

JOURNALISM 2004 CONFERENCE

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ABC IWAKI AUDITORIUM

12.10 PM - DOES THE LOVABLE LARRIKIN LIVE?

Moderator Mike Smith: Ladies and gentlemen, if I can have your attention. *Does the Lovable Larrikin Live?* My name is Michael Smith from the Press Club Committee: sometime larrikin... I'm not sure about the lovable bit. In this session we are trying to examine the changing culture of journalism and journalists by comparing the present generation of young journalists to the previous generation. The purpose of this examination is not to judge what may be the better culture - the old or new - but to at least identify how it's different and what difference that it's made to the readers, the listeners and the viewers. We are going to hear a presentation of some research and then discuss it with the children of the 60's and the children of the 70's and a couple of children of 80's. I'll introduce our panellists a little later.

But first, about two years ago Deakin University journalism lecturer Josie Vine approached the Press Club with an idea to research this subject as part of her Ph.D thesis. There was a lot of anecdotal evidence that the days of the hard-drinking, hard-working, hard-playing journalists were gone and replaced by generation Xers with different priorities and different ways of doing things : more likely to spend their evenings in the gym than the pub, more likely to be sipping a latte than a double scotch. Josie wanted to test that hypothesis and see if it meant anything – to go deeper and try and find out whether it made any difference to the journalism that we get in this town. She needed some interview subjects in two age groups -those who began their careers in the 70's and those who began their careers in the 90's. We linked her up with quite a number of interview subjects and the results of her research, which she did in conjunction with her fellow lecturer Paul Bethell are presented here for the first time today. Please welcome Josie Vine.

Josie Vine: Thanks Mike. In my game, journalism's role is discussed a lot. It's our job to think about what this role is. How do journalists know what their role is? So a few years ago I started thinking about how other professions know what their role is and I started thinking about what Florence Nightingale means to nursing. What Shakespeare means to theatre. And I started thinking, well, journalism also has its own character types that inform its self-identity - that of the hard-working, hard-drinking, lovable larrikin.

But we hear a lot of complaints about this larrikin and not about his or her anti-social behaviour. I'm going to use part of David Salter's speech given at this very conference three years ago. David Salter says: 'The trade I've always loved, journalism, seems to be going soft. With very few exceptions the mainstream media are just not prepared to risk the small loss of market share that might come from knocking the gloss off our lovely self-satisfied lives. Result? Too much of what is published and broadcast today has the consistency of baby food; timid premasticated pap.' Now although this complaint is not new there is very little research into whether there is something to complain about. So last year I decided to find out. Through a series of interview I compared comments from 10 people who were young

journalists in 1974 with comments from young journalists of 2003. Of course my aim was to discover whether larrikinism within Australian journalism culture was still alive.

But before I embarked on this crusade I needed the clear definition of larrikinism and what it means in journalism culture. So using various dictionaries, previous studies into larrikinism in general, biographies, autobiographies of Australian journalists and yes... I have got a life outside academia, but I did do a lot of reading. I came up with several themes, which my lovely assistant Astrid is writing up there – I don't know if you can see. You can just see it. I'll go through it. The first one is defiance, very important to larrikinism. The second one is competitiveness and hard work ethic, tenacity; passion is the third and exceeding limits, criminalities and my favourite, alcohol. There were some quite obvious initial findings. Of course we all know that journalists now enter the profession mostly with a tertiary qualification. In 1974, that didn't happen. People came straight out of secondary school. Gender of course, a lot more young female journalists in the profession now than there was previously, whereas in 1974 most of the young journalists were male. Newsgathering techniques: of course now technology dominates our news gathering technique, whereas previously in 1974 it was just hard work, foot-slogging. I'm not saying the technology is not hard work. Believe me I know it's hard work and we all saw that this morning. Social context – sure it was a time of change in 1974 but it was a lot more kind of optimistic type of change- people power. Where is the modern day John Lennon is what I'm asking.

In 2003, yes, it's still a time of change but it's a much more conservative atmosphere. So if we look back onto October 9th we can see that. So we all know today's newsrooms are very different from those of the early to mid-70's. But this investigation was more concerned with how these changes may have affected Australian journalism culture. So I'll start with defiance, if you can see defiance up there. Defiance could be seen in the 74 group's general rhetorical style. Lots of coarse language, lots of swearing – that kind of thing. They also tended to be much more aggressive in body language. They'd sit forward and look at me straight in the eye – very intimidating, some of these. Meanwhile those of 2003 were more inclined to sit straight, avoid eye contact and openly ask if their answers were appropriate. Is that all right Josie? Are you sure that's what you want? Journalists from 1974 also tended to mention misbehaviour and delinquency during secondary education. They also tended to talk of defiance against family or social expectations. In comparison, young 2003 journalists tended to describe themselves as quote 'very serious and sensible' as students. All young journalists of 1974 spoke of defiance as a cultural value – a professional cultural value. Describing their life as a journalist quote 'exciting, adventurous and wild'. In comparison, your 2003 interviewees tended to see journalism culture as quote 'friendly and conservative'. A lot of the 2003 journalists also claimed... that the profession's defiant and aggressive identity was merely a stereotype and two of the 2003 interviewees expressed disenheartenment at journalism's political correctness. Now I wasn't a journalist 1974 but those of you who were, was journalism politically correct? Think about that one. Young journalists of 1974 also described themselves as quote 'young, keen and brash. Compare that to the description of 2003 journalists who describe themselves as quote 'very sedate, very conservative with values including trust and honesty'. Not one mentioned defiance as a cultural value.

In 1974, investigative journalism was very quote 'seriously and actively pushed' and they were very proud of quote 'never being intimidated'. They saw journalism as

again quote 'ground breaking' and their role as quote 'creating pressure for governments and exposing misdemeanours'. I just want to give you this quick direct quote : 'we were really challenging society, poking and prodding and challenging institutions. We were revealing things that had never been revealed before. We were the pests; we thought we were holding people to account. Other institutions had to watch out for us because we were gunna get em'

Certain names came up regularly from the 1974 cohorts about how this sense of defiance was encouraged and nurtured – Graham Perkin, Les Carlyon, Keith Dunstan, John Hamilton and Harry Gordon to name a few. But the young journalists of 1974 were also quite defiant against the media organisations themselves and one of the most striking things was many talked about acts of defiance such as quiet but organised revolts against intrusions. I'll talk about competitiveness a bit. We can interpret competitiveness as underlying journalism's sense of defiance. Both groups agreed competitiveness was in journalism's nature but in 1974... this is the main difference.... journalists held no qualms about stealing each other's stories. So they were competitiveness against colleagues as well as journalists from other media outlets.....those in 1974 enjoyed the competitiveness against their colleagues but their 2003 counterparts tended to see the job as a team effort. Existing in a quote 'friendly surprising not competitive atmosphere'. The differences in competitiveness corresponded with the disparity between the work ethic of the two eras. The competitive streak of young 1974 journalists developed into a particular type of hard work ethic where young journalists were just working around the clock. But these young journalists in 1974 embraced this work ethic and I'll just give you a quick quote, because it's one of my favourites : 'you were just boom, boom, boom, boom, boom, boom you were never tired, hung over maybe but never tired'. But in 2003 many did complain about the long hours and the pressure and were much less keen about working round the clock.

I'll go on to tenacity and passion because I'm very conscious of the time.

The work ethic of 1974 also stemmed from a tenacity as a cultural value. In 74 young journalists were quote 'young, dogged, keen and persistent' and a quick direct quote: 'I have beliefs that were fairly simple – I wanted to get it and I wanted to get it first and I wanted to get it right'. Another one: 'I was obsessed with what I was doing, obsessed with getting the front page lead – with breaking stories'. This tenacity spilled over into a real passion for the profession and again I'm sorry I know the quotes take up time but I just love 'em. Direct quote: 'I'd just fallen in love with it, journalism, I loved the work, I loved the process, I loved the news, I loved the newsmakers, I was wildly excited by it – it was so wrappish, I was just hooked, completely hooked'. In comparison, young 2003 journalists were much more restrained in their expression. Three of the 10 said they wanted to start a family and would get out of journalism when the time came, two others wanted to travel. Although they all claimed to enjoy journalism, most of them complained about, again, the work hours, the stress and not much money.

I wanted to go on to exceeding limits. Now when I talk about exceeding limits I am meaning legal, ethical and social limits including the alcoholism - this is all part of the passion. In 1974, apparently, dozens of journalists were risking jail. These risks ranged from the serious to the mundane - from receiving illegally obtained documents, refusing to reveal a source before a court of law, signing false names to obtain access to office buildings, speeding, trespassing and lying. And those who got away with it, more importantly, were hailed as heroes. In comparison, today's young journalists said they would never be asked to push the boundaries of law or ethics.

But when the question was put to them hypothetically, several times may I add, all but one said they would not – they would never push the boundaries of law or ethics. The one exception was an interesting quote: ‘I’d never not think about it but being a cadet journalist you’ve got to establish your credibility, your reputation and that’s the key. Maybe in 10 years time when I’ve learnt the rules, that’s when I can play with them a bit’. This is 1 out of 10 of the young journalists who is willing to play with the rules. Playing with the rules back in 1974, though, was certainly very common. In 1974, and this is my favourite story, management at The Age had a no drinking policy on the newsroom floor. But there existed a deliberately ignored place in the locker room and I love this little quote too, talking about the bog bar: ‘But it was a benefit because if something hit the fan you had a pile of half-drunk subs ready to drag out and we would often rewrite the paper with half a dozen subs who should have knocked off hours ago and then you had to go and buy them more beer, but it worked’. Drinking was inherent in 1974 journalism culture. Certain pubs were often mentioned: the John Curtin, The City Court, the Kilkenny, The Phoenix, The Golden Age. And I am planning to visit these venues as part of my research. But drinking in 1974 was not really about getting drunk, it was more about unofficial training through conversations with those more experienced. It was about newsgathering because journalists could mingle with sources such as policemen, union and government officials. And it was professional counselling. The pub was the focal point for socialisation among journalists. The social life of journalists changed significantly between 1974 and 2003. All ‘74 subjects said their social group mainly involved other journalists. Meanwhile a mere 2 of the 10 2003 interviewees said the same. Although young journalists of 2003 said they mainly drink when they do socialise with colleagues, their main group of friends tend to be non-drinking and outside the industry. Young journalists today spend more time with their partners, have a private life away from work or just go home and crash at the day’s end.

These were the most outstanding differences. There were many, many more other more subtle differences and if you are interested my thesis will be ready in about 12 months time and when I publish it as a book you can buy it.

What I do want to do now is pose a few questions for the panel about what all these things mean to the type of information the public receives, which is after all, journalism’s whole point.

Do you have your papers in front of you with those discussion questions? You don’t have to stick to them, by all means discuss it how you want.

Mike Smith: Thank you Josie. What we’re going to do now is try and animate that research with some real people and real stories. We have a panel of 4 - 2 from the 2 cohorts, as Josie put it, of the two eras – the people who started in their 70’s and people who started in the 90’s.

On my far left, representing the oldsters, and the senior member of our panel Geoff Wilkinson of The Herald Sun. Geoff is 55. He’s got a classic larrikin pedigree. He was briefly a trainee teacher, a public servant, dole bludger and professional punter before getting a job at the Herald and Weekly Times mail room. Then he got his big break on September 30 1969 when he was hired as a sports cadet. Unfortunately it was with the ill-fated afternoon paper Newsday. When it closed, Geoff’s trail led to the Hobart Mercury, The Sun here in Melbourne, including in the hotbed of larrikinism, police rounds at Russell Street. He switched to Police Media Director for eight years, then Channel Nine, A Current Affair and back to the Herald Sun for the

past 10 years, picking up swags of awards, including a Press Club Quill or two, for crime reporting and legal reporting.

Next to him is Brian Walsh, aged 38. he began as a copy boy on the e Sun News Pictorial in 1984. He worked as a general reporter, sports reporter, and chief police reporter before leaving with a pocket full of Rupert's dollars in 1991. He worked at Tourism Victoria for a couple of years then returned to the scene of his crimes, The Herald Sun police rounds. Then he made his next mistake when he fell for the news editor's three-card trick of agreeing to one shift a week as night chief of staff and that led to three years on news desk jobs and a new skill of being able to hold six simultaneous conversations while screwing up press releases and drinking bad coffee. It also led to the total loss of his cranial hair. He was appointed deputy features editor and weekend editor in 1996 and in '99 managing editor of sport where he stayed until December 2000 when he went to his current position as communications director of www.ourcommunity.com.au - that's a national resource providing help for Australia's 700,000 community groups. That's sort of two mini-legends from the Herald and Weekly Times. And we have two of the brightest young journalists from the other end of town at The Age. Fleur Leyden, on my right, is 25, studied journalism in 1998 and started writing and editing for her university paper in Canberra, and then for Lifestyle magazine as well as reporting in Thailand for Nation newspaper. She joined The Age in 2001 as a business journalist and she's been reporting on telecommunications, small to medium companies, IPO's and funds management. I'm not sure how much of a larrikin there is in Fleur yet, but I was heartened to hear recently when I was making a phone call that she'd actually been filing some copy from a pub - just like the old days. Finally on my left, Melissa Fyfe from The Age, Melissa's 30. She studied journalism at RMIT, majoring in politics. She went to The Age as a cadet nine years ago. She's worked as a section editor for EG, a media reporter and feature writer, Sydney correspondent and she's now the environment reporter. And Melissa is a committee member of the Melbourne Press Club, which gives her some credentials in larrikinism.

The best contact I ever had- and the source of dozens of stories over a period of about 15 years - was a surgeon who was well connected in political and sporting circles as well as medicine and our relationship was forged over two bottles of Johnnie Walker in his lounge room. And he had the lion's share. And that was a session that finished at 7.30am when he stood up and announced that he was due in surgery in 45 minutes time.

About 12 hours before that I'd got someone to smuggle me into a meeting of about 150 public hospital surgeons who were protesting against Gough Whitlam's Medibank. At the end of the meeting about 10pm they passed a resolution to go on strike, which was a pretty fair yarn - it had never happened before. I needed some quotes from one of their leaders so I approached this surgeon in the foyer and he gave me a mouthful in front of a lot of his colleagues, threatened to have me thrown out of the place and poured invective on journalists as a class and me in particular. Said we could never be trusted to get anything right and anything he said would be twisted around 180 degrees. So I said to him 'you give me three sentences and I promise they'll be published in full on the front page of The Age', which was a little presumptuous of me but it worked - I got the quotes and rang the news editor about 10.25. He was very grateful. They needed a front page lead that night and I pleaded with him to keep these three sentences in. Rang the night editor a few minutes later to

plead with him to make sure. Tenminutes later rang the stone when the page was just about to go just to make sure they went in. I went back to the paper, got the first edition took it back to the AMA hall where they were and showed him the front page. And there started a beautiful friendship was the source of probably at least 100 stories for me over the next 15 years.

If I could put to Fleur, maybe first, leaving aside the fact that a 10.30pm story these days would miss one if not two editions – does that sort of thing happen these days? And in your experience in recent years what do you find are the most effective ways to make contacts. As well as answering that, feel free to give us any of your general thoughts about the presentation or research.

Fleur Leyden : Well, first of all, I think that the research is fantastic, Josie's done a great job and I think that a lot of it is accurate and of course there's always going to be anecdotal evidence that won't support it, you know . Because I class myself as a larrikin and I would be drinking this (holding can of beer) and I will later and can I just also say that in order to bring alcohol into the auditorium I've broken the law because this is a government building. Butto answer the question seriously, I think the best way of making contact with people is still, as Josie's research says, face-to-face. In my line of work, there tends to be coffees that you have, lunches that you have and sometimes drinks at the pub that you'll have with contacts. For example, last week, it was 5.30, I'd filed, I said to my editor I'm going down to the pub now because I know there'll be some people down there and I might get some stories and he was great he said 'yeah sure go', so I went down – 10 beers later I had my three stories for the next day. It took a bit of effort writing them the next day I can tell you. So I think definitely face-to-face and building trust and on your first meeting you can't expect to glean the information that you want. But I think that trust is built over time and people have to see you in the flesh rather than give you any good material down a phone line. That's my answer.

Mike Smith: Maybe you, Geoff, a simple question: Does the lovable larrikin live? Is it an extinct species or endangered or simply mutated and does it matter anyway?

Geoff Wilkinson: If he survives he could beChuck Lewis was right, for those who were here earlier when he said it's a great job and it is more fun than being a stenographer. But I fear there's a real risk that political correctness or the changing times or attitudes or whatever are taking the fun out of it to an enormous degree. We clearly haven't got time for the couple of dozen fabulous larrikin yarns that I've gathered in the space of about 24 hours without any trouble at all. I'm pleased to hear that Fleur's a larrikin but I took my dedication to the task a bit further by going to a police rounds send-off last night and getting pissed, that might be the difference. It would certainly be a shame if larrikinism died out altogether because I think it has been certainly an integral part of the profession. As far as contacts go, just one of those stories was that the night the Press Club members or guests who've been to lunches last year will know this bloke Greg Smith, he was called then, who was known as the building society bandit and he was on the front page of The Sun while he plundered building societies all around town and he was eventually caught about 4 one afternoon up at Mount Macedon and the police who'd enjoyed the publicity and depended on it for some extent for quite some time neglected to tell the media that they'd caught him and the first we heard of it up at police rounds which was in at Russell Street was 10.30 at night when a copper came down from D24 looking for a free paper and just mentioned in passing what a great pinch they'd made that afternoon. Sorry, what are you talking about? I caught the building society bandit. So the first thing we did was walk around the corner to the Police Club where two-thirds

of the armed robbery squad was celebrating this glorious victory. The rest of them were upstairs in the armed robbery squad's office interrogating the building society bandit – we caught up with them later on. But at 1 when the police club closed we adjourned with several members of the armed robbery squad to the Herald and Weekly Times where the subs' club - which is the Flinders Street version of the bog bar I guess - was well and truly in full swing and we stuck it out there until about 5 in the morning, as you did in those days. And by that time the stories on the front page and everybody was happy. But as I left to go home the security guard downstairs asked me whether I knew a copper... he described him, yeah I think I know the bloke you're talking about. Well, he's having trouble finding his car and I've walked around the corner into Exhibition Street and sure enough he was having trouble finding his car, which was a police vehicle, unmarked fortunately. So the only thing to do at the time seemed to be to drive him home.... which was a bit unfortunate because he lived in Frankston and by the time I got half way down St Kilda Road his head was on my shoulder and he was sound asleep and snoring. So when we got to Frankston I had to wake him up to ask him for particulars of where he lived. And his first reaction was to look around, look at me behind the wheel and say what are you doing driving this flippin car. Do you know how much trouble we'll be in if you get caught driving a police car? To which I replied not nearly as much as if you get caught driving it. He recently retired at a very high rank and remained a very good contact for many years after that night and I agree that face-to-face - whether it's over a beer or anything else - is clearly where the best contacts are made.

Mike Smith: Brian, I understand that sometime in your day there was actually a reward system for larrikinism or what could be described as larrikinism, annual awards, tell us about those.

Brian Walsh : When I first started at The Sun there were two major awards, I suppose now you have the Melbourne Press Club, you have the Quill's, you also have the Walkleys which were then as well – I've once seen one, I haven't touched one. But they had at The Sun the annual awards were the Bamix's, which were for the biggest, beat-up of the year. And I suppose, I mentioned it to Mike, it's one of the great differences - in those days you tended to celebrate your stuff-ups , whereas now I think we are so corporate, to actually admit that we'd made the mistakes is just not on the agenda. I think the first year I went to the Bamix's and everyone from the editor down attended. It was in the aftermath the aftermath of the Ash Wednesday bushfires. (A reporter) had rocked up there about one or two days after the bushfires to have this welfare worker explain how some of the people were so hard off that they were eating cat food which duly went into The Sun the next day – big story except everyone, including all the welfare workers, the coppers, the fire brigade all the citizens of Cockatoo, couldn't recall anyone that had to eat cat food. So he was sent out in search of this welfare worker who had disappeared into the ether, obviously killed himself laughing for they'd spun such an appalling line and got away with it, so Russ won with that one. The following year Tom Prior, who was then the senior reporter for The Sun, and if you talk about larrikin – an absolute living legend who could drink more beer than I think anyone I've ever seen: loved a stoush, he was one of those blokes who grabbed a taxi on a Friday night. Would do the rounds of about 7 or 8 pubs around the city before the taxi eventually got him home to Brighton. For one you wouldn't get a taxi docket these days, let alone one that stopped at a pub. Tommy won for.... there was a famous transvestite in Melbourne. Her name was Karen. She was incredibly well-known to most of the sporting people in this fair city, including most of the travelling Test players and Tom wrote this story about how

Karen had died of an aids-related illness. Tom woke up the next day a little bit sore in the head for having celebrated his page 1 story and knew he was in trouble when he walked outside and the taxi driver was shaking his head. He said 'Tom! Karen, this story!' . Tom said 'Yeah what's wrong?'. "She not dead.' 'What do you mean she's not dead?' 'I dropped her home three hours ago.' The next day was another story where Karen rose from the ashes to explain that she was a little bit off colour but hadn't quite died. I think I had my best nominationwas writing that a headless body was found fac-down, which I was credited with but to this day blamed the subs for inserting it.

Mike Smith: Thanks Brian. That Tom Prior story reminds me of a classic telex that was sent to a foreign correspondent in some African state who'd filed a story about a coup in this tiny nation. He seemed to be the only one who knew about it though and he got the classic telex message from the editor – 'your story still exclusive please explain!' Melissa, just picking up on one of Brian's points: the media, like all institutions, I guess, has come under much more scrutiny in recent years. Accountability is a catch cry. Society has become more litigious – more watch dogs. Do you think that affects the behaviour of journalists, professionally and personally these days? And once again, feel free to give us any of your general thoughts on the broader issues?

Melissa Fyfe: I just start of by saying that I didn't get drunk at a pub last night trying to make contacts because I had to get up at 5 this morning and started writing a story for tomorrow's paper and if anybody would question the ability of young journalists to drink I think they only need to go to a Christmas party to get the picture right there. But I think in many ways we are living in a time where people are more litigious – there is a lot more awareness of what people write. There are people who are paid to monitor the media and jump on any prospect of a legal case but not only that, you know, I guess, Brian's point about being corporate is true to a degree. But there is also an element of owning up to our mistakes more publicly and at The Age we have to actually say that we were wrong and the mistake by the reporter or the sub editor and that's a very sobering thing to face every day. We don't get awards for massive stuff-ups any more, that's true. I would argue that that's not a bad thing in the context of having to be a bit more responsible about the fact that what we do write has an impact and we need to correct the public record – that's all very boring isn't it? But just generally I think we also live in a different time where we have to....every day is a battle against public relations people and crisis management and image control and all these things which have a much greater role I guess in the media than they did 30 years ago.

Mike Smith: Thanks Melissa. I might take some questions now for any of the panellists or Josie. I think we have a roving microphone. Who's got a question or an old war story – or both? Over here on the left.

Question: Hi, I was just wondering whether Josie's work also compared the products of 1974 with the products of today.

Josie Vine : No, because there have been lots and lots and lots of research comparing the products and I wanted to do something new, something different, something that journalists themselves were concerned about and were talking about and I felt that the changing of culture would complement the research into the changing of product. However what I am going to be looking at is the change in how journalists represent themselves and I know that sounds like academic wanking and I'm very, very sorry - the changes in how...like, for example, at one of the Quill Awards Dinners there was a wine list which had a well- rounded red on it, and it was the journalists, it wasn't a

wine, there was a picture of a journalist with it. So I am looking how journalists represent themselves. But if you're interested in research into the actual products, there's lots of it around.

Mike Smith: It's an interesting issue, how journalists do represent themselves or perpetuate the myths. A very prominent English journalist Christopher Hitchens once said that he became a journalist because he didn't want to rely on his newspapers for information. Question down the front.

Question: Good afternoon, John McKenna speaking. I have recently involved in a television on Channel 31 called *No Limits* if anyone has ever seen it, I'm known as Macca with the funny hat. In relation to political correctness, I am very much interested to know from a journalist's point of view – when we talk disability, political correctness, human rights commission, all of this, is it a topic and before putting the question to you the response that I have had from the public a bit of gadget section I do where I take the piss out of it....and especially within the disability community they love it and I'm a 42-year-old guy who just so much believes that larrikinism has to happen to move forward and it's a great way to break the ice. I go through it everyday hopping on and off a train. So my question, I guess to the panel, if you don't mind is, it a real taboo topic and do you have trouble grasping with it and I'm just interested in the panel's thoughts on that please.

Mike Smith: The topic being – handling disability? I can recommend the programme John referred to. In fact last week, it was a finalist in the United Nations Association Media Peace Awards – good stuff.

Brian Walsh: I suppose from my point of view I've worked for the last four years with Rhonda Gallbally who is now the head of the Disability Council and I probably wish that I had dealings with her 20 years ago when I was first starting in journalism. I think there is a level of political correctness whether it's disability or whether it's indigenous people or whatever – people from different cultures. There is a bit of self censorship even if people talk about disability or indigenous issues you tend to self-censor because you think it's going to cause offence or whatever. And John, as you say, I think the people that are best placed is yourself as the larrikinismis that you want that sort of reaction or people to talk about it and that it's a normal thing. I don't think that in journalism, I don't think anyone ever took me aside and said this is how you deal with it, whether it's disability issues or indigenous issues or cultural issues. You tend to, sort of, I suppose, through osmosis. As with most things in journalism. it's changed now with the courses but you're just stuck somewhere, given a note pad and pen and said go forth and you sort of had to pick it up from those around you. I think we are a bit too sensitive though. We still are.

Mike Smith: Question here.

Question: Yes, my name is John Keogh from Monash University. Josie's research seems to indicate that some of the larrikinism has gone out of journalism with the new breed of journalists. Assuming this is true, and the evidence suggests this, does the panel believe that it might have something to do with when journalists enter the work force now compared to back in the '70's? Back in the '70's they were straight out of high school fairly young. Now they're uni graduates. It's difficult enough to get into uni itself and it's becoming a much more structured and rigorous and perhaps more serious process.

Mike Smith : Yeah and I think the social environment in the early '70's was quite interesting and probably unique historically – it was Vietnam war, flower power, marijuana, LSD and moratorium marches and there was a lot of student protest, particularly on university campuses but also in secondary school. So the

people who did join in the '70's grew up in that politically active social environment, as well. Geoff you have spanned four decades. Have you got any perspective on that?

Geoff Wilkinson: I thought that when you introduced me as a child of the '60's, I wish! Look, it's a good theory but I didn't have the pleasure or privilege of going to university but those I know who have over the years have been fairly partial to a drink and enjoying themselves so I'm not sure if the theory stands up in practice in terms of developing habits of larrikinism. Even defining larrikinism is difficult. I mean I looked at my, admittedly my tabloid dictionary on the desk last night and larrikin is described as hooligan. Well, you know, soccer has hooligans, journalism doesn't. Violent, irresponsible young person.

Brian Walsh: And that's before you get on the booze. Indulge me with one very brief story, again a reflection of changing times I suppose. In the days when subs and reporters used to socialise, admittedly only on one day of the year which was good Thursday, the day before Good Friday when there's no paper and the annual cricket match was played. And one year, sadly, I missed the game because I was in the Fairfield Infectious Diseases Hospital with meningitis and in strict isolation and all that sort of business and during the lunch break at the game down the road at Yarra Bend Park, two of my colleagues who were in various shades of white for the cricket match wandered up the road to the hospital found a couple of doctors' gowns on a hook and donned them and found their way into my ward, which caused a fair bit of consternation when they were sprung about 10 minutes later. I mean you may call them larrikins at the time. I called them mates and they probably shouldn't be named but one of them is now the State's Privacy Commissioner and the other one is a bald headed multimedia megastar, so it didn't seem to affect their futures too much.

Can I just add – I don't think it's so much whether you went to uni or not - I think the single biggest element that's helped to kill off larrikinism is technology in terms of ... the technology has changed with the paper to supposedly make them more efficient. The actual edition times have come back. I suppose in my time I could file from a murder scene at 1.30 to The Sun news desk as I did one night over the two-way doing 130km, talk about illegality or whatever, over the Westgate Bridge, which was a good effort because the office Camira was struggling and nightI was yelling into the two-way and he couldn't tap quick enough. But I think that's why the era of the larrikin is that you could be out at the pub and find something new, find out facts on a story or whatever, get a lead on something – you could get it at 11.00 and it could be on the front page by 12.30. It just changed that quickly and you had the subs who would love to change the paper, to throw it around, with the advent of colour and the new presses and everything it looks beautiful. But the edition times have come back from midnight to – like on The Herald Sun probably 9.30 or 10.00. If you haven't got your story on the news list at three in the afternoon it's got to be an absolute ball tearer.

Mike Smith: Melissa has already filed her story for tomorrow's paper.

Melissa Fyfe: Not quite. I have to run back and do some more stuff on that

Mike Smith: We didn't even think about it until 9.00 at night.

Fleur Leyden: Mike can I just say one thing. I think that one of the biggest changes with technology as well as the PR machine, I don't know what it was like for journalists way back when but these days its no excuse to say PR people are in the way because you've got to think laterally and you have got to find out the information and use your head a bit. But at the same time, sometimes you need basic information from a company and you have to go to the company and you're given the run-around...and they're stalling you and you know they're stalling you. I write on

Telstra and I even know that there's a PR person from Telstra in the audience so I don't know if they've got an interest in journalism or if they're checking up on the new girl doingbut I think that the PR machine is perhaps a bit of a change for young journalists these days and I think it's something that you have to work your way around and it can be quite hard sometimes.

Mike Smith: We are going to take three or four more questions, but those who want to catch the beginning of the one o'clock session on *Tales of the Century* at the Merlin Theatre ...you could slip out quietly now. We'll continue with a few more questions. I think Peter you had a question.

Question: Geoff, I've got a question. I just qualified for larrikinism by saying my hangover probably matches yours today after the police rounds send-off. Leading on from what Fleur has said, having been in the industry for such a long time you mentioned earlier that you feared that younger journalists were turning into stenographers having worked on the other side of the fence with PR machines. What are some tips that you can give young journos about still holding that sense of larrikinism and that gives you good contacts and makes your stories better.

Geoff Wilkinson: Just to correct the record, I certainly didn't say that young journalists were stenographers. I said it's more fun that being a stenographer.

I was on the Press Club committee for a couple of years until a couple of years ago and every year that I'm aware of there has been some discussion on the Press Club about finding and developing a city headquarters for the Press Club and the main purpose being to give journalists young and old from different ends of town and electronic and print and whatever somewhere to socialise, meet, mingle, exchange ideas and whatever. And I think that's a fabulous idea and that's what pubs are for largely. The young people at The Herald Sun struggle to get to the pub on Thursday night still, I'm pleased to see. But as Brian said it is a different culture and just a word of warning to Josie if you're planning on going to those pubs you mentioned. The Kilkenny is now a tabletop dancing venue and the City Court is occupied by spin doctors which is probably a sign of the times and reflects what Fleur was saying. I mean the City Court used to be the font of all wisdom as far as police reporting goes, but now its occupied by Gavin Anderson among others.

Mike Smith: Peter you had a question?

Question: Peter Wieneger from RMIT. I'd like to put this particularly to Melissa and Fleur. To what degree is larrikin behaviour actively discouraged by management. That's one part. The second part is: is it possible to be either lovable or a larrikin when most of the reporter's time, these days, is spent camped in front of a computer researching on the internet?.

Fleur Leyden : I'll do the second part first, but I think that's sort of the real trap because there are days or weeks when I do spend a lot of time camped in front of the computer and you know you've got your phone there and you've got the internet – the internet can be a great search tool, like don't get me wrong, but your better stories are generally the ones that you've met up with someone....so I don't think you can be so much of a larrikin when you're chained to your desk. How much does management discourage larrikinism? Well ...I know my story earlier.... saying that last week I asked my editor at 5.30 can I please go to the pub but I actually had to ask him and when I asked him I made sure no one else heard me because I thought they might think I was slacking off or getting favourable treatment. You just can't leave and go to the pub even if you have filed but luckily for me the guy I report to was like 'Oh okay that's alright' so I'm sure he wouldn't let me do it too much if I didn't come back with a story though.

Brian Walsh: That's tragic.

Fleur Leyden: I think it might be a little bit about – I mean I think you can be – it's a bit hard, I mean news rooms can be quite sort of conservative places plus I sometimes think maybe it's about the fact that the whole interview process these days is so gruelling and there's so much pressure on it...there's so few jobs. I often think about Jim Shembri, I think who from memory, turned up to his interview in a tennis uniform, I was told that once and I don't think that would ever happen today.

Mike Smith: That was with the Chief Commissioner of Police who was in full uniform on a Sunday.

Fleur Leyden: So I just think that it might be a bit more about something to do with that but it doesn't mean that once you get there you can develop a larrikin side to you – I don't think there's anything stopping you doing that.

Mike Smith: I remember when I was a cadet there was sort of a standard for general news reporters – they were unofficially required to produce 30 paragraphs a day. Whether it be one story or two stories or seven 7 stories. And as soon as you reached the 30 paragraphs, you were allowed to go the pub. In fact you were encouraged to go to the pub as long as the chief of staff knew which pub it was so that you could be dragged back. How many paragraphs on average do people file these days?

Brian Walsh: Can I just take up that one, I agree with that. When I started as a cadet we would...there were three or four of us as cadets on The Sun, fight like crazy to get the crap picture story of the day, which had a probably 30/70 chance of making it into the paper. Like the cadets when I was on the desk, the new cadets would arrive and they would definitely be loaded up with two or three yarns just from the outside. Even before you looked at the quality or whatever it was straight away you had stuff to do. If you were a body in the office you had a yarn. So I mean that has changed – I think that is a valid point.

Mike Smith: Two more questions.

Question: Tony Thomas, I'm both a citizen and an ex-journalist. I've got a question for Melissa. About three weeks ago David Bellamy visited Australia and he's an environmental scientist who doesn't believe in greenhouse warming. I think you do believe in greenhouse warming and you describe David Bellamy and all his views as discredited. Do you think discredited is an example of larrikin journalism on The Age?

Melissa Fyfe: Thanks so much for that question. That's a very interesting point that you made. That piece that I wrote was written with a great deal of consideration and has since started somewhat of a storm among the climate change sceptics and the network of people who don't believe in climate change. It's something that was, I guess, a piece of competent journalism, I wouldn't call it larrikin journalism I can put you onto several climate change sceptics who said it was unethical but it was well researched and it's been fully backed up by lots and lots and lots of scientists so I can have a discussion with you about that later if you like.

Mike Smith: I think we'll draw it to a close there. Lunch is on up at the Merlin Theatre, just up in Sturt Street not far away – you can still catch most of the *Tales of the Century* session up there. A reminder that we're back here at 2 for the professional session and at the Merlin Theatre at 2 for the student session. Finally if you could thank our panel members in particular Josie Vine from Deakin University for this panel discussion. Thank you.