

ethical space

**The International
Journal of Communication Ethics**
Vol.14 Nos.2/3 2017 ISSN 1742-0105

Special Issue:
**Ethics of covering
vulnerable people**

Guest edited by Sallyanne Duncan and Jackie Newton

- From ethical challenges to a matter of rights – by Karla Perez Portilla and Lee Knifton
- Survivor autonomy: An ethical starting point in covering disasters – by Denis Muller
- Journalists and emotions: The theory of balance – by Lyn Barnes
- Silencing vulnerability or 'do no harm'? Ethical dilemmas in reporting suicide at times of crisis – by Izabela Korbiel and Katharine Sarikakis
- Jokes in public: The ethical implications of radio prank calls – by Subin Paul and John C. Carpenter
- Myth, Māori and two cartoons: A semiotic analysis – by Steve Elers and Phoebe Elers
- 'My four year old is an asshole': Considering ethical challenges of children as the butt of jokes in contemporary comedy and satire – by Kai Hanno Schwind

PLUS

- Supervisors' perspectives on the ethical supervision of long form writing and managing trauma narrative within the Australian tertiary sector – by Sue Joseph and Carolyn Rickett
- Illness bloggers and sickness scams: Communication ethics and the 'Belle' Gibson saga – by Elaine Xu and Terence Lee

Publishing Office

Abramis Academic
ASK House
Northgate Avenue
Bury St. Edmunds
Suffolk
IP32 6BB
UK

Tel: +44 (0)1284 700321
Fax: +44 (0)1284 717889
Email: info@abramis.co.uk
Web: www.abramis.co.uk

Copyright

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced in any material form (including photocopying or storing it in any medium by electronic means, and whether or not transiently or incidentally to some other use of this publication) without the written permission of the copyright owner, except in accordance with the provisions of the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988, or under terms of a licence issued by the Copyright Licensing Agency Ltd, 33-34, Alfred Place, London WC1E 7DP, UK. Applications for the copyright owner's permission to reproduce part of this publication should be addressed to the Publishers.

Back issues

Back issues are available from the Publishers at the above editorial address.

© 2017 Institute of
Communication Ethics &
Abramis Academic

ISSN 1742-0105
ISBN 978-1-84549-713-2

Printed in the UK.



Aims and scope

Communication ethics is a discipline that supports communication practitioners by offering tools and analyses for the understanding of ethical issues. Moreover, the speed of change in the dynamic information environment presents new challenges, especially for communication practitioners.

Ethics used to be a specialist subject situated within schools of philosophy. Today it is viewed as a language and systematic thought process available to everyone. It encompasses issues of care and trust, social responsibility and environmental concern and identifies the values necessary to balance the demands of performance today with responsibilities tomorrow.

For busy professionals, CE is a powerful learning and teaching approach that encourages analysis and engagement with many constituencies, enhancing relationships through open-thinking. It can be used to improve organization performance as well as to protect individual well-being.

Submissions

Papers should be submitted to the Editor via email. Full details on submission – along with detailed notes for authors – are available online in PDF format: www.communication-ethics.net

Subscription Information

Each volume contains 4 issues, issued quarterly. Enquiries regarding subscriptions and orders both in the UK and overseas should be sent to:

Journals Fulfilment Department

Abramis Academic, ASK House, Northgate Avenue, Bury St. Edmunds, Suffolk IP32 6BB, UK.

Tel: +44 (0)1284 700321, Fax: +44 (0)1284 717889

Email: info@abramis.co.uk

Your usual suscription agency will also be able to take a subscription to *Ethical Space*.

Annual Subscription

Membership of the Institute of Communication Ethics includes a subscription to the journal. Please see the application form on the last page of this issue.

For non-members:

<i>Institutional subscription</i>	£200.00
<i>Personal subscription</i>	£55.00

Delivery by surface mail. Airmail prices available on request or at the journal's web site.

www.communication-ethics.net

Contents

Editorial

Giving voice to the vulnerable – by Sallyanne Duncan and Jackie Newton Page 2

Article

From ethical challenges to a matter of rights – by Karla Perez Portilla and Lee Knifton Page 5

Papers

Survivor autonomy: An ethical starting point in covering disasters – by Denis Muller Page 8

Journalists and emotions: The theory of balance – by Lyn Barnes Page 15

Silencing vulnerability or 'do no harm'? Ethical dilemmas in reporting suicide at times of crisis – by Izabela Korbiel and Katharine Sarikakis Page 24

Jokes in public: The ethical implications of radio prank calls – by Subin Paul and John C. Carpenter Page 33

Myth, Māori and two cartoons: A semiotic analysis – by Steve Elers and Phoebe Elers Page 42

'My four year old is an asshole': Considering ethical challenges of children as the butt of jokes in contemporary comedy and satire – by Kai Hanno Schwind Page 52

Plus

Supervisors' perspectives on the ethical supervision of long form writing and managing trauma narrative within the Australian tertiary sector – by Sue Joseph and Carolyn Rickett Page 61

Illness bloggers and sickness scams: Communication ethics and the 'Belle' Gibson saga – by Elaine Xu and Terence Lee Page 72

Reviews

Sue Joseph's *Behind the text: Candid conversations with Australian creative nonfiction writers* reviewed by Glenn Morrison; Robyn Goodman and Elanie Steyn's *Global journalism education in the 21st century: Challenges and innovations* reviewed by Beate Josephi; Matthew Ricketson and Caroline Graham's *Writing feature stories* (second edition) reviewed by Sue Joseph Page 80

Editorial Board

Joint Editors

Richard Lance Keeble University of Lincoln
Donald Matheson University of Canterbury, New Zealand
Shannon Bowen University of South Carolina

Paul Jackson Manchester Business School
Mike Jempson Director, MediaWise Trust
Cheris Kramarae University of Oregon; Centre for the Study of Women in Society
Former Yomiuri ombudsman, scholar/writer

Takeshi Maezawa

Reviews Editor

Sue Joseph University of Technology Sydney

John Mair Book editor
Ian Mayes Former *Guardian* Readers' Editor
Tessa Mayes Investigative Journalist
Jolyon Mitchell University of Edinburgh
Fuad Nahdi Publisher Q-news; Producer Channel 4
Sarah Niblock University of Westminster
Kaarle Nordenstreng Tampere University
Manuel Perez i Maicas Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona

Editorial board members

Klaus-Dieter Altmeyden Catholic University
Eichstaett-Ingolstadt
Raphael Alvira University of Navarra
Dusan Babic Media plan, Sarajevo
Mona Baker Manchester University
Porfiro Barroso Computense University of Madrid & Pontifical University of Salamanca, Madrid
Jay Black Editor, Journal of Mass Media Ethics
Antonio Castillo University of Western Sydney
Ruth Chadwick Lancaster University
Saviour Chircop University of Malta
Clifford Christians University of Illinois-Urbana, USA
Raphael Cohen-Almagor University of Hull
Tom Cooper Emerson College, Boston, MA
Deni Elliott University of Montana
Chris Frost Liverpool John Moores University
Theodore L. Glasser Stanford University
Anne Gregory Leeds Metropolitan University
Cees Hamelink University of Amsterdam

Ian Richards University of South Australia, Adelaide
Simon Rogerson De Montfort University
Lorna Roth Concordia University, Montreal
Karen Sanders San Pablo University, Madrid
John Steel Sheffield University
Miklos Sukosd Central European University, Budapest
Barbara Thomass Ruhruniversität Bochum
Terry Threadgold Centre for Journalism Studies, Cardiff University
Stephen J. Ward University of British Columbia
Brian Winston University of Lincoln
James Winter University of Windsor, Canada

Contact: Institute of Communication Ethics, C/O Dr Fiona Thompson, 69 Glenview Road, Shipley, West Yorkshire, BD18 4AR, UK

Published by: The Institute of Communication Ethics (www.communication-ethics.net) and Abramis Academic (www.abramis.co.uk)

Sallyanne Duncan
Jackie Newton

Giving voice to the vulnerable

The pursuit of consistent ethical approaches in journalism and wider communications has become an imperative in recent years, thanks in no small part to journals such as *Ethical Space*, yet only foolhardy practitioners would declare themselves to be competent in the field.

Many of the dilemmas faced by media professionals come from competing opinions and needs, from the involvement of multiple parties in incidents or discourses and from the pressures of public antipathy towards the 'mainstream media'. Such is the case when practitioners attempt to engage with 'the vulnerable', individuals or groups of people who have been declared in need of protection or special treatment by wider society. 'Safeguarding' is a common purpose when officialdom deals with such individuals or groups and often journalists, for example, shy away from interviewing the vulnerable because of the fear of causing offence or harm.

Vulnerability itself is a difficult concept to define. Children occupy a special category in journalistic regulation and codes of practice, being offered extra protection for their youth alone. However, there are 'categories' of vulnerability beyond this, in terms of traumatic experience, mental and physical wellbeing, family background and peer influence. For adults, definitions vary according to different disciplines but one that is apt for media coverage is the Australian government's description:

... an individual aged 18 years and above who is or may be unable to take care of themselves, or is unable to protect themselves against harm or exploitation by reason of age, illness, trauma or disability, or any other reason.

Sensitivity of approach

Media reporting of vulnerable people may not be a recent phenomenon but it is one that is increasingly dominating the current 24/7 news cycle. The tensions involved in covering mass human migration, the Syrian refugee crisis, disasters and trauma, terrorist executions and acts of carnage all pose challenges to the journalist trying to report accurately, sensitively and ethically in extreme circumstances. All involve human suffering that renders people vulnerable and all require sensitivity of approach.

But how do journalists, communications officers and NGO representatives determine, in a variety of circumstances, whether a person is vulnerable or just experiencing a normal human response to appalling circumstances? This decision should never be taken lightly as the classification, while well-meaning, can deprive the person so labelled of certain human rights – such as the right to speak for themselves.

These emotional and ethical challenges come as the media landscape is changing irrevocably. Traditional news outlets are under pressure to the extent that, although the vulnerable are the subject of stories, their involvement in the process can be minimal. Instead, some journalists are turning to ready-made content generated by citizens on social media. Is this ethical? Is this the way in which journalists should record the lives of vulnerable people? In addition, the use and misuse of social media, the evolving understanding of mental health and the growing acknowledgement of the rights of those involved in stories to have their say all suggest a more equitable and participatory journalism is necessary when reporting on 'victims' and the vulnerable.

For instance, our own research (Newton and Duncan 2010, Newton 2011) revealed a wide disparity in attitudes between media practitioners and the newsworthy bereaved over coverage of tragic deaths. While journalists often believe that the most ethical stance is to avoid intrusion into grief, bereaved families are aware that this attitude can cut them out of the story of their own loss and deprive them of a voice. Where does this leave the journalistic imperative to give a voice to the voiceless? Our goal, then, has been to breach the gap in coverage which may deprive the bereaved, the mentally ill, the homeless, the young, the traumatised and many others their part in media discourse.

Communication professionals need to find ways of enabling such groups and individuals to share their experiences without the worry of intrusion, exploitation or exclusion. To this end, we proposed our 'three Cs' model in 2012 (see Newton and Duncan 2012) and have refined it in our forthcoming book, *Reporting bad news*, as ethical participation, which we hope will offer journalists a tool with which to assess their actions. This model is based on the concepts of context, clarity and control, in which the journalist liaises honestly with bereaved relatives to gain informed access to their story through clarity of purpose and intent, where the information they are given or they retrieve from elsewhere is placed in an appropriate context and by doing both these relatives achieve greater control over their story (Duncan and Newton, forthcoming).

Right action in difficult circumstances

Ethics is about taking the right action in difficult circumstances so thinking about vulnerability in ethical terms we should concern ourselves with the concepts of minimising harm; fair and honest representation; truth and trust; accountability to those in the story, to the audience and to media employers, and independence of action.

In this special edition, we consider a number of issues thrown up by the act of giving a voice to the vulnerable. Our guest writers, Karla Perez Portilla and Lee Knifton, of the Mental Health Foundation, set the tone by presenting a robust discussion of mainstream media's stigmatisation of mental health issues. They establish that while professional standards, codes of practice and guidelines recognise the need to take care when reporting stories about people with mental health issues these self-regulatory processes do not adequately address concerns about stigma and its effects, something they believe the mass media, and journalism in particular, needs to tackle.

Thereafter, Denis Muller looks at the particular needs of disaster survivors and at the responsibility of journalists to treat them with care and respect. His illuminating study suggests 'victims' may be traumatised but are often eloquent and important witnesses to tragedies they consider as 'their story'.

The vulnerabilities of journalists who deal with the repetitive nature of covering trauma, such as death knocks and court cases, is examined by Lyn Barnes. Her paper explains her innovative theory of balance which provides a framework

for understanding how journalists deal with trauma and the related emotions.

Suicide is a topic that attracts a great deal of media attention but it is one that is fraught with potential harms regarding the effectiveness and appropriateness of media coverage. Numerous guidelines exist to steer journalists towards responsible reporting of this vulnerable group but, as Izabela Korbiel and Katharine Sarikakis explain, these are often 'medicalised' around mental health issues which are seen as individual suffering rather than a problem for society. Their paper argues the societal context of suicide remains unacknowledged in media guidelines which largely fail to assign agency to the person taking their own life.

When journalism meets entertainment...

The next two papers deal with the need for ethical consideration when journalism meets entertainment. Subin Paul and John C. Carpenter use systematic moral analysis and Kant's categorical imperative to explore the ethical implications for three transnational cases of radio prank calls from Australia, Spain and Canada. They argue that, while radio prank calls can contribute to the public sphere, they can also have unintended negative consequences. Steve Elers and Phoebe Elers tackle the controversial topic of perceived racism in cartoons through their commentary on and analysis of representations of Māori people. Using semiotic analysis, they unravel the complexities around the images and the effect these have on perspectives of Māori.

The theme of entertainment continues with Kai Hanno Schwind's paper in which he looks at the ethics of humour, exploring the use (and abuse?) of recognisable children in stand-up routines. He argues for a more nuanced discussion by proposing a categorisation of the humour and comedy targeting children and by arguing for individual meta-ethical analyses of the mediation of these cases.

Finally, we would like to thank the editors, Richard Lance Keeble and Donald Matheson, for giving us the opportunity to edit this special edition. It has been a fascinating and educational process which we have thoroughly enjoyed. It has also enabled us to work with fellow researchers and introduced us to new scholars in our field who, we hope, will become valued colleagues on this quest we share to research media coverage of vulnerable people.

References

Duncan, Sallyanne and Newton, Jackie (2010) How do you feel? Preparing novice reporters for the death knock: An exploration of attitudes and approaches. *Journalism Practice*, Vol. 4, No. 4 pp 439-453

Duncan, Sallyanne and Newton, Jackie (forthcoming) *Reporting bad news: Negotiating the boundaries between intrusion and fair representation in media coverage of death*, New York, NY, Peter Lang

Newton, Jackie (2011) The knock at the door: Considering bereaved families' varying responses to news media intrusion, *Ethical Space*, Vol. 8 Nos 3-4 pp 7-13

Newton, Jackie and Duncan, Sallyanne (2012) Hacking into tragedy: Exploring the ethics of death reporting in the social media age, Keeble, Richard Lance and Mair, John (eds) *The phone hacking scandal: Journalism on trial*, Bury St Edmunds, Arima Publishing pp 208-219

**Sallyanne Duncan, University of Strathclyde,
Jackie Newton, Liverpool John Moores University**

From ethical challenges to a matter of rights

Karla Perez Portilla and Lee Knifton argue that the mainstream media's stigmatisation of people with mental health problems needs to be countered.

Demeaning language and stereotypical representations of mental ill-health in the media are not value neutral, nor do they exist in isolation or without repercussions. The frequent association of mental illness with violence and the use of demeaning representations and language, such as 'nutter', 'maniac' or 'schizo' are built on, create and reproduce mental health stigma. They can inform and justify the way in which people with mental health problems are, or ought to be, treated in their everyday lives which perpetuate self, public and structural discrimination.

Mental health-related adjectives such as 'mad', 'crazy' and 'mental' are gratuitously and uncritically used in everyday conversations by ordinary people and in the media in order to make reference to abnormality, dangerousness, silliness, exaggerated behaviours, extravagance, ridiculous situations and so on. This is so 'normalised' that they are barely even recognised. In relation to popular culture, for example, Kasabian's music video 'You're in love with a psycho', released in March 2017, is a reminder of an existing plethora of demeaning stereotypes around mental health and mental health hospitals. The music video is built on and risks fuelling mental health stigma. It features two of the band members playing patients in a psychiatric ward. It brings together all sorts of stereotypes and demeaning representations with no apparent intention to portray reality but to grab attention instead through some sort of comedy and shock. The video portrays stereotypical annoying/silly behaviours, sluggish facial

expressions, lethargic ways of walking and behaving. It even demeans patients by showing on occasions their visibly naked bodies underneath light hospital garments (McGrath 2017). These demeaning and stereotypical representations stigmatise people with mental health problems and cause harm in and of themselves. They harm the self- and social-esteem of those who have lived experience of mental ill-health. As Perez Portilla argues:

Discriminatory speech [mental health stigma in everyday life and in the media as outlined here] inflicts a harm in and of itself. In this sense, it is not 'just speech' but a form of discrimination that demeans reputation, a practice of 'cultural segregation'; a kind of 'punch' to the self- and social-esteem of the target groups. It promotes their disadvantage; it is a verbal form that inequality takes and a link in systemic discrimination that keeps target groups in subordinated positions. Therefore, the harm of discriminatory speech is not only what it says but what it does (Perez Portilla 2016: 139).

Discrimination, for example, in the access and enjoyment of goods, services, education and employment does not occur in a cultural vacuum. As Bhikhu Parekh has put it:

Discriminatory treatment of and hostility against a section of our fellow-citizens, which we rightly disapprove of, do not occur in a cultural vacuum. They grow out of and are legitimised by a wider moral climate which is built up and sustained by, among other things, gratuitously disparaging and offensive remarks, each individually perhaps good-humoured and tolerable but all collectively contributing to the dehumanisation or demonisation of the relevant groups (Parekh 2006: 314).

Even though Parekh did not specifically speak about mental health stigma, his comments appear apposite. Moreover, the fact that mental health stigma is not yet sufficiently recognised as a pervasive ground of discrimination is a telling story about the invisibility of the harm, both in legal anti-discrimination literature and, indeed, when compared to other pervasive grounds of discrimination such as gender and race.

Furthermore, when national campaigns to address media stigma have been undertaken by government or civil society they have not always reduced discriminatory reporting. For example, in our study of media reporting trends

in Scotland we demonstrated reductions in representations of dangerousness but that this led to increases in other negative representations about people with mental health conditions, for example that they are not capable of working or maintaining relationships. There were also reductions in positive reporting about people with mental health conditions (Knifton and Quinn 2008).

What is to be done?

Now that we have explored the harm in question, we would like to move to an exploration of what can be done about it. In the UK, there are media regulatory bodies for radio and TV (Ofcom), advertising (ASA) and the press (IPSO and Impress). They all have some varying level of independence from the government and this is predicated, amongst other things, upon the need to safeguard freedom of expression. Therefore, content which is not expressly forbidden in laws, such as the Public Order Act 1986 in relation to hate speech, is then 'self-regulated'. Although generally aimed at protecting freedom of expression, self-regulation also includes responsibilities *vis a vis* the audience; for example, obligations to have 'editors' codes' which would indicate the kind of content that can be disputed and to establish fair adjudicating mechanisms.

Mental health stigma in radio, TV, advertisements and the press

In relation to demeaning and stereotypical representations, misrepresentation of vulnerable groups, all the regulatory bodies mentioned above have clauses within their editors' codes. Ofcom (2015), for example, has a section called 'Harm and offence':

In applying generally accepted standards, broadcasters must ensure that material which may cause offence is justified by the context. Such material may include, but is not limited to, offensive language, violence, sex, sexual violence, humiliation, distress, violation of human dignity, discriminatory treatment or language (for example, on the grounds of age, disability, gender reassignment, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation, and marriage and civil partnership).

However, although it is not impossible to bring a complaint, mental health stigma is not expressly recognised. Something similar happens when it comes to advertising – where the potential harm caused by mental health stigma in adverts has been mentioned only tangen-

tially. For example, in 2004 the Radio Advertising Standards Code included a provision which suggested that 'those who have physical, sensory, intellectual or mental health disabilities should not be demeaned or ridiculed' (Section 2.9: 'Good taste, decency and offence to public feeling'). This code is no longer in force having been replaced in 2010 by the Code for Broadcast Advertising. Currently, the equivalent provision is less specific. It establishes that 'advertisements must not cause serious or widespread offence against generally accepted moral, social or cultural standards; must not condone or encourage harmful discriminatory behaviour or treatment; and must not prejudice respect for human dignity' (Section 4: 'Harm and offence', see 4.2 and 4.8).

Whilst disability is often mentioned within standards codes – and mental ill-health can constitute a form of disability – mental health stigma is particularly insidious, normalised and, therefore, often represents distinct challenges that need to be recognised. For example, the ASA Non-Broadcast Code (2017), Section 4: 'Harm and offence', establishes that:

Marketing communications must not contain anything that is likely to cause serious or widespread offence. Particular care must be taken to avoid causing offence on the grounds of race, religion, gender, sexual orientation, disability or age.

Yet mental health is not expressly mentioned. IPSO and Impress do refer to mental health within their 'discrimination' clauses. However, the press is the type of media over which the government has the least control. Moreover, press regulation in the UK has, for the past five years, been in some disarray following the Hackgate controversy and the resulting Leveson Inquiry (see Leveson 2012, Perez Portilla 2016: 187-196). The discrimination clause in both regulators' codes is almost written in the same terms. IPSO's Editors' Code of Practice (2016) Clause 12 reads:

The press must avoid prejudicial or pejorative reference to an individual's race, colour, religion, sex, gender identity, sexual orientation or to any physical or mental illness or disability.

This clause, however, like that of Impress, only protects individuals and not groups. Consequently, when the pejorative reference to people with mental health problems does not refer to an individual in particular, it cannot be contested using this clause.

Self-harm and death by suicide

In relation to self-harm and death by suicide, regulators have been more explicit. For example, Ofcom, IPSO and Impress have regulations in this regard while the National Union of Journalists (Scotland) has produced a *Guide for responsible reporting on mental health, mental illness and death by suicide* (2014). These are positive initiatives. However, mental health stigma is broader than that and a more nuanced approach is possible and necessary.

Mental health stigma in social media

Regarding the internet, and in particular, social media, companies that offer Web 2.0 services such as Google, YouTube and Facebook, tend to be more lenient with the type of content they allow. Facebook, for example, focuses on hate speech and, therefore, leaves any other 'less inflammatory' materials and comments untouched. Its community standards establish that they would 'remove content that directly attacks people based on their race, ethnicity, national origin, religious affiliation, sexual orientation, sex, gender or gender identity, or serious disabilities or diseases'. As can be seen, people can only report hate speech on these grounds and mental health stigma is not contemplated. It also then misses the wider set of subtle negative representations that can be extremely damaging.

Conclusion

We believe that mental health stigma should be more clearly recognised as a pervasive ground of discrimination and the public should have the possibility of bringing complaints against material that may be built on and further fuel mental health stigma. Complaining is not necessarily or even remotely about seeking censorship or punishment but about politicising culture, it is about bringing counter-arguments and more experiences to mainstream media. In the end, it is a matter of fairness and a necessary means to tackle mental health stigma and discrimination.

References

- ASA Non-Broadcast Code (2017) Section 4: 'Harm and offence'. Available online at https://www.asa.org.uk/type/non_broadcast/code_section/04.html
- Code for Broadcast Advertising (2010) Section 4: 'Harm and offence', specifically 4.2 and 4.8. Available online at <https://www.asa.org.uk/codes-and-rulings/advertising-codes/broadcast-code.html>
- Facebook (n.d.) Community standards. Available online at <https://m.facebook.com/communitystandards/encouraging-respectful-behavior/>
- IPSO (2016) Editors' Code of Practice, Clause 12: 'Discrimination'. Available online at <https://www.ipso.co.uk/editors-code-of-practice/#Discrimination>
- Knifton, Lee and Quinn, Neil (2008) Media, mental health and discrimination: A frame of reference for understanding reporting trends, *International Journal of Mental Health Promotion*, Vol. 10, No. 1 pp 23-31
- Leveson, Lord Justice (2012) *An inquiry into the culture, practices and ethics of the press: Executive summary and summary of recommendations*, London, The Stationery Office
- McGrath, Rachel (2017) Kasabian's 'You're in love with a psycho' music video slammed for 'outdated and damaging stereotypes' by mental health charities, *Huffpost UK*, 31 March. Available online at http://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/entry/kasabian-music-video-mental-health_uk_58de6a70e4b08194e3b948ff?, accessed on 27 June 2017
- National Union of Journalists (Scotland) (2014) *Guidelines on reporting on mental health, mental illness and death by suicide*. Available online at <https://www.nuj.org.uk/news/guidelines-on-reporting-on-mental-health-suicide/>
- Ofcom Broadcasting Code (2015) Section 2: 'Harm and offence'. Available online at https://www.ofcom.org.uk/_data/assets/pdf_file/0025/86308/bc2015-04-section_2_harm_and_offence.pdf
- Parekh, Bhikhu (2006) *Rethinking multiculturalism: Cultural diversity and political theory*, Houndmills: Palgrave
- Perez Portilla, Karla (2016) *Redressing everyday discrimination. The weakness and potential of anti-discrimination law*, Abingdon, Routledge
- Radio Advertising Standards Code (2004) Section 2.9: 'Good taste, decency and offence to public feeling', Perez Portilla, Karla (2016) *Redressing everyday discrimination. The weakness and potential of anti-discrimination law*, Abingdon, Routledge pp 187-196

Note on the Contributors

Dr Karla Perez Portilla is a research officer for the Mental Health Foundation in Scotland and researches and evaluates the impact of the 'See Me' programme, Scotland's initiative to end mental health stigma and discrimination. Her main research interests include stereotypes, stigma, demeaning representations in the media and the impact of discrimination on mental health. Her book, *Redressing everyday discrimination*, was published by Routledge in 2016. She has a PhD in anti-discrimination law, an MSc in equality and discrimination and an LLB (Bachelors of Law) degree. She has worked for the Institute for Legal Research of the National Autonomous University of Mexico, taught at the University of Strathclyde, Faculty of Education and at University College London's Faculty of Laws. She also has practical experience working with the West of Scotland Regional Equality Council.

Lee Knifton is head of the Mental Health Foundation for Scotland where he leads the policy, research, programmes and external relations teams. He is responsible for developing the strategic role of the foundation in Scotland whilst overseeing the operational delivery of its programmes. He was its associate head for four years and also has considerable experience of working in the NHS, university and third sector in mental health, addictions, prisons and justice fields. More broadly, he has been involved in leading local and international health policy initiatives and is currently collaborating with the World Health Organisation, New York and Yale Universities on health equity. He co-directs the Centre for Health Policy within the University of Strathclyde's International Public Policy Institute; is associate editor of the *Journal of Public Mental Health* and co-editor of the book, *Public mental health: Global perspectives*.

Survivor autonomy: An ethical starting point in covering disasters

In the aftermath of disasters, media practitioners bear witness, exert accountability on those in power, provide part of the means by which a society engages in a shared ritual of grieving and reassert certain values that enable people to cohere in the face of horror and outrage. To do this, they necessarily encounter survivors, first-hand witnesses to what has happened. These witnesses will be traumatised and vulnerable, confronting media practitioners with an acute ethical dilemma: how to fulfil their professional obligations while minimising harm. This paper, which argues that recognising and respecting survivor autonomy is an essential starting point, takes as its case study the coverage of the Black Saturday bushfires in Australia in February 2009.

Keywords: autonomy, Black Saturday bushfires, consent, disasters, media, survivors, trauma

When disaster, tragedy or atrocity strikes, reporters are never far behind. Coverage of such events has been central to Western journalism since the dawn of the newspaper age. Hunt (1850) tells us that when the English Civil Wars were raging in the 1640s: 'News-agents and News-letter writers were in full occupation.' In an eighteenth-century satire on news, an imaginary order is sent to a type foundry for the logographs saying 'murder', 'fire', 'dreadful robbery', 'atrocious outrage', 'fearful calamity' and 'alarming explosion'. And Hunt tells of the rising fortunes of the *Morning Post* (London) with its coverage of corn riots in 1800 and of 'a great fire' (ibid). What makes such events news is clearly articulated in news values identified by many scholars (see, for example, McQuail 1994; Galtung and Ruge 1965): shock, negativity,

magnitude, cultural and geographic proximity and significance. In the aftermath of disasters, tragedies and atrocities, journalists play key roles as professional fact-finders, image collectors and narrators who bear witness on behalf of those caught up in the event and on behalf of the wider public (Newman, Shapiro and Nelson 2009). They also convey survivors' perspectives and can help mobilise resources (Newman and Drevo 2015).

These roles, taken together with the recognised functions of the media to provide the public with an up-to-date account of events (Hocking 1947), provide the justification for media practitioners to be present at the scenes of disasters, tragedies or atrocities that are on a scale, or of a type, that creates a genuine public interest. Such events, whether caused by natural disasters or the actions of mankind, transcend the conventions that otherwise protect the privacy of grief and trauma from public gaze. As Jorgensen-Earp and Lanzilotti (1998) put it: 'They blur any concept of a boundary between what has historically been called the public and private spheres.'

News coverage also forms part of the means by which society engages in a shared ritual of grieving (Kitch and Hume 2008), memorialising (Clark 2002) and re-asserting values (Edy 1999). This last has been vividly illustrated in the aftermath of early twenty-first century terrorism attacks by radical Islamists on Western countries. News coverage routinely framed these attacks as assaults on common values such as freedom of speech, of movement and of association, and asserted that the citizens of liberal democracies would not be intimidated. It was an example of what had come to be called 'civic religion', a concept derived from the work of Durkheim (1973 [1915]) just over a century earlier, in which he wrote of the need for societies to reaffirm the ideals that unify it.

News coverage of disasters, tragedies and atrocities also seeks to provide explanations, to answer the pressing questions of 'how' and 'why' and, in this way, to carry out the media's fourth-estate function of holding power to account. On the ground, it provides a means by which survivors may give testimony and assist them attain mastery over events that have left them feeling fearful, shocked and helpless (Raphael 1986). It also provides survivors with an opportunity to have their personal experiences validated as part of a greater whole, to vent their anger at perceived failings by the authorities, to call for help and to let their

loved ones know they have survived (Muller and Gawenda 2011).

Powerful though these justifications for media coverage are, they also bring with them equally powerful ethical obligations: to truth-telling, respect for persons and harm-minimisation. Reconciling the justifications for being on the scene with these ethical obligations can present media practitioners with an acute dilemma. In order to fulfil their news-gathering functions, good media practitioners, like good lawyers, follow the 'best evidence' rule. In the aftermath of disasters the best evidence commonly comes from eye-witness accounts given first-hand. The value of this evidence is greatly superior to second-hand accounts. From a news-value perspective it is also likely to be more vivid, personal and immediate than information from second-hand sources. And it is less likely to have been laundered through official spin cycles.

To acquire this quality of evidence, it is essential for media practitioners to speak with those who were directly exposed to the disaster, who saw it for themselves, who experienced it and survived. Typically, media practitioners approach this task with a clear sense of mission, seeing themselves as having a role on the scene as distinct as the roles of firefighters, paramedics or police (Newman and Shapiro 2014). The ethical dilemma arises because the witnesses they seek will be traumatised. As Newman and Shapiro (2014) also noted, media practitioners are faced with balancing democracy's need for representative storytelling and possibly conferring certain beneficences on survivors with the value of harm-minimisation. Media practitioners do not always get this balance right. Survivors may experience encounters with them as helpful, harmful or neutral (Muller and Gawenda 2011; Englund, Forsberg and Saverman 2014). Getting it right is a fundamental ethical duty.

The starting point for an ethical approach to navigating this dilemma is for media practitioners to simply accept that survivors will be traumatised. The clinical evidence for this is unambiguous. Hermans (1997) put it plainly:

Traumatic events violate the autonomy of the person at the level of basic bodily integrity. The body is invaded, injured, defiled. Control over bodily functions is often lost. ... Furthermore, at the moment of trauma, almost by definition, the individual's point of view counts for nothing.

The concept of personal autonomy

The rebuilding of a survivor's personal autonomy is an essential part of the recovery process (Hermans 1997). It follows that the concept of personal autonomy is central to ethical considerations surrounding the treatment of survivors and other vulnerable persons, whether by clinicians, media practitioners or other interveners (see, for example Hermans 1997; Raphael 1986; Muller and Gawenda 2011; Seedat et al. 2004). But what do we mean by this term? Personal autonomy involves an individual's self-governance in pursuit of his or her own conception of the good, a conception that is normally stated in morally neutral terms (Formosa 2013). It assumes the capacity to exercise free will unconstrained by indoctrination or brainwashing. It is reflected in Mill's (1998 [1859]) concept of individual freedom:

The only freedom which deserves the name is that of pursuing our own good in our own way, so long as we do not attempt to deprive others of theirs.

Another facet of personal autonomy may be seen as concerning the relationships between an individual and other people (Oshana 1998). This broadens out the concept from a purely internal Cartesian view of personal autonomy (Descartes 1637) to one that extends to the world outside, importing an additional set of considerations that may influence a person's standing, or at least perceptions of a person's standing, as self-governing or not.

So when we talk of respecting a survivor's autonomy, we are referring to their right to individuality, to govern themselves in ways that allow them to pursue their own conception of what is best for them, without making moral judgments of our own, and to conduct our relationship with them in ways that uphold their standing as a self-governing individual.

A defining characteristic of trauma is the sense of powerlessness. The survivor has been overwhelmed by forces that exhibit a shocking disregard for his or her personal autonomy. To quote Hermans (1997) again:

The core experiences of psychological trauma are disempowerment and disconnection from others. Recovery, therefore, is based upon empowerment of the survivor and the creation of new connections. ... The first principle of recovery is the empowerment of the survivor. ... No intervention that takes power away from the survivor can possibly foster her recovery.

And further:

The restoration of a sense of personal worth requires the same kind of respect for autonomy that fostered the original development of self-esteem in the first years of life.

A study among survivors of the firestorm in Oakland and Berkeley in California in 1994 found that symptoms consistent with dissociation and loss of personal autonomy in the immediate aftermath of the fire, as well as stressful life events experienced later, significantly predicted the appearance of post-traumatic stress disorder symptoms seven to nine months after the fire (Koopman et al. 1994).

With this in mind, it is now possible to see with some clarity the ethical obligations on media practitioners in how they treat survivors. The obligation is to recognise and respect those essential elements that together make up personal autonomy. Seedat et al. (2015) state that respect for personal autonomy trumps beneficence in most Western societies. It follows that whatever good a media practitioner intends to accomplish by interviewing or taking an image of a survivor, respect for that person's autonomy comes first. Sensitive and ethical treatment of survivors can also help assuage what Newman and Drevo (2015) describe as the intensification of anxiety, anger, chaos and burden that the presence of journalists can induce on top of what the disaster has already inflicted.

Case study: The Black Saturday bushfires

The 15 fires that took 173 lives across the State of Victoria, Australia, on Saturday 7 February 2009, represented the climactic horror of a drought described by the Australian Bureau of Meteorology as being without historical precedent. By 11am that day, temperatures had reached nearly 40 degrees Celsius (104 degrees Fahrenheit) in many parts of Victoria, as strong to gale-force north-westerly winds drove very hot air south-eastwards from the Outback. Relative humidity, which is a measurement of moisture in the air, fell to below 20 per cent and then to below 10 per cent as temperatures rose to the mid-40s across the state. Wind gusts of between 90 and 115km/h were reported in many places. At 11.45am near Kilmore East, about 80 kilometres north of Melbourne, a fatigued live power line broke and fell against a metal cable-stay supporting a power pole. The resultant arcing ignited nearby vegetation. So began the Kilmore East fire, which was to kill 119 people and injure 232 (Victorian Bushfires Royal Commission 2010).

At 2.55pm, a fire lookout at Mt Despair, north-east of Melbourne, noticed smoke coming from the site of an old timber mill at Murrindindi, in the forested high country of the Great Dividing Range. Its cause was initially considered suspicious, but it was subsequently found to have started from natural causes. This fire would kill 40 people and injure 73 (ibid).

Meanwhile, in the far south-west of Victoria, a low-pressure system from across the Great Australian Bight had made landfall, bringing a strong, gusty south-westerly wind change. Temperatures dropped, relative humidity rose, but there was no rain. The change was moving eastwards at about 30 km/h and by about 5pm it lay just past Wonthaggi, on the Bass Strait coast south-east of Melbourne. The confluence of these two weather systems in the early evening of Black Saturday was to make an already desperate situation worse. Fires that had been driven south-eastwards by the hot winds suddenly began to be driven north-eastwards, at right angles to their original path. The enormous north-easterly flanks of the fires, some more than 30 kilometres in length, now became their fronts. Whole communities in their path were ambushed. Towns and settlements in the hills north-east of Melbourne were wiped out, including Marysville, Kinglake, Flowerdale, Strathewen and Steels Creek.

The disaster received saturation local media coverage locally over two weeks and extensive international coverage over the first few days. Subsequently this provided an occasion to examine the ethical dilemmas confronting media practitioners at a major disaster from the perspectives both of the practitioners and of the survivors with whom they came in contact. At the University of Melbourne's Centre for Advancing Journalism, a two-stage research project was developed to do this. In stage one, between May and August 2009, researchers from the centre interviewed 28 media practitioners who had covered the fires. In stage two, between February and March 2011, shortly after the second anniversary of the fires, they interviewed 27 survivors whose stories had appeared in media reports during the first two weeks after the fires. Both sets of interviews were conducted using semi-structured interviews and proceeded on the basis of anonymity. This case study is based on the data from those two phases of the research.

The survivors who were interviewed fell into two groups: those who had been the subject of a media item by the journalists who participat-

ed in phase one of this research (the 'matched' group), and those who had been the subject of items by other journalists (the 'unmatched' group). The intention was to see whether the experiences of the two groups differed. In the event, many respondents had had multiple media encounters and some of them were from both groups. No differences emerged between the experiences of the matched and unmatched groups.

A threshold ethical issue for the media practitioners was how they might obtain survivors' consent (Muller 2013). The research showed that the decisive factor influencing survivors in giving or withholding consent was their assessment of whether the media practitioner had approached them in a way that recognised and respected their personal autonomy. They judged this by whether the practitioner:

- was honest and transparent in introducing himself;
- seemed genuinely concerned for the survivors' wellbeing before treating them as subjects for interview;
- approached them in a way that allowed them to say yes or no without feeling pressured;
- began by asking open questions that allowed the survivors to decide what to talk about and how much to say.

The survivors stated that they had been able to make this assessment even though many described themselves as having been in a kind of daze, disoriented by sudden and violent displacement, worried about the fate of family or friends or property, and agitated by lack of knowledge about what had happened to the rest of their community. They reported being in a state of shock but not paralysis. Their testimony on this point was consistent with findings by Griffin et al. (2003) which indicate that survivors may be less fragile than is often thought.

Taking into account their disempowered state, the extent of their personal autonomy at that moment may be summarised as the power to decide whether to speak, to whom to speak and what to speak about. Attempts to pressure or manipulate them were seen by survivors as trespassing on those few powers and often led to a refusal of consent.

The account given by one man who survived a fire at Calignee in Gippsland vividly illuminates the concept of personal autonomy from a survivor's perspective. This man, a farmer in his sev-

enties, together with a younger man, had spent the night fighting a fire which surrounded his farmhouse. They saved the house and the lives of nine people sheltering inside. By morning they were exhausted but still patrolling for embers, when a newspaper reporter walked down the driveway. The farmer described him as 'a well-brought-up young man'. He introduced himself, inquired after their welfare and asked if they were willing to tell him what had happened. Only after receiving their consent did he return to his car for his notebook. The interview yielded a riveting news story of the men's extraordinary feat.

Not long after the reporter had left, the farmer said, a television news crew also walked down the drive. One had a camera on his shoulder, another had a boom microphone and, to quote the farmer: 'They gave me the impression they were going to interview me whether I liked it or not.' He said: 'I told them to bugger off.'

It was clear from the farmer's account that the newspaper reporter had empowered him to say no, to exercise his autonomy, whereas the television crew had done the opposite: in his interpretation of their actions, they had tried to exert power over him and he was having none of it. Whilst the appearance of the television crew with their visually obtrusive equipment may have reflected merely the operational necessities of television and had nothing to do with their attitude, clearly the farmer interpreted their approach as being unacceptably aggressive.

Accounts from many other survivors reinforced the importance of media practitioners respecting survivor autonomy. One respondent who had multiple dealings with the media gave an insight into why her control over the content of the interview was a large factor in her decision-making about whether to co-operate:

I didn't want to say anything that might have made it for one moment difficult for someone who had lost someone dear. I didn't want to say anything that would set back those people.

Q: Did the media people respect that?

I made them respect it. Otherwise I wouldn't talk at all.

The issue of story ownership is another facet of survivor autonomy. Black Saturday survivors despised what they called 'media agendas'. They had no patience with media people who approached them with a pre-determined idea

of what the story should be. It offended them at a deep level. They believed it to be fundamentally dishonest and deprived them of what was after all their story. This sense of ownership of the story ran deep. It was part of the survivors' sense of autonomy. This can be a hard idea for reporters to grasp. Their bylines are on the stories; they refer to their copy as 'my story'. It is part of the language of the profession. But survivors assert otherwise: it is *their* story.

Another way in which survivor autonomy can be diminished is by the manipulation of a survivor's emotions. It was a common complaint from Black Saturday survivors that television crews, in particular, would attempt to get them to cry for the camera. One survivor, a farmer who was also a volunteer firefighter with the Country Fire Authority, had the presence of mind to deal with this in a way that reasserted his power over the encounter while incidentally making the television footage unusable.

Two or three days after Black Saturday I agreed to be interviewed live to [overseas] television. Very straight interview. No problems. That night we had a pretty traumatic public meeting. And I'm walking back afterwards, about 10 o'clock at night, and I get a phone call and it's [overseas] television again saying they wanted to ask me a few questions. They turned up, but I could pick this was different. This time, this fellow was trying to break me emotionally. And I can remember thinking: 'How am I going to handle this fellow?'

This is what I did. He's a lot shorter than me, we're both standing up and he comes right up close to me and he says: 'So, you're a hard man, but I think you've got a soft centre. Am I right?' And the camera is looking up right at me. And I just kept looking at him for probably five seconds, and I said: 'You know [name], I find you a very attractive man.' There's about 30 or 40 people around, and we'd had a horrendous time and we hadn't had a laugh for a long, long time, but everybody was laughing. And he's saying: 'This is not the kind of interview I want.' And I said: 'No, but it's the kind of interview you're going to get.' And I put my arm around him and said: 'Come and meet the people. They'd like to meet you.' And they gave him heaps. He tried to interview people, but he went away without a story at all.

However, survivors were unconcerned when they cried spontaneously during media encoun-

ters. Many did so. In one or two cases, the media interview was the first occasion on which they had been able to cry and they speculated that it might even have been helpful. One survivor said he cried 'at everything' anyway, and the fact that he cried when interviewed did not distress him at all. Another man, photographed with tears streaming down his face, said he was completely at ease with seeing that in a newspaper because it was authentic: 'That's how I was.'

Two further aspects of respecting survivor autonomy concerns understanding the survivor's motive for agreeing to talk to the media and delivering on any promises made to survivors. In the immediate aftermath of the Black Saturday fires, survivors had many reasons for agreeing to speak to the media, and there was abundant evidence that many had a purpose in mind, even in their distracted state:

- to let family and friends know they had survived;
- to call for help;
- to vent anger over perceived shortcomings in the emergency services' response;
- to tell the world they still existed;
- for reassurance that the world had not forgotten them;
- to tell their story and talk about their experiences while retaining some control over the information;
- to have their personal experience validated as part of something much bigger than themselves.

As Seedat et al. (2015) observed, for many survivors, sharing stories of trauma provides an opportunity to give testimony about the past and is perceived as therapeutic. As time went by, some survivors also came to see the media as a resource for getting things done. They said they had been encouraged by police media-liaison staff to use the media if they needed something done because it was probably going to be quicker and more effective than relying on the formal processes of bureaucracy. This experience was reinforced by the findings of Newman and Drevo (2015) about the capacity of the media to mobilise resources on behalf of survivors.

Several survivors spoke of the help they received personally from journalists who had interviewed them. In one case, a truck driver from Marysville whose family had lost everything said he had no idea how to go about

making claims on his insurance company, particularly in his emotionally exhausted state. A television reporter who had interviewed him at a relief centre had become an ally, navigating bureaucratic labyrinths in which he said he felt lost. A high-profile radio journalist who covered the fires became an effective behind-the-scenes advocate for survivors, telephoning recalcitrant insurance companies and saying: 'There are two ways to do this: the easy way or the hard way. We can do it on air if you like, or you can fix it now.' Survivors spoke of the beneficial effects of this advocacy on their own sense of empowerment. It had made them feel re-connected with the wider world and made them feel as if they still counted.

This is evidence that making connections between survivors and media can have many beneficial effects. Although it can never be risk-free, and some media practitioners will behave in exploitative and manipulative ways, the evidence indicates that the risk is worth taking. Of the 27 survivors interviewed in the Black Saturday project, 23 said that their encounters with the media, on the whole, had done them more good than harm. This was consistent with the findings of a study by Turnbull et al. (1988). Although their study focused on the effects of encounters between psychological clinicians and traumatised people, the analogy with journalism is close enough to be useful as corroborative evidence. Their large two-stage quantitative study (n = 1755) found that, although the encounters caused some short-term distress, on the whole the interviews did more good than harm.

A corollary of this is that attempts by authorities to protect survivors from the media, though well-intentioned, are not always in the survivors' best interests. It deprives them of an early opportunity to meet this variety of needs and to exercise their autonomy, which many showed a capacity to do. This is especially true in the acute immediate aftermath of the disaster when survivors have so many reasons for speaking to the media. It is in the longer aftermath – after about 48 hours – that they are more likely to want protection from the media. This became clear in the days following Black Saturday when the survivors' hyperarousal began to subside, grief began to dominate and they began to see the constant media presence as intrusive and exploitative. It was at this point that they became appreciative of efforts by the police to provide ways by which they could avoid the media.

Conclusions

In the aftermath of disasters, tragedies and atrocities, journalists play key roles as professional fact-finders, image collectors and narrators who bear witness on behalf of those caught up in the event and on behalf of the wider public. They also convey survivors' perspectives and needs to governments and relief agencies and can help mobilise resources. Taken together with the recognised functions of the media to provide the public with an up-to-date account of events, they provide the justification for media practitioners to be present at the scenes of disaster, tragedy or atrocity. News coverage also forms part of the means by which society engages in a shared ritual of grieving, memorialising and re-asserting socially unifying values.

Powerful though these justifications for media coverage are, they also bring with them equally powerful ethical obligations: to truth-telling, respect for persons and harm-minimisation. Central to this is recognising and respecting a survivor's autonomy. This means recognising the survivor's right to individuality, to govern herself in ways that allow her to pursue her own conception of what is best for her, without making moral judgments, and to conduct any relationship with her in ways that uphold her standing as a self-governing individual.

Moreover, as the Black Saturday and other research has conclusively shown, actions that help rebuild survivor autonomy contribute to the survivor's recovery. Two crucial ingredients in this are to re-empower survivors and re-connect them with the wider world. It lies within the power of media practitioners who cover disasters, tragedies and atrocities to do both. Thus, in addition to the ethical obligation to minimise harm there is a further ethical obligation to act in ways that promote survivor recovery.

It also happens to be the surest way to get the best evidence on which to base news accounts of what happened, being eye-witness accounts given first hand.

References

- Clark, R. P. (2002) Portraits of grief, the Poynter Institute, 16 August. Available online at www.poynter.org.au, accessed on 2 July 2017
- Deppa, J. (1994) *The media and disasters: Pan Am 103*, New York, New York University Press
- Descartes, R. (1637) *Discourse on the method*. Available online at <http://www.earlymoderntexts.com/assets/pdfs/descartes1637.pdf>
- Durkheim, E. (1973 [1915]) *The elementary forms of religious life*, Fields, K. (trans), New York, Free Press
- Edy, J. A. (1999) Journalistic uses of collective memory, *Journal of Communication*, Vol. 49 No. 2 pp 71-85

- Englund, L. Forsberg, R. and Saverman B.-I. (2014) Survivors' experience of media coverage after traumatic injury events, *International Emergency Nursing*, Vol. 22, No. 1 pp 25-30
- Formosa, P. (2013) Kant's conception of personal autonomy, *Journal of Social Philosophy*, Vol. 44, No. 3 pp 193-212
- Galtung, J. and Ruge, M. (1965) The structure of foreign news, *Journal of Peace Research*, Vol. 1 pp 64-90
- Griffin, M., Resick, P. and Waldrop, A. (2007) Participation in trauma research: Is there evidence of harm? *Journal of Trauma Stress*, Vol. 16 pp 221-227
- Hermans, J. (1997) *Trauma and recovery*, New York, Basic Books
- Hocking, W. E. (1947) *Freedom of the press: A framework of principle*, Chicago, Chicago University Press
- Hunt, F. Knight (1850) *The fourth estate: Towards a history of newspapers and of the liberty of the press, Vols I and II*, London, David Bogue
- Jorgensen-Earp, C. R. and Lanzilotti, L. A. (1998) Public memory and private grief: The construction of shrines and the sites of public tragedy, *Quarterly Journal of Speech*, No. 84 pp 150-170
- Kitch, C. and Hume, J. (2008) *Journalism in a culture of grief*, New York, Routledge
- Koopman, C., Classen, C. and Spiegel, D. (1994) Predictors of post-traumatic stress symptoms among survivors of the Oakland/Berkeley firestorm, *American Journal of Psychiatry*, Vol. 151, June pp 888-894
- McQuail, D. (1994) *Mass communication theory*, Sage Publications, London, third edition
- Mill, J. S. (1998 [1859]) *On liberty*, Gray, J. (ed.) Oxford, Oxford University Press
- Muller, D. (2011) *Media ethics and disasters: Lessons from the Black Saturday bushfires*, Melbourne, Melbourne University Press
- Muller, D. and Gawenda, M. (2011) *Black Saturday: In the media spotlight*, Melbourne, Cussonia Press
- Muller, D. (2013) Black Saturday bushfires and the question of consent, *Ethical Space*, Vol. 10, No. 1 pp 36-42
- Newman, E. and Drevo, S. (2015) Journalists as partners in early response to trauma: Agreements, tensions, and future directions to aid collaboration, *European Journal of Psychotraumatology*, Vol. 6 (selected abstracts from Swedish Psychotrauma Society scientific conference 2015)
- Newman, E. and Shapiro, B. (2014) Clinicians and journalists responding to disasters, *Journal of Child and Adolescent Psychopharmacology*, Vol. 24, No. 1 pp 32-38
- Newman, E., Shapiro, B. and Nelson, S. (2009) Journalism and media during disasters, Neria, Y., Galea, S. and Norris, F. (eds) *Mental Health Consequences of Disaster*, New York, Cambridge Press pp 291-301
- Oshana, M. (1998) Personal autonomy and society, *Journal of Social Philosophy*, Vol. 29, No. 1 pp 81-102
- Raphael, B. (1986) *When disaster strikes: How individuals and communities cope with catastrophe*, New York, Basic Books
- Seedat, S., Pienaar, W. P., Williams, D. and Stein, D. J. (2004) Ethics of research on survivors of trauma, *Current Psychiatry Reports*, Vol. 6 pp 262-267
- Turnbull, J., McLeod, J. and Callahan, J. (1988) Who should ask? Ethical interviewing in psychiatric epidemiology studies, *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry*, Vol. 58 pp 228-239
- Victorian Bushfires Royal Commission (2010) *Final report*, Parliament of Victoria, Government Printer for the State of Victoria, Melbourne, July

Note on the Contributor

Dr Denis Muller is a senior lecturer and senior research fellow in politics and journalism at the University of Melbourne. He practised as a journalist for 27 years, mostly on the *Sydney Morning Herald* and the *Age*, Melbourne. His special research interests centre on media ethics, and he was a consultant to the Finkelstein Inquiry into Media Regulation, conducted in Australia in 2011-12, contributing sections on press theory, codes of ethics and media performance. In 2011, he contributed two chapters to *Australian Journalism Today* (Matthew Ricketson, ed., Palgrave Macmillan) on the subjects of sources and confidences and on mechanisms of media accountability. With Johan Lidberg, he has edited *In the name of security: Secrecy, surveillance and journalism* (Anthem Press, London, forthcoming 2017). He may be contacted at dmuller@unimelb.edu.au or 613 8344 9439 or 61419 414 121. Address for correspondence: PO Box 560, Carlton South, Melbourne, Victoria 3053, Australia.

Journalists and emotions: The theory of balance

The changing media landscape and the demand for news 24/7 can make some journalists vulnerable to stress, especially those who often cover trauma. Whether it is death knocks or covering courts, the repetitive nature of trauma work can affect their mental health. By carrying out 20 in-depth, semi-structured interviews with New Zealand journalists and media managers, and using grounded theory analysis to interpret the data, a theory of balance emerged. The theory provides a framework for understanding how journalists deal with trauma and the related emotions. It identified what can be a continuum for some journalists, from attaining balance to maintaining balance through to potentially losing balance. The model can be used as a teaching device for self-care and serve as a self-assessment tool for journalists covering trauma on a regular basis, to check their mental stability. The investigation identified two key hurdles: the traditional unspoken 'rules' in newsrooms and the tendency of journalists to adopt the bystander position, that is, a reluctance to acknowledge colleagues who may not be coping with their work. It also confirmed that editors might not be fully aware of the risks of trauma work.

Keywords: journalism, trauma, grounded theory, emotional labour, bystander effect, gender, mental health

Novice journalists often carry out death knocks whereby they are expected to interview the family or friends of a victim immediately after a tragedy. Journalists throughout New Zealand are dispatched daily to cover trauma-related events and there is nothing in the journalists' codes of ethics to prevent senior staff sending out inexperienced reporters without proper support, or about providing counselling and/

or debriefing them afterwards (Hollings 2005). Barnes (2016) addressed the fact that there is often minimal education about how to carry out these interviews, or support afterwards. The study considered both direct trauma (experiencing the event first hand) and indirect trauma (hearing the details second hand). Previous research has demonstrated that the denial of emotions and psychological damage from repetitive trauma work can have a cumulative effect on journalists. Moreover, because of a traditionally stoic culture and the socialisation process in many newsrooms, novice journalists feel the pressure to try to remain objective and suppress any emotions.

Any traumatic event, such as a fatality, is a shock to the system and can affect a person's equilibrium (Newman and Nelson 2012). International research has shown that graduates are particularly susceptible to strong emotional and psychological reactions (Dworznic and Grubb 2007). This becomes an issue when young journalists are being dispatched by senior staff to cover traumatic incidents as a form of initiation to see if they can handle the job (Barnes 2017 forthcoming). Figures are not available to indicate the turnover of staff in newsrooms in New Zealand but it becomes problematic when three-quarters of the journalism graduates now are female and the editors and managers are male (Barnes 2015). Graduates also face other stresses, in particular an unpredictable and insecure future with changes in the political economy, including contracted media ownership globally and fewer jobs (Berrington and Jemphrey 2003). These factors are combined with the demand for round-the-clock news on multi-platforms, produced on tighter budgets (Örnebring, Möller and Grip 2015).

Amidst all this uncertainty, the traditional hierarchical structure of newsrooms remains as the most common model, although organisational factors can affect operational factors, particularly in relation to covering trauma (Barnes 2016). Traditionally, editors advocated objective reporting, which was fact-based and feelings-free. Emotion in public discourse has historically been denigrated, considered the polar opposite of rationality, where facts and reason pervade (Wahl-Jorgensen 2013a). Now, however, journalists are expected to empathise with interviewees to extract emotive quotes.

This study contends that journalists covering trauma function on a continuum of balance, whereby the tension between objectivity and emotionality creates a push-pull effect. The

tension between not becoming involved emotionally yet being expected to empathise with victims or people who are grieving can be intensified by internal or intrinsic pressures. These may relate to a journalist's desire to do a good job, which is usually guided by their moral compass, versus external or extrinsic pressures from editors. Using data gathered from in-depth interviews with 20 journalists, the grounded theory study identified three theoretical concepts or stages that journalists can move through when reporting trauma on a regular basis – attaining balance, maintaining balance and losing balance. First, novice journalists need to attain balance. As part of this introductory stage, they must learn and accept the professional ideology and implicit rules of the newsroom as they come to terms with any conflicting emotions. To do so, at this stage, some adopt strategies (with varying degrees of success) to help them manage their work. Second, to maintain balance, they strive to deliver emotionally-laden stories to earn rewards in the newsroom and avoid punishment. Some journalists devise duplicitous ways to stay in control. Sometimes that control requires emotional labour, or 'putting on a mask' and, over time, some become emotionally detached (Hochschild 1979). Third, if they lose the drive to cover trauma-related incidents and feel they have no control over their work, they may burn out and subsequently lose balance.

Journalism and trauma

With the commoditisation of news, violent and traumatic events have become news staples (Coté and Simpson 2000), to the point where Kitch (2009: 29) suggested that current journalism has been 'saturated with tears and trauma'. This change of focus, which Kitch termed the 'emotional shift' (ibid: 30), has also infiltrated more conservative media, which were traditionally more objective. The argument for publishing trauma-based stories has been that 'raw emotion makes the best copy' and, therefore, sells news (Berrington and Jemphrey 2003: 237). As budgets have tightened in newsrooms worldwide, news managers are giving preference to stories that will attract larger audiences, and thus increase profits (McManus 2009). These stories are market-driven topics, as opposed to topics defined by editors as newsworthy. The ubiquitous death knock narrative could, therefore, be viewed as a way in which news organisations have adapted to social, economic and political contexts within which they now operate, by supplying more content specifically to meet audience demands (Allan 2004).

As a result, journalists are confronting increasing pressure to meet the requirements of their editors and media managers, as well as their audience. Yet there is a gap between the expectations of editors and what journalists are expected to deliver in terms of subjective content. Moreover, the swing towards more subjectivity in news stories has caused conflict in newsrooms. As Wahl-Jorgensen (2013b) described it, journalists are caught in the middle of change. Emotionality, or subjectivity, is gaining ground in news reporting, becoming a news value of its own (Meyer 2003). Pantti (2010) found emotions engaged by story-telling can make 'serious' news categories more interesting and intelligible. Disasters, accidents, violent episodes and child abuse are all emotional topics which lend themselves to a specific type of narrative. Rather than threatening the institutionalised ideals, Wahl-Jorgensen (2013b) considers them complementary because she regards emotionality as central to journalistic story-telling. She found that emotional story-telling was the driving force behind award-winning journalism by studying Pulitzer Prize-winning articles between 1995-2011.

Covering trauma presents a number of challenges to journalists. Most importantly, they must not connect emotionally with people because there is a concern that they risk losing their 'professional' objectivity (Novak and Davidson 2013). For example, there is a 'general prohibition' on journalists talking about the emotional aspects of their work (Richards and Rees 2011: 863). This investigation wanted to further the existing work by finding out how journalists learn to deal with trauma on the job and manage their emotions.

Look and learn

The topic of journalism and trauma is relatively new and unexplored in New Zealand. While both Hollings (2005) and Scanlon (2014) addressed natural disasters, namely tidal waves and earthquakes, there was no research regarding day-to-day trauma. International research tended to focus on the effects of trauma on war correspondents and relatively few studies considered the everyday, domestic journalist (Keats and Buchanan 2009; Rees 2007).

New Zealand journalists regularly attend tragedies and are exposed to unpleasant incidents alongside police, fire crews and paramedics with high incidences of vehicle fatalities, suicides, child abuse and drownings. In New Zealand, the same journalists often cover police or crime rounds for years at a time, with very little

preparation (Hollings 2005). There is an expectation that journalists will react 'professionally' to events as they happen, amid chaos and emotionally charged circumstances (Berrington and Jemphrey 2003: 239). Rather, being formally taught, journalists tend to rely on watching experienced journalists and learning along the way (Duncan and Newton 2010; Hopper and Huxford 2015). That includes learning about how to deal with emotions. Hopper and Huxford interviewed 20 journalists: 'Many felt suppressing emotions while covering events was simply a requirement of the job' (ibid: 35).

Empirical reports have shown that journalists' experiences of trauma can put them at risk of both direct and indirect stress, post-traumatic stress disorder, or more long-term difficulties such as depression, generalised anxiety, or struggles with relationships (Keats 2012; McMahon 2001). Novak and Davidson (2013) found that journalists who suppressed their emotions and identified with their 'professional' detached role appeared to have a protective factor in difficult situations. But there could be other reasons for striving for detachment. Emotions have been seen as a liability in the newsroom (Berkowitz 2000) so the lack of acknowledgement of such a problem could act as a form of social control (Benson 2006). Therefore, norms, routines and rules, some spoken and others unspoken, can be enforced to regulate behaviour.

The 2015 study by Hopper and Huxford found that there were ongoing risks to emotional suppression or control – as a result, some journalists might suffer long-term repercussions. They found several of the respondents were still suffering some years later from long-term guilt and self-hatred. Specific aspects of their job have been shown to make journalists more vulnerable to guilt, such as the pressure to sensationalise an article or to pressure distressed people for an interview (Browne, Evangelii and Greenberg 2012). Guilt as a risk factor for psychological impairment was the focus of research by Backholm and Idås (2015). They surveyed 371 journalists who covered the Norwegian terror attacks in Oslo and Utøya in 2011. The researchers identified ethical dilemmas caused by inner conflicts between acting as 'good human beings' versus 'professional journalists' (ibid: 143).

Although most journalists are resilient (Smith, Newman and Drevo 2015), burn-out is a psychological risk associated with covering trauma. Burn-out has been described as 'the physical,

emotional and mental exhaustion that occurs when one can no longer cope with his or her everyday environment' (Dworznic 2011: 23). Other studies have looked at financial costs. An Australian study investigated the number of journalists who had claimed stress leave. Lyall (2012) found in the 10 years to June 2010 that 135 mental health claims were lodged with workers' compensation authorities from journalists and related professionals, leading to an average time off work of 26.4 weeks. During that time, around \$A4.2 million was paid out in compensation, according to WorkSafe¹ information (ibid: 33). There are other implications to losing staff to stress: 'When experienced reporters leave, they take the knowledge of their communities or beats with them, which can lead to less critical and less informed coverage. If coverage suffers, news organisations may lose their audiences' (Jones 2014). Such figures for mental health claims by journalists are not readily available in New Zealand. Instead, the Accident Compensation Corporation sub-contracts to accredited employers and private companies, including publishing companies. Publishers are not required to supply information under the New Zealand Official Information Act 1982.

Grounded in the data

Twenty in-depth, semi-structured interviews were carried out with 16 females and four males. Four were novice journalists (graduates with up to two years in the workplace); six mid-range journalists (two to five years' experience), eight senior journalists (more than five years' in the job), and two former editorial managers.

Following grounded theory protocols, transcripts were analysed after each interview and coded, initially line by line, looking for repetition or key words and recurring actions (Charmaz 2014) as data. For example, 'feeling uncomfortable' clearly became a code early on. Constructing a grounded theory can be challenging. There is always a concern with grounded theory that the data is fragmented, which suggests it could lose its meaning. Because of the process of analysing line-by-line and coding, phrases and sentences are processed in chunks rather than in complete paragraphs. This issue was addressed by including full participant comments to illustrate the coding process that focused on actions, using gerunds, or action words ending in -ing, and identifying key words. By incorporating a wide selection of participant comments to illustrate various arguments, journalists were given a voice and the outline of the theory formed its own narrative.

Categorisation followed more focused coding: categories can be conceptual, abstract, analytical and precise. Each category needs to be defined and its properties explored. For example, a person's years of experience as a journalist is a property, because experience influences consequences and outcomes. Alternatively, conditions, which also affect outcome, need consideration as well: for example, the amount of preparation or trauma training a young journalist has had, or what support is available after an event.

Grounded theory is not a linear process; it involves constant comparative analysis, whereby the researcher revisits the data and continually questions it, thereby refining the concepts. Sometimes this means reinterviewing participants. The voices of the journalists injected a sense of reality and helped to exemplify each category that was identified as the theory emerged. Participant comments also proved to be the best way to keep the theory grounded. For example, novice journalists appeared to test out a range of approaches to help them avoid any unpleasant feelings associated with death knocks:

P. 2: I wasn't used to being so intrusive and I was probably a bit too apologetic, and a bit too, probably not detached enough so it affected me quite a lot. ... You always get that dread when you get asked to do any sort of death knock or whatever.

Others went through noticeable turmoil in their efforts to manage their emotions. They seemed to be aware that repressing their emotions was not good for them but they also wanted to be able to have some control over them:

P. 4: You want to kind of become as cynical and weathered as the senior reporters as soon as possible, you know? You see them with a 'don't give a toss' kind of attitude and that's probably the stereotype of a hardened journalist but it's probably not the healthiest thing to aspire to.

Coping strategies were categorised under three key areas: emotion-focused, avoidance-focused or problem-focused, based on a study by Buchanan and Keats (2011).

Emotion focused: Many of the participants in this study expressed their need to share their experiences. Sharing the narrative is an emotion-focused strategy because talking, emailing or blogging helped to deal with emotions. Talking it out or sharing the story was the strategy

most often used by participants after a traumatic encounter, whether it was with colleagues or other journalists elsewhere in the country.

Avoidance focused: Attempting to disengage from emotions was classified as avoidance-focused. The use of black humour and drinking alcohol were popular options here. Drinking helped one young woman share her emotions and feelings of disillusionment in the short term, as she weighed up 'the good with the bad' aspects of her job. There was also evidence of journalists who tried to deny or repress their responses and not to dwell on them. This suggested disassociation:

P. 16: No, I was more silent, I think. I haven't really thought about it in-depth in terms of how I've dealt with it but I presume it's compartmentalised or something.

Some would simply give into their emotions at times and finding a safe space to let them out was a last resort for some. This is probably because journalists who display emotions fear losing the respect of their peers. Or as Wouters (1992) surmised, they lack or lose status. Instead, they learn that containing emotions earns prestige.

P. 11: I would end up just outside the building; I found this little corner on a concrete driveway or something. I just had a little cry and [would] go back up and get on with whatever I was doing. It was ridiculous.

Problem focused: Some participants would position themselves within their 'professional' role and focus on their work. This distracted several participants from what they described as 'uncomfortable' feelings. It often meant simply obeying instructions, as that made life easier for them and they could reconcile any inner turmoil if they did as they were told.

P. 1: I mean, in a way having an instruction, like a decree that you will do this, makes you not have to agonise over it. You've just got to do it.

P. 4: I think how I sort of cover, for example, a child abuse murder case is completely different to how I probably did it, probably a year ago. Now it's like, okay, focus on the story, you know, just get your lead, get the basics in. A few more details and then it's sort of like at the break you can stop and be like, okay, that's what's happened. Sweet, what am I going to do next? Just kind of deal with it in chunks in a way.

By doing as they were told and not questioning

their instructions, some journalists abdicated their ethical decision-making to their editors. In so doing, they put the importance of the story first and paid less attention to 'minimising harm' to the people in the story. This approach could also be viewed as doing a disservice to their audience as well, because they avoided investigating the trauma too deeply. This comment exemplifies that:

Researcher: Why did you feel you couldn't say no?

P. 8: I don't know, you just ... it wouldn't be good. If you said you didn't want to do a door-knock, then I think they'd be thinking: 'Then what are you doing here?' It was that attitude that we all had to do it. You just do it.

Based on the grounded theory approach of using action words to name categories, three distinct concepts or stages emerged from the data – attaining balance, maintaining balance and losing balance. Within each of these key concepts, three sub-categories emerged that all relate to social processes. The sub-categories of attaining balance are 'being professional', 'confronting emotions' and 'learning the rules'. The sub-categories of maintaining balance are 'getting the get', 'managing emotions' and 'reading the newsroom'. The sub-categories of losing balance are 'hitting the limit', 'juggling emotions' and 'lacking control'.

losing balance are 'hitting the limit', 'juggling emotions' and 'losing control'.

Each stage of Barnes' theory² of balance (2016) is dependent on three underlying conditions: the level of preparation, support for covering trauma work and cogitation. Preparation may relate to prior knowledge of an incident or court case. The more information the journalist had in advance, the better they felt they coped. Support can relate to having someone to share the experience with or knowing that counseling is not discouraged. The third condition is a term that evolved to encapsulate the rationalising that goes on internally. Cogitation can be described as a self-maintenance and self-aligning process, for example, when confronting an ethical dilemma. This process can be influenced by how much time there is between trauma-related assignments and how much time off a person has to 'rebalance'.

The term balance implies a level of fluctuation. For journalists, constant movement or pressure came from the push-pull phenomenon that kept them perpetually on edge. For example, being sent on a job without being fully briefed and the inner turmoil of trying to prepare on the way. This exemplifies the ongoing extrinsic pressures and the intrinsic pressures.

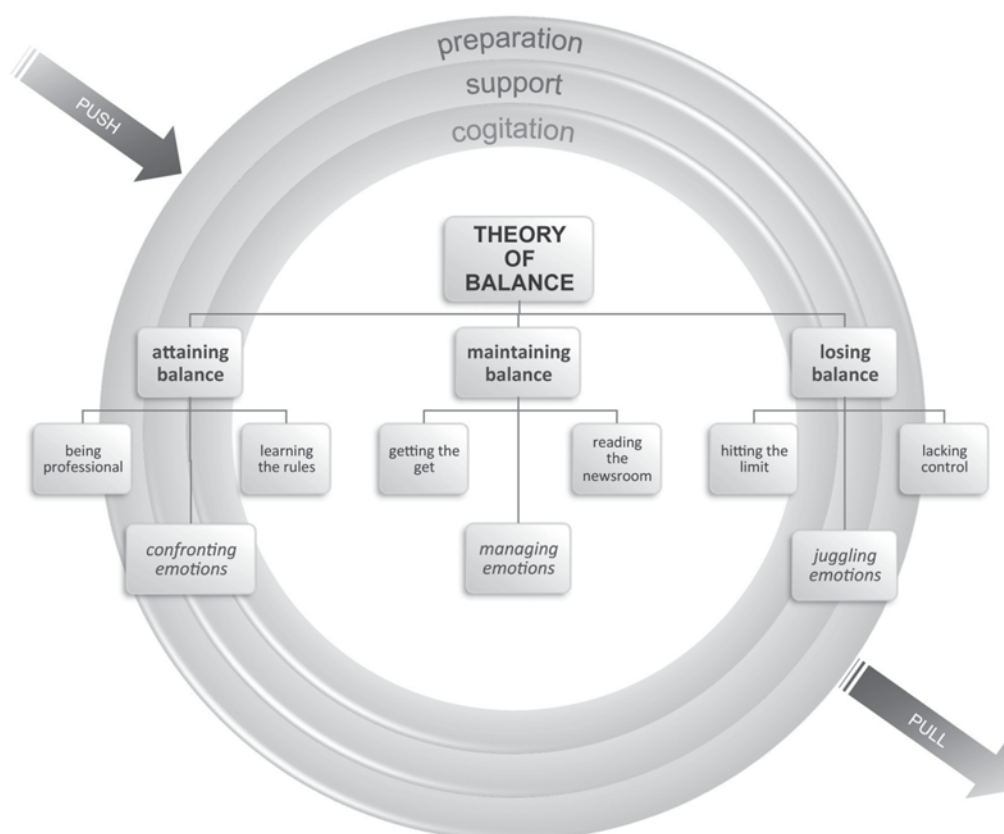


Figure 1: The theory of balance in trauma reporting is dependent on the three conditions: preparation, support and cogitation. Equilibrium is constantly challenged by the push/pull phenomenon, intrinsic and extrinsic factors that journalists encounter with trauma work

First, journalists had to learn how to attain balance when dealing with trauma. 'Being professional' implies adhering to the newsroom rules. For example, the expectation of remaining objective and not getting personally involved. Some of these rules are spoken and others are unspoken, for example, adhering to the code of ethics are spoken. Yet some journalists felt that although they were aware of how they should behave, there were unspoken expectations to break the rules at times rather than return to the newsroom without a story. 'Confronting emotions' and 'learning the rules' of the newsroom are, therefore, self-explanatory sub-categories.

Some young journalists opted out early in their careers if they could not move to the next stage, although this was based on anecdotal comments rather than hard data (Barnes 2015). However, if they achieved all three sub-categories, usually by adopting various coping strategies, they moved on to the next stage, maintaining balance. This is where they were regularly covering trauma and felt a sense of satisfaction from 'getting the get', that is, pursuing people for interviews and enjoying the challenge of getting them to talk. They had to learn to 'play the game' by 'reading the newsroom', for example, figuring out whether they should share any concerns about their work or keep them to themselves; what the accepted behaviours were and how to work around them, if necessary. This stage was dependent on learning how to 'manage emotions'. Balance was constantly tested because of the reluctance to admit disquiet or suppress it. Some journalists displayed signs of loneliness, insecurity and stress as they strived to maintain balance in a competitive work environment. Others became emotionally disconnected.

If the exhilaration of 'getting the get' began to dissipate, as it did for some of the participants in this study, balance was threatened. The thrill of the chase in 'getting the get' came from managing to talk someone around who may have been reluctant to speak to the media or finding an exclusive angle. It may also have come from recognition or praise from editors and colleagues, but if that did not sustain the sense of elation, then there were clear warning signs that something was amiss.

Therefore, the final core category is losing balance. This was typified by the three sub-categories of 'hitting the limit', 'battling emotions' and 'lacking control'. The word 'hit' as in 'hit the limit' implies a sudden, impulsive action, or

a point of no return. 'Limit' implies a maximum number and finality. Consequently the term 'hitting the limit' provides a vivid definition. For some journalists interviewed, it was a snap decision to leave the newsroom, whereby the cumulative experiences or drip-by-drip effect of trauma work took its toll and they could no longer function effectively. 'Lacking control' can intensify the effects of 'battling emotions', which, in turn, could hasten someone 'hitting the limit'. 'Control' can be described as feeling valued, earning a say, or having some input into the news production process. The study drew attention to the adverse role that a lack of control in the newsroom can play and how it can have a destabilising effect. For example, one mid-range journalist said she began to dread reading the newspaper the morning after covering a death knock story because she was worried that her story may have been reduced to a news brief 'because a better death came along'. She would feel guilty because she felt she was letting the family down, especially if she had to convince members to speak openly and see them genuinely distressed as they retold their story of grief. Their emotional investment could thus be completely minimised and she would feel as though she had betrayed them if the story had been edited substantially.

P. X (This person asked not to be numbered in case she was identifiable from other comments and jobs she had covered): Whereas now I've gone from at the beginning of the job absolutely loving that adrenaline, all that sort of stuff that I used to enjoy and now having a panic attack every time there is a big story. Getting the shakes, feeling sick, vomiting on the side of the road, proper panic attacks.

It was evident early in the data analysis that a number of the participants felt 'uncomfortable' with trauma work right from the start. Part of this could be, as several expressed, because they did not expect to have to carry out death knocks as part of their job. This implies that they were not taught as part of their journalism programmes about the reality of daily life as a journalist. Once on the job, they were generally expected to hide their emotions, although there were no guidelines or instructions on how to do this, and in spite of research demonstrating that this could be psychologically damaging. Instead, they assimilated rules for appropriate and inappropriate displays of emotions, usually through adapting to the 'professional' norms of behaviour.

Preparation and support: Preparation refers to how much information a journalist has before covering a traumatic incident or court case, for example, or what guidance the editor provides before setting off to cover a job. As one journalist commented, the only time they usually had to prepare was in the car on the way to the scene. Feeling 'unsupported' can be interpreted as having no outlet for their conflicting emotions, or no one to talk to about 'feeling uncomfortable' or 'when you feel like you're the only person who really knows' in the newsroom. This sense of isolation from a lack of support came through repeatedly. One young woman admitted that as a last resort she sought support from victims:

P. 5: You know, I found myself feeling, which is weird, seeking solace in some way from your sources or your interview subjects...

This final stage in the theory of balance – losing balance – highlighted three key issues: newsroom hierarchy, gender and self-responsibility. Although some changes have been made in the media industry towards providing help for stressed journalists, such as free counselling sessions through the Employee Assistance Programme which provides up to three sessions with a counsellor, respondents were sceptical and some referred to it as 'tokenism', plus, the responsibility to seek support has been left to journalists. There is also concern that few counsellors available through the EAP have specialised in trauma.

There was also a lack of genuine acknowledgement by senior staff and management of the impact of traumatic stress. Unlike a physical illness or injury, journalists were reluctant to talk about trauma in newsrooms. Being stressed, traumatised or needing time out because of work-related issues were topics that were not discussed openly, implying stoicism is still revered and there is still some shame involved. Some comments suggested that management considered changes in technology to be more distressing for journalists than covering trauma-related incidents. They also highlighted another important finding in the study, the assumption that media managers would automatically recognise symptoms of stress, or be able to differentiate different types of stress or abnormal patterns of behaviour. Perhaps more importantly, there was the assumption that they would know how to respond, or would consider traumatic stress worthy of attention. This, in itself, is a form of control and demon-

strates power imbalance. As a former editorial manager commented, he had never had any training about how to identify the effects of trauma on his staff. Instead, it was assumed that, as a former journalist, he would inherently know – and it was up to him whether he chose to do anything about it or not.

The point at which some journalists lost balance was when they were put on the spot by editors who could be intimidating. Several female participants recalled newsroom incidents where they felt openly bullied by male editors. One former senior reporter vividly recalled behaviour she felt should not have been allowed to occur.

Participant 16: Bullying is just rife though... it is acceptable because it is accepted.

Bullying appears to have been fostered by newsroom culture and, therefore, is ultimately endorsed by senior management. One participant commented about how observers turned a blind eye when they heard screaming and swearing. And those who did, made a deliberate decision to ignore such behaviour, which is a form of 'bystander effect', or 'bystander apathy' (Darley and Latané 1968). It appears that editors and colleagues, rather than acknowledge when someone is being bullied, ignore such irrational behaviour and outbursts, perhaps in the hope that it might be contained. Managers and editors who foster the traditional hierarchical structure of newsrooms can be seen as indirectly endorsing this behaviour.

A future of emotions?

This grounded theory study was the first investigation in New Zealand into how journalists deal with emotions when covering everyday trauma. It identifies a self-assessment scale so that journalists can check where they sit on the spectrum, from attaining balance, maintaining balance to losing balance. Awareness of the three distinct phases may alert other journalists to the importance of retaining balance: if they detect indicators of stress or witness inappropriate behaviour, rather than ignore it, they may more readily step in and offer or organise support for colleagues.

This study was limited in that the participants were self-selecting. Rather than approach possible interviewees and risk triggering any unpleasant reminders from the past, journalists were invited to contact the researcher. The study is also restricted by the size and population of New Zealand and the number of jour-

nalists who cover trauma reporting in the country. It is only in the larger centres where there are dedicated court reporters or staff allocated to cover emergency stories. In some areas, journalists cover all rounds. This is mostly the case for radio and television reporters in rural areas who cover all aspects of news.

Finally, balance in trauma journalism is a psychosocial phenomenon, a dynamic interrelationship of social factors and journalists' thoughts and behaviours as they strive to carry out their job and manage their emotions. This is because emotionality has destabilised a traditional mode of practice (Barnes 2016). And it is not likely to change as news adapts to become part of social media (Beckett 2016). First, because competition in the media has become intense, Beckett viewed the inclusion of emotions as an economic necessity, especially when there were many distractions from the news. Second, he argued that emotional cues helped attract attention and prolonged engagement with the reader, listener or viewer. Emotions might also encourage people to share content, which Beckett proposed would become increasingly important for the survival of the media. Third, he argued that people responded more favourably to emotion than to facts. He also predicted the end of objectivity as it existed because journalism was reinventing itself as a 'powerful mix of emotion and relativism'. Since emotions in story-telling are becoming more prevalent, it will be important to monitor changes in newsrooms, to ensure they align in time.

Notes

¹ Worksafe, now known as Safe Work Australia, is a statutory body set up to develop national policy related to work health and safety and related workers' compensation

² I would like to thank the peer reviewer who suggested I call this Barnes' theory

References

- Allan, Stuart (2004) *News culture*, New York, Open University Press, second edition
- Backholm, Klaus and Idås, Trond (2015) Ethical dilemmas, work-related guilt and post-traumatic stress reactions of news journalists covering the terror attack in Norway in 2011, *Journal of Traumatic Stress*, Vol. 28, No. 2 pp 142-148
- Barnes, Lyn (2015) An inexplicable gap: Journalism and gender in New Zealand, *Journalism*. Available online at doi:10.1177/1464884915620231
- Barnes, Lyn (2016) *Journalism and everyday trauma: A grounded theory of the impact from death-knocks and court reporting*, PhD thesis, AUT University, Auckland, New Zealand
- Barnes, Lyn (2017 forthcoming) *Preparing journalists for the inevitable*, Leiden, Netherlands, Brill Publishers
- Beckett, Charlie (2016) Navigating a complex media landscape, The London School of Economics and Political Science, 3 February. Available online at <http://blogs.lse.ac.uk/communications/2016/02/03/navigating-a-complex-media-landscape/>
- Benson, Rodney (2006) News media as a journalistic field: What Bourdieu adds to new institutionalism, and vice versa, *Political Communication*, Vol. 23, No 2 pp 187-202
- Berkowitz, Dan (2000) Doing double duty: Paradigm repair and the Princess Diana what-a-story, *Journalism*, Vol. 1, No. 2 pp 125-143
- Berrington, Eileen and Jemphrey, Ann (2003) Pressure on the press: Reflection on reporting tragedy, *Journalism*, Vol. 4, No. 2 pp 225-248
- Browne, Tess, Evangeli, Michael and Greenberg, Neil (2012) Trauma-related guilt and post-traumatic stress among journalists, *Journal of Traumatic Stress*, Vol. 25, No. 2 pp 207-210
- Buchanan, Marla and Keats, Patrice (2011) Coping with traumatic stress in journalism: A critical ethnographic study, *International Journal of Psychology*, Vol. 46, No. 2 pp 127-135
- Coté, William and Simpson, Roger (2000) *Covering violence: A guide to ethical reporting about victims and trauma*, New York, Columbia University Press
- Charmaz, Kathy (2014) *Constructing grounded theory*, London, Sage Publications, second edition
- Darley, John and Latané, Bibb (1968) Bystander intervention in emergencies: Diffusion of responsibility, *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, Vol. 8, No. 4 pp 377-383
- Duncan, Sallyanne and Newton, Jackie (2010) How do you feel? Preparing novice reporters for the death knock, *Journalism Practice*, Vol. 4, No. 4 pp 439-453
- Dworznic, Gretchen (2011) Factors contributing to PTSD and compassion fatigue in television news workers, *International Journal of Business, Humanities and Technology*, Vol. 1, No. 1 pp 22-32
- Dworznic, Gretchen and Grubb, Max (2007) Preparing for the worst: Making a case for trauma training in the journalism classroom, *Journalism & Mass Communication Educator*, Vol. 62, No. 2 pp 190-210
- Hochschild, Arlie R. (1979) Emotion work, feelings, rules and social structure, *American Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 85, No. 3 pp 551-575
- Hollings, James (2005) Reporting the Asian tsunami: Ethical issues, *Pacific Journalism Review*, Vol. 11, No. 2 pp 139-155
- Hopper, K. Megan and Huxford, John F. (2015) Gathering emotion: Examining newspaper journalists' engagement in emotional labour, *Journal of Media Practice*, Vol. 16, No. 1 pp 25-41
- Jones, Megan (2014) Mental health: Why journalists don't get help in the workplace, *Ryerson Review of Journalism*, 9 December. Available online at <http://rrj.ca/mental-health-why-journalists-dont-get-help-in-the-workplace/>
- Keats, Patrice (2012) Journalism, Figley, Charles R. (ed.) *Encyclopedia of trauma: An interdisciplinary guide*, Thousand Oaks, CA, Sage Publications pp 337-340
- Keats, Patrice and Buchanan, Marla (2009) Addressing the effects of assignment stress injury, *Journalism Practice*, Vol. 3, No. 2 pp 162-177
- Kitch, Carolyn (2009) Tears and trauma in the news, Zelizer, Barbie (ed.) *The changing faces of journalism: Tabloidization, technology and truthiness*, Routledge, Oxon pp 29-39
- Lyall, Kimina (2012) Covering traumatic events without traumatizing yourself and others, Ricketson, Matthew (ed.) *Australian Journalism Today*, Melbourne, Palgrave Macmillan pp 28-44
- McMahon, Cait (2001) Covering disaster: A pilot study into secondary trauma for print media journalists reporting on disaster, *Australian Journal of Emergency Medicine*, Vol. 16, No. 2 pp 52-56
- McManus, John (2009) The commercialisation of news, Wahl-Jorgensen, Karin and Hanitzsch, Thomas (eds) *The handbook of journalism studies*, New York, Routledge pp 218-236
- Meyer, Philip (2003) The proper role of the news media in a democratic society, Harper, Joe and Yantek, Thom (eds) *Media, profit and politics: Competing priorities in an open society*, Kent, Ohio, Kent State University Press pp 11-77

Newman, Elana and Nelson, Summer (2012) Reporting on resilience and recovery in the face of disaster and crime: Research and training implications, *Australian Journalism Review*, Vol. 34, No. 1 pp 17-32

Novak, Rosemary and Davidson, Sarah (2013) Journalists reporting on hazardous events: Constructing protective factors within the professional role, *Traumatology*, Vol. 19, No. 4 pp 313-322

Örnebring, Henrik, Möller, Cecilia and Grip, Lena (2015) *Journalism as livelihood: Gender, space and mobility*. Paper presented at Geomedia: Spaces and Mobilities in Mediatized Worlds, Karlstad, Sweden, May

Pantti, Mervi (2010) The value of emotion: An examination of television journalists' notions on emotionality, *European Journal of Communication*, Vol. 25, No. 2 pp 168-181

Rees, Gavin (2007) Weathering the trauma storms, *British Journalism Review*, Vol. 18, No. 2 pp 65-70

Richards, Barry and Rees, Gavin (2011) The management of emotion in British journalism, *Media, Culture & Society*, Vol. 33, No. 6 pp 851-867

Scanlon, Sean (2014) Quake aftermath: Christchurch journalists' collective trauma experience and the implications for their reporting, *MediaNZ*, Vol. 14, No. 1 pp 83-95

Smith, River, Newman, Elana and Drevo, Susan (2015) *Covering trauma: Impact on journalists*, Dart Center for Journalism and Trauma, Columbia University, July. Available online at <https://dartcenter.org/content/covering-trauma-impact-on-journalists>

Wahl-Jorgensen, Karin (2013a) The strategic ritual of emotionality: A case study of Pulitzer Prize-winning articles, *Journalism*, Vol. 14, No. 1 pp 129-145

Wahl-Jorgensen, Karin (2013b) Subjectivity and story-telling in journalism, *Journalism Studies* Vol. 14, No. 3 pp 305-320

Wouters, Cas (1992) On status competition and emotion management: The study of emotions as a new field, *Theory, Culture & Society*, Vol. 9, No.1 pp 229-252

Note on the Contributor

Dr Lyn Barnes is a senior lecturer in journalism at AUT University in Auckland, New Zealand. Her PhD focused on trauma journalism and everyday journalists. Her other areas of interest include magazine journalism and magazine history. She worked as a sub-editor, editor and writer on a number of magazines before joining academia. Before that she has worked for newspapers, radio, television news and current affairs in New Zealand and Australia.

Silencing vulnerability or 'do no harm'?: Ethical dilemmas in reporting suicide at times of crisis

The outbreak of the financial crisis in Europe in 2008 brought social disintegration and impoverishment, the deterioration of social care and the emergence of new vulnerabilities. The numbers are alarming: studies show links between 10,000 suicides during the first period of the financial crisis (2008-2010) in Europe and North America. The common praxis of the media, however, is to 'medicalise' suicide or to avoid it in order to protect the public. The person committing suicide is presented primarily as an individual suffering from mental disorder, disconnected from the society. Existing media guidelines support this praxis. In the framework of media governance and self-regulation, this study examines 26 guidelines and journalistic codes of conduct for reporting suicide worldwide to answer the main research questions: to what extent are existing ethical guidelines adequate and appropriate in the context of the current crisis and to what extent do they serve the public interest? The paper argues that the societal context of suicide remains unacknowledged in media guidelines, which largely fail to assign agency to a person committing suicide.

Keywords: 'do no harm', media ethics, suicide, vulnerability

Introduction

The debate around the ethics of media reporting on suicide oscillates between imposing an absolute ban to pursuing an open discussion in the public sphere. Liberal thinking sees in suicide an individual and sovereign act of auton-

omy to decide when the life ends (Szasz 1999, Hume 2011), whereas conservatives characterise it as irrational, unnatural and wrong (Battin 1995). Media guidelines on reporting suicides, the object of this study, predominantly subscribe to the conservative view. Historically, religion and culture banned suicide as a heavy and unjustifiable sin (Silva and Correa 2015). For the past 50 years, suicide has been an 'untouchable subject in newsrooms' (Richardson 2014). In 2013, Vaughan in the *Calgary Journal* reported that suicide remained a taboo in the media, at least in news bulletins, though at the same time the narrative was changing due to attempts by journalists to open up the media to discussion (Vaughan 2013).

In North America and Europe, Reeves et al. (2013) found an excess of 10,000 economic suicides – alone in Europe between 2008 and 2010, a total of 7,950 more suicides than predicted were recorded; in the USA, 4,750 more and, in Canada, an additional 240 suicides between 2008 and 2009 (ibid). In this vein, the paper discusses the suitability of 26 international and national ethical guidelines for reporting on suicide. After providing a discussion on the concept of governance of content, to which ethics belong, we offer a working definition of vulnerability and proceed to revisit assumptions about suicide that underpin global and national media guidelines and critically assess them on the basis of:

- a) their comprehensiveness in acknowledging suicide as an act of agency;
- b) their provision in assigning responsibility for care and respect to all actors (or stakeholders) and
- c) their provision in enabling or hindering the fulfilment of journalism's mission to provide the public with the tools to deliberate on social issues.

Ethics as governance of content

Codes of conduct provide guidance for journalists on a range of ethical issues including the coverage of suicides. Decisions are not made simply on the basis of newsworthiness but against the background of needing to strike a balance between the public's 'right to know' and the individual's right to privacy. Ethics can be defined as a corpus of principles for 'good' and 'bad' or 'right' and 'wrong' human performance (Sanders 2003) consisting of norms and values that journalists choose in their professional activities in news coverage and editing but also in their impact on audiences (Kiran 2000).

Ethical decisions are often reactions to deep developments in the technological and/or market environments of the media (Rosenau 1992; Heere 2004; Bonnafous-Boucher 2005; Bellamy and Palumbo 2010; Lievens 2015). The first press council was established in Sweden in 1874 (Frost 2000) and formulated the first set of journalistic ethical principles in 1900 (Scholz 2009). However, some researchers argue that Swedish codes were practically not implemented and point out that either the American *Kansas Newspaper Code of Ethics* from 1910 (Peck 2007) or the codes implemented by the French *Syndicat National des Journalistes* in 1918 (Laitila 1995; Scholz 2009) should be considered the first ones worldwide. Professionalisation of journalism, achieved through the foundation of journalists' associations and the introduction of codes of conduct, pointed at political and economic independence and aimed to protect journalists from interventions from outside (McQuail 1992).

Moreover, journalistic codes of ethics often responded to media and social crises provoked by wars or media/political scandals (Scholz 2009). The two waves in the formulation of ethical codes followed the two world wars when objectivity failings by the press put it under pressure; for instance, a US radio broadcaster, who was controlled by the US Navy during the World War I, was criticised for being the channel of war propaganda during the World War II (Peck 2007). New standards were expected to ensure quality and independence and restore credibility. Furthermore, the political shifts in Eastern Europe following the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 brought another wave of (revised) codes of conduct, among others in Poland (1991), Latvia (1992) and Hungary (1994). Journalism codes of ethics existed in several countries in Central/Eastern Europe also in the times of communist regimes but were revised during the transition processes (Laitila 1995) and the abolition of censorship.

The world's first media guidelines for reporting suicide were formulated in the 1980s in Vienna (Foeldy and Ringel 1993) following an experiment in not reporting subway suicides (quite common at the time) for almost a year. The experiment was based on the assumption that absence of coverage could reduce the number of copycat subway suicides (Sonneck et al. 1994; Etzersdorfer and Sonneck 1998). A decline of subway suicides by 60 per cent in one year was noted as a result of reduced media coverage (Sonneck et al. 2012), turning the strategy of *non-reporting* into the dominant model underpinning media guidelines for covering suicide.

Suicide and the media

A growing body of literature recognises the importance of the 'Werther effect' (named after *The sorrows of young Werther*, by Goethe, in which the main character took his own life; thereafter there were reports of young men killing themselves in a similar fashion) in encouraging copycat suicide following media coverage (Romer et al. 2006; Chen et al. 2012; Kim et al. 2013; Tomandl et al. 2017). Debates focus on the protection of vulnerable individuals, by refraining from providing details about the act and the person committing the act (Niederkrotenthaler et al. 2010; Tomandl et al. 2017). Considerations of protection, safety, and privacy are high in journalists' codes of ethics but so is the tension between (self-) censorship and suicide as a newsworthy topic (Jamieson et al. 2003). Ultimately, does the public have the right to be informed about suicide, not simply as a personal but as a social phenomenon that claims one million lives worldwide, annually? (WHO 2002).

Durkheim's seminal study (1951 [1897]) considers social factors as dominant reasons for suicide. Social integration, stability of personal relationships and living within a strong, regulated community reduce the risk of suicide. Regarding emulation of suicidal behaviour¹ Durkheim's argument was that such an act only reflects already existing suicidal intentions. Further studies present partly contradictory results (Pirkis and Blood 2001). Research has identified a range of characteristics of media content that may have harmful effects (Hadinger 1991; Etzersdorfer et al. 2004; Till and Vitouch 2008), but presents no consensus on whether media coverage can lead to imitation (Motto 1967). Pirkis et al. (2001) point out that most studies fail in the description of the quality and type of media coverage, assuming that all reports have *negative* impact on recipients. Niederkrotenthaler et al. (2010) challenged this by demonstrating a potential suicide-preventive role of the media when a recipient learns from the media about alternatives to suicide. This is known as the 'Papageno effect' after Mozart's opera *The Magic Flute* (1791) in which Papageno overcomes his suicidal crisis.

Suicide and vulnerability

The dominant debate 'medicalises' suicide, considering its reporting a matter of public health. Such an approach marginalises the political dimension of suicide: Counts (1980: 332) sees suicide as an expression of 'power by otherwise powerless people' in her ethnographic research on suicides of young women in Papua

New Guinea. Counts (ibid: 334) labels these suicides as a 'social and political act', a means of communication that cannot be ignored by the community. French writer and philosopher Jean Améry also saw suicide as 'a protest whereby the victim ceases at last to be a victim by taking control of his [sic] own fate' (cited in Richardson 2014: 8). For Michelsen (2016), suicide for political reasons is a sacrifice that should be situated in the philosophy of self-destruction. Suicide can be also considered an act of radical communication, a self-sacrificial political act in which 'the suffering body communicates the injustice experienced by the community to a larger audience' (Fierke 2013: 37). Suicide being 'a permanent answer to a temporary problem' (Ziesenis 1991: 238) may be rather considered 'a permanent answer to a permanent problem' at times of crisis. No reliable data exists about the exact number of protest suicides, but the phenomenon is visible in the countries hit by the economic crisis as is elaborated later in this paper. Furthermore, the article does not take into consideration suicide bombings on the grounds that the guidelines do not refer to suicide terrorists attacks and the discussion, however significant, would go beyond the scope of this paper.²

The global financial crisis created new vulnerable groups. But who should be considered a vulnerable person? While there is no single definition of vulnerability (Brachen-Roche et al. 2017), the term means, in general, the 'predisposition or likelihood of being hurt or harmed' (Bogardi 2006). The UNESCO Declaration of Helsinki, of 2003, names disease, disability or other personal, societal or environmental conditions as indicators of vulnerability.³

Studies on suicide as a media topic during economic crises are, with a few exceptions, limited to analyses of the Great Depression in the US during the 1930s.⁴ The economic ruin of thousands of people caused an immediate and dramatic increase of suicides from 12.1 per 100,000 people in the decade before the Depression, to 18.9 in the year of the 1929 Wall Street crash. The suicide rate remained higher than usual throughout the time of the Great Depression. Studies identify the relationship between suicide rates and long-term unemployment, which leads to increased vulnerability of the individual, diminishes social integration and causes the breakdown of intimate relationships (Platt 1984; Mishara 2008; Rachiotis et al. 2015). Unemployment can lead to higher levels of stress and consequently higher rates of suicide. Additionally, suicides and break-outs of infec-

tions are more common in countries that experience cuts in spending on their public health systems (Karanikolos et al. 2013). Results from a study in Greece conducted for the period between 1968 and 2011 to assess the effects of the government debt crisis show a link between austerity and the rise of suicides: every 1 per cent fall in governmental spending led to 0.43 per cent rise in suicide among men (Antonakakis et al. 2014). Rachiotis et al. (2015: 1) even describe suicide as 'a health hazard associated with austerity measures'.

Methodology

We interrogate the norms governing press coverage of suicide in conditions of extended crisis. We pay attention to the *publicness* of suicide acts in crisis-hit countries in Europe, although the scope of this paper is not to determine whether or not they constitute acts solely deriving from mental ill health. Instead, we foreground the conscious intention of the actor where motive is clearly articulated.

Few studies have investigated guidelines in any systematic way (Pirkis et al 2006; Niederkrotenthaler et al. 2010). This paper follows a case study design, with an in-depth analysis of the strategies employed in the reporting of suicide. It analyses 26 specific guidelines for covering suicide from Australia, UK, Hong Kong, New Zealand, Sri Lanka, Scotland, Ireland, USA, Northern Ireland, Japan, Canada, Switzerland, Austria together with the guidelines issued by the World Health Organisation (WHO) in 2000, which have been adopted in many countries. Noteworthy, in eight countries – Austria, Bulgaria, Denmark, Estonia, Germany, Lithuania, Norway, South Korea, Sweden, Turkey and the United Kingdom – caution with suicide coverage is recommended in journalistic codes of ethics. The codes of ethics, however, are very brief and devote no more than one paragraph to suicide reporting. In contrast, separate media guidelines allow a comprehensive analysis of the phenomenon of suicide and its relevance for the media.

To analyse the guidelines, we applied a multi-method approach combining textual and policy analysis. Text is understood as a multi-faceted arrangement of discursive strategies that derive from a specific cultural background (Barthes 1972). The unique contribution of textual analysis and its main instrument is deconstruction that emphasises the core ideological and cultural pre-concepts of the text (Fuersich 2009). This open and multi-layered technique of reading text focuses on identifying both the frame-

works that shape the text and the underlying patterns. Furthermore, the goals of media policy analysis are to scrutinise the process of communication policy and to point out how they affect the field of communication in general (Hansen et al. 1998) while ensuring the widest range of study and representations of interests are adequately incorporated in the analysis.

The global paradigm in suicide media coverage

Codes of ethics adopted by media organisations and journalists are a core instrument of self-regulation. As Calvert (2004) stresses, the fact that something is legal does not automatically mean that it is ethical. The law and legal order inform us only what is allowed and what is forbidden. In contrast, ethics tell us what we *should or should not* do.

Overall, countries tend to avoid the prescriptive treatment of content through legislation, with the exception of New Zealand, leaving it up to journalists' professional judgment how to approach a suicide story. Ethics presupposes individual attempts to make moral choices (Plaisance 2014).

Graph 1 shows that most of the guidelines have been issued by NGOs and state authorities, mainly Ministries of Health.⁵

Some of our findings are consistent with the results presented in previous studies. We observe a clear global dominant paradigm in the guidelines and as Bohanna and Wang (2012) argue, they are all related to the reporting style promoted by the WHO varying in length and complexity. State authorities focus more on the social role of the media to 'educate' people and to debunk myths about suicide by presenting positive role models and incorporating moral

judgments (i.e. suicide is not a solution). Typical terms used in the codes include:

- encourage (public understanding),
- seek (expert advice),
- clarify (facts),
- don't over-emphasise (the positive characteristics of the person who has died),
- don't show (suicide as a rewarding experience, or an appropriate or effective way to end life),
- debunk (common myths about suicide).

The guidelines point out the need to fight against specific myths and beliefs about suicide such as:

- suicide is unpreventable, nothing can motivate people who want to commit suicide to change their decision;
- suicide is a problem of specific socio-economic groups (only rich or only poor);
- individuals with suicide ideation stay forever suicidal;
- suicide happens unexpected, there are no warning signs;
- people who talk about their suicide thoughts only threaten but do not want to commit suicide;
- once a person overcomes the suicide crisis, they are not at risk of suicide any more.

The guidelines by NGOs encourage journalists to discuss the phenomenon of suicide, in the guidelines' words to 'participate' in the story, and to use their media as platforms for multi-perspective discourse. In contrast, the guidelines by journalists for journalists are mostly concerned with issues related to privacy and the public interest and foreground the independence of journalists.

Graph 1: Guidelines for media reporting suicide used in the analysis. NGOs: Canadian Association for Suicide Prevention, IPSILON Switzerland, Samaritans Ireland, Samaritans UK, Befrienders International UK, PAPYRUS Preventing of Young Suicide UK, SPAN Suicide Prevention Action Network USA, SPRC Suicide Prevention Resource Center USA, SANE Australia, PressWise Trust (UK)

New Zealand has the most interventionist approach as it is the only country with a law forbidding suicide reporting. The Coroner's Act (1988) forbids the disclosure of a method of suicide unless with a coroner's permission. This law is seen as 'draconian' (Hollings 2013) and criticised by scholars and media professionals. Hollings (ibid) contends that such legislation is based on an outdated conception of media effects and does not take into account nuances in suicide research.

In the decision not to report suicide, one question is inescapable: does the right to privacy outweigh the public's right to know? In media reporting, three elements in the concept of privacy are relevant (Richards 2012). First, the emotional wellbeing of the actor and the bereaved is protected. Second, unconfirmed information about the cause of the death is limited. Third, privacy tort does not prohibit the disclosure of any information which is in the public interest, especially if it is a protest suicide.

Twenty of the most frequently mentioned recommendations (in at least four codes) are presented in Table 1. Four concepts underpin the recommendations: public interest, protection of the public, the individual's right to know and the individual's right to privacy. Recommendations can serve more than one aim; for instance,

a guideline: *Do not use photographs of the victim* promotes the actor's right to privacy and protects the public from potential identification with the victim as pictures could suggest similarities between the suicidal person and the reader.

The recommendations are clustered in four categories: linguistic/editorial issues, social elements of suicide acts, the person committing the act and suicide as matter of public interest.

New vulnerabilities and policy

Niederkrötenhaller et al. (2010) studied 15 international guidelines and formulated a catalogue of harmful and protective items. This system of classification is in our view in need of revision. To begin with, the public can be harmed by media coverage that includes the identity of the suicidal person and information about the suicidal act (method in headline, step by step 'guide', suicide location reported). Policies regulating these elements are in line with the right to privacy and there is no evidence that the public interest is served by providing detailed information. However, we identify exceptions, i.e. suicides committed for overtly political reasons. Moreover, a sophisticated analysis of social environments is one of the main missions of journalistic work, anchored in journalistic codes of ethics. We argue the guidelines push media professionals to silence and shift the focus, instead, to mental disorder related to suicide.

It has been suggested in the literature that background information of a suicidal act has a protective character. However, such information is recommended only at the individual level. It is a limited perspective since mental disorder that leads to suicide might also have a social origin. For instance, sudden unemployment is often the reason for male suicide (Barr et al. 2012). Furthermore, there is a contradiction in the guideline itself: on the one hand, it dismisses the societal dimension of suicide but calls for the use of statistics on the other. Yet, in times of economic crisis and social breakdowns, statistics can highlight the social reasons of suicide. Moreover, research has shown a historical correlation between the increase in suicides and austerity, ranging from the Great Depression in the 1930s (Granados and Roux 2009), through the Russian crisis in the early 1990s (Chang et al. 2013) to the economic breakdown in Japan, South Korea and Hong Kong in 1997 (Chang et al. 2009). Similarly, since 2008 and the beginning of the current global financial crisis, there has been a clear rise in suicides (Chang et al.

Recommendation	Public interest	Protect the public	Individual right to know	Right to privacy
Do not disclose details (16)		x		x
Use appropriate language (26)		x		x
Avoid naming methods (24)		x		x
Caution with bereaved (17)				x
Educate public (26)	X		X	
Use expert opinion (19)	X	x	X	
Provide helpline numbers and other sources of help (26)	X	x		
Debunk myths about suicide (26 ^a)	X	x		
Reconsider newsworthiness (9)	X		X	
Address public interest (12)	X			
Respect privacy (8)				x
Reconsider covering the story (13) in order to protect yourself (6)	X		X	
Avoid giving the article a prominent place in any media (14)		x		
Use statistics for background (5)	X			
Avoid sensationalisation (6)		x		
Avoid term 'suicide' in headlines (4)		x		
Avoid oversimplification (13)		x		x
Avoid glorification (15)		x		
Do not present suicide as a solution (14)		x		
Do not use images/photographs of the victim (7)		x		x

Table 1: Most frequently mentioned recommendations

2013). The WHO reported alone for the year 2009 about 4,900 excess suicides compared with the expected number based on previous years. The group at highest risk were men from countries with historically low unemployment rates (ibid).

Among European countries, Greece has been affected by the 'toxic economic conditions accompanying the austerity measures' (Branas et al. 2015: 1). Greece has historically occupied the last place in suicide statistics with the lowest suicide rate in the world. In recent years, a growing amount of literature reports an increase in crisis-induced suicides in the country (Chang et al. 2013; Branas et al 2015; Rachiotis et al. 2015). To determine the effects of austerity (-) and prosperity (+) on suicide rates in Greece, Branas et al. (2015) conducted a 30-year interrupted time series analysis. Twelve economic events between 1983 and 2012, such as the introduction of euro in 2002 (+), the holding of the Olympic Games in Athens in 2004 (+) or a series of austerity measures and protests, riots and violence since 2008 (-) were identified and tested with monthly data about suicides. The results demonstrate an increase in suicides corresponding to austerity-related events in the country. In particular, the events of June 2011, when the Greek government passed a series of new austerity measures and violence during demonstrations escalated, there was a significant, abrupt and sustained increase (36 per cent) in suicides. In contrast, after the launch of the euro in 2002, male suicides decreased by 27 per cent. 2012 was the year with the highest monthly (July and May) reported suicides. It is the year when a Greek pensioner committed suicide in front of the parliament building in Athens to protest against the austerity measures, as he wrote in his suicide note (Kitsantonis 2012, Davis 2015).

Historically, politically-motivated suicides have increased mostly in response to governmental activities. One example is a suicide wave of Greek intellectuals in the 1920s to protest against the actions of the Turkish state (Hardinghaus and Heyer 2012). Another example broadly discussed in the literature is the 'tradition' of self-immolation as a form of political resistance (Hannun 2014). Bulgaria, a country in deep economic and political crisis, experienced at least six self-immolations in public in 2013 (Reuters 2013). They have been reported prominently in the international media. According to the existing guidelines, coverage of these events should have highlighted the mental illness of the person committing suicide thus mar-

ginalising the all-important political factors. A possible explanation for this might be that the recommendations have been drawn up at times of relative stability and prosperity and do not address situations of social breakdowns.

Existing recommendation	Empirical cases
No details to limit potential imitation	Suicide committed in public space to highlight political protest (date and place often symbolic, i.e. Syntagma Square in Greece 2012, parliament in Bulgaria 2013)
Do not quote from the suicide note	Political suicide in public with an explicit message to publicise
Keep the explanation at the individual level	Increasing unemployment, typical in times of crisis, leads to increase in suicide numbers
Draw attention to the mental problems of suicide victims	Crisis-related diminished access to mental health services and the breakdown of social support networks lead to increased mental ill health and suicide
Use statistics, for instance to show that death through suicide is more frequent than in car accidents	Evidence for increased suicide rates during economic crises
No connections between suicides (either geographically or in terms of gender)	There are countries/areas and groups of people with excess number of suicides, for instance males in the UK (Gunnell et al. 2015)
Individual risk factors (i.e. mental health, suicide in family)	In crises, there are additional risk factors, such as the threat of unemployment, cuts in health services

Examples highlighting the inadequacy of guidelines for covering crisis-related suicide

In this respect, the Indian guidelines, published in 2003, can be seen as exceptions. In the preamble of the code, the societal background is discussed as a relevant factor:

On the one hand it appears to be the most personal action an individual can take. On the other hand, it is ubiquitous, has occurred throughout human history in all corners of the world and often under circumstances that show such a striking similarity that one has but to conclude that social factors play an important, if not decisive role in its causation (Gururaj and Isaac 2003: 15).

Moreover, it states that journalists – in order to avoid blaming the victim – should always consider 'a number of social, environmental, biological, occupational and family-related factors'.

Conclusions

One aim of this study was to assess the extent to which existing journalistic ethical guidelines are adequate and appropriate in the current financial and social crises and serve the public interest. Our first consideration was to explore the relationship between the right to privacy and the public interest. State authorities focus on the responsibilities of journalists to educate the public about suicide, journalists' associations speak for autonomy of the journalists in serv-

ing the public interest and NGOs are concerned about the journalist's wellbeing while covering suicide. We could not identify any ethical guidelines that directly responded to the actor's interest and intention. Monk (1987) underlines the limitations of understanding suicide as only an individual matter. He argues it is unlikely that psychiatric illness can be reasons for all suicides, pointing to significant gender, racial and class factors, as well as societal conditions within which groups become vulnerable. As an example, he argues, there is no evidence for a sudden increase in serious psychiatric illness in the 1930s that could explain the high suicide rates during the Great Depression. Further, the 'medicalisation' of suicide (among other social phenomena) offers no space for reflection on individual autonomy.

Thus, we argue that existing media regulatory frameworks are inadequate and inappropriate. Firstly, the societal context of suicide remains severely unacknowledged in all but one code. Second, the lack of adequate reflection on the impact of realities of armed conflict, forced displacement, impoverishment and other forms of mental and physical violence experienced by individuals in the codes reflects a limited understanding of the contexts of suicide and perpetuates its 'medicalisation'. Third, the guidelines fail to acknowledge appropriately agency in the public sphere.

Notes

¹ Based on model learning of Bandura (1977), people learn through observing others' behaviour, attitudes and outcomes of those behaviours also through media

² Moreover, the motivation of a suicide bomber is less to take their own life but rather to take others'

³ See <http://www.unesco.org/new/en/natural-sciences/science-technology/science-legislation/helsinki-declaration/>, accessed on 10 July 2017

⁴ I.e. Stack, Steven (1992) The effect of the media on suicide: The Great Depression, *Suicide and Life-Threatening BEHAVIOR*, June, Vol. 22, No. 2 pp 255-267 and Cook, Thomas, Dintze, Leonard and Mark, Melvin (1980) The casual analysis of concomitant time series, *Applied Social Psychology Annual*, No 1 pp 93-135. Discussion of the literature goes beyond the scope of this paper

⁵ Guidelines published by the state authorities belong mostly to national suicide prevention programmes

⁶ In total, 44 items regarding myths about suicide due to some guidelines paying particular attention to myths

References

- Antonakakis, Nikolaos and Collins, Alan (2014) The impact of fiscal austerity on suicide: On the empirics of a modern Greek tragedy, *Social Science & Medicine*, April, No. 112 pp 39-50
- Bandura, Albert (1977) *Social learning theory*, Englewood Cliffs, NJ, Prentice-Hall
- Barr, Ben, Taylor-Robinson, David, Scott-Samuel, Alex, McKee, Martin and Stuckler, David (2012) Suicides associated with the 2008-10 economic recession in England: Time trend analysis, *BMJ*, August, No. 345: e5142

- Barthes, Roland (1972) *Mythologies*, London, Cape
- Battin, Margaret Pabst (1995) *Ethical issues in suicide*, Englewood Cliffs, NJ, Prentice Hall
- Bellamy, Richard and Palumbo, Antonino (2010) *From government to governance*, Farnham, Ashgate
- Bohanna, India and Wang, Xiangdong (2012) Media guidelines for the responsible reporting of suicide. A review of effectiveness, *Crisis*, January, Vol. 33, No. 4 pp 190-198
- Bogardi, Janos (2006) Introduction, Birkmann, Joern (ed.) *Measuring vulnerability to natural hazards: Towards disaster resilient societies*, Tokyo, New York, Paris, United Nations University Press pp 1-6
- Bonnafous-Boucher, Maria (2005) From government to governance, *Ethical Perspectives*, January, Vol. 12, No. 4 pp 521-534
- Branas, Charles, Kastanaki, Anastasia, Michalodimitrakis, Manolis, Trougas, John, Kranioti, Elen, Theodorakis, Pavlos, Carr, Brendan and Wiebe, Douglas (2015) The impact of economic austerity and prosperity event on suicide in Greece: A 30-year interrupted time-series analysis, *BMJ Open*, January, No. 5 pp 1-10. Available online at <http://dx.doi.org/10.1136/bmjopen-2014-005619>
- Bruun, Lars (ed.) (1979) *Professional codes in journalism*, Prague, International Organization of Journalists
- Calvert, Clay (2004) *Voyeur nation: Media, privacy, and peering in modern culture*, New York, Basic Books
- Chakravartty, Paula and Sarikakis, Katharine (2006) *Media policy and globalization*, Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press
- Chang, Shu-Sen, Gunnwell, David, Sterne, Jonathan, A.C., Lu, Tsung-Hsueh and Cheng, Andrew T.A. (2009) Was the economic crisis 1997-1998 responsible for rising suicide rates in East/Southeast Asia? A time-trend analysis for Japan, Hong Kong, South Korea, Taiwan, Singapore and Thailand, *Social Science & Medicine*, February, No. 68 pp 1322-1331
- Chang, Shu-Sen, Stuckler, David, and Yip, Paul (2013) Impact of 2008 global economic crisis on suicide: Time trend study in 54 countries, *BMJ*, September, No. 347 pp 1-15
- Coroner's Act (1988) New Zealand Legislation. Available online at <http://www.legislation.govt.nz/>
- Counts, Dorothy A. (1980) Fighting back is not the way: Suicide and the women of Kalai, *American Ethnologist*, May, Vol. 7, No. 2 pp 332-351
- Davis, Elisabeth (2015) 'We've toiled without end': Publicity, crisis, and the suicide 'epidemic' in Greece, *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, October, Vol. 57, No. 4 pp 1007-1036
- Durkheim, Emile (1951 [1897]) *Suicide: A study in sociology*, New York, The Free Press of Glencoe
- Etzersdorfer, Elmar and Sonneck, Gernot (1998) Preventing suicide by influencing mass media reporting. The Viennese experience 1980-1996, *Archives of Suicide Research*, March, Vol. 4 pp 67-74
- Etzersdorfer, Elmar, Voracek, Martin and Sonneck, Gernot (2004) A dose-response relationship of imitational suicides with newspaper distribution, *Archives of Suicide Research*, Vol. 8, No. 2 pp 137-145
- Fierke, Karen Marie (2013) *Political self-sacrifice: Agency, body and emotion in international relations*, New York, Cambridge University Press
- Foeldy, Reginald and Ringel, Erwin (1993) *Machen uns die Medien krank? Depression durch Ueberinformation [Does the media make us sick? Depression through information overload]*, Munich, Universitas Verlag
- Frost, Chris (2000) *Media ethics and self-regulation*, Harlow, Pearson Education
- Fuersich, Elfriede (2009) In defense of textual analysis: Restoring a challenged method for journalism and media studies, *Journalism Studies*, February, Vol. 10, No. 2 pp 238-252
- Granados, Jose A., Tapia and Roux, Ana, V., Diez (2009) Life and death during the Great Depression, *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America*, Vol. 196, No.41 pp 17290-17295

- Gunnel, David, Donovan, Jenny, Barnes, Maria, Davies, Rosie, Hawton Keith, Kapur Nav, Hollingworth, Will and Metcalfe, Chris (2015) The 2008 global financial crisis: Effects on mental health and suicide, *Policy Bristol, Policy Report 3/2015*. Available online at http://www.bris.ac.uk/media-library/sites/policybristol/documents/PolicyReport-3-Suicide-recession.pdf#_ga=2.213866708.1513594024.1501836411-1536222608.1501836411
- Gururaj, G. and Isaac, M. K. (2003) Suicide prevention: Information for media professionals, NIMHANS/EPI/SUI.Prevn/Media. Available online at https://www.iasp.info/pdf/task_forces/India_Information_Media_Professionals.pdf, accessed on 10 July 2017
- Hannun, Marya (2013) Self-immolation in Bulgaria isn't as new as you might think, *Foreign Policy*, 14 March. Available online at <http://foreignpolicy.com/2013/03/14/self-immolation-in-bulgaria-isnt-as-new-as-you-might-think/>, accessed on 10 July 2017
- Hadinger, Boglarka (1994) *Selbstmord und die Medien : Empirische, historische und therapeutische Aspekte [Suicide and media: Empirical, historical and therapeutic issues]*, Tübingen, Lebenskunst
- Hansen, Anders (2000) *Mass communication research methods*, Basingstoke, Macmillan Press
- Hardinghaus, Barbara, Heyer, Julia Amalia (2012) *Griechenland Der letzte Vorhang, Der Spiegel*, 13. August. Available online at <http://www.spiegel.de/spiegel/print/d-87737201.html>
- Hollings, James (2013) Reporting suicide in New Zealand: Time to end censorship, *Pacific Journalism Review*, October, Vol. 19, No. 2 pp 136-155
- Hume, David (2011) On suicide, Szasz, Thomas (ed.) *Suicide: The shame of medicine prohibition*, Syracuse, New York, Syracuse University Press pp 109-111
- Heere, W. (ed.) (2004) *From government to governance: The growing impact of non-state actors on the international and European legal system*, The Hague, T. M. C. Asser Press
- Jamieson, Patrick, Jamieson, Kathleen and Romer, Daniel (2003) The responsible reporting of suicide in print journalism, *American Behavioral Scientist*, August, Vol. 46, No. 12 pp 1643-1660
- Karanikolos, Marina, Mladovsky, Philipa, Cylus, Jonathan, Thomson, Sarah, Basu, Sanjay, Stuckler, David, Mackenbach, Johan and McKee, Martin (2013) Financial crisis, austerity, and health in Europe, *Lancet*, March, Vol. 381 pp 1323-1331
- Kim, Jae-Hyun, Park, Eun-Cheol, Nam, Jung-Mo, Park SoHee, Cho, Jaelim, Kim, Sun-Jung, Choi, Jae-Woo and Cho, Eun (2013) The Werther effect of two celebrity suicides: An entertainer and a politician, *PLoS ONE*, Vol. 8, No. 12. Available online at <http://journals.plos.org/plosone/article?id=10.1371/journal.pone.0084876>
- Kiran, R. N. (2000) *Philosophies of communication and media ethics: Theory, concepts and empirical issues*, Delhi, BR Publishing Corporation
- Kitsantonis, Niki (2012) Pensioner's suicide continues to shake Greece, *New York Times*, 6 April. Available online at <http://www.nytimes.com/2012/04/06/world/europe/pensioners-suicide-continues-to-shake-greece.html>, accessed on 10 July 2017
- Laitila, Tiina (1995) Journalistic codes of ethics in Europe, *European Journal of Communication*, December, Vol. 10, No. 4 pp 527-544
- Lievens, Matthias (2015) From government to governance: A symbolic mutation and its repercussions for democracy, *Political Studies, Trust and Democracy*, Special Issue: Online only supplement on governance, Vol. 63 (Supplement S1) pp 2-17
- Machlin, Anna, Skehan, Jaelea, Sweet, Melissa, Wake, Alexandra, Fletcher, Justine, Spittal, Matthew and Pirkis, Jane (2012) Reporting suicide: Interpreting media guidelines, *Australian Journalism Review*, Vol. 34, No. 2 pp 45-56
- McQuail, Denis (1992) *Media performance: Mass communication and the public interest*, London, Sage
- Michelsen, Nicholas (2016) *Politics and suicide: The philosophy of political self-destruction*, London, New York, Routledge
- Mishara, Brian (2008) Suicide and the economic depression: Reflections on suicide during the Great Depression, *IASP Newsbulletin*, December. Available online at https://www.iasp.info/pdf/papers/mishara_suicide_and_the_economic_depression.pdf, accessed on 10 July 2017
- Monk, Mary (1987) Epidemiology of suicide, *Epidemiologic Reviews*, Vol. 9 pp 51-69
- Motto, Jerome (1967) Suicide and suggestibility: The role of the press, *American Journal of Psychiatry*, August, Vol. 124, No. 2 pp 252-256
- Niederkroenthaler, Thomas, Voracek, Martin, Herberth, Arno, Till, Benedikt, Strauss, Markus, Etzersdorfer, Elmar, Eisenwort, Brigitte and Sonneck, Gernot (2010) Role of media reports in completed and prevented suicide: Werther v. Papageno effects, *The British Journal of Psychiatry*, August, Vol. 197 pp 234-243
- Peck, Lee Anne (2007) Ethics, Vaughn, Stephen, L. (ed.) *Encyclopedia of American journalism*, New York, Routledge pp 155-161
- Plaisance, Patrick Lee (2014) *Media ethics: Key principles for responsible practice*, Los Angeles, California, Sage
- Platt, Stephen (1984) Unemployment and suicidal behaviour: A review of the literature, *Social Science and Medicine*, Vol. 19 pp 93-115
- Pirkis, Jane and Blood, Warwick (2001) Suicide and the media: Part I. Reportage in nonfictional media, *Crisis*, October, Vol. 22, No. 4 pp 146-154
- Pirkis, Jane, Blood, Warwick, Beautrais, Annette, Burgess, Philip and Skehan, Jaelea (2006) Media guidelines on the reporting of suicide, *Crisis*, January, Vol. 27 pp 82-87
- Rachiotis, George, Stuckler, David, McKee, Martin and Hadjichristodoulou, Christos (2015) What has happened to suicides during the Greek economic crisis? Findings from an ecological study of suicides and their determinants (2003-2012), *BMJ Open*, March, Vol. 5. Available online at <http://researchonline.lshtm.ac.uk/2137843/1/bmjopen-2014-007295.pdf>, accessed on 10 July 2017
- Reeves, Aaron, McKee Martin and Stuckler, David (2014) Economic suicides in the Great Recession in Europe and North America, *The British Journal of Psychiatry*, September, Vol. 205, No. 3 pp 246-247
- Richards, Neil (2012) Tort privacy and free speech, Dörr, Dieter and Weaver Russell (eds) *The right to privacy: Perspectives from three continents*, Berlin, Boston, De Gruyter pp 255-275
- Richardson, Gemma (2014) *(Un)Covering suicide: The changing ethical norms in Canadian journalism*. PhD thesis submitted at the University of Western Ontario. Available online at <http://ir.lib.uwo.ca/etd/2278>
- Romer, Dan, Jamieson, Patrick, Jamieson Kathleen (2006) Are news reports of suicide contagious? A stringent test in six US cities, *Journal of Communication*, April, Vol. 56 No. 2 pp 253-270
- Rosenau, James (1992) Governance, order, and change in world politics, Rosenau, James and Czempel, Ernst-Otto (eds) *Governance without government: Order and change in world politics*, Cambridge, UK, Cambridge University Press pp 1-29
- Reuters (2013) Sixth man sets himself on fire in Bulgarian poverty protest, 20 March. Available online at <http://uk.reuters.com/article/uk-bulgaria-government-protest-idUKBRE92JOHR20130320>
- Sanders, Karen (2003) *Ethics and journalism*, London, Sage
- Sarikakis, Katharine (2012) The governance of communication and culture: Regularising the regimes of production and consumption, Mayer, Vicky (ed.) *Blackwell companion to media production*, Malden, MA, Blackwell
- Silva, Antonia, Geraldo, Correa, Humberto (2015) Suicide: It's time to break taboos, *Psychology Today*, 13 August. Available online at <https://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/update-brazil/201508/suicide-it-s-time-break-taboos>
- Szasz, Thomas (1999) *Fatal freedom: The ethics and politics of suicide*, Westport, CT, Praeger
- Sonneck, Gernot, Etzersdorfer, Elmar and Nagel-Kuess, S. (1994) Imitative suicide on the Viennese subway, *Soc.Sci.Med*, Vol. 38, No.3 pp 453-457

Sonneck, Gernot, Hirnsperger, Hans and Mundschütz, Reinhard (2012) Suicide and suicide prevention in Vienna from 1938 to 1945, *Neuropsychiatr*, October, Vol. 26, No. 3 pp 111-120

Till, Benedikt and Vitouch, Peter (2008) On the impact of suicide portrayal in films: Preliminary results, Herberth, Arno, Niederkotenthaler Thomas and Till, Benedikt (eds) *Suizidalität in den Medien: Interdisziplinäre Betrachtungen [Suicide tendency in the media: Interdisciplinary considerations]*, Münster, LIT-Verlag pp 67-75

Tomandl, Gerald, Sonneck, Gernot, Stein, Claudius and Niederkotenthaler, Thomas (2008) *Leitfaden zur Berichterstattung über Suizid, Kriseninterventionszentrum*. Available online at http://www.kriseninterventionszentrum.at/dokumente/pdf3_Leitfaden_Medien.pdf

White, Robert (2000) New approaches to media ethics: Moral dialogue, creating normative paradigms and public cultural truth, *Media ethics: Opening social dialogue*, Pattyn, Bart (ed.) Leuven, Peeters pp 47-67

WHO (2002) Suicide prevention in Europe, Working paper. Available online at <http://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/10665/107452/1/E77922.pdf>, accessed on 10 July 2017

Vaughan, Todd Colin (2013) Suicide still taboo in the media, *Calgary Journal*, 8.October. Available online at <http://www.calgaryjournal.ca/index.php/living/1871-suicide-still-taboo-in-the-media>

Ziesenis, Elizabeth (1991) Suicide coverage in newspapers: An ethical consideration, *Journal of Mass Media Ethics*, Vol. 5, No. 4 pp 234-244

- Guidelines on suicide reporting available online at https://www.iasp.info/media_guidelines.php, <http://www.ipsilon.ch/de/medien/medienguidelines.cfm> and http://www.suizidpraevention.at/pdf/resource_media.pdf

Note on the Contributors

Izabela Korbiel is a researcher, PhD candidate and member of the Media Governance and Industries Research Lab. Her research focuses on the under-researched field of ethics and governance of content. She teaches courses in communication ethics and methods at the University of Vienna and works on her thesis about media coverage of suicide in times of financial crisis. She has conducted research in several European countries mostly affected by the current crisis. Contact details: Department of Communication, University of Vienna, Währingerstr. 29, 1090 Wien. Email: izabela.korbiel@univie.ac.at.

Dr Katharine Sarikakis is Professor of Communication Science specialising in Media Governance, Media Organisation and Media Industries at the Department of Communication Science, University of Vienna. She holds the Jean Monnet Chair in Media Governance and Integration and leads the Media Governance and Industries Research lab. Contact details: Department of Communication, University of Vienna, Währingerstr. 29, 1090 Wien. Email: katharine.sarikakis@univie.ac.at.

Jokes in public: The ethical implications of radio prank calls

Digital communication has made international prank calls easier than they have ever been. This paper examines the ethics behind the practice of radio prank calls and their implications for mainstream journalism – applying a combination of Elliott and Ozar’s ‘systematic moral analysis’ and Kant’s principles of the categorical imperative and ends as means. This is done using three transnational cases of prank calls emanating from Australia, Spain and Canada with consequences ranging from the death of an innocent, vulnerable nurse working in a London hospital to the public embarrassment of a vice-presidential candidate in the United States. The study argues that while radio prank calls can contribute to the public sphere, they can also have unintended negative consequences that reflect badly not only on radio hosts but also on mainstream journalists.

Keywords: prank calls, radio hosts, systematic moral analysis, Kant, ends as means, categorical imperative

The inception of digital media changed the ways radio programmes are produced and received across the world. Not only is access to programmes faster today, it has become easier for viewers to switch channels given their shorter attention spans (Agarwal and Barthel 2015). Radio producers are, therefore, constantly seeking innovative ways to package their shows (Purdey 2000). The communication revolution has led to a proliferation of media outlets that compete for both audiences and advertisers. As a result, radio and television rating points have become central in deciding the popularity of media outlets so that the advertisers can conveniently choose their target (Turner 2009). Increasing competition, together with the race for rating points, has pushed many television

channels and radio stations to make their programming sensational and attention-grabbing (Wang 2012).

These factors came to a head in 2012 when two Australian radio hosts prank-called a nurse in a London hospital leading to her suicide. The high-profile case generated a discussion on the ethics of prank calls and suggestions that a more equitable and participatory journalism is necessary when reporting on ‘victims’ and the vulnerable.

Social media also have had a significant effect on coverage of suicide. The suicide of actor Robin Williams in August 2014 resulted in coverage that revealed tensions between control of the media through regulatory systems and professional guidelines and the unregulated world of social media. Here, audiences can access content that the media, when contemplating publication, are required to consider with extreme caution for fear of inciting copycat behaviour amongst vulnerable people.

In prank calls designed to extract classified or personal information that cannot be obtained through conventional or legitimate routes, a radio host masquerades as someone else while tricking informants into revealing the classified information. Our ‘vulnerable’ population, in this study, are the victims of prank calls. By being tricked into providing information, they are rendered unable to protect themselves from harm or exploitation. The prank callers take this ability away when they trick them. Furthermore, as the case of the nurse shows, this population may have additional vulnerabilities that radio hosts should be aware of.

Pranks have been theorised as the use of humour in media ‘to stage an event that makes a social or political point, circulating it in the public sphere’ (McLeod 2011: 97). Author of *Gulliver’s Travels*, Jonathan Swift (1667-1745), who viewed pranks in this way, believed they made audiences more thoughtful, reflective and humane (McLeod 2011). On the other hand, the deception inherent in pranks has been compared to the use of physical force to manipulate someone into doing what the prankster wants (Bok 1978).

In the past, prank calls and other trick-based methods constituted humour or satire on radio and television as distinct from hard news. In recent decades, however, the genres have partially overlapped, leading to a blurring of boundaries between news and entertainment

(McBride and Rosenstiel 2013). A 2004 poll showed that growing numbers of 18 to 29-year-olds in the United States accessed their presidential campaign news from sources such as *Saturday Night Live* and *The Daily Show* rather than from traditional news sources (Williams and Delli Carpini 2009). Scholars such as Gant (2007: 201) argued against adopting a narrow definition of journalism. He asserted that 'there may be journalists who make it their profession, but one need not be a professional journalist to practice journalism'.

An examination of radio talk show hosts reveals their roles as quasi-journalists. As the cases in this paper show, they adopt a journalistic format, using false personages to gain access to information about prominent people for the purpose of sharing that information with the wider public. The purpose of radio talk shows is as often to entertain as to inform, but this tabloid format parallels that of journalism. Therefore, there is a need to study the growing practice of prank calls because of its implications for mainstream journalism and ethics.

While there have been sporadic reflections in newspapers and the blogosphere on the practice of prank calls (e.g. *Ethics Alarms* 2012; Guangming 2012; Minnick 2011), the analytical perspective on the issue has been largely missing. Pearson (2015) adopted a Buddhist ethics approach to analyse the Australian prank call case, concluding that the prank call practice is inherently unethical and should be 'ruled out'.

This study, however, departs from Pearson's (ibid) conclusion to consider some unaddressed questions: At what point does the humorous engagement with the public sphere outweigh the potential harms of deception? What are the implications of entertainment-driven prank calls for legitimate journalism? While it is hard to answer these questions definitively, this study explores them through the analysis of three cases of radio prank calls originating in Australia, Canada and Spain. All three happen to cross national boundaries, adding a global dimension to the phenomenon of pranks. The study employs systematic moral analysis (SMA) and Kantianism, in particular the concepts of ends as means and the categorical imperative.

Case 1: The royal prank tragedy

The first case – which was also used in Pearson's (2015) study – is of Jacintha Saldanha, a nurse who worked at the King Edward VII's Hospital in London. She committed suicide following a call in which she was pranked. Forty-six-year-

old Saldanha worked in the United Kingdom for 10 years until her death in December 2012. The prank call that led to her death was made by two Australian radio hosts, Mel Greig and Michael Christian, from Sydney's 2Day FM station. The two radio jockeys were hosts of the *Hot30 Countdown* show and wanted to get information about the health of Kate Middleton, wife of the Duke of Cambridge Prince William, who was admitted for a pregnancy-related fever in the hospital where Saldanha worked.

In particular, the two Australian radio hosts wanted details of the Duchess of Cambridge's severe morning sickness. They pretended to be Queen Elizabeth and Prince Charles. Saldanha, who answered the call, fell for the prank and transferred them to a duty nurse who divulged intimate medical details about the Duchess. Afterwards, Saldanha was highly traumatised by the media coverage of the incident (Suroor 2012b). Saldanha was also frightened because she had violated the hospital rule that 'when the reception is closed for the night the duty nurse is only supposed to take down phone messages – and not transfer any calls' (ibid). Three days later, when it became clear to the public that Saldanha had been pranked, she committed suicide. Saldanha's role in the incident, which made headlines around the world, was telling the caller: 'Oh yes, just hold on ma'am' (Suroor 2012a).

The Duke and Duchess of Cambridge said they 'were looked after so wonderfully well at all times by everybody at the hospital and their thoughts and prayers [were] with Jacintha Saldanha's family, friends and colleagues at this very sad time' (ibid). Amidst the media furore and public demands to sack the two radio hosts, Greig and Christian were taken off the air. The station temporarily suspended all advertising, as advertisers, including Australia's largest supermarket chain, started pulling their advertisements. In the end, the owner of the 2Day FM station cancelled the *Hot30 Countdown* show and agreed to stop all prank calls. In an interview just after the call, Greig and Christian said: 'We were very surprised that our call was put through. We thought we'd be hung up on as soon as they heard our terrible accents. We're very sorry if we've caused any issues and we're glad to hear that Kate is doing well' (Hindu 2012).

Days after the death of Saldanha, the two radio hosts were apologetic when in a television interview Greig said: 'It came into my head that

I just wanted to reach out to them [the family], give them a big hug and say sorry' (AFP 2012). The 2Day FM station later claimed that it tried to reach King Edward VII Hospital management at least five times before airing the prank call – a claim which the hospital officials refuted (DPA 2012).

A preliminary investigation conducted by the Australian government media watchdog, Australian Communications and Media Authority (ACMA), reported that the prank call 'broke the law' (BBC 2013) for breaching the NSW Surveillance Devices Act when the 2Day FM station aired the call in December of 2012 without consent (Christensen 2014). 2Day FM then approached the federal court to appeal against the finding. The station also wanted to prevent ACMA from finding whether the station 'committed criminal offence or was in breach of its license' (AAP 2013).

2Day FM argued that ACMA had acted as 'policeman, prosecutor, judge, jury, prison warden and parole officer' (Bibby 2014) and demanded that the court, and not a media regulator, conduct the investigation. The court handed down the judgment in favour of 2Day FM, overturning the watchdog finding that the station broke the law. The court also gave extended orders preventing ACMA's preliminary report from being published. The decisions were a setback to ACMA's investigation, and put an end to any possibility that the station might be subjected to tough penalties such as a total broadcast ban (ibid). The court ruling, however, did not prevent the watchdog from continuing to investigate whether the station 'breached the commercial radio code of practice' (Jackson 2014). The legal battle has yet to come to a close and the court rulings have stymied ACMA's probe into the prank call that led to Saldanha's death. In analysing the role of the prank call in the death of Saldanha, it is pertinent to note that she had a history of stress and depression (Johnson 2012). The 2Day FM station later donated 500,000 Australian dollars from its advertising profits to a memorial fund to help her family. Greig resigned from the radio station after she lodged a complaint against Southern Cross Austereo, the company owning 2Day FM, that it had 'failed to maintain a safe workplace' (Davidson 2013).

Case 2: Sarah Palin pranked by Masked Avengers

The second case is of a prank call made to 2008 American vice-presidential candidate Sarah Palin by two radio jockeys from Montreal. The

Canadian radio duo comprising Marc-Antoine Audette and Sébastien Trudel is notorious for pranking Ban Ki-moon, Britney Spears, Jacques Chirac and Nicolas Sarkozy. In all these cases, the duo put the public figures in an embarrassing spot. The radio comedians appear on the afternoon programme *Les cerveaux de l'info* (*The brains of the news*) on the CKOI-FM station and are also known as the Masked Avengers.

In Palin's case, the Masked Avengers posed as then-French President Nicholas Sarkozy to extract information from Palin on the vice-presidential campaign and foreign policy. During the six-minute conversation, Palin talked about hunting, relationships, family and politics. The high-point of the conversation was Palin's admission that she may run for president in eight years. The prank on 'one of the most heavily protected personalities in US politics' (Goldenberg 2008) went viral on the internet in the final hours of the presidential campaign. The transcript of the call was made available on the internet and the audio was uploaded on to YouTube.

Afterwards, in an interview with the Canadian press, Audette said it had taken five days to get clearance from Palin's communications team as well as the secret service for the phone call. When asked for the reason behind the prank, Audette said: 'I wanted to see how she [Palin] was on an intellectual level. You can see that she's, well, not really brilliant' (Goldenberg 2008).

Case 3: Evo Morales pranked by Cope Radio

The last case for analysis involves Evo Morales, who became the President of Bolivia in December 2005. Morales was pranked by David Miner, a comedian from Cope Radio which is a right-wing radio station owned by the Roman Catholic Church in Spain (Keeley 2005). The comedian appearing for the morning show impersonated José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero, Spain's socialist Prime Minister. Miner congratulated Morales on his presidential victory and invited him to visit Madrid. The radio comedian also urged the newly-elected socialist president to join the left-wing syndicate involving Cuba, Venezuela and Spain. 'We are sincerely happy that you are triumphantly joining the new order that we wish to set up in Spain and Latin America, Evo,' said Miner (BBC 2005).

Unlike in Palin's case, the Spanish comedian never told Morales that he was pranked. Later, however, when Morales realised this was the

case, he called a press conference giving details about the telephone call. The Bolivian Embassy filed a formal complaint with the Spanish government, saying that the prank call had 'exceeded the limits of humour and offended the Bolivian people' (Keeley 2005).

The Spanish government was quick to respond to the incident and issued an apology. 'They [the Catholic Church] have arrogantly humiliated a Latin American nation, whom they look down upon from a position of supposed superiority. It is morally reproachable,' said Spain's justice minister (McLean 2005). Miguel Ángel Moratinos, Spain's foreign minister, also summoned the Vatican's envoy to demand an explanation about the remedial steps to prevent similar prank calls. Equally embarrassed by the prank call, Prime Minister Zapatero called Morales to apologise and to congratulate him on his election victory.

Before the elections, Morales advocated a socialist governance model and promised to nationalise Bolivia's gas sector. In fact, before the prank call incident, the Spanish government had made friendly overtures to Morales while trying to safeguard the interests of Spanish oil and gas companies in Bolivia (Crawford 2005). Given the situation, the prank call by Cope Radio amplified the Spanish government's embarrassment. The Catholic Church, meanwhile, had been critical of Zapatero's government and its policies such as the legalisation of gay marriages.

After the prank call was broadcast, the immediate reaction of Cope Radio was to dismiss the incident as 'just another joke' (Keeley 2005). But as pressure from the Bolivian and Spanish governments mounted, the radio station caved in with its board of directors acknowledging that the prank call 'had gone too far' (*Chicago Tribune* 2005). Cope Radio issued a statement which said: 'The board of this station wishes to clarify that it has never been its intention to lack respect for the president-elect of Bolivia, nor hinder the normal development of the international relations of our country' (Reuters 2005).

Ethical analysis of radio prank calls: Kantianism and deception

The ideas of Immanuel Kant (1724-1804) have been used as a moral compass in different circumstances to resolve ethical dilemmas. For the current analysis, two Kantian concepts are central in terms of their aptness and applicability: (a) ends as means, and (b) the categori-

cal imperative. The concept of ends as means stems from the will, which, according to Kant (1956 [1785]: 95), can be found only in 'rational beings'. It is the end that serves as a subjective ground for the self-determination of the will. In comparison, means serve only as the ground of the possibility of an action whose consequence is an end. The concept of ends as means holds little value if it is applied to something whose existence in itself does not have an absolute value (for example, an inanimate object). Whereas, for rational beings including human beings – whose nature inherently makes them ends in themselves and hence beings to be revered – the concept acquires 'practical' value. Kant (ibid: 95) explains this as follows:

Now I say that man, and in general every rational being, exists as an end in himself, not merely as a means for arbitrary use by this or that will: he must in all his actions, whether they are directed to himself or to other rational beings, always be viewed at the same time as an end.

Kant (ibid: 96) further says:

Persons, therefore, are not merely subjective ends whose existence as an object of our actions has a value for us: they are objective ends – that is, things whose existence is in itself an end, and indeed an end such that in its place we can put no other end to which they should serve simply as means; for unless this is so, nothing at all of absolute value would be found anywhere.

This theorisation leads to the practical imperative or the final statement of the concept of ends as means which is applied to ethical analysis. It states: 'Act in such a way that you always treat humanity, whether in your own person or in the person of any other, never simply as a means, but always at the same time as an end' (ibid).

The concept of the categorical imperative is tied to Kant's (ibid) formula of ends as means in that it originates from human will or motivations, which is the bedrock of Kantian philosophy. Human actions are considered to be driven by will or intention. Kant presupposes that human beings are 'morally good' and 'occupy a special place in creation' (ibid: 22). Drawing upon this goodness or good will, the formulation of the categorical imperative is worded as follows: 'I ought never to act except in such a way that I can also will that my maxim should become a universal law' (ibid). Since the statement is

presented in a negative form, the procedure to apply the principle of categorical imperative is to assess the 'material maxims' (ibid) of the human action under consideration.

Method

Following the earlier discussion of radio hosts as quasi-journalists and Pearson's (2015) treatment of them as journalists, this study analyses the three cases through a decision-making tool called systematic moral analysis (SMA). Developed by Elliott and Ozar (2010), SMA is a series of questions that approach and examine an ethical problem in a journalistic case from different angles. SMA, thus, can be visualised as a multi-layered sieve through which the action under consideration is made to pass. And by looking at the filtrate, one can decide whether the action is ethically permitted or prohibited. In fact, SMA lists four different ethical possibilities: ethically prohibited, ethically permitted, ethically required and ethically ideal.

The questions that constitute SMA are derived from the principles of Kantianism and rule utilitarianism (Hooker 2002). The latter holds the view that the morally right action is the one that produces the most good or brings about the greatest amount of good for the greatest number (Elliott and Ozar 2010). The principles of rule utilitarianism and Kantianism are not mutually exclusive, but here the focus will be on the set of SMA questions that are grounded on Kantianism. The application of Kantianism is preferred to rule utilitarianism because the impact of prank calls made by the radio hosts goes beyond ethics and into the realm of human rights – and Kant was one of the earliest exponents of the philosophical idea of human rights. Therefore, the set of SMA questions considered for the analysis is the following:

- Q1. Does the action fulfil one or more of the professional journalist's role-related responsibilities?
- (a) Is the action serving the public in the society where the journalist practises? Or are the actions serving only the preferences of an individual or subgroup within the society?
- Q2. Will the action potentially cause emotional, physical, financial or reputational harm?
- Q3. Is causing this harm justified?
- (a) Does the intended action respect all persons affected? Does it treat all persons in the situation consistently and impartially? (ibid: 23-24).

As such, SMA does not mandate a philosophical framework to answer the questions and determine the ethical validity (or invalidity) of the action. In the analysis, however, SMA will be used in conjunction with Kantian concepts to evaluate if the prank calls violate journalistic and Kantian ethics.

Analysis and discussion

The three cases of prank calls are analysed through SMA questions and the Kantian concepts. In the first SMA question, the operative word is role-responsibility, which is the duty of a journalist to empower the citizens by accurately reporting on 'needed information' (ibid: 14) and keeping them informed. For example, citizens *need* (italics in original) information about governments and other power-wielding institutions – including persons holding offices – for self-governance and to function effectively as a democratic society. Journalists can also provide information to cater to the *desires* that the members of a society consider to be common to everyone, or almost everyone, in the society (ibid). Provision of such information is optional. Information that responds to desires comprises mostly 'soft-stories' such as news about cultural events and sports. These human interest stories promote human bonding. In addition to needs and desires, Elliott and Ozar (ibid) describe a third category of information as 'preferences' – individualised interests that do not affect the society directly and fail to create bonds. Preferences, therefore, do not constitute needed information.

Applying these criteria to the first case demonstrates that information about the Duchess's morning sickness is a preference, or at best, a desire, but certainly not needed information as it cannot assist the people in their self-governance. Knowledge about British royal family members holding no official power in the Australian or British society can only be a preference or desire of a certain number of people. Radio hosts, in this case, are thus akin to journalists producing soft stories rather than being hard news reporters. However, in Palin's case, it can be argued that the society needed to know more about its prospective vice-president. Although no notable information came out of the prank call, it did engage with the society through humour and critique, thus adding to the marketplace of ideas. Morales's case is different from the other two cases in that the goal of the prank call was not to extract information but to make a political point. The Spanish radio comedian who is believed to be 'an anti-socialist activist' (Wikinews 2005) lam-

pooned the Bolivian and Spanish governments to alert the society of the possible dangers of socialism. To that end, he acted as a watchdog of the government power thereby fulfilling the journalist's role-related responsibility of providing needed information, like the Canadian radio hosts.

The second SMA question analyses the harm of the journalistic action. The harm can be emotional, physical, financial or reputational. Because journalists fulfil a vital social function, according to the SMA, they have a *duty* to cause harm (italics in original). Thus, they must be able to 'evaluate effectively when they can prevent or reduce harm, when such harm is fully justified, and how to explain their choices both to those they harm and to the citizens they serve' (Elliott and Ozar 2010: 10). For example, no burglar would want to have their actions reported; yet, journalists cover these stories because such reports are likely to make potential victims aware and vigilant even though it causes harm to the burglar. Here it is instructive to emphasise Kant's concern with dignity. According to Kant, you can lock up a burglar because you respect that person's ethical capacity and are trying to correct him. In other words, you are not harming him, but aiming to do good.

The prank calls by the Australian and Canadian radio hosts represent opposite ends of the continuum in terms of harm or consequence. While the prank call by the Australian radio hosts led to the death of Saldanha (maximum possible physical and emotional harm), Palin was only 'mildly amused' (CBC News 2008) by the Masked Avengers. The prank call by the Spanish radio comedian falls somewhere in between. His call disturbed international relations, but was contained by some quick diplomacy on the part of the Spanish government. Using the harm principle of SMA, it can be debated that Saldanha had a moral right to be treated with respect and not be subjected to deception and irrevocable harm as she was not a stakeholder in the public realm. Palin and Morales, on the other hand, were public figures holding offices and arguably the limited harm caused to them can be justified on the basis of the public's right to know their political leaders in open, democratic societies.

The third SMA question asks if the journalistic action treats all persons impartially and respectfully. As explained in the previous section, the Kantian philosophy of ends as means is derived from reverence or respect for a rational being. Therefore, the third SMA question is related to the concept of ends as means. So essentially

the question to be considered here is: can the actions of the radio hosts be compatible with the idea of humanity as an end in itself? Quite clearly, Saldanha, Palin and Morales would not have attended the telephonic conversation and revealed the information had they known they were talking to radio hosts. In other words, Saldanha, Palin and Morales did not *share the ends* of the actions of the radio hosts. According to Kant (1956 [1785]), this implies that Saldanha, Palin and Morales were not used as ends in themselves by the radio hosts.

...it is manifest that a violator of the rights of man intends to use the person of others merely as a means without taking into consideration that, as rational beings, they ought always at the same time to be rated as ends – that is, only as beings who must themselves be able to share in the end of the very same action (ibid: 97).

Thus, for the Australian, Canadian and Spanish radio jockeys, Saldanha, Palin and Morales served only as means to ends, which ranged from rating points to checking government power.

In addition to the three questions from the SMA, Kant's concept of the categorical imperative has implications in the case of prank calls. As mentioned earlier, application of the categorical imperative will entail examining if the maxims (prank calling in the present case) can serve as a universal law. All three prank calls involved an intentional deception in the form of a statement, or more specifically, lying as the Australian, Canadian and Spanish radio hosts initiated the conversations by introducing themselves as the Queen, President Sarkozy and Prime Minister Zapatero. The moment the maxim – that is the act of prank calling, in other words, lying – is made a universal law, it becomes self-destructive because a law of lying cannot be universal. In fact, in his book *Groundwork of the metaphysic of morals*, Kant (1956 [1785]) illustrates the application of the categorical imperative by applying it to lying. He says:

But I can by no means will a universal law of lying; for by such a law there could properly be no promises at all, since it would be futile to profess a will for future action to others who would not believe my profession or who, if they ever did so over-hastily, would pay me back in like coin; and consequently my maxim, as soon as it was made a universal law, would be bound to annul itself (ibid: 71).

Using the principles of Kantianism, one could not establish that the conduct of the Australian radio hosts was more unethical than Spanish or Canadian radio hosts because Kantianism does not distinguish between the degrees of lying or ethical violation. Thus, for Kant, lying is impermissible whatever the circumstance – even if it saves lives. This finding resonates with Pearson's (2015) suggestion. 'Given the topic of the prank was the royal family,' Pearson explained, 'it raises the issue of the extent to which celebrity gossip-style journalism would be sustainable under a [Buddhist] Right Speech approach. The simple answer is that it would not. It would fall foul of the Buddha's disapproval of gossip-mongering...' (ibid: 462). In the cases of prank calls, the moral hardness of the Buddhist and Kantian principles contrasts with the SMA, and by extension, to rule utilitarianism, which takes the consequence of the actions into consideration.

At another level, it could also be argued that public response to lying or prank calls also plays a role in the determination of the ethical outcome. Because if the public at large considers a prank call a joke and not a lie, then we are outside of the realm of truth/untruth and move into that of play. If it's a joke, then the rules of social life are suspended for a moment and the risk to social life is reduced. Therefore, the more we see something as a joke, the more we are off the hook from some of the questions that philosophers ask. In other words, there could also be limitations of a broad-brush application of Kantianism or SMA to jokes or prank calls, and hence the public response to the cases should be carefully considered.

Conclusion

The radio hosts in Australia could not have foreseen the tragic consequences of the call answered by Saldanha. Her mental state ostensibly contributed to her death as much as the call itself, but the fact that someone died warrants the actions of the radio hosts and the station they worked for to close legal and ethical inspection.

In the Spanish and Canadian cases, the calls to Morales and Palin had clear political overtones. In the tradition validated by Swift (McLeod 2011), the comedian at Cope Radio used humour to engage the public in a discussion about the rise of left-wing politics in Spain and Latin America. The Canadian hosts, meanwhile, introduced a non-scripted conversation of someone seeking a public office into the public sphere, allowing voters to make a more

informed choice. Regardless of whether one is politically conservative or liberal, engaging policy-related ideas is a mandate for democratic citizens. To the extent that humour promoted this, it can be said to have value.

At the same time, the deception inherent in prank calls left clear traces. In the Spanish case, the Bolivian and Spanish governments, along with the Catholic Church, were left to re-establish trust in relationships that were violated by the prank. Palin, meanwhile, was forced to re-establish her public credibility at a crucial time in the election. Is the established political order so far removed from the general public that someone with divergent views has an ethical right to use deception to infiltrate it? While it is difficult to answer this question, the analysis clearly raises it.

The cases in this study also have clear implications for professional journalism. The radio hosts, by making prank calls, practised widespread and public deception at a time when public opinion about news media is at all-time low (McCarthy 2014). Irrespective of their beats, journalists of good conscience need to consider the ethical implications of using deception to gather information. While it might have value in some cases, the violation of trust that deception necessarily entails should be carefully weighed. Journalists have to delineate between their own behaviour and that of the radio hosts engaged in gratuitous deception. Furthermore, thinking about vulnerability in ethical terms, we should concern ourselves with the concepts of fair and honest representation, truth and trust, accountability to those in the story, and minimising harm.

One tool to help them achieve this is ethical analysis through SMA, which enables them to weigh public good versus the deception involved, consider truthful alternatives that would achieve the same end and reflect on the moral implications of deception if they employ it. Not only will this safeguard the personal integrity of journalists, but through the accumulated development of personal integrity, will raise the standards of media. This frees them to bring people together, which helps society function, through the free and truthful flow of information. This, more than entertainment achieved through deception, matches journalism's intended purpose.

Finally, the analysis shows that prank calls in all three cases violated ethics according to Kant's ideas of ends as means and the categorical

imperative, but only in the Australian case was the prank call clearly unethical according to the terms of the SMA. It can be argued using the SMA that the prank calls in the Canadian and Spanish cases, while not ethically ideal, were ethically permitted because they served the higher purpose by producing skepticism among the public and speaking truth to power, both of which are needed in a democratic society (McLeod 2014). This difference in ethical outcome reflects the tension between Kantianism and SMA, and suggests that radio hosts, as quasi journalists, should also review the SMA before making prank calls which adopt a journalistic format. Prank calls may be innovative in terms of audience ratings, but as this study showed, they can also have dangerous consequences.

References

- AAP (2013) Royal prank call: 2Day FM loses bid to thwart media watchdog investigation, *Guardian*, 7 November. Available online at <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2013/nov/07/royal-prank-call-2dayfm-loses-bid>, accessed June 2016
- AFP (2012) Radio hosts say sorry to nurse's family, *Hindu*, 11 December. Available online at <http://www.thehindu.com/todays-paper/tp-in-school/radio-hosts-say-sorry-to-nurses-family/article4185975.ece>, accessed June 2016
- Agarwal, Sheetal D. and Barthel, Michael L. (2015) The friendly Barbarians: Professional norms and work routines of online journalists in the United States, *Journalism*, Vol. 16, No. 3 pp 376-91
- BBC (2005) Morales hoaxed by Spanish radio, 21 December. Available online at <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/americas/4549802.stm>, accessed June 2016
- BBC (2013) Radio royal hoax 'broke law', according to watchdog, 20 September. Available online at <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/entertainment-arts-24172564>, accessed June 2016
- Bibby, Paul (2014) 2Day FM wins appeal against ACMA over royal prank call, *Sydney Morning Herald*, 14 March. Available online at <http://www.smh.com.au/entertainment/tv-and-radio/2day-fm-wins-appeal-against-acma-over-royal-prank-call-20140314-34rn8.html>, accessed June 2016
- Bok, Sissela (1978) *Lying: Moral choice in public and private life*, New York, Pantheon Books
- CBC News (2008) Montreal comedian pranks Sarah Palin. Available online at <http://www.cbc.ca/news/arts/montreal-comedian-pranks-sarah-palin-1.759027>, accessed June 2016
- Chicago Tribune (2005) Station apologizes for Morales prank, 25 December. Available online at http://articles.chicagotribune.com/2005-12-25/news/0512250421_1_bolivian-president-elect-evo-morales-station-minister, accessed June 2016
- Christensen, Nic (2014) 2DayFM back in court claiming ACMA acted as 'accuser and fact finder' in royal prank call case, *Mumbrella*, 5 March. Available online at <http://mumbrella.com.au/2dayfm-appeals-media-watchdogs-powers-royal-prank-case-211391>, accessed June 2016
- Crawford, Leslie (2005) Spanish radio hoax on Morales leaves Bolivia fuming, *Financial Times*, 23 December. Available online at <http://www.ft.com/cms/s/0/2c15a21a-7358-11da-8b42-0000779e2340.html#axzz2q1P8m7CJ>, accessed June 2016
- Davidson, Helen (2013). DJ Mel Greig resigns in wake of tragic royal prank call, *Guardian*, 5 December. Available online at <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2013/dec/05/dj-mel-greig-resigns-in-wake-of-tragic-royal-prank-call>, accessed June 2016

- DPA (2012) Australian radio station hits back over prank, *Hindu*, 10 December. Available online <http://www.thehindu.com/news/international/australian-radio-station-hits-back-over-prank/article4183537.ece>, accessed June 2016
- Elliott, Deni and Ozar, David (2010) An explanation and a method for the ethics of journalism, Meyers, Christopher (ed.) *Journalism ethics*, New York, Oxford University Press pp 9-24
- Ethics Alarms (2012) The shock jocks and the suicide: A moral luck cautionary tale, 8 December. Available online at <http://ethicsalarms.com/2012/12/08/the-shock-jocks-and-the-suicide-a-moral-luck-cautionary-tale/>, accessed June 2016
- Gant, Scott (2007) *We're all journalists now: The transformation of the press and reshaping of the law in the internet age*, New York, Simon and Schuster
- Goldenberg, Suzanne (2008) Joke on Palin again as she falls for fake Sarkozy call, *Guardian*, 3 November. Available online at <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2008/nov/03/sarah-palin-phine-prank-sarkozy>, accessed June 2016
- Guangming (2012) Degeneration of Australian radio station's journalistic ethics. Available online at http://en.gmw.cn/2012-12/13/content_6004005.htm, accessed June 2016
- Hindu (2012) Twitter users want DJs sacked, 8 December. Available online at <http://www.thehindu.com/todays-paper/tp-national/twitter-users-want-djs-sacked/article4176971.ece>, accessed June 2016
- Hooker, Brad (2002) *Ideal code, real world*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, second edition
- Jackson, S. (2014) 2Day FM wins Royal prank call appeal, *Australian*. Available online at <http://www.theaustralian.com.au/media/broadcast/day-fm-wins-royal-prank-call-appeal/story-fna045gd-1226854989508#>, accessed June 2016
- Johnson, T. A. (2012) Royal prank call: Nurse was treated for depression last year, 23 December. Available online at <http://www.indianexpress.com/news/royal-hoax-call-nurse-was-treated-for-depression-last-year/1049057/>, accessed June 2016
- Kant, Immanuel (1956 [1785]) *Groundwork of the metaphysic of morals* (trans. by Paton, H. J.), New York, Harper Torchbook
- Keeley, Graham (2005) Radio prankster's joke call sparks transatlantic dispute, *Times*, 23 December. Available online at <http://www.thetimes.co.uk/tto/news/world/article1983959.ece>
- McBride, Kelly and Rosenstiel, Tom (2013) *The new ethics of journalism: Principles for the 21st century*, Thousand Oaks, CA, CQ Press
- McCarthy, Justin (2014) *Trust in media returns to all-time low*, 17 September. Available online at <http://www.gallup.com/poll/176042/trust-mass-media-returns-time-low.aspx>, accessed June 2016
- McLean, Renwick (2005) Official call to new leader of Bolivia is Spanish hoax, *New York Times*, 23 December. Available online at http://www.nytimes.com/2005/12/23/international/americas/23bolivia.html?_r=0, accessed June 2016
- McLeod, Kembrew (2011) On pranks, *Communication and Critical Cultural Studies*, Vol. 8, No. 1 pp 97-102
- McLeod, Kembrew (2014) *Pranksters: Making mischief in the modern world*, New York, NYU Press
- Minnick, Katie (2011) Journalists and ethics: Prank calls, *Media Editing*, 24 February. Available online at <http://drakej70.wordpress.com/2011/02/24/journalists-and-ethics-prank-calls/>, accessed June 2016
- Pearson, Mark (2015) Enlightening communication analysis in Asia-Pacific: Media studies, ethics, and law using a Buddhist perspective, *International Communication Gazette*, Vol. 77, No. 5 pp 456-470
- Purdey, Heather (2000) Radio journalism training and the future of radio news in the UK, *Journalism*, Vol. 1, No.3 pp 329-352
- Reuters (2005) Radio spoof triggers diplomatic row, *ABC News*, 23 December. Available online at <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2005-12-24/radio-spoof-triggers-diplomatic-row/767646>, accessed June 2016

Suroor, Hasan (2012a) Nurse who took the prank call on Kate found dead, *Hindu*. Available online at <http://www.thehindu.com/todays-paper/nurse-who-took-hoax-call-on-kate-found-dead/article4177090.ece>, accessed June 2016

Suroor, Hasan (2012b) Saldanha's bosses intended to have a 'chat' with her, *Hindu*. Available online at <http://www.thehindu.com/news/national/saldanhas-bosses-intended-to-have-a-chat-with-her/article4181827.ece>, accessed June 2016

Turner, Graeme (2009) Politics, radio and journalism in Australia: The influence of 'talkback', *Journalism*, Vol. 10, No.4 pp 411-430

Wang, Tai-Li (2012) Presentation and impact of market-driven journalism on sensationalism in global TV news, *International Communication Gazette*, Vol. 74, No. 2 pp 711-727

Wikinews (2005) Evo Morales hoaxed by a Spanish church-owned radio station, 23 December. Available online at http://en.wikinews.org/wiki/Evo_Morales_hoaxed_by_a_Spanish_Church-owned_radio_station, accessed June 2016

Williams, Bruce and Delli Carpini, Michael (2009) The eroding boundaries between news and entertainment and what they mean for democratic politics, Wilkins, Lee and Christians, Clifford (eds) *The handbook of mass media ethics*, New York, Routledge pp 177-188

Note on the Contributors

Subin Paul is a doctoral candidate in the School of Journalism and Mass Communication at the University of Iowa. He is interested in international communication, digital media production and journalism history with a focus on South Asia. His research articles have appeared in *Journalism: Theory, Practice and Criticism*, *Contemporary South Asia*, *Journalism Practice* and others. He is currently working on a biography of an Indian war correspondent, T.G. Narayanan. Contact details: Subin Paul, 100, Adler Journalism Building, Iowa City, IA-52242. USA. Email: subin-paul@uiowa.edu

John C. Carpenter is a PhD candidate at the University of Iowa School of Journalism and Mass Communication. A former journalist and news editor, his research examines intersections of language and the ways journalists perceive their roles in society. Publication of his most recent paper, 'Creating English as a language of global news contraflow: *Al Jazeera* at the intersection of language, globalization and journalism', is pending in the *Journal of Arab and Muslim Media Research*. Contact details: John C. Carpenter, 100, Adler Journalism Building, Iowa City, IA-52242. USA. Email: john-c-carpenter@uiowa.edu

PAPER

Myth, Māori and two cartoons: A semiotic analysis

In May 2013, two cartoons depicting Māori people were published in two newspapers in Aotearoa New Zealand. Māori politicians condemned the cartoons as perpetuating racism, while the Race Relations Commissioner said the cartoons were offensive but not racist. The purpose of this paper is to critique those two cultural artefacts. We draw upon Barthesian criticism to conduct a semiotic analysis as an oppositional response to challenge the dominant colonial social order. By default, this essay is a form of ideological demystification – a tool to deconstruct what is taken for granted as natural and normal – in this instance: the representation of Māori.

Keywords: Māori, racism, stereotyping, representation, semiotics, cartoons

‘The newspapers there tell us that the colonizer alone is qualified to speak of the colony’

Jean-Paul Sartre (cited in Memmi 2003: 17)

Although located in a different context, the epigraph of this paper epitomises the media representation of Māori in Aotearoa New Zealand. A recent case in point concerns two cartoons depicting Māori people, which were published in May 2013 in two newspapers owned by Fairfax New Zealand Limited. Māori politicians condemned the cartoons as perpetuating racism, while the Race Relations Commissioner said the cartoons were offensive but not racist. In May 2017, the Human Rights Review Tribunal ruled that the cartoons did not breach the Human Rights Act. Despite the tribunal’s ruling, this case highlights ethical issues concerning the representation of Māori in news media. The purpose of this paper is to critique those two cultural artefacts, which have been normalised

and legitimised as part of hegemonic discursive practices in Aotearoa New Zealand. We draw upon Barthesian criticism to conduct a semiotic analysis of the two cartoons as an oppositional response to challenge the dominant colonial social order. A fundamental tenet of semiotic analysis is that cultural artefacts are signs which convey meaning and, for Barthesian criticism, it is the second-order signification, or connotative plane, from where myth is operational. Therefore, as a semiotic analysis, by default this essay is a form of ideological demystification – a tool to deconstruct what is taken for granted as natural and normal – in this instance: the representation of Māori people.

The structure of this essay follows a thematic logic. First, a concise discussion of Māori in Aotearoa New Zealand will be sketched out to provide a contextual background to articulate the social realities of Māori. This leads into a discussion of racism and representation in media discourse, followed by a brief discussion of editorial cartoons. Then, the cartoons will be presented as cultural artefacts before we discuss Barthesian criticism (semiotics), which is outlined as the method for analysing cultural artefacts and signifying practices. This will be followed by our semiotic analysis and then discussion where we seek to explicate meaning from the cultural artefacts and, by doing so, we will discuss how the values of the dominant colonial and social system are embedded within the cultural artefacts of study.

The realities of colonisation

Māori are believed to have arrived in Aotearoa New Zealand from Polynesian islands between AD 1210 and AD 1385 (Moon 2013). As indigenous peoples, Māori were *ngā kaitiaki* (guardians) of Aotearoa New Zealand for several hundred years until the ‘European invasion and settlement of New Zealand’ (Page et al. 2013: 365). From the early 1800s, the British progressively settled in Aotearoa New Zealand (Keiha and Moon 2008) and they brought with them ‘viral dysentery, influenza, whooping cough, measles, typhoid, venereal diseases and the various forms of tuberculosis and similar diseases’ (Belich 1996: 173), as well as alcohol and tobacco which they encouraged Māori to consume (Lange 1999). In 1840, *Te Tiriti o Waitangi* (the Treaty of Waitangi) was signed between representatives of the Crown and Māori chiefs (Moon 2002), and while discrepancies exist between the Māori and English language versions (May 2012), it was used by the Crown to usurp sovereignty from Māori (Durie, M. 1998). At the time of the signing of the treaty, the

Māori population was believed to be between 70,000 to 90,000 while the Pākehā population was just 2,000 (Dalziel 1999). According to King (1999: 10), Pākehā is 'is derived from the word "pakepakehā", meaning fair-skinned folk. It simply denotes people and influences that derive originally from Europe but which are no longer "European"'. However, the Pākehā population outnumbered Māori by 1858, and the Pākehā population reached 256,000 in 1872, and half a million by 1881 (Gordon and Trudgill 2004).

As power became entrenched in the hands of the colonialists, Māori were subjected to massive land losses (Kingi 2008; McCan 2001) including *raupatu* (land confiscations) which drastically reduced their economic base. *Te reo Māori* (Māori language) was banned in schools (Ka'ai-Mahuta 2011) which meant children were punished for speaking Māori there (Durie, A. 1999). The loss of lands and language meant a loss of culture because land, language and culture are intertwined for indigenous peoples (Naden and Havea 2014). For example, the purpose of renaming indigenous lands is to erase the indigeneity associated with the land (Walters et al. 2011) and to remove indigenous identity systematically (Berg and Kearns 2009). As Ngūgĩ wa Thiong'o (1994:15) asserted: 'Language as culture is the collective memory bank of a people's experience in history,' and by replacing the indigenous language with the colonising language, the colonised people are forced to accept the mindset, values and ideology of the colonising power (Fanon 1967).

Consequently, the impact of colonisation in Aotearoa New Zealand is well-established (Robson 2007). As Mason Durie (2003:21) stated: 'There are no surprises. On almost any indicator, such as health, education, employment, offending, home ownership, or income levels, Māori performance is substantially worse.' The health and social statistics bear similarities to those of other indigenous peoples who share the same histories of colonisation (Etemad 2007; Lashley 2006). This is perhaps unsurprising given that oppression and marginalisation are detrimental to health and wellbeing (Nairn et al. 2006). Furthermore, indigenous peoples share similar experiences of racism (Chakma 2001), which has been said to be both an ally and a product of colonisation (Stam and Spence 1983). According to van Dijk (1993), racism as a system of white group dominance is reproduced through discourse and communication. In Aotearoa New Zealand, examples of racist discourse can be found in the media's 'negative

and stereotypical depictions of Māori' (Moewaka Barnes et al. 2013: 65).

Racist media discourse

Racist stereotyping often reflects societal racism (Downing and Husband 2005) and is reproduced by the media (van Dijk 1991) in a momentum that keeps the cycle going. Spoonley (1990: 31) summarised the relationship between the media and society, stating: 'If the media are racist, then it will be because the wider society is racist. The media will reflect and appeal to commonly held values to varying degrees. If racism is part of New Zealand society, then it would be unusual not to find it represented in the media.' Accordingly, research has shown the extent of anti-Māori racist media discourse in studies of newspapers from the late 1800s to early 1900s (Will 1973), 1949 to 1950 (Thompson 1953, 1954a, 1954b, 1955), and 2000s (Moewaka Barnes et al. 2012). More specifically, Māori are framed in the media as either the 'Native/Inferior Other', the 'Deficient/Depraved/Negative Other' or the 'Activist/Radical/Excessive Other' (Pihama 1996).

An example of negative Māori stereotyping in the news media is the over-reporting of child abuse cases involving Māori. Merchant (2010) found a 1 to 1.1 ratio between Pākehā and Māori in actual incidents of child abuse, but a 1 to 1.9 ratio in terms of the news print media coverage of Pākehā and Māori child abuse. The over-reporting of Māori child abuse contributes to the commonly-held perception that child abuse is a 'Māori problem' (Keenan 2000; Warner 2015). This is a matter of some concern given that the media are a primary source of information about cultural groups other than one's own (Hartmann and Husband 1974; Steuter and Wills 2011; van Dijk 1987). As Cindy Kiro (former Children's Commissioner) stated: 'If we were to believe everything we read, we'd think Māori were bad, sad or mad' (Massey University 2010: para 3).

Moreover, the negative stereotypical depictions of Māori are not restricted to news media, as a recent study found that Māori were under-represented in all commercial forms of television advertisements. But they did feature in government and community advertisements for 'drink-driving, gambling, smoking, family violence, and literacy problems' (Rubie-Davies et al. 2013: 191). It is, therefore, unsurprising that research since the 1950s has consistently shown that Pākehā are considered 'successful, hardworking, intelligent and self-centred', while Māori are viewed as 'trouble-makers,

lazy, unintelligent, dirty, aggressive, easy-going and friendly' (Holmes et al 2001: 79). The discursive practice of negatively framing Māori positions them as inferior to Pākehā, and aligns with Bhabha's (1994: 70) assertion of colonial discourse which construes the colonised as 'degenerate types' in what is essentially a vulgar display of power and ideology. The dominant ideology is embedded in media discourse which shapes negative perceptions of Māori to wider society. It even influences Māori self-perceptions which can manifest as internalised racism (Moewaka Barnes et al. 2013) where they incorporate 'into his or her own self-schema the dehumanizing messages of his or her own in-group made by others' (Gamst et al. 2011: 251). The media use dehumanising messages to construct oppositions (Hamelink 2016), and one way this is achieved is through editorial or political cartoons in newspapers (Steuter and Wills 2011).

Editorial cartoons

Cartoons are drawings which caricature an event or personage (Danesi 2009) and are distinctive cultural artefacts (Warburton and Saunders 1996) because they offer a 'glimpse into various points of view operating during particular times and places' (Ferri and Connor 2006: 76), thereby revealing information about the society that created it. Cartoons in newspapers, also known as editorial cartoons or political cartoons (hereinafter referred to as 'cartoons'), intersect between popular and political culture and, according to Steuter and Wills (2008), are visual commentary pieces on current events from an ideological perspective. Cartoons are considered less factual than photographs in newspapers (van Leeuwen 2005) but yield power because more people consume their news from cartoons than from full-length

news articles (Steuter and Wills 2011). However, while cartoons are commonly perceived as emancipatory and a way of holding the powerful to account, they are often deployed as a weapon against the powerless (Murawska-Muthesius 2009).

MacDonald (1995) discussed cartoons as a means of oppressing and exploiting Māori in his study of cartoons in newspapers in Aotearoa New Zealand from the 1800s to 1930s. He found that a large percentage of cartoons 'depicted Māori as clowns, savages, drunks, layabouts and as being generally uncivilised people who were holding up Pākehā progress by not allowing any more of their land to be alienated' (ibid: ii). MacDonald's study is the only research concerning Māori representation in cartoons in Aotearoa New Zealand as the nature of inquiry given to cartoons is generally located within the study of media effects and the role of humour (Dines 1995). For example, the recent articles by Brown Pulu (2013) and Foster (2014) briefly discussed, but did not undertake an analysis of, two cartoons that depicted Māori people – which are the subjects of inquiry for this paper and will be presented next.

The cultural artefacts

The *Marlborough Express* and the Christchurch-based *The Press* are newspapers owned by Fairfax New Zealand Limited (Fairfax). The shareholder-owned company is one of two key players in the print newspaper and online news market in Aotearoa New Zealand; the other being New Zealand Media and Entertainment (Myllylahti 2016). On 29 May 2013, the *Marlborough Express* published a cartoon (Figure 1) while the following day, *The Press* published a cartoon (Figure 2), both illustrated by Scottish-born cartoonist Al Nisbet. The cartoons have been widely circulated on the internet, published in scholarly journals (Brown Pulu 2013; Foster 2014) and in court documents (Wall v Fairfax New Zealand Ltd 2017) and are, therefore, in the public domain. Following each cartoon, to provide a description of them, we have directly quoted the Human Rights Tribunal (ibid). The descriptions serve as the first order of signification, or denotation.

It depicts a group of four adults and four children. All are dressed in school uniform heading to school with bowls in hand. In the background is a direction sign pointing the way to 'Free school meals'. Two of the adults are thin, plainly elderly and well above the New Zealand superannuation age of 65. The other two adults are much younger and obese. The female has

Figure 1: The *Marlborough Express*, 29 May 2013



a cigarette hanging from her mouth while the male has a tattoo on his left arm and left leg. The male says to the woman 'Psst! ... If we can get away with this, the more cash left for booze, smokes and pokies!' The three primary or intermediate school children who are just in front of the adults are shown reacting to this comment by raising their eyebrows. The flesh tone of all eight characters is pink and their hair colour is variously ginger, blonde, red and grey (the children) white (the elderly woman) and blue (the younger female adult). The elderly man is bald while the male adult is wearing a cap (backwards) (ibid).

[The second cartoon, right] depicts a group of two adults, five children and a dog sitting at or standing around a table. All seven characters are overweight, if not obese, including the large baby seen sucking on a pacifier. Four of the children are of school age and are in school uniform. In the background is a television together with associated electronic appliances. The father is portrayed sitting at the table simultaneously holding the baby and a can of beer. On the table is a second can (lying on its side) together with several Lotto tickets, a packet of cigarettes (a cigarette hangs from the mouth of the adult woman) and a cell phone. Addressing his family, the male adult says: 'Free school food is great! Eases our poverty, and puts something in you kids' bellies!' One child burps while the other members of the family react approvingly to the father's sentiments. The flesh tone of all seven characters is again pink. Hair colour is variously grey, ginger, black and red. The male adult is wearing a cap (backwards) (ibid).

Barthesian criticism

Roland Barthes (1915-1980) was one of the key figures responsible for the development of semiotics (Bruce and Yearley 2006). 'Semiotics' and 'semiology' are often used interchangeably (Etherington-Wright and Doughty 2011). Semiology is the 'science of the study of signs and of the communication of meaning through signs' (Milner 2005: 68). Barthes wrote: 'What is semiology for me? It is an adventure – it is what *advenes*: what comes to me from the Signifier' (Barthes 1988: 4). In Saussurean semiology, the signifier is one of two components of the sign; the other being the signified (Barthes 1988). Saussure (1959) posited that the signifier is the sound-image or form, while the mental representation of the idea or concept of the signifier

Figure 2: *The Press*, 30 May 2013



is the signified, which together form the sign. Barthes used semiology to critique notions of power and ideology; his analysis of the *Paris-Match* magazine cover is an example:

On the cover, a young Negro in a French uniform is saluting, with his eyes uplifted, probably fixed on a fold of the tricolour. All this is the meaning of the picture. But, whether naively or not, I see very well what it signifies to me: that France is a great Empire, that all her sons, without any colour discrimination, faithfully serve under her flag, and that there is no better answer to the detractors of an alleged colonialism than the zeal shown by this Negro in serving his so-called oppressors. I am therefore again faced with a greater semiological system: there is a signifier, itself already formed with a previous system (a black soldier is giving the French salute); there is a signified (it is here a purposeful mixture of Frenchness and militariness); finally, there is a presence of the signified through the signifier (Barthes 1972: 115).

Barthes' analysis employed the two orders of signification: denotation and connotation, which were concepts borrowed from Hjelmslev (1959) (Barthes 1967, 1974, 1983). In the *Paris-Match* example, denotation or what was literally present in the image, was a black soldier saluting the French flag. However, at the connotative level, the image 'acts as a signifier in ideological systems of meaning about colonialism, nationalism and patriotism' (Ali 2012: 292). Thus, denotation, the first order of signification, is the literal description of the meaning of words or things, while connotation, the second order of signification, is the meaning that is generated by involving cultural meanings (Berger 1999, 2010).

It is at the level of the second-order signification, or connotative level, from where myth is operational. For Barthes, myth is a synonym for ideology and refers to 'the body of beliefs and representations that sustain and legitimate current power relationships' (Sériot 2016: 407). Accordingly, Allen (2003) says it is the role of the 'mythologist' to 'expose, or often simply to remind us, of the artificial and constructed nature of such images' – referring to Barthes' analyses of images. Therefore, we are influenced by Barthes' theory of semiology/semiotics to conduct a semiotic analysis as a form of ideological demystification – a tool to deconstruct what is taken for granted as natural and normal – in this instance: the representation of Māori people in the two cultural artefacts.

In the earlier section, the two cartoons were presented as Figure 1 and Figure 2, and we provided a description from *Wall v Fairfax New Zealand Limited* (2017). That description serves as the first order of signification (denotation), and here we will undertake a reading of the images at the second order of signification (connotation). However, there are three important disclaimers to our study. First, we have full knowledge of the sociopolitical context from where the cartoons were situated, as we are both avid consumers of news media. Second, our analysis concerns the cartoons themselves and not the intentions of the cartoonist. As Chandler (2007) rightly asserted, meaning cannot be reduced to the intention of the communicator as we regularly communicate information to others without being aware of doing so. Therefore, the cartoonist's intentions are irrelevant for a semiotic analysis. Third, as Barthes (1977: 38-39) stated: 'All images are polysemous; they imply, underlying their signifiers, a "floating chain" of signifieds, the reader able to choose some and ignore others.' Our analysis is simply that, *our analysis*.

A semiotic analysis

Myth functions in cultural codes that carry negative associations and meanings – the cartoons provocatively stereotype Māori. Thus, we start by examining the physical characteristics that are portrayed. While the main characters seem to be Māori, we notice that Figure 1 includes Pākehā characters. The two children in the front left appear to be Pākehā, although the ambiguous nature of ethnicity means they could also be Māori. However, the totality of the image suggests those two characters represent an out-group when their appearance would suggest they are Pākehā. They are looking at the Māori characters with suspicion, signaling

the Māori characters' status as being untrustworthy, perhaps dangerous – people to avoid. The Pākehā characters are school children, not fraudulent Māori adults. And more importantly, the Pākehā children are worthy of help – they are deserving. It is not their fault that they are poor; they are innocent children who are used as props to signal 'Othering'. The 'Other' is an important code of the cartoons which functions through a system of binary classification as an organising principle to distinguish the 'Other' from the rest of society. The inclusion of Pākehā children in Figure 1 differentiates between the good and bad, skinny and fat, and the deserving and undeserving. Or in other words, Pākehā and Māori: us and them.

In Figure 2, although some characters have light or red hair, we read this image as a family gathered around a table at home, thereby reinforcing the idea that the characters are Māori and not Pākehā. The caption in Figure 2 includes the possessive pronoun in 'eases our poverty' which suggests one unit. Their inclusion brings attention to the lighter shades of Māori which is an attempt to erase ambiguity in the white-brown world of New Zealand and to dismiss race and ethnicity as erroneous concepts. More importantly, it is a reminder that the growing 'white Māori' population are also the 'Other'. A form of 'Othering' that presents itself is the exaggeration of the characters' physical features which works to create a distance between them and the audience to reinforce negative stereotypes. The characters' eyes are close together to emphasise dumbness and docility, while the size of many of the characters conjures notions associated with obesity such as laziness, gluttonous, hedonism and lack of self-control. They are representations which reaffirm stereotypical perceptions of the fat, lazy and dumb Māori. The grammatical error in the caption 'And puts something in you kids' bellies' is used to reaffirm stupidity. Obesity is stigmatised while the idealised figures of whiteness gain visibility and status. The inclusion of *tā moko* (traditional Māori tattoo), while not clearly recognisable but present nonetheless, is used as a cultural identifier on one of the characters in Figure 1 and serves as a code so there can be no misconstruction as to who *these people* are. The *tā moko* is scribbled on disrespectfully, to devalue the lower-classed body and to trample over Māori culture.

Negatively associated with Māori culture by dominant assumption, gang culture is implicit in both images. Figure 1 has a character wearing a blue cap, while another character wears a

red cap in Figure 2. The caps are on backward which shows immaturity by adults. The colours of the caps represent the two largest gangs in Aotearoa New Zealand, as blue is worn by the Black Power gang, and red is worn by the Mongrel Mob gang – both are predominantly Māori (Hamilton 2014). Gangs are deviant, so too are behaviours presented in the cartoons, including smoking near children (including a baby), alcohol consumption and gambling in a family environment. Deviance is closely associated with societal conceptions of crime and this is signified in the cartoons' captions. For example, Figure 1 includes: 'Psst!... If we can get away with this' which implies not just unethical behaviour but also a criminal mentality. In this way, Māori become criminalised. The 'Psst!' shows that the characters know their behaviour is questionable.

The association of 'free school food' invokes a sense of entitlement which is embodied in the discourse of special privileges for Māori, such as 'Māori privilege' (Borell et al. 2009; Meihana 2015). This view of 'privilege' is maintained with the presence of luxury products e.g. cigarettes, alcohol, lottery tickets, and electronic items – the reader is left thinking how can *those people* afford luxury items? This illustrates that the 'free school food' case is representative of wider societal structures where Māori are given unnecessary benefits. In that regard, the body shapes of the characters signify two contrasts: the negative connotations associated with obesity as already mentioned, and the opposite: the sense that Māori are 'privileged' because they supposedly get extra benefits that other members of society do not receive, like 'free school food', which helps maintain a hefty body. Therefore, the 'free school food' is presented as something that Māori do not need, but also as being detrimental to their health and contributing to their privilege and 'entitlement mentality'.

In that sense, Māori are juxtaposed as being either 'poor' or 'privileged' – the audience can choose why they dislike Māori. The descriptions of gluttony and privilege seek to remove and deny whatever it is Māori possess and desire; if Māori are overindulging then they should be moderated and controlled. On the other hand, the carrying of empty bowls (Figure 1) suggests beggary which is closely related to social problems such as poverty, disease and mental illness. Around the time that the cartoons were published, some newspapers included letters to the editor and news articles about begging. For example, on 30 March 2013, under the headline

'What's the policy on street begging?' (Naylor 2013) a letter to the editor in the *Dominion Post* highlighted the rise of beggars on the streets of Wellington. Two months later, on 18 June 2013, a news article featured in the same newspaper, titled 'City council acts on rise in "opportunistic" begging' (Heather 2013). While in Auckland, on 3 July 2013, a news article headlined 'Beggar ban' (Jones 2013) was published in the *New Zealand Herald*. Therefore, the suggestion of beggary in Figure 1 as a code is inescapable from the contextualised social environment and acts as a cue, suggesting, once again, Māori are 'getting something for nothing'. Moreover, Māori are happy to humiliate themselves in exchange for free food, which shows that Māori culture is moribund and has been replaced by the 'lifestyle' depicted in the cartoons – a reaffirmation that Māori can never be civilised.

Associated with this lack of civilisation is the Anglocentric notion of the 'savage'. The so-called 'dignified Māori' (Wineguard 2012: 39) or 'noble Māori' (Brooking 2004: 60) no longer exists. The images constitute proof of savagery and, therefore, present a universal truth. The family in Figure 2 are burdening taxpayers by relying on 'free school food' because they have spent their own (welfare) money on cigarettes, alcohol, lottery tickets and electronic items – and food for their pet dog. The girl burps and thinks nothing of it as the spit leaves her mouth – indicating she is uncouth. The baby is also spitting and, like the rest of the family, the baby is obese: its eyes are close together with a facial expression of low intelligence. The baby symbolises biological determinism: this ethnic group are *born* this way; Māori are dehumanised and demonised. They are degenerate and cannot be saved; but worse: they are multiplying. Māori children currently comprise 25.6 percent (or 1 in 4) of all children in Aotearoa New Zealand, due to a high birth rate and this is predicted to increase (Statistics New Zealand 2016). If the cartoons signified poverty and classism, then the characters in both cartoons would be stereotypical images of poor Pākehā because there are more of them who are poor than Māori (Rashbrooke 2013). But the poor Pākehā are not the problem; *Māori people are the problem*. That is what the cartoons signify to us.

Discussion and concluding comments

We begin by summarising the events that unfolded after the publication of the cartoons. The cartoons became a focus of nationwide discussion after publication. Māori politicians from different political parties made pub-

lic statements condemning the cartoons. Te Ururoa Flavell, Member of Parliament for the Māori Party, said: 'It's way out of line and racist' (Dally 2013: para 27). Tau Henare, Member of Parliament for the National Party, said: 'It's just gotta stop and people in positions of power like a cartoonist for a newspaper should know better' (Dally and Dally 2013: para 54). The Mana Movement, a breakaway political party from the Māori Party, wrote to the Race Relations Commissioner requesting that action be taken (Radio New Zealand 2013). While Louisa Wall, Member of Parliament (Labour Party) for Manurewa, lodged written complaints that eventually resulted in the ruling by the Human Rights Review Tribunal in May 2017:

... it was not unlawful for the defendants to publish the two cartoons which are the subject of the present proceedings. The provisions of s 61 of the Human Rights Act 1993 were not breached. This is because the cartoons were not likely to excite hostility against or bring into contempt Māori and Pacifica (Wall v Fairfax New Zealand Limited 2017: 53).

The findings of the Human Rights Review Tribunal were unsurprising given the studies of racist media discourse in Aotearoa New Zealand (e.g. Will 1973; Thompson 1953, 1954a, 1954b, 1955; Moewaka Barnes et al. 2012) which indicate that there are no repercussions for news media when they negatively stereotype Māori. Within the media discourse, the cartoons become normalised and legitimised as part of hegemonic discursive practices in Aotearoa New Zealand. The news media are free to depict Māori however they like, as they operate within the rules and regulations of the dominant culture and its institutions. This is exemplified by the 56-page decision of the Human Rights Review Tribunal which includes references to Pākehā case law, freedom of expression, rights of editorial decision-making, freedom of the press and other colonial forms of thinking that are embodied in dominant narratives. But absent in the decision is any reference to Māori laws, rules and protocols – known as *tikanga Māori*; it is not seen – if it is invisible it cannot be recognised. Once again, Māori are subordinated to colonial rule, ethics and morality. The dominant group defines acceptable standards including racism. Susan Devoy, the Race Relations Commissioner, stated that the cartoons were offensive but not racist (Radio New Zealand 2013), and said that the nation needs to 'de-myth those bunks' (cited in Manhire 2013: AO33).

Our semiotic analysis 'de-mythologised' the form of representation associated to Māori. We interpreted the cartoons to signify Māori as a problem: they are poor, untrustworthy, irresponsible, criminal-minded, obese, unintelligent, ill-mannered, beneficiaries who are always looking for a handout. The cartoons also show a contradiction: that Māori have poor parenting skills which contribute to the cycle of deprivation, as shown by smoking and drinking in front of their children but, on the other hand, that Māori are born degenerate as shown by the representation of the baby caricatured as unintelligent. The representation of the 'free school food' reproduces the discourse of 'Māori privilege' (Borell et al. 2009; Meihana 2015), and indicates that Māori do not need initiatives like the free breakfast programme because they take advantage of it. The inclusion of the luxury products, such as cigarettes, alcohol, lottery tickets and electronic items, signal that this is representative of a wider structural issue, where Māori exploit unnecessary benefits. All of this serves to 'Other' Māori from Pākehā, in a binary opposition, which is illustrated by the inclusion of the innocent Pākehā children who are presented as deserving of help. Moreover, an important consideration is the invisibility of the historical and social conditions.

This analysis, then, unmasks normalised racism in Aotearoa New Zealand. The conclusion by the Race Relations Commissioner that the cartoons are not racist and the finding by the Human Rights Review Tribunal that the cartoons were not unlawful merely serve to legitimise racist acts. Significantly, the *Marlborough Express* found that 7,500 people out of 10,100 participants in an online poll did not find Figure 1 offensive (Wall v Fairfax New Zealand Limited 2017). The majority rule in a colonial society. The insights of the late Māori scholar, Ranginui Walker, are relevant for this discussion:

The Fourth Estate is controlled by Pākehā. It selects the events it deems newsworthy, which usually centre on violence, conflict and competition. When these events involve Māori and Pākehā, it consistently represents the status quo, helping them to maintain their power. So long as this unequal power relationship persists, the struggle of the Māori for a just and equitable society is a struggle without end (Walker 1990: 45-46).

And what about the cartoonist? What was he thinking when he represented Māori in his drawings? He has actually commented: 'The whole point was overlooked ... that being of a

system that gave something for nothing which could be exploited by a few' (Nisbet 2013: para 26). So, who are these few? According to Al Nisbet: 'I basically tried to work out the sort of people who would try to get away with something like that' (cited in Manhire 2013: AO33). It is clear from our analysis who these people are.

References

- Ali, Suki (2012) Visual analysis, Seale, Clive (ed.) *Researching society and culture*, London, Sage Publications, third edition pp 283-301
- Allen, Graham (2003) *Roland Barthes*, London, Routledge
- Barthes, Roland (1967) *Elements of semiology*, New York NY, Hill and Wang
- Barthes, Roland (1972) *Mythologies*, New York NY, The Noonday Press
- Barthes, Roland (1974) *S/Z*, New York NY, Hill and Wang
- Barthes, Roland (1977) *Image, music, text*, London, Fontana Press
- Barthes, Roland (1983) *The fashion system*, New York NY, Hill and Wang
- Barthes, Roland (1988) *The semiotic challenge*, New York NY, Hill and Wang
- Belich, James (1996) *Making peoples: A history of the New Zealanders from Polynesian settlement to the end of the nineteenth century*, Auckland, Penguin Books
- Berg, Lawrence and Kearns, Robin (2009) Naming as norming: 'Race', gender and the identity politics, Berg, Lawrence and Vuolteenaho, Jani (eds) *Critical toponymies: The contested politics of place naming*, Surrey, Ashgate Publishing pp 19-51
- Berger, Arthur Asa (1999) *Signs in contemporary culture*, Salem WI, Sheffield Publishing Company
- Berger, Arthur Asa (2010) *The objects of affection: Semiotics and consumer culture*, New York NY, Palgrave Macmillan
- Bhabha, Homi (1994) *The location of culture*, London, Routledge
- Borell, Belinda, Gregory, Amanda, McCreanor, Tim, Jensen, Victoria and Moewaka Barnes, Helen (2009) It's hard at the top but it's a whole lot easier than being at the bottom: The role of privilege in understanding disparities in Aotearoa/New Zealand, *Race/Ethnicity*, Vol. 3, No. 1 pp 29-50
- Brooking, Tom (2004) *The history of New Zealand*, Westport CT, Greenwood Press
- Brown Pulu, Teena (2013) 'Forget China: No shark trade in Tonga. Yeah right', *Te Kaharoa*, Vol. 6, No. 1 pp 217-259
- Bruce, Steve and Yearley, Steven (2006) *The Sage dictionary of sociology*, London, Sage Publications
- Chakma, Suhas (2001) Setting the record straight, Chakma, Suhas and Jensen, Marianne (eds) *Racism against indigenous peoples*, Copenhagen, The International Work Group for Indigenous Affairs pp 10-16
- Chandler, Daniel (2007) *Semiotics: The basics*, Abingdon, Routledge, second edition
- Dally, Joelle (2013) 'Racist' cartoon slammed, *Dominion Post*. 30 May. Available online at <http://www.stuff.co.nz/dominion-post/news/politics/8736355/Racist-cartoon-slammed>
- Dally, Joelle and Dally, Michael (2013) 'Racist' cartoon slammed, *The Press*, 30 May. Available online at <http://www.stuff.co.nz/national/8736295/Racist-cartoon-slammed>
- Dalziel, Raewyn (1999) Southern Islands: New Zealand and Polynesia, Porter, Andrew (ed) *The Oxford history of the British Empire: Volume 3: The nineteenth century*, Oxford, Oxford University Press pp 573-596
- Danesi, Marcel (2009) *Dictionary of media and communications*, Armonk NY, M. E. Sharpe
- Delgado, Richard and Stefancic, Jean (2001) *Critical race theory: An introduction*, New York NY, New York University Press
- Dines, Gail (1995) Toward a critical sociological analysis of cartoons, *Humor: International Journal of Humor Research*, Vol. 8, No. 3 pp 237-255
- Downing, John and Husband, Charles (2005) *Representing 'race': Racisms, ethnicity and the media*, London, Sage Publications
- Durie, Arohia (1999) Emancipatory Māori education: Speaking from the heart, May, Stephen (ed.) *Indigenous community-based education*, Clevedon, Multilingual Matters pp 67-78
- Durie, Mason (1998). *Te mana, te kāwanatanga: The politics of Māori self-determination*, Melbourne, Oxford University Press
- Durie, Mason (2003) *Ngā kāhui pou: Launching Māori futures*, Wellington, Huia Publishers
- Etemad, Bouda (2007) *Possessing the world: Taking the measurements of colonisation from the 18th to the 20th century*, New York NY, Berghahn Books
- Etherington-Wright, Christine and Doughty, Ruth (2011) *Understanding film theory*, New York NY, Palgrave Macmillan
- Ferri, Beth and Connor, David (2006) *Reading resistance: Discourses of exclusion in desegregation & inclusion debates*, New York NY, Peter Lang Publishing
- Fanon, Frantz (1967) *Black skin white masks*, London, Pluto Press
- Foster, Susan (2014) When the quip hits the fan: What cartoon complaints reveal about changes in societal attitudes to race and ethnicity, *The European Journal of Humour Research*, Vol. 2, No. 4 pp 25-45
- Gamst, Glenn, Liang, Christopher and Der-Karabetian, Aghop (2011) *Handbook of multicultural measures*, Thousand Oaks CA, Sage Publications
- Gordon, Elizabeth and Trudgill, Peter (2004) English input to New Zealand, Hickey, Raymond (ed.) *Legacies of colonial English: Studies in transported dialects*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press pp 440-455
- Hamilton, Claire (2014) *Reconceptualising penalty: A comparative perspective on punitiveness in Ireland, Scotland and New Zealand*, Abingdon, Routledge
- Hall, Stuart (1997) *Representation: Cultural representations and signifying practices*, London, Sage Publications
- Hamelink, Cees (2016) *Media and conflict: Escalating evil*, Abingdon, Routledge
- Hartmann, Paul and Husband, Charles (1974) *Racism and the mass media: A study of the role of the mass media in the formation of white beliefs and attitudes in Britain*, London, Davis-Poynter
- Heather, Ben (2013) City council acts on rise in 'opportunistic' begging, *Dominion Post*, 18 June p. 1
- Hjelmlev, Louis (1959) *Essais linguistiques*, Copenhagen, Nordisk Sprog- og Kulturforlag
- Holmes, Kelly, Murachver, Tamar and Bayard, Donn (2001) Accent, appearance, and ethnic stereotypes in New Zealand, *New Zealand Journal of Psychology*, Vol. 30, No. 2 pp 79-86
- Jones, Nicholas (2013) Beggar ban, *New Zealand Herald*, 3 July p. 4
- Ka'ai-Mahuta, Rachael (2011) The impact of colonisation on te reo Māori: A critical review of the state education system, *Te Kaharoa*, Vol. 4, No. 1 pp 195-225
- Keenan, Danny (2000) Hine's Once Were Warriors hell: The reporting and racialising of child abuse, *Social Work Review*, Vol. 12, No. 4 pp 5-8
- Keiha, Pare and Moon, Paul (2008) The emergence and evolution of Urban Māori Authorities: A response to Māori urbanization, *Te Kaharoa*, Vol. 1, No. 1 pp 1-17
- King, Michael (1999) *Being Pākehā now*, Auckland, Penguin Books
- Kingi, Tanira (2008) Māori land ownership and land management in New Zealand, *Making land work*, Canberra, Australian Agency for International Development pp 129-151
- Lange, Raeburn (1999) *May the people live: A history of Māori health development 1900-1920*, Auckland, Auckland University Press

- Lashley, Marilyn (2006) Remediating racial and ethnic inequality in New Zealand: Reparative and distributive policies of social justice, Myers, Samuel L and Corrie, Bruce P (eds) *Racial and ethnic economic inequality: An international perspective*, New York, Peter Lang pp 129-150
- MacDonald, Vince (1995) *The evolution of socio-political cartoon satire in the New Zealand press during the 19th and early 20th centuries: Its role in justifying the alienation of Māori lands*, Master's thesis, University of Canterbury, Christchurch, New Zealand
- Manhire, Toby (2013) At last, Devoy speaks out on race, *New Zealand Herald*, 31 May p. A033
- Massey University (2010) Media stereotyping of Māori needs to change, Massey University, 23 April. Available online at <http://www.massey.ac.nz/massey/about-massey/news/article.cfm?mnarticle=media-stereotyping-of-mori-needs-to-change-23-04-2010>
- May, Stephen (2012) *Language and minority rights: Ethnicity, nationalism and the politics of language*, New York NY, Routledge, second edition
- McCan, David (2001) *Whatiwhatiho: The Waikato raupatu claim*, Wellington, Huia Publishers
- Meihana, Peter (2015) *The paradox of Māori privilege: Historical constructions of Māori privilege circa 1769 to 1940*, Doctoral thesis, Massey University, Palmerston North, New Zealand
- Memmi, Albert (2003) *The colonizer and the colonized*, London, Souvenir Press
- Merchant, Raema (2010) *Who are abusing our children? An exploratory study on reflections on child abuse by media commentators*, Master's thesis, Massey University, Albany, New Zealand
- Milner, Andrew (2005) *Literature, culture and society*, Abingdon, Routledge, second edition
- Moewaka Barnes, Angela, Borell, Belinda, Taiapa, Ken, Rankine, Jenny, Nairn, Ray and McCreanor, Tim (2012) Anti-Māori themes in New Zealand journalism: Toward alternative practice, *Pacific Journalism Review*, Vol. 18, No. 1 pp 195-216
- Moewaka Barnes, Angela, Taiapa, Ken, Borell, Belinda and McCreanor, Tim (2013) Māori experiences and responses to racism in Aotearoa New Zealand, *MAI Journal*, Vol. 2, No. 2 pp 63-77
- Moon, Paul (2002) *Te ara ki te Tiriti: The path to the Treaty of Waitangi*, Auckland, David Ling Publishers
- Moon, Paul (2013) *Turning points: Events that changed the course of New Zealand history*, Auckland, New Holland Publishers
- Morley, David and Chen, Kuan-Hsing (1996) Introduction, Morley, David and Chen, Kuan-Hsing (eds) *Stuart Hall: Critical dialogues in cultural studies*, London, Routledge pp 1-22
- Murawska-Muthesius, Katarzyna (2009) The Jyllands-Posten Muhammad cartoons controversy: Racism, and 'cartoon work' in the age of the world wide web, Huggan, Graham and Law, Ian (eds) *Racism Postcolonialism Europe*, Liverpool, Liverpool University Press pp 148-161
- Myllylahti, Merja (2016) *New Zealand media ownership 2016*, Auckland, AUT's Centre for Journalism, Media and Democracy
- Naden, Neville and Havea, Jione (2014) Colonization has many names, Havea, Jione (ed.) *Indigenous Australia and the unfinished business of theology: Cross-cultural engagement*, New York NY, Palgrave Macmillan pp 1-8
- Nairn, Raymond, Pega, Frank, McCreanor, Tim, Rankine, Jenny and Barnes, Angela (2006) Media, racism and public health psychology, *Journal of Health Psychology*, Vol. 11, No. 2 pp 183-196
- Naylor, Glennis (2013) What's the policy on street begging? (letter to the editor), *Dominion Post*, 13 March p. 4
- Nisbet, Al (2013) Cartoonist hits back over 'racist' drawings, *Dominion Post*, 3 June. Available online at <http://www.stuff.co.nz/dominion-post/comment/columnists/8749998/Cartoonist-hits-back-over-racist-drawings>
- Nöth, Winfried (1995) *Handbook of semiotics*, Bloomington, IN, Indiana University Press
- Page, James, Davis, John M, Whitely, Michael, Stone, Ariel, Schaaf, Tessa and West, Doe (2013) Perspectives on invasion: Great Britain, Northern Ireland, United States, Canada, and Australia, Malley-Morrison, Kathleen, McCarthy, Sherri and Hines, Denise (eds) *International handbook of war, torture, and terrorism*, New York NY, Springer pp 359-379
- Pihama, Leonie (1996) Re-positioning Māori representation: Contextualising 'Once Were Warriors', Bieringa, Jan and Dennis, Jonathan (eds) *Film in Aotearoa New Zealand*, Wellington, Victoria University Press, second edition pp 191-194
- Radio New Zealand (2013) Cartoon 'appalling, but not racism', 30 May. Available online at <http://www.radionz.co.nz/news/national/136461/cartoon-%27appalling,-but-not-racism%27>
- Rashbrooke, Max (2013) Introduction, Rashbrooke, Max (ed.) *Inequality: A New Zealand crisis*, Wellington, Bridget William Books pp 1-17
- Robson, Bridget (2007) Economic determinants of Māori health and disparities, Bargh, Maria (ed.) *Resistance: An indigenous response to neoliberalism*, Wellington, Huia Publishers pp 45-61
- Rubie-Davies, Christine, Liu, Sabrina and Lee, Kai-Chi Katie (2013) Watching each other: Portrayals of gender and ethnicity in television advertisements, *The Journal of Social Psychology*, Vol. 153, No. 2 pp 175-195
- Saussure, Ferdinand de (1959) *Course in general linguistics*, New York NY, The Philosophical Library
- Sériot, Patrick (2016) Barthes and Lotman: Ideology vs culture, *Sign Systems Studies*, Vol. 44, No. 3 pp 402-414
- Spoonley, Paul (1990) Racism, race relations and the media, Spoonley, Paul and Hirsh, Walter (eds) *Between the lines: Racism and the New Zealand media*, Auckland, Heinemann Reed pp 26-37
- Stam, Robert and Spence, Louise (1983) Colonialism, racism and representation: An introduction, *Screen*, Vol. 24, No. 2 pp 2-20
- Statistics New Zealand (2016) Population projections overview. Available online at http://www.stats.govt.nz/browse_for_stats/population/estimates_and_projections/projections-overview/nat-maori-proj.aspx
- Steuter, Erin and Wills, Deborah (2008) *At war with metaphor: Media, propaganda, and racism in the war on terror*, Lanham MD, Lexington Books
- Steuter, Erin and Wills, Deborah (2011) The dangers of dehumanization: Diminishing humanity in image and deed, Ross, Susan Dente and Lester, Paul Martin (eds) *Images that injure: Pictorial stereotypes in the media*, Santa Barbara CA, Praeger, third edition pp 43-54
- Thiong'o, Ngũgĩ wa (1994) *Decolonising the mind: The politics of language in African literature*, Harare, Zimbabwe Publishing House
- Thompson, Richard (1953) Māori affairs and the New Zealand press, *The Journal of the Polynesian Society*, Vol. 62, No. 4 pp 366-383
- Thompson, Richard (1954a) Māori affairs and the New Zealand press: Part I, *The Journal of the Polynesian Society*, Vol. 63, No. 1 pp 1-16
- Thompson, Richard (1954b) Māori affairs and the New Zealand press: Parts II and III, *The Journal of the Polynesian Society*, Vol. 63, Nos 3-4 pp 216-227
- Thompson, Richard (1955) Māori affairs and the New Zealand press: Part IV, *The Journal of the Polynesian Society*, Vol. 64, No. 1 pp 22-34
- van Dijk, Teun A (1987) *Communicating racism: Ethnic prejudice in thought and talk*, Newbury Park CA, Sage Publications
- van Dijk, Teun A (1991) *Racism and the press*, London, Routledge
- van Dijk, Teun A (1993) Stories and racism, Mumby, Dennis K (ed.) *Narrative and social control*, Newbury Park CA, Sage Publications pp 121-142
- van Leeuwen, Theo (2005) *Introducing social semiotics*, Abingdon, Routledge

Walker, Ranginui (1990) The role of the press in defining Pākehā perceptions of the Māori, Spoonley, Paul and Hirsh, Walter (eds) *Between the lines: Racism and the New Zealand media* Auckland, Heinemann-Reed pp 38-46

Wall v Fairfax New Zealand Limited (2017) In the Human Rights Tribunal. Available online at <https://www.justice.govt.nz/assets/Documents/Decisions/wall-v-fairfax-new-zealand-ltd-2017-nzhrrt-17.pdf>

Walters, Karina L, Beltran, Ramona, Huh, David and Evans-Campbell, Teresa (2011) Dis-placement and dis-ease: Land, place, and health among American Indians and Alaska Natives, Burton, Lisa M, Matthews, Stephen A, Leung, ManChui, Kemp, Susan P and Takeuchi, David T (eds) *Communities, neighborhoods and health: Expanding the boundaries of place*, New York NY, Springer pp 163-198

Warburton, Terry and Saunders, Murray (1996) Representing teachers' professional culture through cartoons, *British Journal of Educational Studies*, Vol. 44, No. 3 pp 307-325

Warner, Joanne (2015) *The emotional politics of social work and child protection*, Bristol, Policy Press

Will, Donald (1973) *Stereotypes of Māoris held by Europeans: A study based on four newspapers of the liberal period*, Master's thesis, Massey University, Palmerston North, New Zealand

Wineguard, Timothy (2012) *Indigenous peoples of the British Dominions and the First World War*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press

Note on the Contributors

Dr Steve Elers is a member of the following *iwi* (Māori tribes): *Ngāti Kauwhata, Ngāti Hauā, Ngāti Maniapoto, Ngāti Raukawa, Ngāti Kahungunu ki Wairarapa, Rangitāne, Ngāi Tahu*, and *Ngāti Hikairo*. He is a lecturer in the School of Communication, Journalism and Marketing at Massey University. His recent doctoral thesis (2016) at Auckland University of Technology's School of Communication Studies examined Māori perspectives of public information advertisements targeted at Māori. He has published in *Te Kaharoa, Intercultural Communication Studies and Grounded Theory Review*, and has recently been accepted for publication by *China Media Research* and *Postcolonial Text*.

Phoebe Elers is a researcher at Massey University's School of Management. She recently submitted her doctoral thesis at Auckland University of Technology's School of Communication Studies which examined a digital communication medium that connects patients to their healthcare providers. Her primary research interests include discourse analysis and semiotics, Māori health, and the use of information and communication technologies for healthcare purposes. She received a Master's degree from Queensland University of Technology in 2014.

‘My four year old is an asshole’: Considering ethical challenges of children as the butt of jokes in contemporary comedy and satire

Drawing from relevant theory in humour research and media studies, this paper analyses the representation of children and minors in comedy, in particular within darker forms of humour and satire. By focusing on two recent cases – an excerpt of a stand-up routine by comedian Louis CK and a controversial sketch featured at the Oscar ceremony in 2016 hosted by Chris Rock – it explores to what extent the use of children and minors as part of disparaging humour discourses present moral and ethical challenges and possibly violations. It argues for a more nuanced discussion by proposing a categorisation of the humour and comedy targeting children and minors and by arguing for individual meta-ethical analyses of the mediation of these cases.

Keywords: comedy and ethics, satire, taboo comedy, disparaging humour, children, stand-up comedy

Introduction

When comedian Katie Rich, a regular staff member of popular television sketch show format *Saturday Night Live* (NBC 1975-present) issued a tweet about Barron Trump, Donald Trump’s youngest son (aged ten at the time), controversy ensued (Itzkoff 2017). The tweet read: ‘Barron will be this country’s first homeschool shooter’ (Rich 2017) and resulted in a temporary suspension by Rich from the show and a variety of publicised criticism, among others

by Chelsea Clinton (Bromwich 2017). Though the common thread of criticism was directed at the hitherto allegedly unbroken rule within American politics and media that children of presidents ‘should be off limits’ (ibid) it points to a larger recurring debate within Western mainstream media: how appropriate is the use of children as topics in the discourse of comedy entertainment and how should it be done best?

The increasing desire to protect children from the dangers and ambiguities inherent in society corresponds with the invention of childhood as a socio-cultural concept which some researchers locate at the beginning of the nineteenth century (Ariès 1962). The advent of the middle classes and the development of schools helped to ‘differentiate children from adolescents and adolescents from adults’ (ibid: 128). After the rise of the mass media throughout the twentieth century scholars have been analysing efforts by parents and authorities to mitigate negative effects on children (see, for instance, Maccoby 1954; Barcus 1969; McLeod et al. 1982).

Because humour and comedy depend on socio-cultural context they reflect the moral and ethical boundaries these humorous discourses operate in at various times. Hence, what is important is a thorough reflection of the ethical climate by those producing humour and comedy. After all, as Blackburn (2001: 5) has argued, ‘the satirist and cartoonist, as well as the artist and novelist, comment upon and criticize the prevailing climate just as those who get known as philosophers’.

The ethics of humour and satire are a constant subject of public debate as well as academic research across various disciplines. However, the use of children and minors in comedy and satire has rarely been the focus of scientific research – a gap this paper hopes to contribute to in closing. By analysing specific cases and discussing relevant theory of the inter-disciplinary field of humour studies and media studies, I argue for a refined and nuanced discussion of the ethical ramifications of the utilisation of children and minors in comedy, both as subjects and participants.

Hence, a central question this paper will address is: how can the democratic necessity of being able to generate humour and satire from all realms and discourses of society be reconciled with an equally relevant concern to protect its most vulnerable members? First, though, I will introduce the relevant psycho-social dynamics of humour as a cultural phenomenon.

On the meaning of humour

Humour as a communicative tool and socio-cultural substance permeates almost every aspect of the society we live in. As Gournelos and Greene assert, 'humor is ... a highly complex rhetorical, social, and political tool. Moreover, we can never be quite certain *who* is laughing, *how* they're laughing, or *why* they're laughing ...' (italics in original) (2011: xviii). However, over centuries of academic research, within the interdisciplinary field of humour studies, three dominant theories of humour have emerged: incongruity, superiority and relief theory. In brief, the incongruity theory claims that humour arises when a built-up expectation is resolved with a surprise turn, whereas the superiority theory connects the occurrence of humour with social hierarchy and the dismantling of authority (laughing up or down). The relief theory renders humour as a tool and method to enable a discourse to help us cope with all kinds of fears and desires, from the unease attached to bodily functions to more profound experiences such as birth and death.

Without exploring all theories in more detail, it is important to note that they may overlap and in many cases occur simultaneously when we try to analyse certain jokes or humorous discourses. In the specific cases of this paper, aspects of superiority and relief theory dominate the analysis. In particular, the latter, which is also described as catharsis theory, addresses the approaches to joking with more taboo-laden subjects: '... in catharsis theory, humor comes from a momentary eruption of relief of psychological and/or social tension (e.g., laughing during a funeral or at a faux pas)' (Gournelos and Greene 2011: xviii). Humour and comedy involving vulnerable members of society, in particular children, causes anxieties reflected in relief and superiority theories. However, for our purposes, it is not only important to be aware of how different types of humour work, but also to reflect on what they actually accomplish.

Here, it is vital to differentiate between humour used in every-day social interaction and humour in its mediated form – comedy on stage, television or online. The dissemination of humour through media, especially social media, seriously complicates analyses and negotiations over the meaning of a joke, 'because mediated humor is not firmly located in one context anymore, making mediated jokes even more polysemic and ambiguous' (Kuipers 2008: 388). With regards to our topic, 'context' also refers to an often-cited mantra within the world of comedy – 'know your audience'. Through the mediation

of humour, the comedian or joke-teller is not in control of its audience anymore. Inevitably, this makes mediated humour a 'team-effort' where writers, directors, editors and, to a certain extent also, critics are equally responsible for the dissemination and possible ethical consequences of humour as are the comedic performers themselves.

Hence, what has to be addressed in the conclusion to this analysis are two main questions: should there be an ethical code of conduct within the industry of comedy production or, conversely, is its absence a prerequisite for humour and comedy to work in the first place?

On children, humour and mockery

Before focusing on the cases and the ensuing ethical dilemmas, it seems useful to map out how the relationship of children and humour has been explored in academic research. Various disciplines, chiefly social-psychology and linguistics, have been focusing on the dynamics of children and humour in terms of levels of comprehension and personal development, meaning an enquiry of what types of humour make infants laugh. Hurley et al. (2011: 242) state that children laugh at 'deformity and the grotesque' and stress the importance of humorous visual stimuli: 'Well before an infant can get a verbal joke she may exhibit a delight almost amounting to an addiction for the simple game of peek-a-boo, in which an adult or other child briefly hides behind an occlude, and then is suddenly revealed – "Peak-a-boo!" – to peals of laughter' (ibid: 220).

Of specific relevance for our approach are studies examining the psycho-social effects of humour and laughter experienced by infants. In his study on 'Laughter and ridicule', Michael Billig (2005) explores the dynamics of 'corrective mockery' as an important part of every child's socialisation: 'There is the overt message of the adult, laying down the rules. Then there is the covert teaching that indicates how the adult world of rules can be disrupted' (ibid: 204). Psychologists, such as Johnson and Marvis (1997), conducted studies with children in their case study on 'Little Ari', in which they showed that earliest incidents of verbal humour occurred in the form of linguistic mistakes. When Ari called things by the wrong name, his parents laughed, which in turn informed Ari of his errors. Another, more 'classical' example, stems from the studies of Sigmund Freud (1990 [1909]). Here, Freud describes the embarrassed reactions of 'Little Hans' towards the flirtatious attempts of a little girl and the amusement this causes to

Hans' parents. The disciplinary laughter works in two ways: Hans learns what is appropriate behaviour in public as well as that inappropriate behaviour can be socially funny.

What these approaches have in common is the hypothesis that embarrassment and ridicule play an important part in an infant's development, that a child learns about ethical frameworks, moral norms and social etiquette through 'mild forms of punishment' such as being laughed at. The conclusion, then, is that this serves as an important aspect of every child's socialisation, as long as 'the mockery was enacted with displays of delight to ensure that the child, who was being mocked, was not being excluded from joining in the laughter' (Billig 2005: 204).

What cannot be underestimated, however, and what makes these claims problematic, is the social hierarchy and maldistribution of power inherent to these dynamics. In particular, if children and minors are subjected to an undefined audience in mass and/or social media, this imbalance in power is disproportionately enhanced because mediated exposure is significantly different from (parental) face-to-face interaction. As a consequence, various types of disparaging humour face constant criticism by practitioners and audiences alike. As Hurley et al. argue:

In effective humor you want the butts of your jokes to be approximately equal in cleverness to the audience – there's no mirth in pointing out the 'stupidity' of (real) idiots, or infants, or cows, for instance. This is why moron jokes lose their allure once childhood is over (2011: 267).

Still, the processes of joke negotiations are bound by the contexts of their humorous discourses and it seems too short a deduction to simply declare children and minors a thematic 'no go area' for humour, comedy and satire. Hence, the following discussion of cases will hopefully enlighten the debate and specify the argument.

Laughing at children – the cases

The following cases chosen stem from various realms of mass media, more specifically stand-up comedy and sketch comedy. What they have in common is that they utilise children and young adults as targets of comedy, as 'butts of their jokes'. As I am going to show, they do so from different perspectives, ideological points of departure and, ultimately, with different results.

Case 1: Louis CK stand-up routine

American writer, actor, director and stand-up comedian Louis CK reigns among the most prolific and unique voices in contemporary comedy. After decades of experimenting with different styles and types of comedy, Louis CK created a distinct type of comedic performance in which the ambiguous play with taboo-subjects and the use of (allegedly) personal material based on his private life constitute the main threads of his humour. As a recurring theme, his two daughters feature in his stand-up routines, often in outrageous and reveal-all segments that have continually transgressed boundaries of what was deemed acceptable within stand-up comedy. A striking example of the use of his children is this excerpt, a routine from his HBO special *Shameless* (2007). The section about his younger daughter is approximately five minutes long and consists of an outrageous description of the little girl's character and demeanour. Louis CK delivers the routine in a 'dead-pan', mostly matter-of-fact manner. The bit is structured into four different 'anecdotes', which serve as accumulative steps, each addressing aspects of disparaging and humiliating humour towards his child:

Step 1 – abstraction: The other kid we have, she is a girl, she is four ... she's also a fucking asshole (audience laughter) ... it's true man, I'm serious. I say this with no remorse. Fucking asshole, she's a douchebag (audience laughter) ... she *is*... fucking jerk. The other day I'm like, we're like trying to leave, put your shoes on, please, put your shoes on, put your shoes on. How many times can you say that to someone before you just wanna kick them right in the fucking face (audience laughter)? Seriously, if you're with a group of people that are trying to go somewhere and you can't go, you can't go, because a member of your party just refuses to put their shoes on (audience laughter), that person is a fucking asshole, ok? (audience laughter). You don't do that to people. Imagine you're with a group of people: 'Hey, we can't go'. 'Why?' 'cause fucking Bill won't put his shoes on, he just won't put 'em on!' (audience laughter). 'Fuck, Bill what's your problem?' 'I don't wanna put 'em on!' (audience laughter), 'Fuck you!'

In Step 1 Louis CK uses inter-familial abstraction to generate humour. By transferring the irrational childish behaviour of not wanting to put your shoes on onto a grown man (Bill), the absurdity of the situation and frustrated reaction of the parent are successfully transformed

into comedy. At the same time, this opening serves as a striking introduction to the little girl's stubborn character.

Step 2 – equalisation: The fucking kid sucks, seriously. The other day, I walk into the kitchen. She's talking to my wife, she says: 'Mum, I saw a doggy today!' and I'm like 'Really? Where did you see a doggy?' and she's like: 'I'm telling mum and not you!' (audience laughter). I'm like: 'Hey, fuck you, I'm just asking to be nice anyway' (audience laughter). 'You think I actually give a shit about a dog you saw? (audience laughter). 'Like that was gonna be an awesome story that you saw a fucking dog!' (audience laughter). 'Who gives a shit?' 'I've got better stories than you, I have an interesting life. I'm on fucking television. I won an Emmy. You don't ask me what fucking happened to me today, you little bitch!' (audience laughter, applause) ... (laughs) No, I didn't say that to her, obviously. But that's the thing nobody ever calls her on her bullshit (audience laughter). That's how she got to be an asshole in the first place (audience laughter) ... Nobody just goes: 'Ah, fuck you, you don't know!' (audience laughter). I'd love to be just for one day, to be fucking, totally... 'Oh, you drew a dog? Let me see this ... that's not a ... shitting me? ... that's a scribble, that's nothing. That's not even a ... anything. Show me a dog that looks like that I'll give you a thousand dollars, seriously' (audience laughter) ...

In Step 2, Louis CK equalises childish and adult behaviour and contextualises inevitable 'shortcomings' of infants and children by measuring them against grown-up standards. The accumulation of insults presented like a lot of bottled up parental frustration is broken by a meta-comment ('No, I didn't say that to her, obviously'), offering a first disclaimer that all of his reactions are, in fact, made up for comic purposes. This is important, since Louis CK is about to enter the next area of taboo.

Step 3 – taboo: children and violence: The other day I was just like, dreaming about fucking kicking (audience laughter) ... like, kicking her out of the window ... you know, just fucking 'pfooom' (audience laughter). I would never fucking hurt her, but I wanna, I do, you know (audience laughter) ... One day my daughter had a black eye, because she walked into a door, because she's stupid (audience laughter) ... and, uhm, she had a little black eye, and I took her to ice-cream,

we went to an ice-cream place ... and everybody at the ice-cream place was giving me, like, a dirty look. And I realise: they think I hit her! And she has a black eye and that's why I'm taking her to the ice-cream, that's what they think (audience laughter). And I was so insulted, I wanted to say: 'Hey, fuck all of ya, ok? She's this big. You think if I hit her she'd have a black eye? (audience laughter). She'd be fucking decimated, there'd be nothing there. Look at this shit. I would ruin her head with one punch, easily (audience laughter). She has no defensive skills, she fucking sucks, she'll be like (mimes friendly smiling child face), smiling at me (mimes punching the kid) (audience laughter) ... just a dent, like a fucking bomb went off' (audience laughter) ...

Here, Louis CK plays with the audience's anxiety of listening to a first-hand account of domestic child abuse and the taboos attached to violence against children. The comedy ensues through exaggeration and the unexpected turn of his reaction to the shocked onlookers ('And I realise: they think I hit her') by the inappropriate and incongruent double-take reply 'I was so insulted' and 'You think if I hit her she'd have a black eye?'. Again, he sets the anecdote up with the de-escalating disclaimer: 'I would never fucking hurt her' though with a more ambiguous spin than before by adding 'but I wanna, I do'. In the final part of the routine, Louis CK then addresses the actual issue of his comedy – parental overstraining – by injecting a further taboo subject:

Step 4 – taboo: children and sexuality: I don't know, I love my daughter, but people really don't get what it's like with a kid full-time. You know, we parents make you love our kids, because we dress them up and take 'em out, and you look at them and go 'awwww, nice', but you don't know what she's like when she comes home, and the dress comes off, and she rubs her ass in mud, she's fucking gross, she won't fucking take a bath, like, once you have a baby, you can't force the kid ... fuck her, let her sleep in her clothes, not dealing with it tonight. Her hair gets clumpy. She stinks. Sometimes it's like, fucking, uugh (mimes turning away in disgust) ... rancid, stinky, fucking kid. She fucking ... in front of people, she like scratches her asshole in front of people, like fucking deep asshole scratching (audience laughter) ... in the fucking panties, and then she smells her finger (audience laughter), that's the kind of person I'm talking about. She's dis-

gusting (audience laughter and applause). I come home and she's just laying there on the carpet with just, spread eagle naked and she's just stretching her vagina open going 'arrgh' (audience laughter) ... fucking, holding it open and I'm like 'fuck' (mimes jump scare) ... shit ... ok ... wow ... that's ... wow (audience laughter) ... don't react ... hey, I can't go 'ahhhhh' (screams and mimes pointing in shock), that would fuck her up (audience laughter) so I go 'Hey, hello, hi, how are you?' ... 'how was school?' ... 'ok' ... 'aarrrrgh' (mimes daughter screaming) ... (audience laughter) ...

What makes this bit controversial is the repugnant and sexually explicit portrayal of the child's body and inappropriate behaviour (stretching her vagina). Another transgression CK plays with and generates humour from is the indiscreet exposition of his daughter's private life. This is not how children are usually talked about by adults – neither in real life nor in fiction. At this point, when his performance gets more and more exaggerated ('ahhh' and 'aarrrrgh') and the 'shtick' of transgression and inappropriate exposure has been recognised and registered with the audience, Louis CK ends on a surprisingly thoughtful punchline:

I don't know what the fuck to do about it either. She does it all the time and I can't ... I don't wanna stop her ... cause you know what? She's happy! That's the happiest I have ever seen any person, in my entire life. That's a fucking human being, at their happiest, just 'aaarghh', that's what we all wish we could do. We should all be doing that, but ... we gotta fucking stop it, cause she'll be fucking homeless if she doesn't cut this shit (audience laughter).

Despite the outrage, disgust and shock of his daughter's behaviour, Louis CK, the father, recognises the freedom of mind and body and lack of impulse control as something positive, as a value to strive for and, thus, ultimately as something that needs to be protected. As such, his (over)sharing of outrageous and taboo-breaking anecdotes becomes an act of solidarity with both parents of children. The routine can be read as a plea for uninhibited and outrageous behaviour which, though frowned upon, is ultimately liberating.

The question remains, however, whether Louis CK's use of his daughters in his comedy routines is ethical in the sense that his naturalistic performance instigates a claim for authenticity

and veracity. Despite never using their actual names, we assume that his daughters exist and are forced to negotiate our unease with the fact that the anecdotes presented are shared without their consent. What becomes clear from studying Louie CK's stand-up comedy is that his humour originates to a large extent at the intersection of the offensiveness of his material with the ambiguity of his stage persona. Constantly meandering back and forth between straight-forward genuine punchlines and a subversive meta-perspective on his own comedy we remain unsure of where his humour actually originates. As a consequence, we are faced with fictitious versions of his daughters that are utilised to convey CK's distinct humour of an overwhelmed and exhausted parent. Here, children are not really harmed, but have to be fictionally harmed for the sake of his comedic trajectory to work. Still, as Willis (2009) points out, in comedy this artistic licence comes with the disclaimer that,

... being a comic figure with a licence does not place people outside of social life or mean that comic talk has no social consequences. ... This ambivalence of the comic figure is also paralleled, of course, in the material offered (humour), which is by design ambiguous. Thus, the comic figure can use any or all of these factors as an excuse should jokes cause offence, as, indeed, we all can when taking on the role of teller: 'It was only a joke' (ibid: 137).

To illustrate a converse approach in utilising children in comedy and its ethical consequence, I will now introduce a second case which features children as actual performers.

Case 2: Chris Rock sketch at the Oscars

In 2016, comedian Chris Rock hosted the 88th Academy Awards ceremony. That year, the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences had been criticised and ridiculed for its lack of diversity in nominating Afro-American actors (for instance, through the hashtag campaign #OscarsSoWhite). Black comedian Rock addressed the controversy and boycott by a variety of (black) actors in his opening monologue, but it was a short sketch later in the show which caused significant offense and criticism in the aftermath of the broadcast. First, Chris Rock made a comment about the Academy's legal advisors. He said:

The result of tonight's Academy Awards have been tabulated by the accountant firm of PricewaterhouseCoopers. They

sent us their most dedicated, accurate and hard-working representatives. I want you to please welcome Ming Zhu, Bao Ling and David Moskowitz...

Three Asian children, dressed as 'mini-lawyers' with suits, glasses and briefcases entered the stage to laughter and applause from the audience. Their appearance was the 'punch-line' to the sketch, drawing humour from the racist stereotype that Asian (and Jewish) people 'are good at maths and business'. Anticipating and commenting on the controversial nature of the joke, Rock added another punchline: 'If anybody's upset about that joke, just tweet about it on your phone – that was also made by these kids.'

In effect, the first part of the sketch, exploiting a cultural-ethnic stereotype, was supposed to serve as a 'red herring' to set up a satirical joke criticising the effects of globalisation and the ignorance by the American public towards child labour in China and other Asian countries. That said, in this paper I will neither analyse how the sketch was executed in terms of its comedic trajectory nor deconstruct its socio-cultural and racial context. What is important for our purpose is the fact that the sketch used real children as actors which, ultimately, complicates its execution, reception and meaning. As part of the critical reaction to the sketch, actress Laura Kung, the mother of one of the children, publicly criticised the producer's ethical approach:

[She] had been told that they would be introduced as accountants from PricewaterhouseCoopers, the firm that tabulates the Oscars results. She assumed the bit would be complex, perhaps an artful takedown of the crude stereotype that Asians excel at math. Instead, she would soon realize, Rock's elementary joke merely restated it. ... So it came as quite a blow when Rock himself, given the chance to provide young actors of color with 'great parts', chose to, as actress Constance Wu put it, 'parade little kids on stage w/no speaking lines merely to be the butt of a racist joke'. Much like Rock's decision not to participate in the boycott, the Kungs' decision to participate in the bit made moral and practical sense, which makes it all the more heartbreaking (Kovvali 2016).

In the critical assessment of the production of the piece, it becomes clear that the parents were presented with the entirety of the sketch only after they had signed the contract

for their daughter to participate as part of the Oscars telecast (Tseng 2016; Kovvali 2016). The insufficient preparation and pre-production, on top of the fact that the children merely had a 'walk-on' part in silly costumes and no speaking lines, render their use in the sketch as exploitive and ethically problematic. In her discussion of the use of child actors for controversial theatre plays, Ott (2010: 19) argues:

The inclusion of children may provide an accurate reflection of the world and may inspire the audience to analyse their actions and the effects that they are having on the rest of society. On the other hand, some productions use the child on stage as a token shock element: manipulating the audience into an unearned, strong emotional response. In this case, however, it is not only the thematic context (commenting racism with racism) that is problematic, but also the lack of ethical consideration towards a vulnerable group of media workers, here: child actors, and their parental guardians on behalf of the producers of a globally broadcast show.

Hence, the close analyses of these two cases show that a more differentiated and nuanced approach is needed when assessing the ethical dynamics of the use of children and minors in comedy and humour. I will now offer a categorisation of different types of comedy involving children and finally suggest a meta-ethical framework in which to evaluate them.

Categories of disparaging humour

When children and minors serve as the butt of a joke in comedy and satire they do so for different reasons. In order to evaluate the ethical and moral consequences of this, at times, controversial approach to humorous entertainment, I have identified different perspectives of disparaging humour towards children and minors and propose the following categorisations.

- (1) Parental and familial humour: taking the cue from the first case analysed for this study, Louis CK's routine about his four-year-old daughter, this type of comedy features children as part of anecdotes or other verbal recollections. The humour originates from observations of everyday behaviour, mostly within a family setting and can feature elements of exaggeration as well as controversial and offensive jokes. The comedic trajectory of parental and familial humour and comedy is often to make claims about and comment on parental shortcom-

ings and frustrations. There are differences in terms of the material and comic disposition by male and female comedians, reflecting the confirming or subversive approaches to perspectives and stereotypes of gender in society. In stand-up comedy, this type of humour is represented by, among others, Louis CK, Jim Gaffigan, Mary Ellen Hooper, Lisa Alvarado and Hugh Fink in the US and, Dara O'Briain and Michael McIntyre in the UK.

- (2) Humour featuring children as cipher: in this type of humour and comedy, children and minors are utilised not to make fun of distinctly childish or infant behaviour or comment on family relations, but to call attention to other issues and grievances in society. The use of children adds a layer of controversy and possible offense, in particular if taken literally, often an ambiguity these types of comedy and satire deliberately play with and take into account. The sketch using Asian child actors at the Oscars ceremony discussed in this study is an example for this type of humour (further complicated by the use of actual children on stage). But also stronger forms of satire can be categorised as such, for instance the controversial cover of French satirical magazine *Charlie Hebdo*, in September 2015, which featured a cartoon drawing of the refugee boy Aylan, or rather Alan, Kurdi who had drowned the previous year in the Mediterranean Sea (Cavna 2015; Davy and Hackel 2015). The ethical scope of using the boy's image was discussed widely, for instance by Cavna (2015: 1) who, despite claiming that drawing children in peril had almost become a metaphorical tool of the trade by political cartoonists, asked: 'But how is such an image's effect changed when the child has a virally published name, and a still-fresh universal association? ... How are the rules of satiric engagement altered when the child is already a symbol infused with white-hot politics and deeply poignant discomfort and loss?'
- (3) Bullying humour: this type of comedy drawing humour from 'laughing at children' clearly derives from the realm of the so-called 'darker forms of humour' (Kuipers 2008; Lockyer and Pickering 2009). Here, comedians deliberately pick on children and minors by focusing on alleged physical or mental short-comings and making fun at their expense. Even though the dynamics of this kind of humour are similar to the mech-

anisms of ridicule and ostracising known from 'schoolyard bullying', it is important to specify that this type of comedy in its mediated form is not necessarily employed with malicious intent by some comedians. For instance, though arguably ethically ill-advised in the prevailing socio-political climate at the time, the controversial tweet by comedian Katie Rich about Barron Trump, mentioned in the introduction to this paper, did not set out to target and bully Barron Trump as such, but rather used his public persona as 'son of Donald Trump' to comment on the controversy surrounding the new president and his conservative and controversial stance on gun regulation in the United States.

However, other stand-up comedians have adopted a far more problematic approach to this type of bullying humour. For example, the case of Canadian comedian Mike Ward and his jokes about Jeremy Gabriel, a young boy who suffers from a facial disfigurement and received some media attention on Canadian television because he was invited to sing for the pope. Comedian Ward, a few years later, made him the subject of his television comedy special, joking about the boy's alleged terminal illness and calling him ugly. The case became controversial when the boy, by now 19, went public and claimed that Ward's jokes had resulted in him being bullied at school and caused so much distress that he had tried to commit suicide. Ward was ordered to pay a fine by the Quebec Human Rights Tribunal, which Ward declined and appealed on the grounds of free artistic expression (Birell 2016; Khandaker 2016).

What the case illustrates is the problematic ethical negotiations of mediated disparaging humour towards individual children used mostly for 'shock value', with the targets, or victims, clearly voicing their disapproval of their involvement. As a consequence, an imbalance of power ensues, plausibly giving reason for the argument that, for the most part, this type of humour, 'or attempted humour, is not only inappropriate but also disastrous for the various social identities and relations that are drawn into it' (Lockyer and Pickering 2009: 1). As such, it has significant moral and ethical ramifications for its butts, targets, its perceived 'other' – children and minors.

(4) Adultified representations of children: this type of comedy draws humour from the trope of using children as substitutes for adults and adult behaviour. In particular, cartoons are making use of this effect, for instance in the comic strips such as *Peanuts* (1950-2000), or animated cartoons such as *The Simpson* (NBC 1989-) or *South Park* (Comedy Central 1997-). The culturally projected innocence and naivety of children and their demeanour is used to convey 'grown-up truths' and to comment on adult behaviour. The inclusion of controversial themes and language, in particular in *South Park*, has occasionally been perceived as offensive and problematic (Ravenwood 1999; Shea 2010; Poniewozik 2015), but because it does not make use of actual children as actors (the voice actors are all adults) and presents its comedy in a highly artificial, aesthetic and distorted reality, its satirical effects target society as a whole and not children as vulnerable, disempowered individuals.

Conclusion

As I have shown in the early section of this paper, jokes, in general, represent a process of negotiation about the line between funny and offensive (Kuipers 2008: 384). More precisely: 'Humour is only possible because certain boundaries, rules and taboos exist in the first place. Their existence, along with the satisfaction and sense of agency gained in overcoming them, are equally vital to why we laugh' (Lockyer and Pickering 2009: 16) That said, in evaluating the ethical ramifications of comedy and satire targeting children and minors, it is important to apply a social critique of its humour. For example, Weaver (2011), in his study of racist humour, examines 'the ways in which racist humour acts as racist rhetoric, has a communicative impact, is persuasive, and can affect impressions of truth and ambivalence' (ibid: 1). For humour is always equally inclusive as it is exclusive and, if it targets vulnerable groups or members of a society, particular attention and consideration is required.

Both the categorisations of disparaging humour towards children in general and the discussed cases, in particular, show that there is a fundamental difference between various types of 'corrective mockery' (Billig 2005) in face-to-face interaction and the variety of approaches of comedy and satire as part of mediated communication. As Madianou (2011), in her discussion of media ethics, rightly asserts: 'The media are not neutral conveyors of meaning: mediated communication is asymmetrically

structured and its structuring inevitably shapes the experience of communication' (ibid: 179). This reminds us of the responsibility we have towards children and minors as the 'weak element' in these discourses, for 'wronged subjects are often silent' (ibid). At the same time, we have to be aware of the pitfalls of a misunderstood advocacy for the vulnerable, in particular in an ethical climate of over-cautious political correctness.

In conclusion, we can assert that questions of offense at an individual level should only partially inform these debates. Rather, the main focus should be on where the comedy or acts of ridicule originate from. What kind of laughter does the disparaging humour induce? Does it possibly represent, or at least point to, larger socio-cultural dynamics which give the ridiculed subject, either as group or individual, some empowerment by eventually making them 'own the joke'?

Questions such as these, then, underline the necessity of carefully conducted meta-ethical analyses of individual cases, in which also the media as 'conveyors of the message' have to be the subject of constant critical investigation. As a consequence, the entertainment industry and media workers at all levels of the creative process have to be aware of the distinct ethical challenges in working with children and minors. Perhaps ethical codes of conduct and concepts of parental mediation across the entertainment industry and media in general have to be refined and strengthened to protect one of the most vulnerable groups.

References

- Ariès, Philippe (1962) *Centuries of childhood: A social history of family life*, New York, Random House
- Barcus, F. E. (1969) Parental influence on children's television viewing, *Television Quarterly*, Vol. 8, No. 3 pp 63-73
- Billig, Michael (2005) *Laughter and ridicule: Towards a social critique of humour*, London, Sage
- Birrel, Ian (2016) Edinburgh festival: Nothing funny about comedian who drove disabled child to attempt suicide, *inews.co.uk*, 7 August. Available online at <https://inews.co.uk/opinion/columnists/comics-nothing-funny-driving-disabled-child-attempt-suicide/>, accessed on 28 June 2017
- Blackburn, Simon (2001) *Ethics: A very short introduction*, Oxford, University Press
- Bromwich, Jonah Engel (2017) Chelsea Clinton and others say: Leave Barron Trump alone, *New York Times*, 23 January. Available online at <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/01/23/arts/television/barron-trump-tweet-katie-rich-snl.html>, accessed on 30 May 2017
- Cavna, Michael (2015) So *Charlie Hebdo* drew the drowned Syrian boy. Was it wrong?, *Washington Post*, 16 September. Available online at https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/comic-riffs/wp/2015/09/16/so-charlie-hebdo-drew-the-drowned-syrian-boy-was-it-wrong/?utm_term=.c533cf0840ff, accessed on 27 June 2017

- CK, Louis (2007) *Shameless*, HBO, excerpt: 'My four-year-old is an asshole.' Available online at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fOaIFgse4Hw>, accessed on 28 May 2017
- Davy, Steven and Hackel, Joyce (2015) Why *Charlie Hebdo's* cartoons of the drowned Syrian boy are lost in translation, *pri.org*, 17 September. Available online at <https://www.pri.org/stories/2015-09-17/why-charlie-hebdos-cartoons-drowned-syrian-boy-are-lost-translation>, accessed on 27 June 2017
- Freud, Sigmund (1990 [1909]) *Analysis of a phobia in a five-year-old boy ('Little Hans')*, *Case Histories 1*, *Penguin Freud Library No 15*, Harmondsworth, Penguin
- Gournelos, Ted and Greene, Viveca (2011) *A decade of dark humor: How comedy, irony, and satire shaped post-9/11 America*, Mississippi, University Press of Mississippi
- Hurley, Matthew M., Dennett, Daniel C. and Adams Jr., Reginald B. (2011) *Inside jokes: Using humor to reverse-engineer the mind*, Cambridge Massachusetts, MIT Press
- Itzkoff, Dave (2017) Katie Rich of 'S.N.L.' is suspended for tweet mocking Barron Trump in *The New York Times*, 23 January. Available online at https://www.nytimes.com/2017/01/23/arts/television/katie-rich-snl-suspended-barron-trump-tweet.html?_r=0, accessed on 30 May 2017
- Johnson, K. E. and Marvis, C. B. (1997) First steps in the emergence of verbal humour: A case study, *Infant Behaviour and Development*, No. 20 pp 187-96
- Khandaker, Tamara (2016) This comedian is fighting for his right to 'make fun of everything', *vice.com*, 26 February. Available online at <https://news.vice.com/article/this-comedian-is-fighting-for-his-right-to-make-fun-of-everything>, accessed on 28 June 2017
- Kovvali, Silpa (2016) Parading kids onstage ... to be the butt of a racist joke? This is Chris Rocks's idea of progress?, *Salon.com*, 8 March. Available online at http://www.salon.com/2016/03/08/parading_kids_onstage_to_be_the_butt_of_a_racist_joke_this_is_chris_rocks_idea_of_progress/, accessed on 25 June 2017
- Kuipers, Giseline (2008) The sociology of humor, Raskin, Victor (ed.) *The primer of humor research*, Berlin, De Gruyter pp 361-398
- Maccoby, E. (1954) Why do children watch television?, *Public Opinion Quarterly*, Vol.18, No. 3 pp 239-244
- Madianou, Mirca (2013) Ethics of mediation and the voice of the injured subject, Couldry, Nick, Madianou, Mirca and Pinchevski, Amit (eds) *Ethics of media*, New York, Palgrave Macmillan pp 178-197
- McLeod, J. M., Atkin, C. K. and Chaffee, S. H. (1972) Adolescents, parents, and television use: Adolescent self-report measures from Maryland and Wisconsin samples, Comstock, G. A. and Rubinstein, E. A. (eds) *Television and social behaviour, Vol. 3: Television and adolescent aggressiveness*, Washington DC, US Government Printing Office
- Ott, Meredith (2010) *Child actor ethics – Children in plays with adult themes*, Saarbrücken, Lambert Academic Publishing
- Poniewozik, James (2015) How 'South Park' perfectly captures our era of outrage, *The New York Times*, 8 December. Available online at <https://www.nytimes.com/2015/12/09/arts/television/south-park-sketches-grander-satire-themes.html>, accessed on 29 July 2017.
- Ravenwood, Emily (1999) The Innocence of children: Effects of vulgarity in South Park, *CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture 1.2*. Available online at <https://doi.org/10.7771/1481-4374.1038>, accessed on 29 July 2017
- Rich, Katie (2017) Barron will be this country's first homeschool shooter, *twitter.com @katiemaryrich*, tweet, 20 January, no longer available
- Shea, Nina (2010) National Review: An uncensored look at 'South Park', *npr.org*, 27 April. Available online at <http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=126300994>, accessed on 29 July 2017
- Tseng, Ada (2016) What it's like to be the butt of the joke: One of the kids at the Oscars speaks out, *Pri.org*, 2 March. Available online at <https://www.pri.org/stories/2016-03-02/what-its-be-butt-joke-one-kids-oscars-speaks-out>, accessed on 25 June 2017
- Weaver, Simon (2011) *The rhetoric of racist humour – US, UK and global race joking*, Farnham, Ashgate Publishing
- Willis, Ken (2009) Merry hell: Humour competence and social incompetence, Lockyer, Sharon and Pickering, Michael (eds) *Beyond a joke: The limits of humour*, New York, Palgrave Macmillan pp 128-147

Note on the Contributor

Dr. Kai Hanno Schwind is an Associate Professor at Westerdals Oslo School of Arts, Communication and Technology, Christian Kroghs Gate 32, 0186 Oslo, Norway. Telephone: +47 94 24 80 32; email: schkai@westerdals.no.

Supervisors' perspectives on the ethical supervision of long form writing and managing trauma narrative within the Australian tertiary sector

Writing is a form of therapy; sometimes I wonder how all those who do not write, compose or paint can manage to escape the madness, the melancholia, the panic fear which is inherent in the human situation.¹

Miller and Tougaw observe: 'If every age has its symptoms, ours appears to be the age of trauma.'² Their observation may help explain the emergence of memoir and autobiographical or autoethnographic creative works, not just commercially but also within the tertiary sector. Almost all of this work is appearing within journalism, English and creative writing schools as students turn to creative practice degrees as a means to write through traumatic events. The focus of this paper is to share various perspectives from experienced academics gathered during a qualitative research project where a range of scholars supervising trauma narrative Higher Degree Research (HDR) candidates within Australian universities were interviewed regarding what their needs are in relation to the ethical supervision of their candidates. We anticipate this paper may also contribute to a better understanding of the supervisory relationship pertinent to candidates undertaking their own personal trauma narrative research and the ways in which academics might provide a safer space for both themselves and their Higher Degree Research students.

Introduction

The research for this paper is shaped by the field of literary journalism, a long-debated and critiqued scholarly arena in the northern hemisphere though it is far less debated and critiqued in Australia. Away from this global debate concerning the naming of this genre, we contend that memoir/life-writing/autoethnography sits comfortably within this burgeoning field of journalism research, also found nestled within creative writing schools.

Our concern with current practices pertinent to supervising this mode of literary journalism is twofold: firstly, is the commodification of trauma in the tertiary sector in order to gain a degree, without proper safeguards for the student, an ethical practice? And secondly: linked to this concern is also the possibility of vicarious traumatisation for academics managing these kinds of student testimonial projects. There is clear documentation of 'vicariously induced PTSD in therapists who talk to traumatised clients' (Littrell 2009: 308). Witnessing student repackaging of traumatic narrative in a supervisory role might produce the same effect in academics (Joseph and Rickett 2010: 4) and, therefore, they too need safeguards.

Building on previous scholarly work focusing on the benchmarking of Australian doctoral standards (Webb, Brien and Burr 2012), this paper aims to develop an understanding of the institutional framework supervisors require to support and empower them and their candidates to safely produce literary journalism texts of trauma narrative. Can there be a generic form of doctoral supervision applicable across the disciplines? Debate around this issue has been on-going for some decades. We argue that, indeed, there is a generic scaffolding around doctoral supervision, but that the space within this scaffolding must be fluid, depending on many elements, both professional/disciplinary and personal. In this way, we agree with Frick et al. when they contend: 'The pedagogic relationship between the doctoral student and research supervisor(s) forms an important *relational* learning space. This relational learning space exists regardless of the doctoral programme format' (Frick, Brodin and Albertyn 2014: 1). This is a quasi-private space between supervisor and candidate, with periodic and eventual institutional and community accountability.

What we have learnt from our own research is that the canon around supervision literature is growing but none of it attests, or tests, what we

recognise as the fraught issues around supervising trauma narrative in this quasi-private and fluid relational space. Catherine Manathunga (2007) comes close to echoing a broad warning: 'For both supervisors and students, there are additional risks associated with the blurry boundaries between acting upon students' disciplinary subjectivities and providing advice and guidance about aspects of students' personal lives' (Manathunga 2007: 219); as do Aitchison and Mowbray (2013: 859) when they observe that: '... the role of emotion in the doctoral undertaking is often subsumed in the passionless language of bureaucratic rationalisation and economic imperatives'. Again, while not directly addressing the writing of trauma narrative as creative artefact, they are articulating some of our supervisory concerns. They argue: '...governments and institutions demand efficiency and productivity, and favour "countables" such as research outputs, completions and competencies rather than the more subjective and elusive aspects of experience such as emotion' (ibid: 859-860).

While Aitchison and Mowbray lean towards recognition of this seemingly unspoken gap of emotion within the learning space, again their approach, while non-specific, is still important: '... the emotional aspects of doctoral education are rarely openly discussed during candidature. The research culture of higher education is deeply rooted in notions of scholarship that favour objectivity, disembodied rationality and autonomy' (ibid: 861). Indeed, their research, as with Manathunga's eight years earlier, finds that candidates rarely felt able to confide in their supervisors about emotional issues affecting their lives and candidature. Two years later Aitchison (2015) insists:

...discourses that view the ability to write as a 'given', ensure writing is silenced, that it is not explicated in curriculum or supervisor training, and is therefore situated as incidental to doctoral scholarship. Thus, discussions about pedagogical practices of writing remain peripheral, even subversive – except at times of crisis, when writing comes very much to the fore (Aitchison 2015: 1294).

Psychology professor James Pennebaker (2000: 8) argues that 'converting emotions and images into words changes the way a person organises and thinks about trauma...'. He further explains: '... by integrating thoughts and feelings ... the person can more easily construct a coherent narrative of the process'. But as taboos are broken down by society and the market place

explodes with memoir, students look towards the academy to write about their own crises. Joseph asserts this allows '...for the discussion of formerly proscribed subjects' where 'people write their life stories in an attempt to heal, to expose, to indict, to rebalance an injustice, as a community service, to help other victims, to empower', and that increasingly 'many turn to the university as a framework to execute their work' (Joseph 2011).

Doctoral supervision in the Humanities and Social Sciences has become a focal point for debate, growing in magnitude in the past decade. There are various reasons for this, but one of the integral explanations is the emergence of the creative PhD and, attendant to that, differing definitions of what constitutes 'research' in this space. Hamilton and Carson conclude that it was the publication of the Strand Report,³ formally recognising practice-led research in 1998, which led to the acceptance of the creative PhD throughout Australia (Hamilton and Carson 2013: 1). Our research⁴ examines a particular category of creative doctoral investigation – life writing/memoir/auto-ethnography shaped by the narration of trauma. It is clear from the cumulative literature reviews on supervisory practices⁵ that issues around the safety or, otherwise, danger zones of such endeavours – and the resulting ethical tensions – have not been adequately addressed within the academy. We believe both issues are of paramount importance both to the professional and personal approaches within supervision in the Australian tertiary sector and, we argue accordingly, further afield.

This paper, while one of several we are producing from our research to date, aims to draw attention to what supervisors of HDR candidates writing trauma narrative believe may be lacking pedagogically on an institutional level, and what strategies could be implemented for 'safer' supervision of such projects.

The study: Methodology

Ethical approval for this research project was granted by the University of Technology Sydney's human research ethics committee,⁶ and thirteen supervisors drawn from the Humanities and Social Sciences within the Australian academy were interviewed between 13 October 2015 and 6 May 2016, either by Skype, telephone or face-to-face. The qualitative interviews were semi-structured, drawing on a set of five inter-related questions in an attempt to answer our over-arching question: do supervising academics of long form trauma narrative doctoral

research within the field of literary journalism (memoir, life-writing, autoethnography) feel professionally and emotionally equipped to supervise ethically and safely such work, and what further resources and training are needed to support ethically and safely their role?

Interviews were recorded, including consent, and academics were given the opportunity to be on-the-record or de-identified; two of the thirteen academics chose de-identification during the course of the interview. In these two cases, it was to protect the identity of candidates, since what was discussed may have led to recognition. Interviews were then transcribed. This research was funded by the Journalism Education and Research Association of Australia (JERAA) as part of the JERAA Research Grant 2015. It was also conducted in accordance with the Australian Media, Entertainment and Arts Alliance Code of Ethics.

A major indication from the data is that the majority of interviewees believe there is an opportunity for more explicit addressing of the life-writing of trauma narrative with its attendant triggers for psychic injury. Within the HDR supervisory pedagogy in their own institutions, many flagged existing ethical and supervisory protocols, but nothing which had a specific focus on the creative and autobiographical rendering of trauma narrative, and its ramifications. Having identified trauma narratives as a potentially fraught space for both candidate and supervisor (Joseph and Rickett 2010; Joseph 2011), we hope that the long-term objective of this research project promotes a further discussion throughout the academy, with the future goal of developing strategies for redress.

As a starting point, this paper immediately focuses on the final two questions of the five we asked the thirteen academics taking part in our research project. The following selected data will be presented in a raw, Question and Answer format (edited only for space) to provide an authentic voicing of how our interviewees, all highly experienced HDR supervisors within creative or journalism disciplines, initially and instinctively responded to the selected questions:

1. What are your recommendations for improving the pedagogy and practices around supervising HDR trauma narrative?
2. How can institutions further support both the student and supervisor working within this field?

We acknowledge that given the word limit constraints of this paper, we have not been able always to provide the supervisor's responses to these two questions in full, but as part of the qualitative interview process we have selected the most representative observations to build a collegial picture of current and possible future practice.

Supervisors' perspectives on Question 1

Professor Catherine Cole, Wollongong University

I think it's really important that less-experienced supervisors get the protocol thing right, get the support thing right and also have a forum in which to discuss, without breaching confidentiality too much, some of the things they've had to deal with and how they're managed. I think that's really, really important. ... But there are always things that slip under the radar. Know where the support is. Be very clear, as a supervisor, about your own feelings about the whole process. If you've experienced similar trauma, this can be a good thing...

...I don't want to make the protocol thing sound too bureaucratic. I think it's just more that ensuring people are aware of what's required legally, what's available as support and where to go for help. How to ensure the annual report or the biannual report process is honest and fair and the student can talk about it. But I do think also being aware of your own psychopathology within this is important.

... this is something that maybe in the past was dealt with, a long time ago, by the students either failing or becoming so unhappy they just left so the university didn't have to worry too much about it. But now, more and more people are coming – especially through the creative and visual arts. It isn't just unique to them. Other areas as well are taking more and more international students, for example, where they've often come from very, very traumatised places. Of course it's important that at least these matters are discussed and protocols and supports set in place that is respectful of both student and teaching while meeting the organisational response. ... It just seems you can't pretend it's not happening. It's happening and it's happening very much within these areas (interview, Cole, 2015).

Dr Fiona Giles, University of Sydney

I'm wondering if rather than a set of guidelines about how to manage the relationship that the supervisor follows and ticks boxes, it might be better to build it up ... between the candidate and the supervisor ... and to write an ethics of

engagement to some extent. So it's not just the supervisor saying: 'I've done this, I've ticked the box' but there's two of them understanding together what the process is. At least having a road map of some kind, a broad road map of where they're headed and what they might encounter along there.

There's things like history that people ... might be doing which might be written in narrative form, not as memoir. But they still cover traumatic material. And then in psychology people writing PhD on child abuse or incest or self-harm. In cultural studies, I met a PhD student a few years ago who'd worked as a prostitute and was writing about prostitution and self-harm and drug taking. So there were trauma elements there. So I think it comes up in ... different contexts (interview, Giles, 2015).

Professor Kevin Brophy, University of Melbourne

I think [the] suggestion that there be explicit training around the ethics concerned with that is a good suggestion, that's specifically for supervisors ... I think it would be very important if you did focus on trauma narrative to make it, for any kind of training, involve awareness that this applies at any moment to all, or can apply at any moment to all kinds of creative writing, even film scripts.

I think, maybe rather than subjecting theses of a non-fiction kind that are dealing with narratives of trauma, rather than subjecting them to an ethics clearance process, maybe it needs to be framed as an ethics awareness process to make sure that the student is aware of as many of the ethical implications. I'm wary about the term clearance because I don't think you're going to eliminate the ability of creative writing to hurt, to reveal, to run a very dangerous line between offence and revelation, and I wouldn't like to see creative writing become anodyne in the face of needing clearance. I'd rather that the clearance was framed as a process of increasing awareness of the ethics of the project such as this (interview, Brophy, 2015).

Professor Matthew Ricketson, University of Canberra

The practices need to be written up in projects of this kind and in other places so that people become more aware of them. Within institutions, one thought might be to have a more ... overtly ... balanced and mindful supervision team so that you have, let's say, someone's come to you as the primary supervisor because of your experience in this kind of area. Well, maybe the other people on the panel are not simply a junior colleague or a very, very senior colleague who's just filling in the numbers, but

someone who is more attuned to the kind of issues here so that you've got more than one port of call.

Different places place different weight on the primary as distinct from the secondary. ... I think it's an area where having two people who are quite closely involved will be of benefit to the student and will be of benefit to the supervisor because – it's like a co-author – you've just got that ability to bounce things backwards and forwards and to hopefully complement each other. One person is, say, really strong on the content of the area to do with the trauma. Then you've got someone who's got a stronger mental health background, or a background that complements so you build from the original supervision model. If you're weak on theory, get a good theory person; if you're weak on the content well then get a strong content person and so on. You build your supervision panel – or you should – so that it complements your needs as a student and your weaknesses and strengths. Apply that idea to this so that you are explicitly understanding and recognising there are mental health issues involved for both student and supervisor. That's what it's referred to at the Uni of Canberra. It's a supervision team ... the primary supervisor is the only person who gets a workload allocation; you will then have a secondary supervisor and you might have an associate depending on what the student wants. The idea is to build it a little bit more as a team that will provide complementary input (interview, Ricketson, 2015).

De-identified interview 7

There's really very little at our university of any kind of advanced standing on how to supervise or be a supervisor; it's all very operational. I was going to say I'm now supervising a number of projects with a professor of mental health nursing and that's actually really great because even though they're not even that kind of project – we're actually working quite a lot on history and other kinds of things, but it's really fantastic when those issues come up, because there's actually an expert that can deal with things. When questions come up in the ethics forum, it's really great.

Well I think it [trauma narrative] is a quite risky-in-a-way form of supervision and I don't think that fledgling supervisors should be just thrown into it. I don't believe that for any kind of supervision. I think it would be really great if there was maybe not a mandated module, but resources available that people could go to and find. One of the troubles with OLT⁷ is that all of these resources are developed, but often you

don't know about them and often they're these cumbersome, difficult websites. I think a little ready-reckoner kind of thing, something like a booklet or something. A little resource that was just a checklist or something (de-identified interview 7, 2015)

De-identified interview 8

If there was some kind of basic workshop, a three-hour basic workshop or something, that someone getting into this territory could do, online or something, text – certain texts to read, warn – certainly the warning areas, key discussion points. I think something like that would just be fabulous. We all have to do these supervision workshops, which are a lot of the general stuff about supervision, but to have one dedicated to people who are going to deal with trauma narratives or even creative writing more generally ... that would be fabulous, I reckon. If you could distribute it maybe even via an organisation like AAWP or something (de-identified interview, 2015).

Associate Professor Debra Adelaide, University of Technology Sydney

I would think that if there isn't some kind of statement or set of guidelines or protocols, or whatever you like to call it, then there should be, but it shouldn't be too extensive because we don't need more paperwork. If supervisors are taking on a student who's writing a trauma narrative and they feel that they don't really understand what will be involved – it should be made available to them in the form of a statement.

If there was something that a student was working on and for some reason – and I can't imagine why – this would affect me really, really personally to the point where I felt that I was myself suffering or traumatised, I suppose I would go and talk to someone more experienced. In the past I would've gone and talked to ... really, really experienced supervisors.

I suppose as confronting as some of the material is ... I mean, I read this piece [of a life-writing candidate] and just wept. It was such an awful story. So things do have the ability to affect me like that. It's hard not to be moved by – sometimes by what your students are writing, but I don't feel that I am affected to the point where I ever need to seek any help. I don't feel that at all. I suppose if I did I would see what support was available at the – through Student Services, for a start. I know they're very good for students. I don't know how helpful they are for staff (interview, Adelaide, 2015).

Professor Nigel Krauth, Griffith University

My recommendations for pedagogy and practice are not formulaistic. For the kinds of knowledge that trauma narratives uncover, the frameworks need to be flexible, agile and capable of innovation.

- Supervisory teams need to be solid in their supervisory capacities and insights, and in their caring and communicative skills.
- A crucial factor is the trust the student has in the supervisor, and vice versa, and the commitment of the supervisor. If there is a breakdown of trust or commitment, then there needs to be quick action to find alternative supervision arrangements. This requires a culture in the school where the student feels safe about speaking freely regarding their supervision.
- Common sense, caring, and a general understanding of defamation and other publishing laws and practices need to pertain in supervisory advice.

Get to know your HDR students very well in the supervisory process through personal discussions and friendly email exchanges. Go out to lunch, regularly, in HDR groups and one-to-one (interview, Krauth, 2015).

Associate Professor Dominique Hecq, Swinburne University

I think it's very important for supervisors to know themselves first of all, so I would recommend supervisors to answer a list of questions for themselves before they embark into such a difficult territory. So basic questions about what makes them tick, what are their master signifiers, whom they identify with and what makes them distressed, what makes them angry, what makes them identify with people or what are the triggers of empathy for instance. Sometimes we identify with victims without knowing why we are doing it, but it's important to know why we do it. So that's the rational aspect of it, but also I think that supervisors need to have an analyst – a therapist. I don't like the idea of therapist because there is the idea of normality attached to it, but a psychoanalyst is better because he always flicks back the question to you.

And then the student needs to do the same work independently of their supervisor, and I think the student needs a therapist or somebody they can turn to if there is a crisis because trauma never goes away.

I've written a ... paper for *TEXT* about problems and mistakes I made and what I did about it and how I learnt from my mistakes. However, what has helped me in this process is this reflecting upon it and writing and working through the problem, through writing actually was to think about another person I might like on the supervisory team. So it has been to broaden the supervisory panel and I have found that immensely useful (interview, Hecq, 2015).

Professor Gail Jones, University of Western Sydney

I've supervised a lot of trauma narratives and a lot of trauma work – there's not a lot of institutional recognition of what this means as an area of investigation. So I guess I've just developed my own protocols and my protocols are to deal with reading and discussing particular works ... talking about what is empathy, what is empathetic unsettlement, what is the distinction between historical and structural trauma, giving some sort of rather great examples. So talking about the way in which levels of generalisation are offensive to the victims of trauma and to historical victims of violence. So ideas about levels of discussion, but being historically specific and contextualising is more likely to lead to an ethical outcome, but also more likely to lead to one's own caution and hesitation I think. I don't know anybody has ever investigated this before. There's so much theoretical work, you know, I can give anyone a bibliography on trauma settings, but I doubt anyone's actually asked these questions about the academy (interview, Jones, 2015).

Associate Professor Kate Douglas, Flinders University

I think I'm increasingly thinking that it would be good – everybody, I think, feels kind of slightly undermined when you create more kind of guidelines to support supervisors. ... I work in RHD for a portion of my job and every time we try and do something that we think is more supportive, people feel as though it's an increased level of kind of surveillance or something like that, which is not what I think this is. But I do really feel no supervisor should be going into these kinds of projects without ... either a very experienced supervisor working with them, perhaps two other supervisors working with them, or some sort of set of guidelines that can be talked through with the candidate in the initial meeting perhaps with at least two supervisors present. I think there has to be something like that (interview, Douglas, 2016).

Supervisors' perspectives on Question 2

Professor Catherine Cole, University of Wollongong

One way or another, supervisions – and I speak here from having worked at three unis now on different experiences of supervision. I think most universities are aware from a number of points of view. One is their own liability issues, including vicarious liability around supervision and expectation of completion and so on. I think there are a whole lot of just straight organisational matters which made people say: if we take this person on, are they going to complete within three years? Most universities now [are] introducing this element that if you don't finish in time, you start paying, all these sorts of things. So there are legal issues. I think also universities are mindful of who's a – and I say this in inverted commas – 'good supervisor' and who's not. People who get too close to students, who don't supervise well through protocol because they don't know the best ways to do it. That's why those annual reports or biannual reports are always important to be done honestly.

I suppose there are other elements too. But if you said to a university do you really sit down and think about what this might mean, I don't know. There are so many elements of what constitutes trauma. But I do think most universities, to be fair, do have enough internal mechanisms to say: all right, the student's distressed. Let's get them student support or student counselling or international studies or supervise – they do provide supervisor training around these issues, if not directly, then certainly peripherally. They'll talk about it through supervisor training programmes. I've heard it at UTS. I've been in seminars where people have talked about what happens when a person starts to break down for a range of reasons, not just trauma.

...I've been doing some work with Liverpool Uni in the UK and UEA and so on. Do you know some of these universities actually specialise in trauma narratives and have units which are looking at trauma from the point of view of the post-colonial and so on? So they must, in themselves, have a whole range of protocols. I haven't looked into it in depth. But if you've got a cohort of 15 people who are all people who've experienced some pretty remarkable things, how do they manage a group like that? You've almost got to kind of gestalt, haven't you, where there's this conversation around a particularly painful area (interview, Cole, 2015).

Dr Fiona Giles, University of Sydney

I'm a bit torn about whether or not more ethics. Just that I don't want more in my life. ... I'm really wary of requiring more documentation and compliance requirements of ourselves and our students. On the other hand, I can see in certain instances why it's important to have that.

You're responsible for your own fate. If you make a mistake it's you who made the mistake, not the institution that can support you to prevent the mistake happening. So I'd really like the institution to support you to prevent the mistake. Not make you fill out another form (interview, Giles, 2015).

Professor Kevin Brophy, University of Melbourne

Maybe there needs to be – maybe institutions need to be a little bit more sophisticated and targeted in the kind of counselling services that are offered and specifically employ people who are capable and knowledgeable enough to supervise the highly intelligent but perhaps fragile people who are doing PhDs, and not send them to the same counsellors that other graduates are talking to (interview, Brophy, 2015).

Dr Willa McDonald, Macquarie University

Just to recognise it as a potential issue and to make sure supervisors know they can access support. And where they can access it, and also for students. I don't know if this is related or not, but we do have nominated people who are students' representatives that students can go to if they have issues with their supervision, that's not you. They have to have someone they can go to, to bypass you if they have complaints or concerns.

I think there not only needs to be support for the supervisor who may recognise what the student is going through, but perhaps somebody independent within the department or faculty that the student can go to if they feel they can't come to you, but something is going on. Because you've got this double role of having to keep them on track with the project (interview, McDonald, 2015).

Professor Matthew Ricketson, University of Canberra

I don't think academia as an institution or as an enterprise, deals with the muck of human emotions very well at all ... they're head people, they're intellectual people. When I say 'they' I mean 'we' you know, so it's just not where they go to naturally.

It used to be a kind of once-a-year, one-day workshop. It's now a continual series of work-

shops on all different aspects: examination, ethics committees, writing workshops. When I arrived there it was mandated, you had to do one a year; now I don't think it is mandated, but they're actually offered all the time. They are face-to-face. There's some materials online for some of the stuff, but they did that because they were responding to 'I can't make it on this day' whereas if we just continually are offering them, you just come along as you need ... the process that you're in and having struggles with at the moment.

There are modules on dealing with the examination process; the supervisor/student relationship; the confirmation seminar and getting you ready for ... writing ... but I don't recollect trauma.

The hope is that I think it's probably fair to say that five or ten years ago, there wasn't much in the way of workshops about the student/supervisor relationship and how important it is and how potentially difficult it can be and how much management it requires from both parties and from the university to support both parties. Like at least there is some understanding now that that is a key relationship ... that lots of PhDs, if they fall over, it's because the relationship between the supervisor and the student has broken down. This is the next thing which is to do with the content of what you're researching about and not just seeing it through a 'rats and stats' mindset, but understanding, you know ... there are disciplines that are quite attuned to this, like anthropology and ethnography and you would presume, psychology and psychotherapy and so on (interview, Ricketson, 2015).

Professor Jen Webb, University of Canberra

I'd like to see them work together. When someone's doing a PhD that's engaging with trauma narratives then I think that the supervisor and the candidate together, or supervisors because we have panels, should actually be in conversation maybe with a specialist trauma psychologist who's trained in the field, and talk every six months – you touch base and you debrief and then you go on from there. That means you're getting an outside – the cold, calm, outside – view of it who will see if there's risk – people go slow enough, do the first years, but I think six months is probably long enough. I think by the time you get to your six months if there are serious problems you can catch them then before it becomes a disaster. But that would have to be mandated and then there would have to be some sort of sign off by the research students'

office. They need to see the document; they need to see the confirmation document. They need to see all the other documents to be sure that you're going – that you're going about it the right way.

I think it's that failsafe button and the failsafe would be something like knowing that there is a system in place to back me up, knowing there's a system – I'm not a trained psychologist. I don't have time to go to the doctor and say I feel a little bit stressed because one of my students is having a bad time. What are they going to do about that?

I think it's probably fairly obvious in the writing disciplines because we are pouring ourselves out in a way. I think the problem is we supervise them and say I'm not a therapist, you're having issues, let's get you into counselling, let's get a professional to deal with you and that. So I think that students may expect that supervisors be the grown-ups and to be responsible. [Supervisors need to] understand if they did try to counsel them, they're going to be in legal trouble. Because you've given them advice and you've got no idea what you're talking about (interview, Webb, 2015).

De-identified Interviewee 7

Well, I think really authentic support and really knowledge-based training delivered by experts. That's my answer to lots of these kind of projects because often we get people supposedly offering us training, but they know a lot less than us and then I think that becomes quite – what is it called when you're distanced? Yes, it makes you feel alienated. It's very alienating, but there really are pools of experts out there that have done a lot of work in these areas (interview, 2015).

De-identified Interviewee 8

I think maybe there needs to be a kind of more open process between the research deans and – when they're allocating students, or when you accept a student, maybe there does need to be a kind of area where you can declare whether you think this is an area that you need support or not, but yes, that would be suggesting again a kind of counselling approach and I'm not sure that is the best approach. Might just want to talk to colleagues or talk to someone about what you might do under certain circumstances (interview, 2015).

Associate Professor Debra Adelaide, University of Technology Sydney

... The fundamental thing about being a creative writer – not that I'm setting them all up to be basket cases; I'm not trying to set up anything except preparing them for the confronting things they're getting in workshopping. They do. It's very confronting putting your work out there and getting feedback. It can be really confronting, and I always tell them how affected I was the first time I ever got feedback on my work. Felt sick for a month, but I realise that that was necessary.

The other thing that absolutely has to be taken into consideration, I think, in this sort of discussion, is that our postgraduates are experienced writers, and if they're not they don't get into the programme. It's basic, they should be. We'd only accept them if they've got a track record. Basically by the time I would get a DCA student, that student is an experienced writer, so they've gone through a lot of this stuff anyway. So they may not need the help. They may not need any help, and they may find that the writing of the story is sufficient to – difficult though that may be – it is sufficient to help them. Just thinking of the students I've got at the moment, they're all experienced. They've all been well published (interview, Adelaide, 2015).

Professor Nigel Krauth, Griffith University

A school needs a flexible reporting and support system within its culture, in conjunction with a dependable university counselling service (interview, Krauth, 2015).

Associate Professor Dominique Hecq, Swinburne University

I used to think they [ethics committees] were a pain in the ass because they'd ask questions and so forth, but I think it's a good thing that they go through the ethics committee. It helps us think through the dangers. But you're right about particularly autobiographic projects, you never know what you are going to find, there are always skeletons in the closet and you don't know whom you are going to upset but it's important to at least cover your bases from the academic point of view. Even if the person upset is a family member, it can be disastrous. I think it's an important part of the process. I think the forms are not devised for our kinds of projects, and I think a lot of work needs to be done in the policy department. The questions they ask are not particularly addressing the problems we are encountering. So yes, there is an area there that needs to be addressed.

I think there should be a team of therapists or analysts who are attached to the university but not part of the university. So a team of people we can trust and that are not, how shall I say, traceable through human resources for instance. Something that is really confidential or para-institutional. It [trauma] pops up everywhere, even in straight doctorates. But certainly in poetry a lot of trauma comes, but not only lived trauma but also witnessed trauma. It's everywhere, yes (interview, Hecq, 2015).

Professor Gail Jones, University of Western Sydney

Ethics committees seem to be very much based on social sciences rather than the humanities and don't always have a sensitivity to language and to the kind of things that we do. What I would like is for there to be instruction to supervisors. So not an ethics committee that clears the project, because we don't really ever know where a project will go, and there are privacy issues and intimate disclosure makes people very vulnerable, and I'm not sure I would want some of my students to have to lay out before an ethical committee whatever exactly they're doing, or to describe it before it's thought through. But I think if we insist that supervisors need some training and ethical circumspection and some strategies, psychological strategies, to help students. Kind of a language. Language is things like projection, transference. Even to talk to students about something like denial, how that works in being in the university. So vocabulary, ethical vocabulary and ethical strategies for dealing with real people and their experience, they would seem to me more useful.

And I think actually having awareness of the discourses of psychology and psychoanalysis and all of those things because we're dealing with psychic damage often. And then with recovery, you know, how does one recover, how does one use language and intellectual strategies for a restorative purpose? I mean, don't you think that we need a restorative ethic? We need to believe that there's some good that comes from this. I really think the idea of a humanistic discourse about self-growth, identity and inferiority, you know, recognising the irreducible inferiority of your students, that seems to me so much more important than the risk assessment model (interview, Jones, 2015).

Associate Professor Kate Douglas, Flinders University

... I think that we had a community of practice at Flinders for a little while and we had kind of interdisciplinary people working together and talking through these issues and I found that

very supportive. But like everything else that's organised for academics, it's fine for the first couple of meetings and then everyone says I don't have time to attend these meetings anymore. But we had people from law and politics and sociology and English and creative writing and it was really good. And so I thought these kinds of interdisciplinary conversations are very supportive because people all of a sudden realise that this is not an issue that just they are dealing with alone, which is fantastic. But I don't know, I think every time you feel like you can offer some kind of support, people always just see it as some kind of invasion on their time. So I don't know. I feel like I can micromanage all this stuff with a couple of really close colleagues and I find that very helpful (interview, Douglas 2016).

Conclusion

The important perspectives drawn from the representative supervisors' lived experiences not only demonstrate the commitment these academics have to their candidate's ultimate success, but also testify to the impulse to manage ethically projects borne out of trauma narratives. Those of us working in the fields of humanities, journalism and creative practices are perhaps more likely to increasingly encounter candidates who seek to write personally about traumatic events that have disrupted their lives and caused psychic distress. As one of the interviewees, scholar and novelist Gail Jones observes:

And to be alive is to be wounded, and that doesn't have to incapacitate you. It can become another kind of capacity for imagining the humanity of other people. I'm sure that's why we're all in the field, or why we all care about it (interview, Jones, 2015).

Writers often turn to writing projects as a response to wounding. Another of the experienced interviewees, writer Debra Adelaide makes this particular observation about candidates: 'If they're going to be creative writers, they are going to be vulnerable' (interview, Adelaide, 2015). It would seem vulnerability is part of the creative process when rendering authentic autobiographical experiences. We return again here to echo Kevin Brophy's observation and warning: '...the ability of Creative Writing to hurt, to reveal, to run a very dangerous line between offence and revelation, and I wouldn't like to see Creative Writing become anodyne...' (interview, Brophy, 2015). These notions allude to the somewhat nebulous core of creative practice and the more political heart

of journalism; notions which do not always neatly align with an empirical paradigm of traditional modes of ethics clearance or academic writing.

There is a general consensus amongst those we interviewed that further onerous and time-consuming protocols for already time-poor writing project supervisors is not necessarily the best strategy for improving pedagogical and supervisory practices relating to autobiographical trauma projects, and there is a sense from some interviewees that further bureaucratisation and compliance might adversely affect creative output. However, we do wish to signify that many of the interviewees signalled the need for more intentional institutional work to be done by way of educating and establishing a shared model of best practice that involved developing tailored training modules for academics supervising HDR projects dealing with traumatic narration. Aitchison reminds us: 'In the humanities and social sciences, writing is the major pedagogical activity that dominates, even defines, interactions between students and their supervisors ... our understanding of what goes on in supervision around writing is still relatively limited' (Aitchison 2015: 1295-1296). To advance our shared understanding of supervisory practice and support, several interviewees flag that at their universities, candidates have supervision panels, with more than one supervisor. But several also acknowledge that this can also create tensions – frequently, only a principal supervisor is allocated workload credit, which may create a disincentive to already overworked and time-poor academics from taking part as a panel member. Reflecting on the possible incentive for being on a panel without a workload allocation, Matthew Ricketson, of the University of Canberra, comments:

Well look here's the trade-off ... at the point at which the student graduates with their PhD or their Master's, the secondary supervisor is acknowledged, not only acknowledged in the same way that the primary is at the graduation ceremony, but you as a secondary supervisor or second member of the panel can count it as a completion and because of the metric which says in your performance and development review meeting each year, one of the measures that you are judged by, is how many HDR completions you have (interview, Ricketson, 2015).

Regardless of possible 'trade-offs', we would argue there is a strategic opportunity for institutions to more formally address this possible inequity (and lost opportunity in some cases) to

create a more robust and safer HDR experience by affording workload allocations to all panel members, and include trauma experts, or psychotherapists, on panels if necessary.

We offer this preliminary research paper as a starting point of collegial dialogue undertaken with expert HDR supervisors working in the Australian tertiary sector. In voicing some of their perspectives, we hope this paper serves to generate an ongoing nation-wide conversation devoted to addressing the issue of how to create safer boundaries around trauma narrative projects. Our future work, in dialogue with colleagues and experts, will turn attention to how tertiary institutions might go about implementing practical strategies to further support both the supervisor and candidate because as Gilmore concludes: 'Trauma inflects so much autobiographical material that we should probably admit that it has already chosen us and acknowledge this demand' (Gilmore 2007: 368). Finally, we hope to further this research internationally, as a potentially comparative and discursive model.

Acknowledgements

We would like to thank the thirteen academics who gave freely of their time and expertise. The generous sharing of insightful responses to the selected research questions have added to a deeper understanding of supervisory practices in the area of autobiographical writing projects shaped by trauma. We also acknowledge the Journalism Educational and Research Association of Australia's Research Grant scheme (2015) of which we are the grateful recipients.

Notes

- ¹ Greene, G. (1980) *Ways of escape*, London, The Bodley Head p. 9
- ² Miller, N and Tougan, J. (2002) *Extremities: Trauma, testimony, and community*, Illinois, The University of Illinois pp 1-2
- ³ Australian government-funded inquiry into research in the creative arts, Strand Report, 1998
- ⁴ JERAA grant 2015: The ethical HDR supervision of literary journalism: Managing long form trauma narrative within the Australian tertiary sector
- ⁵ See Baker and Buckley (2009) Evans, T., Macauley, P., Pearson, M. and Tregenza, K. (2003) and Brien, D. L., Burr, S. and Webb, J. (2012)
- ⁶ UTS HREC No. 2015000377
- ⁷ Office for Learning and Teaching

References

- Aitchison, C. (2015) Writing the practice/practise the writing: Writing challenges and pedagogies for creative practice supervisors and researchers, *Educational Philosophy and Theory*, Vol. 47, No. 12 pp 1291-1303
- Aitchison, C. and Mowbray, S. (2013) Doctoral women: Managing emotions, managing doctoral studies, *Teaching in Higher Education*, Vol. 18, No. 8 pp 859-870

Baker, S., Buckley, B. and Kett, G. (2009) Future-proofing the creative arts in higher education: Scoping for quality in creative arts doctoral programs. Australian Literature Review, Effective supervision of creative practice higher research degrees, 2013, Government Office for Learning and Teaching Project Final Report. Available online at <http://www.olt.gov.au/project-futureproofing-creative-arts-melbourne-2007>, accessed on 28 April 2016

Evans, T., Macauley, P., Pearson, M. and Tregenza, K. (2003) A brief review of PhDs in creative and performing arts in Australia, Jeffrey, R. and Shilton, W. (eds) *Conference proceedings of the Australian Association for Research in Education* pp 1-14. Available online at <http://dro.deakin.edu.au/eserv/DU:30004959/evans-brief-review-2003.pdf>, accessed on 28 April 2016

Frick, L., Brodin, E. M. and Albertyn, R. M. (2014) A conceptualisation of the doctoral student-supervisor relationship as a negotiated learning space, Nygaard, C., Branch, J. Scott-Webber, L. and Bartholomew, P. (eds) *Learning spaces in higher education*, Oxfordshire, Libri Publishing pp 241-262

Gilmore, L. (2007) What do we teach when we teach trauma? Fuchs, M. and Howes, C. (eds) *Teaching life writing texts*, The Modern Language Association of America pp 367-373

Hamilton, J. and Carson, S. (2013) *Literature review in effective supervision of creative practice higher research degrees*. Available online at http://supervisioncreativeartsphd.net/?page_id=197, accessed on 28 April 2016

Joseph, S. and Rickett, C. (2010) The writing cure?: Ethical considerations in managing creative practice life writing projects, Cole, C., Freiman, M. and Brien, D. L. (eds) *Strange bedfellows: Refereed conference papers of the 15th Annual AAWP Conference*. Available online at http://www.aawp.org.au/the_strange_bedfellows_or_perfect_partners, accessed on 26 April 2016

Joseph, S. (2011) Supervising life-writing of trauma in a tertiary setting, Krauth, N. and Brophy, K. (eds.) *TEXT*, Vol. 15, No. 2. Available online at <http://www.textjournal.com.au/oct11/joseph.htm>, accessed on 26 April 2016

Littrell, J. (2009) Expression of emotion: When it causes trauma and when it helps, *Journal of Evidence-based Social Work*, Vol. 6, No. 3 pp 300-320

Manathunga, C. (2007) Supervision as mentoring: The role of power and boundary crossing. *Studies in Continuing Education*, Vol. 29, No. 2 pp 207-221

Pennebaker, J. (2000) Telling stories: The health benefits of narrative, *Literature and Medicine*, Vol. 19, No. 1 Spring pp 3-18

Ricketson, M. (2005) Literary journalism, *The Media Report ABC*, interview by Julia May, 23 June

Strand, D. (1998) *Research in the creative arts: Evaluations and investigations programme*, Department of Employment, Education, Training and Youth Affairs, AGPS, Canberra

Webb, J., Brien, D. L. and Burr, S. (2012) *Examining doctorates in the creative arts: A guide*, Australasian Association of Writing Programs. Available online at http://d3n8a8pro7vbm.cloudfront.net/theaawp/pages/20/attachments/original/1384907948/Examiners_booklet_final_0.pdf?1384907948, accessed on 28 April 2016

Interviews

Catherine Cole, University of Wollongong, 13 October 2015: Skype; France

Fiona Giles, Sydney University, 22 October 2015: Skype; Sydney

Willa McDonald, Macquarie University, 29 October 2015: Skype; Sydney

Kevin Brophy, University of Melbourne, 29 October 2015: Skype; Melbourne

Matthew Ricketson, University of Canberra, 27 November 2015: face-to-face; Melbourne

Jen Webb, University of Canberra, 30 November 2015; face-to-face; Melbourne

De-identified interview 7, 15 December 2015: telephone

De-identified interview 8, 17 December 2015: telephone

Debra Adelaide, University of Technology Sydney, 18 December 2015: telephone; Sydney

Dominique Hecq, Swinburne University, 29 January 2016: telephone, Melbourne

Nigel Krauth, Griffith University, Queensland, 26 January 2016: email; Queensland

Gail Jones, University of Western Sydney, 29 January 2016: telephone, Sydney

Kate Douglas, Flinders University, 6 May 2016: telephone, Adelaide

Note on the Contributors

Sue Joseph is a Senior Lecturer who teaches and supervises journalism and creative writing, particularly creative nonfiction, in both undergraduate and postgraduate programmes at the University of Technology Sydney.

Carolyn Rickett is Associate Dean of Research for the Faculty of Arts, Nursing and Theology, Senior Lecturer in Communication and creative arts practitioner at Avondale College of Higher Education.

PAPER

Illness bloggers and sickness scams: Communication ethics and the 'Belle' Gibson saga

In April 2017, 'Belle' Gibson was found guilty of contravening the Australian Consumer Law because she sold her recipe book and mobile app using deceptive business practices. Using the 'Belle' Gibson saga as a case study, this paper examines questions of communication ethics and the effect that technology has on our ethical behaviours and practice. It contends that technology has altered our perceptions of authenticity and credibility as well as our social relations and sense of 'intimacy' with online strangers.

Keywords: illness narratives, truth telling, communication ethics, social software, Australia

Introduction

In 2015, Annabelle 'Belle' Gibson's 'miraculous' recovery from multiple cancers was outed as a lie. On all fronts, the illness blogger's story appeared authentic and credible. She had published a recipe book with Penguin Australia, was awarded the 'Fun Fearless Female Award' for being an inspirational role model, and Apple Inc. marketed her mobile app as one of the pre-installed applications in its then-upcoming Apple Watch product. Central to the controversy was how Gibson deliberately posted texts and images about her health to legitimise her fictional illness narrative, creating 'experience expertise' (Leimūmäki 2012: 259-260). The false information Gibson shared online validated the authenticity of her illness narrative and increased her credibility as an illness or sickness blogger and, indeed, as a potent communicator on health remedies.

Communication is no longer an activity premised on 'shared presence'. It creates shared experiences in the constructed online environment. As a form of computer-mediated communication, social media enables internet users to form 'intimate' relationships by facilitating the online transmission and dissemination of information (Whitehead 2015: 121-122). Advances in information and communication technologies (ICTs) simplify the diffusion of information through the 'technologizing of communication' (cited in Woodward 2009: 9). Even though computer-mediated communication creates a sense of 'intimate universality' between strangers (Whitehead 2015: 121), the rapport that is built is contingent on a positive interaction between the perceived authenticity and credibility of the communicators and the information they share. In Gibson's case, her active social media presence and positive news coverage by mainstream news media purveyed the impression that her illness narrative was authentic and credible.

If social institutions are underpinned by communication through the exercise of meaning-making, then the examination of communication ethics must include not only institutional discourses but also human actors involved in the technological 'augmentation of human experience' (ibid: 4). The 'Belle' Gibson saga is representative of the misaligned expectations towards truth-telling and communication ethics in the digital age of information. But it is not unique. For example, *ABC News* reported in 2013 that several American personalities, including recording artistes Natalie Grant and Brad Paisley, were taken in by Hope Jackson's story that her 'daughter' was dying from neuroblastoma, a type of paediatric cancer. Jackson, who got Paisley to sing 'Amazing Grace' to her 'daughter' over the phone under false pretences, was later convicted of the felony charge of theft of services (Litoff 2013). A more recent case involved British violinist Bethan Doci, who was jailed in the UK for 32 months after pleading guilty to 11 counts of fraud. She appealed for money to cover her cancer treatments by posting an advertisement on the *Craigslist* website and collected more than 300,000 pounds sterling between 2010 to 2013 (Morris 2016). These tales of fakery are symptomatic of the increase in health deceptions, propelled by the ease of online communications forging 'relational proximity' between communicators and their audience (cited in Woodward 2009: 11). Rather than simply critique the lack of ethics in the Belle Gibson saga, we look at how the ethical perspectives of human social actors influ-

ence their ethical conduct, particularly in the realm of communication practice.

Social software and online illness narratives

The internet has created novel forms of computer-mediated communication that are the product of social relations and social processes. One example is 'social software' which is regarded as a new form of socialisation in the online space. The term refers both to ICTs that facilitate computer-mediated communication, and the content produced and/or enhanced by an online community (Fuchs et al. 2010: 43-45, 47). According to the *Digital in 2017: Global Overview* report, there are more than 3.7 billion active internet users and almost 2.8 billion active social media accounts globally (Kemp 2017). The choice of social software, along with its technological constraints and communicative functions, sends 'metamessages' about the intentions of the speaker and influences how the recipient interprets the message (Tannen 2013: 101). Within this sociality, mediated by ICTs, communication becomes technologised (Woodward 2009: 9). When used as an avenue to facilitate emotional or informational social support, social network sites become operationalised as online support groups. Receiving online social support is not a passive activity; posting in social network sites constitutes either an act of gaining or expressing social support, both of which illness bloggers and their readers can simultaneously perform. For instance, adding hashtags such as #stupidcancer to Twitter posts can function as an open and public request for and/or acknowledgement of social support (Myrick et al. 2016: 598).

As a channel of communication, social software can become an unwitting instigator of health deception when fake illness bloggers take advantage of the personal and temporal distance of computer-mediated communication. The terms 'Munchausen by internet' (Feldman 2000: 669) and 'Munchausen's Syndrome by Google' (Griffiths et al. 2009: 159) highlight the ease with which the resources of the internet can be manipulated to corroborate fictitious health claims (Cunningham and Feldman 2011: 185). Munchausen's Syndrome refers to a type of factitious disorder where 'patients' try to gain attention or sympathy by feigning sickness. The internet's provision of easily accessible information makes it convenient for fake illness bloggers to construct untrue personal stories and medical histories. Other than textual information, the internet's database of images can also be used to legitimise fictional illness narratives. In the UK, doctors documented the case

of an unnamed 40-year-old woman who admitted that the printed copy of her radiograph, which she had provided to multiple doctors, was identical to an image found on Google Images (Griffiths et al. 2009: 159-160).

To an extent, the public consumption of personal and intimate information has been normalised by ICTs, exemplifying the 'social setting' of a contemporary screen and internet culture (McCosker 2008). With the now-popular emphasis on, and increasing public support of, the value of holistic medicine, the individualised and subjective views of patients take on a measure of medical and scientific legitimacy (Bury 2001: 267). The seeking of technology-mediated social support is an example of how communication has evolved in tandem with advancements in ICTs. The pedestrian practice of presenting and recounting one's experience of illness or health issues through online illness narratives indicates the increasing centrality of technology in augmenting our human experience (Woodward 2009: 4). Besides offering connectivity, technology also facilitates the determining of 'social similarity' between individuals and their prospective virtual communities (Hampton and Wellman 2003: 285). In fact, our somewhat seamless switch in the use of communication mediums – from mailing lists and Internet Relay Chats (IRCs) to contemporary social and networking platforms such as Twitter, Facebook, and WhatsApp – reflects our 'technological membership' in different and evolving types of virtual communities (Feldman 2000: 669).

The meteoric rise and fall of 'Belle' Gibson

In 2009, Australian illness blogger Annabelle 'Belle' Gibson shared with her online readers that she was diagnosed with terminal brain cancer and had four months to live (Do 2015). She told her 200,000 Instagram followers that she had stopped conventional cancer treatment and was treating her malignant brain tumour through a mix of nutrition and alternative therapies (Cavanagh 2015). A few years later, she claimed that the cancer had spread to her liver, spleen, blood and uterus (Lal 2015). Capitalising on the story of her 'survival' from multiple cancers, she signed a publishing deal with Penguin Australia to release *The Whole Pantry (TWP)* recipe book and later launched a recipe application for mobile phones (Donnelly and Toscano 2015c). The mobile application was voted as Apple's Best Food and Drink App in 2013. It was also among a selection of mobile applications to be pre-installed in the new Apple Watch (Donnelly and Toscano 2015a). She was quoted

having said that Apple told her: 'Not only did you create an [sic] great app, you also created a market for healthy living apps' (Avdulova 2014). When *Yahoo7 News* interviewed her on television, she was hailed as a 'new breed of entrepreneurs', and her mobile application was described as the 'world's first health, wellness and lifestyle app' (Yahoo7 2014).

In a news article published on 8 March 2015, the *Sydney Morning Herald* alleged that Gibson had misled the public about her charitable endeavours. The illness blogger-turned-entrepreneur had stated publicly that she donated A\$300,000 of the proceeds from the sales of her *TWP* recipe book and mobile application to various charities (Donnelly and Toscano 2015d). As public doubt grew about the validity of her health claims, she deleted thousands of posts that referred to her cancer diagnoses from her social media accounts. Bowing to public pressure, Penguin Australia admitted that it did not fact-check Gibson's story before publishing the recipe book, which detailed her recovery from multiple cancers in its preface chapter. As the controversy grew, Penguin pulled the book from circulation in Australia, and publisher Simon & Schuster also terminated the book's impending launch in the US. Before ending their partnership with Gibson, both publishers had reportedly sought clarifications from her but failed to receive requisite assurance about the veracity of her biography and charitable activities (Donnelly and Toscano 2015c; 2015e).

After the public unravelling of her deceit, Gibson permanently deleted her social media accounts (Piotrowski 2015). She did, however, grant exclusive interviews to the *Australian Women's Weekly* magazine (TAWW) and current affairs programme *60 Minutes* (see Nine Entertainment 2015; TAWW 2015). In the televised interview, which was reportedly watched by more than one million viewers in Australia (Ward 2015), she maintained that she had been deceived by her immunologist and neurologist. Therefore, she was not 'intentionally untruthful' to the public (cited in Willis and Ma 2015). When it was later reported that she had received a then-undisclosed five-figure sum for her spot on *60 Minutes*, more than 11,000 people signed an online petition demanding that she donate the money to cancer research (Spinks 2015b). By donating the money, the petitioners wrote that Gibson would be 'putting it on public record how sorry you are to those you hurt' (Spinks 2015a).

The fragility of authenticity and credibility

The increase in fake illness bloggers is inadvertently led by the changing measures of authenticity and credibility in the online space. With internet-facilitated mobility, the tendency for online users to perceive strangers as 'neighbours' is amplified (Introna 2007: 327). At the same time, authenticity is a social construction without fixed constitutive elements (Omatta 2011: 790). As an expression of the network society, the internet is a virtual provider of 'intimate universality' (Whitehead 2015: 121). The users' response to online narratives is shaped by the creation of shared experiences (Ressler et al. 2012). The rhetoric of authenticity is believed to have a paramount influence on the establishment of online communities because these virtual spaces are operated 'with a presumption of honesty and authenticity' (Whitehead 2015: 122, 138). It is posited that the disposition of users to the internet impacts their ability to judge the authenticity of the online content. The degree to which individuals imbue technology into their lives influences their susceptibility in falling prey to 'information naïveté' (Omatta 2011: 787-788). In other words, if individuals conceive the internet as an integral part of their lives, it is assumed that their familiarity with various digital environments will equip them with the know-how and discernment to evaluate the authenticity of the online content. This link between familiarity and discernibility appears at worst fallacious, and at best tenuous.

While online authenticity revolves around the communication of socially-mediated *realness* and reality (Omatta 2011: 791; Steffen 1997: 105), online credibility is centred around the notion of reliability. What this means is that the perception of credibility has shifted from the concept of authority to reliability. In other words, if users had previously assessed an online source as a reliable source of information, they would continue to consider it as a credible source in the future. However, an individual's credibility assessment is also influenced by subjective judgments about the reliability of online sources. For instance, the aesthetics of web pages and the identifiability of bloggers can shape perceptions of credibility (Greenberg et al. 2013: 5). Moreover, the definition of 'news' and 'news sources' has evolved, and the social network connections of users now serve as their 'news filter' in determining what *is* news (Marchi 2012: 248, 252). The lack of objective and definitive indicators points to the fragility of authenticity and credibility in the online space. This fragility also reveals the potency of the

incomplete nature of illness narratives because their plots are 'an underlying structure and a dynamic activity unfolding in the process of making sense of the story' (Steffen 1997: 106). Taken together, online illness narratives can be seen as constructed and socially-defined forms of expressions resulting from multiple acts of meaning-making (Whitehead 2015: 121; Woodward 2009: 3).

Both Gibson's social media followers and the journalists who covered her inspirational story thought she was credible, no doubt influenced by her online displays of authenticity. When *Cosmopolitan* magazine was questioned for not thoroughly investigating Gibson's cancer claims before awarding her the 'Fun Fearless Female Award', the magazine's editor was quoted as saying:

She was very believable and I think we all wanted to believe her... I mean who's going to question when someone is talking about that they've got cancer and they're going through this horrendous life experience? ... She was reader nominated and reader voted – that's how the Fun Fearless Female awards are done and at the end of the day the readers voted her the winner in that category of social media (Sharp 2015).

Gibson's former employee was reported as saying that she would describe a trip to the dentist as an all-day doctor's appointment, making it sound as if it was related to her cancer (Lal 2015). Her convincing presentation of experience expertise was the critical factor that led to the deception of mainstream media outlets and the everyday internet user (see Avdulova 2014; Jones 2014; Sharp 2015).

One could argue that the act of meaning-making commences as soon as a user engages with a piece of communication (Woodward 2009: 4), and as such it is naïve to assume that a neutral position can exist in an illness narrative. Claims that Gibson's sickness scam would not have succeeded if people had been less trusting and more discerning ignore the innate power relations that exist between illness bloggers and their readers (for example Do 2015; Guillatt 2015; Razer 2016; Sams 2015). In fact, illness narratives contain pre-determined roles for illness bloggers and their readers (Ressler et al. 2012). The very act of meaning-making regenerates reality (life as lived) and experiences (life as experienced) into forms of online expressions (Woodward 2009: 3). '[S]haring simply implies the obligation of reciprocity and forces the outsider into a position as insider' (Steffen 1997:

103). Contrary to the assertion, a 'peer review process in blogging' does not always increase the credibility of online content (Banning and Sweetser 2007: 456).

Online illness narratives are a form of technology-mediated social support through which illness bloggers gain access to 'weak ties' – namely, individuals who experience similar health conditions – and the social support network of friends, families and empathisers. Illness bloggers are the 'patients,' and the weak ties are their social support. Through group action, the identification and assumption of a role within a social system can normalise over time (Hsu and Lin 2008: 66-67). Participating in illness narratives, therefore, inculcates the role and norms of behaviours – indeed, of ethical practices – that members should adopt in the social system, thereby reducing the risks of role conflicts.

The investigation of responsibility

In 2015, Consumer Affairs Victoria (CAV), the consumer affairs regulator in Victoria, Australia, began investigations into Gibson's health claims and fundraising activities. It concluded that Penguin contravened the Australia Consumer Law (ACL) by not substantiating the claims Gibson made about her health and charitable donations (CAV 2015: 2-3). The publisher had previously stated that due diligence was 'unnecessary' because *TWP* was 'a collection of recipes' (cited in Smith 2015). Later, a video of Gibson's media training session, which was submitted as evidence to the Federal Court of Australia, revealed that Penguin already had concerns about her health claims (see Davey 2016). To address its breach of the ACL, Penguin agreed to a three-year enforceable undertaking. It contributed A\$30,000 to the Victorian Consumer Law Fund and implemented an internal compliance education and training programme. The company would from thenceforth substantiate claims about medical histories or conditions and print a prominent warning notice when statements about alternative and unconventional treatments are made in future publications (CAV 2015: 6-7). The enforceable undertaking initiated by Penguin was a positive development, but it has no legal obligation to follow through with the terms of the undertaking once the agreement expires in 2018.

The blowback from the controversy necessitated the involvement of the CAV, but the limited influence of the enforceable undertaking on the publishing industry indicates that it was aimed more at placating the public. If the intention was to generate regulatory reform,

the Australian Publishers Association (APA) or the Media, Entertainment and Arts Alliance (MEAA) would have been involved. The existence of enforceable legal regulations and/or industry codes could have reduced the public's investment of trust in Gibson. This lack of regulations meant that news coverage about alternative treatments could be interpreted by the audience as 'medical facts' ratified by journalistic due diligence. To illustrate, the Australian Press Council (APC) has specific standards of practice for journalists to adhere to when they report on suicides. Published news articles have to be accompanied by information about crisis support services and assistance (see APC 2011a). Free-to-air television licensees also have to abide by the industry code when broadcasting materials which may cause distress in news or current affairs programmes (see FreeTV Australia 2015: 7-9). However, no similar legal or industry requirement exists for mainstream media outlets in Australia. They do not have to include a notice or disclaimer in their news coverage of alternative health or medical therapies.

Media outlets should have been more critical in their narration of Gibson's success in self-treating her cancers. The APC's guideline on health and medical matters recommends that statements on efficacy 'should always be sourced, even if made by the most eminent authority; on any lesser authority, they should be cross-checked with some other sources' (APC 2001). However, advisory guidelines are not binding, and publisher members are not obliged to comply with them (APC 2011b). The fundamental ethical responsibility of journalists is to offer truth and objectivity in their reporting (Ward 2009: 71), but mainstream news reports about Gibson's illness and claims about curing her cancer through alternative therapies were neither fact-checked nor cross-checked (for example, Barker 2014a; Dasey 2014; Miller 2014). Unlike Penguin, the journalists and news publishers did not face any repercussions. Other than updating the old news articles with a link to another report about Gibson's sickness scam (for example, Barker 2014b; Jones 2014), journalists who wrote glowingly of her positivity and business acumen did not have to take responsibility for their lack of due diligence.

In April 2017, the Federal Court found Gibson and her company guilty of engaging in unconscionable conduct and misleading or deceptive conduct under the ACL. Gibson was not present in court for the previous four hearings. Both respondents were prohibited from making fur-

ther claims relating to Gibson's diagnosis of brain cancer, that she had four months to live, and that she eschewed conventional cancer treatments in favour of alternative therapies. Gibson was also ordered by the Federal Court to contribute A\$30,000 towards the CAV's costs. The CAV also noted its intention to seek additional pecuniary penalties against Gibson and pressed the court to order her to print 'a non-punitive/adverse publicity notice' in both the *Herald Sun* and the *Australian* newspapers (Federal Court of Australia Penal Notice, 7 April 2017). At the time of completing this paper for publication (June 2017), final judgments have not been pronounced, and the case remains unresolved.

Technology can constrain ethical behaviours

To make sense of the reactions from the media and public after the controversy broke, we should acknowledge that ethical judgments are determined by differing ideas about the roles and purposes of communication technologies (Introna 2007: 315). In other words, examining our ethical perspectives offers insight into our expectations of ethical behaviours and practices. To the public, Gibson had exploited the internet and the mainstream media outlets for her nefarious ends. She had deceived countless online users and continued to profit from her deceptive practices when she was paid A\$75,000 for her *60 Minutes* interview (*The Dominion Post* 2016). Gauging from comments made on public websites, it appears that public expectations were for her to apologise, to express contrition and to seek to make amends (see, for example, posts about Gibson on www.gomiblog.com). She was thus seen as fully culpable and, therefore, answerable for the controversy. Accordingly, when she neither apologised nor showed remorse for her actions, expressions of public anger emerged (see Donnelly and Toscano 2015b; Spinks 2015a; Thackray 2015). It was reported that Australian customers who bought the recipe book sought refunds for their purchases (Donnelly and Toscano 2015f). Penguin bore a degree of the public's anger for being complicit in the deception because it did not verify Gibson's claims. Although Penguin's acceptance of the enforceable undertaking was ethically sound, the decision was arguably motivated by self-interest and a desire to distance itself from the saga. Excerpts of emails submitted to the Federal Court related how Penguin's public relations firm described the public fallout as 'a situation of corporate risk' and advised its client to 'get on the front foot' to end its partnership with Gibson (cited in Donnelly and Toscano 2016).

The obvious lack of due diligence on the part of Penguin and mainstream news media throws light on the fact that possessing ethical knowledge does not automatically translate into ethical action. Gibson had more than 200,000 social media followers but they, too, were blindsided by what has been described as the 'relational proximity' of online communication (in Woodward 2009: 11). In 2013, Gibson responded to her detractors by writing a (now deleted) Facebook post: 'It's working for me and i am grateful to be here sharing this journey with over 70,000 people worldwide. Thank you for being here – xx Belle' [sic] (Belle Gibson Uncovered 2015). In this instance, she re-contextualised her high number of online followers into public validation of her illness narrative. The wellness empire that Gibson created can be likened as a form of 'gestural economy' where 'symbolic solidarity is seeded and cultivated without bearing any necessary relationship with evidence-based truth or a genuine commitment to act' (Rojek 2017: 4). While it appears as if social network sites are committed to the social, they are, in fact, forms of synthetic media that produce pseudo-sociality (Thurlow 2013: 244). Clicking the 'like' button on Facebook posts exemplifies this notion of demonstrating interest without committing resolve to take further actions (West and Trester 2013: 145).

In using the 'Belle' Gibson saga as a case study, the aim of this paper is not to set out a case for new or better policies and regulations about online behaviours, but to illustrate how the rampant use of technology has managed to blur the distinction between our 'online' and 'offline' personas. Firstly, communication platforms are structurally embedded with assumptions of how and what they should be used for. They are the constructed artefacts and actors of social relations and processes (Introna 2007: 319). It is understood that ICTs catalyse the creation of virtual spaces and that they bring about new types of content and present new contexts of interaction. However, another way of looking at the entrenchment of the digital space in our everyday lives is to define it in terms of how technology impacts usage patterns, takes advantage of affordances in digital environments, and how users adapt to the techno-structural constraints of the communication platforms (Herring 2013: 5-6). Seen in this way, the term 'Web 2.0' does not only describe the technological characteristics of ICTs but reflects the potentialities that arise from the users' interaction with technology. Secondly, the technical infrastructure of a platform limits the possible actions of communicators and

the (non-)ethical outcomes of communication (Christians 2011: 17). Technology is, thus, presented to users with an inherent set of potential ethical issues because it constrains their capacity to exercise individual ethical judgments and behaviours (Introna 2007: 321). As a result, the way(s) we regard and imbue technology into our lives exerts an influence on our ethical positioning and expectation of ethical behaviours.

Conclusion

The 'Belle' Gibson saga offers a timely study into how technology has altered not only our social relations but also our expectations towards communication and communication ethics. As the saga illustrates, ethical conflicts can arise when online expressions are accorded the same ethical expectations as reality (life as lived) and experiences (life as experienced). Gibson's lies about her diagnosis of multiple cancers are both unethical and inexcusable. However, her sickness scam not only raises questions of communication ethics *per se*, but compels us to rethink our ethical relations with technology – the way we relate to both the communication medium and the information that is being mediated. In our increasingly mediated society, where acts and processes of communications are augmented by technology, there are tangible risks when subjective assessments of online authenticity and credibility are regarded and presented as objective truths. To practise communication ethics in the online space, paradoxically, it is necessary to establish a 'proper distance' so that we can maintain our proximity and ethical responsibilities simultaneously (Silverstone 2003: 475).

The imbue of technology into our lives can (de)sensitise us to how the technical infrastructure of ICTs delimits online behaviours and communication outcomes. The ability for online users to respond is subject to the techno-structural capacity of the communication platform. When we recognise how this alters our communication patterns and expectations, we also glimpse the constraints it places on our ethical judgments and behaviours. If our online behaviours are circumscribed (to an extent) by technology, then we cannot realistically expect an 'online' persona – however *real* that projection and (re)presentation is – to be a true extension of an individual's 'offline' persona.

At the same time, as the successful litigation against Gibson shows, online behaviours can be subject to the purview of the law. As our social relations continue to be shaped by advances in technology, the challenge of practising commu-

nication ethics in the digital space will prompt further discussions about how we can or should maintain a congruent practice of ethical behaviours across different communication platforms.

References

- Australian Press Council (APC) (2001) *Guideline: Health and medical matters*. Available online at <http://www.presscouncil.org.au/document-search/guideline-health/>, accessed on 10 September 2016
- Australian Press Council (APC) (2011a) *Standard: Suicide reporting*. Available online at <http://www.presscouncil.org.au/document-search/standard-suicide-reporting/>, accessed on 8 September 2016
- Australian Press Council (APC) (2011b) *Standards*. Available online at <http://www.presscouncil.org.au/standards/>, accessed on 10 September 2016
- Avdulova, Ksenia (2014) Wellness: A conversation with Belle Gibson, creator of the Whole Pantry App. Available online at <http://visual-therapy.com/blog/wellness-a-conversation-with-belle-gibson-creator-of-the-whole-pantry-app/>, accessed on 22 May 2016
- Banning, Stephen A. and Sweetser, Kaye D. (2007) How much do they think it affects them and whom do they believe?: Comparing the third-person effect and credibility of blogs and traditional media, *Communication Quarterly*, Vol. 55, No. 4 pp 451-466
- Barker, Garry (2014a) Good stuff in the pantry, *Sydney Morning Herald*, 28 July
- Barker, Garry (2014b) Pop into the pantry app for a healthier lifestyle, *Sydney Morning Herald*, 23 July
- Belle Gibson uncovered (2015) The Belle Gibson files: Belle Gibson on being discredited, Available online at <http://bellegibson.net/belle-gibson-on-being-discredited/>, accessed on 17 May 2016
- Bury, Mike (2001) Illness narratives: Fact or fiction?, *Sociology of Health and Illness*, Vol. 23, No. 3 pp 263-285
- Consumer Affairs Victoria (CAV) (2015) *Enforceable undertaking*, Victoria, Australia, Consumer Affairs Victoria
- Cavanagh, Rebekah (2015) Consumer Affairs Victoria steps up investigation into Belle Gibson, *Herald Sun*, 2 November
- Christians, Clifford (2011) Primordial issues in communication ethics, Fortner, Robert and Fackler, P. (eds) *The handbook of global communication and media ethics: Volume I*, West Sussex, Blackwell Publishing pp 1-19
- Cunningham, Julie M. and Feldman, Marc D. (2011) Munchausen by internet: Current perspectives and three new cases, *Psychosomatics*, Vol. 52, No. 2 pp 185-189
- Dasey, Annette (2014) The whole story, *Herald Sun*, 23 November
- Davey, Melissa (2016) Belle Gibson video submitted to court sparks condemnation over cancer claims, *Guardian*, 14 September
- Do, Emma (2015) Why did it take this long for cancer faker Belle Gibson's lies to be revealed? Available online at <http://www.vic.com/read/why-did-it-take-us-this-long-to-call-bullshit-on-belle-gibson>, accessed on 12 April 2016
- Donnelly, Beau and Toscano, Nick (2015a) Apple pulls plug on promos for Belle Gibson's The whole pantry app, *Sydney Morning Herald*, 19 March
- Donnelly, Beau and Toscano, Nick (2015b) Belle Gibson on 60 Minutes: Don't expect an apology, *Sydney Morning Herald*, 25 June
- Donnelly, Beau and Toscano, Nick (2015c) Belle Gibson US book launch for The whole pantry cancelled after concerns she faked cancer, *Sydney Morning Herald*, 17 March
- Donnelly, Beau and Toscano, Nick (2015d) Charity money promised by 'inspirational' health app developer Belle Gibson not handed over, *Sydney Morning Herald*, 8 March
- Donnelly, Beau and Toscano, Nick (2015e) Publisher Penguin pulls Belle Gibson cook book The Whole Pantry, *Sydney Morning Herald*, 16 March
- Donnelly, Beau and Toscano, Nick (2015f) Refund calls over 'cancer survivor' Belle Gibson's book and app sales, *Sydney Morning Herald*, 12 March
- Donnelly, Beau and Toscano, Nick (2016) Penguin was warned on Gibson con, *Age*, 21 September
- Federal Court of Australia penal notice (2017) Issued to Annabelle Natalie Gibson on 7 April 2017
- Feldman, Marc D. (2000) Munchausen by internet: Detecting factitious illness and crisis on the internet, *Southern Medical Journal*, Vol. 93, No. 7 pp 669-672
- FreeTV Australia (2015) *Commercial Television Industry Code of Practice*, Australia, FreeTV Australia
- Fuchs, Christian, Hofkirchner, Wolfgang, Schafraneck, Matthias, Raffl, Celina, Sandoval, Marisol and Bichler, Robert (2010) Theoretical foundations of the web: Cognition, communication, and co-operation. Towards an understanding of web 1.0, 2.0, 3.0, *Future Internet*, Vol. 2 pp 41-59
- Greenberg, Sharon, Yaari, Eti and Bar-Ilan, Judit (2013) Perceived credibility of blogs on the internet – The influence of age on the extent of criticism, *Aslib Proceedings: New Information Perspectives*, Vol. 65, No. 1 pp 4-18
- Griffiths, E. J., Kampa, A., Pearce, C., Sakellariou, A. and Solan, M. C. (2009) Munchausen's Syndrome by Google, *The Annals of The Royal College of Surgeons of England*, Vol. 91 pp 159-160
- Guilliatt, Richard (2015) Belle Gibson, Amanda Rootsey, Jess Ainscough and others fight cancer with 'wellness', *Australian*, 4 April
- Hampton, Keith, and Wellman, Barry (2003) Neighbouring in netville: How the internet supports community and social capital in a wired suburb, *City & Community*, Vol. 2, No. 4 pp 277-311
- Herring, Susan (2013) Discourse in Web 2.0: Familiar, reconfigured, and emergent, Tannen, Deborah and Trester, Anna (eds) *Discourse 2.0: Language and new media*, Washington, DC, Georgetown University Press pp 1-26
- Hsu, Chin-Lung and Lin, Judy Chuan-Chuan (2008) Acceptance of blog usage: The roles of technology acceptance, social influence and knowledge sharing motivation, *Information & Management*, Vol. 45, No. 1 pp 65-74
- Introna, Lucas (2007) Making sense of ICT, new media and ethics, Avgerou, Chrisanthi, Mansell, Robin, Quah, Danny and Silverstone, Roger (eds) *The Oxford handbook of information and communication technologies*, New York, Oxford University Press pp 314-333
- Jones, Rachael (2014) Australian app creator's triumph with Apple watch, *Age*, 13 September
- Kemp, Simon (2017) Digital in 2017 global overview: A collection of internet, social media and mobile data from around the world. Available online at <https://wearesocial.com/sg/blog/2017/01/digital-in-2017-global-overview>, accessed on 24 April 2017
- Lal, Chloe (2015) Belle Gibson silence over wellness app scandal, *Woman's Day*, 19 March
- Leimuma'ki, Anna (2012) What does falling ill mean? Illness narratives as elucidation of experience expertise, Cohen, Esther, Toker, Leona, Consonni, Manuela and Dror, Otniel E. (eds) *Knowledge and pain*, New York, Brill pp 259-292
- Litoff, Alyssa (2013) Uncovering dying daughter hoax that lured in several celebrities, *ABC News*, 6 November
- Marchi, Regina (2012) With Facebook, blogs, and fake news, teens reject journalistic 'objectivity', *Journal of Communication Inquiry*, Vol. 36, No. 3 pp 246-262
- McCosker, Anthony (2008) Blogging illness: Recovering in public, *M/C Journal*, Vol 11, No. 6. Available online at <http://journal.media-culture.org.au/index.php/mcjournal/article/view/104>, accessed on 25 May 2017
- Miller, Megan (2014) To Belle and back, *Herald Sun*, 6 December
- Morris, Steven (2016) Violinist Bethan Doci jailed for £300,000 cancer fraud, *The Guardian*, 2 December
- Myrick, Jessica, Holton, Avery, Himelboim, Itai and Love, Brad (2016) #Stupidcancer: Exploring a typology of social support and the role of emotional expression in a social media community, *Journal of Health Communication*, Vol. 31, No. 5 pp 596-605

Nine Entertainment (2015) Belle Gibson: The whole hoax, *Nine Entertainment*, 28 June Available online at <http://www.9jumpin.com.au/show/60minutes/stories/2015/june/the-whole-hoax/>, accessed on 17 May 2016

Omatia, Boniface (2011) The ethics of representation and the internet, Fortner, Robert and Fackler, P. (eds) *The handbook of global communication and media ethics: Volume II*, West Sussex, Blackwell Publishing pp 785-802

Piotrowski, Daniel (2015) Exclusive: 'I understand everyone's anger, but this is not OK': Whole Pantry founder Belle Gibson breaks her silence to condemn 'malicious' campaign against her over 'fake' cancer claims, *Daily Mail Australia*, 17 March

Razer, Helen (2016) Razer: Belle Gibson's hocus pocus survived on our fascistic irrationalism, *Crikey*, 10 May. Available online at <http://www.crikey.com.au/2016/05/10/razer-belle-gibsons-hocus-pocus-survived-rampant-irrationalism/>, accessed on 25 May 2016

Ressler, Pamela K., Bradshaw, Ylisabth S., Gualtieri, Lisa and Chui, Kenneth K. H. (2012) Communicating the experience of chronic pain and illness through blogging, *Journal of Medical Internet Research*, Vol. 14, No. 5 e143

Rojek, Chris (2017) The case of Belle Gibson, social media, and what it means for understanding leisure under digital praxis, *Annals of Leisure Research* pp 1-5

Sams, Lauren. (2015) An honest account of our experience with Belle Gibson, *Cosmopolitan*, 17 March. Available online at <http://www.cosmopolitan.com.au/health-lifestyle/lifestyle/2015/3/an-honest-account-of-our-experience-with-belle-gibson/>, accessed on 17 May 2016

Sharp, Annette (2015) Cosmo defend failure to research Belle cancer claims and says she can keep Fun Fearless Female Award, *Daily Telegraph*, 24 April

Silverstone, Roger (2003) Proper distance: Towards an ethics for cyberspace, Liestøl, Gunnar, Morrison, Andrew and Rasmussen, Terje (eds) *Digital media revisited: Theoretical and conceptual innovations in digital domains*, Cambridge, Mass., MIT Press pp 469-490

Smith, Michelle (2015) The 'hole' in the pantry story: Should Penguin have validated belle Gibson's cancer claims?, *The Conversation*, 16 March. Available online at <http://theconversation.com/the-hole-in-the-pantry-story-should-penguin-have-validated-belle-gibsons-cancer-claims-38843>, accessed on 3 November 2016

Spinks, Stefanie (2015a) Belle Gibson is still profiting off faking cancer: Demand she donates it to cancer research. Available online at <https://www.change.org/p/belle-gibson-is-still-profiting-off-faking-cancer-demand-she-donates-it-to-cancer-research>, accessed on 17 May 2016

Spinks, Stefanie (2015b) Belle Gibson on *60 Minutes* tonight! Available online at <https://www.change.org/p/belle-gibson-is-still-profiting-off-faking-cancer-demand-she-donates-it-to-cancer-research/u/11218279>, accessed on 10 January 2017

Steffen, Vibeke (1997) Life stories and shared experiences, *Social Science & Medicine*, Vol. 45, No. 1 pp 99-111

Tannen, Deborah (2013) The medium is the metamessage: Conversational style in new media interaction, Tannen, Deborah and Trester, Anna Marie (eds) *Discourse 2.0: Language and new media*, Washington, D.C., Georgetown University Press pp 99-118

The Australian Women's Weekly (TAWW) (2015) Exclusive: Belle Gibson breaks her silence on that cancer diagnosis, *The Australian Women's Weekly*, 20 April. Available online at <http://www.awww.com.au/latest-news/in-the-mag/belle-gibson-speaks-out-20243>, accessed on 14 May 2016

Thackray, Lucy (2015) 'Blood's boiling ... absolute lowlife': Twitter erupts after Belle Gibson interview and her former followers are left even more angry, *Daily Mail Australia*, 28 June

The Dominion Post (2016) Cancer con artist's big TV payday revealed, *The Dominion Post*, 21 September

Thurlow, Crispin (2013) Fakebook: Synthetic media, pseudo-sociality, and the rhetorics of Web 2.0, Tannen, Deborah and Trester, Anna Marie (eds) *Discourse 2.0: Language and new media*, Washington, D.C., Georgetown University Press pp 225-250

Ward, Miranda (2015) *The Voice* drops on its return while 1.073m watch Belle Gibson's *60 Minutes* interview, *Mumbrella*, 29 June. Available online at <https://mumbrella.com.au/the-voice-ratings-belle-gibson-60-minutes-nine-302328>, accessed on 12 January 2017

Ward, Stephen (2009) Truth and objectivity, Wilkins, Lee and Christians, Clifford (eds) *The Handbook of Mass Media Ethics*, London, Routledge pp 71-83

West, Anna, and Trester, Marie (2013) Facework on Facebook: Conversations on social media, Tannen, Deborah and Trester, Anna Marie (eds) *Discourse 2.0: Language and new media*, Washington, D.C., Georgetown University Press pp 133-154

Whitehead, Deborah (2015) The evidence of things unseen: Authenticity and fraud in the Christian Mommy blogosphere, *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, Vol. 83, No. 1 pp 120-150

Willis, Charlotte, and Ma, Wenlei (2015) Tara Brown to Belle Gibson: 'You're a pathological liar', *News Limited*, 29 June. Available online at <http://www.news.com.au/entertainment/tv/tara-brown-to-belle-gibson-youre-a-pathological-liar/news-story/0f53718144abf61d8f09012103bccb0b>, accessed on 23 May 2016

Woodward, Wayne (2009) A philosophically-based inquiry into the nature of communicating humans, Wilkins, Lee and Christian, Clifford (eds) *The handbook of mass media ethics*, London, Routledge pp 3-14

Yahoo7 (2014) Health, wellness and lifestyle app, 28 February. Available online at <https://au.tv.yahoo.com/sunrise/video/watch/21742703/health-wellness-and-lifestyle-app/-page3>, accessed on 23 May 2016

Note on the Contributors

Elaine Xu is a media and communication doctoral candidate at Murdoch University, Perth, Australia. Her research examines how the communication of need in charitable fundraising influences donor perceptions and behaviours. Contact: School of Arts, Murdoch University, Murdoch, Western Australia 6150; email: uxeniale@gmail.com.

Terence Lee is an Associate Professor in Communication and Media Studies at Murdoch University, Perth, Australia. He is Chair of the Communication Management postgraduate programme and is also a Research Fellow of the Asia Research Fellow at Murdoch University. Contact: School of Arts, Murdoch University, Murdoch, Western Australia 6150; email: T.Lee@murdoch.edu.au.

REVIEWS

Behind the text: Candid conversations with Australian creative nonfiction writers

Sue Joseph

Hybrid Publishers, Murrumbidgee, Victoria, pp 224
ISBN 9781925272475 (paperback)

Behind the text is a nonfiction cocktail: one part travelogue, a dash of portrait writing and two shots of analysis, poured in a tall glass as journalism research.

The writing – about the potentially dry topic of producing a particular style of nonfiction – is fluid, direct and engaging, so that whatever else the book may be, you can be sure it's a good read. As a piece of research it will be probably be judged lightweight, caught as it is between the scholarly and the creative. For it enlightens us more closely as to the lives of the writers than the finer points of the genre. Author and University of Technology Sydney journalism academic Sue Joseph herself admits in her introduction that 'the text is not overtly scholarly, although it was gathered through scholarly research processes' (p. x).

Nonetheless, the result is gripping as any novel, and if this is research I want more.

Joseph's literature review, for example, is neatly confined to an excellent 10-page introduction, incorporating a brief gloss of history and key figures in the field, mostly of US and UK literature and including Norman Sims, Lee Gutkind, Ben Yagoda and others, as well as a snapshot of her results. Her aim, then, is to interview 11 of her favourite authors, each of whom she perceives as being a writer of creative nonfiction.

Joseph uses a first-person narrative approach, a common enough device in nonfiction and one, I suspect, is part of her grand plan to immerse her reader in the subject she investigates. Specifically, that is any Australian writing fitting the hugely controversial label of 'creative nonfiction' (or CNF).

To be sure, the journey is as colourful as any CNF dramatic manuscript, as we travel with Joseph and others to record interviews in Byron Bay, Moore River Native Settlement, in Western Australia, and via Skype to Kabul in Afghanistan (this live in front of her university class) to name but a few.

To this end, like any good writer, Joseph prefers to 'show not tell' in presenting her argument. Each chapter of *Behind the text* is a metanarrative, a piece of creative nonfiction in its own right and one that renders faithfully Joseph's research on the topic and her interviews of some of Australia's finest exponents of the genre.

Which begs the question, what exactly is creative nonfiction? Interestingly, Joseph's answer remains purposefully vague, leading me to conclude she has let the book speak to its own definition. What there is comes by way of anecdote, an exercise she conducts for her creative nonfiction classes at UTS. She asks her students to 'think of a creative nonfiction text they have read ... in books, newspapers, magazines or online' and on any timescale. Joseph then asks them to choose one they can see 'as a film in their heads'. When she asks this, 'Lights go on all around the room' (p. xvi).

Joseph's message is that it is in the experience of reading itself that nonfiction is revealed as literary or creative. For example, she asks, what 'makes one piece sing off the page into your mind forever, and another dribble away into nothing?' (pp xvi-xvii).

Definitions by others are briefly explored, but each under a different name. Indeed, from my experience, and as Joseph conveys, alternative names for creative nonfiction abound, including longform or literary journalism, narrative journalism, the new journalism, the 'new' new journalism, feature writing, the essay, or simply a 'Sunday read'. Yet earlier research by Joseph, based in part on book sales, has proven that Australians love nonfiction.¹ The current work suggests Australian CNF is 'rich and vital' and 'read with relish' by Australians, but simply 'never discussed as a cohesive genre' (p. x).

For my part, as a writer and sometime teacher of creative nonfiction, it is certainly worth our time to tease out a name and identify a skill set for this compelling mode of storytelling. However, while the term CNF is widely accepted overseas, those writing it in Australia often fail to recognise themselves as CNF (or worse, 'longform') writers. They prefer to be known – perhaps, they think, less ostentatiously – as simply writers or journalists.

Other Australian titles have paddled strongly in these same muddy waters, notably Ricketson's *Telling true stories* (Allen and Unwin, 2014) and Eisenhuth and McDonald's *The writers reader: Understanding journalism and nonfiction* (CUP,

2007). But Joseph's is the first Australian text to speak the name of the beast in its title. Even Ricketson mostly uses the softer (perhaps less American) descriptor 'narrative' nonfiction.

Unfortunately for Joseph's project, some of her interviewees couldn't care less whether it is a genre or not. Fairfax war correspondent Paul McGeough, the first of Joseph's interviewees, is clearly uninterested in what category of writer he might be. 'I've never thought about it,' says McGeough. 'Beyond journalist reporter, I've never tried to define myself' (p. 3). Three other of Joseph's favourites: David Marr, Helen Garner and Chloe Hooper – a potpourri of Australia's finest – went so far as to refuse to take part.

Perhaps one of the best reasons to eschew the labelling question comes from journalist Margaret Simons. 'Journalism, finding things out, is actually very dirty work,' she says. 'Interviewing is very dirty work. When it's done well, it's always on the ethical edge; it almost always makes people seriously angry. And so one of my problems with literary journalism is that "literary" in this country, at least, implies something that's a bit stratospheric and up there and away from all the dirt and the push and the pull' (p. 133).

All of which goes some way to answering Joseph's research question as to 'whether the creative nonfiction writers in Australia wish to be identified as a significant group, or even regard this as an issue worth their time pondering' (p. x). We are left to conclude that the care factor about this question by Australian authors was, generally speaking, very low.

I think the book may have been richer, or at least more complete academically, with a final chapter drawing together Joseph's conclusions from the essays built around the author interviews. Admittedly, her results are declared in the introduction, when she writes: 'Many of my subjects feel the same as Marr, Garner and Hooper. Responses to many of my questions were polemical; many of the authors strongly queried why I would even ask about a defined grouping of writers' (p. xvii).

Despite the disappointing responses recorded faithfully in the book, Joseph remains committed: '... I enjoy very much the term "creative nonfiction". I know what it is, and I champion it as a term to be recognised and regarded in Australia' (p. xvi).

Part of the aim of literary and journalism research is to engage its various publics in the research question itself. Joseph says she hoped the book will 'foster discussion among Australian practitioners, as a contribution to international debate on the genre' (p. xvi). In this respect, and also as to engaging a more general audience in the same debate, *Behind the text* certainly does its job.

Note

¹ Joseph, Sue (2011) Australian creative non-fiction: Perspectives and opinions, *ejournalist*, Vol. 11, No. 2 pp 31-52

Glenn Morrison,
IASP Tutor,
Charles Sturt University

**Global journalism education in the 21st century:
Challenges and innovations**

Robyn Goodman and Elanie Steyn (eds)
Knight Center for Journalism in the Americas,
Austin, Texas, pp 496
ISBN 1587903881

Much has happened to journalism since the founding of the World Journalism Education Council in 2007. The idea of creating a book mapping journalism education globally was conceived then, and now we have this text.

It is divided in three parts. Part I offers country case studies from all over the world: Australia, Chile, China, Egypt, India, Israel, Russia, South Africa, U.K. and United States. In Part II, three chapters contextualise these studies by examining where journalism education finds itself in the second decade of the 21st century. Part III engages with the difficult future journalism education faces. The fascinating chapters range from 'Pop-up newsroom' and 'When alternative and real reality collide' to 'Coding the curriculum' and 'Reconsidering news production'.

As Goodman writes in her introduction, at a time when the media are under attack in many parts of the world – be it Poland, Turkey, the Philippines or the United States – journalism educators are in the forefront of the 'struggle to save journalism's reputation'. With many accusations of fake or alternative news swirling about, educating about the value of facts and fairness, ethics and logic is a major mission to ensure journalism's continued contribution to good governance and civic life.

Importantly, covering journalism education in all parts of the world meant stepping back from some of the concepts customarily foregrounded in Western countries. The notion that journalism has its greatest value in assuring checks and balances on governments and is a vital pillar of democracy is not applicable the world over. Irrespective of the role, desired graduate competencies remain, possibly surprisingly, similar. They centre on competent communication skills, the ability to find and tell stories accurately and quickly, on being able to comprehend and evaluate unfamiliar material, selecting essential information and having a basic understanding of evidence.

Tertiary institutions would add that knowledge of current affairs and issues of cultural, social and religious institutions and broad general knowledge also needs to be seen as essential.

At this point, *Global journalism education* has to bridge another entrenched divide, that of the academy and industry. The pathways of journalism education vary greatly between countries, especially in Europe, where some nations have the tradition of media houses or special journalism schools, which are not regarded as being on a tertiary level, providing journalism education. But universities the world over, as Chris Frost writes in his case study on Great Britain, also struggle to balance 'university requirements to provide a well-rounded, liberal arts education against the industry requirement for an especially vocational, training-orientated curriculum' (p. 213).

The contributions do not privilege college education over other providers of journalistic education, such as delivered by media houses or NGOs. All the same, by the sheer fact that most of the chapters are written by teachers of journalism in universities, the book generates the impression of a mostly tertiary-based journalism education. The case studies are very illuminating in showing the differences in national media developments, yet also the similarities of the problems faced.

For instance, Mark Deuze in his chapter, 'Media and entrepreneurship as ways of being in the world', advises all students to be prepared for an increasingly precarious working life as a journalist, yet not to lose sight of critical engagement and vital public service that journalism ought to and needs to provide. Oscar Westlund and Seth Lewis, in calling for a new understanding of news production, highlight the way in which technology is increasingly replacing human actors in the media industries. In their view, journalism students should be provided with 'more nuanced perspectives' on how to approach and collaborate with technological 'actants' (namely technologies such as algorithms, applications, networks, interfaces and the like) and audiences (p. 415).

In summing up journalism education's first century, Joe Foote reminds us that journalism has seen very difficult periods over that time span. As this volume attests, globally journalism education's task of being 'a beacon on conscience' (p. 446) is as pressing as ever.

**Beate Josephi,
Honorary Associate,
The University of Sydney**

Writing feature stories (second edition)

Matthew Ricketson and Caroline Graham

Allen & Unwin, Sydney, pp 373

ISBN 9781760113698

It has been 13 years since the first edition of *Writing feature stories* was published. The sole author then was Professor Matthew Ricketson. With this timely second edition, he is joined by academic Caroline Graham. The cover blurb proclaims: 'Bestselling classic completely updated for the online world.' But this new edition does not simply have chapters added about the online explosion within the industry since 2004 – every chapter has been updated, with online and technological impacts woven seamlessly throughout.

One of the first differences between the text is its weight – this one is so much heavier with an extra 89 pages. Each chapter is packed with 'how-to' information, commentary from the authors together with excerpts and comments from practitioners. It's easy to read, entertaining and enjoyable – so not like a conventional text-book at all.

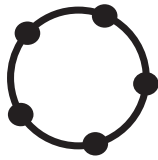
There are 12 chapters, each beginning with a sassy and upbeat intro such as: 'Why feature stories matter', 'Creating stories for the full range of media forms', 'Being reader-oriented from start to finish', 'Generating fresh ideas', 'Editing your story and getting published'. A number of features are unpacked and analysed while in a section tagged 'The story behind the story', their authors – Rick Morton, Jane Cadzow, Chloe Hooper, Owen Jaques, and Katharine Murphy – explain the genesis of the piece.

Each chapter ends with a short section containing discussion questions and exercises. And the book finishes with a lengthy if highly subjective list of suggested further readings – covering topics as varied as books about writing, books about interviewing, award-winning journalism, humour and satire, sports journalism, film adaptations, a long list of *New Yorker* pieces, travel writing, literary journalism and podcasts.

The opening lines sum up its overall informed and witty approach: 'One of the great things about the internet is that it's made everyone a writer; one of the terrible things about the internet is that it's made everyone a writer. That's a paradox, yes, but the two can co-exist' (p. 1). It then goes on to suggest we resist regarding the paradox as an 'either/or' but rather look at it as a 'both' (ibid).

This text feels similar to sitting in a classroom and being in the hands of an inspired, self-deprecating yet quirky lecturer; a lecturer who lives what he or she teaches, and loves it; and who has lived and is living through immense upheaval and change, with an embracing good humour. In this case, we are in the hands of two academics who have rendered this classroom experience effortlessly to the page. There is a wealth of knowledge here, pulled together with craft and a delightful zeal. A worthy improved and comprehensive second edition, fit for the 21st century.

Sue Joseph,
University of Technology Sydney



The Institute of Communication Ethics

ICE aims to:

- formalise the study and practice in the fast growing discipline of CE and articulate the communication industries' concerns with ethical reasoning and outcomes;
- provide communication practitioners with a centre to drive the study of ethical practice in communications;
- develop specific tools, quality frameworks and training methods and provide them to its members; assess initiatives in related disciplines and offer guidance and ethics training for communicators;
- offer qualifications that support the practice of communication as an ethical discipline underpinned by principles, rules of conduct and systematic self-examination.

Membership Application

I would like to apply for annual membership to the ICE with:

- ☐ Personal membership with access to Ethical Space online (£55)
- ☐ Personal membership plus printed copy of Ethical Space (£75)
- ☐ Organisational membership (non profit £200, for profit (small) £500, multinational £5000)

Note: Please contact the ICE office for further details of local chapters of ICE.

Name _____

Address _____

Country _____ Postcode _____

Email _____

Tel _____ Fax _____

Name of University/Institute/Organisation _____

Payment

- ☐ I enclose a cheque payable to 'Institute of Communication Ethics'

Please return to:

Dr Fiona Thompson, 69 Glenview Road, Nab Wood, Shopley, West Yorkshire, BD18 4AR
For assistance please contact: info@communication-ethics.net

