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‘A Prank Between Mates’: Social Media Responses to Sexual Assaults
Against Men.

A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

in

Media Studies

at Massey University, Distance Learning,

New Zealand.

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2014

Abstract

This thesis analyses social media commentary and its influence on the production of discourse around sexual assaults on male victims. It draws together a number of strands from different disciplines, including issues of representation in social media, rape myths affecting victims more generally, the specific challenges to masculinity caused by assuming a victim identity and myths of male sexual invulnerability. The analysis centres on a promotion run by Hell Pizza in 2012 which rewarded an entrant who confessed to committing an act which appeared to describe unlawful sexual connection. Covering questions of the construction and enactment of masculine identities in New Zealand and how these masculinities are enforced, the research identifies themes within the comments which indicate an adherence to and reinforcement of hegemonic masculinities. Behaviours and attitudes such as victim blaming are also apparent in the online discourse along with an assumption that male victims of sexual assault do not exist or are not affected by mental and emotional harm in the wake of an assault. The commentary is indicative of the wider social attitudes to sexual assaults against men which victims may be exposed to, and the problem of low reporting rates among male victims is also touched on and considered with reference to the largely unsupportive environment which victims may find themselves in.

The key findings of the thesis are that evidence exists of a number of different kinds of dismissal and minimisation of the seriousness of assaults on men in the commentary around the specific incident analysed, and that when this is directly addressed and mentioned by victims their own experiences are frequently ignored or silenced. The thesis suggests that many of the challenges faced by female victims of sexual violence are equally applicable to male victims, a finding which may have implications for awareness campaigns and education about consent.

Acknowledgements

Thanks are due to Dr Jenny Lawn and Dr Ian Huffer for their assistance and encouragement during the writing of this work. I have appreciated their insight and advice. Deepest gratitude is also extended to Bernie, for his relentless enthusiasm and patient listening ear. I am also indebted Matthew, Sebastian and Robert for their thought provoking conversation, voices of reason and late night Facebook chats which helped to propel me forward.

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