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'And here's the news': analysing the evolution of the marketed newsreader

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Ron Burgundy (Will Ferrell): I don't know how to put this but I'm kind of a big deal.

Veronica Corningstone (Christina Applegate):

RB:

VC:

RB:

Really.

People know me.

Well, I'm very happy for you.

I'm very important. I have many leather-bound books and my apartment smells of rich mahogany. (*Anchorman: The Legend of Ron Burgundy* [film], 2004)

Since television's inception, newsreaders have been a central part of the audience's lives. They encourage us to invite them into the privacy of our homes with promises of consistency, predictability and trustworthiness contributing to the 'mythology of transparency' (Bignell and Orlebar, 2008: 134) that television news presents. They offer a familiar face amidst ever-changing flows of new information and they are some of the most well-known and highly paid personalities on television. In Australia, newsreaders are rarely journalists and, despite the fact that they often become the public face of television networks, they are rarely thought of as celebrities either. This means that, for the most part, the Australian newsreader has slipped between journalism studies and celebrity studies and is really only considered as part of more general cultural studies of news and even more rarely as an object of study itself (see Cann and Mohr, 2001; Curtis, 2005; Morse, 2004; Place and Roberts, 2006; Plane,

1996; Shepard, 1997). This article seeks to address this gap in the literature by providing a brief historical overview of television newsreading in Australia, together with an analysis of the relationship between newsreaders, gender, celebrity and ratings. In this way we want to put forward a new model for thinking about the relationship between the newsreader and celebrity, as not being antithetical concepts, but rather complementary parts of the *marketed* newsreader's function: a figure who is as heavily implicated in the marketing and promotion of news as in its dissemination.

In part, this concept of the 'marketed newsreader' is derived from the work of Stuart Cunningham and Graeme Turner who state that, at its simplest, 'the credibility of a news service is a *bankable commodity* [and] it is easier, quicker and sometimes even cheaper to build credibility through, for instance, *the promotion of a key personality*' (2007: 91–2, emphasis added). By referring to newsreaders as 'marketed newsreaders' we want to draw a clear connection between the newsreader, the celebrity image they construct to connect with their audience, and the way this functions as a form of marketing designed to attract a greater audience share for their network's news broadcasts.

This article presents the preliminary findings of a larger study of newsreading in Australia that brings together studies of news with the work of celebrity theorists Graeme Turner (2004) and Irving Rein et al. (1997). The study is built on a combination of content and textual analysis, mapping the gender of newsreaders in Australian news (including the stories they present and the news bulletins on which they appear), and interviews and surveys conducted in relation to the news broadcasts presented in our sample state of Tasmania. Surprisingly, even though 'TV continuously represents gender to its viewers' (D'Acci, 2004: 373), there has been relatively little work done on gender and newsreading on Australian television (D'Acci, 2004: 377). Cann and Mohr suggest the need for more work to be done and, in particular, work that addresses whether the 'gender hierarchy of anchors [is] evident through assignment to weekend or weekday work' (2001: 2–3). Again, this is something that we have started to map, and we offer our preliminary findings in this article in the hope that it may stimulate more research into this area.

Newsreaders

Newsreaders are the 'key personalities, [the] prominent markers of the identity of the networks' (Cunningham and Turner, 2007: 93). At the forefront of every news service, newsreaders become 'the faces that attract the audience, the ratings and the sponsors' (Courtis, 2005). For this article, when we refer to newsreaders, the definition will be taken from Margaret Morse, that is, someone who 'represents not merely the news per se, or a particular network or corporate conglomerate that owns the network, or television institution, or the public interest; rather, he [or she] represents the complex nexus of all of them' (Morse,

2004: 213). This is because the newsreader contributes two of the most fundamental elements of television news: a sense of *liveness* through their direct-to-camera delivery of the news to the audience and a sense of *narrative*, imposed by the institution and structured around news values (the ranking of reports) and the institutional divisions in news gathering organizations (Harrison, 2000) (e.g. 'foreign news', 'business news'). John Hartley identifies that news reports tend to use four narrative functions (1982: 118–19) and it is important to note that it is the newsreader who is responsible for at least two of these functions, the *framing* of a report (the establishment of the news topic) and the *closing* of the report (the condensed encapsulation of that report).¹

The newsreader's primary role is to act as the 'shifter between stories ... as well as between television and the viewer' (Morse, 2004: 210), making the newsreader someone who needs to be articulate, authoritative and trusted. This is also why they are often referred to as news 'anchors', as they become the unchanging central figure that 'anchors' the ever-changing world of news, the consistent face and personality that an audience feels they can rely on, regardless of the content of the news. Along with the selection of stories (and the shots and voiceovers these stories are composed of) the newsreader is the principal meaning-making processor for the audience, the audiences' guide through the world of the new. Having just the right person in the newsreader's chair, whether male or female, older or younger, is therefore crucial to a news service's success. Again, this is supported by Cunningham and Turner who note that the 'importance of the newsreader or presenter ... is related to their embodiment of the trustworthiness of the news service' (2007: 90).

It is also important to distinguish between newsreaders and journalists. In some instances the two roles are quite similar and are often seen as being one and the same. But in practice only one Australian network, the ABC, requires that their newsreaders are also qualified journalists and, as Ben Courtis notes, only two Australian newsreaders currently possess the skills actually to be both a journalist and a newsreader:

Tony Jones, who can turn from the daily agenda to an exquisitely perceptive analysis of Lebanon with correspondent Robert Fisk on *Lateline*, and Kerry O'Brien, who risks antagonizing the usual suspects time and again by persisting in his line of questioning on refugees with an obfuscating Prime Minister [Howard]. (Courtis, 2005)

Both Jones and O'Brien work for the ABC. More significantly, according to the Media Entertainment and Arts Alliance (MEAA) *Code of Ethics*: 'members engaged in journalism commit themselves to: honesty, fairness, independence, and the respect for the rights of others' (2008). These fundamental principles of journalism are expanded throughout the Alliance's 12 codes, which focus on 'the respect for truth and the public's right to information' (MEAA, 2008), ethical requirements that do not attach to newsreaders.

Despite these quite profound distinctions, there is nothing to exclude newsreaders from previous discussions of celebrity journalists as these studies

focus on the 'well-knownness' of the personalities rather than their ethical duties or obligations.

A history of newsreading in Australia

In understanding the function of the newsreader, it is also important to understand the history of newsreading in Australia and, more particularly, the way gender impacts on newsreading. Traditionally, the newsreader is older, male and a figure of authority, in part because this was the model of broadcast news fashioned and popularized by Edward R. Murrow, and in larger part because there has always been 'a prevailing assumption that newscasts would not receive high ratings unless reported by a man' (Stone quoted in Cann and Mohr, 2001: 162). This latter point is supported by a variety of theorists (including Beasley, 1987; Sanders and Rock, 1988; Sebba, 1994) who acknowledge that journalism has always been 'predominantly [a] male occupation' (quoted in Cann and Mohr, 2001: 1), though the greater number of female students current enrolling in journalism, media and communications degrees around Australia would suggest that this is changing.

Australia's first prime-time television news anchor was Chuck Faulkner of TCN-9 in Sydney. He was followed by the ABC's James Dibble, who was to go on presenting television news for 27 years. These news bulletins were shot in black and white with the newsreaders simply reading on air live from radio bulletins, most of them having been 'former radio entertainers with clipped accents, impeccable diction and an air of even-handed authority' (Place and Roberts, 2006: 274). This is because the concept of the newsreader came from radio news, translated to television through the use of intercut reports pre-recorded by reporters at various locations.

Developments in technology included the introduction of satellite in 1966 (enabling news to be received from overseas), and videotape and electronic video cameras in the 1970s. Throughout these changes the news continued to be shepherded by:

... calm and clear-headed front men, like Brian Henderson who wound up Nine's nightly prime-time bulletin with a reflective 'That's the way it is' for over 40 years, creating the most successful news program in Australian TV history. (Place and Roberts, 2006: 275)

But with these advances in televisual technologies there also came a change in who was presenting the news, with the emergence of the newsreading *team*, composed of both men and women.

Gauntlett notes that: 'in the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s, only 20 to 35 percent of characters [on TV] were female ... by the mid-1980s, there were more women in leading roles, but still there were twice as many men on screen' (2002: 43). Indeed, it is only in the past 10 to 15 years that the gender balance has shifted

dramatically, so that now 'men and women are seen working side by side... During the 1990s and into the new century, gender roles on television became increasingly equal and non-stereotyped' (Gauntlett, 2002: 57–8).

Tanya Halesworth was Australia's first female newsreader, a presentation announcer on the ABC, followed by Margaret Throsby, who was the first woman to read major news bulletins on national radio after the Second World War, and in 1978 became the first woman to read the television news. Throsby remembers that: 'It was a huge deal actually and it made the front page of the papers. I mean, it was ridiculous – "Here is the news – read by a woman" read one headline' (Channel Seven, 2007).

For Terry Plane, a former network director of news and current affairs at Channel Seven, it is the change in audience perception that has driven these on-air changes. More particularly it is 'a softening in women's attitude to getting their news from a man, although a lot of people still prefer a man and woman together on the news' (Plane, 1996: 3). Plane argues that 'women now accept women as figures of authority' (1996: 3) and that, while there was a clear preference among audiences in the late 1980s for male newsreaders, by the early 1990s: 'cracks started to appear in traditional responses to questions on the gender issues: young women were saying they did not care if the newsreader was a man or a woman, so long as they could do the job well' (1996: 3). Female audiences accepted, if not preferred, a female behind the news desk (Cann and Mohr, 2001: 1) and female newsreaders quickly became the 'new trend' in delivering news.

During the 1980s audiences could find 'Jana Wendt and David Johnson on Ten in Melbourne and Katrina Lee and Tim Webster on Ten in Sydney' (Place and Roberts, 2006: 275), and in 1987 Jennifer Keyte was appointed the weekday newsreader on Channel Seven in Melbourne, Australia's first solo female prime-time commercial news presenter. While Keyte saw this as 'a milestone, it was a turning point in commercial television' (Keyte quoted in Channel Seven, 2007), entertainment reporter Peter Ford suggests that the trend can be attributed to the network executives' 'realisation that the female audience at home do want to see a female on TV and in control... That glass ceiling we used to talk about for women in Australian television is smashed into a million pieces' (quoted in McCormack, 2007). Editor of the Australian *Woman's Day* magazine, Alana House concurs, claiming that women like watching women; 'I think viewers are looking for someone who they feel is a bit more sympathetic and empathetic when it comes to presenting or to interviewing someone' (quoted in McCormack, 2007).

Progressively then the 'anchor's chair ... became more of an even playing field ... even though the pattern was generally a stunning girl alongside an average-looking bloke' (Place and Roberts, 2006: 275). As an Australian female newsreader from 1978 to 1997, Katrina Lee concedes that looks really did matter for women in news, noting that: 'unfortunately it was probably very important, much as we'd like to think that it wasn't what was really important'

(Channel Seven, 2007). While less prominent now, these traditions still seem fairly entrenched, as evidenced in host David Koch's response: 'You don't have to be an oil-painting as a bloke to be on TV ... obviously.' He laughs at himself; a bald, middle-aged man, wearing glasses and one of the biggest stars on Channel Seven. This is also confirmed by Sian Powell, who suggests that while there is now a clear preference for women newsreaders, this preference relates not only to talent and ability but, most importantly, to looks as well. Powell believes this focus is not the same for men and several of the interviews conducted with the Australian news hierarchy confirms this; Paul Williams, then-General Manager of Radio and Television News and Current Affairs at the ABC, states: 'I guess there are people on air who are unpleasant-looking, I guess they're mostly men', comments that are echoed by Peter Meakin, then-Director of Current Affairs at the Nine Network, who says: 'Certainly appearance is important for men and women. But we get a lot more calls about the way women look than we do about how men look' (both quoted in Powell, 1997: 5).

Female newsreaders achieved equal on-air representation with their male counterparts, with the movement gaining so much momentum that now 'female news anchors outnumber males in many states' (Place and Roberts, 2006: 275). This is supported by our analysis of both Channel Seven and Channel Nine. As at July 2008, females marginally outnumber men as newsreaders across all Australian states, while sports presenting is still very much a male-dominated part of news broadcasts and weather is equally shared between males and females.

This increase in visibility has gone hand in hand with a change in society's perception of the roles of men and women, particularly in the workforce, and nowadays 'sexual equality is something that almost everybody in power at least *says* they are in favour of' (Gauntlett, 2002: 5–6). It could even be argued that newsreading itself contributed to this larger societal change by showing female viewers in a position of authority at a time when women were striving for equality in the workplace. As Plane notes, these 'women show that they can do everything that men can do' (1996: 7). For Gauntlett, this social change has redefined the concepts of 'masculinity' and 'femininity'; 'femininity is not a core value for women today. Instead, being "feminine" is just one of the performances that women can choose to employ in everyday life – perhaps for pleasure, or to achieve a particular goal' (2002: 9–10).

In one sense, the gender divide appears to have been crossed. But that said, gender *hierarchies* in newsreading still clearly exist. While 'women outnumber men as television news presenters and are challenging the dominance of their male colleagues in current affairs' (Powell, 1997) there is still some question over how much power women themselves actually exercise over news production and what is broadcast. This undoubtedly correlates with whether the newsreader is a qualified journalist, and therefore whether their position involves decision-making (rather than just dissemination) in relation to news content. In practice, it manifests itself in three main ways.

First, as suggested by Cann and Mohr's study (2001), it impacts on whether male or female newsreaders present certain stories. In most Australian states, for example, women are still consigned to presenting news on weekends rather than weekdays. More significantly, men continue to dominate sports-reader positions. Australia-wide there are just two female sports readers (on Channel Seven and Channel Nine), one in Brisbane and the other in Darwin.

Having conducted some analysis of prime-time news broadcasts over a one-week period in one Australian state, Cann and Mohr similarly found that: 'gender remains an important factor in Australian television news broadcasting ... [and] the effects of gender were evident in the representation of roles of male and female anchors, reporters and sources' (2001: 6). Their research indicated that soft weekend news predominantly featured female newsreaders and hard-hitting, authoritative weekday news was presented by male newsreaders. This is supported by our own research, which analysed the current male-to-female ratio of Channel Seven's and Channel Nine's newsreaders throughout Australia, suggesting that the gendering of newsreading may still carry significant connotations, with the gender of the newsreader actually functioning as a signifier of whether the story will be a hard news or soft news story.

Second, even given the increasing acknowledgment and effort by corporate powers to appear to promote equality, higher up the hierarchy there are still more men in positions of power (Gauntlett, 2002: 9–11). As Plane notes: 'in the executive suites of some commercial networks ... two of the most senior decision-makers in television have said privately ... that "news won't rate unless it's read by a man." Their gender? Too easy!' (1996: 3). Furthermore, 'despite the changes that have occurred within journalism, some senior television executives still hold the view that the news must be read by a man if it is to attract high ratings' (in Cann and Mohr, 2001: 1). Based on these findings, the changes in newsreading may therefore be being driven as much by networks feeling the need to achieve more visible on-air equality (Soderlund et al., 1989) as by any genuine attempt to create gender parity. It is therefore, once again, being driven by marketing decisions.

The third significant impact of gender is on the news itself. Theorists point to the way news has gradually become more 'feminized', both in terms of the news content (soft news, gossip, celebrity, domestic issues) as well as its presentation with the 'collapse of traditional gender roles ... [actually] taking place on the screen' (Lumby, 1994: 50). Over the past two to three decades, we have seen more female newsreaders moving away from the less serious roles women previously filled in television. D'Acci notes that 'for much of its early history, the television industry, for example, directed women to such professions as continuity girls (the people responsible for continuity from shot to shot)' (2004: 382) and Ford concurs, noting that 'once women in Australia TV had to do you know, knitting patterns, or the barrel girl or the weather, preferably in a bikini, those days are long gone' (McCormack, 2007).

Those days 'long gone' are as close as the late 1980s, when news was still primarily male dominated, but often ended with some soft news story in order to regain the female audience ahead of the prime-time viewing schedule (Fiske, 1987). It is a trend that still exists today, with news services ending with a 'tail-piece' following the weather, which is commonly a softer news item designed to end the news on a brighter note (the clichéd 'dog on water-skis' being perhaps the most famous example).

Younger female newsreaders also raise another possible reason for the aggressive marketing of female newsreaders. In a bid to attract the elusive younger audience, networks have attempted a younger-style news programme that sees, 'among other things, the elimination of the authoritative adult presenter' (Cunningham and Turner, 1997: 97). Understanding how newsreading remains gendered is therefore a crucial component in understanding the function of the marketed newsreader.

Celebrity

As the role of the newsreader has evolved along with audience expectations, so too has the concept of the newsreader as a celebrity. From their first television news bulletins, newsreaders became well-known personalities, and for Daniel J. Boorstin it is this 'well-knownness' that is the basic element of being a celebrity: 'a celebrity is a person who is known for his well-knownness ... journalists are the creators of well-knownness. In the process of creating well-knownness for others, it's not surprising that some of them become celebrities too. It's inevitable' (quoted in Shepard, 1997: 27).

Boorstin was one of the first theorists to make the link between journalism and celebrity status, and his work can be directly applied to newsreaders. Indeed, we would argue that newsreaders are even more akin to celebrities than journalists because they *are* the face of the news and are therefore even more responsible for the creation of 'well-knownness' than the journalists themselves. As Place and Roberts note, this process began as early as the 1960s when 'TV newsreaders [became] fully-fledged, instantly-recognisable celebrities' (2006: 274).

In tracing the relationship between news reporters and celebrity Alicia Shepard refers back to the Watergate scandal that ultimately led to the resignation of then-President Richard Nixon in 1974, the uncovering of which was attributed to the relentless investigative work of journalists Bob Woodward and Carl Bernstein. The pair's four-year investigation saw them emerge as 'two of the most famous journalists in America and [they] became forever identified as the reporters who broke the biggest story in American politics'.² Shepard suggests that it was the 'Watergate affair [that] changed journalism in many ways, not the least of which was by launching the era of the journalist as celebrity' (1997: 26). James Fallows finally coined the term 'celebrity

journalist' in 1986, when he stated: 'their names appear in gossip columns and society pages ... We know when they wed ... when they become parents ... and when they get divorced' (quoted in Shepard, 1997: 26).

In contrast, S. Robert Lichter prefers to locate the commencement of celebrity journalism with newsreading, the moment 'when Barbara Walters became the first million-dollar anchor on ABC' (quoted in Levy and Bonilla, 1999: 84). Since then, some of the highest-paid women on television in America, including Walters, Diane Sawyer, Katie Couric, Connie Chung and Jane Pauley have not just infiltrated the industry, they have, in many ways, come to overshadow their male counterparts. As Lloyd Grove notes: 'while television has been as male-dominated as any other big business, it's the women who are leading the charge' (1994: 68), with Grove claiming that women are more capable of building communities of viewers because they have the 'natural' ability to make people feel comfortable (1994: 69). Gendered stereotypes aside, all of these women are journalists *and* presenters, again demonstrating the slippage between journalists and newsreaders. The celebrity journalist therefore comes in two forms: 'those who ... earn that [celebrity] status from exemplary work, and those who become famous simply because they appear on television' (Witcover quoted in Levy and Bonilla, 1999: 82); either way, newsreaders clearly fit under this rubric of 'celebrity journalist' too.

In America, according to former CBS producer and *New York* magazine media critic Jon Katz, the move towards 'celebritizing' the newsreader has progressed at an extraordinary rate since the late 1980s:

... the networks have gone to the old Hollywood star system for visible female personalities. Making stars out of glamorous women rather than do serious journalism. But that's the way you create a journalistic superstar now – build big mythologies about them and their careers, and promote them heavily. (quoted in Grove, 1994: 69)

While this has yet to occur on such a scale in Australia, the idea of 'building big mythologies' around newsreaders is an interesting one and at the very least raises questions around the ways in which gender continues to be implicated in news-reading. While the bigger proportion of female newsreaders is certainly a positive for gender equality, female newsreaders continue to be inflected in certain ways, as Grove notes: 'sometimes it's sex appeal as commonly understood, but more often it is the thrill of being wooed by a celebrity' (1994: 69). It is no mistake that it is overwhelmingly female newsreaders who are also labelled as *celebrity* newsreaders. Here femininity is again being stereotypically aligned with more trivial, emotional or tabloid reporting, just as celebrity is more commonly aligned with softer news stories around identity politics rather than the communication of information. Attempts to brand female newsreaders as celebrity newsreaders can therefore also be read as an attempt to undermine the credibility of these newsreaders; gendering celebrity in this way can therefore be considered detrimental to women.

Consider, for example, Katie Couric, who made the transition from host of American breakfast programme NBC's *Today Show* to news anchor of CBS's *Evening News* (Wolcott, 2007: 60). As Wolcott states:

Those human-interest stories and apple recipes [on the *Today Show*] obscure the fact that, when she actually does hard news, America's sweetheart is as tough as they come.... Moving to CBS to be the first solo anchorwoman of the nightly news was greeted with less than universal hallelujahs.... To sceptics, Couric was too chirpy a known commodity to be the living-room bearer of bad news; to them, she lacked hard-news cred, having spent so much of her career acting cuddly. (2007: 60)

Couric is very much the *marketed* newsreader. Couric's appointment to CBS had one main aim – to build audience share by attracting the elusive younger audience (Goodman, 2006) and: 'under Couric, the CBS *Evening News* would no longer be your grandpa's Oldsmobile; it would evolve from a glorified headline service with crusty, patriarchal gravitas into something chewier and more interactive ... ushering in a new era of informality' (Wolcott, 2007: 61). As Goodman notes: 'in an era when the iconic anchor doesn't exist any more and the relevance of the position itself has been drastically diminished, Couric announced herself ... by standing up ... to one side of an innocuous new set' (Goodman, 2006).

Of course it is not only audience fragmentation but audience loyalty that drives this demand for the marketed newsreader, and this is illustrated by the example of French newsreader Melissa Theurian. An attractive 28-year-old, she is 'admired by millions of men around the world' thanks to her appearances on YouTube. Her incredible success as a newsreader is openly attributed to her looks and the celebrity status she, and her news network, has created. 'I never knew the words "George Bush" and "Iraq" could sound so sexy,' comments a US admirer.... 'Talk about drop-dead gorgeous. We love you France. Are all your anchors like that?' (quoted in Bremner, 2007). In the US magazine *Maxim* website, Melissa Theurian is voted 'above nine American male and female superstars as "TV's sexiest news anchor".... Not an excellent journalist [notes Gael Polles, but] people find her beautiful, independent-minded and nice, and that is enough' (quoted in Bremner, 2007).

We argue that it is this ability of the newsreader to achieve, sustain and develop their celebrity status that makes them a *successful* newsreader as a newsreader's success ultimately relies upon being well known, familiar and making the audience feel comfortable welcoming this person into the privacy of their homes. It therefore becomes important to further define what we mean by 'celebrity' and understand how it may not necessarily be contradictory or insulting to describe a newsreader as a celebrity.

At its most basic, the *Wedgwood Dictionary of English Etymology* states that 'celebrity' is derived from the Latin term '*celeber*' meaning 'much-frequented' or 'thronged', while the *Oxford English Dictionary* simply defines 'celebrity' as 'a public character'. For Rein et al.:

... at first glance, a definition of celebrity quickly reveals a source of confusion. Many person-types are somehow associated with celebrity-hood: heroes, leaders, legends, idols, stars, superstars, and icons ... Most definitions of celebrity concentrate on reputation, praise and popularity.... There is this implication that memory is a crucial dimension, that celebrity tends to be fleeting, less permanent than fame or greatness. (Rein et al., 1997: 14)

So there is nothing pejorative in the term itself, rather, as we have seen in the Couric example above, 'celebrity' only becomes pejorative in the way it is *used*. In Rein's terms, celebrity simply refers to a more 'fleeting' public profile and this is something we will return to again below.

For Graeme Turner:

... the contemporary celebrity will have emerged from the sports or entertainment industries; they will be highly visible through the media; and their private lives will attract greater public interest than their professional lives ... the modern celebrity may claim no special achievements other than the attraction of public attention. (Turner, 2004: 3)

The newsreader therefore qualifies as a celebrity on a number of grounds: as emerging from a particular industry (the news industry), as being highly visible in the media and as being designed to attract public attention. Turner goes on to suggest that:

... we can map the precise moment a public figure becomes a celebrity ... it occurs at the point at which media interest in their activities is transferred from reporting on their public role ... to investigating the details of their private lives. (2004: 8)

This is also true of newsreaders, whose private lives often attract more attention than their public role as presenters; this is certainly the case with commercial newsreaders' appearances in women's magazines, but it is also true of the 'constructed' private life that is offered in television stations' own promotion and marketing of their newsreaders. The newsreader is therefore a marketable commodity that in turn markets and promotes another commodity, the nightly news bulletin.

Hand in hand with this is the concept of the public's right to know, and the question of how much of what is disseminated is actually in the public interest. For Martin Conboy, 'news in the public interest is increasingly defined as news with a public personality in the focus' (2002: 149), while for Catharine Lumby: the 'evolution of celebrity in the twentieth century is intimately related to the evolution of technologies for making individuals public' (2004: 112). Here, the idea of celebrity *image* is important, because it serves as a reminder of how the celebrity is, essentially, a construction that is developed across a *series* of texts and intertexts. The newsreader's image is similarly constructed through a primary text, their appearance on the news bulletin, and a series of promotional intertexts, such as billboards, newspaper advertisements, public appearances and news-breaks (both before and after the news bulletin).

Therefore, vitally important to the growth of celebrity is the increase in promotions and public relations. This informs both the construction of the marketed newsreader and, of course, is a central part of the newsreader's own functioning; they are, in essence, the primary way in which the news is marketed. Television news relies on publicity and marketing; networks produce 'promos' to promote their newsreaders and 'create' newsreaders to market their news service. A key example of this would be to show the newsreaders participating in community activities; a 'promo' aired on WIN Television in Tasmania, for example, shows the WIN newsreader John Remess relaxing, enjoying a coffee at Hobart's well-known waterfront venue, Salamanca Place. The promo thus serves to promote the newsreader while at the same time constructing an image of the newsreader as a 'local' engaged in 'local' activities, contextualizing him in the lives of viewers.

These 'promos' also support John Langer's notion that celebrity requires the public to observe the person being observed:

The private lives of public people are represented to resonate with our own. Their troubles may be more glamorous and more protracted, but their structures of relevance seem to have a relation to ours. Scratch the surface, find the authentic self, and they turn out to be, underneath it all, human to a fault, not so much different from us. (1994: 79).

Chris Rojek (2001: 18) argues that we can divide celebrities into three main categories: ascribed, achieved and attributed; *ascribed* is someone who becomes a celebrity through blood lines and relations, such as Prince William or Paris Hilton; *achieved* describes those individuals who gain their celebrity status through open competition, or from working in a particular area, such as politicians and sportspeople; and *attributed* is a term reserved for those individuals who are simply thrown into celebrity by the media and have no special talent or skills, such as a reality television contestant.

Following Rojek's formulation, newsreaders can be classified as *achieved* celebrities, *achieving* their celebrity through their familiarity with viewers. Vital to them becoming well known is becoming what Todd Gitlin refers to as the 'familiar stranger'. Gitlin suggests that 'people have long imagined a world populated by figures who were not physically at hand and yet seemed somehow present' (2001: 22). This type of imagined bond is essential to newsreaders' success. It is what they set out to establish with their audience, to keep them returning to that network for their news, night after night. This relationship assists in the formation of the imagined community of viewers for the news bulletin (all watching the same newsreader, discussing the same story, at the same time, all around the state) and enables the newsreader to develop a connection with his or her viewers, constructing their celebrity through 'conceptions of familiarity' (Marshall quoted in Turner, 2004: 20). Familiarity and well-knownness, as Giles notes, can be achieved on local levels

and in a localized way, where people in certain circles are 'known' (2000: 6), and newsreaders fit well into this classification of local celebrity as they need to become very well known within their communities. Forming and sustaining this relationship with the audience is vital in maintaining a regular audience for their news bulletins.

Ratings

The acquisition of ratings is the endpoint of the marketed newsreader, the ability to gather a large audience share for both the news service and the network. Virginia Nightingale defines 'ratings' as 'the percentage of homes with a television set that actually watched a particular program', further adding that 'television ratings is the cornerstone of television audience measurement' (quoted in Cunningham and Turner, 2007: 357).

Ratings have a significant effect on the operation of programming, and especially news. News provides networks with an ability to personalize and localize, offering boundless opportunities to target the audience; in several Australian states the news would be one of the few examples of local programming produced for and by members of that state. The six to seven o'clock news and current affairs time-slot is particularly important in the networks' struggle to build audience share and gain the competitive edge over their counterparts because the time-slot acts as a 'breeding ground for some of Australia's most recognisable personalities, and [a] launching pad for the rest of the night's viewing' (Place and Roberts, 2006: 274).

The ratings system has often been the target of intense criticism over its authenticity, control and effectiveness. One of the main concerns is that while ratings indicate an approximation of the audience share, showing the 'percentage of households that are tuned to a particular station at a particular time', they do have their limitations (Stockbridge, 2000: 190). As Nightingale notes, ratings:

... cannot indicate the extent to which a program is liked, the degree of attention with which it is being watched, or the potential demand for certain sorts of programs. For these reasons it can be argued that ratings should not be taken as a serious reflection of public taste. (quoted in Cunningham and Turner, 2007: 360)

Despite this, the viewing patterns of audiences remain important to the financial success of television networks because strong ratings still entice advertisers to spend money with one network over another, and without advertising revenue a network will struggle to remain competitive (Morse, 2004: 211). In Australia, the clear relationship between ratings and advertising, and the constant challenge to increase them 'has seen the infiltration of tabloid strategies into television news and current affairs' (Turner, 2004: 69), which has gone hand in hand with the rise in celebrity culture. We are now seeing

'an overwhelming investment in the power of the visual, in the news as an entertaining spectacle' (Turner, 1999: 59), while for Catharine Lumby this juxtaposition of serious news with tabloid news 'connects the public and private spheres' (1997: 17–18), achieved through 'blurring the lines between news, entertainment and propaganda' (Hume, 1996: 144).

While some commentators have focused on why this increasing interest in entertainment, the spectacle, and the private and personal is a 'deeply problematic development for culture' (Hallin quoted in Morse, 2004: 213) – Hallin suggesting that it threatens to 'divide the news even further into knowledge for an elite and reports for the poor and less-educated' (quoted in Morse, 2004: 215) – others, like Turner, focus more on the result, stating that:

... patterns of programming reveal the effects of this shift towards the private, the domestic and the feminine ... television is entering a new phase ... [and] those shifts in programming [are] usually criticized as the consequence of tabloidization. (Turner, 1999: 69)

This again raises the question of gender for further study around whether the increased presence of the female newsreader is commensurate with this more general 'feminization' of news content.

Locating the newsreader

We will be adopting the term 'para-social interaction' to discuss the relationship that is formed between the newsreader and their audience. This notion of a para-social relationship was first introduced in the 1950s by Donald Horton and R. Richard Wohl, who described how, over time, an intimate relationship is formed between the television personality and viewers, an 'illusion of [a] face-to-face relationship' (1956: 215). This bond is formed as 'often [the "actor"] faces the spectator, uses the mode of direct address, talks as if he were conversing personally and privately. The audience, for its part, responds with something more than mere running observation' (1956: 215).

Far more than just identifying with the personality, it is the 'casual manner in which we watch' television that has seen the personality/viewer relationship deepen, and para-social interaction occur in a way that is virtually unmatched by any other medium (Giles, 2000: 61–2; Marshall, 1997: 121). For the newsreader this para-social interaction is formed and sustained through direct address, where they appear 'alone, in apparent face-to-face interaction with the home viewer' (Horton and Wohl, 1956: 219). Similarly there is 'no pretense that the audience is there ... [and] the host serves as the means by which the audience is included in the program' (Marshall, 1997: 123). In this way, the newsreader provides continuity, a familiar face acting as a guide for their viewers as they receive their daily news, enabling them to 'claim and

achieve an intimacy with what are literally crowds of strangers' (Horton and Wohl, 1956: 216). The newsreader acts as a mediator between the news and the audience, functioning 'as a bridge between the domestic world of the viewer and the public worlds of news' (Bignell, 2008: 90). Just as the newsreader has often slipped between the provinces of celebrity studies and journalism studies, so too does the newsreader sit between the private domain of celebrity and the public domain of news. They domesticate, contain and explain the new to the audience.

Essential to sustaining a relationship between the newsreader and the audience is the continuation of the interaction. For that to happen, each interaction has to have been a positive experience for the viewer to return the following night, and: 'if the initial encounter has been satisfying, the viewer will re-engage, and an on-going relationship will develop' (Rubin and McHugh quoted in Giles, 2000: 63). It is this continued engagement that enables 'the celebrities that do emerge from television ... [to] service the process of familiarization' (Marshall, 1997: 131). In this case, the viewer's familiarity with the newsreader enables them to acquire a familiarity with the news.

Breaking down the physical barriers: 'the skilled news ... presenter works away at removing the traces of mediation between the program, the content and its viewers, while simultaneously building familiarity and trust in their capacity to perform a social service for the audience' (Cunningham and Turner, 2007: 91). The presentation of news is all about breaking down the physical distances between the audience, the journalist and the event, and encouraging familiarity with the audience 'to reinforce the feeling of close proximity to the real and the familial' (Marshall, 1997: 190–2). Such a bond enables: 'media consumers [to] form relationships with media characters, albeit unilateral relationships, that affect us in ways that resemble any other relationship with a person' (Giles, 2000: 62). This is one of the ways we can characterize the relationship between newsreaders and their audiences, based upon a desire to close the gaps between themselves and their audiences, and between their audiences and the news events.

In many ways this imagined relationship has come to resemble face-to-face interactions (Rojek, 2001: 52), where an audience feel they 'know' the television personality simply through this electronic relationship. This is especially true of newsreaders. Viewers develop a para-social interaction through perceived feelings of familiarity (the repetitive presence of the newsreader every weeknight, at the same time, in their home), community and nationhood. In this way news audiences think of themselves as communities, all sitting down at the same time in different parts of the state or country, to watch the same newsreader present the same news. International news can also develop feelings of connectivity and community by breaking down physical boundaries and bringing the audience closer to the world around them. This feeling of community is only strengthened by the presence of the newsreader, a

familiar and friendly face that welcomes the viewer, guides them through this new information (usually from local to state to national to international news) and then bids them 'goodnight, see you tomorrow'. In this way newsreaders not only naturalize the news for the audience, they also naturalize their network as the most reputable and reliable source of news.

The newsreader therefore functions as something akin to a brand, branding the news as the property of one particular network rather than another. They function at the intersection between audience, news and news organizations and in this way, the newsreader may go beyond simply marketing the news towards becoming a central part of a television network's overall public relations campaign. Indeed, we could argue that newsreading is public relations in its purest form, in that newsreaders help manage the relationship between the organization (the network), the events that they 'host' (the news they report on) and their multiple publics (the audience). This may also explain the increasing trend toward female newsreaders. As one Australian public relations scholar has noted, 'the face of public relations is female' (Rea, 2002: 1) mostly because females are a 'better buy' than male employees, they represent the 'new consumer public' and public relations (more than journalism) has traditionally been regarded as 'women's work' (Donato quoted in Toth, 2007: 240). Understanding the connections between newsreading and public relations could therefore provide another fertile area for further research into newsreading in the future.

Conclusion

The importance of the marketed newsreader will only increase as news audiences become more fragmented and more difficult to retain in the face of continually up-dateable internet and cable channel news coverage. The opportunities for audiences to gain news from other sources means 'news audiences are no longer captive. They have equal access to the original sources of news and can eliminate the middle man' (Hume, 1996: 143). It is therefore this increasing range of flexible delivery options for news that has placed a greater emphasis on marketing newsreaders, as marketers suggest that in order to replace the volume of business provided by the old mass audiences, news providers and advertisers must now 'develop more loyal outcomes from a smaller, narrower group, or niche' (Hume, 1996: 143), hence the shift in terminology from newsreader to *marketed* newsreader that we have adopted for this article.

The marketed newsreader is also a significant figure in the domestic 'shifts' in news, for the public's interest in the person behind the news has not gone unnoticed by networks keen to cash in on the public's perceived curiosity regarding the newsreader's private life. In fact, networks work hard to make the public *want* to know. They market their personalities, including their

newsreaders, so that they remain visible and ever-present in our daily lives. Furthermore, they cultivate newsreaders as celebrities because they recognize that it is through their 'well-knownness' and establishment of 'para-social' relationships with their audiences that they can best function. In this way newsreaders occupy a most unusual position, relying on their celebrity to mediate journalism to their audiences. How this function has changed and will continue to change will, we hope, be the subject of more research by both others and ourselves in the future and, in the words of the newsreaders themselves, should certainly be worth tuning in for.

Notes

1. By way of completeness, the other two functions, *focusing* and *realizing* are often handled by the reporters and interviewees/commentators that appear during the report.
2. See: www.hrc.utexas.edu/exhibitions/online/woodstein/

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