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### 'You Need to Protect the Community': Representations of Young Indigenous Men in Mainstream News Media Coverage of the 'gang of 49'

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#### Abstract

This paper considers representations of the so-called 'gang of 49' which appeared in the mainstream news in Australia from late 2007. In particular, it focuses on how Indigenous masculinity is associated with discourses of criminal behavior, delinquency, violence, and aggression within this media coverage. In examining these gendered discourses of violence, the paper also considers the ways in which the mainstream news media justified its extensive coverage of the so-called 'gang of 49' through recourse to the protection of public safety and security, thereby explicitly representing Indigenous males as a threat to the mainstream Australian community. Finally, the implications of this representation are considered in light of previous calls for accountability within the mainstream news media in relation to its coverage of issues concerning marginalised groups of people.

#### Introduction

In January 2007, Adelaide's *The Advertiser* began reporting on stories concerning a 'gang of 49', and thereafter the so-called 'gang' became a common feature within this particular newspaper. The term was used to refer to a group of predominately male Aboriginal youths who were "blamed for hundreds of crimes across Adelaide" (see, for example, Riches, James and Henderson 2007, 1), and who were frequently represented as violent, 'hardcore', and 'lawless'. The 'gang of 49' was investigated by police through 'Operation Mandrake', which was initially reported in the media as an operation designed to investigate car theft and repeat offenders. Media coverage of crimes by the so-called gang continues as this paper was written.

In 2009, while completing her PhD concerning representations of Indigenous Australians and refugees, the author had a personal experience with the representation of the 'gang of 49' that highlighted how discourses such as those (re)produced in the media come to constitute reality. Her house was broken into one night by a small number of youths who appeared intoxicated and were somewhat aggressive. The author had managed to call to the police, and the youths, while intent on stealing objects such as laptops, were easily distracted by conversation until the police arrived, including congratulating the author on her pregnancy. During the course of the conversation, several references were made by the youths themselves to the 'gang of 49', including "there are 49 of us waiting outside", and subsequently members of the police force who arrived and apprehended one of the offenders also made casual references to this gang on those terms, assuming the offenders in question were Indigenous.

This incident is included in this paper to highlight an important issue: the power of media coverage in constituting and (re)producing reality. The incident highlighted for the author the very real power those representations have, not only for those who are considered to be the readership of news media, but also for those who are the subject of negative (or positive) media reporting. In this case, it is notable that both the young men and the police had taken up this label made available by the media (as outlined throughout this paper), despite the 'gang' not necessarily being an empirical fact. This take up of a representation by the media highlights the importance of ongoing critiques of media representations in order to understand how people and events are represented to the public who may have no contact with those people or events themselves. Correspondingly, this paper analyses the media coverage of the 'gang of 49' in order to examine the dominant discourses and modes of representation in this highly racialised media coverage.

## **Method**

This paper employs a critical discourse analytic approach to examine the representations of the gang of 49 in the mainstream news media. This approach considers, as do Wetherell and Potter (1992), the way in which the variability inherent in language is used to perform various tasks in constructing and developing accounts of the world and arguing for particular outcomes, whilst at the same time following Parker's (1992) warning that a focus on language which does not consider the political, social, and power relations in whose service an account may operate risks becoming an empty analytic tool rather than actually producing productive and applicable results. As such, the paper draws upon a synthetic approach such as that employed by Wetherell (1998) and Wetherell and Edley (1999), who argue that a stance which utilises a fine grained analysis of the action orientation of talk (e.g. Edwards and Potter 1992) as read through the existence of power relations and operations of subjectification within that text (following the work of Foucault) is the most productive. Such a focus on the way in which power relations and inequalities are maintained in the mainstream media through dominant discourses means that the discourse analysis employed in this paper is inherently critical; a form of analysis generally considered the most appropriate for the analysis of media texts (e.g., see Fowler 1991; van Dijk 1993, Fairclough 1995).

A requirement for qualitative (or indeed all) research is the call for situated reflexivity – that is, for the researcher to make clear their standpoint and be able to situate their research within that. The author is a non-Indigenous Australian living and working on the land of the Kurna people in the Adelaide plains in South Australia.

In relation to the data, a search for “‘gang of 49’ OR ‘gang of forty-nine’ OR ‘operation mandrake’” with the top 12 mainstream news media paper by circulation (see conducted Australian Press Council 2007) in April 2012 returned 201 articles, 149 of which were news articles and which formed the data set for this paper.

## **Results**

This section presents the two themes found as a result of data analysis. These are discussed in relation to previous literature in the area.

### *Indigenous Australians and crime*

The criminalisation of youth, and specifically (in the Australian context) Aboriginal youth, is not a new phenomenon. Literature has long documented the criminalisation of Indigenous Australians in a wide variety of institutions in Australia, including the police force and criminal justice system (Cunneen 2001; Meadows 2002). This literature has identified that Indigenous Australians are frequently stereotyped within the media as inherently criminal or dangerous (Meadows 2002; Simmons and LeCouteur 2008), that Indigenous Australians are often viewed within the legal system and police force as a threat (Cunneen

2001), and that Indigenous Australians remain significantly over-represented in prison in Australia (Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody 1991). Indeed, the Report of the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody (RCADIC) included a section which specifically examined mainstream news media coverage of Indigenous Australians, and found that the media frequently reported on Indigenous crime, constructing Indigenous Australians as a “problem” and as “dissident, disruptive, or criminal” (RCIADIC 1991, section 12.6.7). The Report also commented on the fact that Indigenous people felt that where a crime was committed by an Indigenous person, media reports frequently reported the offender’s race, but did not do so if they were non-indigenous, instead including other demographic information such as age (RCIADIC 1991, section 28.1.16). An example of such coverage in relation to the ‘gang of 49’ is provided in Extract 1:

#### Extract 1

1. The Aboriginal gang of 49 is believed to be responsible for a wild crime spree in which five people were assaulted.
2. Police are hunting for a group of teenagers who bashed two women with iron bars in a “cowardly attack” on Monday night.
3. In the latest gang-related spree in the southwestern suburbs two women were bashed and robbed, then three people waiting at the Marion railway station were assaulted by offenders who stole backpacks and wallets.
4. The six alleged offenders are described as 15 to 17 years old, of Aboriginal appearance, of slim build and wearing hooded tops.
5. A woman was treated in hospital for facial cuts after being hit with an iron bar and another was left “sore and bruised” after a vicious bashing about 10pm on Monday.
6. Detective acting Chief Inspector Kym Hand said “the attacks were cowardly, opportunistic and violent and the targets were not armed and not able to defend themselves.”
7. Chief-Insp Hand could not confirm the group was part of the gang of 49.
8. However, The Advertiser has learned some of the gang have been recently released on bail and are again committing crimes (Milnes 2007a, 7).

This extract clearly represents the ‘gang of 49’ as an Indigenous gang by explicitly referring to it as “Aboriginal” in the first sentence, following previous research (e.g., Hartley and McKee 2000; Mickler 1992). The so-called gang is then criminalised in this sentence by stating that it is “believed to be responsible for a wild crime spree in which five people were assaulted.” The representation of these crimes as a ‘wild crime spree’ is an extreme case formulation that implies that these crimes were especially uncontrollable or fierce, thus tying into notions of Indigenous Australians as *inherently* violent and uncontrollable, as well as notions of masculinity given the typical association between masculinity and violence (and particularly gang violence) (see Alexander 2004 for an example of this association).

Interestingly, the attribution that the ‘crime spree’ was committed by the ‘gang of 49’ is made despite the article later reporting in section 7 that in fact the Chief-Inspector could not confirm that the group, who are reported as being “of Aboriginal appearance” (section 4), were actually part of this alleged ‘gang’. Instead, in this extract the crimes are related to the so-called gang on the basis that the newspaper has “learned that some of the gang have been released on bail and are again committing crimes” (section 8). Thus the extract explicitly foregrounds the Indigeneity of the alleged offenders, and relates the crimes to the offenders’ race and supposed membership of a ‘gang’. Indeed, the very use of the term

'gang' in this extract, and in the wider mainstream news media coverage, implies inherent criminality and violence.

In relation specifically to Indigenous youth crime, researchers such as Hartley and McKee (2000) and Sercombe (1995) have noted that the coverage of Indigenous crime can be so pervasive that categories such as 'juvenile crime' become synonymous with *Indigenous* juvenile crime, with constructions of "the criminal" having "a young Aboriginal face" (Sercombe 1995, 92). Additionally, Mickler (1992) specifically argues that the media frequently report on Indigenous issues in a biased and inflammatory manor, particularly in relation to crimes allegedly committed by Indigenous youth. This conflation therefore constructs Indigenous young people as inherently criminal, as members of 'gangs' and as deserving of jail sentences. Furthermore, this criminality is also explicitly discussed as being a *male* attribute, with Sercombe (1995) arguing that the stereotypical offender is young, male and black. An example of such coverage appears in Extract 2:

#### Extract 2

1. 1. Assistant Commissioner Gary Burns said that while incarceration was not the answer to the social issues leading to Aboriginal youth crime, the community needed to be protected.
2. 2. "Some are so bad that the best opportunity for public safety is to incarcerate them, but the reality is that you can't lock them up and throw away the key," he said. "Some on the list have been there since its inception and they aren't changing their behaviour at all. 3. "These are serious recidivist offenders and they're high-profile crimes."
3. 4. Police have identified 23 males aged between 14 and 26 as the main members. Some have recorded close to 100 convictions by the age of 17 (Riches and Lower 2008, 28).

In sections 1 and 4 of this extract the article explicitly states that the 'problem group' in question is young Aboriginal males. The extract quotes Assistant Commissioner Gary Burns arguing that this group of people is beyond help, stating that they are "serious recidivist offenders" (section 3), unable to change their behavior (section 2), and that the only solution is to "incarcerate them". By providing additional 'contextual' information in section 4 to these comments made by the Commissioner, this extract does little to problematise the commissioner's statements. Whilst the Commissioner does touch on social issues in his quote (for example, that you "can't lock them up and throw away the key"), the extract does not provide a detailed discussion of what these might be. Correspondingly, this extract presents not only a link between Indigenous male youth and violence, but also a position whereby the alleged violence of this group lead to only one solution; incarceration, in order to protect the community.

Whilst the RCIADIC (1991) commented that racism and criminalization in the mainstream media appeared to be lessening over the years in which the report was written, the above extracts clearly indicate the continuing racialisation within the media of crimes allegedly committed by Indigenous Australians. More recently Meadows (2001) and Hollingsworth (2005) and Jakubowicz et al. (2004) have argued that Indigenous issues are frequently only covered if they contain a criminal element. Additionally, McCallum (2007) found that Indigenous Australians continue to be represented as threatening, with 'Indigenous violence' appearing as a routine news story in mainstream newspapers across the six-year period of her study. Similarly, these findings of continued criminalisation are supported by various studies concerning the role of Indigenous Australians in 'riots' such as the Redfern and Brewarrina riots (see Goodall 1993; Morris 2005; Budarick and King 2008; Simmons and LeCouteur 2009). This focus on criminalisation is evidenced in Extract 3:

### Extract 3

1. Police are expecting a spike in criminal activity when several "extremely dangerous" members of an Aboriginal gang are released from jail by the end of the month.
2. The profile of the gang, from Adelaide's western and northern suburbs, has been raised by a week of random violence, including a home invasion by machete-wielding attackers and a string of robberies, as well as high-speed chases (McGarry 2007a, 5).

This extract is taken from one of the first articles to report on the 'gang of 49'. The existence of the 'gang' is accepted uncritically in this extract, and the term is used as though it were a fact rather than a construction. The fact that the 'gang of 49' is again explicitly referred to as an "Aboriginal gang" in this extract reflects the arguments discussed in relation to Extract 1 regarding the overt linking of the criminal activities of this alleged gang with the youths' status as Indigenous Australians. Discourses of violence are also drawn upon in this extract when the youths are referred to as "extremely dangerous" (section 1), and as likely to re-offend given the expected "spike in criminal activity."

Interestingly, the crimes allegedly committed by members of this gang are referred to in this extract in section 2 as "random violence", and therefore suggests that the crimes are somehow uncontrollable or unpredictable. Indeed, in characterising the crimes as "random violence" rather than as (for example) "random crimes", the extract draws upon discourses and stereotypes of Indigenous Australians (and, of course, especially 'Indigenous gangs') as being violent and unpredictable. Such representations reflect discourses of Indigenous Australians as primitive in that they represent these youths as unable to organise or control themselves, thereby mirroring arguments stating that Indigenous Australians did not organise themselves and resist colonisation (see Riggs, 2004, for a discussion of this argument made by Keith Windsuttle, and see Morris, 2005 for a discussion of the representation of Indigenous Australians as primitive in relation to criminal violence).

As such, the current analysis reflects findings of previous research regarding Indigenous Australians and crime, including findings that Indigenous Australians are represented as inherently violent, alcoholic and dysfunctional, and thereby as responsible for, and likely to commit, violent acts.

#### *Calls for tougher penalties*

The second theme found within the mainstream news media in relation to the 'gang of 49' was that of calls for tougher penalties for the youth involved. Such calls mirror previous research on the Intervention, in which government and army intervention was justified on a similar basis – that is, essentially the need to protect the broader community from a group of criminal Indigenous males. As such, an outline of the Intervention is called for here.

Since mid-2006, the level of child sexual abuse in Indigenous communities has been the focus of much media and government attention. This attention was largely prompted by two interviews in May 2006 on *Lateline*, with the Alice Springs Crown Prosecutor, Nanette Rogers, and then Indigenous Affairs minister, Mal Brough, in which allegations about sexual abuse and pedophile rings were made. Watson, in her discussion of the Northern Territory intervention, argues that these interviews made the media coverage of the issue of child sexual abuse in the Northern Territory a "full blown moral panic" (2009, 5), and prompted the Chief Minister in the Northern Territory to establish the Northern Territory Board of Inquiry into the Protection of Aboriginal Children from Sexual Abuse. The Report from this Board of Inquiry, entitled *Ampe Akelyernemane Meke Mekarle - 'Little Children are Sacred'* was released to the Chief Minister at the end of April 2007. Following the release of this report, the incumbent Howard government announced a number of

measures that would be put in place to address child sexual abuse in remote Indigenous communities in the Northern Territory. In early August 2007 three Bills were introduced to federal parliament. Together, these Bills comprised legislation relating to a range of areas, including welfare payment quarantining, bans on pornographic material, alcohol restrictions, and changes to the permit system and land tenure arrangements (Hunter 2007; Watson 2009). In order to implement the Bills, the *Racial Discrimination Act 1975 (Cth)* which makes acts that make the “distinction, exclusion, restriction or protection based on race” (RDA 1975: S9(1)) unlawful was suspended, thus enabling the intervention to implement measure solely designed for Indigenous Australians.

The (ongoing) Northern Territory Intervention has received both criticism and support from commentators, both Indigenous and non-Indigenous (see Stringer 2007; Altman 2007; Langton 2007; Watson 2009; Howe 2009 for a discussion of these issues). However, one issue that was clear surrounding the Intervention was the unprecedented levels of media coverage of violence in remote Indigenous communities, which many argued was largely sensationalised (e.g., Altman 2007; Watson 2009). This media coverage generally discussed the Intervention and the sexual abuse of children in graphic detail, with little consideration of broader, contextual issues relevant to violence in Indigenous communities (Altman 2007; Due and Riggs 2012). This finding is echoed in the analysis outlined above, and the ‘moral panic’ seen in the Intervention is also highlighted in the extracts below. These extracts indicate how the discourses of violence seen in the above section were frequently used in the mainstream news media to justify calls for more intervention into the lives of Indigenous Australians, and frequently for ‘tough’ penalties for their crimes – specifically advocating for jail terms. An example of such calls can be seen in extract 4.

#### Extract 4

1. Police Commissioner Mal Hyde says some members of the Gang of 49 “should be taken out of circulation because they cannot be rehabilitated.”
2. The frustrated police chief's call for action follows further crime sprees linked to the group of repeat juvenile Aboriginal offenders.
3. He said that police knew that when some of the offenders were released, the crime rate would go up “so we have to work as fast as we can to put them back inside”.
4. “I have argued that the courts should be taking community safety more into account when dealing with these people,” Mr Hyde said yesterday.
5. “The reality of it is you still need to protect the community. Some of them won't be rehabilitated. That's the bottom line, you need to take them out of circulation”, Mr Hyde said (Milnes 2007b, 6).

In this extract the mainstream news media draws upon statements made by the South Australian Police Commissioner that some members of the ‘gang of 49’ should be “taken out of circulation because they cannot be rehabilitated” (section 1). The extract explicitly links Indigenous Australians with crime, and simultaneously constructs these Indigenous youth as unable to be rehabilitated and therefore as inherently criminal. Additionally, the use of terms such as “taken out of circulation” and “these people” function not only to criminalise but also dehumanise the Indigenous Australian youth to which this article refers.

The extract then goes on to quote the Police Commissioner arguing that: “The reality is you still need to protect the community” and, since these youth are unable to be rehabilitated “you need to take them out of circulation” (section 5). Thus, in quoting the Police Commissioner extensively in this extract, the media justifies claims for jail

sentences for these youth on the basis of community protection. Whilst the article from which this extract was taken later quotes people who counter these claims made by the Police Commissioner (as detailed in Extract 5 below), the foregrounding of the Police Commissioner's comments are prioritised by placing them at the beginning of this article, and by the headline of the article itself: "Lock the Gangs up, says Police Chief."

#### Extract 5

1. General Counsel for the Aboriginal Legal Rights Movement Chris Charles said yesterday there was "no such thing" as a Gang of 49.
2. "The comments were a knee-jerk reaction from the commissioner with sinister overtones, he needs to be more tolerant in his language," Mr Charles said.
3. "The police commissioner needs to consult with the Aboriginal community about his implementation of the findings of the State Coroner in the recent Sansbury inquest which highlighted abuses and defects in Operation Mandrake."
4. Aboriginal Justice Advocate Tauto Sansbury said no rehabilitation program had been developed.
5. "I challenge Mike Rann to come clean and show me and the Aboriginal community a rehabilitation program," he said.
6. In further crimes linked to the gang, two cars were stolen and there were several attempted break-ins in the western suburbs on Tuesday. An empty cash register was also snatched from a Henley Beach hair salon (Milnes 2007b, 6).

Here, the article quotes a General Counsel for the Aboriginal Legal Rights Movement and an Aboriginal Justice Advocate who argue that there is "no such thing as" a 'gang of 49' (section 1), that the comments made by the Police Commissioner have "sinister overtones" (section 2), that "abuses and defects in Operation Mandrake" needed to be investigated (section 3), and that there is no rehabilitation program available for the Aboriginal community (sections 4 and 5). The article, however, does not continue to discuss any of these points, and instead goes on to list crimes that were supposedly "linked to the gang" (section 6). Thus the positioning of these comments (after the claims made by the Police Commissioner but before a list of crimes committed by the gang) diminishes them, with the mainstream news media doing little to engage with counter-claims, instead continuing to refer to the 'gang of 49' as if it were a fact. Indeed the listing of these crimes attributed to the 'gang of 49' at the end of the article in section 6 functions to legitimate the claims made by the Police Commissioner for jail terms, and to disprove the counter-claims made in the middle of the article.

These findings echo those of Due and Riggs (2011), who found that the mainstream news media tended to uncritically accept the 'need' for the Intervention and the measures put in place as a part of it, and indeed reinforced the need for such measures through the frequent sensationalisation of crime allegedly committed by Indigenous males in the Northern Territory. Similar issues were noted by Dunne-Breen (2012), whose analysis of media coverage and policy in relation to the Intervention highlighted a lack of critical examination by journalists of information provided by government ministers. A specific example of the media reporting in the same uncritical way in relation to the 'gang of 49' can be seen in Extract 6:

#### Extract 6

1. Aboriginal thugs spreading fear and mayhem will not be tolerated in South Australia, Mike Rann said yesterday.

2. The Premier backed Attorney-General Michael Atkinson, who this week said many young Aboriginal criminals were evil, beyond rehabilitation and better off behind bars.
3. Mr Rann also supported Mr Atkinson's provocative claim that anti-jail "hippie hand-wringers" were stopping the state government protecting the community. "We will continue to lead Australia in rehabilitation, but we will not allow a group of young thugs to cause mayhem, to prey on people, to use guns and to basically think that they are above the law," Mr Rann told parliament.
4. "Where people can be rehabilitated, let us rehabilitate them, but where they cannot be rehabilitated, let us put public safety first, rather than just giving them a hug."
5. Mr Rann has asked his top social welfare adviser, David Cappo, to meet Chief Justice John Doyle to convey the government's view that "there is no merit having these violent criminals back on the street so they can go out and reoffend again."
6. During the past three weeks, the so-called Gang of 49 is believed to have committed a dozen audacious armed robberies targeting hotels, bakeries, coffee shops, bars, TABs, fast-food outlets and a jewellery exchange (Owen 2009, 7).

This extract extensively uses quotes from the Attorney-General and the Premier of South Australia regarding the need for prison sentences for members of the 'gang of 49'. In these quotes, these Indigenous people are represented as "evil" (section 2), and as "Aboriginal thugs" (section 1). This representation of these young Indigenous males then justifies the calls for the need for jail sentences since they are, the extract tells us via the Attorney-General, "beyond rehabilitation and better off behind bars" (section 2). In reporting these comments uncritically, the mainstream news media perpetuates the discourses of criminalisation seen in the words of these two men, and does little to contextualise the claims they make. Furthermore, these representations of the youth involved as "beyond rehabilitation" explicitly constructs these Indigenous youth as beyond help. Such a representation works to justify 'tough' sentences in that – precisely without a chance – rehabilitation would by definition be ineffective.

Indeed, in perpetuating these discourses the mainstream news media becomes not only complicit in stereotyping and sensationalising issues such as the 'gang of 49' but also in simplifying issues of Indigenous sentencing. In this extract, the prospect of rehabilitation is positioned as out of the question for these Indigenous youth, with calls made to instead "put public safety first, rather than just giving them a hug" (section 4). Thus jail sentences are advocated for these youth on the basis of public safety, and rehabilitation programs are constructed as weak and insufficient through the use of the metaphor of 'hugging' – a term which further implies that these youth may have been indulged in the past, but to no avail.

The need for tough penalties is also advocated for here through the term "hippie hand-wringers" for anti-jail advocates (section 3), thus further implying that rehabilitation programs are not 'tough' enough sentences for these alleged 'gang' members. This call is similarly supported in the extract through the use of discourses regarding the 'uncontrollable' nature of the 'gang' as seen in the quote from Mr Atkinson that "...we will not allow a group of young thugs to cause mayhem, to prey on people, to use guns and to basically think that they are above the law" (section 3). Here, the term "mayhem" again draws upon discourses of uncontrollability and the references to the youths "thinking they are above the law" implies that they are lawless and violent. In this way the mainstream



news media positions itself as having an imperative to report these incidents and the calls for tougher sentencing in order to 'protect the community'.

## Conclusion

This paper has shown that discourses of Indigenous Australians as inherently criminal, violent, alcoholic, dysfunctional and unable to be rehabilitated, remain prolific in coverage of Indigenous issues. By utilising these discourses, mainstream news media was vocal in its calls for 'tougher' penalties for the crimes, frequently advocating explicitly for custodial sentences for offenders. In doing so, the mainstream news media justified the custody of Indigenous Australians based on stereotypes and discourses of dysfunction, inherent criminal characteristics, and violence. Furthermore, and whilst it is accepted that the media did not always explicitly represent these so-called gang members as males, it could be argued that the early characterisation by the media that the gang was mostly male, together with previous research on the representation of violence and masculinity (see Alexander 2004), suggests that much of these media representations can be read as made salient in the context of Indigenous males rather than females.

The representation within the mainstream news media of Indigenous youth as *inherently* dysfunctional (and correspondingly unable to truly be rehabilitated by white Australia) means that these youth were represented as symbols of the moral decline of Indigenous Australians more broadly. This representation is particularly insidious in light of the similar representation of Indigenous men in relation to sexual abuse in the Northern Territory Intervention. As was the case in relation to the Intervention, the threat allegedly posed by Indigenous Australian males to non-indigenous Australia (as portrayed in these extracts in terms of violence and dysfunction) led to a perceived need for more intervention and attempts at 'assimilation' in the form of custodial sentences. Such an understanding therefore paves the way for these newspapers to legitimate their argument that they were *morally* required to discuss these issues of violence in Indigenous communities since white intervention was warranted and necessary in attempts to protect the community.

It is important to note that this paper does not take the position that the mainstream news media should not report on issues such as violence in Indigenous communities, or issues of gender in relation to violence. However, it is arguable that one of the main roles of the media in general is the facilitation of democracy by ensuring a flow of information to the public that encourages debate and critical reflexivity (Downing and Husband 2005; Keane 1991). However, despite previous findings from various reports and studies, including the *National Inquiry into Racist Violence* Report (HREOC 1991) and the RCIADIC report in 1999, it is clear from this paper that negative, and stereotypical constructions of Indigenous Australian men remain prevalent in the mainstream news media. Such representations do little to allow the public to engage critically with the issues at stake to make informed decisions, and in the case of the example provided at the beginning of this paper, may affect both police perceptions of youth, and the self-representations of youth themselves. Indeed, the overly simplistic representation of Indigenous youth seen in this analysis masks the complex nature of remote Indigenous communities, of inter-generational trauma, and of previous (unheeded) calls for assistance in dealing with violence (see Robertson 1999, for example), to name just a few issues. Furthermore, calls for custody to "protect the community" as seen in this media coverage, position Indigenous Australian men explicitly as a threat to the broader Australian community, and do not allow for a reasoned debate around dealing with any issues which may exist, or for culturally appropriate ways to deal with violence (see, for example, Zellerer 2003; Day 2003). As Hunter specifically argues in relation to the Northern Territory Intervention, the "oversimplification of these issues diminishes our capacity to construct effective policy options" (Hunter 2007, 39).

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