

New Types of Objectivity:

How methods to achieve objectivity has become its outcome, how the media has divided between being a partisan and public service model, being relatively objective and how impartiality and fairness are a more realistic goal than objectivity.

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OBJECTIVITY, IMPARTIALITY AND FAIRNESS—DEFINITIONS AND HISTORY

To understand what objectivity, impartiality and fairness mean, we must go back to basics—dictionary definitions. The definition of objectivity or to be objective, according to the Cambridge Dictionary is to be “based on facts and not influenced by personal beliefs or feelings.” (2014). The definition of impartiality or to be impartial, according to the Cambridge Dictionary is “not supporting any of the sides involved in an argument.” (2014). Finally, the definition of fairness or to be fair according to the Cambridge Dictionary is “the quality of treating people equally or in a way that is right or reasonable.” (2014) (In a journalistic context, while you do treat people equally, you also have to treat all sides of the story equally).

While these concepts are different, all three require a person to not be influenced by anything and practicing equality. It can be easy to see why some journalists mistake impartiality and fairness as achieving objectivity or being objective. Especially with well-known media codes of ethics emphasising the need to be fair and balanced rather than objective. For example, the first General Principle that the Australian Press Council applies in its General Statement of Principles is to report accurately and fairly.

“General Principle 1: Accurate, fair and balanced reporting—publications should take reasonable steps to ensure reports are accurate, fair and balanced. They should not deliberately mislead or misinform readers either by omission or commission.” (2011)

Similarly, the Media Entertainment & Arts Alliance (MEAA) code of ethics states that “Alliance members engaged in journalism must commit themselves to honesty, fairness, independence and respect for the rights of others.” (2014) *The Sydney Morning Herald’s* code of ethics also emphasise fairness and impartiality, but say nothing about objectivity. “Impartiality—staff will not allow personal interest, or any belief or commitment, to undermine their accuracy, fairness or independence. Fairness—staff will use fair, honest and responsible means to obtain material. They will identify themselves and the newspaper before obtaining interviews or images.” (2014).

The history of journalism objectivity can be traced back to the nineteenth century, particularly to the wire services and the education of the journalists during that time. In regard to the education of journalists during this time, most journalists were trained in some sort of scientific discipline and therefore took a scientific approach to their writing, as well as the editors’ desire for accuracy. Objectivity is also traced back to the wire services, due to the effects that the telegraph had on language and delivery.

“The wire services supposedly led to a lean, unadorned ‘objective’ style; a form of writing stripped of locality, regional touches and colloquialisms. This is understandable given that the price per character was one cent. Wires employed factual, denotative and functional language, leaning towards the inverted pyramid form.” (Maras, 2013, pp28-29)

“Some writers have argued that the idea of objectivity was spread by the wire services and that these services adopted it for commercial reasons. During the nineteenth century, most political news was presented in either a partisan or interpretive style. But a wire service that wanted to sell news to many newspapers reflecting various political views

had to be non-partisan...it had to stick to facts and leave judgment to the papers.” (Breen, 1998, p121).

The idea of objectivity rose in the 1920s and 1930s due to the effect of propaganda during World War I. “Many journalists had also been involved in wartime propaganda or had seen it in operation at close quarters and their experience made them sceptical about news from official sources.” (Breen, 1998, p124) Despite this scepticism, the ideal of formal or professional objectivity caught on.

JOURNALISTIC PROCESS, OBJECTIVITY AND NEWS FRAMES

Despite the scepticism that journalists developed of news and facts from official sources during World War I due to their exposure and involvement in propaganda, it didn't stop the journalists from using the material.

Despite the obvious use of propaganda as public relations, the propagandists seemed to have no trouble manoeuvring around journalistic objectivity. According to the International Encyclopedia of Propaganda (1998) “Everyone is subject to some degree of prejudice or bias. This represents no difficulty for propagandists but is, rather, an advantage, as objectivity is part of their frame of reference only when particular propaganda is meant to give the impression of being objective.” (p543) Propaganda was powerful due to its delivery, the most powerful was not the propaganda that was false or blatantly fear-filled rather it was the propaganda that was accurate but not complete. The propagandists manipulated the material and the messages to suit their needs and they argue that journalists do a similar thing. “For centuries journalists have been using selectivity bias to stress some points of view at the expense of others.” (p404) This is where news frames come in.

“(News frames) They highlight some aspects of events behind a story and downplay others, often with the effect of supporting a certain way of looking at the world. This is accomplished by word choice and by source selection.” (Baresch, Hsu & Reese, 2012, p637)

The theoretical and practical application of news frames in journalism did not immediately follow World War I propaganda, it can be traced back to 1974 when sociologist, Erving Goffman introduced the theory in his book, *Frame Analysis: An Essay on the Organization of Experience*.

“News media are no doubt the most important actors in the framing process: They are the frame generators, organizers, and transmitters, linking social structure and the individual. News content is not mere combination of words; it carries embedded social meaning and reflects the prevalent organizing principles in society through journalists' selection of words, news sources and metaphors. This process sets the boundary of an issue, reduces a complex situation to a simple theme, and shapes people's interpretations by making some elements salient while ignoring others.” (Baresch, Hsu & Reese, 2012, p638)

News frames as stated in the Baresch, Hsu & Reese references are accomplished by word choice and by source selection, which means that the way a story is framed is decided,

if not done through the journalistic process by individual journalists, which would be directed at them by the publication that they are employed by.

“Occasionally a journalist or news organization deliberately adopts a specific ideology, but often their work routines and source availability lies behind these choices. In any case, news frames lay the foundation on which we citizens build our collective understanding of our world.” (Baresch, Hsu & Reese, 2012, p638)

This is true with newspapers that adopt either a public service or partisan model to work and publish by, which I will be discussing in the “Newspapers and objectivity—the partisan and public service/watchdog models” section. So if, on occasion or permanently a journalist and/or news organisation deliberately adopts a specific ideology, which is proven in their news frames, does that mean that these publications are abandoning objectivity? Not entirely. News frames obviously don’t make the news or publications objective, however they only slightly tip the scales into the favour of one ideology or another. They don’t completely absorb the publication or journalist into one ideology or another. However how news is framed depends on the journalist and/or the publication, usually more often than not it’s the publication, however a “journalists’ commitment to objectivity shifts, depending on the material they’re covering” (Meikle, 2009, p100). This is especially true with targeted/niche publications and online journalism, which I will be discussing in the “Targeted/niche publications—relative objectivity and target audience” and the “Online journalism, blogs and objectivity—is it possible?” sections.

OBJECTIVE VS INTERPRETIVE TRUTHS AND JOURNALISM

“There are two general views of journalism. The first view is of a neutral, professional, objective, restrained and technically efficient journalism based on the idea that the news media are impartial transmission belts conveying information to the public and that the journalist’s job is to watch the ongoing social process and to transmit accurate, faithful accounts of it, free of sensationalism or bias. The second view is that of the journalist as a participant in the news. Significant news would only come to light as a result of the journalism imposing his or her own point of view on it. Participants believe that the news must be reported in context, with journalists imposing their own points of view on it. Participants also believe that the journalist must provide the background and interpretation necessary to give the events meaning.” (Breen, 1998, p122)

Breen states that one criticism of these two views is that it makes the journalist live in a split professional existence—the journalist must be objective and neutral yet must also be a participant and report in context to what’s happening and what they are reporting on. Breen also states that journalists are already living in this split professional existence as “there is a continuing debate between objectivity and subjectivity, observer and watchdog conceptions of the press and libertarian neutrality and social responsibility.” (p122) This debate is due to the nature of the publication, the practice of the journalist and the fact that objectivity is in the eyes of the beholder or reader.

Conley questions whether journalists should be searching for ‘objective’ or ‘interpretive’ truths. These questions of what truths journalists should search for and what truths they find in a story can determine how objective a story is found by a reader.

“Should journalists search for ‘objective truths’ that rely on the reporter’s fact-gathering and the reader’s interpretive abilities? Or should they be searching for ‘interpretive truths’ that rely on the reader’s clinical reasoning skills and that leave room for journalistic licence? (1997, p285)

‘Objective truths’ are truths that journalists should search for if trying to aim for as much objectivity in their work as possible, whereas ‘interpretive truths’ are truths that journalists should search for if aiming for impartiality and/or fairness. These truths can be easily seen in newspapers and magazines. The ‘objective truths’ are usually seen in the journalistic practices of newspapers. Whereas ‘interpretive truths’ are usually seen in the journalistic practices of targeted/niche publications like magazines as they have more journalistic licence to cater to their specific target/niche audience. I will be analysing and discussing journalistic practices in newspapers and magazines in the next two sections.

NEWSPAPERS AND OBJECTIVITY—THE PARTISAN AND PUBLIC SERVICE/WATCHDOG MODELS (CASE STUDY—THE SYDNEY MORNING HERALD VS THE DAILY TELEGRAPH)

Mass media, not just individual newspapers, magazines or other publications fall into two models—the public service/watchdog or partisan model.

“Under the public service model, one goal for the media is to provide a range of different viewpoints to a wide audience comprising different sections of society. It enables citizens to hear views and information of which they were not previously aware and with which they may disagree.” (Rowbottom, 2009, p614) “The term public watchdog suggests that the media perform its democratic function by holding the government and other public institutions to account, and exposing abuses of power.” (Rowbottom, 2009, p610)

“(The partisan model) does not aim to bring together all different parts of society, but attempts to permit the media to represent different views without being constrained by balance or impartiality.” (Rowbottom, 2009, p616)

In other words, the public service/watchdog model allows newspapers to publish stories comprising of different topics, allowing its target audience to be informed of information that they would not have been aware of under any other circumstance, or possibly if they read other newspapers and can allow readers to come up with their own conclusions. Whereas the partisan model allows newspapers to publish stories comprising of different topics, allowing its target audience to be informed of information, however the difference is with its presentation—the partisan model presents its information supporting a specific ideology.

For the purposes of this essay, I will be using *The Sydney Morning Herald* and *The Daily Telegraph* as case studies, arguing that *The Sydney Morning Herald* has adopted the public service/public watchdog model and that *The Daily Telegraph* has adopted the

partisan model. I will be analysing the political stories of both newspapers in particular, due to *The Daily Telegraph's* propensity to support conservative political ideologies.

In order to complete an accurate analysis for the purposes of this essay, I have followed the political coverage of both newspapers for the last three months.

The Daily Telegraph has been known for its conservative stance among readers, journalists and the general public. The aim of my analysis to prove that this is true and therefore has adopted the partisan model and over my three month analysis, I have found that this is true. While *The Daily Telegraph* reports the news in an inverted pyramid style as standard for all newspapers, when it comes to political or political-related stories, they go to the effort to present their conservative stance with their political stories with dramatic language, dramatic headlines and dramatic graphic design choices.

In regards to their political coverage, *The Daily Telegraph* has a tendency to mock opposing political parties—Labor, the Greens and the Palmer United Party in particular. Sydney Lord Mayor Clover Moore is clearly their favourite politician/government figure to mock. When *The Daily Telegraph* uses politicians in these parties as sources in political stories, they usually place their quotes and information towards the end of articles.



Fig 1. Example of *The Daily Telegraph's* mockery of other parties and graphic design choices.

To further emphasise their bias and therefore their conservative stance to their readers, they use dramatic language in their articles.

“Peter Slipper has gone from a married, high-flying, tail swearing federal Speaker to a single Meals on Wheels server facing a possible jail term.” (Slippery Pete’s wheels come off)

“Last week I spat my cornflakes like ninja knives across the kitchen bench when I read the Lord Mayor Clover Moore’s opinion piece in *The Daily Telegraph* on business voter reform. Her allegation: That the Liberal Party has ‘secretly worked’ on proposals for business voting reform in the city.” (Ward, Come on Clover, there was nothing secret about it and you know it, September 4 2014).

“Clover Moore’s reign as Lord Mayor seems destined to end in 2016...” (Godfrey, Finally, a chance to vote: No Moore, September 18 2014)

“Four young men would still be alive today if the Labor government had properly designed and implemented the home insulation scheme.” (Meers, Deaths blamed on Labor, September 2 2014)

Evidence of their bias or conservative stance can also be found in its staff or writers— Andrew Bolt is known for his stance and is controversial, Gareth Ward is the Member for Kiama for the Liberal Party and Christine Forster—Prime Minister Tony Abbott’s sister.

Throughout the last three months of my analysis, the biggest news story that *The Daily Telegraph* has reported on is the government’s changes or efforts to change counter-terrorism laws due to the actions of ISIS/IS/ISIL and the domino effect from these efforts, such as proposals on burqa bans, tightening security and police raids on people of interest. *The Daily Telegraph* has gone out of its way to emphasise how much of a threat that ISIS/IS/ISIL and terrorism is to Australia and the Australian way of life. Evidence of this can be found in the image below:



Fig 2. How *The Daily Telegraph* reports on terrorism related stories.

The Daily Telegraph’s adoption of the partisan model has not been without its controversy, however despite this adoption, which obviously effects how they cover the news, they do still cover the news, as a newspaper it still does its job.

“At *The Sydney Morning Herald* we are passionate about giving you independent, quality journalism, whether that is around major news investigations and crime reporting or sport, business, food, travel, parents or culture and art.”

The Sydney Morning Herald prides itself on being “Independent. Always.” that it places these words or their “motto” on the cover of their newspapers every day.

However despite this assertion, *The Sydney Morning Herald* has been known for its left-wing political stance (previously a conservative political stance) among readers, journalists and the general public. The aim of my analysis of *The Sydney Morning Herald* is to prove that it sticks to this motto and provides independent coverage on politics and therefore has adopted the public service/watchdog model.

The Sydney Morning Herald, like *The Daily Telegraph* also reports the news in an inverted pyramid style, however in contrast to *The Daily Telegraph*, when it comes to political or political-related stories their stories are longer, more detailed, more narrative-like, factually structured and varied in sources—as opposed to graphic design and image heavy. *The Sydney Morning Herald* has a tendency to place their political stories together over several consecutive pages rather than spread throughout the newspaper.

Despite its left-wing political stance, *The Sydney Morning Herald* does write and publish more objective political stories, they do this by the inverted pyramid style, the variety of sources across the political spectrum and by presenting the facts to the reader and letting them decide what side of the political spectrum they reside on the story and the issues that are being reported on. In regards to presenting the facts to the reader and letting them decide, this is achieved through a graphic design choice to display the facts in both large and small fact boxes that can’t be missed by the reader. Examples of these fact boxes can be found below:



Fig 3. *Sydney Morning Herald* fact boxes.

Despite its more factual and objective writing and publishing style in comparison to *The Daily Telegraph*, *The Sydney Morning Herald* does display hints of its left-wing political stance. The News Review weekend pull-out section in particular displays these hints,

although perhaps the editors and staff at *The Sydney Morning Herald* make this decision due to the fact that the *News Review* section provides an opportunity for analysis of the weekly news and major issues that arise from the weekly news.

“If you weren’t feeling apprehensive before listening to Tony Abbott, there’s a much higher chance you were after listening to him.” (Hartcher, *News Review*, Sep 20-21 2014, p30)

“Is Abbott seeking to reassure or to alarm? Judging by his words, he is trying to do both. Give us a frisson of fear, but also offer the assurance that he is our protector. And by accentuating the danger, he emphasises his position as protector.” (Hartcher, *News Review*, Sep 20-21 2014, p30)

“Every time Abbott indulges himself in expressing his personal preference for Muslim women’s attire, he commits an act of hypocrisy and harms the cause he claims to champion. It is a sick fetish unworthy of the leader of a great nation going to war in the name of the freedom.” (Hartcher, *News Review*, Oct 4-5 2014, p28)

Some readers and media commentators and academics could argue that analysis and a little bit of opinion is the point and purpose of the *News Review* section. This makes it harder to tell whether *The Sydney Morning Herald* journalists are being biased or just doing their job as a commentator for this particular section.

Another hint of bias occurs with the publishing choice, or at least the order of which political stories are published, *The Sydney Morning Herald* has a tendency to print analysis or comment and opinion on a political stories on the same page/s as other political news stories.

Despite a small hint of bias, *The Sydney Morning Herald* does its job as a public service/watchdog model by providing a variety of sources in its political stories—more of a wide variety than *The Daily Telegraph*. For example, the September 13-14 story “High security at buildings, ports, sporting events” has Victoria Police Commissioner Ken Lay, Police Commissioner Andrew Scipione and founder and chief executive of Intelligent Risks, Neil Fergus as sources. The October 14 story “Coal is good for humanity: PM” has ANU Economist Frank Jutzo and Climate Institute chief executive John Connor as sources with grabs from Opposition Leader Bill Shorten. The October 15 story “Opposition, unions pan donation laws” politicians across the political spectrum are sources—Former NSW Premier Barry O’Farrell (Liberal), NSW Premier Mike Baird (Liberal), Opposition Leader John Robertson (NSW Labor), Greens MP Jamie Parker and Independent MP for Sydney Alex Greenwich.

Despite the differing views from readers, journalists and the public about the quality of the content in both *The Daily Telegraph* and *The Sydney Morning Herald*, they both do their jobs as partisan and public service/watchdog newspapers respectively. *The Daily Telegraph* does its job as a partisan model newspaper by reporting the news and clearly showing their conservative political stance and *The Sydney Morning Herald* does its job as a public service/watchdog model newspaper by reporting the news with a wide variety of sources

and presenting readers with the facts to let them decide how they interpret a story and a reporter’s objectivity. A final example of the differences between these two newspapers as partisan and public service/watchdog models can be found in the images below on the story of Julia Gillard’s memoir release.



Fig 4. The Sydney Morning Herald and The Daily Telegraph reporting on Julia Gillard’s interview on the release of her memoir. The Sydney Morning Herald’s is on the left, The Daily Telegraph on the right.

TARGETED/NICHE PUBLICATIONS—RELATIVE OBJECTIVITY AND TARGET AUDIENCE (CASE STUDIES—THE AUSTRALIAN WOMEN’S WEEKLY VS WOMAN’S DAY AND WOMEN’S HEALTH VS MEN’S HEALTH)

The techniques of objectivity emphasise ritual rather than substance. By following accepted rituals the journalist can be absolved from charges of error, bias and partisanship. The advent of wire services promoted straight objectivity. The advent of newsmagazines reminded journalists that interpretation was also important—and could be entertaining. (Breen, 1998, p136)

The magazines I am using for case studies in this section won’t fall under the category of “newsmagazines”—two are tabloid magazines catering to women and the other two are health magazines that cater to both genders. However for the purposes of this section and this essay, I am labelling them as newsmagazines as they publish and present specific news to its target audience. For this section, my case studies are *The Australian Women’s Weekly vs Woman’s Day* as they are tabloid magazines that cater to women in different writing and content styles, and *Women’s Health vs Men’s Health* as they are health magazines that present health news catering to both genders. In order to complete an accurate analysis for the purposes of this essay, I have analysed the coverage of news in these four magazines for the last three months.

“...Journalists’ commitment to objectivity shifts, depending on the material they’re covering.” (Meikle, 2009, p100)

As all four newsmagazines cater to specific target audiences, they are not wholly objective or impartial. However they are *relatively objective*—they write, design and illustrate their stories to be objective within its targeted audience and niche. It is up to each

reader to determine what side of the story or the subject within the story they will take and what the publication is trying to achieve or get across.

In the case of *The Australian Women's Weekly* vs *Woman's Day* they are women's magazines that cater to women in different ages groups with different content in different ways.

Woman's Day tends to favour the tabloid style, both in content and language choice. They focus on celebrities that are around the age of its targeted audience (women from ages 18 to 34 and 25 to 54 according to its media kit) and publish stories that would be of relevance to that targeted audience. These celebrities included the UK royal family, Schapelle Corby, Mariah Carey, US celebrities and Aussie celebrities, usually female. The stories that *Woman's Day* tend to publish are pregnancy stories, inspirational kid stories, real life stories, as well as constant coverage on Australian reality television shows such as *The Bachelor*, *The Block* and *My Kitchen Rules*. *Woman's Day* has focused repetitively on the soon-to-be second child of the Duke and Duchess of Cambridge, the twist in *The Bachelor* saga of Blake Garvey dumping his fiancée, Sam for another Bachelor contestant and George Clooney's wedding.

The Australian Women's Weekly tends to favour the long narrative feature style, in fact I would call it a shorter form of literary journalism. Stories are longer both in its content and size. Due to its narrative feature style and strict 3-column graphic design and possibly in-house interviewing style (which is shown by *The Australian Women's Weekly's* choice to publish profiles in a Q&A format), the stories, especially profiles are more in-depth and coherent in comparison to *Woman's Day*. The story is not as rushed and easily flows, complete with a line of asterisks and white space to indicate to the reader to take a break. *The Australian Women's Weekly* focuses on celebrities that are around the age of its targeted audience (women from ages 35 to 49 and 50 + according to its media kit) and publish stories that would be of relevance to that targeted audience. These celebrities have included Edwina Bartholomew, Deborra-lee Furness, the UK Royal Family, Jeanne Pratt, Juliette Binoche, as well as female politicians. *The Australian Women's Weekly* emphasises the need for female role models heavily, in the October 2014 issue they had their first Power List, which they hope appears in future issues annually. Foreign Minister Julie Bishop topped the list and the women who made the list were decided by a panel of independent judges and editor Helen McCabe stated. The October issue also had an article titled "When only a man will do" with a profile on the Commonwealth Bank CEO, the Woolworths CEO, the Telstra CEO and the Chief of Army and their views on women becoming leaders in the world.

The Australian Women's Weekly is more news-centric than *Woman's Day*. *Woman's Day* creates its own news whereas *The Australian Women's Weekly* makes a decision to focus on one aspect of news that relates to its readers. One example of this was a story in the

November issue titled “Life with a Burqa” which was a profile Q&A piece focusing on four Australian women who wear burqas and what their life is like on a daily basis. This story was published among the change in counter terrorism laws and the debate of establishing laws to ban burqas. However rather than focusing on the political side of the story, this story took a personal approach to the news subject.

Out of the two, *Woman’s Day* is the most biased publication even within the scope of relative objectivity. To inform the reader of their point of view or what side of the story they are on, they use dramatic language and make specific, even manipulative graphic design choices. For example, one story was on Mariah Carey’s divorce, which they dubbed a “Diva Divorce” and Courtney Cox was described as “psycho” in a story on her and her fiancé’s relationship. In regards to specific and manipulative graphic design choices, a repetitive and well-known choice is bolding key sentences or paragraphs so they stand out and entice the reader, as well as large captions across their featured images, for example the caption “He just couldn’t let her go” with a cover story on Blake Garvey and The Bachelor contestant/girlfriend, Louise.



Fig 5. “He just couldn’t let her go” image

The most obvious specific and manipulate graphic design choice that I came across was a story on the announcement of the Duchess of Cambridge’s pregnancy. It was a story on the possibility of the Duchess carrying twin girls, the headline was “Kate & Wills’ double joy—twin princesses” in purple and pink text boxes with the pages and fact boxes in pink. Clearly they as well as their readers want this possibility to become a reality, hence their story and image choice.



Fig 6. “Kate and Wills’ double joy—twin princesses” story

Through their dramatic language and specific and manipulative graphic design choices, *Woman’s Day* presents their stories in a way that only just stops short of telling their readers what to believe and what side of the story to take, hence being the most biased publication within the scope of relative objectivity.

In contrast, *The Australian Women’s Weekly’s* graphic design choices are simple with images usually taking up a whole page and a strict 3-column grid structure for text, due to catering to an older audience, its news-centricity and its literary journalism-esque style, *The Australian Women’s Weekly* is not as biased, it consistently maintains relative objectivity.

In the case of *Women’s Health vs Men’s Health*, they are health magazines that present health news catering to both genders and their relative objectivity revolves around what health ideals they are presenting to their reader and telling them what they should achieve. In my analysis of both publications, I have found that the content, graphic designs and illustrations are similar due to both being complementary publications providing content on the same topic. However I also found that the differences between the two publications are their use of language and the way their content is presented towards the target audience is different and therefore so is their relative objectivity.

The content of the feature articles in *Women’s Health* obviously focus on health issues relevant to women of its target audience (women between the ages of 25 to 44 according to the Pacific Magazines website)—these issues include weight loss, achieving a work-life balance, relationships and sex. They do publish articles on celebrities and feature them on the cover, however the difference between how *Women’s Health* focuses on celebrities and how *Woman’s Day* and *The Australian Women’s Weekly* is that their focus is only on the celebrity’s health practices and regime, rather than the possibilities of what is happening in their personal life. For example, Jessica Mauboy was the cover girl for the November issue and the article revolved around her running, gym and outdoor exercise

regimes and her recent weight loss. Shailene Woodley was the cover girl for the September issue and the article revolved around her dancing and yoga regimes, as well as her diet.

Any references to a celebrity in other feature articles are always health related, for example “even if your eyesight is healthier than Michelle Bridges...” (Eye-T issues, September 2014, p40) Similarly to *The Australian Women’s Weekly*, *Women’s Health* takes a personal approach to covering news issues, for example, the November issue contained a feature article on Australians who have benefited from the medical use of marijuana at a time where its legality, or rather the validity of its illegality is being publicly debated.

Due to being a complementary publication, *Men’s Health* is similar in its content and how it covers its content, the only difference being the gender of its target audience. However this “only” difference is not a small one. *Men’s Health* obviously focus on health issues relevant to men of its target audience (men between the ages of 25 to 49 according to the Pacific Magazines website), these issues include similar issues to those covered in *Women’s Health*—muscle mass or gaining a six pack, achieving a work-life balance, relationships and sex. The difference between *Men’s Health* and *Women’s Health* is its use of aggressive language, for example the words “scrawny to brawny” on the cover of the November issue to describe its cover man Joe Manganiello and this sentence in one of its feature articles “If all you want right now is to lose some lard from your middle, feel more energised or look passable in a T-shirt, then this is a story for another day.” With this sentence, it is more aggressive and direct than sentences seen in *Women’s Health*. There is also an emphasis on fit male celebrities to look up to such as Jason Dundas in the November issue. There are constant instructions on how to get abs or a muscular body like the aforementioned celebrities that the male readers are being told to aspire to, similarly to how *Women’s Health* have instruction for women on how to get a leaner and toned body. On a similar note, the articles on their cover men also revolve around their exercise regimes.

The graphic design of both publications are erratic—it changes depending on the topic, the length and the goal of the article. One article will be image heavy with words in a box like format, while another could stick to the 3 column grid structure.

The content of both *Women’s Health* and *Men’s Health* are more academic and factual than personal. Most of the sources in the articles are medical professionals and/or academics in the area that the article is focusing on. This conscious source choice provides the articles and therefore the publication as a whole credibility as relatively objective publications.

I previously mentioned that all four magazines are relatively objective as they write, design and illustrate their stories to be objective within its targeted audience and niche. It is up to each reader to determine what side of the story or subject within the story they will take and what the publication is trying to achieve or get across. For these magazines, relative objectivity is a more realistic goal than being wholly objective and it is as close to being objective as they are going to get.

ONLINE JOURNALISM, BLOGS AND OBJECTIVITY—IS IT POSSIBLE? (CASE STUDIES— (NEWS.COM.AU VS MAMAMIA)

“Online journalism, at its best, brings to bear alternative perspectives, context and ideological diversity to its reporting, providing users with the means to hear voices from around the globe.” (Allan, 2006, p105)

Online journalism is relatively new, emerging within the last ten to fifteen years. One of journalism’s first experiences with the online world came with blogging, however it was met with journalistic backlash. The main criticisms or backlash at the fact that bloggers were not trained professional journalists—they did not know how to professionally or accurately report the news, they were subjective and that they would constantly make mistakes. This backlash was so severe that some news organisations would forbid the use of blogs as sources or for research, “...the strictures of objective reporting were also being interpreted by some news organizations as grounds for prohibiting the use of blogs as news sources in their own right.” (Allan, 2006, p85).

Over the last five years however, due to the rise and popularity of social media as a journalism tool, as well as with the increase in the use of the internet and mobile technology, blogs and online journalism has been and is still being completely embraced. Journalists and news organisations “..have to come to grips with the importance of establishing new forms of dialogue beyond journalistic circles.” (Allan, 2006, p84)

This is where this section comes into play, online journalism has been embraced and still continues to be embraced, however with the ease of access that nearly everyone has to the internet and being able to post whatever they want, is objectivity and impartiality possible in online journalism?

For this section, my case studies are *News.com.au*, which has a variety of news and links to the websites of different tabloid newspapers also owned by News Corp Australia and *Mamamia*, a blog which caters to women. I have followed the coverage of stories published on both websites for the last three months.

News.com.au’s audience is the most diverse, its average readers are of both genders between the ages of 25 to 54 and range from home buyers to job seekers, grocery buyers, mums with children under 18, passive job seekers, car buyers, sports fans, home owners and baby boomers. Due to its diverse audience, it publishes a wide variety of stories—national, world, lifestyle, travel, entertainment, technology, finance and sport to cater to its audience. This is to be expected with an online news site and like any other newspaper or magazine, *News.com.au* is expected to cater to its audience, however whether it is truly objective lies with what news they cover and how they cover the news.

News.com.au covers news in a tabloid, magazine-like style as opposed to a newspaper style. This is due to the fact that *News.com.au* is a conglomerate website publishing stories from tabloid newspapers—*The Advertiser*, *The Daily Telegraph*, *The*

Courier Mail, Perth Now and *The Herald Sun*. They generally have dramatic, click-bait headlines such as “The day CNN killed Obama”, “Inkredible Tales: Our soldiers reveal their deepest secrets”, “Has this really become a dirty word?” “Woman kicks sales through the roof”, “J.Lo: ‘my diva antics cost me love’”, “Man horrifically bashed over a slice of pizza”, “Was Queen target of terror plot?” and so on. However when it comes to the major news stories they keep their headlines concise and sharp, for example “N Korea releases two Americans”, “Another Aussie ISIS fighter killed”, “Burkina army on two-week notice”, “Prosecutors appeal Pistorius verdict” and so on.

News.com.au tends to display objectivity and follow the inverted pyramid style in regards to its major news stories such as “Another Aussie ISIS fighter killed”, whereas in its newsworthy but more magazine like stories, such as “Kilauea volcano spares family gravestone in Hawaii cemetery” they tend to be more narrative and magazine like.

“A third Australian man has been reported killed fighting in Syria as the US awaits news of who was in a 10-vehicle Islamic State command convoy bombed in Iraq. The man from Sydney’s southwest is understood to be from a well-known family and married with children, Fairfax Media reports.” (*Another Aussie ISIS fighter killed*, November 9)

“As slow-moving lava approached a cemetery in a Hawaii town, Aiko Sato placed flowers at the headstone of the family plot she’s tended to over the years, thinking it would be the last time she would see it. ‘I made peace with myself.’ Sato said Monday of visiting the Pahoehoe Japanese Cemetery on October 23. A few days later, lava smothered part of the cemetery and the family believed the headstone had been buried. But a photo taken on October 28 by a scientist documenting the lava’s progress showed the headstone engraved with the Sato name standing in a sea of black lava.” (*Kilauea volcano spares family gravestone in Hawaii cemetery*, November 5)

“News objectivity is assured, according to the site’s account of its operation, because the algorithms ensure ‘news sources are selected without regard to political viewpoint or ideology, enabling you to see how different organizations are reporting the same story.’ (Allan, 2006, p177)

Although I am not analysing the political stories on *News.com.au*, this point relates to the nature of online journalism and how it sticks out to the reader and has an impact. Due to being a part of the huge online news world, the importance of hits and search engine rankings, *News.com.au* need to publish stories that stick out to the reader, they need to publish tabloid, magazine-like stories as well as the hard news and this means that objectivity may be sacrificed to meet its own needs. However they do achieve objectivity of sorts by doing its job in catering to its wide variety of readers, therefore objectivity is possible for *News.com.au* if the editors and reporting staff analyse their reporting methods, story choice and journalistic practices overall.

“We’re not a mummy website, we’re not a news website and we’re not an opinion website either. We defy categorisation...unlike other women’s websites, we’re serious about making a difference. We pride ourselves on bringing you new perspectives on the issues but at the same time there are some social justice issues that guide our editorial and we care about deeply.” (*What is Mamamia?—Mamamia About page*)

The above description can be seen on the About page of the *Mamamia* website, this description makes it clear what *Mamamia*’s purpose as a website is and clearly defines itself as a blog. More importantly it states that it is not a news website, that it is a women’s website and brings new perspective on the issues (for the sake of this essay, news issues). Therefore it is stating that it is not objective.

Mamamia as a blog caters to its audience, however news wise it does offer opinionated perspectives of news. In fact it does have a news section on its website. The news section contains articles that summarise news in an inverted pyramid style, however their news section is generally an opinion on the news of the day.

Examples include a November 7 article “The Australian politician’s domestic violence comments that made us cringe” and an August 21 article on *The Daily Telegraph*’s choice to publish a photo of James Foley seconds before he was beheaded on their front page:

“He’s a professional pot-stirrer who hates homosexuality and compared it to bestiality and paedophilia, wants a burqa banned and calls pro-choice organisations ‘pro-death’. Normally we’d write him off as a bigot, unworthy of the public’s attention but this particular pot-stirrer happens to be a member of the Australian Senate.” (Unknown, *The Australian politician’s domestic violence comments that made us cringe, Mamamia*, November 7)

“This morning my seven-year-old son asked me the most uncomfortable question I’ve ever been asked as a parent. As he stood dressed in his green and gold school uniform, he looked up at me with his dark eyes and asked me why the black ninja was trying to cut the bald man’s head off. Did you cringe as you read that? Because I cringed as he said it.” (Anderson, *Dear Newspaper Editors, what should I tell my kids who have questions about this?* August 21)

Not only do *Mamamia*’s writers insert themselves and write opinion pieces on the news and even insert themselves by commenting in the comments sections, often arguing with their readers’ comments, but they also go to the effort to put together an article of the day’s news, titled “*Monday/Tuesday/Wednesday/Thursday/Friday’s news in under 5 minutes*”. In these articles, they summarise the biggest news stories in a few paragraphs without asserting opinion or stance—it’s as close to objective as they will get. Despite their efforts and the fact that some of their staff are trained journalists and writers, due to their statement on their purpose, objectivity is not possible for *Mamamia*.

News.com.au and *Mamamia* prove that objectivity is possible and impossible simultaneously, whether a news, blog and/or media website is objective depends on an editor or founder’s decision on whether their blog or website or online news publication will be wholly objective or not.

WILL OBJECTIVITY BECOME EXTINCT?

“Objectivity is part of our culture’s attempt to say what knowledge is and how to pursue truth in the many domains of inquiry...Standards of objectivity will persist so long as humans strive for rigorous, rational understanding and fair social arrangements.” (Ward, 2004, pp317-318)

The newspapers, magazines, news website and blog that I have chosen to analyse for this essay are not wholly objective but they find other ways to be objective to suit their needs—by adopting partisan and/or public service/watchdog models, by aiming for relative objectivity and/or by embracing the fact that they can’t be objective at all. Finding how objective or what type of objectivity to adopt is the way of the future for newspapers, magazines, news websites and blogs rather than aiming for whole objectivity.

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