

# Comparing media on transgendered people and social issues

[Sociology](#), [Social Issues](#)



In this, the 21st century, control over the masses seems to be becoming more apparent from a hierarchy containing a handful of self-selected highly ranked, influential individuals. Controlling the views and beliefs of whole nations of people, by controlling what information they receive and how this information is delivered. Some of these people are highly respected, trusted and in positions of authority.

Their words have the power to not only give hope to, but also scare and shape the beliefs of their followers who, unquestionably trust in their intentions. A prime example of this powerful influence on society is in the so-called democratic country of Australia, where one man, Rupert Murdoch, owns two thirds of the nation's biggest newspapers. 75% of the remaining is owned by one other man, John Fairfax (Donavan, 2011).

So then, the well-known saying 'Don't believe everything you read or hear' is a good reminder to anyone subjected to receiving the news anywhere in Australia, to keep an open mind, be sceptical and seek out any other facts through further research before making up their minds on a reported situation. Just because something is broadcast through the media, or is said by an important person, it does not automatically make it fact or cover the whole truth.

Very rarely are both sides of a story ever expressed unbiasedly, bringing forth all facts and information and then leaving it up to the individual to make a decision. Consequently, this paper will compare different media outlets. One stemming from great power and position, and the other from a small local community organisation, showing the different strategies and

contexts in which they report, how and who they influence and what factual information they use to back up their statements on the topic of transgendered people.

Before examining these differences, it is important to mention that the term 'transgender' can be defined several ways academically, so for the sake of this paper 'transgender' will be used as the umbrella term covering people whose biological sex does not completely, in part or at all coincide with their gender identity. Furthermore, it must be mentioned that gender identity is different from homosexuality, which is sexual orientation. Transgendered people, like everybody else can be straight, bi, gay or somewhere in-between (Dra.

Torres, 2001). For a group of people that have existed as some predict, since mankind's genetic make-up started to differ from 'perfect' (Reitz, 2009), equality in society has never seemed to exist for long, if at all. There are historical accounts throughout Ancient Greece, Rome and across the Mediterranean to the Middle East of transgendered people worshipping their transgendered goddesses and not only being socially accepted but thought to possess powers of protection and good fortune.

That was until Christian and Islamic influences spread and not only were their religious beliefs defamed and eradicated, transgendered people were as well (Dra. Torres, 2001). 2000 years on it seems not much has changed in the eyes of the Catholic Church. On the 22<sup>nd</sup> of December 2008, Pope Benedict XVI gave his annual end of year Christmas speech to a room filled with archbishops and priests. Broadcasted from inside the Vatican, through

their personally owned television station, website, and printed in newspapers across the globe.

He summarised the year that was, describing in lengthy detail the occurrence of World Youth Week in Australia, sending messages of peace to war-torn countries and comparing gay and transgendered people to a rainforest. At a time of year that is supposed to be about spreading peace and joy and bringing people together, Pope Benedict XVI started off with these blessings saying "...The grace of God has appeared for all. He then mention World Youth Week in all its glory following by saying and the earth is a gift we must all protect and not abuse the earth's resources for personal gain. He states it is the Church's responsibility to firmly publicly protect the earth and the self-destructive man from himself. He describes human being disposition of being man and woman and this ' self-destructive man' is anyone that does not ' respect the order of creation' by treating it as out of date philosophy of metaphysics. His reasoning that transgendered people exists follows. What is often expressed and understood by the term " gender" ultimately ends up being man's attempt at self-emancipation from creation and the Creator. Man wants to be his own master, and alone - always and exclusively - to determine everything that concerns him. Yet in this way he lives in opposition to the truth, in opposition to the Creator Spirit. Rain forests deserve indeed to be protected, but no less so does man, as a creature having an innate " message" which does not contradict our freedom, but is instead its very premise.

The great scholastic theologians described marriage, understood as the life-long bond between a man and a woman, as a sacrament of creation, which the Creator himself instituted- without modifying the “ message” of creation... From this perspective, we should... defend love against sex as a consumer good, the future against the exclusive claims of the present, and human nature against its manipulation. ”(Pope Benedict XVI, 22nd Dec 2008)

Christmas day, three days later his speech hypocritically had the following comments. Wherever the dignity and rights of the human person are trampled upon; ... wherever fratricidal hatred and the exploitation of man by man risk being taken for granted; wherever internecine conflicts divide ethnic and social groups and disrupt peaceful coexistence;... wherever the basics needed for survival are lacking; wherever an increasingly uncertain future is regarded with apprehension, even in affluent nations: in each of these places may the Light of Christmas shine forth and encourage all people to do their part in a spirit of authentic solidarity. (Pope Benedict XVI, 25th Dec, 2008)

This is a man in charge of the wealthiest city, representing ‘ The Creator’, in the largest populated religion globally, consisting of just below 550 million people. His statements were not only badly timed, but uneducated, unethical to say the least and unacceptable to come from a man with such powerful status and influence. He has labelled transgendered people as non-believing mavericks, who chose to change their sex to rebel and free themselves. From what exactly, is incomprehensible the way he puts it, just that they want to emancipate themselves.

Not by getting a crazy haircut or wearing outrageous clothing. Not by not socially conforming and not following trends and not even by becoming

Atheist. But by subjecting themselves to multiple, painful operations, enduring a hormonal rollercoaster, being socially unaccepted, ridiculed, disowned and being a target for violence. As he sees it, depending on where these self-freeing masters-of-their-own-destiny are from they are 'choosing' to throw away almost every basic human right, to instead live a life most likely filled with prostitution and drugs! That's emancipation? Benedict XVI, 2008) This total misconception has no factual basis, and is obvious from the only reference being ancient theologians' description on marriage, which resulted in not only offending the gender diverse, but homosexual people as well, who, through further research found he used the same 'emancipation reason' on two years earlier (Benedict XVI, 2006). He is basically saying that gay people are a threat to creation because if everyone 'chose' to be gay creation would cease to exist. Ironically enough the same could be said about the celibate priesthood.

This was an unnecessary personal attack, abusing his position and the media tools he has at his disposal to turn what should have been an inspirational and motivating speech to other power religious leaders into an excuse to breed a prejudice point of view that reached and is still reaching millions. On the very opposite, more positive end of the scale there thankfully exists an organisation called 'the Gender Centre' residing in Sydney, Australia. They are funded by Human Services and Community Services and provide a range of facilities not only for transgendered people, but to their loved ones and also organisations.

Their pledge states "...The Gender Centre is... committed to educating the public and service providers about the needs of people with gender issues. " (Polare, Jul-Sep, 2011) Their services include support and education, social and support groups, drug and alcohol counselling, HIV/AIDS information, condoms and lube distribution, needle exchange, accommodation, referrals to specialists, outreach programs, counselling and support groups for families of transgendered and the production of a quarter-yearly magazine called ' Polare'. Polare, Jan-Mar, 2011) Polare is a free magazine and every edition is packed full of helpful information, personal entries and latest news stories all relating to gender issues and the local society. It reports the facts and allows people to send in unsolicited contributions and also has forums on their website for gender issue discussion and debate allowing for all opinions to be heard and responded to.

Every page turned exposes more helpful companies and services, for example the Jan-March issue's page 12 has an ad for a hair removal company, an ad encouraging under 25 year old transgendered to write into the magazine sharing their stories. Opposite on page 13, an article on how a male to female transgender named Lana, fought to be accepted into a professional women's golf tournament in the US, which she won not only the right to play but the tournament itself.

The story continues on with other transgendered sports players and the difficulties they have faced including Lana's legal battle to be accepted in the US, Britain and European professional golfing tours. Her fight forced the review of the National Collegiate Athletic Association policies making it easier

for other transgendered people to compete in sports and fit in in society, whilst also raising awareness (Cummings, 2011). In issue 88 July-Sep 2011, pages 8-12 covers in depth information on the Gender Centre and what they do.

Unlike the Pope's speech, they address transgendered people by name and highlight the social issues they face such as homelessness, social isolation, unemployment and family rejection and provides services to help each of these and more (Moore, 2011). Ironic to what he represents, there was no mention of any solution or help from Pope Benedict XVI. Further in issue 88 are stories of new drug treatments for Hepatitis C and legal battles transgendered are fighting to have the right to be classified as they see themselves not on what their genitalia represents.

At the very back of every edition, they have a 'Directory Assistance' section six pages long containing services and organisations. These contacts are aimed to help not only the transgendered but the homosexual community too. It covers all states over Australia and includes a few international contacts (Gender Centre, 2011). Online, the Gender Centre provides a 41 page fact sheet covering a wide variety of interrelated topics. From information on their training sessions they can provide for employers and organisations, to information on intersex and ambiguous genitalia.

It also provides 10 pages of information on all the rights transgendered people have and highlights different circumstances. It also includes useful contact details of legal and other organisations that might be needed especially in an emergency. (Gender Centre, 2008) It is relieving to see such



organisations exist, for such a special group of people living in a society so overpowered by greedy, power-hungry individuals. These people go through so much emotional trauma and psychological stress just trying to understand themselves and who they really are.

To then go out into such a critical society and be able to hold their heads high with pride deserves recognition at the strength and resilience the human spirit is capable of. In conclusion, it would only be foolish to wait for a day and age where everyone is considered as worthy as the next, because as the time passes, the rich and powerful only seem to be getting richer and in more powerful positions, controlling more and more what the masses are lead to believe.

The worst thing about this, especially when it comes to the leader of a religious group, is the loss of the basic human morals and consideration for other people in general, losing sight of what and who they are representing and influencing. Instead of helping out fellow human beings because they care and want to help, unfair and hypocritical judgements are passed. It just goes to show that even the Catholic Church makes huge mistakes, but as long as our community organisation groups exists, hope can still spread among the people.