Title: “Coming clean” on duty of care: Australian print media’s representation of male versus female sex offenders in institutional contexts

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Public opinion about sexual abuse of minors is greatly shaped by mass media and the way individual cases are reported. This paper examines Australian print media’s representation of sex offenders, focussing particularly on the sex of the offenders and aiming to shed light on some of the misconceptions and deep-rooted prejudices within the population at large. Given the multi-faceted nature of sexual offences, this paper focuses on sexual offences committed by both males and females against minors in the context of a companion breach of duty of care. In order to explore the effect that linguistic tools can have in the Australian print media’s way of reporting sexual abuse cases, twenty-nine newspaper articles published in Australian dailies were selected for analysis. The analysis of these articles reveals a marked bias in the manner in which sexual offences perpetrated by males, as opposed to females, are reported, suggesting a male monopoly on sexual abuse. We argue that this biased representation, which hinders adequate profiling of sexual offences against minors, may stem from an androcentric view of sexuality and from the systematic denial of female agency when it comes to sex.

Keywords: media representation; child sexual abuse; duty of care; female sex offenders

Introduction

In recent years, a great deal of media attention has focussed on sexual offenders and sexual harassment in a wide array of social, educational and professional settings. Subsequent

to a long series of sensational (and often sensationalist) revelations of various sexual offences committed by Roman Catholic priests in the context of educational institutions (Plante, 1999, pp. 1-5), the issue of duty of care was brought into the focus of public attention. As in relation to most topics, public opinion about sexual abuse of minors is greatly influenced by the mass media and the way individual cases are reported (Greer, 2003, pp. 58-59; McCombs, 2004, pp. 26-29). It is widely acknowledged though, that media representations can be misleading and potentially damaging as they often portray a distorted view of events (Goddard, 1999; Kitzinger, 2002). Among the concerns identified by researchers studying media representation of child sex offenders is the wide dissemination of the view that strangers pose the greatest threat to children's safety and also the "stereotypical, reductionist images" used to depict perpetrators (Greer, 2003, p. 129). These over-simplified portrayals create recognition barriers to understanding the true complexity of sexual offences against minors.

Although for decades studies have been pointing out the numerous inconsistencies and inequalities in the representational styles of journalists reporting on male sex offenders, as opposed to female sex offenders, public attitudes have changed little (Denov, 2003a, 2004; Hunt, 2006; Landor, 2009). Societal pressure developing along the lines of public opinion can also have a profound impact on professional practices, such as teacher recruitment (McDevitt, 1996). For instance, recent studies revealed that there is a marked gender bias when hiring teachers, particularly in early childhood education, and that male teachers are subject to a significantly higher level of scrutiny than their female counterparts (DeCorse & Vogtle, 1997; King, 2009; Weaver-Hightower, 2011).

Whilst the resulting heightened awareness of child sexual abuse is unarguably a positive outcome, there seem to be a large number of lingering misconceptions and prejudices within the perceptions of the general population on both sexual abuse in general and the

demographics of sex offenders in particular (Canter & Heritage, 1990). In this paper, representation of sex offenders in the print media will be investigated, with particular attention given to the language and discourse patterns used to describe sexual offences committed by both males and females. While studies to date suggest that the vast majority of perpetrators of sexual crimes are male (Snyder & Sickmund, 2006; Vizard, Monck, & Misch, 1995), most of these same studies also acknowledge that a small percentage of the perpetrators are female. The relatively small percentage of female offenders does not in any way diminish the seriousness of the sexual offences committed by them.

This paper is organised as follows: first, the aim of this research project is outlined, followed by a review of the previous studies. Next, the methodological framework of the study is delineated as that of critical studies and the selected newspaper articles are examined and compared before summarising and discussing the findings of this project and drawing a border crossing conclusion.

Aim and scope of research project

A border fixes the margins of a territory (public opinion), which is controlled and patrolled by powerful gatekeepers, as in this instance: the print media (see Daly, 1992). The aim of this project is to “come clean” by first constructing a transgressive or “border narrative” (Giroux, 1991) of the reporting of sexual abuse cases within the same criminal rubric and then by analysing some of the gender-specific peculiarities in that reporting. This in turn will shed light on the limiting effect that the use of linguistic tools can have on general public opinion. This paper will argue that there are several inequalities in the representation of males when compared with females in the Australian print media, attaching, in most cases, unwarranted, gender-labels to crimes. To support this argument, a selection of newspaper

articles, published in Australian dailies, will be examined. Due to the multi-faceted nature of sexual offences, the focus has been narrowed down to sexual offences committed by both males and females against youths under the legal age of consent in institutional settings where the perpetrators were in the role of the victims' carers or educators. This phenomenon of the breach of duty of care by individuals in trusted institutions remains a somewhat understudied area (Wolfe, Jaffe, Jetté, & Poisson, 2003). While the reporting of child sexual abuse cases both by strangers or by family members are met with unmitigated condemnation, this paper will show evidence that similar cases in institutional settings are reported in a more ambivalent way.

Child sexual abuse and demographics of sex offenders

The past two decades have seen an increasing awareness of sexual abuse of children, which brought the issue to the forefront of public interest. Given the aim of this research project, this review will set out to give a brief overview of the existing literature on sexual offences against minors and studies undertaken on the demographics, in particular the sex of sex offenders.

The extensive body of research carried out on the subject suggests that the increased attention to sexual offences is not the result of an increase in the number of cases, rather an increase in the number of cases that are reported (Anderson & Swainson, 2001; Canter & Heritage, 1990; Coxell & King, 2002; Watkins & Bentovim, 1992). Within this vast body of research, relatively few studies concentrate on the demographics and characteristics of sex offenders, and even less set out to undertake research on female sex offenders (Busby & Compton, 1997; Groth & Burgess, 1980; Muehlenhard & Cook, 1998; Struckman-Johnston, 1998; Tewksbury & Mustaine, 2001). In fact, very few studies deal with the phenomenon of

females as sex offenders, seemingly assigning the sex offender label to males exclusively (Calderwood, 1987; Fedoroff & Moran, 1997; Lenhart, 2004; Myers, 1989). It is noteworthy that entire books, with titles like *Home Truths about Child Sexual Abuse* (Itzin, 2000), suggesting an all-encompassing approach to the matter, exclusively mention males as potential sex offenders, ignoring the possibility that females may be capable of such offences. Moreover, in a report on child sexual abuse offender characteristics (Smallbone & Wortley, 2001), commissioned by the Australian Institute of Criminology, the male offender – female victim scenario has been taken as grounds for the study, again fostering the view that these types of offences do not occur with the sexes reversed. The apparent denial of the possibility of women as potentially harmful sexual aggressors within the perceptions of the general population (Denov, 2001; Sgroi & Sargent, 1993; Smith, Pine, & Hawley, 1988) has left sexual harassment of men and sexual offences perpetrated by women as “guilty secrets” and seriously understudied phenomena (Anderson & Swainson, 2001; Fitzgerald, Drasgow, Hulin, & Magley, 1997; Struckman-Johnston & Struckman-Johnston, 1994; Vaux, 1993; Welsh, 1999; Williams, 1997).

The vast majority of studies on sexual harassment of males tend to examine this phenomenon within the context of sexual harassment of males by homosexual males, rather than harassment by females. In fact, a large proportion of gender related studies carried out on male issues seems to be preoccupied with homosexuality (Mitchell, Hirschman, & Nagayama-Hall, 1999; Schneider, Soh-Chiew Ee, & Aronson, 1994; Welsh, 1999), suggesting that, even when it comes to sexual harassment of males, only males are capable of committing such offences. Of the few studies focussing on female sex offenders, some go as far as identifying a “beauty bias”, suggesting a negative correlation between the perceived attractiveness of the female abuser and the perceived psychological harm to the male victim caused by sexual harassment. In other words, it is suggested that, when a man encounters a

woman who overtly and even aggressively initiates sexual contact, he is likely to view the situation as a fortuitous sexual opportunity, not a violation of his own will (Smith, et al., 1988; Struckman-Johnston & Struckman-Johnston, 1994). Analysts speculate that female abusers might be underreported if the target is male, because males have been socialised to believe they should be flattered or appreciative of sexual interest from a female. Furthermore, victimisation is seen as a “feminising” experience, suggestive of the victim not fulfilling his “male role” (Anderson & Swainson, 2001; Busby & Compton, 1997; Howard, 1984; Smith, et al., 1988).

In light of these findings, it can be reasonably asserted that a great deal more research is needed in order to gain further insight into the demographics sex offenders, with particular attention to their sex. Amongst many others, Nelson (1994) and Plummer (1981, p. 228) suggest that the stereotype of paedophiles as exclusively males is both false and naïve. This is echoed by the findings of a report commissioned by Child Wise – the Australian representative of ECPAT International, a non-profit organisation working to prevent sexual abuse of children (Hunt, 2006). This report draws attention to the fact that females are not only capable of perpetrating, but in fact do perpetrate sexual abuse. The following section explores some of the factors that may hinder the recognition of females as potential sexual predators.

Sexual abuse by female perpetrators – recognition barriers

The public and professional assumption, that sexual abuse by female perpetrators is somehow less severe and less harmful, seems omnipresent not only in the media, but even in a large percentage of the academic literature as well. The reliance on traditional phallogentric sexual

scripts coupled with the widespread view amongst academics that sexual abuse by females is of little significance led to the denial of even the possibility of females as sexual offenders. Mathis (1972) commented on a female sex offender stating “That she might seduce a helpless child into sexplay is unthinkable, and even if she did so, what harm can be done without a penis?” (p.54). Misconceptions, prejudices and deep-seated social taboos tend to intertwine and produce a number of barriers that may prevent the wide-spread recognition of sexual abuse by female perpetrators (Allen, 1990, pp. 108-109). As is suggested by the findings of this study, mass media outlets play a role in promoting and engendering these preconceptions amongst the population at large.

The most significant barrier to recognising females as potential sex offenders seems to be the deeply entrenched view of males as agents and females as patients (Denov, 2003b). Denov (2004) uses the example of the Canadian justice system to demonstrate and draw attention to the ubiquitous inequalities between males and females when it comes to sexual offences. According to her, until 1983 the Canadian Criminal Code did not allow for the charging of females with rape or sexual abuse and, at the same time, did not acknowledge that males can be victims of such attacks (Denov, 2004, p. 21). She also points out that such laws are not unique to Canada as, in many countries, these laws still govern the criminal deliberation process in sexual abuse cases. Laws like this echo the still pervasive view that women are incapable of committing a range of sexual offences, thus reaffirming female sexual passivity by suggesting that females could not be the instigators of sexual abuse, or sexual activities in general.

Another significant barrier is the overextension of feminist explanations of sexual abuse. According to these perspectives (such as Cavanagh, 2004; Finkelhor & Russell, 1984; Herman, 1981) sexual abuse is a direct result of cultural socialisation processes. In other words, men are socialised to be sexual predators, and women to be docile recipients. Barriers

like these tend to divert attention from accurately profiling sex offenders, thus hindering efforts to uncover the nature and extent of sexual abuse against minors.

Representation of male vs. female sex offenders in the Australian print media

The data

Twenty nine newspaper articles published in nine Australian dailies between 1999 and 2010 were randomly selected for analysis: fifteen reporting on cases of sexual abuse by seven female perpetrators and fourteen reporting sexual abuse cases where the offenders were nine males. All the cases involved teachers or coaches who were known to the victims and had duty of care. Of the seven female perpetrators, six offended against boys and one against a girl, while six of the male perpetrators offended against girls, two against boys and one against both sexes. The total number of victims cannot be ascertained based on the lack of information provided by some articles.

All newspaper articles analysed in this research have been accessed through and downloaded from the Factiva database and from M.A.K.O., an organisation that claims to be Australia's first free public "Paedophile/Sex offender registry". The keywords, and combinations of these keywords, used to locate the relevant articles were "sex offenders/offences", "male", "female", "child", "child sex abuse" and "paedophile". The scope of the search was limited to dailies published in Australia. Table 1 summarises the sources and headlines of the articles examined. Links to the articles can be found in Appendices A and B. Due to space restraints, entire texts are not included in the appendices, however all newspaper articles can be accessed via the Factiva and M.A.K.O. databases.

Table 1. Headlines

Methodological framework

Given the paper's critical studies framework, a qualitative content analysis (Weber 1990) was performed on descriptors (such as terms used to describe professional or social standing, or in some cases physical attributes) appearing in the articles. As Fowler (1991) has shown, language plays a crucial role in the media and can colour readers' views of particular actions and events, thus affecting their perceptions and interpretation (conf. Teo 2000). Thus, the analysis of these descriptors can be instrumental in revealing potential differences in the reporting styles of similar cases with male/female perpetrators in their focus. An examination of the reporting styles then allows for comparison of the implicatures, i.e. suggested meanings not overtly expressed, in the texts. Descriptors in the reporting of cases of sexual abuse by females were compared and contrasted with those appearing in the articles reporting similar cases with males as perpetrators. Two independent counts were conducted manually by the researchers on all the terms used in the articles to describe the offenders, offences and victims; these two independent counts were later cross-checked.

Analysis of the articles

This section begins by examining the characterisation of offenders as presented in newspapers' headlines. As Teo (2000) has argued, headlines are highly concise devices that orient the reader "to process the text in a pre-determined direction" (p. 13) by strategically encapsulating ideological values or attitudes underlying newspaper reports, and therefore an analysis of the lexical choices made in the headlines was used to uncover the general tone of the article and its operations.

Upon close analysis of the selected articles, the first and most obvious difference between discourse patterns is the apparent, albeit somewhat hidden, sympathy for illicit relationships between an older female and a much younger male or female, while articles reporting cases of similar relationships between an older male and a much younger female or male tend to express pronounced disgust towards the male perpetrators. This pressure is well illustrated by some of the headlines: An article reporting U.S. teacher Mary Kay LeTourneau's marriage to her former student, with whom she started a sexual relationship when the boy was twelve years of age and for whose rape she served a seven year sentence, is entitled "School lovers tie knot" (*Sunday Mail*, 22/5/2005). On the other hand, the article reporting Brisbane teacher Allan Thomas Walters' sentencing to five years, suspended after thirteen months, for charges of indecent dealings against a boy who was thirteen years of age at the time of the offence, is entitled "More time for pervert" (*The Courier Mail*, 7/4/2001). Moreover, some of the headlines suggest motives to explain the female teachers' behaviour, thus diminishing personal and professional responsibility for their offences. A report on a sporting coach who avoided a potential 10-year sentence for charges of having sex with her daughter's teenage former boyfriend by blaming her actions on the onset of menopause was entitled "Accused betrayed by her hormones" (*Daily Telegraph*, 28/5/2010), and a report on a schoolteacher accused of conducting a sexual relationship with a 15-year old was entitled "Breakup led to sex with student" (*Courier Mail*, 31/1/2006). No such justifications can be found in the reports on male offenders.

With regard to the perpetrators' characterisation, the present study differs significantly from previous research on sex offenders' media representation. Despite the widely acknowledged fact that most child abuse cases involve adults who know their victims (e.g. neighbours, relatives, parents), child sexual predators are typically represented disembodied of human characteristics, as strangers lurking in the dark, barely human, and thus

characterised as *animals, fiends, perverts, beasts, or monsters* (Clark, 1998; Kitzinger, 2002; Landor, 2009), adjectives that are also becoming increasingly prevalent in reports of child pornography on the internet. This study, focussing on offenders who have a duty of care within institutional contexts, did not find many tokens of such virulent language; instead, offenders were described in terms of social normality, including neutral information such as name, age, occupation, marital or family status and even positive descriptions of character. Yet, mirroring practice in society, bias in the depiction of male and female perpetrators is evident in the data, as can be seen from the analysis of the 86 tokens of keywords in the two groups of articles summarised in Table 2.

Table 2. Summary of the 86 labels used in the articles to characterise perpetrators

One of the most obvious differences seems to be the use of the terms *paedophile/paedophilia* in the texts. It was found that, in the examined articles, the terms *paedophile/paedophilia* were used almost exclusively in the description of male sex offenders. On the other hand, in articles describing female sex offenders, the term *paedophile* appeared only once. The term *paedophilia* is not mentioned in any of the articles written on a sexual abuse case where the perpetrator was a female. The use of these terms in describing male sex offenders exclusively seems to suggest that *paedophilia* is a male monopoly. Further corroboration of this point is provided by examples of over-lexicalisation found in the text. Fowler et al. (1979) define ‘over-lexicalization’ as a pragmatic strategy resulting from a repetition of quasi-synonymous terms that give rise to a sense of ‘over-completeness’ in the way participants of the news discourse are described. Typically, it is powerless people who are over-lexicalised. This can be seen by the use of the word ‘teacher’ in the articles analysed. While generally the default assumption is that ‘teacher’ refers to a female occupation and is thus over-lexicalised when applied to males (as in *male teacher*), most of the articles under

examination use ‘teacher’ to refer to male offenders working as educators and qualify it as ‘female teacher’ when the default assumption (i.e., that paedophiles are males) is not met. Another case in point is the term *pervert*, which appeared only once, in an article reporting sexual abuse cases where the sex offender is a male. The most negative terms applied to female offenders, such as *accused* or *jailed*, clearly refer to the outcomes of the offences committed, not to moral qualities –or lack thereof - of the offenders, as do the terms used for males. The term *rapist*, common in cases where the paedophile is unknown, is not found in this data.

Other interesting differences become evident when comparing neutral and positive labels used to depict offenders. Neutral terms in both groups of articles refer to general information about the perpetrators, including name, age, place of residence and employment, and marital/family circumstances. While most of these facts are listed for both genders, it is only female offenders that are given a family role, either as *married woman* or as *mother of* a certain number of children. One article is entitled “Mum had sex with daughter’s ex-boyfriend” (*The Daily Telegraph*, 27/5/2010), a second article refers to the offender as “the 34-year old married mother of 4” (*Sunday Mail*, 22/5/2005), and yet another as a “jailed mother” (*Courier Mail*, 24/2/1999). In fact, almost 20% of the labels for female offenders include references to motherhood. References to husbands and boyfriends are also found in the articles reporting on female sex offences. Thus in a series of articles about Ellis, the “Tearful teacher jailed for sex with boy” (*The Sydney Morning Herald*, 5/5/2005), reporters speculate on her not wearing her wedding ring in court (*ibid*) and later announce the couple’s separation despite the husband’s initial support during the trial (*The Australian*, 28/6/2005). Conversely, the only marital information given about males is found in spouses’ quotes or references to “unsuspecting wives” (*The Courier Mail*, 13/9/1999), but no male offender is characterised as “the married father of four” or “dad”. Despite our initial expectation that

physical descriptions of female perpetrators would be found in the papers, only one article described Ellis as “a petite blonde who appeared in court dressed in black and wearing dark sunglasses” (AAP, 18/8/2004). No such descriptions of male perpetrators are found, but interestingly there are allusions to physical features of their spouses. Mrs Randell, for instance, is twice labelled “a former Ms Tasmania” (*The Courier Mail*, 13/9/1999, 14/8/1999), suggesting she is or was a beautiful woman.

With regards to positive labels, these are found exclusively in articles depicting male offenders’ achievements ‘before the fall’ and indicating the high standing of these individuals in the local or international community. Thus, one male offender is described as a “celebrity tennis coach” (*Adelaide Advertiser*, 5/8/2004), another as an “internationally renowned educator and computer expert” (*The Courier Mail*, 7/4/2001). It is noteworthy that traditional gender role expectations can be found even in the context of child sexual offences.

Keywords referring to patients, i.e., participants affected by the actions of others, and to the offences described in the articles seem to differ greatly according to the gender of the perpetrator, as can be seen in table 3 and 4 respectively.

Table 3. Summary of the 138 labels used in the articles to characterise the minors involved

Table 4. Summary of the labels used in the articles to characterise the offence

Minors sexually abused by females are repeatedly described as *lover/young lover* (occurring five times) and the alleged relationship between abused and female abuser is described as *love* (occurring once) or (*illicit*) *affair* (occurring six times) or romanticised through references to *the couple* (occurring four times) and *the pair* (six times). These depictions of events not only trivialise the offences, but also infantilise adult women by portraying them as naïve parties caught in a love story, rather than independent agents responsible for their actions. On the other hand, the persons abused by males are over-

lexicalised and thus portrayed as utterly powerless by being repeatedly described as *victims/sexual playthings* (occurring seventeen times) (cf., Goddard & Saunders, 2000), despite the fact that some of these relationships lasted as long as the former (up to four years). Only one of these relationships is once described as an *affair*. Notably, the term *victim* appears only six times in articles written about female sex offenders. However, two characterisations of the female perpetrator were found as *victims*, alongside adjectives like *vulnerable, lonely, depressed* or *heartbroken* (*Courier Mail*, 31/1/2006), which leaves the reader questioning whether these sex offenders are to blame at all or had any agency in the offence (conf. “betrayed by her hormones”, *Daily telegraph*, 28/5/2010). The label *victim* is also applied to spouses of male perpetrators (see for instance *The Courier Mail*, 13/9/1999).

The seriousness of female abuse of underage males is consistently downplayed in most of the reports examined. In one of the articles, discussing the case of Mary Kay LeTourneau and referring to her young pupil sexually abused by her, Beverly Baker, president of the Federation of Parents and Citizens Association of NSW, said: “Of course a young boy would think it is a fun, good experience – imagine the kudos he would get with his mates – but he is in no way capable of handling the emotional problems it will inevitably cause.” Justifying his decision not to impose a sentence on the 48-year old woman who admitted having underage sex District Court judge Paul Conlon said, “My assessment of the objective seriousness of this matter is that it falls towards the very lower end of the range for offences of this type” (*The Daily Telegraph*, 27/5/2010). Statements like this echo the seemingly popular belief, discussed earlier in this paper, that male victims of sexual abuse do derive pleasure from the experience and are, to a certain degree, responsible for what had happened to them. The frequent use of the nickname *Ben* to refer to Benjamin Dunbar, the then 15-year old boy involved in one of the cases, reinforces the perceived lack of seriousness of the situation and gives an impression of unwarranted familiarity between reporter and subject.

Further, whilst the reporting of LeTourneau's case was not positive, it was less negative than that of male offenders' cases. Particularly noteworthy was the mention of LeTourneau's threat of physical harm to the child victim, giving rise to circumstances of aggravation, a factor ignored in the article's commentary on LeTourneau's conduct. Quite the contrary conclusion is indicated by the child victim being referred to as the "*young lover*", a positive description not given to the victims of male perpetrators. Under section 9(6) of the Penalties and Sentences Act 1992 (QLD), a threat of physical harm to a child is taken into account in sentencing an offender and is likely to lead to a longer or more severe sentence (Penalties and Sentences Act 1992 (QLD)). Referring to the victim as "*lover*", whilst at the same time failing to give appropriate significance to the threat of physical harm, both diminishes LeTourneau's turpitude and enhances the anticipated appeal of the "*lovers*" liaison.

Discussion

This paper has presented a contrastive depiction of male and female educators who committed sex offences against children under their care, by focusing on lexical choices used in 29 news reports to label agents, patients and actions. The analysis reveals a markedly different characterisation of offenders according to gender. Whereas male offenders attract harsher criticism in the media, female offenders are generally portrayed in a more sympathetic manner and excuses are found to justify or lessen the seriousness of their acts.

But having found differences in the discourse construction of the sex offender does not explain why these differences exist in the same place. The question that arises at this point is what motivates this dichotomisation of the male and female offenders, besides the obvious fact that they represent opposing sexes. To address this question, there needs to be an examination of the conceptualisation of sexuality in society, together with what are the constructs and linguistic tools available to express, signal and regulate this conceptualisation.

A number of feminist scholars have commented on the systematic gaps in English that make it hard to express women's experiences (Graddol & Swann 1989; 110), in particular when these relate to sex. In one of the first studies in this area, Stanley and Robbins (1978) noted that the English lexicon contains a significant number of verbs to denote male sexual activities and relatively few terms to denote female activities, an imbalance they claim cannot be explained without reference to cultural assumptions. Moreover, verbs denoting sexual intercourse tend to either be sex neutral (*to have sex, to have intercourse, to have an orgasm, to come*), or to describe the male role in intercourse (*to screw, to penetrate, to ejaculate*). Similarly, Shuster (1973, in Richardson 1981) showed that the passive voice is typically used in reference to women's sexual experiences (*to be/get laid, to be had, to be taken*), while the active voice is used in reference to males' activities. Sex is thus something men do *to* women (Basow 1992), and sexuality is defined in terms of penetration. Little has changed since that study was published, as the androcentric view has imposed itself as the neutral perspective and has thus become naturalised (Bordieu 2001). To illustrate, in an informal discussion held by one of the researchers with undergraduate Language and Gender students, the question "how could you describe sex from a female perspective" was met with nervous giggles, as students struggled to find the words. Similarly, mentions of the topic of the present study elicited expressions of bafflement and doubt from students and colleagues that "women can do that". And yet, as Haste (1994) noted, the same act from a female perspective could in principle be described as *enclosing* or *enfolding*, which would entail an utterly different symbolism and subjective experience, and would cast women as active rather than passive beings without autonomous sexuality, aroused by male actions and thus under male control.

We are thus faced with a paradox: On the one hand, the naturalised phallogentric view of sexuality has cast women into a passive, subordinate role. On the other, the cases discussed in this paper show that clearly women are able to be sexual agents. One way of solving this

paradox, whilst maintaining the hegemonic view, is to depict women as not being completely in charge of their own actions. This is accomplished in the articles examined by either attributing women's sexual initiatives to mental conditions such as depression or loneliness resulting from a romantic breakup (*Courier Mail*, 31/1/2006), physical conditions such as hormonal changes brought about by menopause (*Daily Telegraph*, 28/5/2010), or by the forces of passion and love (*AAP*, 18/8/2004). Another way of addressing this paradox, also seen in the articles examined, is to make the boys the agents of seduction. Thus a voice is given to these boys to claim the initiative in the sexual encounters. Ben Dunbar, for instance, is quoted as saying that he had initiated the sexual liaison with Ellis, after she displayed reluctance at first (*The Sydney Morning Herald*, 5/5/2005). Similarly, Nolan's illicit relationship with a then 15-year-old student is said to have been initiated by the boy and continued as Nolan was scared of the consequences should she reject his advances (*Courier Mail*, 31/1/2006). And Fualalu, who was 13 years old when the relationship with LeTourneau became sexual, is quoted as saying "Her letters sounded a little bit crazy [...] but it turns me on to see her get mad" (*Courier Mail*, 24/2/1999). No similar voice is given to victims of male perpetrators. One cannot help but compare the latest quote with the report on Livingston, a teacher given a disciplinary hearing because "he allowed the student to perform oral sex on him" (*Herald Sun*, 7/9/2010). Women are thus linguistically rendered passive and are denied responsibility for their actions even when clearly taking active control of their sexuality.

Conclusion

The above analysis of the articles makes visible the previously unseen, revealing a distinct bias in the manner in which sexual offences perpetrated by males, whether against boys or girls, are reported when compared with those reports of similar offences committed by

females. The bias seems to be pitched against males. The findings of this paper suggest that the representation of male sex offenders in the Australian media will normally attract the use of pejorative gender-labels, such as *paedophile* or *pervert*, whereas similar offences involving female sex offenders do not. Frequently, sexual offences perpetrated by females seem somewhat mitigated by the near romanticisation of the situations by use of such words as *young lover* or *pupil lover* to describe a student for whose care the female offender has been responsible and by tending to infantilise women and deny them sexual agency in offences against minors. Circumstances of breach of trust and aggravation are either downplayed or ignored, giving rise to an unbalanced representation of genders in relation to similar crimes.

Moreover, this paper pointed out some flaws in the seemingly pervasive belief that gender studies equate to feminist studies. While feminist studies make up a large and important part of gender-related studies, the origins and aims of feminism, i.e. the struggle to achieve gender-equality, should not be ignored. Unarguably, any such struggle presumes at least two elements which are considered to be unequal. In the case of gender inequalities, the dichotomisation of the two sides can only lead to entrenching the dispute, rather than developing a solution for the perceived conflict. In other words, gender studies should not be framed as a perpetual dispute, treating male and female issues as fundamentally irreconcilable. Rather, they should adopt an even-handed approach in finding common ground to analyse and solve conflict on an equitable basis. Gender studies have for too long presumed discrimination against one group only, ignoring the reality that discrimination, as an aspect of human psychology, is not uni-directional. Gender studies should not, as a precondition, be considered the exclusive preserve of a feminist approach. It seems obvious that both a great deal more border crossing research and a reassessment of priorities are needed. It is time to “come clean” and put gender back into gender studies.

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