Platform: Journal of Media and Communication Volume 8.2 has been edited by postgraduate representatives of the Australian and New Zealand Communication Association.

Platform is published by the School of Culture and Communication, The University of Melbourne.
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We are pleased to bring you this special issue of *Platform: Journal of Media and Communication* in partnership with the 2017 Australian and New Zealand Communication Association (ANZCA). This year’s conference theme, “Communication Worlds: Access, Voice, Diversity, Engagement”, brought together scholars from across the diverse field of communication research to consider issues of diversity and accessibility throughout media and communications practice and scholarship.

At the postgraduate/early career researcher pre-conference attendees had the chance to consider more critically the nature of academic labour with a panel of early career experts sharing their experiences and advice on academic life and wellbeing. Alongside this, a Keynote from Professor Paula Gardner tackled issues of community-based collaborative research projects, with a focus on feminism and diverse authorship.

This special issue emerges from these themes, bringing together postgraduate and early career research from a range of disciplinary backgrounds at the forefront of Australian and New Zealand communications.

The issue opens with an examination of voice and access in the digital realm. In “Only for White, Middle-class Feminists? Issues of Intersectionality Within the World of Contemporary Digital Feminist Campaigns”, Jessamy Gleeson explores tensions over intersectionality in the digital feminist campaign Destroy the Joint (DtJ). Gleeson’s paper draws on data from interviews with three former campaign members to examine the digital silencing of the voices of disability activists on DtJ’s Facebook page. Gleeson argues that despite the potential offered by social media for the enablement of diverse voices and intersectional values, this potential was not realised in the DtJ campaign—a shortcoming that must be resolved in digital feminist spaces if voices beyond those of white, middle-class women are to be heard.

Continuing the focus on online interactions, Sean McEwan’s “Nation of Shitposters: Ironic Engagement with the Facebook posts of Shannon Noll as Reconfiguration of an Australian National Identity” considers the rise of ironic posting, or shitposting, as a disruption to contemporary standards of discourse. Focusing on the case study of ‘Nollposting’—posts concerning the Australian singer and celebrity Shannon Noll—McEwan explores the accumulation of cultural capital situated within particular Australian discourses. The article investigates the intersections of the Australian battler trope and hyper-masculine vulgar, situating the practice of Nollposting within the context of hyperbolic and ironic Australiana. Here, McEwan’s thoughtful engagement with contemporary internet culture deals with the simultaneous recognition and subversion of mainstream conventions, contextualised within localised online practices and cultural capital.

Shifting the issue towards considerations of ethics and narrative, Carmen Jacques’ paper “Victim or Survivor? Emerging Narratives from Experiences of Terrorism” provides a glimpse into the
everyday effects of terrorism as it is lived and told by those who survived the 2002 Sari Club bombing in Bali, and the 2005 London bombings. Jacques’ paper engages us in a space where ethics and storytelling are foregrounded—where we “visit” others’ perspectives in order to understand how they seek to “live well” after an experience of violence that has complicated their physical, emotional and relational worlds. The stories presented in the paper demonstrate a delicate traversing of the spaces between “victim” and “survivor”, and how individuals impacted by terrorism reinterpret their pasts to bring meaning and purpose to their present.

The final two articles in this issue engage us in the worlds of sports broadcasting and news media. Edward Reddin’s paper “Cultural Citizenship, Social Utility, and Positive Network Externalities: The Role of Anti-Siphoning Legislation” examines the changing Australian broadcasting landscape and its stagnant anti-siphoning legislation. Specifically, Reddin looks at the link between televised Australian Football League (AFL); cultural citizenship, social utility, and positive network externality; free-to-air versus pay-TV; and Australian anti-siphoning laws. Reddin argues that Australia’s current legislation around broadcasting rights of culturally significant sports, such as the AFL, has its flaws in terms of its obligation to fulfil its cultural remit. Reddin also adds that to gain a better understanding of such tension, audience engagement and consumption must also be examined. This argument then poses the question: What do the tensions emerging from the changing conditions in the AFL broadcasting sector mean for regulation that is designed to preserve the cultural citizenship that is facilitated by access to mediated sport?

In “Propositional Journalism and Navigational Leadership in Tasmania”, Bill Dodd seeks to identify the voices of those most prominent in pitching and commenting on propositions, and how this type of reporting was framed. Examining over 1,100 proposition-centered articles from three major news outlets in Tasmania, the study finds that reporting of the future leadership is primarily led by masculine political and business sources. Although Dodd reasons that through metaphorical framing the dominant masculine political and business sources are legitimised, the opportunity to explore feminist leadership would be of interest.

As guest editors for this special issue we would like to thank Chris O’Neill from Platform for his collaboration and support throughout this process. We would also like to thank the conference organisation team, Gerard Goggin, Fiona Martin, and Jonathon Hutchinson for their support throughout the conference and for this publication. A special thanks too for the hard work and dedication of conference organiser Fuchsia Sellers, as well as Eugenia Lee for her dedication and assistance in co-organising the postgraduate and early career researcher pre-conference. We look forward to further engagement with the postgraduate community at future conferences, with the next ANZCA hosted by the University of Auckland under the theme, “Multiple Realities: Fluidity, Hybridity, and Stability in Global Communication”.

Elizabeth Goode is a PhD candidate in the School of Creative Industries at the University of Newcastle, Australia. Her doctoral thesis utilises a biographical narrative approach to examine the cultural identities and sensemaking of intercountry adoptees in Australia. Her research interests include cultural identity construction, cross-cultural migration and transracial adoption, narrative inquiry (including biographical research), and autoethnography.
Kyle Moore is a PhD candidate at the University of Sydney in the department of Media and Communications. His doctoral research explores how location-based gaming practices are situated within our understanding of sociocultural and material circumstances. Drawing from ethnographic observations of the game Ingress, his research develops the concept of situated play to understand this emerging commercial phenomenon. Kyle has previously published research on mobile, portable, and location-based games in journals such as M/C Journal and Games & Culture.

Pita Shelford is of Te Rarawa and Ngāpuhi (iwi/tribes in Aotearoa, New Zealand) is a PhD student at the University of Waikato, Aotearoa. Pita is an emerging researcher who is interested in indigenous health and specifically hauora tāne Māori (Māori men’s health and wellbeing). In keeping with hauora tāne Māori, Pita’s doctoral research will explore the implementation and health outcomes of a Tuakana-teina/peer education model that focuses on life transitions of koroheke Māori (elderly Māori men) within rural communities.
**Only for White, Middle-class Feminists?**

**Issues of Intersectionality within the Worlds of Contemporary Digital Feminist Campaigns**

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Intersectionality was a term first articulated by Kimberle Crenshaw in 1989; Crenshaw describes intersectionality as the acknowledgement that domination exists along multiple axes, including those related to class, race, sexuality, and disability. Initially being incorporated into feminism’s third wave, intersectionality continues to play a prominent role in contemporary feminist groups and campaigns. Furthermore, Alison Winch (2014) argues that it can be “dangerous” not to engage with the histories and debates of feminism, as this helps us to recognise why some feminists—and their existing campaigns—are more visible than others. Using qualitative interview data, I examine the role of intersectionality within a contemporary Australian-based campaign: Destroy the Joint (DtJ). DtJ has previously received criticism for their approach to intersectionality; resultantly, I will consider questions of access, diversity, and voice as existing within DtJ’s ‘world’, and analyse how the campaign has previously handled and addressed these critiques. Can feminists equally access and contribute to these campaigns in a social media-based space? Does DtJ fully emphasise issues that impact women of colour, queer women, and women of other minority groups? These questions are further complicated by the existence of DtJ within an online space—one in which the “blocking” of opposing voices is as straightforward as clicking a button. This paper argues that intersectionality should be a central activity and consideration for social media-based feminist campaigns, and that to ignore this issue is understood by other feminists to presume to speak for other women.

**Introduction**

The concept of intersectionality has played a significant and recognised role in feminist theory and activism since at least the 1980s. The term, coined by Kimberle Crenshaw in 1989, was partially a reaction to earlier tensions within the U.S. feminist movement, and stemmed from the erasure of black women within second wave feminism. The theory of intersectionality has since also been expanded to understand the experiences of women of various abilities, and women of different sexualities and gender identifications.

This research examines the role intersectionality plays in a contemporary digital feminist campaign: Destroy the Joint (DtJ). Drawing on interview data with activists from the campaign, I consider how DtJ has addressed issues of intersectionality in terms of access, diversity, and voice.

**Intersectionality: From the Second Wave to the Digital Era**

Following the two World Wars, second wave feminism came to prominence in the early 1960s. Key to second wave thinking was the search to “render women’s immediate and subjective experience to formulate a political agenda” (Dekel, 2011, p. 475). Second wave feminism sought rights for women...
to receive equal pay for equal work and access to birth control and abortion (McHugh, 2007), and sexual liberation (Gerhard, 2001).

However, second wave feminism was also critiqued for its emphasis on issues primarily impacting white, heterosexual women (Hallstein, 2008). As Lynn Hallstein points out, much of second wave feminist thought comes from a site of “situated knowledge”, and members of the second wave movement held experiences and understandings that were “situated within a very specific context of privilege and advantaged cultural currency” (2008, p. 145). Audre Lorde, an African-American lesbian poet, was one of many women who rejected large portions of second wave feminist thought due to its continued focus on the plight of middle-class, white, educated women. When radical feminist theologian Mary Daly spoke about reclaiming women’s spirituality through rituals honouring the goddess, Lorde in turn asked Daly the question, “What colour is your goddess?” (Freedman 2002, p. 89). Lorde’s question highlighted a larger attitude towards the second wave—generations of feminists in the US would speak largely to white, middle-class, educated women, and mistake their problems for all women’s problems.

Resultantly, third wave feminism was partially born from these critiques—and alongside it, the theory of intersectionality. Kimberle Crenshaw initially described intersectionality as how the “dominant conceptions of discrimination condition is to think about subordination as disadvantage occurring along a single categorical axis” (1989, p. 140). She further argues that this single-axis framework erases the unique experiences of disadvantage and oppression faced by women of colour (1989)—an idea that has since also been expanded to understand the experiences of women of various abilities, and women of different sexualities and gender identifications (Gordon, 2016). Crenshaw’s initial conception of intersectional was intended to draw upon the differences between sex discrimination and race discrimination (Gordon, 2016): however, other scholars have reconceptualised intersectionality as existing along a series of axes (Yuval-Davis, 2006), or as a dynamic process (Staunæs, 2003). Furthermore, other feminist collectives across second wave feminism have articulated similar concepts to that of intersectionality: the African American feminist Fran Beal used the term ‘double jeopardy’ to refer to the costs of being both black and female in 1969, whilst a decade later the Combahee Rover Collective described the “major systems of oppression [as] interlocking” (1977, no page). The application of intersectionality can therefore be summarised as one that, according to Patricia Hill Collins (1998), challenges the matrix of domination. It is also dynamic and malleable: according to Hill Collins and Bilge, it is a theory “constantly under construction” (2016, p. 31).

In contemporary feminist campaigns, groups, and research, intersectionality continues to play a role prominent role. Alison Winch writes that an emphasis on the plurality of contemporary feminisms without considering deeper theories and history can lead us to “gloss over the [existing] power structures” (2014, p. 15). Winch (2014) further argues that it can be dangerous not to engage with the histories and debates of feminism, as this helps us to recognise why some feminists—and their existing campaigns—are more visible than others. Risman emphasises that there is a “considerable consensus that one must always take into consideration multiple axes of oppression; to do otherwise presumes the whiteness of women” (2004, p. 442). Evans argues that intersectional feminist praxis is central to the activism of younger feminists in three ways:

1) It underpins the types of activities and events they organise; 2) it influences discursive approaches to inclusion; and 3) it constitutes a popular subject of theory application amongst the activists (2016, p. 67).
Intersectionality can therefore be considered a way to understand the unique and different experiences of oppression faced by, for example, a gay, black woman (when opposed to that of a straight, white, woman)—and is therefore of key significance to contemporary feminism. How intersectionality is applied in online feminist campaigns—if it all—is therefore the primary concern of this paper.

Contemporary literature has also analysed how intersectional practises are considered to be lacking in contemporary offline feminist campaigns and publications. Miriam (2012) argues that SlutWalk marches fail to recognise that the ‘choice’ that women of colour have in electing to call themselves ‘sluts’ is dissimilar to the ‘choices’ of white women. Elsewhere, Hughes (2011) asserts that lobby groups advocating for quotas to advance the role of women in politics do not consider the representation of women from different minority backgrounds. Melissa Phruksachart notes that the recent Women’s March on Washington “received pushback from black and women of colour feminist for its inattention to intersectional feminist philosophy and activism” (2017, p. 514). Finally, Baer’s 2012 assessment of German feminist activism demonstrated that some forms of activism within the country are characterised by an unexamined level of privilege, and a limited engagement with differences amongst women.

However, little work exists in considering how intersectionality is applied in digital settings. A significant contribution to the discussion of the role of intersectionality in digital feminist spaces is the work of Christina Scharff, Carrie Smith-Pei, and Maria Stehle (2016). In their examination of digital feminist campaigns originating from Germany, Scharff, Smith-Pei and Stehle note that the exclusion of different subjects may be “potentially (re)produced in and through the performances of neoliberal subjectivities in these online environments” (2016, p. 6). They further argue that the process of identity making is a “continually shifting process... fostered by the circulatory, even viral, reach of the digital” (Scharff et al, 2016, pp. 11–12). In the face of a digital environment in which identities are fluid, shifting, and potentially excluded due to wider neoliberal values, how do feminists then best apply intersectionality?

Exactly what constitutes intersectional practices in campaigns also remains somewhat unclear. Williams suggests user engagement within feminist digital spaces needs to prioritise discourse that is “anti-ableist, anti-racist, and anti-sizeist” (2017, p. 10), whilst Mgbako noted that there was a “delicate balance of priorities” required between sex workers and HIV/AIDS activists to build an offline intersectional campaign in Botswana (2016, p. 10). Furthermore, Gines (2011) observes that although intersectionality is a useful analytical tool at an individual level, it is made more difficult at a group level because of the varying, different behaviour of groups. As feminism increasingly moves to online campaigning (Winch, 2014), it is important to consider the implementation of intersectionality in digital environments and campaign groups. The following section outlines the research methods used within this paper, before then moving to examine the data considering how intersectionality is applied in DfJ.

Methods

This paper draws upon data gathered during a series of semi-structured interviews with Australian-based feminist activists. The interviews took place between November and December 2014. The
three feminist activists interviewed for this research had each undertaken moderation of the DtJ public Facebook page.

The use of in-depth interviews meets several demands of the research. As this paper examines the perceived intersectionality of a specific online feminist campaign, it is central to discuss these perceptions with people directly involved in the campaign. Interviews “enable researchers to obtain information that they cannot gather by observation alone” (Berger, 2000, p. 111). Additionally, Rakow argues, “in many disciplines... feminist scholars have found the [interview] methods particularly appropriate” (2011, p. 417). In this case, interviews allowed for the views and opinions of those directly involved with the DtJ campaign to be represented and analysed within the research. The three interviewees were also, as Klaus Jensen (2002) says, ‘informants’ on specific topics—they are do not just represent a variety of social categories, but are instead well-placed sources. Steinar Kvale (1996) further deems informants to be not the subject of analysis (as they would be in a representative study), but instead subject to, and witnesses of, events.

In addition to semi-structured interviews, the wider DtJ campaign was examined using a case study method. As a method of examination, case studies are noted for their ability to pay close attention to detail, and to uncover unique features of each case (Pyke and Adams 2010; Thomas 2011). Following from this, the purpose of this case study is instrumental in nature—it is framed by the understanding that the research is commenced with a specific purpose in mind (Stake 1995; Thomas 2011). In this instance, the purpose of the research is to understand how a specific feminist group either has or has not incorporated intersectionality into their campaign. The case study method allowed for the gathering and analysis of data—including newspaper articles, Facebook posts, blog posts, and Tweets—that contained information related directly to DtJ’s approach to intersectionality.

The results of these interviews and the relevant case study data hold a number of significant themes: therefore, the following results are separated into three sections, each discussing a specific subject. The first section outlines the campaign origins of DtJ, giving particular consideration to the group’s grounding in digital activism. The second section considers how intersectionality is essential for digital feminist campaigns, and draws on a specific 2015 example from the DtJ campaign to highlight the campaign’s current shortcomings in relation to intersectionality. The third section analyses the specific views of DtJ campaigners in relation to intersectionality, and details the particular approaches of DtJ to incorporate a diversity of perspectives in their digital activism. Finally, the concluding section of this paper argues that feminist activists in digital spaces should take further steps to incorporate intersectionality into their work.

**Destroy the Joint Campaign Origins**

The DtJ campaign began as a response to a particular incident involving an Australian talkback host, Alan Jones. On 31 August, 2012, during the course of an on-air discussion with a guest, Jones began discussing the plans of the then Australian Prime Minister Julia Gillard to promote Pacific Island women in business and politics. Jones said:

> She’s promised $320 million to promote ‘gender equality’ in the Pacific region... She said that we know societies only reach their full potential if women are politically participating... Women are destroying the joint—Christine Nixon in Melbourne, Clover Moore here.
Honesty. (Jones, 2012, as cited in Farr, 2012, no page.)

The Destroy the Joint campaign (DtJ) materialised from a tweet responding to Jones’ initial on-air comments. In response to Jones’ comments, Jane Caro tweeted the following response on the same day:

Got times on my hands tonight so thought I’d spend it coming up with news ways of ‘destroying the joint’ being a woman & all. Ideas welcome. (Caro, 2012)

The #destroythejoint hashtag was then added by Jill Tomlinson—a Melbourne based plastic and reconstructive surgeon—in her response to Caro’s initial Tweet. Tomlinson said:

Bored by Alan Jones’ comments on women destroying Australia? Join with @JaneCaro & suggest ways that women #destroythejoint (Tomlinson, 2012)

Following the initial Twitter hashtag (which generated a number of news reports on the issue), another woman, Sally McManus, started the Facebook page, “Destroy the Joint”—a term that was quickly co-opted by a number of Australian women to describe their actions in resisting forms of patriarchal oppression. The initial popularity and resultant growth of DtJ was originally focused solely of Jones’ actions—following his initial comments about women “destroying the joint”, he made a further series of gaffes a few weeks later about Gillard’s father “dying of shame” that triggered a DtJ-led advertiser boycott of Jones’ radio station, 2GB (Radio Today, 2012; The Sydney Morning Herald, 2012).

Following this boycott, DtJ began expanding its campaign scope to move beyond Jones’ comments. Prior to December 2012, DtJ began to launch a series of campaigns that appeared to encompass a more comprehensive approach to feminist issues outside of Jones’ initial comments. However, these campaigns varied in their approaches to the incorporation of intersectionality, with several of DtJ’s campaigns attracting criticism for their lack of perceived intersectional values (Ellis, 2015; Joint Destroyer, 2013). The following section outlines a particular incident that took place in 2015, and concerns the digital silencing of the voices of disability activists by the DtJ page.

“Destroy the joint? Shit, I’d be happy just to be allowed in the joint.”

In November 2015, Sam Connor—an Australian-based disability activist—privately messaged the DtJ Facebook page to ask if the page could share an upcoming memorial event. The memorial event Connor had asked DtJ to share was intended to “remember women, men and children who have died as a result of violence, neglect, or abuse” (Connor, 2015, no page). DtJ responded to Connor’s request by querying the memorial’s relevance to its audience, and said that they would “suggest posting it to disability activism pages… unfortunately we won’t be able to post this to our page as we have to stick to our remit closely” (DtJ, as quoted in Connor, 2015, n.p.). Connor’s further attempts to discuss this with the DtJ moderator were blocked—according to Connor, Facebook sent her a message alerting her that the DtJ Facebook page had reported her message as “abusive” (Connor, 2015, n.p.). At this point, Connor visited the main DtJ Facebook page in order to “find out what kind of information DtJ considered more important than the counting of dead disabled women” (Connor, 2015, n.p.). Connor then noticed that the page had just “posted a
lighthearted ‘Buzzfeed’ post, where women where asked to contribute their experience of
#beingawoman” (Connor, 2015, n.p.). At this point, Connor and her fellow activists began publicly
posting their experiences of being women with a disability on the main DtJ Facebook page, with
Connor arguing that some of the posts were “so far removed” from her experiences of being a
woman with a disability.

DtJ then banned the commenters (including Connor) from the Facebook page, stating that they
were “spamming this post and page with a large number of obvious half truths and
distortions” (Ellis, 2015, no page). Connor then went on to write about her experience for the
independent news site The Stringer, stating that DtJ were silencing the voices of women with
disabilities by blocking and deleting their comments (Connor, 2015). Following the publication of
Connor’s piece, DtJ issued an online apology, and stated that “anyone who has been banned as a
result of this will be unbanned” (DtJ, 2015).

This observation—one of a denial of access to the digital world of feminism—was also made by
other disability activists prior to Connor. In 2013, the prominent Australian disability activist and
writer Stella Young wrote a piece in which she notes that, as a disabled women, she would “just like
to be allowed in the joint” (Young, 2013, no page). Young continues to highlight the invisibility of
women with disabilities by pointing out that the initial DtJ pledge, published on their website and
Facebook page, omits any references to disability. For the sake of brevity, the entire pledge is not
reproduced here, but the relevant section is as follows:

I want an Australia where we respect each other; an Australia where no person experiences hate
because of their gender, race, religion or sexuality. And I will challenge anyone who uses sex,
race, religion or sexual orientation to incite hatred or to demean or vilify any of us. I will not
stand by and let others do so without speaking up. (Cited in Young, 2013, n.p.)

In her piece, Young said that she had raised the issue of the omission of disability as a reason many
people experience hate with the DtJ creators of the pledge; however, Young noted that
“disappointingly, they said ‘we can’t include everything’” (2013, n.p.).

Critiques of DtJ’s blocking of Connor and her fellow activists were also evidenced elsewhere in
the mainstream media. Wendy Syfret, of i-D, said:

When abled bodied women speak about issues like wage imbalances, public representation,
family violence, poverty, and prejudice they need to make sure they’re speaking for all women,
and not restricting themselves to an ableist point of view. (2015, no page, emphasis in original)

To this, Katie Ellis added that the “silencing of disabled voices does not further the [feminist] cause”
(2015, n.p.). The wider feminist movement has a long-standing history of ignoring the rights of
disabled women; simultaneously, disability rights activists have also ignored the varying
experiences of people within its movement as being at times dependent on their gender identity
(Garland-Thomson, 2002). Margaret Lloyd describes women who have a disability as therefore
being “caught between… [a] movement in which they have been invisible as women, and [another]
in which their disability has been ignored” (2001, p. 716). Additionally, Helen Meekosha wrote in
2002 of the potential of the Internet to level the playing field for women with disabilities when it
comes to communicating with their peers, and to provide a space for women to have a “voice”
online (p. 80).
Online movements such as DtJ can therefore be viewed to hold conceivable potential for women with disabilities: unlike offline activist groups and movements, the participation and input of women with disabilities is not restricted by issues of physical access, location, or other problems that may arise with face-to-face activism. As Kate Ellis and Mike Kent point out, “social media has the potential to both enable and further disable people with disability” (2016, p.24). The deletion of comments and blocking of disability activists from the DtJ page is therefore of particular concern: it not only goes against wider intersectional values that feminism has traditionally struggled to incorporate, but it also targets a particular minority that may struggle to participate in more traditional offline settings.

At this point, it is worth turning to the direct voices and experiences of DtJ moderators, in order to bring further nuance and experience to this research. Drawing on interviews with three DtJ Facebook page moderators, the following section outlines campaigners’ perspectives and approaches to intersectionality in their particular digital world.

**Only for White, Middle-class Women?**

DtJ’s initial approach to intersectionality within their campaign was articulated by three former campaign members during interviews for this research. Jennie Hill, El Gibbs, and Kim\(^1\) were each moderators of the Facebook DtJ page during its initial inception. The roles and tasks of each campaigner differed, with Hill outlining that she was primarily responsible for training other moderators, and Gibbs stating that she undertook a large portion of organising for the initial boycott campaign. In contrast to these specific roles, Kim said that they undertook more general moderating duties on the DtJ Facebook page. Furthermore, Hill also noted that she had a higher level of access to the DtJ Facebook page than a standard moderator—she noted that during her initial six months with the campaign, she was ‘promoted’ from a moderator role to an administrator role. On Facebook, moderators have the ability to respond to or delete comments, and send messages as the page. Administrators operate at a higher level of access from moderators—they can manage all aspects of a Facebook page, including responding to and deleting comments, sending messages as the page, and assigning other people as moderators or administrators.

When asked about the role of intersectionality in DtJ, Hill said that attempts at inclusivity and intersectionality were made within DtJ, and that the moderating team for the DtJ Facebook page consisted of people who were from a number of different minority groups—including people who were gay, disabled, and trans. Hill explained that every post that was written on the DtJ page would first be posted on a private administrator group consisting of DtJ moderators and administrators. In this private group, administrators would be able to vet and change posts, and moderators would have the “opportunity to comment on a post before it goes up”.

According to Hill, this vetting process would allow campaigners who held particular concerns with issues of race, sexuality, or gender to suggest changes to posts prior to publication—something that Hill considered to be “very, very valuable”. Gibbs, a DtJ moderator, further outlined this vetting process when she said that her contributions to this private Facebook page were typically focused on ensuring the group was “acknowledging privilege [and] particularly white privilege”. According to Gibbs, these acknowledgements would cause “a lot of fights in the [Facebook] admin group” during her time as a moderator. These feelings of frustration were echoed by Kim. Kim said

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\(^1\) Not her real name.
that they felt they were “constantly hitting [their] head against a brick wall trying to get a bit more discussion about issues of class and race” to take place within the DtJ public page.

Each of the three DtJ moderators interviewed for this research—Hill, Gibbs, and Kim—acknowledged that DtJ were, at times, not practising intersectional values. Hill cited perceptions that DtJ weren’t “doing intersectionality well enough, which we’re not, and we’re not getting at lower socio-economic [class] women, which we’re obviously not”. Kim said that DtJ was an example of “mainstream feminism inhabited by white liberal feminists”, but added that DtJ did “help push the agenda along”. Gibbs added that she would sometimes “get annoyed when things [posted on the DtJ social media pages] were just focused on heterosexual women or white women or wealthy women”. To this, Gibbs added that she personally identified as an intersectional feminist, and that her particular “feminist school” was one of “acknowledging privilege, particularly white privilege”.

Significantly, DtJ moderators also spoke of wanting to incorporate more intersectional values—but also stated that the wider DtJ audience were not always ready to take that next step in terms of understanding and undertaking a deeper analysis. Gibbs said that the first few months of DtJ’s existence consisted of “fairly feminism 101 [style posts]” on their Facebook page, and that “there was some really basic work [done] around race and class”. Gibbs further expanded on this point saying that she could “write technical essays about intersectionality and white privilege... but it’s not going to get the woman in the suburbs to actually see [this] corporate kind of crap”. This raises a noteworthy question for feminist activists in digital spaces: to what extent do the needs of a particular audience dictate the content posted on a campaign page? Gibbs expanded on this point by saying that:

It was a joke in the beginning that I would get the least comments on the posts that I would write and put up because I’d do more complicated things and people would kind of go “I don’t understand”...then one of the others would put up something about something sexist in an ad and they’d get 300 comments and I’d just go “Okay, I’m really not doing this right”.

Consequently, Gibbs had to adjust her initial approach—one that she described as discussing “power and power relations”—to instead finds other ways to lead into conversations that received a higher level of engagement with the DtJ audience, and use “some pop culture sort of stuff as a way into talking about [these issues]”.

However, this approach—one of leading the DtJ audience towards discussions of power and intersectionality through pop culture—was not universally accepted or enforced by other DtJ moderators. Kim cited the lack of consistent intersectional values on behalf of DtJ as one of the reasons they eventually left the moderating team. Kim said that they were “very aware of the differences in feminism and I felt that the particular kind of feminism that DtJ is advocating wasn’t reflective of my feminism”. When asked to expand on these differences in feminist perspectives, Kim said that there were “so many other issues that we need to deal with as feminists... DtJ wasn’t doing enough for my liking”, and that groups like DtJ “can’t [continue to] look past race and class, and ability and gender, and sexuality”.

The attempts at intersectionality within DtJ have, according to campaigners, typically focused around the need for diversity within the moderating team and the ongoing focus and discussion of issues that impact women outside of Australia. However, Kim suggested that these attempts were “quite tokenistic”. There were no clear written policies from DtJ regarding their policy on
intersectionality and inclusivity: however, as an informal campaign group this is neither always anticipated nor expected.

This leads to wider questions of what intersectionality may look like in contemporary feminist campaigns. Whilst considering the fact that feminist activists in these groups already undertake large amounts of unrecognised digital labour (Gleeson, 2016), how can campaigns implement a level of intersectionality that opens their digital spaces and ‘worlds’ to other, more traditionally marginalised, voices?

**Intersectionality in Digital Feminist Worlds**

The primary theme outlined in the sections above was the silencing of digital voices. This was undertaken by DtJ in the case study analysed through the deletion of comments, and the banning of activists from the DtJ Facebook page. This silencing speaks to wider issues of digital access and voice within DtJ, and as evidenced by these concerns, I argue that intersectionality needs to be not just a central concern and focus for digital feminist campaigns, but also the subject of active and ongoing implementation and discussion.

Furthermore, social media has been positioned as a site of particular importance for feminist activists (Carter, 2014; Khoja-Moolji, 2015; McLean and Maalsen, 2014; Portwood-Stacer and Berridge, 2015). Feminist groups have used both Facebook and Twitter to facilitate coordinated acts of protest and wide-ranging discussions on issues pertinent to contemporary feminism (Altinay, 2014; Antunovic and Linden, 2015; Meyer, 2014; Thrift, 2014; Williams, 2015). The issue of intersectionality in online spaces is one that is therefore not unique to DtJ: a number of other feminist campaigns have also been accused of not fully considering or practising intersectionality in their online spaces, and have taken steps towards further incorporating intersectional practises into their work. In the case of SlutWalk, the Melbourne-based local campaign group have developed and implemented a code of conduct in response to criticisms regarding intersectionality (SlutWalk Melbourne, 2016). Additionally, a number of white women based within the US chapters of the Women’s March have addressed concerns of race-based exclusion by stepping down from their leadership roles, and altering the initial name of the march (from the ‘Million Women’s March’ to the ‘Women’s March) (Gebreyes, 2017; Stockman, 2017).

However, DtJ’s efforts at implementing intersectional values remain somewhat ambiguous. As Hill outlined earlier, the campaign group has previously incorporated people from a number of diverse backgrounds into their moderating team. However, none of the three interviewees could point to a firm policy or code of conduct related to the implementation of intersectional practises within DtJ. Further clarification on this issue was also sought through the DtJ Facebook page, however no response was recorded.

The silencing of voices is an ongoing site of tension within feminist digital spaces. On one hand, campaigners have noted that constant inclusivity and intersectionality are incredibly hard – according to Hill, “trying to be all things to all people is not always possible”. But on the other, the suppression of marginalised voices is not an acceptable practice within contemporary feminism. If these voices are not incorporated and discussed within wide-reaching groups such as DtJ, feminists risk isolating important voices for the movement beyond the traditional white, middle-class woman.

In not fully engaging in intersectionality, DtJ risks ignoring wider power structures. The perspective that activists such as Connor should contact other groups and pages to “raise
awareness” regarding issues for disabled women demonstrates Winch’s (2014) earlier concerns: that this emphasis on the plurality of feminisms can lead to a glossing over of power structures. Digital spaces can also be considered indirectly complicit in reinforcing these pluralities: in an online world in which every activist campaign can have its own Facebook page, it can be difficult to unite within one group.

Exactly how DtJ can incorporate intersectional values into its campaign is an issue that both the literature and the activists interviewed for this research could not fully resolve. As noted earlier, some activists and academics have ventured suggestions on user engagement with wider literature regarding intersectionality (Williams, 2017), but activist groups do not always make firm strategies regarding the steps they have undertaken for inclusivity publicly available.

What does remain clear at the conclusion of this paper is that further consideration needs to be given to the silencing of activist voices in digital feminist spaces, and the perceived lack of intersectionality in prominent feminist groups such as DtJ. If an activist group such as DtJ wishes to lay claim to intersectionality, further work needs to be done by the campaign to anticipate and work alongside voices of dissent.

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Nation of Shitposters: Ironic Engagement with the Facebook Posts of Shannon Noll as Reconfiguration of an Australian National Identity

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This paper considers the recent rise of ironic engagement with the Facebook posts of Shannon Noll, or "Nollposting". It is a form of "shitposting", or online engagement that is characterised by its disruption of previously established standards of discourse. I argue, following Nissenbaum and Shifman (2015), that it serves as an opportunity for users to accumulate cultural capital through the act of taste distinction (Bourdieu, 1986), mocking those not familiar with Internet standards of discourse through ironic imitation of their forms of speech and cultural consumption. Following recent work on the cultural logic of trolling (R. M. Milner, 2013; Phillips, 2015a), I aim to situate this phenomenon within broader media cultures around Australian national identity. I argue that we cannot understand Nollposting without understanding Noll himself as reconstituted figure of the mythic Australian battler in a postmodern media environment. Like other comedic icons before him (McCallum, 1998), the figure of Noll becomes a renegotiation of Australian identity.

Introduction

Recent work on the cultural logics of trolling (R. M. Milner, 2013; Philips, 2015), argues that their behaviour should be situated in broader media cultures in order to be understood. Building upon this work, this paper considers ironic engagement with the Facebook posts of Shannon Noll (Nollposting), both as a vehicle for the accumulation of cultural capital by users, and ultimately within an Australian comedic tradition of negotiating national identity through mockery (McCallum, 1998).

This paper begins with a definition of "shitposting", a form of Internet interaction predicated upon thwarting established norms of discourse in favour of seemingly anarchic, poor quality contributions. Far from being random, however, I argue that shitposting functions to accrue cultural capital, a form of social standing within a particular environment defined by knowledge and recognition of cultural artifacts, and the ability to place them within hierarchy (Bourdieu, 1986). Bourdieu uses the term habitus to describe the embodiment of this cultural capital; it is a "structuring structure, which organises practices and the perception of practices" (1986; 170). Following work by Nissenbaum and Shifman (2015) on cultural capital in meme environments, I

1 For the purposes of brevity, I have chosen to focus chiefly on Shannon Noll content that has been posted to Facebook. I believe there is ample room for analysis in the ways different platforms, such as Facebook, Reddit and Tumblr, alter content and the reception thereof, but as I cannot do it justice in the space available I have decided upon a narrower scope.
explore users’ ironic engagement as a way to generate cultural capital at the expense of those that do not share their habitus. I do this with particular attention to what Zizi Papacharissi calls “the habitus of the new”, a “performative fluency” of/within social media environments that emphasises user’s ability to “produse” identity (Papacharissi and Easton, 2013, p. 181). I track the history of “Nollsy” as avatar of the “Aussie Battler” throughout his initial Australian Idol run, through to his subsequent memetic re-birth and ironic re-appreciation, in petitions to have him play Groovin’ the Moo and creation of pages such as “Shannon Noll was robbed of winning hit TV show Australian Idol 2003”. Focusing on Nollposting in particular, I find that a typical Nollpost has three features: an opening with sexual innuendo related to the original post, a request for an item that Noll has borrowed back, and an extended sign-off, usually in Australian slang. The ironic deployment of an offline pattern of communication is a demonstration of the user’s embodied cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1986). Indeed, the act of ironic engagement with Noll himself is a form of taste distinction, playing into a long history of the Australian humour at the expense of the “bogan”, or Australian “white trash” figure, who act as “repositories of negative value, bad taste[;] they are positioned as the antithesis of the absent but ever present normative middle-class subject” (Pini, McDonald and Mayes, 2012, p. 146).

Despite this potential critique, I argue that Nollposting serves in the last instance as renegotiation of this Australian national identity, pointing to similarities between it and engagement with other kitsch comedic icons such as Edna Everage. Like the television series Kath and Kim before him, Noll has become subject to an extradiegetic narrative that casts his resurgent popularity as a triumph of the Battler (Turnbull, 2004). Nollposters are both self-critical and self-celebratory, distancing themselves aesthetically from Noll while re-appropriating from him his authenticity as “the quintessential good Aussie bloke”, thereby reifying a dichotomy of battlers under threat from elites (Whitman, 2013). It is not that Nollposting is wholly ambivalent, but that in the act of defining themselves in reference to Noll’s exaggerated Australiana, Nollposters position themselves as arbiters of Australian national identity.

That Post Gave Me Cancer: A Definition of Shitposting

Nollposting, and the Facebook page Shit Memes from whence it ultimately derives, is an opportunity for shitposting, a form of internet rhetoric characterised by its “content of aggressively, ironically, and trollishly poor quality” (Klee, 2016, no page). Key to shitposting is the assumption that it derails active discussion, and sends threads off-topic through low-quality posting, often using inflammatory, (ironically) falsifiable, provocative, or vulgar content (Mercer, 2014). Shitposting is about misbehaviour, about not following previously established rules of discourse and discussion. Shitposting recently came to mainstream media attention with the work of “Trump trolls” who attempted to derail discourse (Biggs, 2016; Griffin, 2016) in order to sway the election to favour Trump. The archetypal shitposting on Facebook is “ShitpostBot 5000”, which utilises an algorithm that “randomly selects a user-submitted template, then fills it in with user-submitted source images” (Biggs, 2016, no page), posting every half hour. Several notable groups has arisen on Facebook that are dedicated to shitposting, including “Simpsons Shitposting”, “Bernie Sanders’ Dank Meme Stash”, and “Rick and Morty Schwiftyposting”. Activity in these groups typically consists of posting images from, or related to, a guiding topic (the Simpsons, Rick and Morty), but of a particular bent: “[i]ncoherent jokes, hasty Photoshopping, mashups, irrelevance, errors in spelling or grammar—all are hallmarks of the shitpost” (Klee, 2016, n.p.). This is not to say that
shitposting is merely about posting shit, so to speak, but rather, it describes a specific aesthetic and mode of engagement characterised by its flippancy.

Shitposting, as a formal term, has not received much attention in academic literature so far, hence my reliance on non-academic sources for these definitions. I believe, however, there can be a productive similarity drawn between shitposting and what Nick Douglas calls “Internet Ugly”, “an imposition of messy humanity upon an online world of smooth gradients, blemish-correcting Photoshop, and AutoCorrect”. Douglas describes the Internet Ugly as an aesthetic that seeks to create its own standard of beauty in opposition to a presumed mainstream value, that emphasises “symmetry and purity” (Douglas, 2014, p. 315). Like the Internet Ugly, shitposting is a “cultural dialect, used not just to frame certain propositional content but to communicate things about its user” (Douglas, 2014, p. 315).

Fig. 1. A Simpsons Shitpost: The humour relies upon a familiarity with the content of a famous joke from the Simpsons’ episode “Itchy and Scratchyland”, where Bart is only able to find a “Bort” licence plate. Here, he finds his licence plate. Collected March 2017.

Shitposting is also a form of memetic discourse, that is, related to the propagation and production of Internet memes: “group[s] of digital items sharing common characteristics... that were created with awareness of each other...[,] circulated, imitated, and/or transformed via the Internet by many users” (Shifman, 2015, p. 7-8). As a form of memetic discourse, shitposting requires a certain literacy of meme templates and a knowledge of “shared popular culture experience and
practices” (Knobel and Lankshear, 2007, p. 217), as seen in Fig. 1. The joke relies upon the manipulation of images to present itself as a real screenshot from *The Simpsons*, yet those familiar with the media it references understand the subterfuge on display. Memetic discourse is also characterised by its rich *intertextuality*, with humour coming from the absurd juxtaposition of images or video from wildly differing contexts, as in Figure 2 (Knobel and Lankshear, 2007).

![*Listens to Mr Brightside once*](image1)

Fig. 2. The image features Martin Prince “coming out of his cage, and doing just fine”, a reference to the Killers’ seminal 2004 hit “Mr. Brightside”, from their seven-times platinum album *Hot Fuss*. Collected March 2017.

![CULO](image2)

Fig 3. ???. Collected March 2017.
As Milner argues, this literacy functions as a gatekeeping device, as a way to distinguish between those who get the joke, the “in-crowd”, and those who do not (R. M. Milner, 2012). This leads to shitposting images that are totally incoherent to outsiders, such as Figure 3.

It is this emphasis on gatekeeping, and of “forming and signifying communal belonging” (Nissenbaum and Shifman, 2015, p. 485), that is the focus of my analysis of Nollposting. Users posting in shitposting groups are demonstrating their superior literacy: the barrier of entry required to engage serves as a mark of their distinction from a “mainstream” audience (Miltner, 2014). Shitposting, then, is a way to accrue cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1986) through a double mastery of norms of discourse: both by recognizing these “mainstream” norms (ie, of standardisation), and discarding them in favour of subcultural value. In this way I would argue that it functions similar to how Bourdieu describes the appropriation of “kitsch” objects, an “exclusive appropriation which attests the owner’s unique ‘personality’” (Bourdieu, 1986, p. 282). Without the ability to hold a monopoly over the use of certain forms of art, i.e., the works of culture that form the nucleus of the shitpost, the focus is instead on the uniqueness of the relationship that the user has to the art. Or, as Bourdieu puts it,

Liking the same things differently, liking different things, less obviously marked out for admiration - these are some of the strategies for outflanking, overtaking and displacing which, by maintaining a permanent revolution in tastes, enable the dominated, less wealthy fractions... to secure exclusive possessions at every moment (Bourdieu, 1986, p. 282, emphasis added)

Shitposting, like Bourdieu on kitsch, then, is a way to “constitute insignificant objects as works of art, or... to give aesthetic redefinition to objects already defined as art” (Bourdieu, 1986, p. 282), thereby increasing the user’s cultural capital. As Skeggs, drawing on Bourdieu, describes the use of the term “kitsch”, it implies that “the classifier knows of the prior negative signification and association of the object, a positioning which can be seen to give it authentic value” (2004, p. 108). Key also here is the emphasis on the permanent revolution in tastes, and the re-signification that comes with this struggle, which I will discuss in another section.

With its focus on the disruption of norms, shitposting (and Nollposting) is also a form of subcultural trolling: it has a “simultaneously symbiotic and exploitative relationship to mainstream culture” (Phillips, 2015a, p. 21). Without a (nebulously defined) mainstream to antagonise, and thereby valorise oneself in opposition to, shitposting would lack a driving ethos. But like Phillips’ work on trolling before me, I would suggest that Nollposting is not as far from mainstream Australian discourse as an initial reading may indicate (Phillips, 2012). Rather, like Australian comedic icons Kath and Kim, and Kenny Smyth before him, the production of Noll relies upon a reification of a problematic “Battler” identity (Turnbull, 2004).

“Catch ya at the Byford this arvo for a few coldies and a flutter on the dishlickers”: What is Nollposting?

A key element in the development of Nollposting is the contradiction that Nissenbaum and Shifman describe “between following conventions and supplying innovative content [that] leads to memes’ configuration as unstable equilibriums” (Nissenbaum and Shifman, 2015, p. 483). That is to say, Nollposting is always (d)evolving, searching for new opportunities for cultural capital, and this sketch is best viewed as a snapshot of Nollposting at a particular point in time, rather than a
definitive study that outlines some Platonic form of Nollposting. With this in mind, there are several elements that successful (in terms of likes and replies accrued) Nollposts employ.

The first is an opening of sexual innuendo, positioning Noll-as-Adonis, that relates to the post by Shannon Noll himself. This is demonstrated in the *Ur-Text* of Nollposting itself, a comment upon a post of Noll enjoying a fish taco, posted on January 12 2016:

![Facebook comment](image)

Fig. 4. Facebook comment, collected March 2017.

As the memetic form of Nollposting developed, an apology was added to this initial ribbing:

![Facebook comment](image)

Fig. 5. Facebook comment, collected March 2017.

Users here are, through ironic adoption, mocking Noll as a representative of those that do not understand the habitus of the new, thereby distinguishing themselves. The precedent here is “I’m Thinking About Thos Beans” (Kang, 2015), a shitpost that mocks an elderly man for posting on the Facebook wall of a corporation, expressing his desire for their product. There are notable similarities, from the mockery of patterns of speech, to the petition that was started in support of the elderly man starring in a Bush’s Beans advertisement (O’Shields, n.d.). It also has precedent in the meme “Naked Banana”, which describes an interaction on Facebook shown in Figure 6:

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2 Unless the user is a public figure, such as the later example of Dave Callan, I have (crudely) anonymised these images for the sake of users’ privacy. I have also chosen not to include direct links to these images, as this would make this anonymisation pointless.
The object of mockery here is very clearly the users’ inane discussion of the mediocre picture, but more specifically, what it represents: a breach in the discourse standards that govern online interaction, which marks these participants as outsiders. There are several forums devoted to such mockery, such as the subreddit r/OldPeopleFacebook (“cracker bargel,” n.d.). Whereas shitposters have fully inculcated this “a set of dispositions that are invited and regenerated via a state of permanent novelty” (Papacharissi et al, 2013, p. 600), these users are laboring with archaic (earnest) forms of communication, unsuited to social media.

They do not have the “feel for the game” (Bourdieu, 2014, p. 111), and in mocking them, shitposters again demonstrate their dual mastery: both of this habitus of the old and their own, preferred habitus. They are, in effect, beating these users at their own game. As time wore on, the
apology soon developed as an opportunity for cultural capital itself, with users taking the opportunity to post more elaborate Australian slang:

![Image of Facebook comment](image)

**Fig. 7.** The hypersexualisation of the Noll character is shared with other earlier posts in the development of Noll-as-meme, such as those from Shit Memes. Facebook comment, collected March 2017.

As we see in Figure 7, the opening sortie is followed by a request for an item that Noll has borrowed back, with the item’s absence assigned blame for recent marital troubles. The item is typically mundane, such as a “Whippa snippa” or other tool (Woods, 2017), but over time, this has again been weaponised as its own source of capital, with the item in question increasing in obscurity, yet at the same time, denoting a very particular Australian cultural experience. In several cases the item is a piece of Australian media from the 1990s or early 2000s, such as a *Water Rats* DVD or a copy of *So Fresh: The Hits of Autumn 2004*. This should be seen as a reflection of Bourdieu’s argument for the need of a *permanent revolution in tastes*, and the accelerated reflexivity of the habitus of the new. As the traditional avenues for cultural capital lose their exclusivity, the shitposts become more and more convoluted in order to outrun the risk of appearing stale. The return of the item also promises the return of domestic bliss to the poster’s household, and is claimed to act as an aphrodisiac. The posts adopt a distinctly heteronormative framing, particularly with the trope of a shrew-like “trouble and strife” who withholds sex from the long-suffering partner as punishment for misdeeds.

![Image of Facebook comment](image)

**Fig. 8.** Facebook comment, collected March 2017.
The use of sexual vulgarity and excessiveness, such as in Figures 8 and 9, has a long association with representations of (Australian) working-class, and thereby ‘authentic’, identities, which savvy users can then re-appropriate for cultural capital (Skeggs, 2004). The ironic hyperbole that is both the positioning of Noll-as-Adonis and the ravenous sexual appetite of the poster’s wife upon receipt of an household item is a way to “condemn to ridicule... men and women who simply fall short, in the eyes of their judges, of the right way of being and doing” (Bourdieu 1986, p. 511). The mundanity of this object and the extreme reaction to its return reflects the “absence of cultivated aesthetics or tastes” (Gibson, 2013, p. 64) against which the user is distinguished against.

Posts are typically closed with an extended sign off, which is also an opportunity for users to demonstrate “signifiers of authoritative status” (Nissenbaum and Shifman, 2015, p. 483) through use of strine, Australian slang:

Again, I must stress that I am painting a broad picture of memetic engagement with Shannon Noll posts, and this does not represent an exhaustive study of every particular nuance of the form, or indeed a strictly linear timeline of this change. Given the the contingency of contemporaneous Internet phenomena, that have the potential to change with each and every iteration, I believe our focus should not be on developing normative frameworks to which these forms of interaction may adhere to one day and not the next. There exists a certain difficulty in analysing the posts here, in that these engagements are fatuous; obviously, none of these posters are actually seeking these items back, nor is an answer from Noll actively sought. They are not fans of Noll, as such, but rather using his status as a cultural icon to produce themselves, through negative relationship to him. Their affected “blokeyness”, that is, their exaggerated portrayal of this imagined Australian masculine...
working class culture (Winter, 2016), and their mockery of Australian slang all point to an ironic re-appropriation of a “wrong” form of expression, thus creating “differential social positions among those members posting memes” (Nissenbaum and Shifman, 2015, p. 486). As detailed, users post requests for items Noll has borrowed, give extended sign-offs, make inappropriate jokes, all of which go against this habitus of the new, under which such requests would be made in private message or without such fanfare. That they do not know Noll notwithstanding, they are very clearly parodying an imagined Australiana. The increasing complexity of the vocabulary involved (to the point of fiction), and the specificity of culture referenced, offer an opportunity for Nollposters to be a truer blue than Noll himself.

Towards a Genealogy of Nollposting, or: “Who I Am”, the Production of Shannon Noll as Meme-subject

Unlike other forms of shitposting groups on Facebook, i.e., the aforementioned Simpsons Shitposting, there is no “Shannon Noll Shitposting” group that I was able to find. Rather than work with an established canon of media as their “clay”, so to speak, with which to make memes, the primary texts of Nollposting are the posts of Noll himself. There are two points to take from this. The first is that this places, I believe, an upper limit on the esotericism involved in the humour of Nollposting. Because users lack a centralised hub with which to post and re-post new permutations of Shannon Noll related content, there are less “in-jokes” or metahumour involved in Nollposting. One of the few examples I was able to find merely outlined the attributes of a typical Nollpost, without any further recombination:

![Fig. 11. Facebook comment, collected March 2017.](image)

Compare this to Figure 3 from Simpsons Shitposting, with its own closed meme ecosphere: it is oblique even for fans of the show, being the product of constant metatextual combination and recombination.

With this in mind, I argue that we should read Nollposting as an intersection of meme-literate posters with broader Australian cultural tropes: the “clay” that they use to make memes out of is the Australiana, and cultural moment, that Noll represents. This accounts for the increasing complexity in Nollposting developing not around the locus of the works of Shannon Noll or his posts, but rather the corpus of an imagined Australian working class experience: it is an engagement with the character of Noll as Barnesian working class man, what he represents. The
opportunities for cultural capital lie in the evermore novel expressions of Australian collective identity, to the point of (near-Shitpostbot 5000) absurdum. It is successful to the extent it plays with this familiarity: while the development of Simpsons Shitposting may be oblique to fans of the show, Nollposting will be accessible to those familiar with Australian vernacular. It is a way to both “constantly constitute both communal identities and the positioning of individuals in relation to them” (Nissenbaum and Shifman, 2015).

The particular success of Nollposting should be historicised within the context of Noll as ex-Australian Idol contestant in the Howard Era. As Fairchild argues, the Idol phenomenon is designed to build affective investment in contestants through development of them into recognisable brands (Fairchild, 2007). Throughout his run on the program, Noll was presented “as a kind of throwback to a brand of classic Australian masculinity summed up in the words “good Aussie bloke” (Fairchild, 2007). He “was the embodiment of the bedrock values of country Australia... the symbolic foundations of the entire nation” (Fairchild, 2007, p. 371). That Noll was an “authentic” character was solidified by his association with Australian pub rock and vignettes that focused on his background as a down-on-his-luck farmer (Carah, 2016, p. 177). The presence and success of Noll also validated Idol as meritocratic structure: if a salt-of-the-earth type such as Noll could make it to the final two, then it was more than mere factory line, but in the business of unearthing authentic talent. Noll lost, but his presence was established: his debut album That's What I'm Talking About was certified five times platinum (ARIA, n.d.) and his debut single “What About Me” was the fifth highest selling single of the decade (Sebastian's debut was the first) (ARIA, 2010).

Noll’s popularity during this time should be understood in reference to the dominance of the “Battler” identity as political subject during the Howard Era. Although it has long been a central figure in white Australian national imaginary (Elder, 2007), under the Howard government the term “Battler” took on special significance. As Dyrenfurth writes, the deployment of the term by Howard “imparted a hitherto unimaginable political legitimacy” (Dyrenfurth, 2007, p. 216). These battlers were constructed within a “new three-tier class system, sandwiched between powerful elites, and powerful unionists and welfare dependents” (Scalmer, 1999, p. 9), and facing constant attack from both sides. Howard’s great success with this rhetoric relied upon divorcing it from class considerations: anyone could be a battler, and the existence of a working class was made obsolete “by its aspiration to middle-class membership” (Dyrenfurth, 2005, p. 188). It was, at the same time, enshrined within a kind of privatised egalitarianism: in “rhetorical combat with his imaginary mainstream were ‘the designer forms of discrimination... race, gender and sexual preference’... [that] unnecessarily divided Australians” (Dyrenfurth, 2005, p. 187). As free market entrepreneurship was constructed as a universal value, Australia remained the land of the fair go, so long as it protected an idealised, “ordinary” middle class. Howard even encouraged identification of himself as a “political battler”, making reference to his struggles to attain leadership of the Liberal Party (Johnson, 2007, p. 7). It is within this ideological environment that the persona of Noll as Battler found traction. Henk Huisjer uses Noll as an example of Battler persona (Huijser, 2009), while one music journalist called his single ‘Shine’ “an unofficial WorkChoices soundtrack that celebrates the advancement of one over the good of many” (Mathieson, 2011, p. 195). There is perhaps no better example of Noll’s battler credentials than his breakout single, ‘What About Me’. A cover of a Moving Pictures original, the single is a plaintive call for the “little people” to be noticed; it is an anthem from the perspective of one who merely “wants my share”. The empty signifiers that abound match perfectly with the Howard battler who works hard to “get ahead”, or to “have a go” (Dyrenfurth, 2007, p. 218). There is no concrete demand or expression of solidarity,
as in similar songs (the aforementioned Jimmy Barnes hit ‘Working Class Man’): as such it is easily colonised by (neo-)Liberal values.

It is important that following his initial success, Noll faded largely from mainstream media attention, aside from appearances in advertisements (Wilson Everard Advertising, 2013) or scattered articles that degraded him for his national anthem rendition (Van Boom, 2014; Zanotti, 2014). This, I argue, made him an object of kitsch, primed for the sorts of ironic re-appropriation earlier described in Bourdieu: he became, as mentioned earlier, an object “less obviously marked out for admiration” (1986, p. 282). This narrative of rebirth and rediscovery will become important to his development as a meme.

The history of Shannon Noll-as-meme dates back to two pages: the first being Shit Memes, and the second the more blunt “Shannon Noll was robbed of winning hit TV show Australian Idol 2003” (Adams, 2016). Noll is not the only cultural product to have been subjected to this memetic rebirth: many Australian-focused meme pages also indulge in a kind of parochial nostalgia, choosing as their content cultural icons from the 1990s and early 2000s (“Aussie music of the 90s & 00s memes - Home,” n.d.). He is, however, by far the most successful. Posts typically placed Noll as the feature in pre-existing meme formats, focusing on his desirability as sex symbol, or victimhood.

This ironic popularity online soon translated into an explosion of interest, with petitions for Noll to play regional concert series Groovin’ the Moo (Dunn, 2016), and bookings on university campuses (Heyer, 2016). Fans spammed event pages with memes of Noll (Williams, 2015), bands released tracks focused on the injustice of his loss (Louder, 2016), parody articles released claimed that he was robbed of the triple J Hottest 100 crown, (“Shannon Noll Robbed of Hottest 100 Win For Twelfth Year Running,” 2016), petitions were organised to have him represent Australia at Eurovision (Conors, n.d.), and faux memorials were held commemorating his loss to Sebastian (Mack, 2016). This flurry of activity lead to renewed interest in Noll in more traditional mainstream media outlets (Adams, 2016). It is at this same time that Nollposting began. Important to note here is the two key components that both Nollposting more formally and his earlier use in

![Image](image.png)

Fig. 12. From Freeman (2016).
memes share: his status as a victim and his framing as a hypermasculine, hypersexual being. Noll himself, in this earlier period of memetic development, occupies a specific enough in the Australian cultural imaginary that he denotes this particular Australian identity, “the battler”, by mere invocation. The references to his staid masculinity and grievances further strengthen this association.

**We’re (Not) All Someone’s Daughter, (Nor) Someones’s Son: The Suffocating Battler**

But in my description of Nollposting, and Noll’s success as a meme more broadly, I have not accounted for his incredible popularity specifically. As previously mentioned, other memes pages co-opt Australian artifacts of nostalgia and shoehorn them into memes, especially Shit Memes, which is more concerned with Guy Sebastian than his runner up (Freeman, 2016). Why Shannon Noll? Why not, for example, Daryl Braithwaite, the vocalist of Australian 1970s glam band Sherbet? He occupies a similar place in Australian music hierarchy, recently finishing the regional Red Hot Summer Tour alongside Noll. He has as his ironic champion comedian Dave Callan, who calls him “our Lord and Saviour” in both shows and popular Facebook posts (Bowden, 2017). He was also the subject of a recent viral response to the Triple J Hottest 100 announcement, where one user commented “ya jokin should have been higher” #100-2, before commenting:

![Comment](image)

Fig. 13. From Sargeant (2017).

There appears to be many of the same qualities that Noll possesses: his song “Horses”, in particular, is an exemplar of Australian kitsch. Yet he does not occupy the same place in the popular imagination, and his success as a meme stalled. We can make a number of readings about their difference in musical style that contribute to this, with Braithwaite’s soaring vocals and propensity for falsetto indicating a femininity that stands in stark contrast to Noll’s frankly limited vocal range, a gruffness that communicates the masculine authenticity of a pub rocker. Braithwaite’s association with the naff pop group Sherbet also does not help him in this regard. But the over-determining explanation is that Noll is a **battler**, or at least is constructed as a battler. Nobody could confuse Daryl Braithwaite with a **battler**; Shirley Strachan, maybe. As discussed earlier, the importance of the battler to the formation of Australian identity during the Howard era was crucial, and this was the fire in which Noll was forged. Not only does Braithwaite lack the rugged, self-sufficient masculinity that is associated with this performance of battling, he has not been subject to any extra-diegetic narratives regarding his own battles. He remains an unremarkable journeyman of the Australian music scene, with or without the memes. The ironic revival in Noll’s popularity, however, is able itself to be reconstituted as a triumph of the battler: the second time as farce.

The dominance of the battler identity in Australian popular culture, and its continuing relevance, problematizes any reading wherein Nollposters are merely making fun of him. I do not
preclude this possibility, but I do not believe that simply because one engages an object in jest one negates its importance or influence: this is also the thrust of Whitney Phillip’s later work on trolling, focusing on its effects rather than the intent of the actors involved (Phillips, 2015b). We might investigate this in relation to another battler created at the same time as Noll, that of the plumber Kenny. As Kirsty Whitman argues of the film Kenny, “centralising working class masculinity is closely associated with mainstreaming, authenticity and averageness, and it is often at the centre of cultural and social understandings about what it means to be Australian.” (Whitman, 2013). There is a productive similarity between the characters of Kenny Smyth and Noll. Like Noll, Kenny was framed as the archetypal Aussie battler, humbling eking out his existence in a world with the odds stacking against him. They are also particularly products of the Howard era, wherein “working-class identities are acceptable, only insofar as they are aligned with neo-liberal capitalist constructs” (Whitman, 2013, p. 61). In the same way that Kenny has an almost fetishistic commitment to his job, Noll’s constructed personality is humble and uncomplaining, merely striving to get by. When he does complain, his rallying cry is “What About Me?”, bemoaning that he is not getting his share, what he is owed. It is not, pointedly, “What About Us?”. Both Noll and Kenny’s success during a similar time period can be in large part attributed to how they legitimize “the delegation of ‘Aussie values’ to the safe-keeping of an idealised and “ordinary” Australian - an imaginary but powerful figure of national rhetoric” (Collins, 2007, p. 90). The through line of supposed invisibility is shared by both characters, but as argued by Whitman, this is something that “allows them to utilise the language of the oppressed, while denying voice to other, more oppressed people and groups within Australian society, making systems of inequality and privilege invisible.” (Whitman, 2013, p. 60). That is to say, when we are concerned with the little boy waiting to be served at the counter of a corner shop, our gaze does not include those not present in the shop to begin with, whether due to being priced out by the small retailers’ markup, or because they live in a food desert which renders the concept of a “corner shop” itself a distant dream. This granting of victimhood status is especially pertinent when we consider how much of Noll’s early ironic popularity had to do with memes that featured a comic overreaction to him being “robbed” of the Australian Idol title by Guy Sebastian, casting it as some epoch-ending disaster. With this in mind, I argue that Nollposting has more to do with a renegotiation of this Australian identity within a new, postmodern media environment that it does a critique of it.

Furthermore, there is a long history of Australian comedy that wrests with national definition, especially the battler (McCallum, 1998), which I believe is worth using as context to Noll’s ironic appraisal. Describing such previous comedic icons such as Norman Gunston, Edna Everage and Paul Hogan, McCallum attributes to them a mixture of both “apology and defiance” (1998, 207). They are presented as characters to be both mocked and celebrated, depending on the context in which they are presented or their development as characters. The character of Edna Everage, for example, began as a parody of suburban housewife inanity but transformed, over time, into a “colonial triumph” as audiences became more familiar with her routine and her success overseas became “Australian nationalist aspiration” (McCallum, 1998, p. 215). Her transformation into an icon of kitsch (Siemienowicz, 1999), allows her viewers to re-appropriate these signifiers of suburbia into something to be (un)ironically celebrated. This is further explored in Sue Turnbull’s discussion of Edna and television series Kath and Kim, whose humour she argues often involves “gleeful recognition rather than ironic distance” (Turnbull, 2008, p. 27). Kath and Kim is an obvious precedent to Nollposting, particularly its focus on the minutiae of cultural experience. Much of its humour, based in speech patterns, accent, slang and humourous malappropriations, all
recall Nollposting’s evermore specific strine and use of cultural markers, albeit aimed towards a lower-classed figure.

We might integrate this with the recent history of class humour in Australia, focused around the “bogan”, or white working-class poor (Pini and Previte, 2013). Investigating what visions of the working class are used in this humour helps reveal “ongoing efforts of the middle class to reinscribe boundaries and differences, and focuses attention on the way in which middle-class values, attitudes and tastes are normalized and naturalized” (Pini et al, 2012, p. 145). Similar to Nollposting, depictions of the bogan falls into established Australian media practice of portraying the imagined working class as “potentially violent and aggressive as well as sexually degenerative and promiscuous” (Pini et al, 2012, p. 146). I would argue that Nollposting itself represents a continuation of this tradition in humour, an example of how the “historical arc of class-based humour in Australian media is now refracted through new electronic and social networking platforms” (Gibson, 2013, p. 66). But as I have argued, as well as being a way to fix figures like Noll in the social hierarchy, it is also a way for users to distinguish themselves in relation to Australian national identity. As Gibson writes, humour around “battler-bogans and bogan-heroes tread[s] a fine line between condescension and celebration but nevertheless tap into entrenched nationalist sentiments and values appealing to Australianness” (Gibson, 2013, p. 72).

Nollposting also follows from several other memeic representations of Australian identity ad absurdum, such as Sam Kekovich’s advertisements for Meat and Livestock Australia, promoting the consumption of lamb on Australia Day. These advertisements consisted of Kekovich addressing the nation “Lambassador”, bemoaning the rise of “un-Australianisms” such as vegetarianism, which he blamed on “long-haired dole bludging types” (Ma, 2015). Whilst this ostensibly satirises the hypermasculine Australian identity, it does through without challenging several of the central conceits of the “white Australian rural tradition” with which it engages (Han, 2007, p. 365). The satirical value of the advertisements were limited at best, as noted in one complaint to the advertising standards bureau, which noted that they gave ” the wider community a feeling of validity in ridiculing those who are different or fail to fit their ideal mould of a "true blue Australian" (Advertising Standards Bureau, 2009).

so many upset veggy poofs. If you don't want to celebrate Australia day and you don't want to honour our traditions, you can get absolutely fucked. I'll remember to have an extra outlet next Australia day for you veggy's though, might even get an extra tray of the delicious fuckers.

Fuck yeah yeah nah straya cunt.

Fig. 14. From vtk94lude (2006)

YouTube comments on the advertisement, as in Figure 14, suggest that ironic use of strine (“fuck yeah yeah nah straya cunt”) can easily be reconciled with hate speech.

As McCallum argues, there is a profound difficulty in attempting to read the impact of Australian comedy of national identity, especially when there is “different ways of reading the work available to a large heterogeneous audience” (McCallum, 1998, p. 201). But I would suggest that it is the parsing of this ambivalence that distinguishes the users themselves. In showing their ability to mock Noll and others like him, they demonstrate what I would call the Goldilocks
theory of Australian nationalism, drawing from (Kimmel, 2013, p. 52). They are neither too
Australian, like the hyper-masculine figure of Noll, but neither are they too effete and high-minded
to not recognise a truth to the character of Noll. Their taste is just right; at risk of making a truly
horrendous pun, as Bourdieu says, “taste classifies, and it classifies the classifier” (1986, p. 6). The
true judge of being Australian is making the judgement of what counts as Australian.

This Isn’t How it Has to Be, Little Darling

As Nissenbaum & Shifman write, “paradoxically, memes’ unstable nature keeps this community’s
shared culture at the center of discussion, reinforcing its importance” (Nissenbaum and Shifman,
2015, p. 498). Even when Nollposting is critical of this imagined working class culture it
distinguishes itself against, it does so by uncritically accepting several of its basic fictions, thereby
breathing new life into them. Beating someone at their own game still means that you are playing
their game, not your own. Nollposting, like Kenny before him, succeeds “because it registered the
new configuration of lived experience” (L. Milner, 2009, p. 161). Whilst my study is by no means
exhaustive, I believe it points to productive areas for future research, particularly regarding the
relationship between articulation of national collective identity under late capitalism and memetic
discourse. As Figure 15 indicates, there is a persistent association within certain internet
subcultures of Australians with shitposting.

Further study could investigate this link. This is not to suggest, of course, that there is essentialized
quality of Australian culture that grants us a predilection to shitposting, but that there is a
significant overlap between our masculinised battler and the gendered discourse standards that
govern participation on the Internet. Ostensibly satirical pages such as Yeah the Boys, that are hubs
of unironic sexism and homophobia (Economos, 2016), would be objects of particular concern
here, as would the popularity of the “Alf Stewart Rape Dungeon” meme, that “parodies” the
character from the soap opera Home and Away by portraying him as an inveterate rapist and
unapologetic racist (Bub, 2012). More quantitatively minded scholars than myself might investigate
the back-end of Australian meme communities, particularly how Facebook algorithms sway how content is delivered.

Nollposting has so infected discussion of Shannon Noll that news articles announcing his latest single releases engage in ironic hyperbole regarding its quality (Barden, 2017; Pitney, 2017). This is not unlike Sue Turnbull’s discussion of Kath and Kim, which possesses an “ambivalent impulse, being either self-celebratory or self-critical” (Turnbull, 2004, p. 108) that is ultimately made irrelevant by the program’s position within broader media contexts that made it into the “little Aussie battler triumphing over the odds” (Turnbull, 2004, p. 108). I would argue that a similar impulse is at work within Nollposting. Whilst its form may not conclusively be a self-critical examination of Australian mythology or a self-congratulatory celebration of it, within a broader media context that still valorizes battler tropes uncritically, and given Noll’s background as a Howard era relic, I argue that Nollposters are contesting over the correct amount of (ironic) Australiana, merely than dispensing with it entirely. Nollposters cannot have their fish taco and eat it too: as the old adage goes, “ironic shitposting is still shitposting”.

References


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Victim or Survivor? Emerging Narratives from Experiences of Terrorism
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This paper explores the impacts of terrorism, and of consequent disability, on three people. Two participants have a direct, and one has an indirect, experience of terrorism, but all have been deeply impacted by their encounter in the physicality of everyday existence. Using storytelling, as described by Hannah Arendt (1998), as the medium for exploring the daily lives of people directly affected by a terrorist attack, I choose here to focus on the ways in which they describe their disability, or their relationship to disability, and the meanings they create around their direct experience of terrorism. I seek to understand the ethical struggles of life after a terrorist attack. I ask how does one live an ethical life, a life that seems ‘right’ in the eyes of the person concerned? Through two stories, that of “Phoenix”, a victim of the 2002 Bali Bombings, and of Gill Hicks, a survivor of the 2005 London bombings, and her partner Karl Falzon, I explore how the long-term physical effects of terrorism play a significant role in the ways victims and survivors reassert themselves into their social world. Part of the agency implicit in the storytelling shared by these participants is encapsulated in the perceptions that these people are survivors, not victims; and this also impacts upon the various ways in which they approach living a good life with a disability and as a visible reminder of the randomness and extraordinary ferocity of terrorist attacks.

Introduction

This paper explores the impacts of terrorism on the everyday lives of ordinary people1. In many ways I mirror the approach taken by Jackson (2013b) in his book The Wherewithal of Life, when he converses with three immigrants from the Global South who have moved to the Global North. He does so in order to understand their experiences better—their daily struggles with living elsewhere, the cultural, religious and economic differences between there and here, and most significantly for me, he also asks, how does one live an ethical life in this new environment? How does one maintain a sense of well-being? I transmute the experiential field of immigration to terrorism.

Schmid (2012) places victims of terrorism into the following categories: direct/primary (involved in the attack) and indirect/secondary (family members of those who died; first responders etc.).2 I will explore the everyday effects of terrorism through the narratives of two people (“Phoenix” and Gill Hicks) from the first category and one from the second (Karl Falzon—Gill’s partner). It is important to note that Gill and Phoenix consider themselves to be survivors of terrorism, which in turn sets up a dichotomy between victim and survivor. This paper will explore how this dichotomy is traversed like a tightrope where one is always trying to keep the two modes of experience in balance.

1 ‘Ordinary’ in this sense is not meant in a derogatory or negative way; as Michael Jackson (2013b, p. 13) notes, studies concerned with the ways in which people live everyday ethical lives are usually focussed on extraordinary humans like Ghandi and Tolstoy.
2 Aly (2014) also includes, the resonant mass (general viewing public – could be a person in another country witnessing the event via television)
I am using a collaborative ethnographic methodology which allows for a conversational mode of interaction rather than formal interviewing, which in turn allows for an emergent and particular engagement with each participant. Rather than the researcher simply analysing data, researcher and participant collect evidence together and co-create knowledge. Through the stories each participant tells me, we hope to build a picture of the realities of living with terrorism in daily life. I do this, again in light of the way Jackson (2013a, 2013b, 2005, 2008) realises Hannah Arendt (1998), not to explain the present as causally related to the past (i.e. to the act of terrorism), but rather to explore and better understand the way in which that act is being (re)interpreted and experienced and how that event is being responded to over time.

Like Jackson I do not want to “describe a literary trope” or a clinical condition, such as disability, but to “describe a modality of extreme experience that will help elucidate the conditions under which sociality and storytelling become possible or impossible” (2013a, p. 62). Thus, in this paper, it is not my aim to describe the clinical conditions which inform my participants lives—the specific medical details of their injuries and disabilities—rather I want to explore the ways in which they talk about their conditions: as limiting, inspiring and/or connecting. Thus as Jackson states, if we are to avoid the trap of becoming infatuated with our own intellectual-cum-magical capacity to render the world intelligible, then the vocabulary “we” all too glibly project onto “them” must be tested continually against the various and changing experiences of actual lives. Otherwise we risk becoming complicit in the social violence that reduces the other to a mere object—a drudge, a victim, a number, assimilated to a category, a class, or a global phenomenon. (2013a, pp. 4–5)

So rather than describe a disability, in its fullest medical sense, in this paper I seek to understand the ways in which the disabilities caused by an act of terrorism are understood, felt, made meaningful and lived in the everyday life of a person with a direct experience of terrorism. I do so in light of Luria’s (1987) work with Zazetsky who suffered a catastrophic brain injury. Instead of reducing Zazetsky to his brain injury, Luria reveals Zazetsky’s dynamic relationship with his condition over time, his struggle to make good what he had lost (M. D. Jackson, 2008). Luria’s approach is similar to the one outlined by Frank (2013) where he argued that when a person is ill they have lost a sense of identity both due to the isolation of being treated for said illness in places such as hospitals (Ullyatt, 2015, p. 6) and the fact that the world feels as though it is moving along without them while they are suffering alone (Holmes, 2015). For Frank (1995, p. 40) the illness

3 The collaborative process includes sending the transcribed interviews back to each participant to review and edit as they see fit. I also invite them to provide feedback on my analysis, including this paper. This allows for each participant to engage with the research in a productive way and to the extent that they wish. For a deeper understanding of my methods please refer to the following texts (to name a few): Benson and Nagar (2006); Lassiter (2005); Mosher (2013); Narayan (2015); Rappaport (2008); Rouse, Lederman and Borneman (2012).

4 As Jane Gilmore (Anna*, 2017) recognises through Anna’s story, there is a danger in survivor stories of having to emulate the “good survivor”: in other words, why can’t you be like Anna who ‘transformed her life for the better’ after years of domestic abuse/violence? I tread with the same wariness here—while there are inspirational moments/themes woven throughout Gill, Karl and Phoenix’s stories, I do not offer them up here as such a one track/hegemonic trope; I offer them here so that we might understand that surviving is a struggle for well-being and that we might all go ‘visiting’ in the Arendtian sense—that we might find ourselves more open to a different way of being in the world.
narrative is transformative in that it allows the teller to assert a sense of themselves and their suffering back into the world from which they feel removed.

In this paper, I will briefly describe the theoretical bases of storytelling and everyday ethics. I will then move through particular aspects of Phoenix, Gill and Karl’s stories as they relate to the focus of this paper, which is to explore the descriptions of everyday pain and difficulties, motivations, helping others, and more specifically what Gill, Karl and Phoenix are trying to get others to understand or change. This paper is my first attempt to bring the words and everyday lives of participants to the forefront of academic knowledge pertaining to the human capacity to recover (or not) from violence. Through acts of storytelling I seek to understand how those who have experienced terrorism reinterpret that act in order to make it meaningful in their present day life.

**Storytelling**

Jackson pays homage to Arendt’s notions of storytelling in his book *The Politics of Storytelling: Variations on a Theme by Hannah Arendt*, through a recognition “that storytelling is a mode of purposeful action (praxis) that simultaneously discloses our subjective uniqueness and our intersubjective connectedness to others, as well as the environmental forces to which we are all subject” (2013a, p. 13). Jackson (2013a) argues that stories provide the teller with a sense of agency (as we rework and recount events that ‘happened’ to us) and as a way to reaffirm ‘our sense of belonging’ to a social group (as we retell our private experience in a way that others can relate or respond to). For Jackson (2013a, 2013b), and Arendt (1998), this is how stories enable us to live—by connecting us to others and giving us a voice and a sense of individuality amongst the many with whom we belong.

**Visiting**

The ‘critical’ aspect of storytelling lies in Arendt’s notion of visiting. According to Disch, “visiting means imagining what the world would look like to me from another position...” (1993, p. 687). This is not to be confused with empathy, which ‘obstructs’ understanding by ‘erasing all difference’. Visiting, on the other hand, promotes understanding, as we experience the world from different perspectives, imagining what we might look like from within this different world and realising how we might define our principles differently if we normally stood in this position. Arendt argues this critical perspective lies in “being and thinking in my own identity where I am not” (1954, p. 241).

**Everyday Ethics**

Jackson (2013b) expands this notion of visiting through the lens of Sartre (1983) by including the notion of ethics. According to Jackson, visiting via storytelling provides an opportunity for us to become something more than our conditioning allows. Ethics and storytelling, for Jackson, are “synonymous with freedom” as they provide an opportunity for us to go visiting and in the process not quite render back to who we are. Jackson explains:
Stories are redemptive, then, not because they preserve or represent the truth of any individual life but because they offer the perennial possibility that one sees oneself as, and discovers oneself through, another, despite the barriers of space, time, and difference. (2013a, p. 244)

Thus, after the telling and the listening, both narrator and audience gain something for and of themselves in the process. We are redeemed and made ethically free as the narrator asserts a sense of themselves as one amongst many. Simultaneously the audience gains a sense of agency by visiting an alternate way of being and not quite rendering back to who they were before the telling.

Lambek argued for a hermeneutical approach to ethics and suggested living is a process of “…interpretation and self-interpretation as people make their way in the world, with the human capacities, cultural resources, and historical circumstances given them” (2015, p. 8). In other words, an ethical approach allows us to explore the challenges faced in the everyday lives of human beings as made choices (within the confines afforded to us by our position and place in the world), which give our lives meaning and make them feel worthwhile. Although people are often struggling to live well, Das (2015, 2007; Zengin, 2010) and Jackson (2013a) would add that the dimension of violence can offer a confounding complication. For both Das and Jackson violence is considered to be one of many choices available to us as human beings in order that we might make our way in the world. Through her fieldwork, Das (in Zengin, 2010) was confronted by the fact that violence is in fact a normal part of everyday life for a large proportion of the world’s populations. Das then asked: “…how can ordinary, everyday acts stand up to the horrors of ethnic, sectarian sexual violence and at the same time be capable of morphing into these very acts of violence?” (Zengin, 2010, no page). In other words, how in the face of everyday violence does one live a ‘good’ life, a life worth living, yet also find in oneself the propensity to be violent? And does one ever truly find oneself released from violence? Or does one find a way to live with violence, alongside it, just making do?

Victim/Survivor

It is significant whether a person with an experience of terrorism recognises themselves as a victim or survivor. Phoenix chose his moniker for this research, and I find the imagery of the phoenix arising anew from the fire particularly potent. As Phoenix was extensively burned in the attack and while he has taken part in many medical studies, he has only done a few interviews and has never taken part in social research like the kind we are conducting together. The victim/survivor question also came to the fore after the 2014 Boston bombing. Adrianne Haslet-Davis walked off the set of Meet the Press in the US as the show did not comply with her two conditions (Block, 2014):

1. Not to refer to her as a victim but as a survivor
2. Not to mention the names of the perpetrators as she did not want primacy given to their story, rather she wanted the survivor stories to be the main thread of conversation.

Jackson refers to Katherine Boo’s experiences in the slum of Annawadi (near Mumbai) where Boo found (seemingly much to her surprise) that despite living in abject poverty there was still a sense of hope and a life worth living. This sits in direct opposition to the way the ‘West’ portrays people living in poverty (Boo, 2012 cited in Jackson, 2013b).
What do the monikers of ‘victim’ or ‘survivor’ do in such circumstances? Does one give a sense of being in control while the other does not? Does one lend itself to vulnerability while the other equates to resilience? Lastly, just how ‘real’ is this survivor/victim dichotomy?

Private Pain/Shared Narrative

Frank’s (1995) work in *The Wounded Storyteller*, according to Holmes (2015), marginalises the caregivers and focuses on those who are suffering and the cultural narratives available to them. By linking the personal private experience of illness to the cultural narratives available to the sufferer, Frank (1995) builds a tension akin to the one illuminated by Arendt (1998) when she argued that through storytelling the narrator is able to assert a sense of uniqueness among many. In other words, the private pain, which can never be fully shared, is only understood/related in terms of how the experience can be shared in a mutually convened cultural narrative. I now turn to Phoenix, Gill and Karl’s stories in order to further explore these themes.

Phoenix’s Story

I have visited Phoenix at his house on three separate occasions to conduct our face-to-face interviews. We have also conversed via email and in a limited fashion through Facebook (Phoenix thought it the best place for me to view his photos and observe his travels). Phoenix was inside the Sari Club on October 12, 2002, when a huge bomb was detonated by terrorists from Jemaah Islamiyah. This was the second bomb of the evening; the first was detonated by a suicide bomber across the road at Paddy’s bar. In our first interview Phoenix told me about how he awoke with burning rubble and roofing materials on top of him, and that he was disoriented but knew he had to move if he was to survive. He removed the rubble, stood up and saw a white light to his side. As he moved toward the light he noticed a young Asian girl and she was sort of curled up in a very awkward position and as white as a ghost and she just lay there you know wasn’t moving or anything and I didn’t have really time to go and check on her or anything like that because there was just fire everywhere…

Phoenix, upon seeing other people, collapsed against a wall shortly after he made it outside. He said his lungs were filled with smoke, he was gasping for breath, and desperately dehydrated. Phoenix was eventually stretchered off to the makeshift triage where travelling doctors, medics and tourists were administering what little cares they could. Forty-four days later Phoenix awoke in hospital in Perth. By the time he awoke from his medically induced coma, many of the other patients, victims and survivors of the Bali bombing had already left the hospital. Phoenix had suffered burns to 64% of his body.

Fifteen years later, Phoenix finds himself ready to tell his story. Phoenix does not describe himself as disabled; his relationship to disability is one of giving and receiving. Recently losing his job, Phoenix decided to do some volunteer work and ended up working with Fishability, helping disabled people to fish in different locations around Perth. He takes pleasure in the simple task of baiting a hook for someone who can’t do that for themselves; he enjoys the company and the scenery. He doesn’t consider himself disabled in any way; he can after all still use and move his hands, despite the loss of many fingertips. I asked Phoenix to describe the way he saw his injuries:
Well look, I guess there’s different degrees of disability, I mean you know if you couldn’t move your arm or clench your first and grab a drink then you know I’d probably say yeah well, you’re disabled, you can’t – doesn’t have that function or motor skills to do you know daily tasks but I guess I’m pretty lucky that I can – most of my movement’s really good, that’s about the worst. You—you know I do get chronic back and neck pain but so do a lot of other people as well so you know I don’t see myself as being disabled and you know with the work that I do with Fishability, I mean I see people there that are disabled. A person in a wheelchair is disabled. There’s a guy that had a stroke, can’t move anything down his left side, the guy’s disabled. That’s what I would class as a disability but I don’t think my injuries would you know would meet that criteria [...] when you’re suffering from PTSD one of the issues is there’s a lot of focus on yourself and your own issues and so to recover from it you’ve really got to change your thinking to more an outward perspective and help – and by helping other people you’re doing that.

Phoenix stresses the importance of helping others to aid in his own recovery; that reaching out beyond his own internal or private pain is a vital part of living with a violent event such as terrorism.

Significantly, Phoenix realises his identity as both victim and survivor. Phoenix’s narrative has challenged my assumption that those with an experience of terrorism see themselves as survivor (an agent taking control of/responsibility for one’s life in a social world post-attack) or victim (a vulnerable individual unable to physically or mentally move beyond the experience itself). This has allowed me to better understand the ways in which Phoenix claims agency through his narratives. Phoenix reaches outwardly in three ways: as a member of the BPPAI to promote peace and understanding at the Sari Club site where the 2002 attack occurred; as a volunteer for Fishability; and as a would-be travel blogger, who intends to relate his travel experiences prior to, since, and in light of the 2002 attack. In direct opposition to what Phoenix assumes the terrorists wanted—to stop him living a life of worldly travel and engagements with others—Phoenix continues to be “the person he was before.” Phoenix has created a sense of agency by reinterpreting his past experience of terrorism and using it to make sense of the present.

Indeed, Phoenix argues that his physical scarring is “a conversation starter […] it tends to lead into more—wider topics like terrorism in general”. Something which is often presumed as weakness, as isolating, and as a sign of fragility is also simultaneously something which is connecting, resilient and strengthening. In this sense, Phoenix reaffirms Jackson’s (2013a, p. 17) notion that stories provide the teller with a sense of agency (as we rework and recount events that ‘happened’ to us) and as a way to reaffirm ‘our sense of belonging’ to a social group (as we retell our private experience in a way that other than can relate or respond to). Thus, Phoenix has transformed his experience of terrorism from isolating to one which connects him to his social milieu.

Jackson (2013b, pp. 102–103) does note that traumatised persons are often unable to narrate their own story. He argues that this is due to the fact that that which unifies “... space, time and character on which narrative coherence depends are broken.” Furthermore, Jackson argues that when narratives are possible they are not like other narratives we ‘ordinarily tell’—they are often without closure. Thus, I do not want to suggest ‘recovery from’, rather I use the term ‘to live with’, terror.
Gill’s and Karl’s Story

I first met Gill and Karl at a social innovation Hackathon run in Perth in December 2016. They arrived with their daughter Amelie after a long-haul flight from Europe, jet lagged and in desperate need of coffee. There was no coffee. I offered to go to the nearest shops and bring some coffee back as I needed to pick up a visiting overseas colleague. Amelie, who had completely misheard what I said and thought I was going to meet some magical clowns, jumped at the chance to come with me. I was willing but hesitant: would these strangers allow me to take their only child? Yes. I felt the trust build easily from this point, although I was nervous to approach Gill and Karl to ask them to participate in the research. It became quickly apparent to me on the first day we met that Gill and Karl were an interdependent couple and that he was involved in Gill’s activities with countering violent extremism (CVE) as much as she was. It felt disingenuous to interview one without the other, as I believed their ethical lives were intertwined. Thus far I have conducted one interview with Gill and Karl via Skype and make regular contact with Gill via Facebook. I also have my fieldnotes from the conversations we had during the Hackathon. The following is in part taken from the above interactions and sourced from some online news articles (referenced when needed).

Gill was involved in the 2005 London bombings. Gill had caught the tube at Tufnell Park and was in the same carriage as Germaine Lindsay, a suicide bomber, who blew himself up along with the train they were travelling in. Hovering in and out of consciousness, Gill and the other survivors talked to one another for over an hour before their rescuers arrived. Gill was the last person to be removed from the train; covered in soot and ash, she was completely unrecognisable (Dapin, 2015). For Gill this moment of terror is also a shining moment of our humanity. She was rescued by people who had no idea who she was; all they knew was that she was another human and therefore worth saving, worth putting their own lives at risk for. Gill lost both legs from the knees down in this attack. She now walks with the aid of stumps which fall off during hot sweaty weather, stumps which cause her endless amounts of pain. The nerve endings in her knees were not properly cauterized during her operation, the situation was too desperate and her life was hanging in the balance. These nerve endings continue to grow and every time she puts on her stumps they are forced into cups and weighed upon by her body. Gill told me that her daily life has become one of pain management (or coping with extreme pain without medication), working meetings around physiotherapy appointments, pre-planning and routine: none of which naturally gel with Gill.

Gill met Karl years after the terror attack. Gill had returned to Adelaide for a family event and was simultaneously looking to escape the pressures of an acrimonious divorce. Karl was recently divorced with three children. Neither was looking for a new relationship. They met in a jazz club, Gill talked about her desire to have a child, and they fell in love. Karl is very much a part of Gill’s life and her mission; they describe themselves as an interdependent unit.

Gill has now dedicated her life to CVE: to showing and providing an alternative platform to violence. Gill knew what she wanted to do even before she left the hospital. She walked the route that the bombers had taken to get to London, through 22 towns and cities over a period of a month. She walked alongside Muslims and the broader community and encouraged people affected by the bombing, suspicious of their neighbours, hostile and fearful, to join the walk for a while and talk to someone they wouldn’t usually meet with. Gill says, “If someone’s got a head scarf or piercings or tattoos or whatever our outer you know look is, how do we find that the inner that’s the same as everyone else in your life?” Gill used her story in order to find her new place in the world, in order to bring people together after that moment that literally tore people apart. I asked
Gill and Karl now—some 12 years on—what is your daily life like? How does this attack reach into the present? I ask this in respect of the ethics of everyday life, as a question of well-being and how one lives a good life. What we’ve found so far—Gill, Karl and I—is that Gill is frustrated by, and Karl is concerned with, the way in which Gill’s pain and disability affect their everyday life.7

K: I guess particularly in the last year more than the previous years, Gill’s mobility is really limited. So for Gill to get to the shops—
G: Alone, yeah.
K: Alone is a real—okay so the stretch when you do that is when I’m not here. When I’m not here Gill’s forced to do it.
G: But if the weather’s too hot—
K: Then you’re stuck.
G: Then I’m stuck because my legs fall off literally in the hot weather so I’m absolutely stuffed, yeah. And I haven’t yet got a way of—Amelie’s still too young for me to have the wheelchair and have her in the wheelchair with me and me operate a chair in the types of footpaths and things that we have, it’s just horrific so it’s just – that’s not going to happen either. So yeah, so I have to be super-organised and plan ahead and that’s something that I’ve found really difficult because my brain doesn’t work like that so that has increased a lot of anxiety if unexpected things land on the day of say you know heat or Karl not around or I’ve forgotten to get milk or just those sorts of things.

I asked Gill and Karl what drives them to continue working to counter violent extremism every day when even basic activities can cause huge stress:

G: For me what keeps me going is the anger, I think—
K: It’s not the quality of the work you’re doing?
G: I think I’m so angry at—and the senselessness of violent extremism and terrorism as a channel in which you know a growing group feel that that’s their way of being able to make a difference and I’m angry, I’m frustrated, every incident fuels me even more but then that also adds to my growing frustration of you know I can’t work many more hours than I already do and you know then we see – what I see reflected back is a world that’s changing not for a sense of evolving but to a sense I see as regressing back into an us and them frame and I get frustrated over how - what else I could be doing and that’s when I think the positivity of the motivation of anger keeps me thinking of maybe there’s another way, maybe there’s a different way to communicate this, maybe there’s a different project I need to deal with that—

[...] I don’t really feel that my purpose in life is to motivate people to have a better life, I feel that my purpose is to actually stop someone becoming a violent extremist and so that’s where it’s been difficult because I’ve been put into a framework of motivational [speaker] and I feel anything but...

Gill’s motivational speaking engagements are a practical way for her to finance her work with would-be violent extremists. Simultaneously they are a form of frustration, as she sees less value in

7 Since this interview, Gill has embarked on a journey of reducing her pain levels through/with medicine. At the time of this interview, Gill was adamant she would not take such a journey.
sharing her story with mainstream audiences. In this sense, Gill’s frustration could be a result of her story falling on deaf ears. Gill’s story is simultaneously a source of strength, resilience and connection as well as frustration, loneliness, and fragility. Sharing her story is a way to survive financially while trying to make ‘the work’ and her life meaningful which in turn provides a sense of hope and well-being.

Gill described her disability during our conversation as life-long, as something that she will never be without or ever be able to fully heal from (Phoenix’s injuries and ongoing medical care were revealed in much the same way). Gill perceives her disability as simultaneously adding a point of significance in connection within her relationship to Karl (they’ve only known each other since Gill became disabled and Karl related to her despite this fact), and as adding a detracting layer of work as if she is a chore for Karl (he fits his life around Gill and her needs and schedules). Karl does not perceive their relationship in the same way.

K: We have to think about Gill and health and—
G: So I’ve got to be—I think for me it’s about—there’s no freedom for me because I need to be near some sort of prosthetics hospital outlet and then I also need to you know so we’ve been looking at leaving South Australia for example and okay so where do we go? What do we do? And again I’m completely governed by the prosthetics care from state to state—[...] that’s like ... this other layer of the ongoing implications to the injuries that completely impact life. I can’t actually you know when—if I’m ever asked oh it’s amazing how you’ve recovered, actually no, there is no recovery. This is—it will always continue to shape my life until my last day. [...] I don’t take any medication so it’s been a process of retraining my thoughts to associate pain with how lucky I am that I’m even here. So, it’s yeah.
I: No medication whatsoever?
G: Not to—Karl would quite like me to be medicated.
K: The amount of discomfort she feels for no gain is—it’s debilitating. It’s really hard to watch. So, you know and—yeah, there’s a level of comfort I’d like Gill to have in life. So even just this thing about the legs slipping off you know, that alone is difficult, you know, that alone, it hugely limits Gill’s mobility and what can we do to fix that? You know and then you just start looking at the different possibilities. Look, there’s stuff there that can happen so with Gill’s stumps, Gill’s stumps are very short so they’re very short and as short as they could possibly be so that means that a liner has to come up over the knee joint and halfway up her thigh, most of the way up her thigh so Gill doesn’t then have any cooling effect from her lower limb. All her biology’s messed up because of the way things are so you know the inconvenience of it all, it’s huge.

According to Karl, doctors are unsure exactly how the nerves are growing back, and won’t know exactly what is happening until they “open Gill up.” The surgery will be complicated by the damaged tissue surrounding the nerves, leading to a high risk of infection. Karl stated that there has even been talk of “losing knees”. Karl recognises that “it bears on Gill a lot.”

G: I absolutely do not want anyone else to experience what I do, both in this country or anywhere, and I’m so acutely aware that you know my peers in other countries don’t even have it as good as I do and for me to feel this shit then I can only imagine what their lives are like in Pakistan or Iraq or—and to me it’s just—yeah, I’m finding that very hard, of particularly being
back in Australia. I’m feeling so far away from people who absolutely understand that—the full impact of the experience. [...] But just to answer the question of how my situation impacts you? K: I don’t know, our lives are so immersed and merged together that that is just normal. [...] I’ve never seen as a situation of ‘you’re disabled’. And it comes with all this extra stuff, the extra stuff just comes with being with you, it’s part of what is normal.

I return to Jackson here:

I want to resist explaining away the indeterminate relationship that seems to exist, on the one hand, between the conditions that frame our fate, set our course and determine our identity and, on the other, the unforeseen events, adventitious encounters and improbable developments that characterize the course of an actual life... These are mysteries... (2005, p. 393)

In light of Jackson’s words, to describe their relationship with each other and with Gill’s disabilities in biological terms, would miss what has been borne out of this fire: the natality of this terror event. Gill and Karl describe their relationship to each other and Gill’s disability in strikingly different ways: Gill sees herself as a burden that pushes Karl’s life out to “the edges of the day”\textsuperscript{8}; Karl, having known Gill only as disabled, describes attending to Gill’s needs as their version of ‘normal’. He celebrates Gill’s purpose and only seems to find life difficult when Gill is in pain, frustrated and unable to work to her purpose. If we return to Arendt’s concept of visiting here we can understand the ways in which both Gill and Karl view their interdependence by visiting each other’s perspectives. Gill says she makes a clear distinction between the Gill before the bombing and the Gill after the bombing; it is the only way she can make sense of the changes and the impact of the attack. I think this relates not only to the Gill who was career focussed and couldn’t imagine such violence ever touching her life, but also to the Gill who was fiercely independent and reliant upon no-one, whose partner did not have to sacrifice his time and needs to cater for her own. This is the fragility I have been referring to for Gill: the fact that she cannot escape her own body and that it places demands not only on her, but also on her intimate partner. It affects their everyday existence. And yet it also fires her soul: the pain; the limitations; the things she would not share with others; the things she does not want anyone else to suffer are the very reminders that keep her going. Gill transforms the past into the present by listening to her body and using it to make a difference, using it to stem violence.

For Phoenix, Gill and Karl, I would argue along with Jackson (2008, pp. 389–390), that there is a struggle-for-being that reflects a desire to be recognised as an acting subject who influences, and makes a difference to, the lives of others. Gill has used her story to ’fund’ the work, meaning that Gill does not always find herself sated by the telling. If narratives, as Jackson and Arendt suggest, are a way to insert oneself back into a social world, and if we are concerned with well-being, then we must pay attention to when, where and to whom these stories are performed.

Conclusion

In this paper, I have sought to bring the words and everyday lives of participants to the forefront of academic knowledge pertaining to the human capacity to recover (or not) from violence. Through

\textsuperscript{8} Karl often begins working on his business at 2am after Gill has gone to bed and finishes around 4am.
acts of storytelling I hope to understand how those who have experienced terrorism reinterpret that act to make it meaningful in their present-day life. A common thread revealed by these stories is one of being driven to help other people. Phoenix and Gill both talk of the embodied repercussions of terrorism, as a catalyst to act and reach out to others, rather than an excuse to focus inwardly on their problems. Gill does so at times with little regard for her own comfort. In these cases, the survivor living an ethical life is not just living a comfortable, isolated life but connecting with others and helping those who are less able in some way (Phoenix’s disabled anglers, Gill’s audience to whom she offers a non-violent pathway, Karl’s love for and dedication to Gill).

There is a nuanced relationship between being victim or survivor: as Phoenix said, “we are both”. The injuries sustained and disabilities now being lived in the everyday and over time create a form of resilience and vulnerability that is traversed at times like a tightrope: a struggle for well-being that requires Phoenix, Gill and Karl to find a constant balance between that which befalls them and that which they can control. The violence which inexorably changed their lives is now a catalyst for action; it has been reinterpreted as their life’s mission to make the world a better place. I would argue that both Gill and Phoenix have realised a sense of humanity, one which they would share with others, as giving and peaceful (non-violent) beings.

Acknowledgements
I would like to thank Phoenix, Gill Hicks and Karl Falzon for their time, their words and sharing their lives with me.

References


Cultural Citizenship, Social Utility, and Positive Network Externalities: The Role of Anti-Siphoning Legislation

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Rowe suggests that televised sport plays a substantial role in facilitating participation in a nation’s culture (2004b). This sentiment is arguably more pronounced here in Australia than anywhere else in the world—our broadcasting legislation contains provisions ensuring that free-to-air broadcasters get priority when acquiring the rights of “events of national importance and cultural significance” (Australian Government, 2017, p. 1). This provision lists some 1300 protected events; all exclusively sport. However, many comparable countries list approximately 100 events, which include non-sport events. Given that the Australian Football League (AFL) is clearly identifiable as an Australian game and part of Australian culture, making this code widely accessible is evidently a necessary requirement for cultural participation. Yet, the free-to-air broadcasting market often fails to fulfil this obligation. Despite the fact that approximately $900 million was paid for the most recent round of free-to-air AFL broadcasting rights (Mason and Stensholt, 2015), evidence suggests that there is a considerable disparity in AFL viewing opportunities in the free-to-air market. While this situation would appear to erode the public access remit that sport has historically supported, of more concern is that current regulatory arrangements appear to normalise such an outcome. The concepts of cultural citizenship, social utility, and positive network externality suggest that, in an ideal world, all games should be freely available to all citizens. Leaving this function to the pay-TV sector raises issues about confining participation in media sport culture to “the comparatively affluent sectors of the population” (Rowe and Hutchins, 2013, p. 4), undermining the perceived potential of sport to enrich cultural citizenship and national identification. While it’s established that incumbent broadcasters face uncertainty due to shifting audience behaviours, evolving delivery technologies, and new industry players, this paper argues that regulation designed to preserve the cultural citizenship for Australians that is facilitated by access to mediated sport requires considerable overhaul in order for it to remain relevant and deliver its public access remit.

Introduction

Television is changing. Shifting audience behaviour, new industry players, and evolving delivery technologies complicate the broadcasting landscape, and compromises established commercial and pay television business models. For decades, broadcasters that televise sport have purchased the broadcasting rights for elite sport as a major component in driving their business (Nicholson, 2007). In this respect, free-to-air and pay-TV operators recently purchased the 2017–22 Australian Football League (AFL) broadcast rights for $2.5 billion—the largest amount ever paid for broadcasting rights in Australia (Mason and Stensholt, 2015). Of that amount, approximately $900 million was paid for the free-to-air broadcasting rights. While these broadcasters hope to recuperate that investment by selling advertising, or through a mix of advertising and subscription sales, in a context where television production, distribution and consumption are changing, this business model faces uncertainty. Moreover, while content creation, distribution, consumption, audience
measurement, and revenue are often seen as ripe for opportunity in this environment of uncertainty (Burroughs and Rugg, 2014; Lotz, 2014), an aspect of the sector that may have been overlooked in terms of its possibilities in this shifting broadcasting landscape is government regulation.

Televised sport is perceived to play a dominant role in facilitating participation in a nation’s culture (Rowe, 2004b) to the extent that the Australian Government utilises legislative measures to ensure that “events of national importance and cultural significance”—such as the AFL Grand Final—remain “freely available to all Australian viewers” (Australian Government, 2017, p. 1). The centrality of sport to Australian culture, and therefore to Australian citizenship and cultural inclusiveness, is difficult to overstate—in 2016, the top six most watched television programs on free-to-air television in Australia were all sport related (Hickman, 2016). Given that the AFL is clearly identifiable as an Australian game, and demonstrably part of Australian culture—the top-rating programs on free-to-air and subscription television in 2016 were AFL matches—making this code widely accessible is evidently a necessary requirement for cultural participation. Yet, the free-to-air broadcasting market often fails to fulfil this obligation. Normalised by regulatory arrangements, evidence suggests that there is considerable disparity for AFL viewing opportunities in the free-to-air market—a situation would appear to erode the public access remit that sport has historically supported.

In Australia, the Broadcasting Act 1992—which contains provisions that give free-to-air broadcasters a protected entitlement to purchase broadcasting rights to sports on the grounds of cultural significance—has not been adequately amended to account for social, industrial and technological developments that have punctuated the sector over the last 25 years (Hutchins and Rowe, 2012). Accordingly, the issue of regulation demands further investigation: what do the tensions emerging from the changing conditions in the AFL broadcasting sector mean for regulation that is designed to preserve the cultural citizenship for Australians that is facilitated by access to mediated sport?

Cultural Citizenship, Social Utility, and Positive Network Externality—The Role of Anti-Siphoning Legislation

Some analysts point out that sport has not been treated with the same reverence in the academic literature as other cultural products such as news, music, film, and online content (Boyle and Whannel, 2010; Hutchins and Rowe, 2012). Sport “is often treated as a rather trivial topic, and thought to be far less important in understanding the relationship between economy, society and culture than many minority arts and leisure activities” (Warde, 2006, p. 108). However, sport requires our attention for many reasons. To begin with, from a political economic perspective, elite level sport serves the ideology of the capitalist class by operating as an “opiate of the masses”, working to distract us from “more pressing social and political issues” (Corrigan, 2014, p. 45). Sport plays a role in reinforcing structural inequalities and stereotypes, especially in terms of race, gender, sexuality and ethnicity (Yoo et al, 2013; Rowe, 2014; Wenner, 1998). Analysing the “meanings associated with mediated sport texts” can also provide valuable insights into our “cultural priorities and the current state of power relations” (Wenner, 1998, p. 5). Research is also required on the grounds that executive-level decisions influence how sport is presented and consumed, which in turn constructs our culture, and yet little is known about what takes place within boardrooms when these decisions are made (Milne, 2016). Sport also demands investigation due to the nature of
meaning attached to it at the point of consumption: Shirato and Yell (1996, p. 158) argue that sport should be investigated because it is “being used by greater numbers of people” compared to idealised forms of “high culture (ballet, opera, poetry)”. Gantz and Lewis (2014) also demonstrate that emergent media devices open up a whole new array of motivations and meanings for how sport is consumed by the contemporary sports fan, and how these newer practices intertwine with traditional media sports consumption.

Most importantly, however, sport demands our attention for the perception that it contributes to our cultural citizenship. Sport can build a sense of national identity through the “selective celebrations of past successes” in order to “promote a sense of exceptionalism or superiority” (Vincent and Kian, 2014, p. 302). Mediated sport has the social effect of a positive network externality; people enjoy not only “the event and the ‘conversational network’ through viewing, [but] their participation also adds value to the network for everyone” (Smith et al, 2015, p. 723). The idea that watching sport permits us to participate in a common culture illuminates its social utility, in that consuming mediated sport allows:

[T]he everyday, symbolic means by which senses of collective belonging are encouraged and deterred, especially regarding social subjects who may feel isolated, because of various forms of mobility and inequality, from the social collectivities that they inevitably encounter. (Rowe, 2016a, p. 3)

While the relationship between cultural citizenship and sport should not be overstated, given that “demographic diversity and socio-cultural complexity” can mitigate sports perceived “prosocial” characteristics (Rowe, 2016a, p. 2), sport appears to be central to Australian culture because it is accessible, popular, and enjoyable (Cashman, 1987, 2010), and because it potentially reflects an underlying ethos of egalitarianism in our culture (Rowe, 2016a). Meaningful participation in our culture is often also perceived to be tied up with a need to be knowledgeable about sport (Rowe, 2016a).

This relationship between free and equitable access to televised sport and culture can then be seen as a justification for government intervention in the free market of broadcasting, to ensure that sports of cultural significance remain widely available to the citizens of a country (Corrigan, 2014; Evens et al, 2011; Nicholson, 2007; Rowe, 2004a, 2004b; Smith et al., 2015). It is argued that without such regulation, the result would be market failure from the consumers perspective—that is, broadcast rights to sports of cultural significance would be purchased by pay-TV operators and placed behind subscription pay-walls, or siphoned off, thereby confining the participation of media sport culture to “the comparatively affluent sectors of the population” (Rowe & Hutchins, 2013, p. 4), in turn undermining the perceived ability of sport to enhance cultural citizenship (Jolly, 2010).

In Australia, this legislation is contained in the Broadcasting Services Act 1992 (BSA). The BSA contains a provision (the Broadcasting Services (Events) Notice, more commonly known as the anti-siphoning list) that gives free-to-air broadcasters a protected right over pay-TV broadcasters to first purchase the broadcasting rights of sports on the anti-siphoning list, which are chosen on the grounds of cultural significance by the Minister who oversees the Act (Australian Government, 2017). This sentiment is perhaps more prevalent in Australia than in any other country in the world: as of late 2017, the anti-siphoning list contains some 1300 protected events, all exclusively sport, while many other comparable countries list approximately 100 events, and include non-sport events (Ofcom, 2010). While anti-siphoning regulation would seemingly guarantee delivery of
culturally significant sports to Australian people, it could be argued that the legislation as it currently exists does not adequately fulfil this obligation. Tables 1 and 2 demonstrate that the coverage of AFL games on free-to-air television tends to skew in favour of clubs with the largest membership. In 2016, the free-to-air broadcaster covered the two largest clubs by membership, Collingwood and Hawthorn, more than 11 times compared to the two smallest clubs by membership, the Gold Coast Suns and the Greater Western Sydney Giants. In 2017, this situation was marginally better, with the difference in coverage between the two largest clubs and the smallest two clubs reduced to a gap of six games, although another ‘minnow’ club by membership, the Brisbane Lions, had one solitary game on free-to-air in Melbourne in 2017.

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Table 1. AFL Membership vs Free-to-Air Broadcast Frequencies (Melbourne), 2016.
### Table 2. AFL Membership vs Free-to-Air Broadcast Frequencies (Melbourne), 2017

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There are 11 less games of AFL on free-to-air each season under the new 2017–22 deal. Under the terms of the new deal, Foxtel retained the right to sub-licence a Saturday afternoon game to a free-to-air broadcaster in those rounds where there was no Thursday night or public holiday game. It was believed this game would be on-sold to the Channel 10 free-to-air broadcaster, but when the two parties failed to reach an agreement on the market value of the games, Foxtel decided to show the game exclusively on its pay TV platform. It has been estimated the sub-licence would be worth around $30 million per season. More info: [http://www.afl.com.au/news/2016-10-27/fewer-games-on-freetoair-tv-in-2017](http://www.afl.com.au/news/2016-10-27/fewer-games-on-freetoair-tv-in-2017)
While non-regulatory factors such as form, geographic market, and scheduling logistics may be contributing factors, deficiencies in the regulation also play a pivotal role in this outcome. The Act, as it currently stands, contains a “quota number” provision, which states that the maximum number of AFL games on free-to-air television in any round is to be four, based on an 18-team competition with nine matches in a round (Australian Government, 2012). With only four games out of nine to choose from to broadcast each week, this provision would seemingly put pressure on the free-to-air broadcaster to prioritise the largest, most well-supported clubs, in order to maximise ratings. Such an outcome indicates that regulation is not performing to an optimal level in terms of achieving its public access remit: the concepts of cultural citizenship, social utility, and positive network externality suggest that, in an ideal world, all games should be freely available to all citizens. Accordingly, for those supporters of the less-represented clubs, it becomes increasingly difficult to meaningfully engage in this part of Australian culture and to reap the accordant public access remit, or alternatively, short of changing allegiances to another team, those supporters may become disenfranchised with the televised coverage of the game altogether, and opt out of participating in this segment of Australian culture entirely.

Anti-siphoning legislation can be attacked on other fronts. It can be considered overly protective of incumbent free-to-air broadcasters, and it prevents sporting bodies from getting true market value for their sports rights (Evans et al, 2013; Smith et al, 2015). The list prevents the benefits of competition, such as choice, service, and lower costs, from being passed on to consumers, and the list can be seen as obsolete as pay-TV penetration grows, free-to-air broadcasters expand via digital channels, and as audiences acquire content from non-traditional sources (Jolly, 2010). Determining what are events of national importance is also problematic in that the “absence of popular global sports such as basketball and the under-representation of soccer [on the list]... suggests something of a lag between the intensifying diversification of the Australian population and the composition of the anti-siphoning list” (Rowe, 2016a, pp. 6–7). Caution also needs to be taken against championing access to sport on “noble” citizenship grounds, as it may conceal the fact that “sport-related consumption... unfairly advantages some cultural forms and commercial interests over others” (Rowe, 2016a, p. 3), in turn raising further questions about the relationship between media literacy and cultural participation (Lunt and Livingstone, 2012). The list may also reinforce gender inequalities given the disproportionate lack of female sports on the list, while the concept of citizenship, on which justification for the list is based, is itself a fluid concept (Rowe, 2016a). Finally, the criteria of events that qualify for inclusion on the list remain unclear (Jolly, 2010; Smith et al., 2015), while it can also be argued that the list is outdated in terms of technology (Rowe, 2014, 2016a; Rowe and Hutchins, 2013).

Some industry incumbents have used this last characteristic for their own benefit. For example, Seven West Media purchased the online rights to the 2016 Olympic games, and then effectively adopted a pay-TV business model by placing premium online content behind subscription paywalls (C-Scott, 2016; Mitchell, 2016). Similarly, newcomers to the broadcasting market such as telecommunication and IT companies, who deliver content on internet-enabled platforms—usually on a subscription basis—are now either acquiring sports rights themselves as a way to attract customers, or forming alliances with existing broadcasters to position themselves as vertically integrated content providers (Curtin et al, 2014, p. 4). The delivery of sport via internet-based platforms exposes another flaw in the legislation; presently, anti-siphoning laws do not prevent emerging broadcasting organisations from acquiring the rights to sports of cultural significance,
and migrating those rights to internet-based platforms, which are almost exclusively delivered on a subscription basis (Evens et al., 2011; Smith et al., 2015; Vranica and Marshall, 2016).

These criticisms aside, support for legislation remains durable. The strongest reasoning is that failure to maintain the list would mean the capture of sport by transnational capital, and the erosion of the “social and cultural citizenship rights of the (by definition) non-elite majority of the populace” (Rowe, 2014, pp. 147–148). Smith et al (2015) also argue that more, not less, protection is needed, particularly in a media environment where direct payment for content is likely to become more common, and where “individuals will increasingly have to take responsibility for their own use of technologies and consumption of media and communications content” (Lunt and Livingstone, 2012, p. 16).

The discussion above is important for at least two reasons. Firstly, it clearly demonstrates the tension between neo-liberal approaches to social inclusion advocated by those who would see the demise of anti-siphoning regulation, versus perspectives favouring anti-siphoning legislation, to support collective cultural participation that is not contingent on one’s ability to pay for it. Secondly, for the purposes of research and analysis, providing a detailed review of regulation is necessary because it allows us to understand it in such a way that it can be analysed respectively in terms of structuration theory (Giddens, 1979; 1984) and the systems model of creativity (Csikszentmihalyi, 1988). Giddens defines structures as “the rules and resources, organised as properties of social systems” (1979, p. 66), while for Csikszentmihalyi the “domain” conveys “ideas or forms” from one generation to the next (1988, p. 325). Anti-siphoning regulation evidently fulfils the criteria of a structure or domain, and understanding it in this way directs the researcher to investigate the rules and resources of a structure, and the rigidity and precision of a domain, as a means of identifying and understanding the dynamics and composition of those structures and domains.

Furthermore, as these theoretical frameworks allow us to see structures and domains as both constraining and enabling, research can also identify the opportunities that may emerge as these structures and domains deal with changing social, political, technological, legal and economic factors, and how any such changes will be accepted and implemented. This largely general systems theory approach (Capra, 2015; McIntyre, 2016) is necessary because, as Meese and Podkalicka (2015) argue, broadcasting rights research has been dominated by political economic approaches in the past, and research instead needs to focus on both ends of the production and consumption of sport. Structuration theory and the systems model of creativity may bridge this gap by investigating the rules, resources, fields, domains and idiosyncratic behaviour across the AFL broadcasting spectrum that is at both the production and consumption ends at the same time.

The Rise of the Sports ‘Produser’

Accordingly, focusing only on regulation with regard to production is not going to provide a complete picture of the broadcasting landscape—analysis of how regulation is engaged with at the point of consumption is necessary to complete our understanding of what is occurring. Once sports rights are acquired, broadcasters endeavour to protect and monetise those rights. In the case of subscription-based services, monetisation is achieved by placing the content behind “walled gardens”—making the content accessible on television through encrypted subscription (Curtin et al., 2014) and authentication portals (Burroughs and Rugg, 2014; Corrigan, 2014). Given that sport plays a role in the identity formation of the increasingly digitally literate fan (Rowe, 2016b; Yoo et
audience resentment can grow if content becomes inaccessible by migrating behind these walled gardens (Hutchins, 2011). Accordingly, a perceived threat to the traditional business model of incumbent (and emerging) broadcasters has been the rise of the produser and their ensuing influence on formal broadcasting structures. Defined as the “collaborative, iterative, and user-led production of content by participants in a hybrid user-producer” role (Bruns, 2006, p. 1), produser behaviour accounts for the relatively easy capture of formal content by informal agents, followed by the redistribution and consumption of that content online, by utilising any combination of Virtual Private Networks (VPN), affordable consumer technology, and pirate websites. Clearly, this type of behaviour could also be considered part of what has been termed the “informal media economy”, in that it includes a “range of activities and processes occurring outside the official, authorised spaces of the economy” (Lobato and Thomas, 2015, p. 7). Rather than seeing formal and informal media systems as binary opposites, the informal media economy framework emphasises the interdependency of formal and informal media (Lobato and Thomas, 2015), which in turn allows for a nuanced and holistic understanding of the broadcasting landscape in Australia. VPNs, for example, can be used to sidestep geoblocking restrictions designed to usher consumers towards subscription access, and would seem to threaten established formal media structures, and yet VPN use is presently not technically illegal in Australia (Turnbull, 2017).

An examination of pirate behaviour further illuminates the lack of a clear distinction between formal and informal media systems. In the online environment, audiences prefer their content for free (Sirkkunen and Cook, 2012), and in the face of perceived unjust exploitation by formal media structures, produsers can turn to pirate websites to distribute and access highly valued sports content. Where such behaviour threatens to undermine the monetisation of intellectual property, protection for rights holders is enforced by copyright law. Yet, there appears to be an inability of copyright legislation to effectively police the protection of intellectual property, especially when copyright regulation varies considerably from country to country (Milne, 2016), and as digitised content can be so readily shared and moved across global contexts (Hutchins and Rowe, 2012). It bears mentioning that the destabilising potential of the produser is not a result of technology alone; rather, their emergence is more indicative of broader social, political, and economic trends, such as the affordability of new technologies, increased levels of affluence, competition-driven innovation, advertising trends, and the deregulation of media, telecommunication and tax sectors (Butler et al, 2013; Curtin et al, 2014).

While Corrigan guards against overstating the rise of the produser as a complete paradigm changer on the grounds that fan production “is increasingly incorporated into MediaSport’s familiar commercial structure” (2014, pp. 49–50), the utilisation of VPNs and pirate websites by audiences points to a wider trend that returns us to the inadequacy of broadcasting legislation. Although free-to-air television still dominates the AFL broadcasting market, audiences are shifting their consumption towards online delivery, as demonstrated in Figure 1. Clearly, there is still a way to go before online consumption overtakes traditional modes of delivery, but current anti-siphoning legislation does not adequately account for audience behaviours moving in this direction, given that the regulation was created in an era when television content was delivered almost exclusively via either terrestrial transmission, or satellite/cable subscription:
These types of changes in audience behaviour are themselves open to analysis. The threat to existing broadcasting business models and anti-siphoning regulations that the produser elicits, is based on their ability to utilise and evade anti-piracy technology and copyright enforcement methods—such as watermarking, digital rights management features, and geo-blocking—in new and unforeseen ways that are not entirely determined by these structures. In this respect, combining formal production investigation with produser analysis signals a new and exciting mode of research that differs from other approaches. Researcher-led produser analysis that involves participant observation and self-reflection, which focuses on “bottom-up” deliberations (Meese and Podkalicka, 2015, p. 96), can reveal the critical assessment and judgement processes (Schön, 1983, 1987) that an agent undertakes when dealing with structures such as regulation and technology, and how those structures may enable or constrain action. In essence, investigation along these lines can reveal, for example, how and why structures such as anti-siphoning laws, copyright legislation, VPNs, and pirate websites are supported, recreated, resisted, and transformed by the produser.

**Broadcasting Reforms**

Broadcasting regulation must be reformed to account for changing audience behaviour, internet-based delivery services, and increased competition from new entrants in the marketplace. In the first instance, and in order to address the disparity represented in Tables 1 and 2, anti-siphoning quota groups could employ a minimum, rather than a maximum, number of games to be shown on free-to-air television each round (i.e., not less than four games), and the provisions could be
extended to include a minimum number of games per team per market per year. Another relatively straightforward option would be for legislation to include a provision that obliges pay-TV providers to unbundle sports content from their tiers of subscription packages (Lotz, 2014), leading to a lower price-point for the consumer. Furthermore, as long as consumption moves towards online delivery, with sports content likely to remain behind subscription paywalls on these platforms, the anti-siphoning provision must account for this mode of distribution. If anti-siphoning reform moved in this direction, it would require the free-to-air networks who purchase these rights to deliver it without cost via their digital portals.

Far more transformative options exist. The government could require subscription-based rights-holders to provide a level of access without charge. This would require pay-TV broadcasters to reposition themselves as “multiple platform” operators who deliver content via “increasingly sophisticated capture and relay technologies” (Rowe and Hutchins, 2017). Such an approach may cater to differing levels of consumer affluence and fulfil the cultural citizenship remit by offering content at a range of prices according to varying levels of fidelity, ‘liveness’, advertising, delivery platform, and featured content. By adopting a freemium business model (Kumar, 2014; Rietveld, 2016), subscription services could capture audiences by providing delayed, advertiser-supported, low fidelity content on mobile platforms without charge, and then commercialise that audience by upselling them to premium coverage. Such a regulation could also be applied to direct-to-consumer models, where sports organisations leapfrog the broadcaster and sell their games directly to consumers (Rowe and Hutchins, 2014, p. 14). Finally, the government could enforce legislation that requires rights holders to offer sports content to competitors at a reasonable cost and on a non-exclusive basis (Evans et al, 2013). This line of reasoning follows the “essential facilities doctrine” (Evans et al, 2013, p. 97). This holds that that certain inputs, such as sports rights, are difficult to reproduce, yet so essential for participants to compete in the marketplace that in order to facilitate competition, “access is provided to the ‘essential facility’ for all market players on ‘fair, reasonable and non-discriminatory’ terms, which are overseen by broadcasting and/or competition regulators” (Smith et al, 2016, p. 545). In such a regulatory environment, because access to the essential facility is universal, providers are required to differentiate themselves in the marketplace through means such as customer service, presentation, and lower price points. While this outcome may seem contrary to the established order in Australia, such a situation already exists in the Singapore broadcasting market, demonstrating that such outcomes can be achieved. Without these changes, produser resentment about being funnelled toward the authorised gates of walled gardens could see a continued rise in VPN use and pirate website access, and a concomitant increase in litigation by rights holders against such access. Such an outcome would place further dependency on copyright protection laws to litigate against violators, despite the fact that copyright law itself faces considerable uncertainty (Davies and Sigthorsson, 2013; McIntyre, 2007).

Conclusion

In order to understand how anti-siphoning legislation can accomplish its cultural remit in such a context, a qualitative case study, that investigates a complex bounded contemporary system, where there is no clear delineation between the phenomenon and its context (Daymon and Holloway, 2011; Yin, 2009), is necessary. As the AFL is one of the largest and richest sports in the country, it would appear to be the perfect site for such a case study. Such an approach will identify the experiences of the agents involved at both the production and consumption ends, the factors that
influence them, and any opportunities that may arise as a result. Informed by the theories of structuration and the systems model of creativity, this type of study is currently being undertaken at the University of Newcastle by the author, to investigate the rules, resources, fields, domains and idiosyncratic behaviour of industry observers, executives from the AFL and their broadcast partners, Australian Government officers, emergent media employees, and AFL consumers who identify as produsers. Already, some of the trends mentioned above have been identified through this research project, and with further investigation, the case study into the AFL broadcasting landscape—and the opportunities that are emerging from the changes in this landscape—will form the basis of a doctoral thesis.

As with most case study method, this research will utilise semi-structured interviews, and document and artefact analysis (Daymon and Holloway, 2011). Triangulation will mitigate the effect of bias (Radway, 1998), as will avoiding preconceived notions and keeping an open mind to alternatives (Dan and Kalof, 2008; Robson, 2011). In this respect, there is a burden on researchers undertaking critical analysis to be wary of what people are saying, as:

[S]ocial life has a tendency to be duplicitous... individuals and groups construct and present images of who they are and what they do that mask underpinning social realities... the most trivial areas of social interaction can be distorted through combinations of misinformation, evasions, outright lies and stage management or 'front'. (Sugden and Tomlinson, 2002, p 15).

As sport conceivably plays a role in allowing for the conceptual representation of a nation’s culture (Rowe, 2004a), and given the sheer amount of money invested in broadcast rights (Schultz and Wei, 2013), an investigation into the tensions and opportunities that exist in AFL broadcasting may ultimately be instructive for best business practices, the formation of government policy, the adoption of technological innovations, and the meanings attached to the practice of consuming sport. An interdisciplinary qualitative research project, built on a strong theoretical foundation, that simultaneously collects data from formal production agents and informal produsers, and that follows a process of rigorous data collection and analysis, will bridge the political economy-audience studies gap, by simultaneously revealing institutionally authorised production practices, and 'bottom-up' innovation strategies.

References


Propositional Journalism and Navigational Leadership in Tasmania

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The future is a world that communication serves to anticipate and construct in the present; a world populated by propositions and developments which, before materialising, are often mediated by journalists’ everyday decisions concerning newsworthiness, source selection and framing. This category of reporting, which I term ‘propositional journalism’, plays a vital role in democratic societies by providing the public with a range of options and alternatives to consider. It is also an important source of public optimism—counteracting pervasive disaster, crime and corruption reporting. However, it is a category of reporting that has been subjected to criticism. According to David Beers (2006, p. 121), the news media’s reporting of the future is limited by the visions and propositions of, ‘corporate-funded think tanks, public relations experts paid by corporations, advertising experts selling us the shape of the new, and government officials beholden to corporate lobbyists.

In response to this critique, and a lack of research on proposition-centred reporting in the academic literature, this paper presents the findings from a case study analysis of propositional journalism in Tasmania where, perhaps more than anywhere else, propositions (dams and pulp mills especially) have fixated political discourse and provoked bitter controversy. The study sought to identify whose voices were most prominent in pitching and commenting on propositions and how this type of reporting was framed. Over a six month sample comprising 1,172 proposition-centred articles from the three major, local news outlets—The Mercury (Hobart), The Examiner (Launceston) and ABC Tasmania (state-wide)—the research found that politician and business sources together represented more than two-thirds of all sources. This paper argues that their prominence was legitimised by the metaphorical framing of news articles. The most common framing devices appeared to celebrate leadership qualities which were identified as proficiency in navigation, construction, gambling, nurturance and marketing. These metaphorical virtues tended to legitimise the dominant political and business sources and served to construct alternative sources and propositions as unreliable and illegitimate.

Introduction

The Australian island-state of Tasmania, like many communities that have historically relied upon primary industry and manufacturing, is facing challenges and negotiating fiercely contested visions of the state’s future, often through the local Tasmanian news media. In this type of discourse, which I term ‘propositional’, news media have an important but relatively unexamined role in mediating propositions for change. Audiences often expect journalists to forewarn their communities of impending disasters and risks (Beck, 1992, 2009; Caygill, 2000; Smith, 2005) and alert them to opportunities, solutions and best practice alternatives (Beers, 2006; Bornstein and Davis, 2010; Huffington, 2015). However, there are doubts about the suitability of news texts to reliably report information about the future and source that information from a diversity of sources. Beers suggested that, in ‘future-focused journalism’, corporate interests tend to monopolise the range of propositions and proponents and discredit alternative ideas.
Going back to Habermas’ ideal, democracy is best served by a public sphere where competing visions of the future can be expressed and subjected to debate without skewing or censorship to fit the agendas of capitalist media owners or government officialdom. [However] The ones given space to frame our collective future tend to be denizens of corporate-funded think tanks, public relations experts paid by corporations advertising experts selling us the shape of the new, and government officials beholden to corporate lobbyists. (2006, p. 121)

Without a diversity of propositions and ideas, there can only ever be a simulacrum of democratic deliberation bracketed by the limited range of ideas under consideration. In response to this critique, this paper examines a 2014 sample of Tasmanian propositional journalism (where development politics has been highly controversial) to determine which voices were most prominent and how such articles were framed. Ultimately, it will be argued that the relative dominance of a specific demographic, namely male politicians and entrepreneurs, was reflected in the metaphorical language used to evaluate and describe the act of proposing an idea for the future. In particular, this paper will highlight the importance of navigational metaphors to the evaluation of leadership quality in news texts and editorials, and how such evaluations may exclude alternative sources and legitimise the symbolic power of influential proponents.

**Tasmania and Development Conflict**

Controversial propositions have been a feature of Tasmanian political discourse since the controversial flooding of Lake Pedder in 1972 which precipitated the formation of the world’s first environmental political party (Beresford, 2015, p. 19). The subsequent dam proposal for the Franklin River was famously prevented as a result of local and national protests (Doyle, 2005, p. 100) as was the proposed Wesley Vale pulp mill in 1989 (Beresford, 2015, p. 64). However, most recently, debate has centred on the woodchip export company, Gunns Limited, and their apparent co-option of the Tasmanian political establishment in attempting to establish a pulp mill in the Tamar Valley. This latest episode in the ongoing development/conservation conflict and the accompanying debate over propositional legitimacy and democratic deliberation provides the most relevant context for this research of propositional journalism in 2014.

Since the 1980s, Gunns Limited had been the preeminent Tasmanian timber and woodchip company accounting for nearly 85 percent of all forestry operations (Krien, 2012, p. 158). After merging with several competitors in 2001, the company possessed an enormous portfolio of businesses and properties including, “almost 170,000 hectares of private land, of which 100,000 hectares were under hardwood plantation” (Beresford, 2015, p. 64). By 2004, further expansion of the company involved construction of a controversial pulp mill to add value to the company’s forestry products and stabilise fluctuations in demand for their woodchip products. However, in making its case for a pulp mill, Gunns had been ruthless in its condemnation of critics and activists. Just days before it announced a feasibility study into the controversial Tamar Valley Pulp Mill, 20 prominent critics of the company were targeted with a defamation suit worth $6.3 million (Beresford, 2015, p. 207). These legal challenges, often termed ‘SLAPP suits’ (Strategic Lawsuit Against Public Participation), were widely seen as a strategy to silence opponents of the new development and, according to Krien, “intimidate its defendants and other potential critics in the wider community” (2012, p. 172).
In addition to this aggressive legal strategy, Gunns’ CEO, John Gay, had controversially leveraged great influence with Tasmanian politicians. Notably, this included the then Labor Premier, Paul Lennon, but also former Liberal Premier, Robin Gray (a former company board member; Denholm, 2013). Forestry had long been a cooperative effort between government and business with the state-owned Forestry Tasmania legally required to supply the forestry industry with no less than 300,000 cubic metres of resource each year. However, a report to the Tasmanian Government claimed the volume was inherently unsustainable (West, 2012, p. 2). However, the close association between Gunns Limited and government became newly controversial when, in 2007, Gay was able to secure an exception from the standard approvals process with the introduction of the ‘Pulp Mill Assessment Bill’, to ‘fast track’ approval of the project (Beresford, 2015, p. 275-276). According to the Tasmanian correspondent for The Australian newspaper, Matthew Denholm, this special treatment and avoidance of environmental oversight, “further undermined mainstream public support for the project”, with the charge of corruption and cronyism undermining the company’s efforts to secure financial investment and public support for the project (2013, no page).

Ultimately, in September 2012, Gunns Limited declared bankruptcy and went into voluntary administration, undone by a sophisticated environmental campaign that targeted financial investors and consumers of forestry products in the global market (Lester, 2014, p. 170). While recriminations concerning this episode and the subsequent recession are ongoing (Schultz and Cica, 2013; Van Tigglen, 2014), this victory could be interpreted as marking a power rebalance in Tasmania and highlighting the importance of ‘social license’ for advancing propositions (Lester, 2016). However, using this research’s chosen focus on propositionality as a key locus of power and agency, such victories represent only a limited form of obstructionist power. The extent to which actors in the conservation movement were also empowered to legitimately advance alternative propositions in public discourse, rather than merely object to other’s propositions, was not confirmed in this victory. Rather, such victories were often described in passive terms and in opposition to constructive propositionality. West argued that, “in Tasmania, we’ve arrived at a situation in which if any interest group regards itself as disadvantaged by a development proposal—whether materially or in terms of its values—there is insufficient weight on the pro-development side to push through resistance to change” (2013, p. 56). This common critique of conservation groups as merely anti-development does not consider whether alternative voices are denied a more proactive position is propositional discourse beyond obstructionism. While fierce conflict over a given proposition gives the perception of a democratic two-sided contest, asymmetries in whose propositions become the object of discursive struggle, can reveal more structural asymmetries and exclusions in public discourse concerning who can legitimately propose change and have their idea taken seriously in news media.

In a provocative passage which captures a key motivation for examining propositional journalism in Tasmania, Boyce (1996) highlighted the continuing denigration and suppression of alternative ideas and innovations in Tasmanian political discourse. Boyce states, “we have allowed our history to be defined by the actions of this small group of very powerful men whose direct experience of living here was buffered by capital and privilege” (1996, p. 40). This elite circle promoted the idea that, “there is no other way than the present ‘practical path’ of ‘growth’ and ‘development’”, and accordingly, “by defining what is ‘normal’ and ‘realistic’, continue to, “misrepresent alternative economic and social structures... as the impractical, untested dreamland of a crazy few” (Boyce, 1996, pp. 57–58).
The Gunns period was characterised by a concentration of power and a myopic focus on the proposed pulp mill, however, in the wake of its bankruptcy some have pointed to a decentralization in leadership and power in propositional debates. In particular, the idea of ‘New Tasmania’ (Stratford, 2006) purported to represent a period of democratic, economic and political renewal. Local and interstate media outlets have since covered ideas from a range of notable individuals. Gambler and gallery owner, David Walsh, has successfully placed his constantly evolving project, The Museum of Old and New Art (MONA), at the forefront of efforts to revitalise the state’s economy (Franklin, 2014). In Tasmania’s north-west, an area badly affected by the forestry downturn, bold urban renewal programs were suggested; notably, the rebuilding of Devonport into a ‘Living City’ according to the ‘Living City Master Plan’. But in perhaps the most symbolic development, the Triabunna woodchip mill, formerly a monument to Tasmania’s woodchip export industry, was purchased by environmental philanthropists and dismantled with the intention of replacing it with a tourism and arts precinct (Van Tiggelen, 2014). This renegotiation of Tasmania’s future was also evident in The Griffith Review’s recent edition, ‘Tasmania: The Tipping Point’ (Schultz and Cica, 2013); a collection of critical reflections on Tasmania’s uncertain future, and the journal’s subsequent collaboration with The University of Tasmania (The Conversation, 2013). In this context, this research’s sample period represents an important moment of transition and optimism with a proliferation of new ideas for the future arising and forming stories in local news media.

Propositional Journalism

Propositional journalism is, for the most part, located at the intersection of journalism and political speech or, more broadly, ‘governmental speech’ (Hage, 2012, p. 46) where propositions for change are reported to the public through news. Journalism has a normative responsibility—whether as the Fourth Estate (Schultz, 1998), as informing the public sphere (Habermas, 1991), or in promoting liberalism’s ‘free market of ideas’ (Siebert, Peterson and Schramm, 1956, pp. 43–71)—to report and scrutinise the pronouncements of politicians. This inevitably brings news texts into contact with political discourse which, it has been argued, tends to be oriented towards the future. In Aristotle’s typology of rhetoric, political speech, “is concerned with the future: it is about things to be done hereafter that he advises for or against” (1992, p. 15). Similarly, for sociologist Pierre Bourdieu (1991), the symbolic power of politicians is precisely the power to make the future come about through speech. “In politics”, wrote Bourdieu, “to say is to do’, that is, it is to get people to believe that you can do what you say” (1991, p. 190). Thus, in his view, the future itself could merely be termed “political truth” (1991, p. 191).

Propositionally is a central part of political speech and the future is often made present in news by incorporating and scrutinising political pronouncements. Accordingly, research concerning the mediation of the future has examined political rhetoric and how political discourse can shape public perceptions of possibility and futurity, often using paradigmatic examples such as President George Bush’s speech justifying the war in Iraq (Bennett, Lawrence and Livingston, 2008; Dunmire, 2005), or in the predictions and promises made during election campaigns (Jaworski and Fitzgerald, 2008). However, the authority to make politician-like pronouncements regarding the future and have them considered and broadcast through the news is not monopolised by elected politicians. Planners, economists, scientists, sociologists, ecologists are all free to formulate and propose ideas for change and often appear to do so in news texts. Sources that propose change can
be considered as possessing a general type of political power which Hage terms ‘governmental power’:

While the holding of state power can be an efficient mode of ‘governmental’ power, the latter can merely be the feeling that one is legitimately entitled in the course of everyday life to make a governmental / managerial statement about the nation — to have a view about its foreign policy, for example, or to have a governmental / managerial attitude towards others; especially those who are perceived to be lesser national or non-nationals, to have a view about who they can be and where they can go. (2012, p. 46)

The field of governmental power, for Hage, is intended to explain who and how individuals accumulate national ‘belonging’ such that they feel legitimately entitled to comment on the future of their locality. My appropriation of the term, while possibly incorporating the accumulation of national capital, is primarily oriented towards news access and source legitimacy in propositional journalism. In particular, this study asks what types of symbolic capital (Benson, 2013; Bourdieu, 1991; Thompson, 2013) news sources require in order to make credible statements about the future and how that legitimacy is conferred on them and their idea through news framing in the media. Being ‘legitimately entitled’ to make a recommendation for the direction of the nation is unequally distributed and reliant on either the quantity of cultural or economic capital one possesses, or both (Bourdieu, 2011). For instance, a private investor with a proposal that involves investing large economic capital into Tasmania is immediately taken seriously within the governmental field. Alternatively, various types of cultural capital relating to one’s leadership qualities are also relevant legitimising symbols in the field. How these leaders and their ideas should be evaluated is implied in the news framing of propositional journalism and, in particular, in the use of common metaphorical devises.

Research Questions

The research questions guiding this investigation were:

1. Which type of voices were most prominent in Tasmanian propositional journalism and which professions were most represented?
2. How was the act of proposing framed in the news reports? And how did these frames allude to ideal leadership qualities, conceived as symbolic capital.
3. How did these news frames correspond with the relative source prevalence across the sample?

Methodology

Data Collection

During this inquiry, 1,172 articles were collected from three Tasmanian news outlets—The Mercury, The Examiner and ABC (Australian Broadcasting Corporation) Tasmania—over a six-month sample in 2014. These news outlets were chosen because they represented a diversity of ownership models, regional locations and broadcast mediums: The Mercury, based in the state capital of Hobart, is the largest selling daily newspaper in Tasmania with a yearly readership of 78,000 in 2016 (Roy Morgan Research, 2017); The Examiner newspaper services the city of Launceston and the north of
Tasmania with a much smaller readership; and ABC Tasmania, with a 25% prime-time share, is more popular in Tasmania than anywhere else in Australia (Spiegelman, 2015), and provides local and national content through nightly news bulletins on television and also through its online platform.

The articles were collected over three, two-month sample periods in 2014: April–May, August–September and November–December. The division of the sample period was designed to capture a greater variety of propositions and proponents over the year. The last sample period, November–December, was chosen to collect summary articles and editorials which typically surmise the state’s progress that year and hopes for the coming year.

The newspaper articles were found using the online database of news text, NewsBank, while the ABC Tasmania articles were sourced using the ‘Google advance’ tool for searching within a nominated URL (Universal Resource Locator), which enabled searching the ABC’s online database for relevant articles. By scanning through a collection of propositional articles, a number of key words were observed which allowed more efficient identification of propositional journalism. These search terms were: “future” OR "opportunity" OR "proposal" OR "idea" OR "bid" OR "plan" OR "push" OR "vision" AND “Tasmania” OR “Burnie” OR “Hobart” OR “Launceston”.

Including the place name ‘Tasmania’ and the three largest cities, ‘Hobart’, ‘Launceston’ and ‘Burnie’, in the search terms excluded articles which did not relate to Tasmania. However, the sample produced through this initial search tended to also produce non-propositional articles which required individual sorting. For the purpose of sorting, a ‘propositional article’ was defined as an editorial, opinion piece or straight news item that was centrally concerned with a potentiality that was advocated for by any given source.

**Metaphor Analysis**

This research employed a ‘metaphor analysis’ methodology (Hellsten, Porter and Nerlich, 2014) to locate and organise key ‘framing devices’ (Gamson and Modigliani, 1989) into coherent news frames. As opposed to approaches to frame analysis that primarily examine selection and salience in news texts (Entman, 1993), this approach considers word choice, figurative language, idioms, catchphrases and especially metaphors to be the most pertinent features for identifying news frames. Metaphors are considered important devices for evaluative frames of ‘political morality’ regarding what should be done and reasoning about moral political leadership (Lakoff, 1996; Lakoff and Johnson, 2008). Secondly, metaphors may allude to symbolic capital (markers of social status) which are relevant to specific fields of power such as the governmental field or, in Bourdieu’s (1998) analysis, the field of education and the ‘state nobility’. Bourdieu and Lakoff’s focus on metaphor as a means of making evaluative judgments is adopted in this research to gain an appreciation for how propositions are evaluated and how those evaluations are present in the way metaphors were deployed in propositional journalism. Following this approach, all instances of metaphorical language were collected and grouped into conceptually related categories to determine the most prevalent evaluative metaphors used to describe the act of proposing.

**Source Analysis**

The research also sought to determine the most prominent news sources in the sample. A news source was defined as anyone quoted directly in stories. Typically, a news article’s most important source, or ‘primary definer’ (Hall et al, 2013, p. 57), is quoted early in the text; often in the lead or,
less commonly, in attributive headlines (Saxena, 2006). Accordingly, rather than including all quoted text from the articles, only the first three quoted sources were quantified and formed an overall tally of the most important and prevalent sources. This list was further narrowed to include only the top 20 most quoted sources from each news outlet.

In the extended research project, this text analysis was complimented with semi-structured interviews with Tasmanian journalists and editors as well as observation of daily news meetings. Editors of newspapers were especially valuable because editorials, more than other kinds of news, tended to employ a moral language of leadership quality and virtue which were relevant considering the research questions. As such, editorials provided good case studies for illustrating how metaphors were deployed in evaluations of leadership quality and legitimacy in the governmental field.

**Propositions and Sources**

The sample period produced both a great diversity of propositions and proponents, but also a great discrepancy in the relative attention they received. Across the 1,172 articles in the sample, there were 227 propositions which were advanced and commented upon by 945 news sources. Propositions ranged from local initiatives which received only a passing mention in news reports, to geopolitical realignments and opportunities which dominated news coverage for weeks at a time. The most discussed proposition in the sample was the prospect of stronger economic ties with China which was precipitated by the high-profile visit of The Premier of China, Xi Jinping, to Tasmania. *The Mercury* celebrated the arrival with a special issue featuring a wrap-around front page in the Chinese national colours of red and yellow. Across all outlets, anticipation of the historic visit and its significance filled 71 articles, including numerous editorials and op-eds.

The relative prevalence of sources through the sample was similarly divergent. While many sources were quoted only once throughout the sample, The Tasmanian Premier, Will Hodgman, was quoted 99 times, more than any other source. A list of the key sources in the sample is provided in Table 1 which ranks the 20 most cited sources from each news outlet. This list of powerful sources reveals several commonalities and asymmetries. In terms of professions, politicians (marked blue) were the most quoted comprising 61% of the 20 most quoted sources. One source, Robert Dobrynski (marked green) was categorised as a public servant. Entrepreneurs and industry representatives (marked yellow and red) were the second most quoted type of source making up 26% of the top 20 most quoted sources. The list was also notable for being almost exclusively masculine with the 20 most quoted men being cited in 632 articles while the women in the top 20 list were only cited in 74 articles. This would suggest that the most prevalent sources in propositional journalism were around 90% more likely to be men than women. While the sources in Table 1 were all recognisable, leaders within the Tasmanian community, the limited gender and professional makeup of this group raised questions about how leadership was defined and evaluated in the sample. Considering these discrepancies in source prevalence, it can be concluded that masculinity, political acumen and entrepreneurialism were legitimising values for entry into the governmental field.
Table 1. Top 20 sources in 2014 sample.

Navigational Metaphors and the Evaluation of Leadership

Leadership values and virtues were present in the metaphorical framing of many articles and arguably served to legitimise the prevailing political and business sources. The most common metaphorical expressions in the sample related to navigation and likened good navigation to good
leadership. This metaphor was essentially spatial and conceived the past, present and future as positions in space and individual agency as movement and direction. According to this metaphor, the leader is responsible for setting the direction and charting a course between the past (behind) and the future (ahead).

Reasoning about leadership in terms of navigation employed culturally salient navigational figures in order to reason about leadership quality. Language relating to ‘maps’, ‘journeys’, ‘pathways’, ‘steps in the right direction’, ‘charting a course’, a ‘firm hand on the tiller’, ‘launch’, ‘drive’, ‘turnaround’ and ‘landmark’ all formed part of a semantic network relating to navigation. The application of this language to the question of leadership formed a ‘complex metaphor’ (Lakoff and Johnson, 1999, pp. 60–73) that was comprised of simple metaphorical components. Translated into similes, this frame implied that a leader is like a navigator, citizens/customers are like passengers, a plan is like a map, progress is like movement, goals are like stops along the way, challenges are like obstacles to movement and achieving the ultimate goal is like reaching the final destination. Overall, there were 1,946 navigational metaphors recorded from the sample making this the most prevalent metaphor for reasoning about propositions and proponents.

Navigational Virtues

Besides the strictly spatial aspects of the metaphor, many necessary virtues relating to navigation valorised a certain style of navigational leadership in the context of post-recession Tasmania. This could be seen in relation to the proposed rebuilding or renovation of the Royal Hobart Hospital where, in the words of one editorial, “The State Government has provided a largely steady hand since taking office in March”, however, “it has not all been smooth sailing” (Editorial, 2014a, no page, emphasis added). This nautical version of the metaphor inferred that a steady hand makes for smooth sailing. Similarly, a passage from an editorial titled provided a hyperbolic description of the strength of hand required to lead Tasmania:

Mr Ferguson has been one of the Government’s strongest performers since taking power. Calm and collected, he has taken the proverbial bull by the horns and set the health system on a course of meaningful restructure and reform. (Editorial, 2014b, no page, emphasis added)

In this passage, Tasmania was likened to an unruly bull that required the strongest and most courageous of leaders to take it by the horns or, as another editorial put it, “firmly grasp the reins and lead the way” (Editorial, 2014c, no page). The value placed on the firmness of grip is perhaps unsurprising considering the stark gender imbalance shown in the source analysis. The famously strong grip of male politicians and entrepreneurs likely owes some of its cultural significance to the ubiquity of the navigational metaphor for evaluating leadership.

The physicality of navigational leadership in the sample was also implied in the association of leadership with competence in the fields of sport and war. For instance, one editorial likened the Liberal Premier of Tasmania to a wartime general:

...in recent days Mr Hodgman has raised his head above the trenches to lead the state’s charge against the Federal Government’s $80 billion cuts to health and education. It is a battle well worth fighting... It is good to see Mr Hodgman showing some ticker and fighting for Tasmania’s fair share of resources. (Editorial, 2014d, no page)
Rather than simply moving, a military leader moves with a type of courage that, in the sample, was often denoted by the word ‘bold’. Such ubiquitous formulations as ‘bold plan’, ‘bold vision’ or ‘bold move’ tended to celebrate courage, decisiveness and timeliness as seen, for example, in this richly metaphorical lead from *The Mercury*: “INVESTORS are ready to pounce to be part of Devonport’s $250 million revival now a master plan to steer the bold vision has been unveiled, Mayor Steve Martin says” (Kempton, 2014, p. 15).

While editorials often evaluated political leadership using a navigational metaphor, similar metaphors extended throughout the straight news reporting to describe political and entrepreneurial leaders. This was evident in the frequent use of the word ‘push’ which was used metaphorically to refer to propositions 158 times in the sample, 81% of the time by journalists themselves rather than news sources or editors. A headline in *The Examiner*, for instance, reported a, “Business push for rise in GST” (Burgess, 2014). The physicality of pushing rather than simply pointing the way or referring to a map again equated navigational virtue with strength. Success or failure of leadership was, therefore, a reflection of the strength and determination of the proponent to push their proposal in a given direction.

Elsewhere, a sporting conception of navigation was preferred which also highlighted the virtues of courage and strength. This could be seen in the editorial headlines, “Hodgman on the ball” (Editorial, 2014d), “Keep eyes on the ball” (Editorial, 2014e) and “It’s time to play ball” (Editorial, 2014a). This metaphor repurposed idioms from popular ball sports like Australian Rules Football and Rugby League where the aim is generally, as a team, to navigate a way from one end of the ground to the other using a combination of skill, strength and wits. By applying these ideas to the evaluation of leadership, this frame implied that leaders should be quick to grasp opportunities as though they were balls. Accordingly, “The Government needs to make sure 2015 is a time when it grasps the opportunities and forges ahead with projects that have been delayed too long” (Editorial, 2014f), and where a missed opportunity, on the other hand, was often characterised as having “dropped the ball” (Editorial, 2014g).

Overall, the virtues of boldness, determination, courage, ruthlessness, decisiveness and discipline were celebrated in editorials’ frequent use of sporting, military and navigational metaphors. While these traits are not intrinsically masculine and women are increasingly earning recognition in these traditionally masculine fields, they nonetheless correspond with recognisable stereotypes of male leadership. Such stereotypes have been found to effect the relative evaluations of women and male leaders. For instance, in a large meta-analysis of leadership evaluation surveys, Eagly, Makhijani and Klonsky found that “women are negatively evaluated when they exhibit masculine leadership styles” (1992, p. 16). The “gender-role congruency hypothesis” (1992, p. 16) which was confirmed in the study suggests that the prevalence of hyper masculine metaphors to evaluate leadership would be a likely explanation for the relative invisibility of female sources in the sample.

Navigational Distractions

One consequence of editors’ use of a navigation metaphor was the frequent warning, found in editorials over the sample, that leaders should not be seduced by dreams and delusions which might lead the state down the wrong path. The request for governments to be more realistic in their goals and promises often took the form of an anti-utopian discourse. This played upon the contrast between clear vision as indispensable for navigation, as opposed to delusions, dreams, short-
sightedness or blindness, which are clearly flaws in any navigator. An editorial in *The Mercury* titled, “Dream the achievable” (Editorial, 2014h), listed a range of failed projects in Tasmania that had promised a way out of Tasmania’s economic mire but had proven unrealistic. Their mirage-like quality, the editorial suggested, was a product of public relations pyrotechnics, so visually appealing that they distracted the state’s leaders, taking them off-course. These included: “grand designs”, “big projects announced in a blaze of publicity that often failed to materialise”, or “big-ticket developments”, “proudly spruiked as a saviour”. In the editorials, such projects were ultimately unsubstantial, delusional or absurd – “bread and circuses built on hot air” (Editorial, 2014e), or “like a movie without a script” (Editorial, 2014h). Elsewhere, *The Mercury* described a controversial cable car proposal for Mount Wellington as, “a mirage – a wonderful vision that disappears the closer you look” (Editorial, 2014i). Leaders should guard against these tempting visions. To avoid these sirens of the governmental field, leaders should proceed methodically and step-by-step which, as this editorial suggested, could ultimately bring the state to a grand utopian future:

The new Liberal Government would do well to instead concentrate on creating a development climate for projects that are achievable and sustainable. A number of successful, smaller developments can easily add up to create a vibrant economy, jobs, and a future for coming generations—a big dream come true. (Editorial, 2014h, no page)

The preference for small steps over dreams can be considered as ideologically opposed to government largess and intervention in the free market, perhaps recalling Friedrich Hayek’s (1976) famous navigational critique of government intervention in ‘The Road to Serfdom’. This position is consistent with free market approaches according to which small projects emerge organically and without government investment. Overall, “It is only a matter of joining the dots to understand where Tasmania is headed” (Editorial, 2014j), rather than concocting a utopian future. This valorisation of small business and decentralised leadership partly explains *The Mercury*’s source list which was more evenly spread between politicians and business leaders.

Part of the distraction of dreams and delusions within this metaphor was a dangerous proclivity for drunkenness which was constructed in opposition to sober rational judgment. In *The Mercury* good leadership often required, “sober heads and a calm approach” (2014e), and encouraged leaders to proceed with, “a due sense of prudence and sobriety” (Editorial, 2014k), or, “a calm sense of urgency and a clear head” (Editorial, 2014l). Often these emotions expressed themselves in, what editors saw as, hasty and thoughtless decision making on the part of the public and public stakeholders. “Too often projects and ideas are met with a sudden and often harsh ‘no’, which is based on emotion and historical differences” (Editorial, 2014m). This critique of poor leadership played upon the deafness and insensitivity of the drunk who does not respond to the needs of others. On controversial issues, editorials called for open and calm discussion. This sober community engagement is overlooked when leaders act with, “malice, or with a fool’s haste” (Editorial, 2014n).

Metaphorically, sobriety and intoxication are commonly used to reflect on emotional states of mind; often with the implication that strong emotion is inimical with sound rational judgment. As Lakoff and Johnson observed in a critique of Kantian ethics, “The vices of drunkenness and gluttony make us unfit for rational deliberation and thereby diminish, or even discard temporarily, our autonomy as rational beings” (1999, p. 434). For Lakoff (1996), Kant’s philosophy of morality is an archetype of the ‘strict father’ morality that he identifies elsewhere as central to conservative
thought. According to this worldview, drunkenness is especially dangerous because the highest moral good is ‘moral strength’ and ‘strength of will’ which are weakened under the effects of intoxication leading to moral failure. In the metaphorical construction of leadership as navigation, strength and determination are similarly prized and heady emotions are considered dangerous distractions. In the context of post-recession Tasmanian, where budget deficits and government spending were salient propositions, the virtue of sobriety was also an injunction towards government prudence and a valorisation of business-minded leaders.

Conclusion

This paper has provided a case study of Tasmanian propositional journalism and an analysis of metaphor and evaluative schema which, it has been argued, corresponded with patterns of news access across a six-month survey of three prominent news outlets. The most frequently used metaphorical devices in the sample reflected a coherent schema for evaluating leadership in the context of post-recession Tasmania, which served to legitimise the reliance on entrepreneurial and political sources.

This paper was motivated by a desire to add nuance and detail to David Beers’ critique of the reporting of propositions. While there was certainly value and impact in David Beers’ critique of the monopolisation of corporate interests over the range of propositions and proponents, he did not provide an explanation for why news access in this type of reporting was especially restricted beyond the fact that the news outlets were owned by corporations (Beers, 2006). Positing corporate ownership as solely determining news content and practice, according to Bourdieu, “condemns without shedding light anywhere, and ultimately explains nothing” (1999, p. 39). The source analysis of Tasmanian outlets largely confirmed that reporting of the future was led by a restricted range of professions and genders: primarily male politician and business representatives.

This research sought to specify who the leading sources were in Tasmanian propositional journalism and work towards an explanation for this restricted governmental field. As opposed to ideological and hegemonic explanations, I have sought to couch these cultural and political structures in more recognisable and commonly utilised language which, I have argued, is the language of morality and metaphor. This approach provides a common language between academics, journalists and their sources. It is intended to promote a reflexive consideration of the cultural structures that place leadership value on such a limited range of actors. This research, by organizing metaphorical language into coherent conceptual frames, found that a navigational construction of leadership was especially prevalent in the sample which arguably served to valorise masculine political and business sources.

The valuation of these dominant news sources and the naturalisation of their legitimacy in articulating plans and visions for the future, was supported by a navigational understanding of leadership quality. The courage, ruthlessness and determination required of navigators was illustrated using traditionally masculine activities such as captainning a ship, taming wild animals, playing ball sports and conducting war. Simultaneously, however, by warning against navigational distractions such as drunken anger and violence, or ideological dreams and mirages, editors sought to curb excessive masculinity in leaders. Accordingly, this paper found that good leadership required a “conciliation of opposites” (Bourdieu, 1998, p. 17). Good leadership was ultimately constructed as moderation and control, albeit within a strongly gendered ideal. Understanding of the relationship between news access and metaphor in Tasmanian propositional journalism could
be improved with further comparative research. Tasmania in 2014 represented a newly masculine political environment with pro-business Liberal governments elected at a national and state level, both replacing female leaders. It would be of interest, therefore, to examine whether changing leadership genders and attitudes towards business interests would correspond with a different construction of valuable leadership.

Acknowledgements

The research used in this paper forms part of a larger doctoral thesis supervised by Professor Libby Lester and Dr Katrina Clifford of The University of Tasmania whose support and advice I am thankful for.

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