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The Carey “king hit”: journalists and the coverage of domestic violence

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In recent years Australia’s football codes have been rocked by allegations that star players, both past and present, have acted inappropriately off-field. In some instances these allegations have involved violence towards partners. This paper explores one such case, involving former AFL great Wayne Carey. In so doing, it explores the so-called ‘cult of celebrity’ and the impact this has both on the players and the media who cover such stories.

People caught up in traumatic situations labelled as domestic violence have been vulnerable to media misunderstanding and misinterpretation. Coverage of these events and issues surrounding such violence has undergone change in line with social change. Work by community groups has produced calls for further shifts in thinking and suggestions for a name change to family violence.

The so-called ‘Wayne Carey Affair’ has demonstrated that journalists have their own vulnerabilities to the cult of celebrity, with extended interviews and coverage often centred on possible explanations/“excuses” for the behaviour patterns of this one individual avoiding the wider social policy implications.

By examining coverage surrounding Wayne Carey, this paper will explore the issues surrounding this major social problem and will question the role of journalists vis a vis the particularly vulnerable individuals caught up in family violence.
Introduction

There is a nascent understanding of the role the media could play in addressing violence in homes that incurs massive social and economic costs for individuals and governments. The journalistic coverage of the Carey Affair demonstrates that there are inherent problems with the way the media frames violence against women in their homes. The Wayne Carey myth is largely a media creation but the coverage of his violence-related arrests in two countries shows that Australian journalists are complicit in framing sporting “heroes” as “bad boys” who have “fallen from grace”.

“This is not the alpha male king, arrogant Wayne Carey. This is a very vulnerable man who’s struggling” – Andrew Denton quoted in The Age, 28 March 2008 p1.

This analysis is not about presenting another patriarchal conspiracy, but rather by close attention to the texts produced with particular focus on language this paper will argue that journalists are vulnerable to a form of cultural blindness vis-a-vis male and female representations in their coverage of family violence. This paper will argue that journalists are vulnerable to the key cultural blinkers of family, gender and sporting celebrity, in particular a specific version of sporting masculinity. These blinkers work to shut out broader cultural and structural factors that influence news production. There is an irresistible attraction to the story of Wayne Carey and this paper will ask whether that attraction lies in the dramatic juxtaposition between the superhuman feats on the sports field and the all too human frailties on display off the field. The Carey story represents a major disjunction between heroic deeds in the public sporting sphere and less-than-heroic behaviour in the private domestic sphere. As Cameron Stewart, writing in The Australian on 31 January 2008, puts it:

As a footballer, Wayne Carey played as if the normal rules did not apply to him. He strutted the field as his nickname, The King, suggested, soaring over lesser men and stamping himself as the dominant AFL player of the 1990s. But as an ex-footballer, Carey continued to live as if the normal rules did not apply to him (p.3).

Sports sociologist John Hargreaves says: “One cannot begin to understand the structure and meaning of sport without also appreciating that it is intimately tied up with conception and evaluations of the social order” (1982: 33). This paper will argue that media coverage of this particular flawed individual demonstrates that journalists ignore their own conceptions and evaluations of the social order at their peril.

Approach and methodology

This paper outlines the findings of a sample study of newspaper, magazine, online and television coverage of Wayne Carey and the charges he faced in the US and Australia which followed directly from ‘altercations’ with his girlfriend Kate Neilson (although none of the charges allege any assault on her) and investigates the correlation between this coverage, the perpetuation of damaging myths and stereotypes concerning intimate partner violence and how Carey’s celebrity/sporting hero status has affected reporting.
The researchers collected a total of 31 media items including 27 Australian newspaper, online and magazine articles and four television interviews that were published between January and July 2008. The articles were taken from Victorian daily newspapers *The Herald Sun*, which is a tabloid newspaper, *MX*, which is a free afternoon tabloid paper for Melbourne commuters, and *The Age* and *The Sunday Age*, which are broadsheet newspapers, the national daily broadsheet newspaper *The Australian*, online news site *Crikey.com*, the *Herald Sun Online* and the magazine *New Idea*. The four television interviews were screened on *Enough Rope* on ABC1 and Channel 9’s *60 Minutes*, *A Current Affair* and *Footy Classified*. The newspaper articles were analysed in terms of page placement, language, news angle/theme. This collection of media products is treated as a case study.

Yin (1994) argues a case study approach is useful when “how” and “why” questions are being asked. In this instance we were interested in how journalists responded to the Carey story and why they responded in the manner that they did. Yin also suggests a case study methodology is useful when investigators have little control over events being studied and clearly the daily hectic, and at times seemingly chaotic, process of news production could be seen as a process very difficult to exert any real direct influence over. Finally Yin argues it is an appropriate method where study is focused on “a contemporary phenomenon within some real-life context” (1994:1). Our aim, like Yin, was to show that this case study “can illustrate certain topics within an evaluation, again in a descriptive mode … even from a journalistic perspective” (1994:15).

We argue that the Carey coverage shows the media playing a substantial role in perpetrating common myths about intimate partner violence through dependence upon familiar gender role stereotypes in the interpretation and representation of Carey and the women in his life. We also argue that the media’s love affairs with celebrity and Australian sporting masculinity combine to blind it to its ethical responsibilities to Carey, others involved in the story, and the public. For the purposes of this study we utilised qualitative discourse analysis extensively to reveal underlying representational patterns (Mills in Evans, 2002:148).

**Background**

In 2008 Wayne Carey, 37, was named as Australian football’s greatest ever player as part of a list of the top 50 players of all time published in the book *The Australian Game of Football* (Slattery, 2008) which was released by the AFL to celebrate 150 years of the game. The dual AFL premiership-winning captain is nicknamed ‘The King’ and had a long and majestic football career, most of which he spent playing for the North Melbourne Kangaroos who he led to the AFL finals for eight consecutive years from 1993 to 2000. But he had a reputation for bad behaviour, both on and off the field.

In 1996 he was convicted of indecent assault for grabbing a woman by the breast outside a nightclub and saying, “Why don’t you go and get a bigger set of tits”. His career with the Kangaroos ended in disgrace in early 2002 after he had an affair with Kelli Stevens, the wife of his vice captain and best friend Anthony Stevens. His team closed ranks against him over the scandal and his behaviour was met with public condemnation, forcing him out of the club. At the end of 2002 he was picked up by the Adelaide Crows and played two seasons, but was forced to hang up his boots for
good due to a neck injury in June 2004. In retirement he took on some coaching and worked in both radio and television as a football commentator.

He made headlines in early 2006 when he left his wife, Sally, six weeks before the birth of their daughter, Ella, and was soon rumoured to be dating Kate Neilson, a former Formula Grand Prix grid girl and model. The Carey-Neilson relationship was made official a few months after Ella’s birth.

Carey was arrested in the US on 27 October 2007, for allegedly assaulting two police after ‘an altercation’ with Kate Neilson while holidaying in Miami, Florida. He allegedly smashed a wine glass in her face but a charge of aggravated battery was dropped after she told police she did not want to pursue charges. As a result of a deal with US prosecutors in which he pleaded guilty, Carey was able to avoid jail. He was sentenced to 50 hours community service in Australia, ordered to attend alcohol and anger management classes, placed on two years probation and required to donate US$500 to a Dade County Police charity (News.com.au, 15 October, 2008).

In Melbourne, he faced court on three charges of allegedly assaulting police and three counts of resisting arrest in his Port Melbourne apartment on 30 January 2008. He had allegedly been on a cocaine and alcohol binge and rang security to have Neilson and her flatmate removed from his apartment. It was not until this incident occurred that the US charges became public in Australia. In response, the Nine Network announced it was not renewing his contract and Melbourne radio station 3AW confirmed it had also dumped Carey. It took Victoria Police more than three months to lay charges over the Port Melbourne incident. He subsequently pleaded guilty and was fined $2000 (Smith, The Age, 4 February 2009).

Neilson is now 26 and still with Carey. She has also been in trouble with the law. At the time of writing she was before the court and could face a jail term for failing to comply with a 100-hour community-based court order for almost $6000 in unpaid parking fines. Both Neilson and Carey have reportedly sought support and treatment for drug and alcohol problems and moved from Melbourne to Queensland’s Gold Coast in the wake of the Port Melbourne incident.

Hot copy

The story placement in the sample shows that Carey and Neilson are highly newsworthy. Out of 27 stories, four were on page 1. Page 3 was the most popular site with nine and the page 4-7 category comprised two 4-5 spreads and a number of page 5 and page 7 stories. Carey always featured on a “display” page (odd numbered page) which are prime spaces for reader attention (Quinn, 2001). The four that appeared elsewhere were given prominent positions in the sport pages or TV liftout.

The Denton interview was the first Enough Rope program for the year on 31 March 2008 and received considerable coverage in other media, both in previews and after it went to air. Thanks largely to AFL obsessed Victorians, the program drew an audience of 1.5 million viewers, making it the highest rating show in its timeslot and second-highest rating episode in the show’s history (Field, 2008).
Perpetuating myths and stereotypes

We believe the Wayne Carey case study demonstrates that journalists are vulnerable to various cultural myths and stereotypes underpinning news coverage which can be summarised under the headings of family and domesticity, gender and a specifically sporting version of masculinity.

Family/domesticity

Underpinning the Carey coverage are notions relating to the importance of family life with an implication that there is a good version of domesticity represented by Carey’s wife, Sally, who appears to be always contextualised by her country-based, close and loving family which is then contrasted with Carey’s own family background, which is presented as a violent and abusive form of domesticity.

Studies have shown that men who abuse their partners have often grown up in homes where domestic violence has occurred and have generally experienced a high level of physical brutality throughout childhood (Bullock & Cubert, 2002:477) and that good reporting of intimate partner violence looks beyond the immediate situation to put the abusive behaviour into a social context, including how this behaviour is learned and perpetuated (Evans, 2001:170). The media has delved into Carey’s family background to reveal he grew up in a home where his father assaulted his mother, but in pursuing this angle the media has behaved unethically in its dealings with both his mother and his father.

‘For Carey, the abuse began in childhood’ was the heading for The Australian’s opinion piece by Jacquelynne Wilcox (2008) which described Carey as a “troubled 10-year-old” living with his mother and siblings in an Adelaide women’s shelter in the 1980s. Mediawatch revealed that Wilcox once worked at the shelter “and she should know one of the first rules of such places: you don’t reveal the identity of the people who take refuge there – ever” (Mediawatch, 2008). Carey’s mother, Lynette, was upset by the piece: “I was very angry when I saw the article, not just for myself but for my children who have moved on. Both my daughters hold down important positions. They don’t want to be reminded of this.” — Statement from Lynette Carey to Media Watch (2008).

Neither Jacquelynne Wilcox or anyone at The Australian, saw fit to contact Lynette Carey before the article was published. It’s as if her son’s behaviour has erased her right to privacy (Mediawatch, 2008).

Wilcox and The Australian defended the piece by arguing Lynette Carey had spoken in public about her experience of domestic violence, but she responded that it had only been on one occasion and her name and face had not been revealed. The newspaper hit back at Mediawatch for its criticism after Carey discussed his mother taking the children to the shelter in the Enough Rope interview (Denton, 2008), saying as Carey had discussed the matter, there was no issue of breach of privacy (Merritt, 2008).

The Herald Sun tracked down Carey’s father, Kevin, and found him drinking beer at a pub in Adelaide where the reporter questioned him about his son and his family (Crawford, 2008). Carey snr is described as wearing trackpants, with a beer in hand.
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and expletives rolling easily off his tongue as he calls his son an “idiot”, blames Wayne’s troubles on his associates and “too much sex” and denies that he had been a violent husband and father. Interviewed while under the influence of alcohol and with the media sitting as judge and jury with old court records dating back to 1957 as evidence, Carey snr is presented as a drunk and found guilty all over again. Articles recounting his criminal history, including charges of stealing sheep, appeared in News Ltd papers around the country under headings such as ‘Carey dad a crim’ (Sunday Times, Perth 30/3/08), ‘Carey’s violent father (Sydney Telegraph, Sydney 30/3/08)’; ‘Carey’s criminal father: Judge condemns offences as stupid and alcohol-related’ (Sunday Mail, Adelaide 30/3/08) and ‘Carey dad was a pest, judge said’ (Herald Sun, 31/3/08).

Both parents had been dragged into the media maelstrom, their histories prime pickings for journalists looking for a new angle – notions of rights to privacy, of interviewees not being exploited unfairly, of criminal records remaining the business of individuals and court officials unless raised in relation to sentencing – all flew out the window in the coverage of the Carey saga. An opportunity for the media to examine patterns and causes of family violence responsibly was overshadowed by the tabloid hype and unethical methods of journalists.

In the Denton interview it was a sister and a brother who became the focus of the media glare with the sister constantly being placed in a maternal role in relation to Carey. During the interview Carey says sister Karen “was like me mum”. Carey is then seen to be tearing up when his sister talks about the shy boy that she knew to be her brother. “That person on the football field is not who Wayne is,” Karen says to camera. Later in the interview she says, “It’s not my brother … he’s been lost for the past two and half years” (Denton, 2008) and later in the interview she demonstrates a maternal ownership of him, describing how proud of him she is now that he is facing his problems and seeking help. Throughout the interview the camera keeps swinging back for close-ups on the sister and brother as they clearly struggle with strong emotions which are especially evident when talking about their shared abusive childhood. Constant juxtaposition is made between the domestic and maternal love that Carey found with his siblings in the absence of the traditional mother and father figures.

Gender

Whannel says, “Masculinity cannot be understood separately from its positioning in relation to femininity” (2002:17) and clearly in the Carey coverage there are obvious framings of the male Carey as the aggressor and Kate Neilson as the female provoker of, or least catalyst for, that aggression. Representations of Kate, constantly pictured as a champagne sipping model wearing minimal clothing in terms of swim suits and evening gowns, create a certain character in the media morality tale that surrounds Carey. Her role is that of the interloper threatening monogamy and domesticity. And with her track record in relation to drug taking, partying and parking offences she is reinforced as being doubly deviant in relation to the social order as well as her own gender. Following the Denton interview, football writer Caroline Wilson wrote in The Age on April 2 that, “Virtually every woman I spoke to yesterday about the subject was unimpressed with Carey. The smirk, the apparent dishonesty and avoidance …” (2008) clearly ensuring that the Carey story was a story to be played out along the battle lines of gender conformity or gender animosity.
The reporting of intimate partner violence has been criticised in numerous studies which have found that myths and stereotypes related to violence against women are perpetuated by the media (Bullock & Cuthbert, 2002; Meyers, 1994, 1997; Ryan et al, 2006; Evans, 2001; Woodlock & Morris, 2008). Our case study fits the frame that blames the victim or excuses the perpetrator for what has happened (Bullock & Cuthbert, 2002). The Bullock & Cuthbert study also found cases in which the victim or perpetrator was abusing drugs or alcohol, implicating the substance abuse as a possible motivation or excuse (2002:491).

Their study analysed a sample of news articles and found 47.8% suggested at least one motivation or excuse for the perpetrator (2002:484) and that key terms to signify domestic violence were rarely used (2002:482). Entman (1993) says word choice can also help frame the news. Benedict’s (1992) research indicates that journalists force set narratives (the woman is a vamp who drove the man to commit the crime) “through their choice of vocabulary, the slant of their leads and the material they choose to leave out or put in” (1992:23-24). In the Carey case there is a constant emphasis on Kate Neilson’s blatant and therefore assumed aggressive sexuality.

Howe says while the figures show that overwhelmingly men are the perpetrators of intimate partner violence they are rarely named as such and the question of men’s responsibility for their own violence “is almost always elided” (1998:30). She explores “some of the representational quagmires” family violence presents for journalists through an examination of the theory of “discursive manoeuvres” which are described as having the effect of neutralising and denying the “guilt, responsibility and dangerousness of the offenders” and hiding them from view through the language used to describe the offending behaviour (1998:30). She gives the example of the term ‘home violence’ which she says functions discursively not only to “domesticate” or trivialise violence in the home but also to erase the perpetrators. She believes the high incidence of intimate partner violence and men’s privileged social position makes it a difficult topic for the media.

The print media in particular is littered with panic-ridden reports on ‘deviant’ youth groups, ‘ethnic’ gangs or pedophile rings. But how do you fan up a moral panic when the perpetrators are a majority group, measured in terms of social and political power? (Howe, 1997:38).

Studies on media coverage of domestic violence in the US, UK and Australia since the early 1990s have identified a number of recurring problematic patterns in the way it is reported (Woodcock & Morris, 2008). These include: News reports that suggest victims, at least partially, are responsible for what has happened to them; reporters stick to predetermined framing such as ‘tragic love story gone wrong’ or ‘she drove me to it’; excuses are made for the perpetrator whose behaviour is explained, justified and often mitigated by drugs and alcohol or psychological suffering; the myth of male aggression that violence and power are rooted in biology and quite natural; when coverage focuses on the perpetrator’s motives, the victim disappears; coverage obscures social dimensions of domestic violence – ways that society produces and promotes violence against women and finally, sensationalisation of the abuse, which blurs the line between news and drama (entertainment).
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Sporting Masculinity/Cult of Celebrity

The Carey coverage is also clearly a product of a country, and specifically a state, where a particular sporting tradition dominates social and cultural life. Carey’s role in this sport has provided the dominant news hook for this coverage and it is this focus on the individual which has exposed journalistic vulnerability. As Whannel argues,

If media representation of sport stars provides, among other things, a policing of masculinity, then the modes of portrayal of the violence of sports stars suggests that such behaviour is subject to strong and clear moral censure. However, the lack of analysis and broader perspective has tended to leave such stories largely in the domain of the trivial: individualized tales in the society of spectacle (Whannel 2002:168 ).

The story from A Current Affair included comments by sports journalist Mike Sheehan from the Herald Sun which focused on Carey’s sporting prowess. Sheehan rated him as the best player in the last 100 years and talks about the “other stuff” that is, sexual aggression and violence, as a thing that is going to “take that away from him” (that is Carey’s sporting dominance), with the clear implication that it is his sporting dominance that should really count in any final assessment of him. In the Today Tonight coverage he is referred to as the “fallen king” of AFL and the term “lovers’ tiff” is used to describe the domestic violence incident. Fellow footballer and ex-team mate Glenn Archer on the Footy Classified episode refers also to “fallen stars” and suggests that Carey’s show of “remorse” is enough to put him back on the path of redemption.

The comparison of image and reality, of represented star and real person, becomes problematic when all we are dealing with is layer upon layer of mediation. It is in this sense that the work of media in selecting, in framing, in focusing, and, above all, in narrativising the lives of sports stars, is a work of construction and production. Meanings emerge precisely from the productive representational practices of the media, and not simply from the inherent characteristics of the star represented.” (Whannel 2002:51).

Whannel goes on to argue that some of the characteristics of this highly problematic version of sporting masculinity include “being a rock-hard, unsentimental heavy drinker” (2002:68) and “self-sufficient heroes – heroes without a need for women – male egos resplendent and narcissistic, confirmed in their victory by admiring (male) team-mates and (male) fans, with no fear of symbolic castration by unsatisfactory encounter with the other” (2022:68). Carey clearly fits these criteria.

Further he suggests that the loss of the “magical powers” of the hero can often be overcome through interventions of friends, “paternal authority” or “by the love of a good woman” (2002: 138). The Herald Sun of 30 March 2008 quotes Carey’s wife, Sally, as saying, “I still care for Wayne very much … I support Wayne and will always support him” (Koha, 2008:7)

In attempting to summarise the Marxist approach to analysing sport, Hargreaves suggests:

Sport is seen as inculcating and expressing the quintessential ideology in capitalist society: egoistic, aggressive individualism, ruthless competition, the
myth of equality of opportunity, together with authoritarianism, elitism, chauvinism, sexism, … The sports spectacle generates aggressive impulses and at the same time sublimates aggression by allowing its release in sadomasochistic displays of physical activity… (1982: 42)

This theme of aggression has been the defining feature of the Carey case.

‘The media has lost the plot on Wayne Carey’

The media has done very little self-examination of its reporting of the Carey affair. One notable exception is Andrew Dodd’s article, ‘The media has lost the plot on Wayne Carey’ on crikey.com (Dodd, 2008) which puts the case that Carey has been treated unfairly and says the media is getting away with contempt of court and unethical reporting by “acting as judge, jury and executioner with complete disregard for the effect the coverage may have on him if he faces trial”. Dodd says the introduction to the *Herald Sun* story ‘My love for Wayne’ (Hastie et al., 2008) is a lie: “Wayne Carey’s girlfriend has told of her love for the fallen AFL great as police investigate a mystery substance found at his apartment.” Dodd reveals the story is based on a blog posted by Neilson in March 2007, but this is not mentioned until paragraph eight. He says the newspaper defended its presentation of the blog content as “news” in the context of the police investigation by arguing that as the blog had not been withdrawn it was contemporaneous material.

Dodd also expressed concern that as Carey had been arrested but not charged immediately in connection with the Port Melbourne incident, the media was free to go way beyond the facts by giving details of former convictions and making insinuations about his state of mind and criminal connections (Beisler, 2008). It was in fact three months between the incident and charges being laid, in which time the media came up with a number of stories that presented Carey as violent, unstable and reminded the public of his connection to Melbourne underworld figure Jason Moran and his family (Herald Sun 3/2/08).

Carey may almost be wishing that he was charged on the weekend, if he had been the coverage since would have been toned down considerably – although with some media outlets there’s no guarantee because some editors routinely bend the rules of subjudice contempt because they reckon that any fine they cop is offset by all the extra papers they sell by digging up dirt on celebrities. (Dodds, 2008).

One example is a *Sunday Herald Sun* page 4–5 spread that was published in the month after the North Melbourne incident (Rolfe, 2008a) about a “safari bust up”. It alleges that while on an African safari in 2006 Carey and Neilson had a fight in the back of their limousine. Neilson left the car and ran into jungle where there were “the big five: lions, leopards, buffalo, rhinoceros and elephants”, which suggests risk of running into these dangerous creatures was preferable to staying in close confines with the ‘volatile’ Carey. According to the report their behaviour “shocked and angered park rangers” and a spokesman for the safari resort “confirmed a guest had caused a serious ‘incident’. The coverage also includes material on the Miami incident: “Carey allegedly kicked one officer in the lip, elbowed the other in the face and said ‘You don’t know who you’re f—ing with” (Rolfe, 2008b)
As Dodds points out, the US charges are outside the jurisdiction Australian media operates in, so journalists have considered themselves free to quote people in the US, including police, hotel and security staff as saying Carey has “anger management problems” and portraying him as a violent person. For example, The Weekend Australian (Rout, 2008) reported Carey had gone into hiding after a tape recording of a Miami restaurant security guard calling 911 (after he allegedly assaulted Neilson with a glass) was put on the internet and picked up by media. It quoted the transcript of the recording.

A Current Affair (2008) said it had uncovered “further evidence of bizarre and violent behaviour” by Carey when it aired an interview with a New York security guard in which he alleged he saw Carey repeatedly hit Neilson and break a champagne bottle over his own head in their hotel room in October 2006.

This same security guard was quoted by the Sunday Herald Sun: “He smacked her… and he smacked her again… and he shook her,” he says in the interview. “She was bruised and she was crying. He was so enormous… it was going to be a challenge to hold him back” (Rolfe, 2008a).

News as entertainment

New Idea reportedly paid Carey and Neilson $180,000 for their story, “My Drink and Drugs Shame” (Fidgeon, 2008). The coverage presents flattering images of the golden boy of football and his glamorous girlfriend, which is far removed from the damaging stories about the couple being involved in violent domestics. As Goc and Bainbridge observe about chequebook journalism, this story takes a “newstainment” approach which blurs the line between where the news ends and the entertainment begins (2008:103) and in which the reporter fails to ask any of the hard questions (2008:108).

The New Idea story is about rehabilitation on two levels: The reader is told that much of what has been reported is “hurtful stories” and this “exclusive” restores the truth: That “Wayne isn’t violent – not at all”; Neilson is “partly to blame for their tumultuous relationship” and that all their problems are due to drug and alcohol use, but that they’re “seeking help to make sure we really do change” (Fidgeon, 2008).

Berns discusses how social problems, including intimate partner violence, are turned into entertainment not only in women’s magazines but also in other media, including television (2004:95-97) as the connections between entertainment and news are increasing. She says the criticism of news focusing too much on entertainment is not new but the drive to make news entertaining has arguably crossed the line into news as entertainment. Altheide (2002:112) argues that commercialism drives this entertainment format, which he describes as the primary frame media use to shape social problems such as crime and violence. It is clear from the sample used in this study that Carey’s giant status in AFL has huge selling power in football-mad Victoria, in particular. Increased competition, corporate mergers of media businesses and a drive for profit have all contributed to the shift towards entertainment in which gathering information becomes secondary to getting emotional reactions and great, snappy quotes:
Capturing a sob, seeing tears flow down cheeks, looking into the eyes of the interviewee during tight camera shots merged as critical features of the message and, in some cases, the most important part of the report (Altheide, 2002:108).

About one third of the sample consists of reports about other news outlets’ coverage, which demonstrates the media’s determination to exploit the high level of public interest in the Carey saga. The *Enough Rope* interview received the most attention, but the *New Idea* article was also reported as news (Beisler, 2008, Byrne, 2008), which assists the story’s rehabilitative aims.

However, it backfired to some extent on *New Idea*, which was accused by other media of doing a “sleazy deal” by reportedly paying Carey and Neilson, and criticised for undermining its own recent campaign against family violence that was endorsed by celebrities including Nicole Kidman:

> If they’re paying for a story based on someone beating up somebody else it’s sleazy and it goes back to the fact that most people think that it’s not criminal. It undermines all these people who work in family violence who are trying to reassure women that it’s not normal and it is criminal” (Crawford, 2008).

Some advertisers made statements to the media that they were considering pulling their ads in the magazine as they were unhappy with their products being associated with the Carey saga. SCA Hygiene, which markets tampons and incontinence pads under Libra and Tena brands, said it “didn’t want to be associated with anything that’s consistent with violence towards women”. Clinique also said it would review its advertising contract with the magazine (Sexton, 2008).

**Wagging the Dog?**

It is clear that in many of the interviews it was the journalists being manipulated and “used” by Carey’s media minders and legal team, a team referred to by Carey on more than one occasion as being “a serious legal team”. Whether this was willingly or consciously is an issue for of another paper, but clearly media organisations and their journalists were used to display and reinforce the Carey legal defence.

In the Denton interview Carey constantly repeats the phrases “I was not thinking clearly”, “I take full responsibility”, describing his own behaviour as being “unacceptable” (Denton, 2008). Carey was also adamant “there is no excuse for my behaviour”, while simultaneously claiming that “everything was a blur” as he outlined just how much drinking and drug taking had occurred before every violent event. He continued his twin moments of acceptance and denial with phrases like “I accept I am the problem”, however “I am not violent towards women” (Denton, 2008).

It is interesting that as this paper was being written “the Carey defence” was being used by the Brisbane Broncos players who are involved in allegations of sexual misconduct.
Conclusions

This case study demonstrates a need to shift the focus of coverage in matters relating to family violence from being seen as isolated, individual acts to a social, collective problem which has its root causes in far more complex cultural and structural factors than just male abuse of alcohol or drugs. The media needs to recognise that such violence is not merely the result of individual aberrant behaviour.

Hargreaves argues that sport is an important part of building any cultural hegemony and it is the hegemonic views of any cultural epoch which journalism can be vulnerable to as this case study has demonstrated, especially in relation to such established normalising views of family, gender and sport.

The biggest blinker for journalists can be the daily norms and routines of news production. A focus that is only on the micro level of news production makes journalists vulnerable to the cultural blindness which results from the bracketing out of the macro context of doing news and as a result the unquestioned assumptions which underpin news production remain unexplicated. As Whannel concludes:

While rightly condemnatory, little of the media coverage of male violence offers much in the way of contextual insight. Issues to do with the construction of masculinity as powerful and invulnerable, the structure of patriarchal power, the concepts of women as objects and as property, and the translation of human relations into commodity relations did not surface in popular discourse (2002:172).

A quote from Gore Vidal began a Sunday Age editorial on the Carey story - “Whenever a friend of mine succeeds, something within me dies a little” ( 2002: 18). Journalists caught up in celebrating the celebrity morality tale of Wayne Carey, the fallen King, displayed their own vulnerabilities and perhaps some of their editorial and ethical integrities died a little too.

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