

THE *BREAKING SILENCES: MEDIA AND THE CHILD ABUSE ROYAL COMMISSION* PROJECT WAS FUNDED BY THE AUSTRALIAN RESEARCH COUNCIL (DP190101282)



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AFTER THE SILENCE



MEDIA REPORTING OF CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE
IN THE WAKE OF A ROYAL COMMISSION

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IN THE WAKE OF A ROYAL COMMISSION

Edited by Kerry McCallum

Contributors: Mona Chatskin, Megan Deas, Tanja Dreher,
Kristy Hess, Emma John, Samantha Joseph, Alanna Myers,
Eli Skogerbø, Poppy de Souza, Lisa Waller

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Content Warning: This report discusses child sexual abuse. This means that some of the information may be confronting, triggering or cause distress – particularly if you have been impacted by violence, abuse and trauma. If you or someone you know is feeling overwhelmed, distressed or in crisis, there is help available at <https://www.childsafety.gov.au/support-services>

The *Breaking Silences: Media and the Child Abuse Royal Commission* project was funded by the Australian Research Council (DP190101282). For more information, visit <http://breakingsilences.net>

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ISBN: 978-1-74088-539-3

Cover image of *The Healing Tree* sculpture by Richard Moffatt to commemorate the Australian Government's National Apology to Victims and Survivors of Institutional Child Sexual Abuse © Commonwealth of Australia 2022.



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INTRODUCTION TO THE *BREAKING SILENCES:* *MEDIA AND THE CHILD* *ABUSE ROYAL COMMISSION* PROJECT

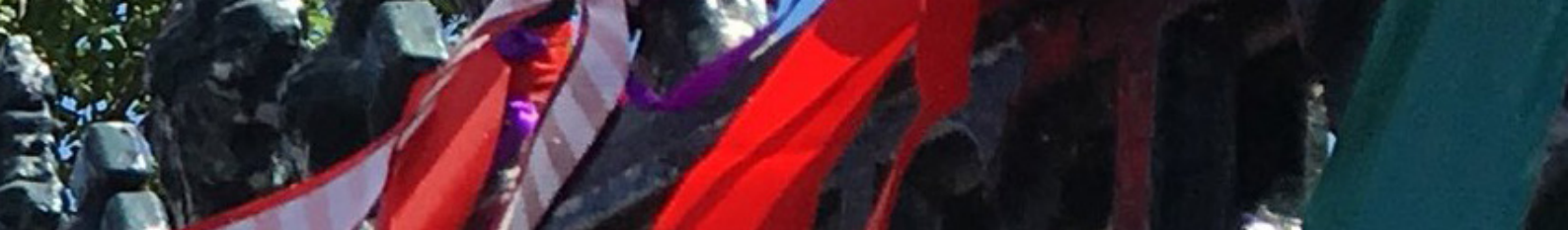
The *Breaking Silences* team

This report provides a snapshot of the wide-ranging work that has been undertaken for the *Breaking Silences: Media and the Child Abuse Royal Commission* project. Funded by an Australian Research Council Discovery Projects grant (DP190101282), over the past four years the *Breaking Silences* team has been researching the role of journalism and social media advocacy in triggering, reporting on, and keeping alive the recommendations of the groundbreaking Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse (2013-17) (RCIRCSA).

2022 marks a decade since Julia Gillard called Australia's largest-ever Royal Commission, and five years since the Commission's final report was handed down. While much has been written about the RCIRCSA and its outcomes, this is the first project to closely examine its mediation.

The RCIRCSA took place at a time of profound change in the global media landscape and afforded new opportunities to bear witness to previous silenced voices. Digital technology enabled an unprecedented flow of information into, and out of, the Commission and around the world, while commitment from major news outlets ensured the RCIRCSA dominated the news agenda for its five years.

As a team we were inspired to interrogate the media activity of survivor advocacy organisations that triggered and shaped the Commission's outcomes, the organisational structures that enabled this 'mediatised' Royal Commission, as well as the reporting from national and local newsrooms.



What lessons could be learned about media's role in this national conversation, its impact on future Royal Commissions, and its global resonances? The support of Commission staff and its Chair, Justice Peter McClellan, the chance to attend commission hearings, and discuss the project with Commission staff, and gain access to archival material, was pivotal.

We interrogated the interplay between this large-scale witnessing exercise and locally-based and globally resonant networks of journalism and social media advocacy, to listen and uphold justice for victims of child sexual abuse.

Research methods included: archival research and historical methods to explore the mediated processes of the inquiry; interviews to explore the media-related practices of journalists who reported on the RCIRCSA, former Royal Commission staff, and survivor advocates; and media analysis of news and social media texts using content and discourse analysis to document the patterns of reporting, exemplar coverage, priorities and silences in news coverage.

Our research finds that public discussion of the Royal Commission, its hearings and outcomes, was pivotal to changing the national conversation about child sexual abuse in institutional settings. Innovative advocacy media practices of survivor advocacy organisation gave voice to previously untold stories, and the RCIRCSA was transformative in its approach to 'open justice'. We have identified journalism that did indeed 'break the silence' and news cultures that walked with communities as they reckoned with the living history of abuse in their communities.

However, our analysis shows that media reporting practices remain gendered, racialised and privilege the stories of the able-bodied. We have documented how media 'hierarchies of attention' driven by news values underpin the uneven and discursively structured nature of reporting of child sexual abuse that foregrounds some powerful institutions and individuals over others. We call this the 'overshadowing' effect.

Bringing together researchers across five universities and conducting the research during a global pandemic presented some real challenges. There have been many bumps along the way, with engagement, fieldwork, conference attendance and team meetings impacted. Crucial to our research process were the many relationships and collaborations spawned with other academics, community organisations, journalists and the public sector. Their engagement, writing, research and reflection has shaped our research findings.

Most importantly, the incredible generosity of organisations representing those with lived experience, who gave their time so generously to help our understanding of the media's ongoing responsibility as it makes public issues around child sexual abuse.

The *After the Silence* symposium represents a moment where we stop to reflect on the outcomes of our ongoing inquiry. We are delighted to share with you a summary of our research findings to date. Most importantly, it is an opportunity to bring together victim-survivor organisations, academics, media and policymakers to discuss the legacy of this mediated inquiry.

The essays included in this report showcase some of our research on this vast topic. We trust you will enjoy the symposium, engage with the research and the responses of the stakeholders who have gathered in Canberra and online to discuss findings from the *Breaking Silences* project.

Special thanks to Dr Barbara Walsh, UC, for her engagement with critical stakeholders, and Dr Caroline Fisher, UC, for sharing Emma's supervision, and to the News & Media Research Centre for sponsoring the *After the Silence* symposium.

IMAGE: LOUD Fence - Ribbons tied to the iron fence of St Patrick's Cathedral, Ballarat. By Belinda Coates / Wikimedia Commons.

RESEARCH TEAM

Chief Investigators



Professor Kerry McCallum

Lead Chief Investigator, University of Canberra

Kerry is Director of the News & Media Research Centre at the University of Canberra. Her research specialises in the relationships between changing media and Australian social policy. With Lisa Waller she is the co-author of 'The Dynamics of News and Indigenous Policy in Australia' (Intellect, 2017).



Associate Professor Tanja Dreher

Chief Investigator, UNSW

Tanja is a Scientia Fellow and Associate Professor in Media at the University of New South Wales, in Sydney, Australia. A former ARC Future Fellow, Tanja's research focuses on the politics of listening in the context of media and multiculturalism, Indigenous sovereignties, feminisms and anti-racism.



Professor Kristy Hess

Chief Investigator, Deakin University

Kristy's research focuses on the relationship between journalism, place-making and social order, especially in local and digital settings. Her work addresses issues of media power and how everyday media-related practices inform understandings of news sustainability in the digital era.



Professor Lisa Waller

Chief Investigator, RMIT University

Lisa's research centres on digital journalism. Her current projects concentrate on the intersections between media, journalism and social media activism; developing an innovations agenda for Australia's country media in the digital era; and strategies for improving Indigenous representation in the news media.

Partner Investigator



Professor Eli Skogerboe

Partner Investigator, University of Oslo

Eli is a co-director of POLKOM – Center for the Study of Political Communication at the University of Oslo. She has researched and taught political communication and media policy, media innovation, social media and internet development, local media, Sami media, telecommunications and methods in media studies.

Research Associates



Dr Megan Deas

Postdoctoral Research Associate, University of Canberra

Megan is the project manager for the *Breaking Silences* project. Her research interests focus on visual culture and visual communication, particularly the role press photographs play in shaping public opinion on issues of national interest.



Dr Alanna Myers

Research Associate, University of Canberra

Alanna provides research and administration for the *Breaking Silences* project. Her research focuses on news discourse and power, particularly in relation to Indigenous representation and environmental and social issues.



Samantha Joseph

Research Associate, UNSW

Samantha is a highly experienced Aboriginal professional having worked within the government and not for profit sectors. Her time working at the RCIRCSA equips her to engage with Aboriginal stakeholders and lead research on related issues for this project.



Dr Poppy de Souza

Research Associate, UNSW

Poppy researches the politics of voice and listening in conditions of inequality. Her work examines the relationship between sound, race and the 'white ear'; and the sensory politics of listening in response to mediated accounts of racialised border practices.

PhD Candidates



Emma John

PhD Candidate, University of Canberra

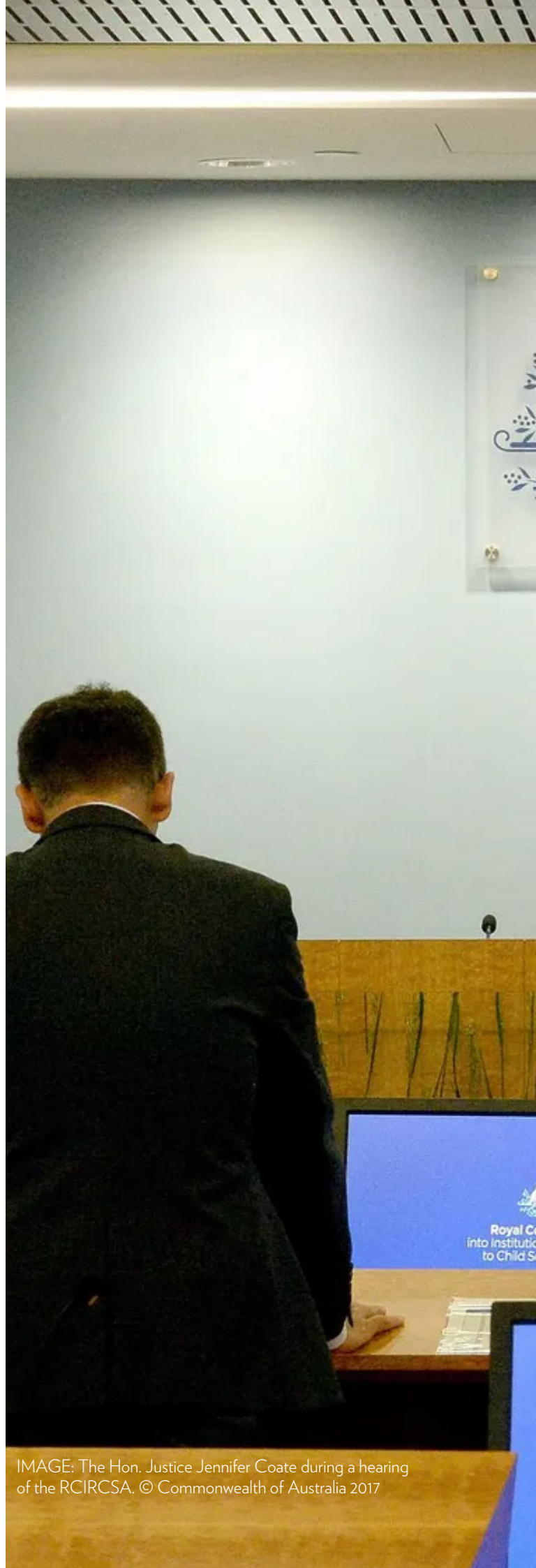
Emma is an ARC-funded PhD candidate and research assistant with the *Breaking Silences* project. Her research investigates the framing of victim-survivors and institutions by journalists in the ABC's coverage of the Royal Commission.



Mona Chatskin

PhD Candidate, University of Canberra

Mona is a PhD Candidate and research assistant attached to the *Breaking Silences* project. Her research compares mainstream and religious media's reportage of institutional child sexual abuse, analysing the Malka Leifer case throughout.





Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse



THE ROYAL COMMISSION INTO INSTITUTIONAL RESPONSES TO CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE AS AN EXERCISE IN ORGANISATIONAL LISTENING

Kerry McCallum

The Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse (2013-17) was the longest, most complex, expensive, widely discussed, and arguably most successful commission of inquiry in Australia's history. Established by the Gillard government, the Commission's Letters Patent required the RCIRCSA 'through private sessions and public hearings, to bear witness to the abuse and trauma inflicted on children who suffered sexual abuse in an institutional context'. As such, it was a unique opportunity to expose crimes and injustices, enable marginalised voices to be heard, and make recommendations for redress where systems had failed.

We interviewed 16 former staff who had worked for the Royal Commission and drew on the extensive archival record of its final report to draw insights into the organisational logics that enabled the RCIRCSA to bear witness to the voices of victims and survivors. They generously shared their time and insights with the *Breaking Silences* team to explain the Commission's media-related organisational practices. In doing so, they explained that how the Commission played out was the result of a complex interplay of structural, political, institutional, organisational, technological, advocacy and personal leadership factors.

- **Leadership and organisational structure.** The RCIRCSA was led by Justice Peter McClellan with a commitment to the principles of 'open justice'. McClellan was universally respected within the commission as an inspirational leader who empowered staff to adopt innovative strategies to meet its aims. The Commission's structure evolved with its public hearing, and its engagement policy and research programs, while at times in tension, were each essential to its goals.
- **Community engagement.** The RCIRCSA's engagement arm was well resourced and resourceful in reaching out to previously silenced communities including First Nations, disability, prisons and lesser-known religious institutions. This group coordinated the private sessions and oversaw the Commission's trauma-informed approach. In a departure from the Commission's media and legal logics much of this work took place deep within the RCIRCSA but was crucial to its strategy, outcomes and final report.

- **Mediatisation.** Public communication and media relations were a central element of the RCIRCSA's organisation, enabling it to engage with and respond to individuals, journalists, and activist organisations. Head of Media and Communication, Dani Redmond, reported directly to the Chair and played a key strategic role in the RCIRCSA. Signalling the Commission's open approach, editors of Australia's major newsrooms were brought together at the outset, and were given unprecedented access to the commission hearings.

Senior journalists described how 'welcome' they were made to feel, which in turn encouraged the sharing of content and a favourable sentiment towards the inquiry that no other Royal Commission had achieved. The Commission's public hearings were its public face, with participants variously referring to them as 'theatre' or even 'public shaming exercises'.

- **Digital technology.** The Royal Commission took advantage of technological innovations such as the live-streaming of hearings, a sophisticated web-page and a monitored social media presence to enable real-time discussion with its stakeholders. Now commonplace, this was the first Royal Commission to live-stream its hearings, connecting the RCIRCSA with Australian and global audiences.

“Public communication and media relations were a central element of the RCIRCSA’s organisation, enabling it to engage with and respond to individuals, journalists, and activist organisations.”

- **Responsiveness.** As a bespoke organisation independent of government, a Royal Commission has a unique opportunity to evolve and develop its own structures and strategies. Chair Justice Peter McClellan capitalised on this flexibility by adapting its focus as evidence became available through the private sessions, policy and engagement teams. Nowhere was this responsiveness more evident than taking the Commission to Rome for an international public hearing of testimony by Cardinal George Pell.

Institutional listening can be defined as an active practice of listening enabled by formal institutions; an empowered space structured to listen, recognise, and respond to citizens' voices, particularly to the marginalised and vulnerable. A listening approach shifts the responsibility from citizens to express their voice, onto institutions to make themselves accessible and receptive (Dreher, 2009; McCallum & Waller, 2021).

We argue that through a 'deliberative' logic, the Commission provided a listening space for diverse voices to be heard, considered, and responded to, and for powerful, often opaque institutions to be held to account. As an exercise in public accountability, the Royal Commission moved certain stories and injustices into the public consciousness, irreversibly changing the national conversation around child sexual abuse in institutions (Wright & Swain, 2018).

Nevertheless, as we explore throughout our research, not all voices were heard or attended to equally in public discussion. News media values and social structures meant that greater attention was paid to more powerful institutions and individuals than to other less prominent but equally heinous crimes exposed by the Commission. Nor are we suggesting a Royal Commission could eradicate child sexual abuse from institutions.

However, we find that the inquiry's ground-breaking methodology did create possibilities for journalism to publicise a wide range of institutional failures and to give sustained attention to the most vulnerable among victims and survivors.

Full paper: Scudder, M., Ercan, S., & McCallum, K. (2021) Institutional listening in deliberative democracy: towards a deliberative logic of transmission, *Politics*, 1-6.

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IMAGE: Musician Tim Minchin performs 'Come home (Cardinal Pell)' in February 2016 © YouTube.

WHAT MADE NEWS HEADLINES DURING THE ROYAL COMMISSION INTO INSTITUTIONAL RESPONSES TO CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE

Lisa Waller, Kerry McCallum, Kristy Hess, Tanja Dreher and Eli Skogerbø

The media coverage generated by the Royal Commission was vital in breaking the silence around child sexual abuse. The RCIRCSA held 57 formal public hearings, reported as 57 Case Studies, during which it heard evidence about child sexual abuse within institutions from 1,200 witnesses, over 400 days, across all Australian capital cities and in several regional areas (RCIRCSA, 2017).

In addition, the Commission heard from 17,000 survivors, including 8,000 private hearings with individual victims. The Commission travelled to every state and territory and employed a vast research team to ensure that abuse in both prominent and smaller institutions was exposed.

Our first collective paper as a research team involved an exploration of patterns of mainstream media attention to the case studies examined by the RCIRCSA from 2013-2017. This research is discussed in two sections of this symposium report. Here we outline the extent to which this ground-breaking exercise in listening for justice was reflected or amplified via mainstream media and what stories gained most media attention over time. We first need to situate the importance of journalists' news values which are

fundamental to understanding how media practitioners focus on particular events rather than others, and in turn build news agendas.

News values shape how journalists construct news stories from events. They are the product of institutional and individual ideologies, and reflect how news organisations relate to their audiences and commercial contexts. Key news values at play in the reporting of the RCIRCSA might include: 'elites', whereby powerful public figures attract more media attention than the marginalised; 'personalisation', a focus on people, rather than abstract or generalised processes; 'meaningfulness', centred upon familiar and culturally resonant stories; and 'continuity' of those stories that are already in the news. A 'scandal' can also be a particularly newsworthy event.

Our research partnership with the RCIRCSA enabled us to access the Royal Commission's monthly media analysis reports. The Commission contracted media intelligence and monitoring company iSentia to produce qualitative and quantitative analyses of its media coverage. Our analysis found that stories involving the Catholic Church were given most attention.

This is perhaps not surprising because the Church was not only the most prominent institution investigated, but had long been at the centre of accusations and journalistic investigation. It was the subject of 13 of the inquiry's 57 case studies; 58.6 per cent of those who gave evidence in private hearings were abused in religious institutions, with 61.8 per cent of those abused in Catholic institutions.

Further, mainstream media coverage paid close and long attention to clerical child sexual abuse and the role of powerful church officials, amplifying this scandal narrative at top volume in media coverage, with the effect of overshadowing other cases and obscuring the voices of people deemed less newsworthy (which we will discuss later in this report).

News about the Royal Commission was broadly structured around its public hearings. Peaks of media coverage occurred when particularly newsworthy public hearings were in session – a pattern that indicates the 'staged' nature of the Royal Commission gave journalists privileged access and fostered a prescribed telling of the story that fit into familiar news structures.

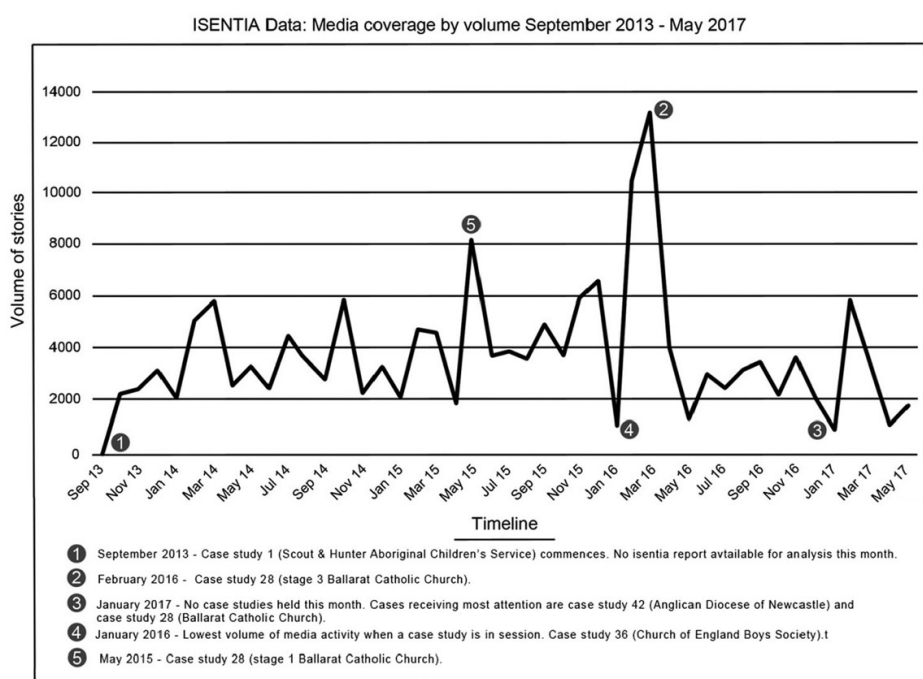
Case Study 28: Catholic Church in Ballarat, received the highest volume and the most sustained coverage of the cases we examined during almost four years of hearings. This case study inquired into the response of the Catholic Church authorities in Ballarat to allegations of child sexual abuse. It comprised three public hearings in May 2015, December 2015 and February 2016. Case Study 28 incorporated evidence pertaining to perpetrator Gerald Risdale, and the Commission's radical decision to conduct a public hearing in Rome to question Australia's most senior cleric, Cardinal George Pell.

“Mainstream media coverage paid close and long attention to clerical sexual abuse and the role of powerful church officials, amplifying this scandal narrative at top volume in media coverage, with the effect of overshadowing other cases.”

Also discussed intensively was Pell's capacity to attend the hearings in Ballarat in person, along with coverage of Australian comedian/entertainer Tim Minchin's release of a song urging the Cardinal to return to Australia.

Ultimately, we suggest the mediated story of the RCIRCSEA hearings emphasised powerful and elite institutions and figures. Tim Minchin's song release, for example, brought together the most powerful contemporary news values of elites, celebrity and entertainment and fused them to the scandal news frame.

This is arguably where the Royal Commission's 'listening for justice' practices and media attention diverge with personalisation of a news event particularly important in a scandal. This means a focus on people, rather than abstract, systemic or structural processes. It helps to explain the lack of attention paid to the critical institutional reviews of organisational policies, procedures and regulations of the Scouts, YMCA, Aboriginal Children's Services and the Salvation Army, which arguably lacked more personalised narratives.



Full paper: Waller, L., Dreher, T., Hess, K., McCallum, K. & Skogerbø, E. (2020) Media Hierarchies of Attention: News Values and Australia's Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse, *Journalism Studies*, 21:2, 180-196.

FIGURE 1: Number of news items September 2013 - May 2017. Source: iSentia.

THE LOGICS AND LIMITS OF ‘MAKING PUBLIC’ IN NATIONAL INQUIRIES

Kerry McCallum, Tanja Dreher and Samantha Joseph

The Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse (RCIRCSA, 2013-2017) has been attributed with fundamentally shifting public understanding and discussion of child sexual abuse, with news media playing a significant role in bringing previously silenced crimes and institutional practices to the fore of public discussion (Wright & Swain, 2018; McCallum & Waller, 2021).

Analysis of the RCIRCSA final report and interviews with former Royal Commission staff reveal the complex interplay between legal, media and organisational logics in the processes of evidence-gathering used by the RCIRCSA to uncover crimes against children in institutional settings.

While the Commission’s public hearings were live-streamed, and prominent key hearings aired in real time on the public broadcaster, by and large the Australian public came to know the Royal Commission through journalists’ news reporting. The *Breaking Silences* project has shown that the intersection between the highly performative public hearings, journalists’ news values and media organisational logics contributed to a particular public understanding of the RCIRCSA and its outcomes (Waller et al., 2020).

However, the RCIRCSA final report and the insights of its former staff suggest that the mediated public hearings were only a small part of the story heard and acted upon by its Commissioners. An amendment to the Royal Commissions Act (1902) in the Commission’s first year enabled, for the first time in an Australian context, ‘Private Sessions’, whereby Commissioners and staff met with victims and survivors in neutral locations to record, de-identify and summarise their testimony.

Over its five years, the six Commissioners met and took testimony from victims and survivors in 8,013 private sessions. The evidence collected, combined with written accounts and extensive research and analysis conducted by the Commission’s policy teams, was central to the process of scheduling a public hearing. Some witnesses gave testimony in both private sessions and public hearings, while others publicised their experience, but the majority of these stories were not made public until the release of the final report in December 2017.

“The mediated public hearings were only a small part of the story heard and acted upon by its commissioners.”

A team of creative writers and journalists was employed to synthesise and write up the de-identified testimony. Simply titled ‘Narratives’, this section of the RCIRCSA Final Report captures 3,949 individual stories and provides some of the most compelling insights into the historical and contemporary experience of child sexual abuse in Australian institutions.

Our research has found that the public representation of the RCIRCSA reinforced the focus of the Commission on the Catholic Church, and under-represented the Commission’s deep engagement with the less prominent institutions investigated. For example, while 14 per cent of private session testimonies were made by Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander survivors, there was no public hearing specifically addressing questions around why First Nations peoples were overrepresented in institutionalised settings where they were vulnerable to abuse. Such organisational decisions can contribute to the media’s inattention to the broader systemic and colonial causes of child sexual abuse such as colonialism, child removal policies and wider child neglect, at the expense of already-prominent and powerful individuals and institutions.

This is not to suggest that the mediation of the RCIRCSA’s public hearings was not a valuable part of changing public understanding of institutional child sexual abuse. Rather, we find that complex and racialised media logics contributed to a *particular* understanding that privileges the publicity of some of the Commission’s findings over others. A wide body of research has found that media is not always approached or experienced as a ‘safe space’ for airing issues, claiming justice or ‘breaking silences’. For instance, systemic coverage of Indigenous affairs in news media, and the exploitation of a ‘deficit’ frame by powerful colonial interests, has contributed to a deep lack of trust by many First Nations people.

Indeed, child sexual abuse has been repeatedly weaponised *against* First Nations rather than providing a catalyst towards justice. This is despite ‘publicness’ being a core principle of the RCIRCSA’s open justice approach and its mission to ‘bear witness to the abuse and trauma inflicted on children who suffered sexual abuse in an institutional context’.

We have identified an awareness that the Commission’s work was not always best done through the RCIRCSA’s public hearings, which were referred to by some as ‘public shaming exercises’. Both prongs complicate the hegemonic idea that ‘going public’ is necessarily the best route to justice and instead highlight again that media and inquiry logics can work against rather than towards transformative justice.

The paper argues that the private sharing of evidence has been undervalued in Media Studies that often centres the journalists’ role in uncovering and ‘making public’ previously unknown stories. We suggest that there is an over-emphasis on the extent that ‘publicness’ is a necessary requirement to derive justice and truth for the victim-survivors of child sexual abuse.

Indeed, examples from other inquiries, such as the Norwegian Truth and Reconciliation Commission, demonstrate a contrary strategy of deep privacy to protect the identity of witnesses. Our research continues to address these challenging questions to better understand how, or whether, ‘making public’ is the best way to bring justice to the victims of child sexual abuse through the inquiry process.

Full paper is in development.

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We suggest that there is an over-emphasis on the extent that ‘publicness’ is a necessary requirement to derive justice and truth for the victim-survivors of child sexual abuse.

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IMAGE: Counsel Assisting, Naomi Sharp, speaks during Case Study 53 © Commonwealth of Australia 2017

INTERNATIONAL RESONANCES: THE NORWEGIAN TRUTH AND RECONCILIATION COMMISSION, 2018-2023

Eli Skogerbø

Although the RCIRCSA was set up and aimed at the uncovering of child abuse in institutions in Australia, its work and report resonated all over the world, where violence and abuse of vulnerable children, individuals and groups have happened and is happening. Yet only lately have the role of institutions and institutional care been investigated thoroughly. Our international research sheds light on the common features of commissions of inquiry broadly aimed at addressing past injustices, but also the unique features that shape their success.

In Norway, a Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) was set up in 2018 to investigate the long-term consequences of well over a century of harsh assimilationist policies, referred to as “Norwegianisation”, against Sámi and other ethnic and cultural minorities. Norwegianisation led to racist practices, stigma, abuse, children being removed from their homes, extensive use of boarding schools for Sámi children, loss of culture, languages, and rights to land and water.

After decades of Sámi political mobilisation and activism, in the 1980s, Sámi rights were strengthened with the Sámi Act in 1987, the adjustment of the Constitution to include the state’s responsibility to ensure Sámi people’s rights to develop their own culture, languages, and social lives, the opening of the Sámi Parliament in 1989, and the ratification of the C169 Indigenous and Tribal Peoples Convention in 1990. Despite these state measures, the Sámi and other national minorities are still exposed to discrimination and hate speech, and past wounds are yet to heal (Andresen et al., 2021, Norwegian Institution for Human Rights, 2022). The effects of the assimilation policy have lingered for decades after it was formally abolished, affecting generations of people.

The issue of coming to terms with previous injustices has occupied the Sámi peoples for decades. The Sámi is an Indigenous people in northern Europe, and their traditional homelands, called Sápmi, stretch from the south of Norway and Sweden across northern Finland into the northern parts of Russia.

“The effects of the assimilation policy have lingered for decades after it was formally abolished, affecting generations of people.”

Concluding a public debate initiated by the Sámi Parliament, the Parliament appointed the TRC in Norway in 2018. In addition to the Sámi, two national minorities – the Kvens and Norwegian Finns – were included in the mandate. The TRC’s mandate is threefold:

1. Conduct historical mapping of Norwegian authorities’ policies inflicted upon the minorities during the Norwegianisation period;
2. Investigate the current effects of the Norwegianisation; and
3. Suggest measures for further reconciliation (such as promoting the minority languages and cultures).

The TRC’s methods consist of gathering individual and group stories through meetings and interviews; studying archive materials; and facilitating close cooperation with affected communities and organisations for consultation. The TRC was originally to finalise its work by 1 September 2022, but due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the period was extended to 1 June 2023.

The Norwegian Commission is part of a new trend where welfare democracies also seek to remedy and reconcile past injustices (Wiebelhaus-Brahm, 2010), and may give opportunity for truth-seeking public discussions at a national level, contribute to judicial and political reforms, and open a change in the national discourse and in the understanding of Indigenous peoples’ experiences (Waller et al., 2020).

The *Silent Voices* project looks at the mediation of the Norwegian TRC from 2016 to 2021 with the aim to understand to what degree the TRC has become



IMAGE: Sami Parliament plenary © Sami Parliament on Flickr.

a public issue and whether it is listened to by public actors. The first analyses show some disturbing findings: although the total media and news coverage was extensive over time, there was a decrease in media coverage and journalistic attention to issues concerning the TRC.

Potentially of major political importance for a democratic state seeking to come to terms with its troubled past – and current – treatment of its Indigenous and national minorities, the TRC lost journalistic attention after its appointment. Only in a few instances did news, opinion pieces, or debates on the TRC reach nationwide or large regional media. There was substantial coverage and debate only in Sámi and other minority outlets. Further, the media attention was uneven and hierarchical.

News about the TRC was covered extensively in Sámi and Kven media and was frequently debated locally and regionally; in other words, there was no silence in the Indigenous, minority, and local media. In these media, many voices presented opposing opinions on the need for a TRC and its communication strategy, which is to gather information and only reveal its findings in the report in 2023. On this point the TRC is fundamentally different from the RCIRCSA, which throughout its working period held 57 public hearings and maintained close working relationships with national media.

Within the first two years of its work period, the TRCs methods and role in the public sphere were questioned. Critics asked how the TRC could call for knowledge and facilitate reconciliation if it did not disclose its findings and methods. Numerous times, the chair of the TRC stressed one of the TRC's main goals – acquiring and spreading more knowledge to the nationwide population

– and expressed his understanding in people's wish for more information on the TRC's work (Høybråten, 2021). It was never publicly clarified why the investigation strategy best served its purpose, although the leader explained it as a tool for protecting witnesses who come forth to share their stories.

Other objections were voiced by people who were concerned that the TRC would contribute to opening old wounds and creating new conflicts. Trust in the TRC was at times highly contested. Further, after almost four years, the number of individual stories collected by the TRC was around 500. Considering that the minorities included in the mandate constitute tens of thousands of people, the number of stories was strikingly low, and may be interpreted as a kind of protest.

Full paper: Vranic, A. & Skogerbø, E. (in press) 'Silence, voice, and public listening: Media coverage of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission', *Journal of Global Indigeneity, Sámi and Indigenous journalism special issue*.

Further reading: McCallum, K. & Waller, L. (2021) 'Truth, Reconciliation and Global Ethics', in Ward, S. (ed), *Handbook of Media Ethics*, pp.783-801, Springer.

“Although the total media and news coverage was extensive over time, there was a decrease in media coverage and journalistic attention to issues concerning the TRC.”

**NATIONAL
AND GLOBAL
COVERAGE**



IMAGE: Survivor Paul Levey holds a poster outside the Vatican in Rome, February 2016. Courtesy of LOUD Fence on Facebook.



Loud Fence Australia
Comes to Rome.
No More Silence!





IMAGE: *The Healing Tree* by Richard Moffatt stands outside Parliament House. © Commonwealth of Australia 2022.

ENDURING SILENCE: AUSTRALIA'S MEDIA AND THE NATIONAL APOLOGY FOR CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE

Tanja Dreher and Lisa Waller

In this research we examined news coverage of Australia's 2018 National Apology to Victims of Institutional Child Sexual Abuse. We focused on whether news reporting of the 2018 Apology reflected the Royal Commission's stated commitment, care and attention to ensuring First Nations people, who were over-represented among victims and survivors of institutional child sexual abuse, were afforded voice and agency in media. We began from the fact that 14.3 per cent of survivors who shared their stories in private sessions were Indigenous, a significant over-representation considering that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people make up just 3.3 per cent of the overall population in Australia.

The Royal Commission recognised from the outset that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children 'are significantly over-represented in some high-risk institutional contexts due to a range of historical, social and economic factors, including colonisation'.

Significantly, it also found that this is a contemporary experience. The RCIRCSA dedicated considerable resources to making sure that First Nations communities were engaged and that those who wanted to share their stories in a private session felt culturally safe and supported to do so. The Commission's emphasis on the importance and urgency of addressing the impacts of ongoing colonial relations and processes, including the over-representation of Indigenous children in both the out-of-home care (OOHC) and juvenile justice systems, aligns with longstanding First Nations media and political agendas.

In our research on newspaper reporting of the 2018 National Apology we focused on racialised hierarchies of attention. Via a content analysis of media coverage, informed by critical discourse analysis, we found that First Nations experiences, expertise and aspirations were remarkably absent in news coverage of the inquiry and the subsequent Apology.

The coverage was also remarkable for its failure to connect the 2018 Apology to other recent national Apologies including the 2008 Apology to the Stolen Generations, or to ongoing concerns related to high rates of Indigenous child removal and over-incarceration.

The Prime Minister Scott Morrison did not specifically acknowledge First Nations in his Apology speech, but the Opposition leader Bill Shorten did speak of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander victims and survivors, reminding the nation that their experience of institutional child sexual abuse compounded the ongoing trauma of dispossession and racial discrimination.

Shorten's speech provided journalists with a routine, highly accessible news source and quotable remarks that news outlets could publish to reflect the Royal Commission's specific commitment to ensuring First Nations peoples were heard through its processes, findings and outcomes. Some Indigenous organisations, including The Healing Foundation, also issued national media statements on the day.

Our media collection provides evidence that First Nations media outlets reported on such Indigenous community responses (eg.: *The Koori Mail*) and presented Shorten's comments and those of other political leaders, as part of their coverage. Mainstream newspapers, on the other hand, remained silent on First Nations victims and survivors, or used Shorten's speech to reinforce a settler colonial imaginary by defining Indigenous children's experience of abuse in out-of-home care as historical, when Indigenous children are 11 times more likely to be in out-of-home care today than non-Indigenous children, and therefore particularly vulnerable to institutional sexual abuse in the present.

Despite the over-representation of First Nations survivors at RCIRCSA private hearings and the inquiry's clear findings that the injustices revealed continue in the present, the mainstream news coverage of the 2018 National Apology to Victims and Survivors of Institutional Child Sexual Abuse barely mentioned First Nations survivors, stories, organisations or proposals.

The research served as an opportunity to problematise the conspicuous lack of media attention to the over-representation of First Nations in contemporary out-of-home care and juvenile detention and its significance in ongoing systemic racism. Where mainstream media coverage did include Indigenous representation, for the most part it relegated colonial injustice to the past, failing to engage with the contemporary concerns and aspirations for justice and self-determination consistently at the centre of First Nations media, advocacy and activism.

The news media's racialised hierarchies of attention and disjunctive account of history did not reflect the findings of the RCIRCSA itself, but rather brought into stark relief the operations of routine professional news practices and news values including a focus on elites and scandal in normalising everyday white supremacy and settler amnesia. While Australian mainstream media has been rightly congratulated for breaking silences on institutionalised child sexual abuse, in the case of the enduring injustice of the removal and abuse of Indigenous children, we found that Australian mainstream media presents an enduring silence.

Full paper: Dreher, T. & Waller, L. (2022) Enduring silence: racialized news values, white supremacy and a national apology for child sexual abuse. *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 45, (9): 1671-1692.

“ The coverage was remarkable for its failure to connect the 2018 Apology to other recent national Apologies including the 2008 Apology to the Stolen Generations, or to ongoing concerns related to high rates of Indigenous child removal and over-incarceration. ”

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THE ABC'S REPORTING OF CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE IN THE AUSTRALIAN DEFENCE FORCE

Emma John


Australia's Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse (RCIRCSA) was a ground-breaking and highly significant exercise in listening for justice. Case Study 40 amplified the voices of men and women who were raped and sexually abused as children in certain divisions of the Australian Defence Force (ADF), and exposed the harmfully inadequate responses of the ADF to allegations of child sexual abuse.

While evidence suggests that sexual assault and abuse including that of children has occurred in each service and across every decade since at least the 1940s, the scope of the RCIRCSA's public hearing was limited by place and time to HMAS Leeuwin between 1960 and 1980, the Army Apprentice School Balcombe between 1970 and 1980, and ADF Cadets between 2000 and 2016 (the then present day).

Case Study 40 also considered a number of contemporary responses of the Department of Defence and the Department of Veterans' Affairs to claims for compensation made by victims and survivors of child sexual abuse at Leeuwin and Balcombe.

This research analyses reporting of Case Study 40 on the ABC's national platforms between 12 November 2012 and 15 December 2017. The ABC's national coverage is a focus for a number of reasons. In its role as Australia's national public broadcaster, the ABC had a mandate and made a commitment to providing coverage of the Royal Commission.

IMAGE: Australian Defence Force Academy (ADFA) trainee officers during the annual Chief of Defence Force (CDF) Parade © Australian Army 2021.



Additionally, the ABC provided unparalleled coverage of the Royal Commission for its duration, made possible by its uniquely expansive nature within the Australian news media landscape.

In its coverage, the ABC afforded Case Study 40's public proceedings a national platform. Taking a critical discourse approach, this research has concerned itself with the content of that coverage. Did it heed the Royal Commission's intent, and allow for vulnerable voices to be heard? Or, did it reproduce existing, deep-set structures of power and amplify the voices of the powerful – specifically, the enduring and apparently inherent power of the Australian Military?

The ABC covered Case Study 40 extensively. Thirty articles were produced in total, with the vast majority published or broadcast during Case Study 40's nine-day public hearing. Through its reporting, the ABC amplified the voices of twelve of the fourteen survivor witnesses who gave evidence during the public hearing. Two victim-survivors were not quoted and didn't appear in any way in any of the coverage. Their absence represents a deafening silence. When the ABC did afford victim-survivors a direct voice, direct quotes were largely limited to the testimony provided during the public hearing, and only appear in coverage on the days the evidence was given.

In its coverage of Case Study 40, the ABC constructed child sexual abuse in the ADF as a historical issue. It effectively distanced the ADF from what it describes as 'failures of the past' and put forward a narrative of a 'changed' military that is generous in its treatment of victim-survivors.

“The ABC provided unparalleled coverage of the Royal Commission for its duration.”

Not only does that serve to obscure the culpability of the Australian military as it exists today, but it's also a construction at odds with some victim-survivors' own experiences, Commonwealth legislation that places clear restrictions on the compensation claims of victims and survivors who were abused as children in the ADF after 30 June 2004, and the findings of previous and ongoing inquiries into ADF conduct and culture.

“In its coverage of Case Study 40, the ABC constructed child sexual abuse in the ADF as a historical issue.”

While the ABC did reference a select few of the reports from previous inquiries, it didn't substantively or reflexively engage with them in its coverage of Case Study 40. Doing so may have disrupted its dominant construction of child sexual abuse in the Australian military as a historical issue, or challenged their willingness to accept and reproduce institutional sources' displacement of accountability onto 'a few bad eggs'.

Findings speak to the difficulty of navigating existing structures of power while attempting to hold the ADF – an arguably essential public institution synonymous with historic socio-cultural narratives of ANZAC mythology, military idealism and national identity – to account.

Full paper is based on research conducted for Emma John's PhD thesis (DP190101282) and is in development.



IMAGE: Cardinal George Pell gives evidence from Rome during Case Study 28 © Commonwealth of Australia 2017

GOING TO ROME: LOCAL RESPONSIVENESS AND GLOBAL RESONANCES

Kerry McCallum and Mona Chatskin

Nowhere was the global resonance of the Royal Commission more evident than the live testimony of Cardinal George Pell in Rome. Our research has showed that Case Study 28: The Catholic Church in Ballarat Diocese was the most high-profile of the 57 cases examined by the Royal Commission. At the expense of other cases identified by the RCIRCSA, it garnered local, national and global media attention. Our interest here is not so much in the media attention given to the Rome testimony, but the advocacy of survivors and the subsequent responsiveness of the Royal Commission to their demands to bear witness to the testimony of a key witness.

The writing and reflections of journalists, Royal Commission staff and survivors examined for this research project suggest that the Rome testimony was the ultimate expression of the Royal Commission's responsive approach to listening to survivors. The Ballarat Survivor's Group and Loud Fence movement were pivotal to the Rome hearing.

“The Rome testimony was the ultimate expression of the Royal Commission’s responsive approach to listening to survivors.”

After advocating for the third round of Case Study 28 hearings to be held in Ballarat, a decision was made for the hearing to be held in Sydney, but for Pell to give testimony via videolink from Rome on 29 February 2016. Local advocacy organisations demanded that a public gallery be provided as for other hearings (Davey, *The Guardian*, 22 February 2015).

General Manager of Engagement and Support Pia Van de Zandt explained how Chair Justice McClellan, after learning of survivors' calls to be present at the hearing of Pell's in Rome, committed to providing a public gallery at the Vatican for survivors to be able witness the testimony. Head of Media and Communication Dani Redmond said 'And so there was a while there within the Royal Commission where you could literally hear the clock ticking...And then when the decision was made. Okay, we'll go to Rome.'"

Van de Zandt paid tribute to the leadership of McClellan in enabling the hearing to get evidence from this significant witness. She explained this as an example of 'listening to survivors, and, hearing them'. The Commission recognised that 'if Pell was not going to come to Australia, and that idea that the Royal Commission holds people to account and people have to give evidence facing the people aggrieved. The survivors said: "he needs to face us."'

Using the digital technologies available, survivors and their supporters crowd-sourced funds to send the survivors to Rome. Ballarat *Courier* editor Eugene Duffy spoke of the transformation that had come over Ballarat, from a time where victims experiences were not talked about, to a virtual ticker-tape parade as the survivors left for their journey to Italy.

Local *The Courier* journalist Melissa Cunningham, who had produced over 200 articles about the issue, was invited to travel with the survivors and did so with the support she received from her editor. Cunningham described that:

...the survivors were coming into the office and saying to the editor: 'You have to send Mel with us because she's covered our story and we want her there and we trust her... When I look back at that time... I felt this huge responsibility too, because I'd been sent there with the survivors.

The global resonance of the hearing became evident with the world's media converging on Rome to report on the event. Redmond described the logistical and communicative complexity of bringing the commission to Rome. It was not only a legal operation, but a diplomatic mediated event involving not only the Australian government but the world's media.

Reporting on the story, particularly the Ballarat Survivors' experience, Cunningham said: 'I felt an immense pressure to be able to tell their stories on that kind of global scale, because there was so much interest in that story too and when I was at the hearing in Rome, I could see their pain and I knew them personally.'

Meanwhile, the hearing was live-streamed back to Australia. Van de Zandt described the moving experience of being at the Ballarat Town Hall with local community members to watch the live feed:

We had the royal commission in Sydney operating from the courtroom. We had the Rome staff and the Rome site for Pell's evidence, and then I was at the Ballarat Town Hall with 200 people, and a large screen, listening to it there. It was just, you know, unbelievable...I mean, it was surreal, amazing....I couldn't quite believe it was happening, you know, that we're connecting all of this.

Full paper is in development.

“The global resonance of the hearing became evident with the world's media converging on Rome to report on the event ... It was not only a legal operation, but a diplomatic mediated event involving not only the Australian government but the world's media.”



IMAGE: LOUD Fence ribbons tied outside the Vatican in Rome, February 2016. Courtesy of LOUD Fence on Facebook.

CASES OF ALLEGED JEWISH INSTITUTIONAL CHILD SEX ABUSE IN AUSTRALIAN MAINSTREAM AND RELIGIOUS MEDIA AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT WITH MEDIA PRACTICE: MALKA LEIFER IN NEWS LANDSCAPES

Mona Chatskin

The Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse (RCIRCSA) examined a broad range of institutions and their responses to child sexual abuse. Orthodox Jewish institutions were the focus of Case Study 22: Yeshiva Bondi and Yeshivah College Melbourne, and examined the responses of the Yeshivah leadership in responding to cases of abuse. This was the only public case study of the Royal Commission which focussed on Jewish institutions.

Notably, the Yeshivah public hearings garnered the highest international audience via the Royal Commission's live stream of any public hearings, highlighting the deep interiority and interconnectedness of the diaspora Jewish community. Revelations and disclosures of Jewish institutional child sexual abuse have been exposed over the last decade, largely due to abuse survivor and advocate Manny Waks whistleblowing about abuse at Yeshivah Melbourne. It is this local survivor-advocacy which triggered much of the global resonance with Case Study 22, and enabled the Royal Commission's findings to begin changing discourse within Australia's Jewish community about cases of child sexual abuse.

In 2016, two of three sisters gave private submissions to the Royal Commission about abuse they endured by Malka Leifer, the principal of Adass Israel School, an Ultra-Orthodox Jewish girls school in Elsternwick, Melbourne. Dassi Erlich, Elly Sapper and Nicole Meyer, are three sisters who were allegedly abused by Leifer during their time as students at Adass.

Manny Waks has supported the sisters in their quest for justice as they spearheaded the Bring Leifer Back campaign, while appealing to Australian and Israeli politicians, which ultimately influenced Leifer's successful extradition back to Australia after more than 70 court hearings in Israel. It is the voices of survivor-advocates that has kept alive the learnings from Case Study 22, and the broader Royal Commission has sustained public interest in the case.

The Leifer case gained notoriety in Australian and international discourse due to the near decade long process of Leifer's extradition to Australia and campaign efforts by victim-survivors. Leifer, was the principal of Adass when in 2008, the school was notified of the abuse allegations and its board assisted Leifer and her family in fleeing the country to Israel. Leifer has 70 charges of child sexual abuse and was extradited back to Australia in January 2021 and is awaiting Australian court proceedings to commence.

While their quest for justice is not yet over as they await Leifer's day in an Australian court, the prominence of the case in media has continued to change the dialogue in Melbourne's Jewish community which experienced a shift following the Royal Commission. The Royal Commission shone a light on the abuse within religious communities and brought it into the fore, and Melbourne's Jewish community are now managing these disclosures and implementing new child safety models at Jewish schools and other Jewish institutions.

Currently, there is no scholarly work that examines the relationship between Jewish institutional child sexual abuse and how it is reported on by media. This PhD thesis uses the Malka Leifer case study as the backbone for analysis, while examining how mediatised public crisis events influence on those who are the subjects of the crisis, i.e. Melbourne's Jewish community.

“The prominence of the case in media has continued to change the dialogue in Melbourne’s Jewish community which experienced a shift following the Royal Commission.”

This research adopts a mixed methods approach of media analysis and focus groups to analyse how the Leifer case's extensive mediatisation impacts the community. A quantitative and qualitative media analysis of reportage by the *Australian Jewish News*, a religious news outlet, was compared against coverage by *The Age*, *ABC*, and *Herald Sun* – the mainstream media. The extensive period of the case and its notoriety led to four key 'moments' and time periods in the case being selected for the media analysis.

The research found a significant difference in the way each news publication reported on the case and shaped the narrative, with different frames being enacted by each media outlet. Findings reveal the power of media representations, and how Jewish institutional child sexual abuse is framed by media outlets within the Australian media landscape.

This analysis serves as the foundation for the main research method, which utilises focus groups consisting of peer conversations, to analyse how the case was disseminated by media and discussed in the community. A significant theme emerging through the research is Jewish people's innate fear of Anti-Semitism, which is so deeply embedded within Jewish people's identities, that it ultimately shapes how they interact with news media.

This abstract is based on research conducted for Mona Chatskin's doctoral research which is funded by an Australian Research Training Program stipend scholarship.

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It is the voices of survivor-advocates that has kept alive the learnings from Case Study 22, and the broader Royal Commission has sustained public interest in the case.

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IMAGE: (L-R) Sisters Elly Sapir, Dassi Erlich and Nicole Meyer who are victims of Malka Leifer speak to the media during a press conference in Melbourne, May 27, 2020. © James Ross / Imago.



AWARD-WINNING JOURNALISM:

Industry recognition of media reporting on the RCIRCSA

YEAR	JOURNALIST/S	PUBLICATION	AWARD
2021	Michael Atkin	7.30, ABC TV, ABC News Online	MEAA Queensland Clarion Awards
2021	Charlotte King	Background Briefing, ABC RN	Quill Awards
2020	Sarah Ferguson, Nial Fulton, Tony Jones	ABC (and In Films)	Walkely Awards
2020	Lucie Morris-Marr	Allen & Unwin	Walkely Awards
2020	Henry Zwartz, Lauren Roberts	ABC News	MEAA NT Media Awards
2020	David Eccles	InDaily	MEAA SA Media Awards MEAA SA Media Awards
2020	Loretta Lohberger	<i>The Mercury</i>	MEAA Tasmanian Media Awards
2020	Oli Bourguignon	7NEWS Melbourne	Quill Awards
2019	Henry Zwartz	ABC News Regional	Young Walkleys
2019	Mike Amor, Sharnelle Vella, Nick McCallum	7NEWS	Quill Awards
2019	Waleed Aly	Network Ten, <i>The Age</i>	Quill Awards
2019	Jason South	<i>The Age</i>	Quill Awards
2018	Mark Riley	<i>The West Australian</i>	Walkely Awards
2017	Louise Milligan	Melbourne University Press	Walkely Awards
2017	Michael Aitkin	ABC TV, ABC Online	MEAA Tasmanian Media Awards
2017	Jane Bardon	ABC	MEAA NT Media Awards
2016	Anne Connolly, Suzanne Smith, Lesley Robinson	7.30, ABC TV	Walkely Awards
2016	Charlotte King	PM, ABC Radio	Rural Press Club of Vic. Rural and Regional Journalism and Photography Awards
2016	Louise Milligan, Andy Burns	7.30, ABC TV, The Drum, ABC TV	Quill Awards
2016	Melissa Cunningham	<i>The Courier</i> (Ballarat)	Quill Awards
2014	Paul Whittaker	<i>The Daily Telegraph</i>	Walkely Awards
2014	Sarah Dingle	Background Briefing, ABC RN	Walkely Awards
2014	Dan Goldberg, Danny Ben-Moshe	ABC TV (Mint Pictures and Identity Films)	Walkely Awards
2014	Jamie Walker	<i>The Weekend Australian Magazine</i>	MEAA Queensland Clarion Awards
2014	Emma McBryde	<i>The Morning Bulletin</i>	MEAA Queensland Clarion Awards
2013	Chad Watson, Joanne McCarthy, Ian Kirkwood, Jason Gordon	<i>Newcastle Herald</i>	Walkely Awards
2013	Joanne McCarthy	<i>Newcastle Herald</i>	Walkely Awards
2013	Sarah Dingle	ABC RN	Walkely Awards
2013	Michael McKenna, Amanda Gearing	<i>The Australian</i>	MEAA Queensland Clarion Awards
2012	Mary Ann Jolley, Geoff Thompson, Mary Fallon	Four Corners, ABC TV	Walkely Awards
2012	Nance Haxton	AM, PM and The World Today, ABC Radio	Walkely Awards
2012	Nick McKenzie, Richard Baker, Jane Lee	<i>The Age</i>	Quill Awards
2012	Andrew Dyson	<i>The Age</i>	Quill Awards

CATEGORY	HEADLINE
Indigenous Issues Reporting	Abuse of Power: Sexual Abuse Allegations in Youth Detention
Radio Current Affairs	The memo that erased a scandal
Walkley Documentary Award	Revelation
Walkley Book Award	<i>Fallen</i>
Pete Davies Memorial Campaigning Journalism Award	Indigenous sexual abuse survivor gets justice after 50 year-long fight
Best News or Lifestyle Feature Best Print Journalist	The Life and Death of Andy MacQueen: child sexual abuse, church cover-ups and the mental health system
Excellence in Legal Reporting	"After the verdict" and body of work incl. the Catholic Standard's Apology to Cardinal Pell
TV Camera Work (Shot of the Year)	Road Trip with Cardinal George Pell
Coverage of Community and Regional Affairs	'This is Tasmania's Ballarat': Abuse survivors speak out
Breaking News Coverage	George Pell Guilty
Keith Dunstan Quill for Commentary	This is why we don't leave justice in the hands of victims (and two other unrelated entries)
News Photograph	The George Pell Trial
All media: Commentary	Atrocities committed in God's name mean Church will never sway me (and two other unrelated stories)
Walkely Book Award	<i>Cardinal: The Rise and Fall of George Pell</i>
Excellence in Legal Reporting	"Body of Work - Child Abuse Commission"
All Media - Excellence in Indigenous Reporting	Various incl. Retta Dixon, example: Institutional sexual, physical abuse compensation case to enter Commonwealth mediation
TV/AV: Daily Current Affairs	Anglican Church Paedophile Ring
Best Feature Story - Broadcast	Abuse victims confront nuns caring for dying bishop
Gold Quill - Coverage of an Issue or Event	George Pell and Sexual Abuse in the Catholic Church
Suburban or Regional Journalism	Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse: A path of hope to Rome
Headline Journalism	Cardinal Spin (and two other unrelated headlines)
Radio/Audio: Documentary, Feature, Podcast or Special	The Salvos: A Matter of Trust
Walkley Documentary Award	Code of Silence
All Media - Social Issues Reporting	Losing My Religion
All Media - New Journalist of the Year	"Body of Work" incl. coverage of the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse
Coverage of Community and Regional Affairs	Shine the Light: Child Sexual Abuse in the Hunter (series)
Gold Walkely	Shine the Light (series)
Radio Documentary, Feature, Podcast or Special	The Family Trap: how the Royal Commission is missing many abuse cases
All Media - Social Issues Reporting	Two Boys, Two Countries, One Story
Television Current Affairs, Feature or Special (more than 20 minutes)	Unholy Silence
Radio News and Current Affairs Reporting	Justice system fails disabled victims of sexual abuse
Best News Report in Print	Church's suicide victims
Best Cartoon	'Best we forget'





IMAGE: Care Leavers Australasia Network (CLAN) members campaign at a public appeal to encourage more people to tell their stories to the RCIRCSA. Courtesy of CLAN on Twitter.

MEDIA HIERARCHIES OF ATTENTION: THE OVERSHADOWING EFFECT IN MEDIA REPORTING OF THE RCIRCSA

Lisa Waller, Tanja Dreher, Kristy Hess, Kerry McCallum and Eli Skogerboe

Our first ‘baseline study’ developed a macro analysis of news values and media logics in the reporting of the 57 public case studies examined by the RCIRCSA between 2013-2017. We found that some hearings were amplified and others ‘overshadowed’ relative to the ‘flat’ hierarchy of representation of the case studies through the RCIRCSA website. Those that received the most news coverage, and also the most sustained media attention over time, related to the scandal focused on the Catholic Church in the regional city of Ballarat, often referred to as the ‘epicentre’ of clerical child sex abuse in Australia, and to the nation’s most senior Catholic, Cardinal George Pell.

We found mainstream media paid close and long attention to clerical sexual abuse and the role of powerful church officials, amplifying this scandal narrative at top volume in news coverage, with the effect of overshadowing other cases and obscuring the voices of people deemed less newsworthy.

The RCIRCSA found children from marginalised groups, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander victims and survivors, children with a disability, and from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds were more likely to experience sexual abuse in residential ‘care’ and schools, yet some of the case studies involving these children were among those that received the lowest volumes of news coverage. The decision to include ‘open’ institutions such as churches and schools, as well as ‘closed’ institutions such as orphanages, has been critiqued by care leaver advocates and advocacy groups for sidelining the abuse of care leavers.

Our analysis further indicated that almost all the case studies that related to reviews of organisational policies, procedures and regulations coincided with a strong drop in overall coverage (see Case Studies 27, 46-49). For example, institutional reviews of the YMCA New South Wales, Scout and Hunter Aboriginal Children’s Service and The Salvation Army, which assessed current child protection and child-safety standards, recorded a low volume of news reports during the month in which they were heard.

Our analysis of peaks in news volume provides further evidence of how hierarchies of news media attention operated to overshadow marginalised victim and survivor stories that were deemed less ‘news worthy’ than Church scandals. For example, two case studies were scheduled in October 2014 in Sydney: Case Study 18: Australian Christian Churches, and Case Study 19: Bethcar Children’s Home.

The Church hearings – involving the high profile and well-resourced Hillsong Church (657 reports) received almost three times more coverage than Bethcar (228 reports) – a state-run foster care facility located near Brewarrina in outback New South Wales. Bethcar operated during the 1970s and assumed responsibility for Aboriginal children.

These findings are typical of the news economy that awards priority to elite organisations and individuals and news values that direct focus towards individual crimes or transgressions rather than structural violence or injustices. Not only did our analysis chart a highly uneven pattern of news media attention, it has also revealed the overshadowing effect of some case studies.

We understand the phenomena of overshadowing as another consequence of intense news media attention on powerful and elite institutions and argue that it has had an impact on representations of case studies that did not rank as highly in journalism’s attention economy, including abuse of children with disabilities that occurred at St Anne’s special school in Adelaide.

“Hierarchies of news media attention operated to overshadow marginalised victim and survivor stories that were deemed less ‘news worthy’ than Church scandals.”

Mainstream journalism presents itself as reflecting social reality and representing the most important events and issues, however, its representations construct public understanding and, in the case of the Royal Commission, have the indirect but powerful effect of minimising attention paid to some issues and events, including cases of healthcare providers and regulators and historical child sexual abuse in out-of-home care.

The overshadowing pattern of news attention deviates sharply from the Commission's 'listening for justice' approach, which delved into silences and shadows to expose the truth. The Royal Commission committed considerable resources through its research and community outreach programs, private and public hearings, to encourage First Nations participation and to ensure the voices of the most marginalised Australians were heard.

It was particularly attuned to historical factors, including the additional risk factors of intergenerational trauma, and it was the first Australian Royal Commission to take private hearings inside prison. These stories did not fit the scandal frame used to expose rings of paedophile priests, or cover-ups of child sexual abuse at some of the nation's wealthiest and most venerated private schools.

Full paper: Waller, L., Dreher, T., Hess, K., McCallum, K. & Skogerbo, E. (2020) Media Hierarchies of Attention: News Values and Australia's Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse, *Journalism Studies*, 21:2, 180-196.

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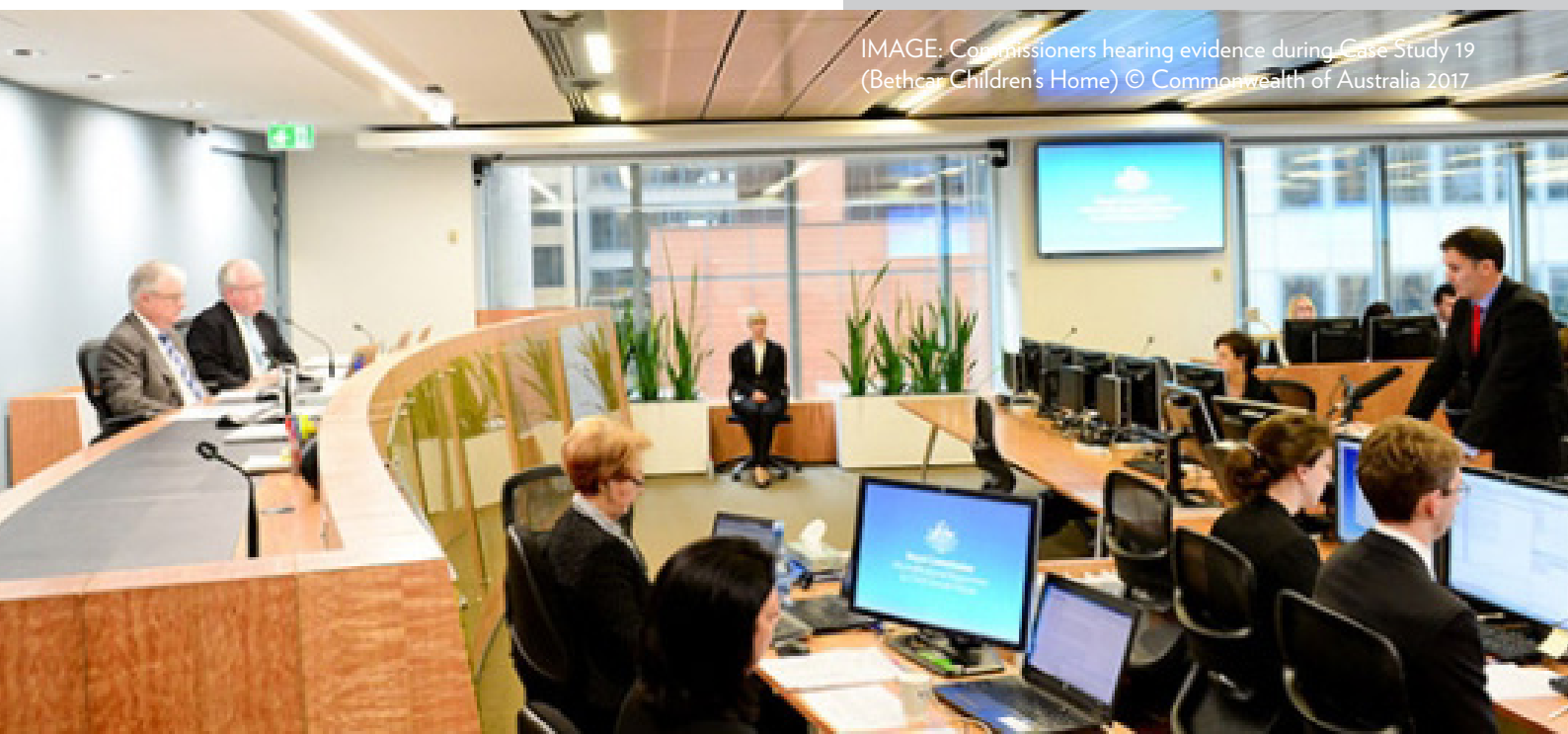


IMAGE: Commissioners hearing evidence during Case Study 19 (Bethcar Children's Home) © Commonwealth of Australia 2017



IMAGE: CLAN members hold up a banner thanking the RCIRCSA as they await its final report
© Lukas Coch / AAP Image.

MEDIA HIERARCHIES OF CARE IN REPORTING ON CARE LEAVERS AND THE RCIRCSA TERMS OF REFERENCE

Alanna Myers and Tanja Dreher

The RCIRCSA documented that 41.6 per cent of all survivors who spoke to the Royal Commission were abused in Out of Home Care (OOHC). Our focus on media, the RCIRCSA and OOHC began with the advocacy of Care Leavers Australasia Network (CLAN) and in consultation with key CLAN spokespeople. Since its inception, CLAN has campaigned for and participated in numerous official inquiries into child abuse in institutions across Australia. CLAN also conducts extensive and ongoing media advocacy work.

Despite the significant achievements of the RCIRCSA, CLAN have argued that the public debate that prompted the Royal Commission, and the subsequent media reporting, reflects what CLAN Vice President Dr Frank Golding OAM has termed a 'hierarchy of esteem' or a hierarchy of care in regards to people who have experienced Out of Home Care (OOHC) as children.

In international comparison, the RCIRCSA Terms of Reference were unusual, restricting the focus of the inquiry to sexual abuse (rather than all forms of child abuse) while also obliging the Royal Commission to examine a very broad range of institutions beyond 'closed' institutions, such as orphanages and missions.

Dr Golding argues care leavers were disappointed in the framing of the Royal Commission for being both: 'too broad, encompassing a range of institutions never before the subject of official inquiries, yet also too narrowly focused on sexual abuse. Care leavers who suffered other forms of abuse were excluded'. '[Its] mandate created unintended consequences, and questions remain about the unmet needs of care leavers who suffered other forms of abuse'.

In this paper we took up these two fundamental concerns with the RCIRCSA Terms of Reference and examined media coverage of the establishment of the Commission. We collected all print articles about the RCIRCSA that were published in two Melbourne newspapers, The Age and the Herald Sun, between 12 November 2012 (the day the Royal Commission was announced by Prime Minister Gillard) and 26 January 2013 (two weeks after the Terms of Reference were announced), resulting in a corpus of 96 articles.

Our content analysis found that survivors/advocates were quoted in 27 articles in total, or just under a third (28%). The most cited sources were religious figures (38, 40%) followed by political figures (28, 29%).

Our previous research found that the Catholic Church, and the figure of George Pell in particular, dominated coverage during the Royal Commission.

These findings suggest that religious figures were occupying considerable column space even before the Royal Commission started. Further critical analysis of the articles in which survivors were cited reveals that they were often positioned further down in articles or in such a way that they did not exert any significant framing power over the narrative.

We also found that very few articles picked up on or questioned the decision to focus the RCIRCSA only on child sexual abuse, and not on other forms of child abuse such as physical or emotional abuse. In fact, only ten articles addressed this question, and only two of these were news articles.

Interestingly, the issue of the Royal Commission focusing only on child sexual abuse was raised the most in letters to the editor, indicating that this was an issue about which there may have been community concern, but which did not make it onto the news agenda.

Conversely, our analysis showed that the term ‘child abuse’ was used interchangeably with child sexual abuse in roughly a third of all articles (34), suggesting a kind of absorption of the former by the latter in the media coverage.

Newspaper reporting did include questions and debate as to the scope of institutions to be covered by the RCIRCSA – but this was framed primarily as a political question in regards to the focus on the Catholic Church. CLAN lobbied for the inquiry to be focused on ‘closed’ rather than ‘open’ institutions.

However, this was not a distinction that the news media used; their discussion of the scope of institutions to be included tended to focus on whether it should be limited to religious organisations or extended to other loosely-defined institutions such as sporting groups.

Overall, we found that while there was extensive media discussion over the form and scope the Royal Commission should take, this was disproportionately focused on the role of the Catholic Church, and the voices of religious leaders dominated the coverage.

Survivor voices did not feature meaningfully in the coverage at this early stage, and care leaver voices and concerns were barely heard. Hence, our findings reinforce the conclusions raised in our previous baseline study about a media ‘hierarchy of attention’ across the reporting of the RCIRCSA, with the result that the concerns of care leaver advocates who had campaigned for a national inquiry were sidelined in the media coverage.

Full paper is in development.

“Very few articles picked up on or questioned the decision to focus the RCIRCSA only on child sexual abuse, and not on other forms of child abuse such as physical or emotional abuse.”



IMAGE: CLAN Vice President Dr Frank Golding and President Leonie Sheedy speak to then Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull in March 2018. Courtesy of Frank Golding.

‘LISTEN, BELIEVE AND PROVIDE JUSTICE’: FIRST NATIONS MEDIA AND KEEPING ALIVE THE FINDINGS OF THE RCIRCSA

Tanja Dreher, Poppy de Souza and Samantha Joseph

In this case study we analyse the contribution of First Nations media in maintaining consistent focus on the removal of Indigenous children from their families, one of the key findings of the RCIRCSA and many other national and state inquiries.

Of the 17,000 survivors who testified to the RCIRCSA, 6,875 of which were heard in private sessions, more than 14 per cent identified as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders (RCIRCSA, 2017, p. 4). Of those, three quarters said they were abused in out-of-home care (OOHC), the majority in a historical residential institution such as a children’s home or mission dormitory.

The RCIRCSA found that the long-term, intergenerational impacts of colonisation, ongoing legacies of removal policies and practices, and the Stolen Generations, all increase Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children’s vulnerability to sexual abuse in institutional contexts. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are significantly overrepresented in out-of-home care and youth detention, exposing them to environments with greater risk.

Our baseline study found that media hierarchies of attention unevenly distribute grief, value, and care, and that despite the over-representation of First Nations survivors who gave evidence in RCIRCSA private hearings, racialised news values contributed to an enduring silence.

“Despite the over-representation of First Nations survivors who gave evidence in RCIRCSA private hearings, racialized news values contributed to an enduring silence.”

Where mainstream media has turned attention to child sexual abuse against Indigenous children, this has often been weaponised against First Nations communities in public discourse and political debate.

Despite clear recommendations coming out of the 1991 Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody (recommendations 205-208) which addressed ethical ways media should report on Aboriginal affairs, a deficit narrative persists, and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander victims of violence and abuse are continually framed as ‘unworthy’ and therefore not newsworthy or worthy of justice.

In this paper, we focus on *Speaking Out*, ABC radio’s longest-running Indigenous program and the first program to be presented *and* produced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. It has been on air for

IMAGE: Radio microphone by Jacob Hodgson / Unsplash.



“Where mainstream media has turned attention to child sexual abuse against Indigenous children, this has often been weaponised against First Nations communities in public discourse and political debate.”

over 30 years. It is produced by the ABC’s Indigenous Unit and is currently hosted by legal academic, writer and filmmaker Larissa Behrendt, a Eualeyai/Kamillaroi woman. We collected *Speaking Out* segments which aired since the 2018 Apology which mentioned either the RCIRCSA, forced child removals, out-of-home care, child welfare and juvenile justice systems, resulting in a corpus of 43 program segments.

First Nations scholars and practitioners on media were foregrounded to inform coding criteria for content and thematic analysis and close listening. Within this, the journalism of Darumbul and South Sea Islander woman Amy McQuire and the ground-breaking book *Does the Media Fail Aboriginal Political Aspirations?* (2020, Aboriginal Studies Press) were touchstones.

While the RCIRCSA was rarely mentioned directly, we found *Speaking Out* provides an example of First Nations-led media that has maintained a consistent focus on the key issues identified by the RCIRCSA and many other inquiries before and since regarding First Nations children and experiences of institutional abuse and ongoing impacts of colonial violence.

Our preliminary analysis found Indigenous expertise, self-determination, and political aspirations regarding Indigenous children were prioritised on *Speaking Out*. Significantly, we found an absence and rejection of ‘deficit discourse’. While inclusive of non-Indigenous audiences who ‘listen in’, the program does not take up a white standpoint.

Speaker analysis found Indigenous expertise and voices representing Aboriginal Community Controlled sector organisations were prioritised, with regular appearances of high-profile or ‘elite’ speakers representing the National Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation (NACCHO), the Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency (VACCA), the Secretariat

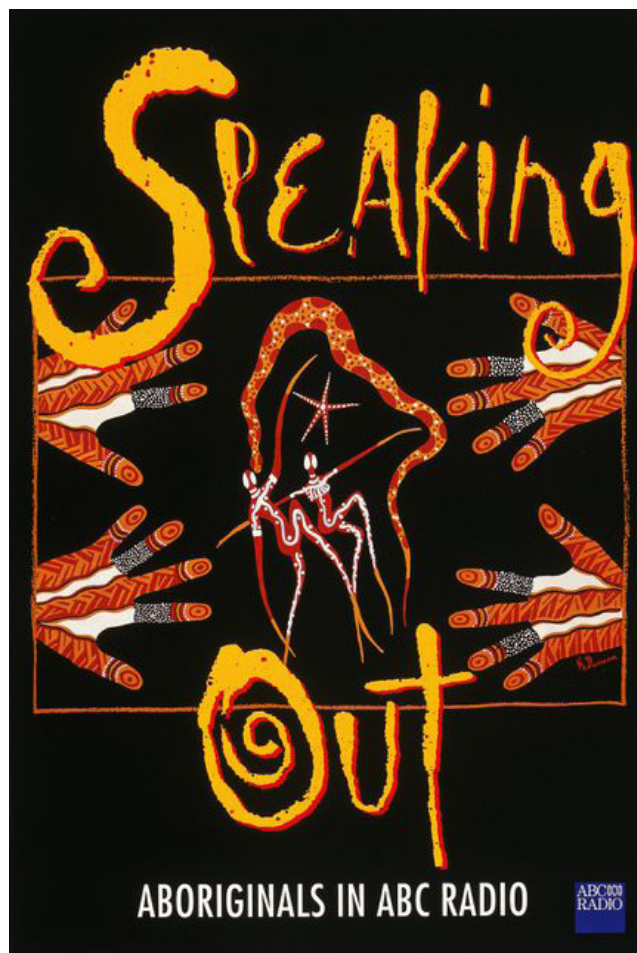


IMAGE: ‘Speaking Out / Aboriginals in ABC Radio’, colour off-set on paper, featuring artwork by Kevin Butler, 1990-1996. In the Powerhouse Collection, Museum of Applied Arts & Sciences.

of National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care (SNAICC) and the SNAIC-led Family Matters campaign. Non-Indigenous voices were in the minority and were either legal academics or activists/organisers with direct expertise in areas of policy and law reform relating to out-of-home-care, youth detention, and forced child removals.

Aboriginal victims and survivors of out of home care and youth detention, including Stolen Generations survivors, were less prominent within our corpus. However, when they were featured, we found Behrendt affords them time and space to speak in their own terms without interruption or interrogation.

The segment *Listen, Believe and Provide Justice*, which aired the week following the 2018 National Apology and featured two Aboriginal Elders and Stolen Generations survivors from Kinchela Boys Home in New South Wales, is an exemplar for the way Behrendt grounds the conversation in First Nations relationships and cultural strength, and is sensitive to context-specific processes for collective healing and justice.

Full paper is in development.



DISABLING MEDIA: TROUBLING NEWS REPORTING OF DISABILITY 'CARE' AND VIOLENCE

Poppy de Souza and Tanja Dreher

This strand of the project is in its early stages of engagement and thus provisional. Our interest in focusing on media and disability comes out of twin observations. First, that there is a consistent pattern where groups more likely to encounter circumstances that increase their risk of abuse in institutions, and thus more 'vulnerable' to abuse—identified by the RCIRCSA as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander survivors, survivors from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, and survivors with disability—are consistently under-represented in media in terms of political voice and structurally marginalised or overshadowed by media norms of ableism and whiteness.

And second, that the writing, scholarship, and media activism of people with disability in response to both the RCIRCSA and the current Disability Royal Commission does important work to problematise journalistic and media norms in productive and potentially transformative ways; we thus aim to foreground the knowledge, expertise, and media activism of people with disability (including through collaboration and co-authorship) in this strand of the project.

The RCIRCSA heard from children who lived with disability at the time of their abuse and of the needs of adult survivors with disability. The RCIRCSA considered both mainstream and disability-specific historical residential institutions and intuitional contexts such as schools, foster care and respite care etc. Survivors with disability gave evidence in public hearings and private sessions. Of the 6,875 survivors the RCIRCSA heard from in private sessions, 4.3 per cent identified as having a disability at the time of the abuse.



Children with disability were over-represented in sites of lawful institutional violence and incarceration—out-of-home ‘care’ and youth detention and immigration detention settings—and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander survivors with disability were over-represented (16 per cent). The RCIRCSA heard that survivors with disability were often caught between disability-specific services with inadequate understanding of trauma, and therapeutic services with little understanding of disability or which were inaccessible to survivors with disability.

Previous research demonstrates that news values and media priorities can reproduce systems of violence, debilitation, and injustice through what Cate Thill has termed ‘disabling hierarchies of attention’. First Nations people and people with disability hold deep ambivalence towards both commissions of inquiry and mainstream media and call attention to the trauma of repeated cycles of inaction.

Some victim-survivor and disability organisations raise concerns around the intense focus by government and the media on sexual abuse which risks elevating the status of this form of abuse to the exclusion of all others based on a hierarchy of victimhood. We see evidence of this in instances where violence against people with disability (including institutional abuse of children with disability as identified by the RCIRCSA) enacted in and through lawful forms of violence are often not understood or reported on as violence by the media.

News journalism too often focuses on ‘exceptional’, individual ‘events’ or acts of abuse rather than the slow and cumulative violence of institutional harm. We take inspiration from disability justice and critical disability media interventions which problematise ‘care’ and lawful violence and look to spaces of disability media activism which help us critically examine what ‘counts’ as violence against people with disability, including disability-specific forms of ‘care’ and control.

Media routinely falls short in responding to the political aspiration ‘nothing about us without us’ when news stories are more likely to hear from family, ‘loved ones’, carers, and disability service providers rather than centring the political voice of people living with disability, their authority and expertise.

“

Some victim-survivor and disability organisations raise concerns around the intense focus by government and the media on sexual abuse which risks elevating the status of this form of abuse to the exclusion of all others based on a hierarchy of victimhood.

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Too often, the voices of disabled people are diverted into therapeutic or ‘friendly’ modes of listening where their stories are packaged to resonate on an individual register of empathy or ‘care’, rather than on a structural and temporal register of justice or institutional transformation.

Beyond access, participation, and representation in media, we aim to look beyond reform and inclusion for remedy or as an end point; instead, we move towards a critical analysis of ableism, power, and privilege within media, following disability justice movements, which insist media be ‘done’ differently.

Full paper is in development.

LOCAL JOURNALISM





IMAGE: The Children's Memorial Garden, Neerkol, St Joseph's Home (1885 - 1978) Kabra, Rockhampton © Eorde Foundation

LOCAL JOURNALISM AND THE ETHICS OF INQUIRY

Kristy Hess, Kerry McCallum, Lisa Waller and Alanna Myers

In this research we explore the moral and ethical decision-making practices of local journalists who reported on clergy sexual abuse linked to Australia's Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse (2013-2017).

Public and scholarly attention to the role of journalism in relation to this sensitive and complex issue has mostly focused on the interventionist role of investigative journalists who are largely credited for bringing the issue into the national spotlight.

However, as these crimes always occur in local communities, there is a need to address how media coverage plays out in place-based news settings, particularly where the town is the focus of national reporting. We captured and recorded the spoken word of nine journalists who had lived in and reported on child sexual abuse in the Ballarat region. The approach draws on Couldry's (2004, 2012) 'media as practice' approach that emphasises participants' practices rather than analysing their responses to survey questions, discourses or narratives.

The diverse and geographically extensive Catholic Diocese of Ballarat has 43 parishes and covers the western third of the state of Victoria. Its headquarters are in the regional city of Ballarat, which became known as an epicentre of clergy sexual abuse through national and international news coverage of the Child Abuse Royal Commission.

“As these crimes always occur in local communities, there is a need to address how media coverage plays out in place-based news settings.”

Two of the most high-profile investigations of Australia's longest, most complex, and expensive Royal Commission were Cases 28 and 35 that pertained to clergy sexual abuse in the Ballarat Catholic archdiocese (Wright, Swain & McPhillips 2017, Wright & Swain 2018).

Over the five years of unprecedented coverage of the RCIRCSA public commentaries represented the region as 'one of the most dangerous places to be a child' in the 1970s when paedophile priests and Christian Brothers were enabled in their crimes through inaction and cover-ups by the Catholic Church.

During this period, reporting of clergy sexual abuse and its devastating effects on individuals and families became central to the news agendas of the city's regional daily newspaper, *The Courier*, other regional newspapers such as Warrnambool's *The Standard*, and ABC Ballarat, the largest Australian Broadcasting Corporation regional newsroom in Victoria, which also broadcasts into the south-west of the state.

IMAGE: Ballarat residents attend a Town Hall meeting during Case Study 28.





IMAGE: Journalists at a press conference. By The Climate Reality Project / Unsplash.

Our research reinforces scholarship that positions local journalists as having a uniquely close relationship with audiences and who serve as a powerful moral compass in shaping the way a community understands itself. The journalists were able to confront and ‘own’ the past and ongoing trauma of clergy sexual abuse in their communities.

Journalists in the Ballarat diocese reporting on the Child Abuse Royal Commission were acutely aware of the normative expectations of truth-telling and recounted how they enacted that responsibility, including the challenges that arose when their deeply-felt moral responsibility to honour survivors’ voices was perceived by some in the community to clash with the journalistic responsibility to remain neutral and not ‘take sides’.

For some journalists, there was a personal moral responsibility to move from a position of silence because of their deep sense of connection to the Ballarat region and being a ‘local’, while others felt this moral responsibility despite being ‘new’ to the town. *Courier* journalist and long-time Ballarat local Fiona Henderson, who wrote more than 100 reports on clergy sexual abuse, said:

I knew I led the coverage ... but I should. [It’s] my home ground. My people.

Personal moral and professional ethical considerations came together here around a common thread of *justice*, namely a conviction that victims and survivors had not been treated justly in the past, and this conviction shaped journalists’ reporting practices. Many of the journalists and editors who were interviewed discussed the importance of changes to editorial policy that put the focus on survivors, reflecting the

truth-telling mission of the Royal Commission. All the journalists we spoke to with experience of the issue reflected on the fact it was a transformative approach.

“I knew I led the coverage ... but I should. [It’s] my home ground. My people.”

Without exception, interviewees paid tribute to survivors, victims, and their supporters for leading the campaign for truth-telling and changing the media’s approach and city’s response to the issue. While some of the journalists interviewed had left Ballarat to work at metropolitan news outlets, or left the industry, they all spoke of their continuing personal and professional relationships with some survivors, and many of them still report on or deal with the issue of clergy sexual abuse. On a personal level, many interviewees reflected that their reporting of clergy sexual abuse and especially their engagement with survivors, victims’ families and their supporters, changed them forever.

The research provided valuable insights to understand how local journalists carefully cultivated relationships with local sources and audiences in order to report sensitively and respectfully on the local impacts of a national inquiry.

Full paper: Hess, K., McCallum, K., Waller, L., & Myers, A. (2021) Local Journalism and the ethics of inquiry, *Ethical Space: The International Journal of Communication Ethics* 18(3/4) pp 20.35)

BEARING WITNESS ‘PROXIMALLY: BALLARAT’S THE COURIER REPORTING OF CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE, 2010-19

Kerry McCallum, Lisa Waller and Alanna Myers

In this case study we explored how a local newsroom bore witness ‘proximally’ to the historical trauma and suffering of institutional child sexual abuse that was, and continues to be, embedded in the social and cultural experience of its community. We argue that while there has been much attention to national reporting of the Royal Commission, less attention has been paid to how local newspapers covered the issue of institutional child sexual abuse, particularly in communities that have been the focus of the national story.

The regional Victorian town of Ballarat came to be widely recognised as an ‘epicentre’ of clergy sexual abuse through saturation coverage of Case Studies 28 and 35 of the RCIRCSA. Ballarat’s newspaper, *The Courier*, is one of Australia’s oldest newspapers, serving the Victorian city of 100,000 citizens since 1867, and remains a significant local institution despite severe disruption in the Australian newspaper industry.

We used content and qualitative thematic analysis to generate a comprehensive record of *The Courier*’s coverage of child sexual abuse for the local community as it reckoned with its own past. The team collected 1,267 items from *The Courier* over a 10-year period

surrounding the Royal Commission from 2010-19, and documented the volume of locally produced journalism, sustained reporting, sources, editorial ‘ownership’ and involvement in local community campaigns.

A key finding was that despite severe contractions in the newspaper industry including newsroom mergers and closures, *The Courier*’s editors committed significant resources to telling the story of child sexual abuse in Ballarat’s Catholic schools, churches and orphanages. Over the ten years more than 70 per cent of the coverage was generated in-house, and its journalists sustained their interest in the issue over time.

“*The Courier*’s editors committed significant resources to telling the story of child sexual abuse in Ballarat’s Catholic schools, churches and orphanages.”

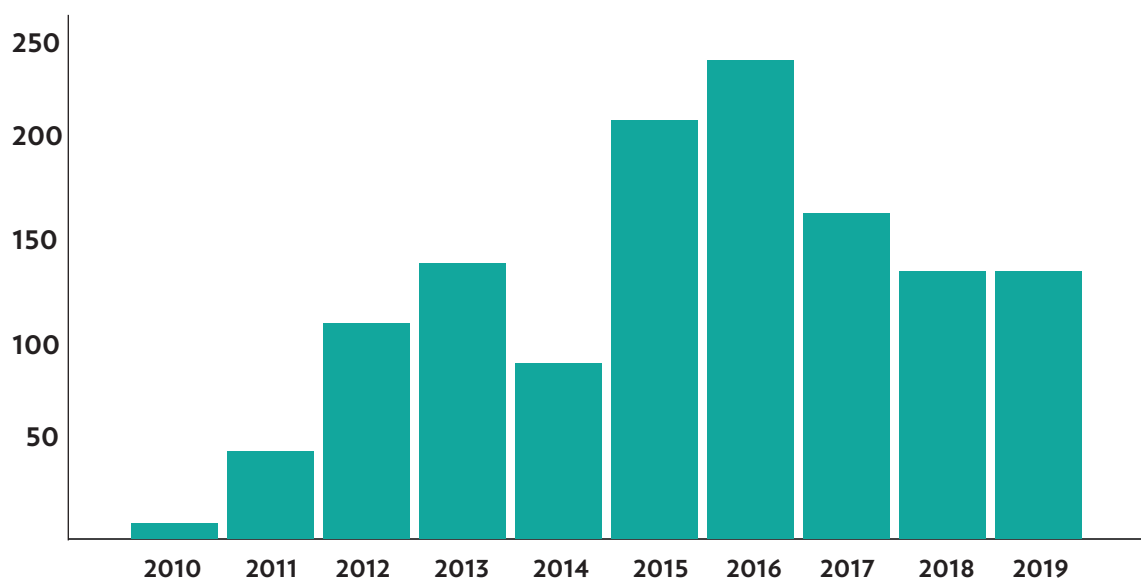


FIGURE 2: *The Courier*’s coverage of institutional child sexual abuse, 2010-2019.

The Courier broke several national stories, including exclusive coverage of a leaked Victoria Police report in 2012 that more than 40 suicides were linked to clergy sexual abuse in Ballarat region. It reported extensively on Case Studies 28 and 35 with coverage peaking in May 2015 and February 2016. Taking a victim-centred approach, *The Courier* stayed close to its local community as *revelations* of abuse emerged through the Royal Commission.

Our analysis identified that *The Courier* not only revealed the extent and impacts of historical institutional child sexual abuse in the Ballarat region; it played a key role in working with the community to face up to, or *reckon with*, its history and continuing impacts of clergy sexual abuse. Its reporting focused on the ongoing and devastating impacts of abuse on victims, their families and the wider community through suicide, mental illness and substance abuse *The Courier* spoke directly to the community through its editorials.

The people of Ballarat are about to face, arguably, one of the toughest periods in our history. Over the next three weeks, the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual abuse will sit at the Ballarat law courts. Paedophile priests and their victims will be required to provide insight into heinous offending which took place at local institutions. (*The Courier*, 2015, 18 May, Public hearings to shine a light on Ballarat's sordid history, p. 13.)

The final theme identified through our qualitative analysis was *recovery*. Through its editorial support for the LOUD Fence movement and funding for journalist Melissa Cunningham to travel to Rome for the Pell hearing, the local paper saw itself at the very heart of the community while it held the globally powerful to account through its coverage of this grassroots movement.

Loud Fence is getting louder... One of the darkest legacies of these crimes was to drive its victims out into a wilderness of guilt and self-destruction. But this gesture [tying ribbons to a fence] says in the simplest of ways the community recognises the wrong and is with you now. (*The Courier*, 2016, 1 February, The power of a message of community hope.)

The paper concludes that regional newsrooms can play a crucial role in working with communities to confront shameful truths and profound failures. We refer to this as 'proximal' media witnessing.

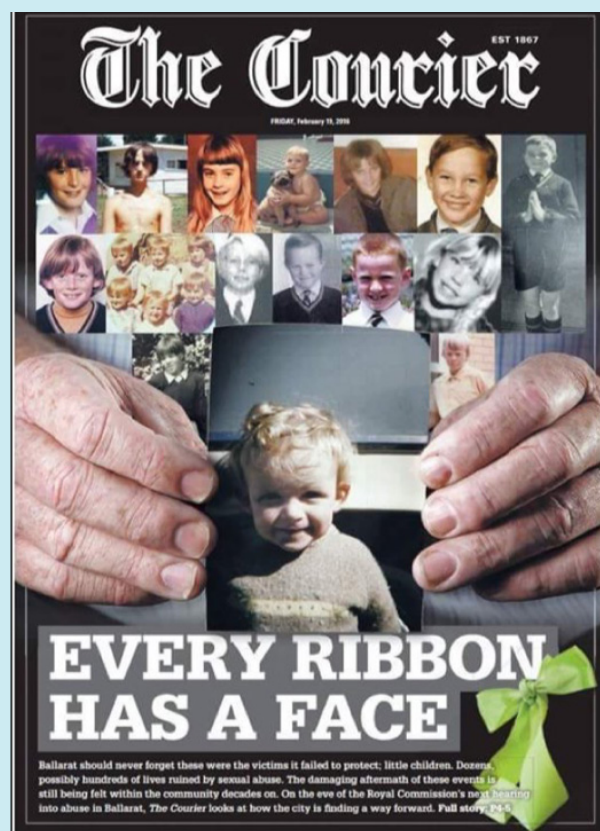


IMAGE: Cover of Ballarat's *The Courier* dated February 17, 2016.

For a local newsroom to witness proximally, it must commit to unflinchingly telling the story over a sustained period, it must commit resources to support local journalists to produce original news stories, its editors must take ownership of the story on behalf of its journalists and the community, involve itself in grassroots community campaigns, and it must commit to telling stories of marginalised or victimized community members in the face of powerful local institutions.

Through its coverage, Ballarat's local newspaper demonstrated the capacity for local journalism to marshal its resources and prioritise the issue and produce a local journalism that is deeply embedded and invested in the community on which it reports. *The Courier's* sustained and embedded reporting stands up as a model for best practice local journalism as it reckons with its relevance in a time of severe disruption.

This locally produced journalism was recognised by the Australian journalism industry through the award of multiple journalism prizes to *The Courier's* Melissa Cunningham. Her journalism showed that it is in this 'proximal' aspect of witnessing that local journalism can carry out some of its most meaningful work.

Full paper: McCallum, K., Waller, L., & Myers, A. (under review) *Revelation, reckoning and recovery: Bearing witness proximally in local journalism.*



JOURNALISM, TEMPORAL REFLEXIVITY AND THE COLLECTIVE MEMORY OF CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE IN A LOCAL NEWS SETTING

Kristy Hess and Kerry McCallum

This research was prompted by the curiosity about how journalists may have historically represented sites where horrific acts of sexual abuse took place, notably orphanages in regional Australia, and their custodians. It sought to understand whether news outlets publicly reflect on their own mediated history during profound mediated moments such as a national inquiry. The research takes as a case study the former Neerkol Orphanage located on the outskirts of the regional city of Rockhampton, Queensland.

Built in 1885, the orphanage was home to more than 4000 children, including child migrants from Britain and Indigenous children separated from their families, before it eventually closed in 1975. In the 1990s, however, allegations of sexual abuse against former residents began to surface publicly, gaining media and political attention and generating survivor advocacy.

In response, the Queensland government commissioned the Forde Inquiry into the Abuse of Children in Institutions. However, due to criminal proceedings the findings in relation to St Joseph's Neerkol were closed. The true scale of the horror at Neerkol was exposed during Case Study 26 of the RCIRCSA (2013–2017).

This research adopted an across-time analysis of news coverage of the local newspaper in Rockhampton *The Morning Bulletin*, focusing on a snapshot comparison between two time periods of 1944–1954 and 2010–2020. It found news coverage of the orphanage shifted from one of community giving and the glorification

of ‘ideal public servants’ who served the institution in the 1940s and 50s to a site of horror and healing some decades later.

There was no evidence in contemporary coverage of the newspaper acknowledging these changing media representations, especially during coverage of the Commission itself. During the 1940s, it is evident the Neerkol Orphanage was a site of shared community responsibility and its custodians celebrated for their noble work.

The paper highlights the example of a chief inspector who is praised in news coverage for being a ‘ray of sunshine’ upon his retirement in the 1950s only to be exposed for his role in facilitating (or turning a blind eye) to evil decades later during the Royal Commission. This we contend, is evidence of how media’s construction of reality is dependent on social, cultural and political context of a given time.

While collective memory scholars tend to focus on commemorative events, the across time analysis also highlights that collective memory is one shared and constructed across community institutions – in the historical coverage it is the church, police and business leaders that are referenced in articles that build a collective understanding of “giving” and “community

celebration” and the glorification of orphanage custodians. In contemporary coverage, meanwhile it is the Commission itself that appears to instigate and redirect the collective memory to one of horror and healing.

Further the shaping of collective memory tends to orbit around constructed or spontaneous events in the ‘present’ time, from annual spiritual celebrations and organised fund-raising festivities to Royal Commissions and court hearings. We advocate a need to turn the lens back on a news outlet’s own history to provide a chance to acknowledge the past in present and reflect on these changing representations.

There is a need to acknowledge the role of journalism in recording history, and engaging with past media practices to inform, if not enrich, the present. We do not suggest local journalists failed victims of child sexual abuse, but rather argue temporal reflexivity may be an important step for journalism practice in both reconciling and making sense of the past (no matter how uncomfortable).

Full paper: Hess, K., & McCallum, K. (2022) Journalism, temporal reflexivity and the collective memory of child sexual abuse in a local news setting, *Media History*.



IMAGE: A news story published on the front page of the *Morning Bulletin* (Rockhampton), December 27, 1949.

“We advocate a need to turn the lens back on a news outlet’s own history to provide a chance to acknowledge the past in present and reflect on these changing representations.”



IMAGE: Still frame from the 'Parragirls, Past, Present' film (2017)
© Jill Bennett, Bonney Djuric, Lily Hibberd.





MEDIATING VIA MATERIALITY: CONTINUING CRITICAL CONVERSATIONS AROUND CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE IN AUSTRALIA

Megan Deas and Kerry McCallum

This essay is based on a panel discussion at the *Difficult Conversations* symposium held in Canberra in March 2022. The panel brought together researchers examining the role of print and visual media in the Royal Commission with community organisations and artists. The essay draws on the words and images of panel members to explore two creative responses to the Commission's findings in which material objects have facilitated difficult conversations about its revelations.

LOUD Fence is a community-driven movement based in the city of Ballarat that uses colourful ribbons tied to fences of institutions implicated by the Commission to acknowledge the trauma of victims and survivors. Maureen (Mauz) Hatcher is the founder of LOUD Fence, while Karen (Kaz) Monument is its Chair. Megan Deas from the *Breaking Silences* project is researching the role of visual activism in the Child Abuse Royal Commission, while textile artist Kerry Martin uses a reparative aesthetic to encourage audiences to confront the testimony of victims/survivors of child sexual abuse of the Catholic church by disrupting church authority and fostering ongoing conversations around painful events.

This paper argues that the ribbons which are at the core of the LOUD Fence campaign are a powerful metaphor for voice due to their potential as a creative and communal project. We find that while the material objects themselves may function as a silent mediator between the victims/survivors and the institutions to which the ribbons are tied, the power of the broader campaign is its role in bringing individuals together at the sites to engage in a difficult conversation about what occurred in these places.

The paper also explores the work of textile artist Kerry Martin's doctoral research, which responds to the testimony of hundreds of victims/survivors subjected to child sexual abuse in Australia, focusing on the Catholic Church. She argues that in addition to the inherent materiality of textiles, they also possess a language – they can be metaphors and metonyms, texts with political messaging, or they translate abstract concepts into tangible form.

Martin reflects that textiles can be familiar, playful, and universal. Through crafting beautiful and intricate objects intended to hold the viewer's attention rather than force them to turn away, her aim is to promote learning and ongoing conversations with and amongst her viewers, and in the context of art-based commentary, a different format for stories to continue to be told. But she is also reflexive about the ethical considerations of creating work such as this. Whose stories is the work telling? How can she tell these stories by amplifying the voices of survivors, without reinterpreting them?

In this essay we reflected on what it is about the material aspects of the two approaches that is so effective in sparking this difficult but necessary conversation. Reflecting on both LOUD Fence and Kerry Martin's art, we find that materiality renders the difficult conversation tangible, making it both personal and public. Megan asks: is the ribbon or art a cloak, a magic shield? In what ways does it challenge or undermine Church authority? Maureen responds that:

“I always say once they're tied to a fence they take on quite different meaning. They're, I don't want to say magical but to me they really become a little bit magic, in that they become a survivor's voice.”

Both of the projects use material objects to subvert institutional authority and empower victims/survivors by giving them a voice.

The work of Martin and LOUD Fence is therefore inherently political; they are grass roots artistic responses to spark conversations that foreground the voices and experiences of those who have suffered at the hands of such powerful institutions. Child sexual abuse is often difficult to think or speak about – it is too abhorrent, it happens behind closed doors, its taboo nature means that it is often not spoken about when it does happen due to the shame that victims/survivors are made to feel. These textiles – the ribbons and these ecclesiastical vestments – are a tangible representation of this most difficult subject.

The paper concludes that difficult conversations are not only necessary to enable victims/survivors to restore their sense of self, to enable their communities to demonstrate support, and to confront viewers with these uncomfortable truths. But they are also necessary in the process of shifting public discourse around these topics. The 'magic' of the textiles, and the creative use of textiles in these two instances, is that they highlight how art and community can facilitate this necessary work.

Full paper is under review with the British Council.

The full panel discussion is available to view at <https://adifficultconversation.com/item/kerry-mccallum-in-conversation-with-maureen-hatcher-karen-monument-megan-deas-and-kerry-martin/>



IMAGE: A work-in-progress image of a textile Rosary, part of Kerry Martin's doctoral research © Kerry J Martin.

IMAGE: LOUD Fence ribbons tied to a metal fence © Peter Kervarec.



PARRAMATTA FEMALE FAC

THE PARRAGIRLS FEMINIST ARCHIVE AND REPARATIVE MEDIA PRACTICES IN THE WAKE OF INSTITUTIONAL HARM AND MEDIA DAMAGE

Poppy de Souza and Tanja Dreher

In this case study, we focused on the creative practices and media interventions of a loose collection of Parramatta Girls Home survivors, known as Parragirls, to explore how the intersecting logics of news media and commissions of inquiry can be deeply problematic and violent for female victim-survivors of child sexual abuse and where media visibility is, at best, a double-edged sword.

The Parragirls archive offers parallel, complementary, and alternative genres of testimonial practice and witnessing to both media and official inquiries. Attention to the Parragirls archive complicates one of key media narratives which emerged during the RCIRCSA public hearings about abuses at Parramatta Girls Home, that ‘providing evidence, while traumatic can be beneficial and worthwhile’.

Historical residential institutions the Parramatta Girls Home in western Sydney and the Institution for Girls in Hay (Hay) in rural New South Wales were identified early on by the RCIRCSA as the focus of one of its public case studies (Case Study 7). Parramatta Girls Home operated under the Child Welfare Act 1939

(NSW) and housed adolescent females classed as ‘uncontrollable’ or ‘neglected’ as well as convicted juvenile offenders.

Both institutions were subject to a cluster of sexual abuse and cover up allegations spanning two decades (1950-74), allowing the RCIRCSA to consider key systematic issues, including the out-of-home ‘care’ and juvenile justice systems, and redress schemes available for victims of child sexual abuse. The RCIRCSA heard evidence from 16 former inmates of Parramatta Girls Home, some of whom also spent time in Hay. More than one third who gave evidence were Aboriginal and many identified as living with disability or receiving a Disability Pension.

Parramatta Girls Home is located within the Parramatta Female Factory Precinct (PFFP), on the traditional lands of the Burramattagal clan of the Darug Nation. The site has borne witness to a long history of female incarceration and punitive confinement and is thus foundational in the establishment and evolution of the out-of-home ‘care’ (OOHC), welfare, and juvenile justice systems in Australia. Today, it is Australia’s



IMAGE: The Parragirls Female Factory building
© Richard Milnes / Alamy

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We found a consistent orientation towards self-determined creative agency, survivor-led meaning-making, and site-responsive practices of repair beyond institutional redress.

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first officially recognised Site of Conscience. Yet for as long as the PFFP has been a site of institutional gendered violence, it has also been a site of anti-carceral resistance, intersectional feminist solidarity, and collective action. Survivor-led feminist activism and advocacy, including through media, played a crucial role in raising public awareness of conditions at Parramatta Girls and the Hay Institution and in agitating for their closure in 1974.

Since the early 2000s, a loose collective of Parragirls have been engaged in a range of creative practices and media interventions beyond the boundaries of news. These provide alternative genres of testimony that supplement and critique media and official inquiries (see <https://www.parragirls.org.au/>).

Our analysis found evidence of the costs and harms of extractive news media attention and contrasting practices that centre creative modes of resistance, reparation, and repair. Parragirls have been exposed to and resisted criminalizing media framings—as ‘riotous’, ‘delinquent’ or ‘deviant’—which reproduce highly raced, gendered, and classed hierarchies of news media attention. These frames compound stigma and shame while overhadowing the harms of institutional gendered violence.

In contrast, much of the Parragirls work has been undertaken outside news media logics and beyond the RCIRCSAs focus on child sexual abuse. We found

a consistent orientation towards self-determined creative agency, survivor-led meaning-making, and site-responsive practices of repair beyond institutional redress.

Parragirls Past, Present: Unlocking memories of institutional ‘care’ (2017), for instance, is a multimedia work which tells of strategies of survival in conditions of pervasive institutional violence, acts of collective defiance and solidarity, and moments of humour and escape—however brief.

Crucially, it redirects attention to shift responsibility back on to state institutions of injustice, including the NSW Department of Family and Child Services all the while sheltering Parragirls from further exposure to media harm. This is an instructive lesson for journalists.

Our analysis indicates that media must work beyond a politics of reform, inclusion or ‘responsible reporting’, and instead must foreground transformative processes and outcomes well beyond news representation and media logics. The Parragirls archive alerts us to possibilities for more reparative media practices led by, and accountable to, the communities most impacted—with institutional transformation and site-responsive responses to trauma and memorialization as central, grounded in a vital politics of collective care and repair.

Full paper is under review with *Feminist Media Studies*.

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Printed November 2022

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