the ranks at ADFA and Duntroon, not to mention across the institution.

But it isn’t just these elite training institutions that incubate this intense masculinity among tribes of young men. I myself emerged from the infantry battalion perplexed by the rituals of all male company. Sexuality is a principle organising force in these contexts. In Townsville the infantry soldiers I worked with would organise ‘pig nights’ (Wadham, 2004). They would go out on the town to get as drunk as possible and to pick up the most ugly girl (by their definition) they could find. These activities would accrue status for the soldier – the more depraved one could be in that situation would accrue more status. The bonding ritual would take on a life of its own through the telling and retelling among the brothers.

This brotherhood while crucial to making soldiers who can ‘win the land battle’ is also a ticking bomb. The litanies of abuse scandals that burden the Australian Military demonstrate the volatile character of the soldier subject and military masculinities. Occasionally this culture of masculine fetish spills into the news, and the media expresses the perplexity of the Australian community. Yet, the media fails in any meaningful way to go beyond claim of sexism within the ranks. The public discourse remains locked into a position that is comfortable for the military as it fails to touch on the perceived sacred cow of military effectiveness - esprit de corps – and dissatisfying for civil society, as it has no coherent explanation for this behaviour other than another sex scandal.

The media/military discourse revolves around the established question: is there a culture of sexism in the military or is the military simply a reflection of broader society? While these men do bring their masculinity to the military, their masculinity is also harnessed, intensified, unleashed and legitimized among cohorts of predominantly male personnel, in almost exclusively masculine environments.

Of around 120 media (see Bolt, 2011, News One, 2011, Pemberton, 2011, Snow, 201, the Sunday Telegraph, 2011, Towell, Grattan & Welch, 2011, Thompson, 2011) stories during the Skype Affair four articles from progressive commentators argued that the perverse act of the men was an expression of broader Western male values and attitudes toward women, and sex. Violence toward women remains a significant issue in Australian society; one in six women have been sexually violated at some point in their lives by a man. For Libby Lloyd chair of the Commonwealth’s Violence Against Women Advisory Group and Heather Nancarrow Director of the Queensland
Centre for Domestic and Family Violence Research (2011) alongside Mike Carlton (2011), the matter of men’s sexualisation and sexual violence toward women was a significant influence that went unarticulated. Kit McFarlane (2011) argued convincingly, that the television programs we watch, which are strongly USA based, also activate and condone men’s misbehavior, the ways that men can treat women and dress it up in humour and carry-on. There is no doubt that broader social influences shape the men and women that enter the military. Yet the question of specific institutional culture remains paramount. The centrality of brotherhood remains invisible. Perhaps barrister Jocelyn Scutt’s (2011) story on Online Opinion was one of few to realize this point and articulate it strongly.

It is true that resocialisation cannot completely wipe the tablet clean. In this sense the soldier is a kind of palimpsest, where the inscription of a previous life, and that includes the ongoing connection to friends and family, lie visible beneath the newly inscribed soldier identity. This is what the military want us to focus on, where their personnel came from, what they brought with them, and how these cultural relics are constituted through the same kinds of imprudent sometimes depraved practices that stem from the broader Australian society. Yet, the military are not like broader society in the way the ADF represent this. The ADF are almost exclusively white men.

**Conclusion**

The Skype Affair represents the divide between the civil and military worlds. A cultural gap marked by the competing perspectives of the military establishment and the civilian media. A discourse that delimits our understanding to the dichotomy that men’s sexual depravity is a general social condition as opposed to an artefact of military culture.

In July 2011 women became entitled to serve in the last 7 per cent of exclusively male roles, arms corps. These are the locations where ‘brotherhood’ is most intense, alongside training establishments. Over 100 years civil society has sporadically been exposed to the enduring issue of boys behaving badly within the military. As media and communication technologies burgeon the incidence of this exposure is enhanced. The Skype Affair and other incidents are testament to this. A modernizing ADF is one that must come to terms with difference in its ranks, including women and broader cultural diversity. When brotherhood is entangled in the question of military effectiveness, and sexual predation is denied, deflected or camouflaged a paradox manifests. It is a paradox between the anachronism of brotherhood and male dominance and the contemporary requirement for a culturally diverse Defence force that can meet the diverse requirements of contemporary warfare (The Defence Committee, 2012).
The zero sum logic that structures this discourse can be shifted. Defence has for a long time employed a discourse that is articulated by a brotherhood to preserve the brotherhood. It has aimed to camouflage its cultural make up and to avoid scrutiny\textsuperscript{16}. The media response is driven to uncover and de-camouflage the enigma that is the military. The media as part of broader civil society can contribute to the development of non-military analysis of civil-military relations and build a robust civil discourse on the role and place of the military in Australia’s democracy. This analysis would empower the ADF to more effectively manage the difficult terrain of making soldiers, achieving the institutions core values while maintaining military effectiveness.

\textsuperscript{16} Since the initial writing of this paper the Department of Defence has released the Pathway to Change: Evolving Defence Culture paper (2012), as a result of a raft of reviews arising from the Skype incident. This document appears, after initial examination, to begin to address the historical discourse of minimisation and defensiveness.
3 Holding Men Accountable: Where Are The Men in Media Representations of Prostitution?

Bob Pease

Introduction

While high profile men in politics and sport are often pilloried in the media if they are caught transgressing what the media regards as moral boundaries in relation to sexual matters, in the wider media coverage of prostitution, men are a neglected zone. Women in prostitution are represented as either victims to be rescued or as women who make lifestyle choices about sex work as a legitimate job. Prostitution has become a battleground between women who want to abolish it and those who defend sex workers’ rights. However, in the media coverage of these divisions, the men who drive the demand for the sex trade are rendered invisible. Why do men pay for sex at home and abroad? What does men’s involvement in the sex trade as customers, or ‘johns’ as they are known in the trade, say about men’s sexuality and their masculinity?

Men’s demand for paid sex is naturalised by both supporters and critics of prostitution. In this paper I argue that the media has a public role to play in fostering discussion about why men purchase sex acts. If the media explored why men buy sex and the consequences for women of them doing so, it would shed new light on our understanding of prostitution. A socially responsible media could open up discussion about men’s sexuality and contribute to holding men accountable for their involvement in the sex trade.

Representing Women in Prostitution

In recent years there have been a number of studies of media representation of prostitution and sex trafficking (Chapman 2001; Wahoun 2007; Galuti 2009; Wallinger 2010; Soderland 2011; Schoenhardt 2011). These studies demonstrate that a narrow range of views about prostitution is presented in the print media, specifically newspapers. The Human Trafficking in the Media report, which analysed all Australian newspapers from 2008 – 2011, found that over 90 per cent of news articles reviewed were simply reportage of facts and figures without any analysis of the issues behind the news story (Schoenhardt 2011). Many of the articles were sensationalist and highlighted the lurid aspects of the story. The Human Trafficking Working Group, which monitored news stories about prostitution and sex trafficking, found frequent references to trafficked women as ‘sex slaves’. The sensationalist approach to prostitution aimed at getting the attention of readers does not allow for analysis of how these issues come about. The media draws upon moralistic sources of information in making comments about prostitution (Wallinger 2010). Prostitutes are more likely portrayed with negative rather than positive references (Chapman 2001). In this way, the media contributes to the marginalisation of women who work in the sex industry.
The representation of prostitution in the media has become battleground for divergent views about prostitution. In the sex work discourse, the focus is on defending the rights of sex workers, whereas in the sexual domination discourse, the emphasis is on abolishing prostitution. There are ongoing debates about whether all forms of prostitution are a part of sex trafficking and whether all prostitutes are victims or not (Soderlund 2011). On the one hand, victim narratives emphasise women’s powerlessness and exploitation, while on the other hand pro-sex work narratives emphasise women’s choices about their sexuality and their bodies.

For some media commentators, it is impossible to separate sex trafficking from prostitution as both involve the commodification of women’s bodies. In this view, all forms of prostitution involve sexual exploitation and abuse of women. So consequently, it makes no sense to distinguish between voluntary and involuntary prostitution (Jahic and Finchenauer 2005). Maddy Coy and her colleagues, for example, regard prostitution as a form of symbolic violence against women. To the extent that prostitution and the sex industry is glamorised, it fails to acknowledge the harm caused to women through exposure to exploitation, coercion and violence. In this view, the sex industry promotes sex buyers as hip and cool, which limits discussion about the underlying reasons why men pay for sex (Coy et al. 2007).

However, from the point of view of some sex workers, we should distinguish between coercion and voluntariness. (Spanger 2008). In the attempt by some in the sex industry to challenge biased attitudes towards sex workers, positive representations of sex workers as freely choosing to be involved in the industry are encouraged in the media. For example, some parts of the media emphasise stories and accounts that claim prostitutes are happy about their involvement in prostitution. Usually, they involve representations of a more glamorous image of prostitution in contrast to the oppression and violence experienced by women in the bottom end of the sex industry (Wahoun 2007). Some defenders of prostitution link it with sexual liberation (Spanger 2011). Those who are anti-prostitution are characterised as moralists who want to put limits on sexual freedom. Pro-sex work advocates regard prostitution as a service industry job, arguing that it is a myth that men buy women when they purchase sex acts (Jeffries 2009). In response to a news article citing the Salvation Army rescuing the victims of the sex trade, Janelle Fawkes the CEO of the Scarlet Alliance challenges the view that the majority of sex workers are coerced into the industry. In her view, sex workers are articulate, intelligent and community minded rather than victims (Grant 2011).

Abolitionists argue that prostitution as a lifestyle choice is a myth (Men Against Prostitution and Sex Trafficking). In this view, prostitution is often glorified and romanticised in the media. In portraying prostitution as a lifestyle choice, it belies the vulnerability of many prostitutes to
violence and health risks due to contexts in which they work. The hypersexualisation of prostitutes in the media is also said to glorify their sexual commodification. Ann Hamilton (2011) compares listening to the views of sex workers on prostitution as equivalent to consulting with those who work in the nuclear power industry on the benefits of nuclear power.

The media is accused by some as passing moral judgement on sex workers and by others as glorifying commodified sex. Thus, the media represents two forms of women’s sexuality in prostitution. On the one hand, there is the glamorous upmarket and powerful prostitute who is confident in her sexuality and has freely chosen prostitution as a career. On the other hand, there is the poor, trafficked woman who has no choice about selling her body and who needs to be rescued from the destitution that prostitution has placed her in. The media loves political infighting among feminists and between academic feminists and sex workers and these divisions between women make for sensationalist reading.

Competing representations of prostitution in newspapers have contributed to confusion among people about these issues. They focus on the different views by women about whether all forms of prostitution should be linked to sex trafficking and whether prostitution itself is exploitative of women. However, none of this coverage of either side of the debate addresses the demand side of prostitution. The debate in the media about prostitution has considered sex work as primarily an issue to do with women’s sexuality and agency. As a result, prostitution is represented as an inevitable practice in society.

Thus, while the media has covered both sides of the debate, it has done so in ways that encourage either titillation or moralising. The focus is always on the women who sell sex and rarely if ever on the men who buy sex. By focusing on prostitutes as the problem, we end up naturalising prostitution as inevitable. This chapter is not concerned with analysing the differences in the feminist positions about whether prostitution is an unavoidable hierarchical and exploitative sexual relation, whether it is simply a varied form of sexual activity or whether it is a form of work under capitalism. All of these positions are concerned with what prostitution means for women who sell sex but none of them explicitly address the men who pay for sex. It is the men’s demand for paid sex that drives the market and if we are to understand the demand, we must interrogate the men who fuel the demand (Heike-Schotten 2005). If we ignore the demand side of prostitution, we cannot address the responsibility men have for perpetuating the problem.

**Ignoring Men in Prostitution**

Because men and masculinity are regarded as the norm, men are generally portrayed in the media in an unproblematic way. Men are generally represented in positive ways in the media in terms of
their achievements, their engagement with important political issues and their sporting prowess. It is important to look beyond this normative representation of men to interrogate how the media represents them in relation to prostitution.

In contrast to the extensive media coverage of women in the sex industry, very little attention is given the buyers of sex. While the media may talk about prostitutes as victims, they do not talk about those who pay for sex as offenders or perpetrators. No stories covered in Australian newspapers from 2008 to 2011 dealt with the men who pay for sex (Schloenhardt 2011). Carole Wahoun (2011) in her analysis of the representation of prostitution in the media has identified that the male customers of prostitutes are not even mentioned in nine out of ten articles. In the study carried out by Laxim Murthy (2008), for the Centre for Advocacy on Stigma and Marginalisation, not one media story was found on the mindset and reasoning behind men’s payment for sexual services. Girish Galuti (2009) says that this may be due to the difficulty journalists have in accessing men who use prostitutes who are willing to talk about their experiences. Of course it is also in men’s interests to be anonymous in the sex trade.

In this article, I address the consequences of ignoring men as buyers in media representations of prostitution. Given that the market is organised to meet this demand, what does it mean when those who pay for sex are not acknowledged? Newspaper representations of prostitution influence the way we understand the role of men in driving the demand for the sex trade. If men are ignored completely, policy and interventionist responses are going to set women up against each other in competing definitions of women’s agency and leave men’s actions unaccounted for.

The demand of men for women and girls for sexual services is the key driver for prostitution (O’Connor and Healy 2005). However, the expression of male sexuality that requires satisfaction through the purchase of sex is rarely problematised in media representations of prostitution. Men’s views about women in prostitution can be understood in terms of men’s sense of sexual entitlement, which in turn is related to their conception of masculinity and manhood (Farley et al. 2011). Heike Schotten (2005) argues that it is best to view sex work as a function of various forms of masculinity. That is, men’s use of paid sex shores up particularly anxious masculinities. The representation of men’s sexuality implicit in media accounts of prostitution is located within what Nicole Vitelloe (2000) calls ‘the male sex drive discourse’. This discourse portrays men’s sexuality as ‘an uncontrollable spontaneous instinct’. Men are seen to have powerful natural sexual urges that they are unable to control. Hence, they are not held to be responsible for acting these sexual demands out. In this view, if prostitutes were not available, it is claimed that rape and sexual violence against women would increase.
The dominant construction of men’s sexuality legitimises the payment for sex that drives the demand for both prostitution and sex trafficking. If men are to take responsibility for the existence of prostitution, they will need to be convinced that the purchasing of sexual services is exploitative of women, whatever the context in which it occurs. Those men who pay for sex do not generally acknowledge that prostitution may have harmful effects on the women. (Farley et al. 2011). Even if it is possible to distinguish between ‘voluntary prostitution’ and ‘coerced sex trafficking’, is this a distinction that matters to male clients? Are they likely to ask the woman whether they are in prostitution voluntarily as opposed to being coerced in some way? (O’Connor and Healy, 2005). It is the man’s experience of sexuality and his sexual gratification that is regarded as paramount in prostitution. Whether this involves the acting out of misogyny and exploitative sexual relations is not seen to be important.

While media representations of victim narratives acknowledge the exploitation of women, it fails to address how this victimization of women is linked to the patriarchal construction of men’s sexuality and how this drives the demand for paid sex.

Increasingly, in recent years, government reports and research monographs have identified the importance of addressing the demand side of prostitution and sex trafficking (Hughes 2004; Joe-Cannon 2006; Durchslag and Goswami 2008; Macleod et al. 2008; Ricardo and Barker 2008). However, the mainstream media has failed to cover this issue and so has reinforced popular views about prostitution. If the media is going to be able to do justice to the complexities of the sex trade, it will need to give some attention to the reasons why men visit sex workers.

Rethinking Media Coverage of Prostitution

While there is a debate within media studies about the extent to which newspaper readers constitute a passive audience (McCullagh 2002), there is some evidence that newspapers influence the views of readers about the significance of social issues (Chermak 1997; Franklin 1998; Mendes 2001; Zufferey and Chung 2006). On the basis of this evidence, it would appear that many people look to the mainstream media to understand and interpret social problems. For many people, it may be their only source of information about those issues. The media has responsibility in how opinions and attitudes are shaped.

The way that women and men are represented in media articles about prostitution has consequences for women involved in the sex industry. These forms of representation also have major implications for how policies are formulated and intervention strategies are developed. If the media fails to address a key issue in the debates about prostitution, that issue is likely to be ignored in contemporary (public?) discussion about the phenomena.

Many commentators have observed that journalism and news reflect the interests of men (Rasmusson 2007). To the extent that men are represented in a negative light, it is rarely identified
as a reflection of men in general or dominant forms of masculinity. The media may take on individual men in political power but fail to challenge men as a gender because of the potential backlash they might receive. While the media may be happy to go after particular prominent men who are caught out in some form of sex scandal, they fail to make the connections between these men’s sexually exploitative behaviour and the behaviour and practices of men in general. It is the personal moral failings of individual men or men who are portrayed as psychiatrically disturbed that is the focus of attention rather than a problem with men and masculinity per se.

Profeminist men’s campaigns that posit a non-exploitative masculinity are rarely acknowledged in the media. The Monitoring Men in the Media Project (2005) found no representation of men who were challenging dominant forms of masculinity. There was no coverage of men who opposed violence against women in the sex trade.

Jewel Woods (2011) identifies ten things that men and boys can do to stop sex trafficking: challenge the glamorisation of pimps in our culture; confront the belief that prostitution is a victimless crime; stop patronising strip clubs; don’t consume pornography; tackle male chauvinism and sexism online; end sex tourism; talk to men and boys about men’s issues in male spaces; support anti-trafficking policies; support creation of ‘John schools’; raise sons and mentor boys to challenge oppression. These practices by men opposed to violence and sex trafficking need to be acknowledged in the media. The failure to do so reinforces the view that challenging men’s violence is women’s struggle and that men have no responsibility to address it.

The media has an important role to play in facilitating debates about prostitution. However, to date, it has ignored essential elements of these debates and thus biased readers’ understanding of the issue at stake. Through opinion editorials, cover stories and investigative journalism, the media should raise the question why prostitution exists rather than debate how to respond to women sex workers. While the media is gender biased, critically informed readers can pressure the media to raise awareness of the demand side of prostitution and sexual exploitation and the role that men can play in challenging it.
4 Toddlers and Tiaras: American Beauty Pageants in Australia

Cassandra Atherton

"Little Miss Perfect Pageant, where all your dreams come true.
Little Miss Perfect Pageant, where the special one is you.
There are citrus colored rainbows on the other side.
Hop on your magic carpet and take a wild ride.
If you think it and you want it, dream it, then it's real!
You are what you feel."

(Sung by Michael Galanes, Little Miss Perfect, Lifestyle YOU channel).

Little Miss Perfect, otherwise known as the Supreme or High Point title pageant winner stands in line with five ‘full glitz’ runners-up. These Perfect Misses all have fake tans, false eyelashes, hairpieces, flippers (a dental plate of fake teeth), acrylic nails and a full face of stage make-up. Before the pageant they have had their legs, eyebrows and armpits waxed, many have had facials and pedicures and a few mothers have even injected their daughters with Botox. Finally, these little girls have been coached on the perfect way for a female to walk and talk and have had classes to hone their ‘talent’, which is most often dancing or singing. Displayed within a portfolio of photoshopped photographs, these Stepford children are touted as the epitome of female perfection.

This article will argue that Australians investment in American cable television’s ‘full glitz’ children’s beauty pageants is evidence of the way in which Australia takes its cultural cues from the United States. It will posit that American beauty pageants, with the support of the Australian viewers of cable television, subversively endorse society’s demeaning stereotype of the perfect woman. Social commentator, Nina Funnell (2011:1) states that, ‘Equating a girl’s self-worth with her appearance is a dangerous and destructive game and one that the media encourages girls to play from a very early age.’ These little girls are women-in-training in a society condoning both the objectification of women and the expectation of women to have docile, pliant and artificial personalities. The final line up of ‘perfection’ on television shows like Toddlers and Tiaras and Little Miss Perfect underlines lingering gender inequality.

Hilary Levey (2009:199) has argued that, ‘Unlike beauty pageants, little research has been done to explore the complex world of child beauty pageants’. This article aims to fill a lacuna in scholarship on American child beauty pageants with reference to Australia’s responses to televised versions of these contests. While the Australian media has been disapproving of hosting
American child beauty pageants in Australia, this belies the popularity of American child beauty pageants on Australian cable television. Rather than being reviled by disturbing images of sexualised cookie cutter children in American child beauty pageants, many Australians are fans of television shows that promote this focus on what Corrinne N. Connolly (2011:17), identifies as the ‘ideals of perfection and beauty, with an accompanying emphasis on sexuality.’ Indeed, it was the reported 1.8 million Australian viewers of Toddlers and Tiaras that led the Texan owner of Universal Royalty pageants, Annette Hill, to stage a child beauty pageant in Melbourne in July 2011. Hill (2010:1) announced on The Oprah Winfrey show, ‘The reason we are going to Australia is we have so many fans down [there]. They really want us to come.’

Airing on the Lifestyle YOU channel in Australia, Toddlers and Tiaras, in its fifth season, and Little Miss Perfect, in its second season are broadcast in high rotation, daily, on Australian cable television with repeat (or encore) episodes often dominating the channel. Although many viewers have blogged that the show is ‘disgusting’, they often simultaneously report that it is ‘compulsive viewing’ and discuss in intimate detail, each episode, adding to the show’s ratings and media interest surrounding child beauty pageants. This response has been discussed by Lindsay Lieberman (2010:747) in her ‘Call For Statutory Regulation of Child Beauty Pageants’, who argues, ‘Today, the controversy of child beauty contests is reflected in the fact that as the industry grows nationwide and attracts more participants, impassioned ridicule and criticism develops simultaneously through the media and internet’. Toddlers and Tiaras has spawned numerous Facebook sites, both for and against the show. The eponymous Toddlers and Tiaras and Take Toddlers and Tiaras off the Air, both have thousands of followers. In addition to this, contestants from the show have their own fan pages. Eden Wood and Taralyn Eschberger are both described on their sites as ‘International Pageant Superstars’. This substantiates Lieberman’s (2010:746) discussion of the way in which, ‘the child pageant industry enjoys heightened success and widespread popularity’ despite them being ‘commonly criticized for such outlandish and destructive practices [including] Girls clad in revealing costumes strut[ting] and danc[ing], remov[ing] pieces of their wardrobes and wink[ing] at judges’.

There were, initially, criticisms of America’s Universal Royalty pageant in the Australian media. In Daily Views (2011:1) pointed out the way in which the company ‘specializ[es] in beauty contests of life-like dolls with false eyelashes and perfectly coiffed hair.’ Pull the Pin protesters, headed by founder, Catherine Manning, campaigned to ban the pageant in Australia, organising a rally at Parliament House in Melbourne on 24th May, 2011. Members were interviewed and pictured with signs stating, ‘Let children be children’. They argued that their protest concerned the fact that, ‘pitting young children against each other in a competition based on physical beauty instils harmful messages in children, including that their looks are their currency and that it’s ok to judge on physical appearance.’ Manning (2011:1) substantiates her claims by pointing to, ‘opponents includ[ing] The Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Psychiatrists, numerous women’s and children’s rights organisations, child development experts and academics, and the majority of
the community: about 95 per cent according to numerous polls and callers to talkback programs who are overwhelmingly in support of action.’ In addition to this, Dr Michael Carr-Gregg, (2011:1) an Australian psychologist and expert in adolescent mental health has been very vocal in the media about beauty pageants, going on record numerous times to state, ‘In my view if you were to say to me that you put your child in that situation I would absolutely suggest to you that it’s bordering on child abuse...These children will not come out of this unscarred psychologically and we’re all sitting around rather like voyeurs watching it happen...There’s something really quite obscene about that.’ This supports Lieberman’s (2010:740) argument that, ‘Society recognises the detrimental effects of child beauty pageants. Family therapists report that pageants interfere with healthy child development’ and yet, as Henry A. Giroux (2003:36) estimates, ‘more than one hundred thousand children under the age of twelve compet[ing]’ in the United States.

However, the stoush between TV stations vying for exclusive rights to the Universal Royalty pageant in Australia and to the six-year-old star of Toddlers and Tiaras, Eden Wood, pulled focus from beauty pageants’ endorsement of society’s oppressive ideals of female beauty. In any beauty pageant, conforming to a narrow ideal, based on appearance is rewarded, while non-conformity is punished. Levey (2009:199) argues that, ‘child beauty pageants can be described as ‘an event with the purpose of rewarding children based on their appearance and personality’. Children’s beauty pageants prepare little girls for a future of pleasing people: initially they are trained to please judges, coaches, parents and their audience. The inference is that later in life they will move on to pleasing their partners and husbands. As Giroux (2003:36) argues, ‘the culture of child beauty pageants functions as a pedagogical site where children learn about pleasure, desire, and the roles they might assume in an adult society’. In addition to this, child contestants are taught that there is no room for individuality. If a girl wears black shoes, instead of the preferred white ones, she compares unfavourably with her identical counterparts and will not win the pageant. In this way, females are judged on a very narrow concept of beauty. Most importantly, A Feminist’s Stand Against Toddlers and Tiaras (2011:1) points out the disturbing way in which beauty pageants encourage the ‘depersonalization of women into objects of desire, instead of individuals with complex personalities.’ This is mirrored in the rows of children who, from the tops of their identical barrel curled heads to the tips of their matte, white Mary Janes, are an unsettling mix of June Cleaver and Anna Nicole Smith. As Connolly (2011:11) argues, beauty pageants ‘encourage disregard for girls through [their depiction of society’s] notions of feminine girlhood.’ These children are in training to fit this image of the ‘perfect woman’ that society promotes and in turn, they are becoming enslaved to superficial concepts of beauty.

However, as Melissa Henson (2011:79), Director of Communications and Public Education for the Parents Television Council, posits, ‘it’s not just our daughters being affected by these images. Boys and adult men are also learning to value women only for their sex appeal.’ Voyeurism is encouraged at every level in pageants as women are judged on their outward appeal and how closely they conform to the ‘perfect woman’ stereotype. The pageants ‘encourage disregard for
girls through its promotion of hegemonic models of sexualized femininity’. Brittani Hensel (2010:1) argues, ‘it is repulsive that as women we complain about the disparity between men and women, but we as women will encourage our children to participate in behaviour that directly correlates with the disparity we’re trying to prevent...Choosing to teach children that beauty is on the inside does not correlate with having them prance around with makeup that’s four inches thick.’ When women accept the narrow and demeaning stereotype of the perfect woman, they are preparing themselves and their daughters for a lifetime of unhappiness: ‘we are setting them up for plastic surgery and botox injections.’ There is compelling evidence from child specialists that it is ‘developmentally inappropriate to teach a six year old to pose like a twenty year old model’ (Liberman, 2010:753) and the American Psychological Association study (2010) on the early sexualisation of young people showed clear associations between participating in these types of events and ‘the development of body issue problems, eating disorders, depression, anxiety disorders and mood disorders.’

Australians’ interest in American child beauty pageants suggests, as Dr Karen Brooks (2011:1) states, that we subscribe to the ‘subjective and superficial evaluation’ of women. In Universal Royalty pageants, the beauty category is the most important. If two children tie in a pageant, their beauty points trump all other categories in the quest for the overall winner. Julie Parker (2011:1) argues that, ‘These sort of pageants do nothing more than tell little girls that their worth is entirely tied up in what they look like, how much they weigh, how expensive their dress is and how sparkly their teeth are. It’s a breeding ground for warped body image and self esteem.’ As Manning (2011:1) argues, ‘Girls are already bombarded with narrow beauty ideals in our culture, from Disney princesses and Barbies and Bratz dolls, to music video clips telling them they should behave like grown women. We should be combating the message society sends our girls that they’re ‘not enough’ – not foisting beauty competition culture on them.’ The way in which dolls like Barbies, Bratz and Disney princesses are dressed and marketed is not only damaging to young girls, it further endorses this narrow stereotype of the ‘grown up’ woman.

The emphasis on dolls and dressing up in pageants is also disturbing for the way in which it encourages passivity. Child development experts point to a difference between playing dress-up and making a career out of it. Mark Sichel (2011:162), a New York based licensed clinical social worker states that, ‘Little girls are supposed to play with dolls, not be dolls.’ In child beauty pageants the girl becomes a ‘Barbie for adults’. They are dressed, undressed, repeatedly groomed and positioned on stage with a variety of backdrops and props. Little girls are often carried to and from the performance space by adults, much like carrying a doll out of a toy store. Playing dress-up ‘is normal and healthy, but when it’s demanded, it leaves the child not knowing what they want,’ Sichel (2011:162) states, ‘accentuating their appearance with such accoutrements as fake hair, teeth, spray tans and breast padding causes the children tremendous confusion, wondering why they are not okay without those things.’ These children grow into women who still feel that they need these artificial devices to be complete. Amanda Drucker (2011:1) points out that they are
taught that their only value is aesthetic as they ‘will only be successful in life if they conform to society’s ideas of beauty.’

Furthermore, this can lead to the Cinderella and/or Pretty Woman complex that second wave feminism was campaigning against in the 1980s and 1990s. The former is where women wait passively to be swept of their feet by a man. The latter concerns women waiting to be ‘saved’ by the target of their affection. The emphasis on waiting in both of these syndromes is what makes them dangerously passive afflictions. What follows is the expectation that women will be eternally grateful and unconditionally love and serve their husband, who has been their saviour. Toddlers and Tiaras has featured the embodiment of both of these complexes in their pageants. One toddler was dressed as Julia Roberts in the film, Pretty Woman.

Melissa Henson (2011:1) described the scene by stating, ‘like Roberts’ film character just before she hits the streets, the toddler is shown strutting back and forth on stage wearing thigh-high PVC boots, a blond, bobbed wig and a white tank to connected to a tight blue mini skirt at the midriff by a large silver hoop.’ The toddler’s mother, Wendy Dickey defended her choice to dress her child in this way by arguing that her daughter “had no idea she was dressed as [a hooker] anyways’ (Henson, 2011:1). As a mother, Dickey stressed that her daughter had worn a brown and white spotted dress from the ‘classy’ scene in Pretty Woman, but that the TV show did not choose to run this footage. The media chose to promote the ‘hooker’ outfit as it makes a more salacious story, than a toddler in a conservative outfit. This was taken a step further when the media reported that Dickey was going to auction the outfit to raise money for Georgia Right to Life, an anti-abortion organization. Assisting in the perpetuation of the Pretty Woman complex, Mrs Dickey demonstrated that she was convinced by the attractiveness of the narrow stereotype of female perfection that translates across media cultures into private spaces. She felt her child had the best chance of winning a pageant if her daughter appeared flirtatious and helpless. It is important to note that her child did, indeed, win the pageant and so her convictions about an ideal picture of femininity were correct.

This mini ‘Pretty Woman’ emphasises the ‘adultification of children’ in American beauty pageants that Neil Postman identifies in his article ‘The Disappearance of Children’. Postman (1982:52) argues, ‘Children no longer dress as children but wear much of the same styles of clothing as adults, just in miniature versions.’ In this way, little girls are morphed into tiny, sexualised women in beauty pageants. Indeed, Giroux (1998:36) argues that ‘within beauty pageants, children are equated with adult women’. Little girls are dressed as some of the most sexualised stars in Toddlers and Tiaras. Lindsay Jackson dressed her daughter, Maddy as Dolly Parton complete with large fake breasts and padded butt and two year old Mia was dressed as Madonna, complete with breast-cones and a dance routine to ‘Like A Virgin’. In a similar move to rewarding Wendy Dickey for dressing her child as a prostitute from Pretty Woman, Maddy and Mia both took out the top
award for dressing as Dolly and Madonna, respectively. Connolly (2010:11) sums this up when she states that, ‘On these shows, the girls are depicted embracing stereotypical female roles and behaviours, when they are portrayed as sexualized mini-adults, dressed in scanty outfits and posed seductively for the camera’.

As part of the line up on the Lifestyle YOU channel, Toddlers and Tiaras aims to attract a young female demographic, especially newlyweds and young mothers. The Lifestyle YOU channel is a mix of lifestyle and reality television programs with many female presenters and themed days, such as ‘Love You Wednesdays’ and ‘Marry You Fridays’. It is hard to miss episodes of Toddlers and Tiaras as they are broadcast multiple times every day of the week. With the introduction of the Lifestyle YOU + 2 channel, every show is also broadcast two hours later on a ‘sister’ station. Most often sandwiched between Trinny and Susannah and Supernanny; this channel ‘trains’ women to be perfect wives and mothers in true Stepford Wives fashion. Lifestyle YOU also broadcasts many ‘wedding’ shows such as Four Weddings, Say Yes to the Dress and Don’t Tell the Bride, which feed into the princess culture that is prevalent in both American and Australian culture for women. Pageants are, as Henson (2011:1) posits, a ‘training ground for superficial, self-centred princesses in the making.’ The Cinderella complex is the pinnacle of this princess culture. Peggy Orenstein (2011:12), author of Cinder-Ella Ate my Daughter: Dispatches From the Front Lines of the New Girly-Girl agrees: ‘Encouraging princess culture – however innocently – contributes to the sexualisation of girls...Sexualisation is not just imposing sexualisation on children before they’re ready and viewing girls as sexual objects, but also valuing a girl for her appearance over her attributes.’

As Emily Maguire (2009:35) points out, ‘princess culture in Australia is on the rise.’ Princesses are just a phase, but as Orenstein (2011:12) argues, ‘they mark a girl’s first foray into the mainstream culture...and what was the first thing that culture told her about being a girl? Not that she was competent, strong, creative or smart, but that every little girl wants – or should want – to be the Fairest of Them All.’ While all children want affirmation, princess culture teaches little girls to get that approval through their looks. This princess culture, a feature of the culture of pageantry in America, now pervades western society. Mary, Crown Princess of Denmark and Catherine Middleton are the icons of this tradition. Paramount to this princess culture are ‘Cupcake dresses’, those dresses that stick out from the waist like the top of a cupcake. All Disney princesses, from Beauty in Beauty and the Beast to Cinderella, herself, wear these dresses. These dresses look very much like the dresses the 1930s child actor, Shirley Temple wore in an effort to remain younger and child-like. All contestants in child beauty pageants are expected to wear an ornate cupcake dress usually beaded with crystals. These dresses are extremely expensive and again, subversively indicate that beauty is only available to the rich. The expensive coaches and talent training, the personal hairdresser and spa treatments leading up to the pageant are unavailable to many families. Without this level of ‘commitment’ as it is labelled, in Little Miss Perfect, contestants are at a disadvantage. Even these costumes promote a warped image of
femininity. Reports (Lambert, 2011:1) of a mother who put her eight year old on “an extreme crash diet involving eating fruit for only a week” was revealed as an attempt to stop her daughter ‘growing too fast and [not] fitting properly into her $1200 pageant dress.’ Parents can spend up to $30,000 a year on pageants. Most spend between $2700 and $3000 per pageant (Lambert, 2011:1). In this way, beauty is being purchased and girls learn that the more money one invests in their appearance, the more beautiful they appear to society.

Pageants are exploitative and promote a perverted image of the perfect woman. Orenstein (2011:12) writes that girls learn that to be beautiful and successful they must ‘Look sexy, but [not] feel sexual, to provoke desire in others without experiencing it themselves’. Child beauty pageants endorse the view that the picture of female perfection is a thin, attractive, congenial, pliant and harmlessly flirtatious girl. Drawing on Levey’s argument, Craig Lambert (2001:1) ‘wonders at the spectacle of “little girls sashaying across the stage” in special layered outfits that allow them to “rip off the jacket, then rip off the skirt. They’re put in revealing clothing and made to look older—this often helps them win….Pageants are a place where existing gender stereotypes are played out. They don’t create the stereotypes. But it’s a very gendered activity”’. American child beauty pageants teach females that the contestant who conforms most convincingly to the narrow stereotype of female perfection is rewarded. In the pageant world, these rewards take the form of a tiara, trophy, cash prize and usually an advertising contract.

So we are left with this picture: ‘Victoria, age eight, stands in front of the broad bathroom mirror practicing facial expressions. Her grandmother stands in the background, repeatedly instructing Victoria to open her eyes wider. ‘See how your eyes are squinty? That’s what we need to fix.’ Victoria reaches up and opens her eyelids wider with her fingers.’ (Athena, 2010:1) Australians are consuming American television series like Toddlers and Tiaras and Little Miss Perfect and even hosting American ‘full glitz’ beauty pageants such as the Universal Royalty pageant. These images of little girls dissatisfied with their appearance are infiltrating the Australian media via coverage of American child beauty pageants. These children are only rewarded when they are heavily made up, rehearsing their traditional talent and dressed in either a bikini or cupcake dress. Australian girls and women are, as psychologist Syd Brown (2011:2) points out, ‘learning basically that they have one characteristic which is of total primary importance, and that is their body and their attractiveness.’ The 1.8 million Australians, who watch the Ultimate Grand Supreme winner in Toddlers and Tiaras crowned each week, are conditioned to believe that the greatest rewards are given to those who strive for, and attain this narrow stereotype of the perfect woman.
5 A League of Extraordinary Gentlemen: Groupies and Gang Bangs in the NRL

Peter Lorentzen

Background

May 11, 2009 was the equivalent of D-Day for the National Rugby League (NRL) competition, but unlike the Nazi forces of World War II, rugby league headquarters in inner city Sydney knew exactly when and where they were going to be attacked. An Australian Broadcasting Corporation edition of its flagship investigative reporting program, Four Corners, was on the verge of exposing the ingrained and festering culture of sexual predatory behaviour among rugby league players. The NRL was accustomed to this kind of attack after years of dealing with a long line of similar exposés, but this was to become the program that brought the problem to an audience wider than just the NRL faithful. Rugby league legend Phil Gould on Channel 9’s The Footy Show labelled this “a sledgehammer blow to the NRL” (The Footy Show).

One of rugby league’s most highly regarded ex-players and then co-host of The Footy Show was Matthew Johns. Johns was at the centre of the attention and initially copped the worst of the backlash as he was named on the Four Corners program, ‘Code of Silence’ (Ferguson, 2009) as the instigator of an incident that had taken place in Christchurch, New Zealand in 2002. Here, Johns and teammate Brett Firman and a subsequent conga line of fellow Cronulla Sharks players, literally crawled through a motel bathroom window to participate in a team sex activity with a 19-year-old waitress. The young woman, given the pseudonym, ‘Clare’, in the broadcast, was made anonymous by Four Corners but her distress remained starkly obvious. The account of her post-traumatic stress disorder and suicidal tendencies after her meeting with the high-profile-playing group left no one untouched. But Clare’s suffering didn’t seem to be at the forefront of the NRL community’s mind given that damage control had well and truly kicked in at headquarters - and when it comes to damage control, the NRL can rely on its media partners to provide almost unlimited support.

Matthew Johns made a pre-emptive apology on The Footy Show before the broadcast of Code of Silence. He had previously been contacted by ABC reporter Sarah Ferguson for his comments on the allegations made against him, but had declined the opportunity to participate on camera. In his response on Channel 9’s popular NRL program, he explained how sorry he was for the hurt he had caused his family, but no mention of ‘Clare’ was made. Following his remarks, he received a pat on the shoulder from his co-host Paul Vautin with the words “Alright mate, well said. Alright, let’s get on with the show”. With that lumbering roundup, Vautin had attempted to put the pending scandal behind them before it had even erupted. Interestingly enough, in this instance, ‘getting on with the
show’ meant moving to a sketch where Matthew Johns acted as his own ashamed fictional brother who is ‘faulty’ because he is gay (Matabele, 2009). But no amount of ridiculing of sexual minorities could this time close the gates on the biggest sex scandal the NRL had faced. Australia’s media was all over the story, not only for its salacious news value but also because of the bigger historical picture it painted of a sporting culture that condoned the objectification of women as a sort of rite of passage.17

It is a culture where a sexy athlete like the former tennis player Anna Kournikova received more attention and made more money than far more talented players of her generation. A culture where Sports Illustrated’s annual swimsuit edition is the most eagerly anticipated of the year and a nude calendar is a common tool in raising awareness and financial support for female athletes and teams. Women are also pressured into wearing skimpy outfits by their own sporting organisations because of the appeal to a wider, male, audience. Lingerie has even become a uniform in the Lingerie Football League in another, and very successful, attempt to generate attention.

**Gender Dimensions of the Footy Culture**

*Code of Silence* didn’t just reveal the then seven year old case from New Zealand; it described an entire culture within the NRL: a culture where group sex rituals are rife among players, where cover ups of players’ sexual indiscretions are undertaken by clubs, where female groupies are routinely exploited. The program also gave some insight into the traumatic impact the player behaviour has on the female victims. All of these issues had been reported previously to an extent, but every time a new case popped up it seemed that no one was able to connect the dots to show a picture of NRL players displaying a shocking attitude towards women that owed more to misogynistic assumptions about male entitlement than an awareness of appropriate behaviour off the football field.

In a world where sports journalism studies such as the to date most comprehensive of the kind, the *International Sports Press Survey 2011* (Horky & Nieland, 2011) show that sports journalism is primarily created by men, about men, and for men, it is no wonder that the stories of sexual misconduct are looked upon with male eyes, with an underlying sense that the idea the victims ‘may have been up for it’ never being far below the surface. It’s a world where the journalists themselves are guilty, as outlined above in reference to Anna Kournikova, Sports Illustrated, nude calendars, skimpy outfits and the Lingerie Football League, of being obsessed with female athletes as sexual objects. The coverage coalesces with the stories that football players have been raised reading, as they dream of becoming the next league great, as John Henningham’s findings from the 1995 survey “A profile of Australian sports journalists” also reflect. Henningham found that sports

17 c.f. Ben Wadham’s essay at Chapter 2 on a similar culture existing within Australia’s military and by extension in its dealings with the media.
journalists are overwhelmingly male, less educated than other journalists but more conservative in their political values. They are also more supportive of traditional objective journalism but less supportive of investigative roles for the media. The prevalent and continuous narrative about football players is one that hails them as studs while the women who might respond to, or find themselves caught up in the football limelight are ‘up for it’ and deserving of what they get. If this is not penned out specifically in the actual articles then the accompanying reader comment threads do the rest of the work in connecting the dots.

Consent and Power: Institutions and Gender Bias

In the aftermath of *Code of Silence*, the media coverage of the program seemed to focus primarily on the notion of sexual consent. No real attention was given to the imbalance of power between the established and wealthy football clubs with their unlimited resources -- not the least easy media access -- versus the account of a young, lone victim.

The distinguishing factor in the *Four Corners* story was that it included an interview with Charmyne Palavi, a self-confessed NRL groupie. She openly discusses her numerous consensual sexual encounters with players and the attraction with these, and how she took part in setting up players with other women. She also reveals that she was raped by a player but did not have the courage to step forward with the story because she would be up against the might of the NRL as well as against the public wrath of a loyal club and player following. But her main role in the program was as a witness to the sexual conduct of a large number of NRL players. After ‘Code of Silence’ had aired on the ABC Charmayne Palavi did indeed get to feel what it is like to be in the middle of a media storm, and what it is like to be scorned in public; so much so that she had to try to explain herself, which she did a week later in a column in the Sydney tabloid the *Daily Telegraph* (Palavi, 2009). She wanted to get the message across that her actions were of her own choice (not including the rape incident), even the bad ones. She wrote:

‘Unfortunately, we live in a society where women will always be shut down for the very characteristics men are revered for - being strong, opinionated, fearless and open about their sexuality.

People seem to be ignoring the bigger issue here while they look for someone to blame. That is - the disrespect for women inherent in the clubs.

The key to fixing that problem is education. I thought my contribution was a valuable insight into a world so few know exist. Regardless of the poor lifestyle choices I have made in the past I hope to continue speaking up, so those women too afraid to speak out gain some self respect and learn they deserve better.

Her attempt to cast herself as a role model for the empowerment of women was, to the majority of readers, like waving a red rag to a bull. Two hundred and thirty-five comments later they had

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18 This belief is reflected by at least some players in the Four Corners program, when they respond to questions from a facilitator of a training program for young players about appropriate socializing with women.

overwhelmingly decided that she must embarrass her parents and that her parenting skills (Charmyne Palavi is a mother of three) are inadequate; a conclusion that is, in itself, irrational, but in the context of Australia’s historical patterns of demonizing women portrayed in the media as not behaving correctly, makes consistent sense. Under the cape of the anonymity that the Internet and newspaper websites provide, Charmayne Palavi was then ridiculed for not only her behaviour but also her looks. The comments were again reminiscent of the Lindy Chamberlain and Dianne Brimble cases described in Chapter 5, and were in the tone of the following: -

- Shampoo brains! What is your point? Are you the future of our gene pool?

- Let’s play a quiz. Four-letter word, starting with ‘s’, ending with ‘t’, contains letters ‘lu’ in the middle of it. You are an absolute disgrace to humanity; you demean women as well as men...

- What is going on here? Are we now being told that trollops should be treated with respect?? If you act like a tart you'll be treated like one and that’s how it's always been and always will be, so what’s the big deal?

- Oh dear, NRL players must be desperate - what a tacky, slutty looking bogan...real classy...

- See what happens when women are given rights!

There were supportive comments to be found as well but only as a minority that drowned in the outpouring of hatred and vitriol where, by comparison, the men at the centre of the ‘Code of Silence’ story that sparked the controversy were apparently of little consequence to at least the blogosphere.

Cowboys and ‘Cougars’: Media Representations of Women as ‘Groupies’ and Players as Vulnerable

Charmyne Palavi’s status as a willing groupie was well established by the media before she participated in ‘Code of Silence’. On February 7, 2008 the Daily Telegraph (Christie, J & Harris, A) revealed a liaison with the star player of the North Queensland Cowboys, Jonathan Thurston. Charmyne Palavi was on the basis of her own updates on her Facebook site labelled a “cyber squeeze” and the “Cougar from Coogee”. It was also stated that she had “hooked her claws into the Dally M winner” (an award that every year is given to the best player in the NRL competition) even though it apparently was Thurston who had pursued her for weeks through her MySpace site. When Jonathan Thurston’s manager was asked about the relationship he, according to the writer of the Telegraph column, Sydney Confidential, Annette Sharp, laughed off Thurston’s antics with the quip, “There was no curfew and he’s a single man who’s entitled to do what he wants.” The double standards were obvious, as the article did not in any way label Jonathon Thurston’s behaviour promiscuous or concern itself with whether a single woman had the same kind of entitlements.
This was the precise point that Charmayne Palavi later would make in her appeal in the *Daily Telegraph*.

On November 4, 2008 Palavi once again hit the gossip pages, first in England and afterwards back home in Australia, this time thanks to a sexual encounter with the English player Keith Senior. The English version of the story published by the *Sun* centred on the English national player in the headline, *Cheating Senior is a rug rat* (West, A & Thorne, F 2008). Charmyne Palavi was interviewed but her role was to confirm that Senior had indeed cheated on his girlfriend back home while playing in the World Cup in Australia. According to the article, this wasn’t the first time Keith Senior had cheated on a girlfriend. When the story hit Australia in Josh Massoud’s *Daily Telegraph* article, ‘The NRL Cougar Taking Web By Storm’ (2008), it was the antics of the NRL groupie that were the focus of the story (Massoud, 2008, Nov 8). She was described as “our cougar” and, under a picture where Charmyne Palavi posed in a tight top holding two cans of beer; a sexist pun was made in reference to her breasts. It was stated that NRL players were “painfully aware of her existence” and that she was the face of what “NRL stars contend with when they hit the tiles”. She was described as “blonde, busty and (fake) tanned”. And again the reporter wrote that Palavi had gotten “her claws into Senior” as a non-verifiable fact, even though the player apparently made first contact with her via her Facebook page. The story berated her for blabbing about the encounter and speculated that rugby league players were now feeling queasy in the wake of both Thurston and Senior getting burned and their relationships with Ms. Palavi becoming public.

Obviously the queasy feeling didn’t last for long for the cohort of NRL players willing to continue engaging with Palavi. A picture gallery, still available on a range of News Ltd websites like couriermail.com.au (2010) shows her with a who’s who of both present and former NRL footballers. Superstars like Greg Inglis, Darren Lockyer, Scott Prince, Israel Folau, Darius Boyd, John Cartwright and Allan Langer are snuggling up to her, as is Joel Monaghan of the Canberra Raiders. Monaghan is in the picture gallery only described as ‘an unknown man’.

**Sexualised Women as ‘Sluts’: The Court Actions**

The repeated use of the word, ‘slut’, by Australia’s biggest circulating newspapers (at least in their online reader comments pages) finally became too much for Charmyne Palavi. She made two legal attempts to halt the offensive references to her in the media, both relating to her sexual activities and her liaisons with rugby league players. The first action came in the wake of a segment on the Steve Price show on radio 2UE on May 14, 2009, in which the Matthew Johns group sex case was discussed. According to court documents held by the New South Wales District Court, she alleged that the segment implied that she was a ‘slut’, and ‘a madam’ that ‘ran a brothel’. She also alleged that she was defamed by the accusation ‘that she puts NRL players and underage girls together for sex and condones NRL players having sex with underage girls in a very organised fashion. The
second legal action was instigated after a reader comment thread to an article in Brisbane’s *Courier Mail* on April 16, 2010, suggested, among other insults, that Charmyne Palavi was a ‘slut’ and that she engages in disgraceful sexual promiscuous conduct. Ms. Palavi sued the Courier Mail in the NSW Supreme Court for the hurt she had felt by the false accusations.

Charmyne Palavi failed in both quests to clear her name (Charmyne Palavi 2011, Apr 12 & May 31). On both accounts the judges found that she had removed evidence from her mobile phones, both by deleting images from one and withholding another phone from the courts (Kennedy, L). The *Courier Mail* and radio 2UE on the other hand did not have to provide any evidence for Ms. Palavi’s promiscuity; the media outlets did not have to explain the relevance of Ms. Palavi’s sex life to its readers and listeners nor were they in any way held to account for anonymous comments on their website. No questions at all were being asked about the importance of demeaning Ms. Palavi; it all came down to the missing proof from her own mobile phones, which the courts, the newspaper and its readers clearly thought would prove Charmyne Palavi’s ‘slutty’ character. The defamation action against the *Courier-Mail* was struck out in April 2011, on the back of another court’s dismissal of the defamation action against 2UE after the telephone evidence was not produced. When Charmayne Palavi’s legal team appealed both cases, they were again struck out in March and June 2012. Disappointingly for a scholarly journal, even the Gazette of Law and Journalism’s report of the legal outcomes referred to the hapless Palavi as a ‘cougar’.19

The Sexual Assault Scandals

NRL players have a long history of getting involved in sexual scandals. The first time a case had a huge public impact was in the 2004 pre-season when six players from the Canterbury Bulldogs were accused of gang-raping a 20 year old woman at a resort in Coffs Harbour, New South Wales. Despite the woman’s allegations, obvious distress and that she had been found the following morning bleeding and taken in an ambulance to hospital, no charges were laid against any Canterbury players because of a lack of evidence. In parts of the media, police statements about “being adamant an attack had taken pace” were interpreted as the police knowing something sinister had taken place but lacking the evidence to prove it. This was, for instance, the case in the entry, *No rape charges against Canterbury Bulldogs* by Anne Summers (2005), on her eponymous website, but overwhelmingly the sports pages reported that the Bulldog players had been cleared of any wrongdoing.

The incident in Coffs Harbour followed a similar case the previous year where a 46-year-old woman had accused one Bulldog player of raping her while another was looking on waiting to do the same. But after the 2004 case, the broader public learned about the sexual bonding sessions

that apparently were rife among the players. Jacqueline Magnay in *The Age* (2004, Feb 29) quoted an anonymous Bulldogs player:

“Some of the boys love a ‘bun’,” said one. “Gang banging is nothing new for our club or the rugby league.”

And after that it wasn’t unknown to the Australian public either. After the Bulldogs scandal, there was a common defence of what had taken place as having been consensual and just a typical night out for rugby league players. Despite no charges being laid, the Bulldogs still chose to sack the club’s football manager; and the club’s chief executive subsequently resigned. In the wake of the media storm, the club was fined $150,000 by the NRL for not protecting the game’s image. Other incidents reported in various media have included the two 2008 rape cases against New Zealand Warriors’ Michael Crockett (Kaye, 2008) and Gold Coast Titans’ Anthony Laffranchi (Davies, 2008); and the rape, drug, and illegal filming of sex in a toilet cubicle case against Brisbane Broncos players Karmichael Hunt, Sam Thaiday and Darius Boyd (AAP, 2009, May 17). These cases all ended up being dismissed on the grounds of insufficient evidence.

Numerous more scandals have been covered. According to Deb Waterhouse-Watson in *(Un)reasonable Doubt: A ‘Narrative Immunity’ for Footballers against Sexual Assault Allegations* (2011), more than 20 cases have been reported in the media (with players from both the NRL and the Australian Football League (AFL) involving at least 56 players and officials, but none have ended with a conviction. Just making it to a trial in front of jurors, as did the poster boy for both the Manly Sea Eagles and the whole of the NRL, Brett Stewart, in 2010, is an uncommon occurrence. In September of that year, Stewart was cleared of sexually assaulting a 17-year-old girl the year before (Arlington, 2010), and no court case has ever been made against multiple players. Normally however, cases do not go any further than the historically more forgiving – of behaviour constructed as ‘natural’ and acceptable for men – process of trial-by-media. This is where public opinion, as seen in the comment threads accompanying newspaper articles and by callers to talk back radio stations, and journalists in overly familiar contact with clubs and players, jointly create a picture of famous players being unfairly targeted by unscrupulous groupies; ergo by ‘bad women’.20 According to prominent media studies analyst Professor Catharine Lumby, who has written about media representations of ‘bad girls’ and also about Australia’s chauvinistic football culture, it was up to the media to take the sexual exploitation issue seriously. Lumby writes:

> The *Four Corners* program on Rugby League that sparked so much commentary about what some footballers do to women quite rightly provoked a horrified reaction. Sarah Ferguson, the journalist responsible, certainly deserves a Walkley for her ability to get women who’ve been through trauma to talk so openly.

> As someone who’s been part of a pro-bono team working on exactly the issues the program shone a light onto - men team bonding over women or even assaulting them – I’m left waiting for a lot of the media who followed her story to ask the most

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important question. What is being done, and what can we do to prevent this kind of behaviour wherever we find it?

In his 2006 *Tom Brock Lecture* (Rowe, 2006) hosted by the Australian Society for Sports History David Rowe pointed to a deep running larrikinism inside the rugby league environment that rejected all talk about issues such as racism, sexism and homophobia. He said that willing sports journalists had gladly helped the NRL community in this endeavour:

In this denial they have been aided and abetted by most sports journalists, whose visceral loathing of social critics of sport is matched only by their passionate identification (sometimes to the point of idolatry) with the objects of their gaze.

Raymond Boyle has also famously described the issue in the book *Sports Journalism: Context and Issues* (2006). Boyle notes that sports journalists prefers to stay on good terms with their sources, the clubs, and players, and to ensure that they would retain access to stories and exclusives and not endanger the relationship with a one off front-page story.

An example of this journalistic boys’ club could be found in an article that appeared in the Sun-Herald on May 10, 2009 (Wiedler, 2009b), the day before *Code of Silence* went to air. Channel 9’s rugby league reporter Danny Wiedler wrote a column where he admitted to having known about the incident in New Zealand for years but had kept quiet out of respect for Johns. He did not try to defend Johns’ actions but he did his best to put them in the best possible light by explaining that ‘Clare’, in the crudest of terms, begged Johns for more sex. Wiedler also quoted Johns’ lawyer who called the young woman’s case ‘flimsy’, and repeatedly stressed that all the Cronulla Sharks players involved were cleared of any criminal wrongdoing (even though they had not been cleared, as charges were never laid). Danny Wiedler had opened his story by establishing that he was both a colleague and friend of Johns. How, under those circumstances, he would be able to report objectively on the story is a matter probably best left to his own ethical compass. A week later in his next column (Wiedler, 2009a), Wiedler kept up the defence of Johns by attacking the *Four Corners* program for being full of holes and flimsy journalism (he did re-use Johns’ lawyer’s word flimsy). His article also dubbed the sexual assault case an ‘afternoon-romp’.

It is a common theme in the articles relevant to the cases discussed in this chapter that sports journalists prefer to use the least loaded words when they cannot avoid reporting on the sexual bonding sessions between NRL players. *Group sex* is a widespread way of referring to what is taking place; *gangbang* is not. This is the case even though their actions seem more similar to a pack of wolves on the hunt ganging up on its victim than a group that is willing to include a stranger, a woman, in its fellowship. This was made clear by ‘Clare’s’ account in the *Four Corners* program. The unwillingness to report on negative stories about sports stars had puzzled the
reporter on *Code of Silence*, Sarah Ferguson, in her research. In an interview in the *Australian* (Kogoy, 2009) she said: -

There wasn’t one person at Cronulla who did not know about the incident - the entire team and football staff - but it managed to get very little airing at the time. Forty members of the Cronulla team and its staff were interviewed by (New Zealand) police and apart from one or two brief news stories at the time, because there was no police charges laid, nothing was done whatsoever.

Initially, the sympathy outpouring to Matthew Johns’ way did not prevent him from losing his job with Channel 9, or his role as assistant coach with the NRL club Melbourne Storm. But Johns’ misfortune didn’t last. In the numerous articles that were written about his role in the Christchurch motel room, how he was subsequently portrayed in the Four Corners program, and in an interview together with his wife Trish conducted by Nine TV network’s Tracy Grimshaw on the commercial tabloid program, *A Current Affair* (2009), a large part of public opinion took his side and argued he was being treated unfairly. Comments attached were similar to the ones that accompanied the article, ‘Matthew Johns Guilty of Stupidity, Not Abuse’ in the Newcastle Herald (Magnay, 2009) shortly after *Code of Silence* had reignited the controversy: -

- Usually i’m very critical of league players and supporters but i think Matthew has taken too much flak in this case. All concerned should pay a fine towards rebuilding the damage they have done.
- Enough!!! i am sick of hearing about this. It was consensual group sex 7 years ago. So now the girl has changed her mind and decided she regrets what she did. Group sex – wife swapping, swingers or whatever they used to be called – is not illegal, just distasteful to some of us.
- i think mat should sue channel 9 and the storm for false dismissal.
- What a disgrace. 7 years later and after the police found no crime had been committed, [sic] a mans life is destroyed by some vindictive woman. Money involved?? Of course. (...) We all know these groupies hurl themselves at big named players etc. Matt and Trish, say nothing more, it’s a matter between the 2 of you. You will only get stitched up by the media. Good luck to you both and your family.

However, the vindication of Johns would not be sustained. Several support groups quickly appeared on Facebook, the main one, *Support Matthew Johns*, still has almost 200,000 members. This can be seen in contrast with the biggest anti-Matthew Johns group that has 545 members, while there are no support groups available for people wanting to help ‘Clare’. The public backing was there and Channel 9 did not take long to notice. It was reported in the *Daily Telegraph* in September 2009 that Johns had been approached to return to the network but had rejected the offer. Instead, the following year Matthew Johns went to rival television Channel 7 where he fronted a new rugby league-based variety program called *The Matty Johns Show*.

The program was taken off the air after one season and Matthew Johns instead went to work for radio station *Triple M* on the breakfast show *The Grill Team*. For ‘Clare’, being vilified by media commentators and in comments from readers and listeners was not the experience she had hoped for. She felt inclined to contact *Four Corners* to plead for help in getting the media to leave her in
peace. In an update (Spencer & Ferguson, 2009) to the program published on the ABC’s website, the program allowed ‘Clare’ the last word on the saga: -

I am being harassed in the most awful ways and what is being reported by journalists is horrible and untrue. They have got people speaking of me that are not my friends or people I have never met. It feels like I am living in a nightmare. All I wanted to do was to make people aware of the culture and stop it happening to other girls.

People are aware of the culture, but that does not mean that her experience will not be re-lived by more young women, not as long as the Australian media continues to see ‘sluts’ and male role models as a match made in sporting heaven.
6 Passing The Banner: The Australian Media’s Coverage of High Profile Court Cases About Women

Janine Little

Background – The Lindy Chamberlain Case

One of Australia’s most reported stories about women, tragedy, and Australia’s criminal justice system ended on June 12th, 2012, when Lindy Chamberlain’s dingo story was, after thirty years of her telling it the same way, finally believed. It was the dingo, after all, and not the mother with the strange haircut and Seventh Day Adventist pastor husband who had killed their baby (Brown, 2012, June 12).

The Northern Territory Coroner’s official finding in June 2012 was a dingo had taken baby Azaria Chamberlain from a tent at the Chamberlain’s Uluru campsite more than 30 years ago. That is just what Lindy Chamberlain and her then husband Michael had told police. How Lindy Chamberlain then came to be wrongfully convicted and sent to jail two years later for killing her daughter is now the notorious stuff of publishing and cinema. Before the story generated book contracts and movie deals, however, there was folklore – black humour, backyard speculations about what wild dogs could fit in their mouths and how come the mother did not cry; holes picked in stories and rehashed by pre-trial media coverage that had Lindy convicted and sentenced even before a jury was empanelled. I remember being a junior copy girl at Brisbane’s Daily Sun newspaper when the Chamberlain murder trial was front-page news, and the journalists ran a sweep on how many years Lindy would do inside. Not on whether or not she was guilty. That was not speculated upon or even considered. From the day that the now defunct Brisbane Telegraph splashed its afternoon front page with the banner, Scissors Killed Azaria, no journalist at least in that city wavered in their notion of the story they were now either chasing or coveting. No wager went to a ‘not guilty’ verdict; even after Coroner Dennis Barritt’s apology to the Chamberlains for the intense media scrutiny the family had endured since Azaria disappeared on August 10, 1980 (Crispin, 2012). The Australian media was not about to ruin the biggest crime and justice story it had covered in its relatively short history.

There would not be another big story like this, one with a woman as simultaneously the victim and suspect. If viewed with the news media’s interests in mind Lindy Chamberlain was indeed ‘suspect’ for what the world’s media, led by Australia’s avid news crews, reported as a lack of emotion at the loss of her child. If viewed as an embodiment of Australia’s historical pattern of depicting women (in a parallel, discursive construct) as either acting right and thus a ‘victim’ of violent antisocial or animalistic behaviour, or behaving badly – and therefore not acting right, being responsible, or deserving of social support (Gill, 2007, Howe, 1998, Lumby, 1997).
1 The Chamberlain Case -- A Benchmark

The media representation of Lindy Chamberlain during the time of the verdict sweeps and dingo jokes is now so notorious as a case study into justice-gone-wrong that it benchmarks most discussions of the wider issue of women and the Australian media. Lindy Chamberlain-Creighton (as she is now known) is herself a high profile campaigner for civil liberties and the rights of accused persons, generally, to a fair trial. She is also a regular source on stories about high profile cases where the defence attempts to cast doubts about the soundness of a court’s decision (Djevic, 2012, March 7). But the irrationality of public opinion reflected in the Australian media’s depiction of Lindy Chamberlain relies on the particular role of gender in the injustice that was done to her. Some argue that gender is also operating as a determinant of relative power in cases involving men convicted of killing their children (such as the Farquharson triple murder). But without the unsound elements of the evidence and jury verdict that convicted Lindy Chamberlain – proved when the new evidence of the baby’s matinee jacket was unearthed two years into Lindy’s sentence – the claims do not connect to material circumstances as they did for Lindy Chamberlain and, as this article shows, for a woman who was not around to speak about what happened to her.

Brisbane mother Dianne Brimble died on a cruise ship during the September school holidays in 2002. The mysterious and shocking circumstances of her death would eventually make the story the most widely reported media event in Australian history – even outstripping the Azaria Chamberlain disappearance and Lindy Chamberlain murder trial. Dianne Brimble, 42, stands for the tragic and fraught side of women’s representation in the Australian media: not the least because she is dead but also because of the way that the media narrative shifted, at turns, to cast suspicion in her direction even though the hard fact of her death remained at the centre of public consciousness. What this says about the historical pattern of mediated women involved in tragedy or violent crime is that it tends to hold women responsible for, but simultaneously implausible witnesses of, what happens to them. Standing Dianne Brimble’s story next to Lindy Chamberlain’s certainly helps to see this pattern but Dianne’s story finds not a wild animal acting on instinct at its denouement, but “unscrupulous persons” who set out to “denigrate her for their own sexual gratification”. And there’s no law against that in Australia.

2 The Brimble Case 2002-2010

Dianne Brimble died on September 24, 2002, without seeing the first day of her cruise to New Caledonia. News about what happened aboard the popular P&O cruise liner reported first that a woman was dead and that it was mysterious. She was found in a men’s cabin and so of course there was sex involved. Even if that were not true it wouldn’t have mattered, since the story had already made the connections and established the public perception. Police soon identify a group of men from Adelaide as the ‘eight persons of interest, the men Dianne Brimble met at the ship’s
ritual Sail Away Party. News coverage went berserk and why wouldn’t it? Eight men, one woman, and all that booze without much visible constraint; this was the party culture of the cruise ship, after all. It took her family eight years to hear an official finding that Dianne Brimble did not consent to group sex or to taking the date rape drug ‘Fantasy’ mixed with alcohol, which killed her. But that was all that really occurred in terms of justice. In 2006, Mark Wilhelm, one of the men who met Dianne Brimble at the Sail Away Party aboard Pacific Sky, went to trial on charges of supplying a dangerous drug, and encouraging her to take it. But that trial was discontinued when the jury failed to reach a verdict on either charge. Another trial was set down for April 2010, but Wilhelm in the meantime entered a guilty plea on a lesser charge and was convicted, but not penalised. Before that, a 17-month Coronial Inquest led up to referral of the case to the NSW Director of Public Prosecutions. The media covered all of it steadily, including what came out of police investigations before any charges were laid. That not only meant that journalists and media outlets were not restricted by contempt laws but also that they could run parts of police interviews with the ‘eight persons of interest’ without the risk of being accused of prejudicing a trial jury. That was the theory, contentious as it is now in Australia given the run of events across other subsequent stories about violence against women, most notably the Jill Meagher murder in Brunswick, Melbourne, on September 15, 2012.

Thanks to Geesche Jacobsen’s Walkley Award-nominated book about the Dianne Brimble story published in 2011, some of the media’s initial coverage of the case as an orgy gone tragically wrong has been recast with the benefit of meticulous research (Jacobsen, 2010, April 30). Jacobsen notes that Dianne Brimble spent most of late night September 23rd to early morning September 24th with Mark Wilhelm. She was seen, in the space of a few minutes, to go from appearing to security guards who saw her with Wilhelm to be “…happy, but not too drunk” (p.7) to “…very intoxicated and …staggering” as “she and Mark walked away from the Pizzeria towards the stairs and lifts at the rear of the ship, which would take them down to their cabins on the Dolphin Deck”. (p. 8) The top news item aside from Wilhelm’s discontinued trial was the court’s consensus with the defence case that Dianne Brimble had consented to taking the illicit drug, GHB or ‘fantasy’. Jacobsen, the Sydney Morning Herald’s chief crime writer notes in Abandoned how three witnesses testified at the preceding 2006 Coroner’s Inquest that on the first night of the cruise, they heard a woman’s voice that they thought might have come from Cabin D182 (Dolphin Deck) saying, “I’m not like that. I don’t do that sort of thing.” (Jacobsen, 2010). Nevertheless, the existence of graphic and degrading photographs of Dianne Brimble was made public early on, as were the cruel comments made about her not just by some of the eight men but by others associated with the 2002 cruise. The Brimble family’s attempt to have the material suppressed until after the Coronial Inquest’s conclusion was rejected because the Coroner felt there was a wider public interest in warning about the dangers of taking GHB (ibid. p.129). Dianne Brimble’s posthumous best interests, and her family’s drawn-out and unresolved trauma, would gain little respite from subsequent media banners like, ‘She was a dog and she ruined my holiday’ (op cit.) or even the well-intentioned op-ed and letter writers who wrote about “images that prompt a sense of anger,
betrayal...no one should be left to die that way...” (Jacobsen, 2010, p.169). Dianne Brimble, the subject of the photos and also of the media’s discussions of morality and responsibility did not get to decide whether or not she should be used to make that point. The media’s organising principle might be that Dianne Brimble let go of the causal chain when she walked up the cruise ship gangplank: she no longer controlled even her own presence in the world, nor its media representation, seemingly because she entered the cruise ship world willingly. The same implied consent to having personal and private space violated is not generally ascribed to men.

Three weeks out from Christmas 2010 the Brimble family talked to their hometown newspaper, the Brisbane Sunday Mail, about the importance of Coroner Milledge’s findings in restoring Dianne’s dignity. In it, the newspaper broaches the topic of cruise ship culture and personal security. A story sidebar lists key recommendations made by the Coroner, including the use of drug sniffer dogs at cruise ship ports and Australian Federal Police on board all ships. The recommendations, according to the Neville Passmore’s report, came after US Congress passed reforms to shipboard security including the use of video surveillance and ensuring medical access for victims of sexual assault. That story ran on page 25. It was just a soft follow-up, an article running around a file photo of Dianne Brimble and friends waving from the Pacific Sky gangplank. The same photo appears in Jacobsen’s book, but the Sunday Mail set a red circle around Dianne Brimble’s face, just in case readers couldn’t make her out: it did make it easier to see her in the passenger group. The headline, “Dignity Restored” was appropriate but came way too late. The first Coroner’s Inquest started in 2006 and ran for a year and a half. That was followed by the ABC TV documentary, The Mourning After, screened after Wilhelm’s aborted manslaughter trial in 2009 and his guilty plea in April 2010 to the lesser charge of supplying a dangerous drug. Coverage of the story picked up again in late 2010 when the re-opened inquest findings vindicated Dianne Brimble from the sex and drug-fuelled insinuations that she was somehow to blame. Jacobsen’s 2011 Walkley nomination in the book-length journalism category was the next media milestone.

In all of this Dianne Brimble assumed a sort of dual identity: by day, a symbol of female victimhood. That was in the stories from the first Inquest, when evidence about her mistreatment invoked ‘moral outrage’ at ‘these disgusting monsters, whose contempt for women becomes more pronounced with every new piece of information and every abhorrent word they utter’. By night: her portrayal as the cause of her own fate along with all the publics’ feelings of betrayal and anger at how and where she was ... in a strangers’ cabin, a men’s cabin. Soon, it wasn’t possible to claim that Dianne Brimble’s death ameliorated her portrayal as at best recklessly wayward and wide-eyed, and at the worst of the media’s representations of her: the woman who decided to take drugs with alcohol and have sex with strangers. Soon, it hardly occurred to anyone apart from those who lived with it day in, day out, that no one had helped her. No one thought to check her pulse, get a doctor, or even think twice about laughing and walking away. Had the media played a part in fostering such carelessness? Even when public space is set up for the purpose of confined social
interaction – a la the cruise ship – Dianne Brimble was somehow still at fault for indulging in that space. For the men it was expected, understandable, if not excusable boyish larrikinism. The women – Dianne Brimble, Kim Duthie of the St. Kilda football team Facebook photo saga, Charmayne Palavi, the woman the media called a ‘cougar’ and one reader commenting on a newspaper blog site a ‘slut’ for setting up dates between rugby league players and her women friends – are behaving badly and as such are somehow to blame for men’s criminal behaviour.

Australian popular views through the years since 2002 held that Dianne Brimble was responsible for what happened to her because she was in the wrong place at the wrong time. As Jacobsen notes, Dianne Brimble was so excited about her first time on a cruise ship that she wanted to party, and was eager to make the most of her first holiday away from Brisbane. When she met Mark Wilhelm, Dragan Losic, Leo Silvestri, Matthew Slade, Petar Pantic, Ryan Kuchel, Luigi Vitali, and Charlie Kambouris, that’s what she did. They said she consented to taking Fantasy. The media reported it that way too. Implicit in the reportage of the presence of a middle-aged woman alone with men in a ship’s cabin is the notion that there had to have been willing participation in all the events on her part. The news reports said that Dianne Brimble went out on the first night of her P&O cruise and drank alcohol, like most of the other ship’s passengers at the Sail Away party. Just how the news narrative turned from that unremarkable event to the implied consent from Dianne Brimble to taking drugs and having sex with strangers is a process that owes more to historical patterns of gender stereotypes and deeply embedded notions of entitlement that still exist within the Australia’s organisational structures.

While the persistence of gendered perceptions of right and wrong, culpability and responsibility in the Australian media’s processes of story selection and framing are not often made explicit, the fact that the same motifs of suspicion and bad behaviour recur in the highest profile stories about women and the justice system is sufficient identification. There is less running story value, after all, when the woman at the centre of the crime turns out to be a victim not of her own fault but of another’s cruelty. Brisbane’s Sunday Mail newspaper followed up the Dianne Brimble story in 2010 mainly because she was from Brisbane. Its story said that the Brimble family’s reaction to the official finding was one of relief that everyone (at least those who saw the page 25 story) would know that what was said about their beloved mother, partner, daughter, was not true, and that her death was a result of the carelessness of others rather than somehow being her responsibility. Journalist Malcolm Knox (2006) wrote about this moral finer point of responsibility when he board a similar ‘mid-range budget cruise’ in the lead up to the start of the long Coronial Inquest into Dianne Brimble’s death to research his piece for The Monthly magazine. Knox confesses in his long, participant observation-style essay that he ‘feel(s) pity for Mark Wilhelm’ and that, ‘the working hypothesis I bring onto this boat is that Wilhelm did nothing wrong’ (Knox, 2006).
How can I countenance such an idea? It’s simple. There is a great gap lying unexplained between the appalling revelations about P & O cruises and tonight’s reality, the 1900 filled berths. There is no way into that gap other than to enter the moral capsule of the cruise” (ibid.).

Knox talked to passengers on his weekend cruise about the Dianne Brimble case. Everyone he met knew about what had happened. They relayed the media’s thousands of hours of coverage with variations of the popular line of reasoning that went, he writes, “fat woman –too friendly--flattered by male attention–Brimble”. “You can imagine her going into a cabin with men,” one of Knox’s female sources tells him, “just because she’s friendly, and then, you know, men can get out of hand, can’t they?”

When the first Coronal Inquest finally started in Sydney later that year, the high-profile barrister Geoffrey Robertson, QC, upbraided the Australian media’s eager reportage of the sordid details of how things in Cabin D182 got ‘out of hand’: -

‘What you have here is in effect a trial for murder where evidence which would be inadmissible in a proper trial is run in the media, there for every potential juror to read. Any “persons of interest” should be arrested – that prevents any speculation while witness statements are taken – and they should then be prosecuted properly in court, not by this “trial” where they have no judge or jury’. (Jacobsen, p. 143)

Even before arriving at the fair trial implications of the selected content and language, there are the privacy issues and the moral obligation to the family (and to Dianne Brimble) to leave some space for what should remain private knowledge and run parallel to a judicial system doing its directed work. It’s the media’s perceived interference in both areas of public importance that has garnered so much vehement support for calls for a stronger regulatory body governing the Australian media. Some of the headlines that Geoffrey Robertson QC objected to prior to the Wilhelm matter going to trial would have perturbed Dianne Brimble’s loved ones and their legal advisers in their discrete efforts to get to the truth as fulsomely as possible.

Brimble witness tells of nightclub drug dealing (ABC News Online Nov 23, 2006)
NSW: Men of interest dealt drugs at police-owned bar: inquest (Australian Associated Press, Nov 30, 2006)
Brimble Inquest evidence unreliable, says [SA Police Commissioner] Hyde
New witness admits claims are hearsay (Adelaide Advertiser, Dec 6, 2006)
Woman tells of Losic’s laughter over Brimble (Mercury, Hobart, Nov 17, 2006)
Second trial in Brimble case (Townsville Bulletin, Dec 7, 2009)
Inquest to reopen as Wilhelm walks (Jacobsen, 2010, April 30)
The sample of headlines above is but a portion from 219 hits from a news media database search on the terms “Dianne Brimble” and “cruise ships” between September 23, 2002, and 15 December 2011. It would be enough to confuse anyone who followed the case, let alone a new reader. Robertson QC’s point was about this confusion effect, the way media choices and angles would tend to lead a trial jury down a certain path.

The prospects of empaneling a jury that could progress any further than the first trial jury’s inability to reach a verdict on Wilhelm’s manslaughter charge might not be that compelling for readers or spectators anymore. Dianne Brimble’s former husband, Mark Brimble, her partner David Mitchell, and their families tried in vain to suppress the worst of the related evidence but their application for a suppression order was rejected. The media was able to report anything said or tabled in open proceedings, which amounted to substantial detail and illustration of what witnesses saw. If the recollections from Cabin D182 were somewhat patchy, the trophy photographs taken by Mark Wilhelm as Dianne Brimble lay naked on the cabin floor, unnoticed in her medical distress, filled in any gaps, as did the recollections of women in an cabin on the same deck, to who Wilhelm showed the phone photographs.

The Banner Passes – From The Dianne Brimble Case To The Jill Meagher Murder

It’s not like this story matters in strict news terms these days. As far as breaking news or even compelling stories go, the Dianne Brimble case had done its dash after Geesche Jacobsen’s Walkley Award nomination and Australian Story’s treatment of the case back in 2006. But it mattered when we heard that Lindy Chamberlain’s long and traumatic road down Australia’s peculiar set of prejudices about women had finally circled back to the beginning: the original finding that the dingo took Azaria Chamberlain was reinstated. The fact that Lindy Chamberlain-Creighton was still around to hear the apology that took 32 years meant something that cannot be underestimated in terms of its significance for the mediated woman news subject. Dianne Brimble was not alive to campaign for the restoration of her own dignity, following the awful events in 2002 and the media’s reproduction of every sad photograph and all the tackiest of insults from those who left her to die in Cabin D182 on the first night of her hard-earned holiday.

For similar reasons it mattered again when Jill Meagher’s apparently random murder moved more than 30,000 people enough in the still chilling spring of 2012 to take to the streets of Melbourne’s Brunswick, on a Sunday morning, to march in support of peace. This time, general public scrutiny focussed on the alleged killer and on the way that he was caught. It was happenstance: a ghostly image on a closed circuit television screen nestled among the lavish bridal gowns of Sydney Road’s Duchess Boutique finds the killer. A thin man in a blue hoodie walks right to left, turns back. Jill Meagher appears, stops just behind the man. Both walk off. News bulletins two days later lead with the grim news that Jill Meagher’s body had been found in a shallow grave at the side of a road...
in Gisborne South, about 50km north of Melbourne. The remote dirt track and the bridal boutique and become sites of public mourning as thousands of flower bouquets and handwritten notes from strangers are left at the makeshift memorials. By the time that Adrian Ernest Bailey, 41, had appeared in court, charged with rape and murder there are footpath barriers containing city’s floral tribute and a farming community’s sombre plaque marking the place where police found the body. Someone in the gallery during the first mention of Bailey’s case yelled, ‘maggot’, as he was led back down to wait out the three months to the next court date. Jill Meagher’s husband and brother were in court that day; they flew to Ireland soon after for her funeral. White ribbons and balloons are distributed there and at the Melbourne march. They are media markers now for non-violence generally, and non-violence against women especially.

Outside Victoria, some of the major metropolitan newspapers run lists of the accused man’s prior convictions; these are in media law terms prohibited story content under sub judice provisions. The interstate media risk being found in contempt of court, but this is probably a matter of weighing that risk against the likelihood that the defence would even attempt to raise it. Contempt risks also reduce proportionally with the geographical and temporal distance from the pool of potential jurists who might be empanelled at a subsequent criminal trial. Would Bailey get a fair trial in Melbourne, after the white ribbons and barely contained public anguish at first the random sexual assault and murder, then the cold premeditation of the 50km drive to dump Jill Meagher’s body? But proximity matters even less in the social network of the world’s most phenomenally popular Internet sharing application, Facebook.

Social Networking and Media Coverage of Crimes Against Women

It was no surprise that Facebook served as a rallying point for international comments and expressions of grief and outrage about what had happened to Jill Meagher. In a somewhat consistent manner with the medium that had been so crucial for police in finding the key person of interest in her disappearance (the CCTV video at Brunswick’s Duchess Boutique) Facebook rapidly became the site of the public’s collective hostility towards Adrian Ernest Bailey. The outcry was so virulent that Tom Meagher, Jill Meagher’s grief-stricken husband, implored social media users to stop posting comments about the case and about the accused, for fear that social media could harm the process of securing fit justice for his wife’s murder. (Russell, 2012). Some of the Facebook postings were so strident that Bailey’s defence lawyer to applied to the Melbourne Magistrates Court soon after his first court appearance for a suppression order to stop any media from publishing his identity. But the Deputy Chief Magistrate Felicity Broughton said that identity was not an issue in the case and did not grant the order to ban the mainstream media from running photographs of Bailey, which first appeared in news reports on October 12 (Russell, 2012, Oct 12). However, Ms. Broughton CM did issue a cessation order for the Facebook discussions of Bailey’s past, as well as the rape and murder charges against him, by way of acknowledging defence concerns about the potential of the material to prejudice a jury. The court order sparked some
controversy when Facebook management maintained that it was itself a social media tool and not a social commentator. In declining to act to remove content and pages relevant to the Jill Meagher murder, Facebook referred to its terms of use as being congruent with its general support of free speech rather than its specific and sole responsibility to censor or regulate content. (Meldrum Hanna, 2012, Oct 11).

Indeed, the instruction by Melbourne’s Deputy Chief Magistrate to prohibit publication of any further material that might risk prejudicing Bailey’s trial was made with a concession to the fact that such bans were “…futile, given the ‘anarchic nature’ of the Internet…” (2012, Oct 12, 11.25am). The most oddly contradictory point about this ‘anarchic nature’ is that much of it is, as the Australian Broadcasting Corporation’s 7.30 current affairs program reported on October 11, 2012, channelled into offensive material that promotes violence against women as well as violent and aggressive communicative approaches to social networking, generally. In this respect, the mainstream news and current affairs media’s publication of the photograph of a man accused of rape and murder came well after the police issued CCTV video of the man talking to Jill Meagher as she walked home from her local pub the night she disappeared. Public distress at the cameo shot of Jill Meagher had been the initial reaction to media coverage. When the mood turned to public hatred for the disguised man in the blue hoodie, there had already been some discussion of why Jill Meagher was ‘permitted’ to walk alone down Sydney Road at that hour but this speculation about her behaviour was nothing like the sustained talk about Dianne Brimble or, before her, Lindy Chamberlain.

As the two most starkly apparent examples of the Australian media’s woman-focussed narrative of responsibility and blame, the Dianne Brimble and Lindy Chamberlain stories had reaffirmed the Australian media’s reflection of a set of contradictory and ambivalent assumptions. These historically held assumptions are about women-as-victims and women behaving badly that have transferred apace with social change from the colonial periodical, to the radio, and then to television. However, the recent and serious concerns about the use of digital technologies via social media to circulate violent, exploitative and hate-based material about women have been raised also in relation to other relatively disempowered and vulnerable groups such as children, the disabled, and also animals. At the centre of concerns is what appears to be an absence of conscience or choices cognisant within communication as an activity with legal consequences and moral relevance – even to the extent of thinking twice about the judicial impact of an overzealous Facebook post or Tweet about the man accused of raping and murdering Jill Meagher. For that reason, what social media might finally bring about is a more explicit and nuanced account by the professional media, generally, of ways in which its coverage of stories about women contributes to individual experiences of Australia’s social justice system. This has already started to occur, for example, with the role of “reader interactivity” and two-way journalism in the “legacy media (i.e. newspapers, TV, radio) and the necessity of journalism to differentiate its formalized research, writing and production practices from the “untrained” narrative of public opinion. The mainstream,
corporate media has had to account for its editorial and production decisions within the digitized world of the blog, and the “audience upload”, which means that its historical patterns of gender inflection in content and presentation might now be more easily identified.
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