

# The Unpalatable-Palatable: Celebrity Feminism in the Australian Mainstream Media

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The changing role of mainstream media has transformed how feminist issues are disseminated and debated resulting in the number of feminist commentators in the Australian media substantially increasing. This amplification of feminist discourse by certain voices is occurring due to the possibilities for celebrityisation generated by online and social media, gendered news and lifestyle commentaries. While this opens up space for greater representation of feminist voices, paradoxically, much of the feminist discourse in the mainstream media problematically reinforces the dominant paradigm rather than challenges it. Mainstream media celebrity feminism can seem unvarying in their homogeneity; their presence is non-threatening, privileged and *palatable*, and is often connected with a 'feminism-as-a-business model'. In contrast, feminists who are perceived as more difficult or dogmatic as positioned as outliers or *unpalatable*. In this article, we discuss data collected in 2014 from two breakfast TV panels, *The Mixed Grill (Today)* and *Kochie's Angels (Sunrise)* when both offered all female panels, headed by the male hosts of the programs. We also look at the same panels on both programs again in 2016 after they had been renamed as *The Grill (Today)* and *Newsfeed (Sunrise)*, and had been restructured to include male panelists. In this paper we discuss contemporary celebrity feminism and question if the populist feminisms advocated in the mainstream media can offer opportunities for substantive political change or are devoid of meaningful feminist politics. These questions are explored through the conceptual framework of the *unpalatable-palatable* which asserts that celebrity feminism is not an uncomplicated or binaristic state but instead reflects a disrupted and disruptive state of flux.

## Introduction

In Australia, interaction between feminism and the media is not a new phenomenon; however, we are now witnessing a proliferation of feminist commentary. This escalation of voices speaking about feminism and

feminist issues is occurring, in large part, due to the possibilities generated by changes in the broader mediasphere. Nevertheless, while there seems to be feminist debate occurring at every turn, to what extent does this reflect greater representation and diversity of feminist thought and activity? In this article we examine one particular positioning of celebrity feminism in Australia through an analysis of breakfast television segments, and the participants, on commercial networks. In 2014, *Kochie's Angels* on *Sunrise* (Channel 7) and *The Grill* on *Today* (Nine Network) both offered all female panels—headed by the male hosts of the programs—that primarily discussed contemporary issues considered to be of interest to women. By 2016, panels on both programs had been restructured to include male panelists. These segments offer highly visible examples of how popular feminism is currently situated in Australia, particularly through the conduit of celebrity feminism, for mainstream audiences. In this article, we examine the dynamic and contested site of celebrity feminism—how celebrity feminism is defined, who gets to be a celebrity feminist, and the implications these have for directing feminist ideas and actions. Crucially, the mainstream media demands celebrity feminists be *palatable* insofar as they are required to embody acceptable postfeminist subjectivities. In contrast, unpalatable celebrity feminists are outliers and are viewed as more difficult or dogmatic. However, as we demonstrate, the distinction between palatable and unpalatable celebrity feminists is not uncomplicated or binaristic; instead, this analysis reflects a disrupted and disruptive state of flux.

## Celebrity feminism

Wicke (1998) coined the term 'celebrity feminist' and was the first to theorise the concept critically. She argues that celebrity feminism 'is a new locus for feminist discourse, feminist politics, and feminist conflicts, both conflicts internal to feminism and feminism's many struggles with antifeminist forces' (1998, 387). Thus, feminism is embedded within everyday practices at multiple levels and this includes the cultural domain which comprises celebrity culture. Celebrities are key conduits through which feminism is mediated to larger audiences. Moreover, many people form their ideas about feminism according to existing frameworks that are accessible through celebrity and the media (Skeggs 1997). If, as Hollows and Moseley (2006) contend, feminist consciousness occurs for many people through how feminism is signified in popular culture then celebrity feminism, broadly situated in mainstream and online media cultures, is now more relevant than ever, and it can add important levels of texture

to feminist agenda. Therefore, as Wicke (1998, 386) argues, to dismiss the complex value and relationship of celebrity feminists to broader (and arguably more complex) feminist politics is to 'fail to take into account the most materially evident new circumstance grounding feminism'. At present, this includes the ever-expanding mediasphere that requires celebrity feminists to operate across multiple modalities that include not only mainstream media platforms such as media including print, radio, and television, but also communicative technologies within media culture such as Twitter, Facebook, YouTube and blogs to maximise their visibility and reach. It also equates celebrity feminism with the brand building of the self as a commodity to be marketed. To date, feminist media studies and celebrity studies have yet to engage fully with the emerging and evolving public subject that is the feminist celebrity (Taylor 2014b). Although some scholarly work has been conducted on celebrity and/or popular media feminism in Australia (e.g. Taylor 2008, 2014a, 2014b; Lilburn, Magarey and Sheridan 2000; Rowlands and Henderson 1996), there has been little critical work on the mainstream media spaces currently occupied by celebrity feminists. Breakfast television programs, while a mainstay of popular culture, have largely been ignored in scholarly literature. This is likely due to the low-brow and superficial status they are afforded as 'light-hearted' cultural (Harrington 2010, 175) and feminist texts.

Since the time of Wicke's (1998, 391) assertion that 'we must recognize that the energies of the celebrity imaginary are fuelling feminist discourse and political activity as never before', there has been a proliferation of celebrity feminist commentators in Australia. The 'celebrity feminist' is not a fixed idea and the label can be applied broadly, creating new possibilities for those who may be tagged as such. What constitutes celebrity feminism, and who can be recognised as a celebrity feminist, are complex and problematic questions. It follows, then, that there is more than one type of celebrity feminist; in Australia this can include celebrities actively claiming feminist status such as journalist Tracey Spicer, *Daily Telegraph's* gendered news site—*Rendezvous*—editor, Sarah Le Marquand, writer and television presenter Tara Moss, and actor Caitlin Stasey. The increase in Australian celebrities associating themselves with feminism synchronises with the rise in feminist affiliations in other Western countries by celebrities such as actor Emma Watson and writer/broadcaster Caitlin Moran in the United Kingdom, and singer/songwriters Beyoncé and Taylor Swift in the United States. The mantle of celebrity feminist can also include popular media commentators who have found a level of celebrity precisely for their feminist social

commentary in the mediasphere such as Clementine Ford, Van Badham, and Helen Razer. They are not necessarily limited to commentary on feminist issues but it does comprise a large part of their media presence. They help drive public discourse around feminisms and they are predominantly known for what they say. Furthermore, celebrity feminism is experiencing a 'bloke turn' and can now be considered (and not without dispute) a male domain, and includes Australian political leaders Malcolm Turnbull and Bill Shorten who have both publicly identified as feminists. This is reflected across broader Western societies with (then) President Barack Obama in the United States, United Kingdom politicians Nick Clegg and Ed Miliband, and actor Benedict Cumberbatch (among others) having participated in the 'This is what a feminist looks like' t-shirt campaign. Karl Stefanovic, co-host of Channel 9's *Today* show has been called a 'feminist icon' ("Karl's Year in a Burberry Suit", 2014) for using his celebrity in wearing the same suit for a year on television to expose sexism by demonstrating that he was not scrutinised for his clothing choices in the same way as his on-air female colleagues, an endeavor that received international media attention (Powell 2014).

This does not mean that everyone who speaks about feminist issues in the media is, or has the potential to become, a celebrity feminist, or in fact even identifies as feminist. However, there has been an increase in the number of voices in the mediasphere that are commenting on feminist issues irrespective of their feminist status—either claimed or bestowed upon them. Consequently, contemporary celebrity feminists are represented here as either a '*direct product* of their feminist intervention into public discourse' (Taylor 2014a, 75) or as a woman (or man, in Stefanovic's case) with a pre-existing public profile who has been 'assimilated' (1998, 389) into the celebrity feminist role, at times, regardless of self-identification as a feminist. It is, therefore, too simplistic to say that celebrity feminists are a homogeneous group; however, as will be demonstrated, there are commonalities and predictabilities such as overrepresentation in the mainstream media of white, middle to high socio-economic status, heterosexual, able-bodied women who could also be considered *relatively safe*, or *palatable*.

### **The unpalatable-palatable**

The conceptual framework explored here to explain contemporary feminism in the Australian mediasphere consists of three notions: the palatable; the unpalatable; and the tensions between, around and within

celebrity feminist culture, which results in what is referred to here as the *unpalatable–palatable* (Casey c.2018). The unpalatable-palatable is not a binaristic concept; rather, it reflects a continuum of tolerability that is afforded celebrity feminists. This does not mean that celebrity feminists are *either* palatable *or* unpalatable—contexts govern how a celebrity feminist is perceived and how she will be accepted by popular media audiences and this can differ according to the stance that is taken, the format through which it is expressed, and how well she is upholding gendered norms (commonly associated with postfeminism) within a neoliberal framework.

The tension that supports the unpalatable–palatable is often embodied within celebrity feminists through the success of their performance of acceptable femininities and their commentary. Segal (1998, n.p.) argued at the end of last century that ‘the media will always be able to find and promote particular voices which are less threatening to their agenda’. On the surface, little seems to have changed. Indeed, a key marker of palatable popular media feminists is their overarching non-threatening media presence and conservative agenda; they are often regarded as ‘acceptable’, and they appear in normative versions of Western ‘beauty’. Furthermore, as Taylor (2008, 31) contends, ‘some cultural actors are granted the authority to speak about feminism, and to have these utterances validated, in ways not permitted others’, and this is generally the case for the panelists who appear on *Kochie’s Angels*, *Newsfeed*, *The Grill*, and *The Mixed Grill*. It is certainly so for Karl Stefanovic whose aforementioned suit-wearing statement about sexism in the media received such extensive media attention internationally (e.g., Dent 2014; Powell, 2014; Lallo 2014). All have experienced this type of cultural recognition to varying degrees because of their celebrity and privilege. This friction between palatability and unpalatability allows the panelists to succeed in the mediasphere; they can occupy mainstream space *because* they often invoke palatable neoliberal sympathies with which to engage rather than challenging the status quo. As discussed below, the panelists were overwhelmingly representative of the entrepreneurial and ‘can do’ attitude associated with postfeminism (Harris 2004). This reflects what Gill (2011, 64) describes as an intertwining of neoliberalism and feminism to create a postfeminist sensibility whereby there is an emphasis on ‘individualism, choice, and empowerment’ as well as ‘self-surveillance, monitoring and self-discipline’. Alternatively, celebrity feminists may represent palatability *within* an (otherwise often) unpalatable neoliberal and postfeminist cultural climate, although, this is less common on the television programs examined here. Visibility in the mediasphere is a

crucial aspect of contemporary feminist work; however, it can be difficult to challenge the dominant paradigm if a substantive feminist politics is evacuated through the format and medium.

Feminists positioned as unpalatable through the mainstream media can be identified both by who they are and what they say. By simply not embodying contemporary postfeminist femininities that achieve legitimacy through appropriately classed, racialised, and sexualised bodies they become unpalatable. The unpalatable feminist is also what Ahmed (2010b) refers to as a feminist killjoy. Ahmed (2010b, 65) states that 'feminists don't even have to say anything to be read as killing joy'. The unpalatable are outliers; they are the (more) difficult and dogmatic feminist commentators, and they are often transgressive in their feminist politics in comparison with those who achieve mainstream media attention. Significantly, they offer a contestation to the more palatable neoliberal feminist politics.

The unpalatable–palatable represents the multiple tensions that surround celebrity feminists, while recognising that there is not a simple binary; rather, it is a disrupted and disruptive state of flux (Casey c.2018). Firstly, the unpalatable-palatable identifies that many feminists are concerned with 'the pessimism surrounding criticism on the intersections of feminism and media culture, the authority conferred on "celebrity feminists"' (Taylor 2008, 109). Secondly, it highlights the need to appeal to mainstream audiences while agitating for feminist change. This centres on the nexus for mainstream audience visibility, but it can be difficult—almost unpalatable—to consume. Thirdly, it refers to the consumption of feminism in the mediasphere (both by media-appointed feminist commentators and the media itself). Lastly, it relates to the figure of a feminist spokesperson who is often a white, middle- to upper-class, heterosexual, able-bodied neoliberal subject—she who must 'pass' and be safe and palatable for broader audiences. What they discuss is often palatably packaged because celebrity feminists can sell 'easily accessible narratives that are appealing for consumers' (Charles 2012, 11).

It is important to remember that this is a shifting terrain. While breakfast television may indicate a binaristic representation of the unpalatable-palatable, within the larger mainstream mediasphere there are increasing occurrences of more confronting feminist voices being put forward. Examples include Ruby Hamad, who writes regularly for Fairfax's *Daily Life*, and Celeste Liddle, whose work appears in *The Guardian*. Neither Hamad nor Liddle fit the mold of the palatable white neoliberal

feminist—indeed, Liddle’s blog is called ‘Rantings of an Aboriginal Feminist’—yet both are reaching a wide audience for their views on a range of women’s issues including the traditionally unpalatable, and therefore invisible, role of race in feminism.

## **Breakfast television panels**

A highly visible and mainstream media space that has emerged that explores feminist issues is breakfast television on commercial networks. The two programs examined here are *Sunrise* on Channel 7 and *Today* on the Nine Network. These programs can be classified as ‘news/infotainment hybrids’ (McNair, Flew, Harrington & Swift, 2017, 112). In the time of the first phase of data collection, both programs offered segments that follow the same format—under five minutes, with female-only panels headed by a male host who poses questions about predominantly ‘women’s issues’. On *Sunrise*, David Koch hosted *Kochie’s Angels*; this was replaced in 2016 by *Newsfeed*. On *Today*, Karl Stefanovic hosted what was originally called *Girls on the Grill* and then, at the time of the 2014 data collection was titled *The Grill*. It has subsequently been renamed *The Mixed Grill*. This format of men facilitating discussion on women’s issues is not isolated to commercial television; the ABC also employed this approach during 2014 on its flagship panel show, *Q&A*, hosted by Tony Jones for the Festival of Dangerous Ideas.

The panel hosts on *Sunrise* and *Today* are positioned somewhat differently although both represent variations of the ‘everyman’—if one accepts the everyman as one who has the privileges associated with being white, middle-aged, able-bodied, heterosexual and wealthy. Koch assumes the paternalistic air of a benevolent father, which contributes to a dynamic whereby the female panelists often adopt the role of feisty daughters teasing their old-fashioned father in ways that can both challenge and reinforce his masculine authority. Stefanovic, who is younger than Koch, commonly strikes a balance between maintaining a moderate liberal feminist stance and flirting with the female panelists. This enhances Stefanovic’s heterosexual value by positioning him as desirable to the women on the panel who, all being well, act as proxies for heterosexual female viewers. This is connected with increasing Stefanovic’s *male feminist capitalist*—a form of social capital conceptually advanced here to explain the advantages offered to, and held by, men who express support for improving the social and economic conditions for

women. In the media, male feminist capital can result in a boosted public profile and the receipt of greater attention, reverence, and popularity—key components of maintaining a public career in the mainstream media—than women who advocate for the same issues.

The shifting terrain of feminism, including male feminism, in the mediasphere is accentuated by the backlash against Stefanovic that occurred after he separated from his wife of 21 years and mother of his children, Cassandra Thorburn, and was revealed to be in a new relationship with the younger Jasmine Yarbrough. While Yarbrough's age should be irrelevant, it arguably contributed to the backlash against Stefanovic by some aspects of the media (Stephens 2017; Vickery 2017). Media identities, Meshel Laurie and Jackie O, for example, both spoke critically of Stefanovic's behaviour on their respective mainstream radio programs, and how it would be perceived negatively by women (Brennan 2017; McDonald 2017). Nonetheless, despite this backlash, and recent controversy surrounding Stefanovic's on-air use of an offensive word to describe members of the transgender community, he continues to receive attention for condemning sexism in the media such as through his criticism of the *Daily Mail* for shaming women about their bodies (Hall 2017a), a media source that extensively covered Stefanovic and Thorburn's separation. Indeed, women's news site Mamamia (discussed below), which reported on the criticism of Stefanovic for his treatment of his wife and children, also endorsed Stefanovic's feminist credentials in an article titled, 'Today Karl Stefanovic showed us what a feminist looks like' by stating, 'Personal feelings aside, we need men like Karl Stefanovic around. Men whose voices are heard and whose words hold weight. Men who are on our side and willing to shout it loud and proud and battle for our right to be treated equally' (Hall 2017b, n.p.). The recent sudden departure of Stefanovic's co-host, Lisa Wilkinson, from *Today* over alleged gender pay disparity between her and Stefanovic (Yosufzai, 2017) however, has received significant media attention, and if it is revealed to be the case, it challenges him to speak out on the basis of the privilege derived from his male feminist capital. This would be Stefanovic's opportunity, if gender pay inequity is indeed revealed to be the reason for Wilkinson's shock departure—as a feminist ally—to demonstrate that he is 'willing to shout it loud and proud' for equal treatment.

The segments hosted by Koch and Stefanovic on *Sunrise* and *Today*, in the main, continue to involve discussion of topics considered to be of interest to women; however, men are now included on the panels, and by 2016, content was arguably more generic. The inclusion of men on



these panels reflects the broader *bloke turn* in Western popular feminism whereby high profile men, such as Stefanovic, are willingly identifying, and occupying space, as feminists and accessing the associated male feminist capital. *Kochie's Angels* and *The Grill* raise the question of whether these spaces offer an opportunity for (particular) women's voices to be heard, if it is tokenistic, or if it is limiting women in what they are able to provide commentary on in a mainstream space. Moreover, does the addition of men to *Newsfeed* and *The Mixed Grill* panels integrate women's perspectives into the broader discourse or does it further limit women's opportunities to be heard?

## The study

The prominence of digital streaming has altered the landscape with the dominance of free-to-air television being significantly challenged in recent years; however, these segments were selected because both *Sunrise* and *Today* dominate the ratings for breakfast television (Bucklow 2016) and therefore still reach a substantial number of viewers. This alone provides a reason to cast a scholarly eye over the content of these programs. Further indication of the current cultural reach of breakfast television in Australia is the recent broadcasting on the ABC of *Get Krack!n*, created by Kate McLennan and Kate McCartney, which satirises the genre with a decidedly feminist edge. These breakfast panels also make a point of highlighting women's and feminist issues, which offers the opportunity for insights into how feminism is currently positioned in Australia for mainstream audiences, particularly as represented through the celebrity feminists who appear on these programs.

Initial data was collected from *Kochie's Angels* and *The Grill* on a daily basis over a four-week period from the 29<sup>th</sup> of September to the 24<sup>th</sup> of October, 2014. Comparison data from *Newsfeed* and *The Mixed Grill* was then collected from segments throughout July 2016. Each segment was viewed and coded manually according to the topics that were discussed and the panel members who were present. The data was then analysed according to emerging themes and conceptual relationships. The items that were discussed reflected issues that were receiving or given traction in the media on that given day. Discernible themes included (among others) parenting, schooling, women's health and body image, politics, older women having babies, violence against women, Muslim immigration, and celebrity gossip. Examples of topics included 'Microsoft CEO slips in interview saying that women should not ask for raises but wait until they

are given them' (*The Grill* 11/10/2014); 'Stripper paid to perform at AFL Game (*Kochie's Angels* 29/9/2014); variations on 'Ban the burqa in Parliament' (*The Grill* 2/10/2014; *Kochie's Angels* 1/10/2014, 3/10/2014, 20/10/2014); 'Mums getting breast milk from strangers of Facebook'; (*The Mixed Grill* 13/7/ 2016); 'Do more migrants increase the risk of terror attacks?' (*The Mixed Grill* 18/7/ 2016); 'Skimpy sportswear - courtside controversy over Nike's tennis dress' (*The Mixed Grill* 1/7/2016); 'Shane Warne gets body shamed for his 'dad bod' (*The Mixed Grill* 6/7/2016); 'Research says couples who drink together are happier' (*Newsfeed* 19/7/2016); and 'Nail biting and thumb sucking could have health benefits' (*Newsfeed* 12/7/2016).

Panelists on both shows were overwhelmingly employed in the media. Overall, television and print media personalities were most highly represented, although, categorisation within the mediasphere was not clear cut as many of the panelists were operating in multiple media spaces such as on radio, and online through blogging, Instagram and Twitter.

### **Postfeminism and feminism-as-a-business-model**

Gill (2007, 41), in discussing the ways in which feminism has been incorporated into media discourse and how this opens up debate and myriad readings of gender in media culture, asks:

[H]ave the media been transformed by feminism, become—in significant ways—feminist? Or have they incorporated or recuperated feminist ideas, emptying them of their radical force and selling them back to us as sanitized products or lifestyles to consume?

The same can be asked of and about celebrity feminists and popular feminist commentators. Are the populist feminisms offered on, for example, *Kochie's Angels/Newsfeed* and *The Grill/The Mixed Grill* devoid of a substantial feminist politics? Neoliberal discourses have undoubtedly significantly influenced certain dominant views on feminism, as 'neoliberal governance is a mode of power that fundamentally operates in and through discourse' (Kauppinen 2013, 83). Understanding the core principles of neoliberalism is fundamental to analysing its impact on feminism and how it has affected perceptions of feminism. The neoliberal emphasis on choice and individual responsibility parallels and intersects with popular understandings of postfeminism. Postfeminist and neoliberal

subjects are epitomised as free-choosing, autonomous and entrepreneurial beings reflecting that postfeminism is not simply a response to feminism but that there has also been a cross-pollination of neoliberal ideology (Gill 2008; McRobbie 2009). Postfeminism, particularly as appropriated by the media, is a mechanism for disciplining women through legitimation and pathologisation but the practices of which are presented as freely chosen (Gill 2007; McRobbie 2009; Taylor 2011). Thus, the ideal subject is represented by panelists such as Sarah Le Marquand, Mia Freedman, and Sarah Wilson (discussed below) who embody a particular version of success where entrepreneurial career, care and repair of the self are prioritised over structural understandings of gendered inequity and collective responses to oppression. Moreover, it is the opinions of those representing entrepreneurial feminism that are validated by the mainstream media, and it is this type of experience that exceeds alternative experiences and knowledge in this forum.

Neoliberal economies have seen the appropriation of feminist ideas as a marketing tool. Indeed, the predominantly unpalatable Helen Razer (2015) has stated critically that declaring oneself a feminist is a good career move for selling within the capitalist market place. Postfeminism, while still the dominant feminist presence in popular culture and the mainstream media, is now evolving to become a form of corporate feminism, or feminism-as-a-business-model. On one level this occurs through feminist discourses being appropriated and hegemonised to sell products, historically referred to as commodity feminism (Goldman, Heath and Smith 1991). On another level, and especially pertinent to breakfast television, is celebrities using feminism to promote their own products, usually themselves. This is connected to marketplace feminism, which Zeisler (2016, xiii) describes as the positioning of feminism as 'a cool, fun, accessible identity' that is available for consumption and that is removed from context and political meaning. In the mainstream media, this form of labour is highly regulated and reflects embodied feminine subjectivities that are classed, racialised, and also sexualised (within acceptable moral and heterosexual boundaries). And despite the entrepreneurial overtones of self-branding, Genz (2015, 551) points out that this occurs within a context of postfeminist 'normative scripts' that limits success to those who can effectively perform particular modes of femininity.

The branding of postfeminism to further business interests was clearly evident on *Kochie's Angels*, *Newsfeed*, *The Grill* and *The Mixed Grill*. In addition to being employed in multiple mainstream media environments,

many panelists were involved in other professional pursuits. For example, Sarah Wilson, on *Kochie's Angels* (6/10/2014, 15/10/2014), has worked as a television presenter, magazine editor, journalist and is also a business entrepreneur, cookbook writer and blogger. Similarly, Mia Freedman on *The Grill* (7/10/2014, 14/10/2014) appears regularly on television and radio and also runs online media outlet *Mamamia*, a business built primarily around Freedman's existing media profile. Sarah Le Marquand, is the editor of *Rendezvous* (*The Mixed Grill* 13/7/2016, 27/7/2016) which is the *Daily Telegraph's* gendered news site. Therefore, we should not forget that on these television shows, these spokespeople for feminism and women's issues are performing and maintaining their celebrity through brand creation and consolidation. These media friendly feminists have emerged from a neoliberal and postfeminist climate that encourages entrepreneurialism. Therefore, the intertwining of feminism and business through the commodification and marketing of their brands on these television shows parallels and reinforces the vehicles on which they are appearing.

Insofar as feminism being 'allowed' within the visible public domains of mass media, while not being mutually exclusive, palatable and unpalatable figures have helped define popular understandings of Australian feminisms. Although they may all contribute legitimately and valuably, there is an *exclusion zone* that highlights the inequality of women positioned outside the dominant paradigms and this is certainly the situation on *Kochie's Angels*, *Newsfeed*, *The Grill*, and *The Mixed Grill*. This includes women of colour, non-able-bodied women, queer women, and low socio-economic status women. This is problematic because there is a tokenism afforded to such women who are given voice but who fall outside the acceptable postfeminist femininities. For example, Sabrina Houssami, a former Miss World Australia and, for the most part a highly palatable figure, was the only panelist who identified as Muslim during the periods investigated. She appeared once on *The Grill* and this was on a panel that discussed banning the burqa ('Banning the burqa in Parliament' 2/10/2014). Furthermore, the current state of these panels can perpetuate the privileged few speaking for the abject Other as no panelists identifying as Muslim were included in the other panels that involved issues pertaining to Islam (*The Grill*: 'Australia at war with Iraq: airstrikes on ISIS' 4/10/2014; 'Pauline Hanson backs Jacqui Lambie banning the burqa' 5/10/2014; *Kochie's Angels*: 'Banning the burqa in Parliament' 1/10/2014; 'Tony Abbott calls for segregation of burqa wearing people in Parliament' 3/10/2014; 'Muslim cleric believes that lingerie dressed mannequins can lead to rape' 16/10/2014; 'Ban the

burqa dropped: visitors now allowed to cover faces' 20/10/2014; *The Mixed Grill*: 'Do more migrants increase the risk of terror attacks?' 18/6/2016). Likewise, no Indigenous people were represented in the discussion, 'NT detention abuse – allegations that government ignored it' (*The Mixed Grill*, 28/7/2016) despite the fact that, as Ryan points out, there is a 'plethora of strong Indigenous women [who] are currently involved in leading roles, affecting policy and contributing in the areas of health, education, science and communication spheres' and that 'contemporary mainstream media seem oblivious to or ignore this fact' (2016, 26). While Celeste Liddle, for example, is providing a contestation toward this overwhelming invisibility through her media presence, she (nor any other Indigenous Australian) did not appear on the program in the period of data collection indicating, as Ryan (2016) notes, that there remains significant work to do with regard to the mainstream media representation of Indigenous voices. Similarly, a discussion about a transgender model's success on *The Grill* did not include a panelist who identified as transgender (17/10/2014), and although there were discussions on *Kochie's Angels* about welfare provisions ('Online forums helping welfare rorters cheat system' 30/9/2014; 'Farmers request youth on the dole to shoot feral animals' 2/10/2014), no panels included people who identified as being, or having been, recipients of income security payments.

The *exclusion zone* is not a new concept. There has been ongoing criticism that the mainstream media endorses those who are unlikely to challenge the dominant regime and thereby disregard calls for diverse representation (Taylor 2014b). White, heterosexist, ableist privilege is at the forefront of most of the visible feminism, and this must be highlighted and challenged. Of course, Australian feminism is in no way restricted to these public and palatable feminist figures; there is a significant amount of other feminist work that is invisible to the gaze of the mainstream media. For example, there is much online activism by feminists that is never widely reported (though there are large online movements that have attracted much attention such as Destroy the Joint), but also in the daily acts of feminist work in places of employment, in direct service supporting women survivors of intimate partner/family violence and sexual assault, and in the every day acts of those working to improve the lived conditions of women. The challenge is to generate debates about structural change when the embedded dominant ideology is neoliberalism and its associated individualistic discourses.

Nevertheless, in keeping with the unpalatable-palatable disruptive state of flux, the volatility of feminism in the mediasphere still manages to break through. A recent example of this involved Mia Freedman, whose behaviour was described by American celebrity feminist, Roxane Gay, as 'cruel and humiliating' due to Freedman describing Gay's physique as 'super morbidly obese' and for revealing information about accommodations that needed to be made for Gay in order for an interview to take place between the two feminists (Noyes 2017a). Despite Freedman's high profile as a commercially driven and predominantly palatable feminist, her actions with regard to the generally unpalatable Gay elicited critical responses from mainstream and non-mainstream media sources locally and internationally (Hawkins 2017; Noyes 2017b). Jenny Noyes (2017b) and Maeve Marsden (2017), both writing for *Daily Life*, the mainstream online lifestyle platform for Fairfax, drew specific attention to Freedman's ignorance of intersectional feminism and recognised her treatment of Gay as emanating from her position of privilege. This incident highlights how, in the case of Freedman, opinion can outweigh expertise and experience in feminist social commentary. Conversely, it reveals that people within, and outside, of the mainstream media are not benignly accepting of those who dominate mainstream media spaces and willingly challenge such authority. This underscores the fluidity and tensions of contemporary Australian feminism whereby celebrity feminists can represent loci of discursive contradictions and be a key site through which ideas and stances can be generated, provoked and fashioned more broadly.

Similarly, this does not mean that seemingly palatable feminists do not have unpalatable moments. Ahmed (2010a, 65) reminds us that the feminist is seen as the disruptor who provokes 'rolling eyes...However she speaks, the feminist is usually the one who is viewed as "causing the argument," who is disturbing the fragility of the peace'. In this sense, speaking within the mediasphere, mainstream or otherwise, about feminism—naming oneself as a feminist—will always be seen as a disturbance by someone. The ability to speak out, while highly privileged, is not without a level of risk as, in the contemporary mediasphere, it can attract the abuse of trolling and cyber-bullying. Such abuse, described by Jane (2016, 7) as 'gendered e-bile' and 'cyber-hate' can feel like, and qualifies as, a form of violence. And while these attacks are not restricted to women, Jericho's (2012) research into the Australian blogosphere indicates that women, especially high profile women, are particularly vulnerable to abuse. Thus, it can be argued that all feminists are seen as unpalatable at times. The unpalatable-palatable tension, therefore, is

never a simple binary; it operates as a continuum whereby there is tension at multiple intersections (Casey c.2018).

## Conclusion

Critiquing celebrity feminism is not to disavow the agency of women who consume feminist knowledge in this way. Nor does it mean that women are cultural dupes who are passively imbibing what they are being fed without critical skills. Palatable and unpalatable feminists, and those in between, have their audiences in the mediasphere; however, it is the feminist spokespeople who maintain their palatability that are having the broadest cultural reach in Australia at the present time. This can be observed on breakfast television panels *Kochie's Angels*, *Newsfeed*, *The Grill*, and *The Mixed Grill* which are populated by subjects who embody postfeminist modes of femininity and articulate entrepreneurial ways of being. The recent inclusion of men on these panels highlights the *bloke turn*, and associated *male feminist capital*, in popular Western feminism; this also signifies the possible appropriation of this women's space and potentially dilutes opportunities for (particular) women to have their ideas recognised in the mainstream media. This is why the unpalatable women's voices need to be heard more widely, and dissent and debate should be applied, not for personal gain and publicity of the individual feminists, but to demonstrate the feminist diversity that does exist.

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