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## Denunciation, blame and the moral turn in public life

### 1. Introduction

Public life is increasingly dominated by accusations of wrongdoing by people in both their public and private capacities. This is a function, in part, of the affordances of social media, but it also reflects a broader moral turn in public discourse. Moral transgressions are increasingly expected to be called out, and perpetrators held morally accountable for said behavior in public fora, ranging from television broadcasts (e.g. Riggs and Due 2010), online discussion boards (e.g. Campbell and Manning 2014), through to Twitter and related social media (e.g. Zarkov and Davis 2018), and increasingly, mixes of all of the above (e.g. Milbrandt 2017; Rintel, Angus and Fitzgerald 2016). The commonsense view of morality is that moral values are seen “as not only given, independent, and necessary (absolute) but as thinglike or as objects not subject to individual interpretation” (Douglas 1970: 120). However, the behaviours targeted in public denunciations do not necessarily represent moral transgressions in themselves, but rather are constructed as such through discourse (Bergmann 1998; Garfinkel 1964; Luckmann 1995). Indeed, it is widely acknowledged that although morality may well constitute “a reasonably coherent set of notions of what is right and what is wrong”, what counts as right or wrong is “intersubjectively constructed in communicative interaction”, and thus “selected, maintained and transmitted in complex social processes” (Luckmann 2002: 19). For this reason, what counts as (im)moral conduct is a site of ongoing discursive struggle. While such ongoing struggles are unlikely to end any time soon, if ever, what has arguably changed in recent years is the loosening of strictures on *publicly* denouncing immoral behavior (Tileagă 2010, 2012a; cf. Augoustinos and Every 2010), even when the (alleged) moral transgressions happen within the remit of traditionally conceived intimate or private relationships.

Intimate relationships, though essentially private, are increasingly publicly scrutinized as a result of the emergence of a democracy of emotions in everyday life (Giddens 1999), and the blurring of the private and public spheres. This is observed in practices of intimate self-disclosures to intimate and non-intimate others in public spaces that thereby become interspersed with private moments. It is also observed in the way that the democratization of emotional communication has enabled the performance of the kind of mediated spectacle that brings everyday morality into public discussion (Dovey 2000). In these contexts, such as those that have received much attention in broadcast talk (e.g. Carbaugh 1988; Livingstone and Lunt 1994; Shattuc 1997), ordinary people disclose their intimate feelings and actions in public fora. Their revelations and especially the discussion of the moral value assigned to them has thus become a form entertainment. In so doing, ordinary people often become public figures by the notoriety they gain through such disclosures.

In this paper, we explore this moral turn in public life through the lens of public denunciations. A public denunciation is a type of “status degradation ceremony” where the expression of moral indignation against those who have contravened the moral expectations of a given community serves to effect the destruction of the person denounced (Garfinkel 1956: 421). Public degradation ceremonies are thus intimately related to the assigning of blame and to the alleged perpetrator’s concomitant denial of wrongdoing. Yet in spite of the evident importance of denunciations for “canonizing” moral expectations in public life (Luckmann 2002), Garfinkel’s (1956) work was primarily focused on how formal degradation in institutional communities, such as in courts of law or the army, leads to

demotion or even exclusion. This thus leaves open the question of “what happens when you extend the notion of degradation ceremonies to the public sphere?” (Tileagă 2012b: 69), especially when the transgressor is *not* an official public figure and the denunciation is situated in “our ever-mutating experience of the private and public” (Dovey 2000:1).

Prior research on (moral) transgressions has to varying degrees touched on the notion of public denunciations to examine the behaviour of public figures, understood here as public officials, or other individuals with some kind of institutionally-conferred role involved in public affairs, whose actions are judged to contravene the social expectancies of their public roles in society. These typically include political figures or institutions (e.g. Ekström and Johansson 2008; Hansson 2018a), corporate leaders (e.g. Faulkner 2011), and celebrities (e.g. Bramall 2018), who become the objects of scandals (e.g. Adut 2008; Thompson 2000) or political condemnations (e.g. Kampf and Katriel 2017). Our project is different. It seeks to extend the inquiry into moral transgressions by examining how denunciations about an ostensibly non-public figure are interactionally accomplished in broadcast talk and, in this process, shine light on the way moral conduct is intersubjectively constructed. Drawing from a larger corpus of public denunciations in broadcast settings, we focus our discussion on a particular instance in which the target of public denunciation is degraded and reconstructed as amoral in the confounded private-public arena of a daytime TV panel show.

The alleged transgressor of our study, Mitch Winehouse, is in the public eye. He is the father of Amy Winehouse, the musical icon who suffered a sudden death following a troubled life of substance abuse. However, Mitch Winehouse is arguably not a public figure. Although he has acquired some ‘celebrity’ status, his role in society is not accountable to taxpayers’ money or related to the general public interests of society. In view of this, the situatedness of the denunciation examined in this paper is also different. Mitch, the alleged transgressor, endorses the confirmation of the expected values associated with his role as a father, but reflexively resists its critique by invoking justifications based on his information preserves (Goffman 1969) as a close father to his daughter. The set of facts about himself and about his daughter’s circumstances that he invokes belong to the private rather than public sphere. They are thus difficult to contest despite the blurred distinction between the public and private (e.g. Shattuc 1997) of the daytime television show in which he is publicly denounced.

Our analysis focuses on how this public denunciation of Mitch develops in the course of this panel interview. In so doing we shine light on the way in which blaming perpetrators lies at the core of public denunciations. We show how public denunciations contribute to reaffirming moral common ground, are themselves immanent to the moral infrastructure of public life, and how the contemporary blurring of the private and public spheres (Habermas 1989) provides fertile though contested grounds for the interactive construction of morality. In order to contextualize our analytical claims, we first briefly discuss prior research on blaming and public denunciation, before going on to describe the data and methodological approach that underpins our analysis.

## **2. Blame and public denunciation**

Various forms of moral criticisms, including accusing, blaming, complaining, criticising, condemning, denouncing, reproaching, reprimanding, and associated expressions of moral indignation or outrage, have been examined in a diverse range of

discourse settings from a variety of different disciplinary perspectives (Wodak 2006). Many studies have focused on what these various different types of moral criticism accomplish, and how targets and/or other recipients respond to them. It has been argued, for instance, that moral criticisms are a key means by which members (re)affirm “common moral ground” in both private and public life (Günther 1995:171; cf. Kampf and Katriel 2017: 315). The targets of such moral criticisms may respond through various types of “justification discourses” (Wodak 2006), including accounts (e.g. Buttny 1993), other avoidance strategies (e.g. Hansson 2015, 2018), apologies or other forms of remedial exchange (e.g. Kampf and Löwenheim 2012; Tileagă 2012b), or they may be outright reject or deny them (e.g. Coulter 1990). Non-target recipients, on the other hand, may respond, for instance, by agreeing or disagreeing with the producers’ expression of moral indignation (e.g. Drew 1998). Studies of moral criticisms have also examined different types of targets, ranging from political figures (e.g. Dickerson 1998), government officials (e.g. Hansson 2018b), and corporations (e.g. Zhang and Vásquez 2014), to celebrities (e.g. Bramall 2018) and reality television participants (e.g. Author 2018b), through to intimates (e.g. Coulter 1990; Pomerantz 1978). Research addressing moral criticism has thus paid attention to the role played by different modalities and settings in shaping them, ranging from political statements (e.g. Hansson 2018a), war crime exhibitions (e.g. Martin and Wodak 2003) and criminal proceedings in courtrooms (e.g. Atkinson and Drew 1979), to different forms of social media (e.g. Milbrandt 2017), through to counselling or psychotherapy sessions (e.g. Buttny 1990; Kurri and Wahlström 2005), and spoken interaction in more mundane, everyday settings (e.g. Günthner 1995).

Public degradation ceremonies are a specific form of moral criticism that aims to instill a sense of remorse on the part of the transgressor and, given its public dimension, to mobilize support for the negative evaluation of the perpetrators’ conduct by the audience. They have been studied from a variety of perspectives, including forms of political condemnation (e.g. Kampf and Katriel 2017) and scandals (e.g. Aude 2008; Ekström and Johansson 2008). However, a public denunciation (Garfinkel 1956) goes further in that its aim is not reintegrative but rather stigmatizing (Braithwaite 1989), as it “undermine[s] the very legitimacy of the condemned party as a social actor” (Kampf and Katriel 2017: 314) insofar as his or her actions are perceived to have breached (presumed) moral common ground. In publicly denouncing a perpetrator and reconstructing the events that led to the transgression, the parties (i.e. the denouncers and the alleged perpetrator) reveal differentiated levels of reflexivity. They make implicit or explicit reference to the normative values of the community by which the alleged wrongdoer’s actions are judged. Public denunciations thus involve a double metapragmatic articulation (Botlanski 2011). On the one hand, they serve to confirm the expected normative behaviour or values associated with an individual’s actions in a given community, thus helping to re-establish a “common moral ground” (see Günther 1995:171). On the other hand, public denunciations serve to critique deviance from normative values in light of the tensions that the alleged moral transgression brought about in the public realm. Public denunciations thus constitute an illustration of how morality is interactively constructed and different moral worlds are invoked in the process, especially in communicative arenas where the public and the private spheres are mixed.

Notably, although Garfinkel (1956) outlined the proposed conditions for the ‘success’ of public denunciations, they have been less frequently studied from a discursive perspective that one might expect. Studies that examine how targets are publicly denounced in actual discursive events have focused primarily on how blame

is ascribed to third parties (e.g. Abell and Stokoe 1999), the self-degradation ceremonies accomplished through public apologies in response to such denunciations (Tileagă 2012b), or in noting that political condemnations may morph into public degradation ceremonies when the condemnation backfires (Kampf and Katriel 2017: 314). More recently, the rise of “online civic shaming” (Milbrandt 2017) or other forms of “digilantism” (Zingerle 2015) have garnered attention, although frequently from the perspective of treating it as a form of cyberbullying (Hollis 2016).

Blaming, in contrast, has been examined in both institutional environments, such as administrative government settings (Hansson 2015, 2018b), courtrooms (Lowrey and Ray 2015), and schools (Goodwin 1996), as well as in non-institutional, private settings. Studies of blamings in institutional settings have generally examined the conditions necessary for blame attribution. Hansson (2015), for example, examines attributions of blame and their respective reactions from a discourse-historical perspective that primarily draws on critical discourse analysis (e.g. Wodak 2006), with a view to establishing a framework for the analysis of blame attribution in government discourse. Studies of blamings in non-institutional settings have, in contrast, tended to focus on the sequential organization of blamings and their avoidance, including studies by conversation analysts (e.g. Beach 1990/1991; Mandelbaum 1993; Pomerantz 1978), and discursive psychologists (e.g. Bloomberg 2016; Sneijder and Te Molder 2005; Tileagă 2005). While public denunciation has only been addressed in passing in such studies, a number of important findings have arguably emerged from the broader discourse analytic literature on blamings.

First, it is evident that second-person blaming is a sensitive or delicate social action (Mandelbaum 1993, Author 2018a). Pomerantz (1978), for instance, suggests that “sequences may be organised to permit and prefer attributing blame to self (e.g. apologies, admissions, confessions) over attributing blame to co-participant (e.g. blamings, complaints, accusations)” (p.120). This is primarily because blamings, and associated reproaches, encompass “morally sensitive” and “affectively loaded” moral judgments of the target in question (Günthner 1995: 147, 169). Second, the party initiating the blaming or reproach can themselves be held responsible for making that moral judgment, and thus to counter-accusations or reproaches (Author 2015). Third, they demand a morally loaded response, which is frequently held to be some kind of admission, account or apology in the case of blame directed at co-present recipients (Malle, Guglielmo and Monroe 2014: 172). However, in reality, they are often met with denials or counter-attacks, thereby seeding (interpersonal) conflict (Coulter 1990). In other words, the morality of the blaming or reproach itself can become the object of discursive dispute.

It follows, then, that public denunciations are likely to be accomplished in ways that “warrant the speaker’s sense of moral offense and indignation” (Drew 1998: 297), thereby conferring the moral imperative for that public denunciation. The case we address in this paper illustrates how the non-observance of latent moral values give others within the respective society the right to publicly denounce perpetrators in order to re-vindicate the moral order, that is, the “seen but unnoticed” expectations (Garfinkel 1964: 226) that are immanent to everyday conduct.

### **3. Data and method**

In this paper we focus on a segment from an episode of a British daytime television show in which the guest is publicly denounced by the panelists as contributing to his own daughter’s demise: from global music acclaim to personal turmoil due to substance excess, and subsequent premature death due to alcohol poisoning. The

segment forms part of a larger corpus of fifteen interviews collected from broadcast settings in which the interviewee is given the opportunity to explain “their side of the story” in relation to behavior on their part that has led to them being publicly maligned.<sup>1</sup> However, close examination of these interviews suggests while such interviews are ostensibly an opportunity for the audience to hear “both sides of the story”, they very often serve primarily as a vehicle for publicly denouncing the interviewee.

The specific excerpt we analyse here comes from ITV’s *Loose Women*, a popular British panel TV show, where Mitch Winehouse, father of the famous musical artist Amy Winehouse, has been invited to talk about his daughter’s life. Mitch Winehouse has been depicted in the press as both, a protective father and an opportunist, especially with respect to his daughter. He has claimed that the documentary film has deliberately portrayed him in the worst possible light (*The Guardian*, 1 May 2015). As shown in the advertisement of the show below, Mitch was invited as a guest to talk about the release of the pre-trailer of the 2015 British documentary film ‘Amy: The girl behind the name’ directed by Asif Kapadia, his family and his daughter’s legacy.

“As father to one of the most talented artists in British music history, Mitch Winehouse was a regular face in the press during Amy’s rise and fall. After her tragic death in July 2011, aged just 27, he established the Amy Winehouse Foundation in order help young people in need, just like Amy. Mitch has been back in the papers in recent weeks, expressing his unhappiness with the new documentary that’s been made about the singer, called, simply ‘Amy’. He join us this lunchtime to talk about the film, family and Amy’s legacy.” ITV website (retrieved on 25/09/2016)

Instead, the panelists, especially one of them, take him to task for being an enabler of his daughter’s demise and eventual death.

The format of this show involves well-known women sitting on a panel in front of a studio audience to discuss topics that usually revolve around recent events and interview guests. The panelists and the guest sit around a desk with coffee mugs in front of them. They face each other and are in full view of the audience. The topics they talk about range from light-hearted to serious, depending on the nature of the events discussed. The show is presented as an informal televised occasion to air intimate socio-psychological issues. In keeping with the genre of reality TV shows (Creeber 2015) the participants perform a mediated ethical self (Moseley, Wheatley and Wood 2013) in as much as they fashion themselves and their lives on camera in terms of right or wrong conduct. In other words, their occupational role is to discuss and denounce behaviour that is in line or contravenes what they, with the help of the audience, understand to be the supra-values of the larger society they represent. The panelists are thus invested with the authority to speak about these values, particularly when they feel they have not been duly observed (Garfinkel 1956: 423).

The sustaining of moral sensibilities is part and parcel of the success of this type of televised programme. Some of the topics discussed are indicative of what Salman Rushdie (2001) has called the ‘death of morality’, characteristic of postmodern societies. They capitalize on the alleged ‘inverted ethical universe’ (Rushdie 2001) of the guests in order to broaden its appeal. Mitch Winehouse represents an ideal guest. He has been negatively criticized in the press for some of

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<sup>1</sup> The corpus consists of recordings and transcripts of interviews collected from the Australian, British, New Zealand, and U.S. media between 2006-2018.

his actions towards his daughter *vis à vis* his claim that the film has depicted him as a villain.

The analysis of this excerpt from our corpus is approached from an interactional discursive perspective informed by research in sociopragmatics and ethnomethodological conversation analysis. The analysis pays attention to the way in which the blame is constructed and resisted by the interactional participants, and how the pursuit of this blaming frames the interview as a public denunciation of Mitch. This is done by drawing on Goffman's (1967) notion of face, elements from CA to capture how the participants attempt to assign blame and deny it in the turn-by-turn sequential development of that interaction (Heritage 1984), as well as elements from membership categorisation analysis (Sacks 1992) that offer insights into the broader indexical value of those blamings given they stem from what a good parent should do for their children. In other words, while our analysis is firmly grounded in a sequential analysis of segments from broadcast talk, it also considers the way in which this segment forms part of a much larger, morally-imbued discourse universe.

#### **4. The role of blaming in public denunciations**

Moralizing judgments, such as those observed in this episode, involve an evaluation of some conduct as infringing expectations, in this case an infringement of supra-community values. They entail moral criticisms on the basis of a normative assessment of (an aspect of) his or her conduct. When the negative assessment carries with it the implication that the individual is responsible for his or her action blaming occurs (Malle, Guglielmo and Monroe 2014; Smart 1961; Watson 1978). Zimmerman (1998) explains that when we blame someone we judge his or her moral standing to have diminished. And, when such an assessment is constructed as part of a routinely uniform behaviour (Garfinkel 1956), the true character of the perpetrator is revealed.

Blame is thus a negative evaluative judgment made of a person in light of their actions or attitudes relative to the broader relational contexts in which that person is being evaluated. Blame carries the implication of responsibility. It therefore has clear implications for loss of face in that interactional moment as well as having potential long-standing negative identity implications (Garfinkel 1956). In that sense, blaming can be a vehicle for causing offence and seeding conflict insofar as it harms the public image or face of the person portrayed as perpetrator (Goffman 1967). However, for blame to be effected its bases need to be established. This, we argue, is what one of the panelists attempts to achieve by invoking aspects of the moral order that were infringed by Mitch Winehouse in pursuit of his self-interests to the detriment of the shared norms and values that ought to bind individuals together. After a few fits and starts to make Mitch (partially) responsible for Amy's fate on the basis of some of his actions, one of the panelists manages to attribute responsibility to him for the non-observance of norms that are culturally available to him as a member of an Anglophone culture, freedom from imposition (cf. Brown and Levinson 1987), by drawing on the inferentially-rich category-bound obligations (Fitzgerald 2012) of parents with regard to their children (Fitzgerald and Austin 2008; Stokoe and Edwards 2014).

What the analysis shows is not so much Mitch talking about Amy's legacy as advertised, but an attempt by the panelists, especially by Jane Moore, to implicate Mitch in Amy's demise, thus amounting to a public denunciation of Mitch. This is in keeping with the views of the general public that paint a picture of Mitch Winehouse as a father primarily interested in profiting from his daughter, and with the role of the panelists to speak of and invoke the values that are internalized by members of a

given culture and bind them together. In view of this, the moralizing judgments and public denunciations observed in the interaction below are to be expected and can be claimed to be institutionally sanctioned (Culpeper 2011). They are in line with the occupational roles of the panelists and a constitutive ingredient of the genre. Through these Jane attempts to assign responsibility to Mitch as an enabler in his daughter's self-destruction, that is, as accountable for Amy's fate (Buttny 1993).

While the interview turns out to be a vehicle for public denunciation, the interactional segment actually starts with Mitch Winehouse offering an extended assessment of the way he believes he has been misrepresented in the film as a result of its editing (data not shown), and thus an attempt to forestall (anticipated) accusations of wrongdoing with respect to Amy's needs *vis à vis* his moral duty as her father. Mitch's agenda in appearing on the program appears to be to restore his moral reputation in light of the release of the film that implicates him in Amy's downfall. However, the line of questioning from Jane Moore, and subsequently Andrea McLean, indicates their agenda is blaming Mitch for his role, in part at least, in enabling Amy's downfall, a vehicle through which they attempt to prosecute ritual destruction of his moral reputation.

The excerpt from the interview with Mitch on which we are focusing our analysis here begins with Jane positioning herself as a "viewer" who is entitled to her own opinion (line 18), and the grounding of her evaluation in the knowledge she gained in that capacity, that is, the knowledge anyone who watches the documentary would be able to gain. (J = Jane Moore; M = Mitch Winehouse; A = Andrea McLean).<sup>2</sup>

"No Regrets As A Father To Amy" *Loose Women*, ITV, 3 July 2015

17 J:I-I have seen the film (.)  
 18           so let me just um um say this (.)  
 19           there's not a narrator is there,  
 20 M:       no.  
 21 J:       it's kind of everybody's sort of  
 22       viewpoint uh °that were around Amy°  
 23       (.) now  
 24 M:       no. [no]  
 25 J:       [I ] actually  
 26 M:       there isn't anybody in there that  
 27       was around Amy (.) that's the point  
 28 J:       no. no. but what what you do as a: (.)  
 29       a viewer is you that make up your own  
 30       min[d  
 31 M:       [ye[p  
 32 J:       [nobody is sort of saying to you-  
 33       there's not a narrator sort of pushing  
 34       you in a certain direc[tor- ] direction.  
 35 M:       [no no.]  
 36 J:       so: (.) what I what it came away for

Given Mitch has already alluded to the film being biased in its (mis)representation of his role in Amy's downfall (data not shown), Jane appears to be working through the course of this sequence to forestall "the risk of being treated as a biased party predictably blaming the other" (Abell and Stokoe 1999: 299). In other words, in

<sup>2</sup> The interview, which was transcribed using CA transcription conventions, is available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2JDapMUNmc4>. A copy of the complete transcription of the interview is available from the authors on request.



proposing an alternative description of the film as not having a (potentially biased) line (line 19), Jane is alluding to the “dilemma of stake and interest” (Edwards and Potter 1992: 158) that descriptions of “reality” frequently entail. Notably, she introduces this description through a tag question (line 19) designed to mobilise agreement from Mitch. In so doing, Jane invites conversational alignment with a new course of action: to establish the facts from which she, and the audience, should be able to hold him accountable for (some of) his action (lines 21-23). This allows her to pursue her interactional agenda in the interest of the audience and the general public, as well as to demonstrate sensitivity to the moral delicacy of her incipient activity (Mandelbaum 1993).

Mitch offers an explicit disagreement at line 24 forestalling the initiation of Jane’s next action (indexed through ‘now’ at line 23). He goes on to imply that Amy’s life in the documentary was also potentially misrepresented through an alternative description (Beach 1990/91). Notably, he places prosodic emphasis on ‘anybody’ in a way that makes relevant his knowledge as a father who was close to his daughter in an attempt to disarm (Edmondson 1981) any kind of argument Jane could possibly come up with in this respect (lines 26-27). That is, the information preserves justifications he has offered (prior to this excerpt), based on his close father-daughter relationship, would thus make negative judgments implying his responsibility unsustainable. He reiterates, albeit indirectly, his point about being misrepresented by offering a metapragmatic comment to account for his repair (‘that’s the point’ line 27). In so doing, he orients to Jane’s prior claims as launching an incipient or pre-blaming sequence.

Jane thus goes back to the point in the interaction where stance alignment was previously achieved in lines 19-20 and repositions herself as viewer in pursuit of her goal (lines 32-34). This positions Mitch to re-align with her project. This is observed in the micropause subsequent to the production of ‘so’ (line 36) where Mitch could have come in, but did not given that these facts had already been agreed. With ‘so’ Jane marks a connection with what has been established thus far and indicates the ensuing initiation of the pending activity (Bolden 2009).

Jane then proceeds to offer the grounds on which to implicate blame and warrant her denunciation of Mitch, as we can see in the continuation of the interview below.

36 J: so: (.) what I- what it came away for  
37 me is that actually you Amy were  
38 very close  
39 (.)  
40 M: mhm.  
41 J: she adored you you adored her (.)  
42 absolutely and I think as parents with  
43 hindsight there are lots of things we  
44 could say we would have done differently  
45 with our children et cetera (.) the  
46 only point I really lost sympathy for  
47 you was when (.) she went to Saint Lucia,  
48 M: glad you brought that up  
49 J: and she’d gone there to escape (.)  
50 M: ye’  
51 J: the madness=  
52 M: =yeah  
53 J: and you turned up with a camera crew.  
54 M: a reality TV crew.

55 J: a reality TV crew=  
 56 M: =aha=  
 57 J: =an'. as I felt looking at it(.) you  
 58 invaded her privacy again  
 59 when she had gone there to get away  
 60 from that kind of thing.  
 61 M: we:ll the thing is (.) I was in Saint  
 62 Lucia every two weeks (0.3) because  
 63 I would go and see Amy- she wanted me  
 64 to be there every two weeks (.) I made-  
 65 that was not a reality TV crew, I made-  
 66 >I don't know if some of you might have  
 67 seen it<, do you ever see (.) the- the  
 68 channel four documentary I made about  
 69 the struggles of families (with) facing  
 70 with addictions? (0.1) you did?  
 71 THAT (.) is what they are talking about  
 72 (.) THAT is what they are saying is as a  
 73 reality TV crew, they knew I took a  
 74 TV cre[w]

She first acknowledges the possibility that he has knowledge about Amy that is not accessible to anyone else in his capacity as a father and that what she is about to say is her own view. This is observed in the careful design of her next turn (lines 36-38, that is, the self-correction, the portrayal of her stance as subjective (“came away for me”), and the insertion of “actually” which frames her view as not necessarily in line with what she thinks Mitch might be expecting her to say (Clift 2001). This orients to both the preceding trouble as well as to that which her ensuing action is likely to create. In presenting her stance as personal, Jane presents it as subjective, hence open to contest. Jane prefaces her responsibility-implicative negative judgement of Mitch’s actions with fabricated alignment (Goffman 1981), that is, a pretence of agreement, to advance her agenda, that is, she manages the activity so that Mitch and possibly others will be induced to have a false belief about her ensuing action. She thus positions herself as a parent too and brings up the close bond between father and daughter (lines 37-38) to which Mitch reacts with an acknowledgment (line 40). This is followed by a positive assessment of the strength of their bond (line 41). This time she positions both Mitch and herself as parents. Jane’s comment regarding parents’ negative ledger for non-deliberate wrongdoing also applies to Mitch through the use of the inclusive plural “as parents” (line 42) rather than “as a parent”, and “we” (line 43). The invocation of the category of (good) parents enables Jane to thereby invoke an inferentially rich set of category-bound obligations that lays further groundwork for the forthcoming blaming (Watson 1978). This is difficult for Mitch to counter given its commonsense nature as captured by the idiomaticity with which it is packaged. Having provided legitimate grounds for the implication of blame on what may be considered to be a general truth about most parents, and her own stance on the subject, she now initiates her moral criticism of Mitch.

Jane reporting that she “lost sympathy” for Mitch in lines 45-47 marks the point in the interaction where Jane moves into the denunciation sequence itself. That she has no sympathy for him despite his continued troubles in relation to his daughter’s addiction implies that he was at least partially responsible for Amy’s demise, hence for the sadness that befell him. Mitch’s reaction (line 48) displays that he has heard Jane’s contribution as implicative of forthcoming blame. It indicates he has no option but to discuss the topic as the factual information that Jane goes on to

provide (i.e. Mitch visiting his daughter while she was in St Lucia and filming her) could not, at least at this stage, be disputed. It also displays his understanding of the metapragmatic relevance of what is coming next and his awareness of the position the panelists have taken: attributing to him moral responsibility for Amy's fate on the basis of his actions.

Jane builds up her responsibility-implicative denunciation of Mitch across a number of turns. She cites the facts that led Amy to go St Lucia (lines 49 and 51) as antecedent to her responsibility-implicative moral judgement (line 53). This denunciation is accomplished through drawing attention to a discrepancy between what a good parent does and Mitch's actions. The incongruousness of filming someone who needed to leave the general un-healthiness brought about by (unwanted) celebrity attention implies that Mitch put his own goals before the needs of his daughter. This diminishes Mitch's moral standing as a father who has "fail[ed] to act as a proper, responsible member of that category" (Stokoe and Edwards 2012: 187). She thus depicts his action as having violated a basic norm of that type of relationship: the obligation of parents to respect their children's autonomy and ensure their well-being (Fitzgerald and Austin 2008). Put differently, theirs was not a relationship of equals where what is best for each other is pursued (Giddens 1999). Amy is depicted as constrained by the arbitrary power of her father. She is thus unable to assert her agency under such circumstances. It then follows that she was not responsible for the state of affairs given her limited capacity to influence them (Laidlaw 2010). Instead, her father was.

Mitch reacts by initiating an alternative account of those events to undermine the grounds for Jane's prior denunciation (Buttny 1990, 1993; Mandelbaum 1993), thereby resisting the implication that he is a "bad father", and avoiding admission of fault (Pomerantz 1978). In other words, his subsequent account indicates that he has heard Jane's contribution as blame-implicative. His alternative description begins with a repair delivered through a modified repeat that amounts to a claim of greater epistemic authority with respect to those events (Stivers 2005). It also attends to the inferences made available by describing the group he brought to film as "a camera crew" as opposed to "a reality TV crew", given the latter invokes the possibility that Mitch's actions were exploitative rather than understanding of Amy's situation.

Jane treats this repair as non-consequential by readily accepting it through a repeat (line 55), before going on to reiterate the moral grounds for her denunciation of Mitch (lines 57-60): that his behaviour is irreconcilable with a supra-value of the community the panelists represent, the alleged British middle-class (cf. working class) supremacy of the individual's freedom of action above all (Brown and Levinson 1987), and the category-bound obligations of (good) parents to protect their children from exploitation or harm, and the importance of understanding their point of view as essential (Giddens 1999). The insertion of the adverb 'again' (line 59) implies that this is not first time Mitch has done this. Jane thus does not call attention to a single offence but to a potential series of offences to demonstrate a pattern of moral irresponsibility. In so doing, Jane indicates that she is blaming him for contributing to the "madness" in Amy's life (see lines 49, 51, 53).

Mitch's subsequent account in lines 61-74 (which was itself initiated in line 54) signals his understanding of the implicit metapragmatic activity that is taking place, that is, implicating him as (partly) responsible for Amy's demise by construing him as a "bad" father who exploited his daughter's difficulties (Buttny 1990). He first attends in his account to rebutting the accusation that he did not respect his daughter's need for privacy. He justifies his presence in St Lucia by juxtaposing her need to

escape the public's attention with her desire to have her dad there on a regular basis (lines 61-64). In so doing, Mitch mobilizes his identity as a present father to Amy by providing more knowledge based on his information preserves (Goffman 1981) to counterbalance the grounds of the denunciation. Having rebutted the invasion of privacy for which he was blamed, he now addresses the allegedly unethical practice of taking a film crew. He does this by recruiting the audience (lines 64-74) with a view to explaining his altruistic intentions behind it. He thus refers back to a film he had previously produced on the subject of addiction to reinstate his moral standing. The film is described as serious and morally laudable. This is illustrated in its institutional packaging ("Channel 4"), its instructive or educational purpose ("documentary") and the social significance of its theme ("the struggles of families facing addictions") (lines 68-70).

The justification offered does not necessarily diminish blame insofar as it could still be argued that he was partially responsible for Amy's troubles. It does, however, delay consideration, albeit briefly, of the topic at hand, namely, the view of the panelists while Mitch had been authorized to film Amy, he should not have done so, as filming under such circumstances represents an infringement of the latent values of the culture he is part of, and what a good democratic relationship entails. As we can see in the continuation of the interview below, this is something Jane alludes to in her subsequent response to Mitch's account (beginning in line 75).

74 TV cre[w]  
75 J: [b]ut whatever  
76 M: no no  
77 J: it's for it's a TV crew. (.) it's a  
78 TV crew.  
79 M: but it's not a reality TV cr[ew,]  
80 J: [no ] well  
81 but that- [that is sort of not the]=  
82 M: [I- I went out there]  
83 J: =point is it?  
84 M: let me finish what I'm saying (.) I  
85 went out there and I took a serious  
86 fi-film crew  
87 (.)  
88 J: aha  
89 M: it was a serious documentary about  
90 addiction within the family (.)  
91 because of that film we have managed  
92 to help hundreds of families, (.)  
93 >and we went there with Amy's permission<  
94 I can assure [you.]  
95 J: [yeah] but it's  
96 st[ill]  
96 M: [of ]course when you  
97 see that film [you ]  
98 J: [when] I see that I  
99 think if it was my daughter (.) and  
100 again um you know hindsight productions  
101 [but ] if it were my daughter  
102 M: [yep.]  
103 J: I wouldn't put her in the position (.)  
104 of a:sking her whether or not I [could]  
105 M: [well ]  
106 J: bring a film [crew because I would look ]=

107 M: [you- you you might be right]  
 108 J: =at it and say=  
 109 M: =°yeah°=  
 110 J: she shouldn't- nobody should be  
 111 there filming her at that point  
 112 [because she looked]  
 112 M: [well you might be ri]ght b[ut  
 113 J: [she  
 114 looked (.) natural (.) and happy  
 115 [and ] great and relaxed,  
 116 M: [yeah]  
 117 J: [which in the rest of the film- ]  
 118 M: [an' why do you think she was (happy)]  
 119 natural and relaxed, cos she had her  
 120 family and friends †around her  
 121 J: [†yeah]  
 122 M: [that's why=  
 123 J: =not a TV crew  
 124 M: no.

Jane dismisses the relevance of Mitch's focus on the (alleged) misrepresentation of the camera crew as a "reality TV crew" (line 75). Her subsequent repair of Mitch's turn (lines 77-78) and explicit metapragmatic comment that follows ("that is sort of not the point, is it" lines 81, 83) further undermines the relevance of this alternative description of events to exonerating him from blame.

At this juncture, Mitch construes Jane's talk here as doing interruption (Bilmes 1997) in order to re-take speakership, before embarking on a justification of taking a film crew. He offers counter-assertions (Beach 1990/91) that undermine the denunciations (his film was for families suffering from addiction) as a form of "consciousness raising" (lines 89-92). He also defends himself against the accusation of having invaded her privacy by deflecting moral judgements onto something else: the altruistic benefits that can be accrued from something that some may see as offensive despite it having been condoned by its alleged victim (having been given permission by Amy - lines 93-94 - and Amy's desire for him to be there - lines 63-64).

Jane, however, initiates a second denunciation sequence through invoking her identity as (good) mother who would not have asked her daughter to give permission for filming in the first place (lines 98-106). Unlike Mitch, Jane would have understood her daughter's point of view and what was best for her and for one another to have a good democratic relationship. She then claims that this is because "no one" should have been filming her "at that point" when she was happy having escaped unwanted media attention (lines 106, 110-112, 114-115). In so doing, Jane alludes to Amy's inability to voluntarily assert agency under such conditions (Laidlaw 2010), and thus Mitch's responsibility as a (good) father to have done so on her behalf (i.e. look after his daughter's best interests and respecting her needs). She thus implies that Amy had agreed to being filmed because she could not say no to her dad given the power he had over her. She makes available the inference that their closeness was not necessarily healthy, and so he should have known that it was not morally right to ask her to do so, as this would contravene the democratic basis of the relationship parents and their children ought to have. While Mitch initially offers concessive admissions (lines 107, 112), he then offers an alternative description of events (lines 118-120), and their conversation reaches an impasse as they appear to be agreeing on what are actually contradictory agendas (lines 121-124).

Another panelist, Andrea McLean, intervenes at this point in the interview, as seen below.

125 A:           ↑Mitch (.) can we- obviously we-we are  
126           all parents here, and ( ) as we said  
127           at the start at the end of day you  
128           are a dad that has lost a daughter=  
129 M:           =yeah.  
130 A:           erm is there anything- we (.) as  
131           parents we all do our very best  
132           for our children you under  
133           particularly differ- difficult  
134           circumstances- do you think there  
135           are some things that maybe with  
136           hindsight, as Jane mentioned, you'd  
137           look back and think. d- do you know  
138           (.) maybe I got that bit wrong  
139 M:           ↓nu:h.

While Andrea also implicates that Mitch is partially to blame for Amy's downfall, she orients to this denunciation as sensitive (Mandelbaum 1993) through various features of dispreferred turn design, including delaying the question her turn is leading up to very end of the turn (lines 134-139), the occurrence of (self-initiated) self repair (lines 125, 133) numerous cut-offs, restarts and hesitations (lines 125, 130, 134, 137), as well as mitigation (line 135, 138). That Andrea's turn is seeking an admission of wrongdoing from Mitch is evident from the candidate answer (Pomerantz 1988) implicit in Andrea's question that helps to present what she suspects is the answer and expects confirmation of it, namely, that Mitch *did* get it (a bit) wrong. Mitch responds, however, with denial that is delivered as the preferred response, thus construing Andrea's turn as accusation-implicative (Garcia 1991). The overall agenda here of the panelists thus becomes abundantly clear: they are seeking to publicly denounce Mitch and seek an admission from him of his wrongdoing. Such an admission, however, is not forthcoming.

Overall, then, we have seen in this interview the alleged perpetrator and the denouncer seek conversational alignment to advance their conflicting agendas through the production of increments and question tags at strategic interactional moments to induce agreement. Once this is achieved the participants build up the grounds for their respective cases. We have seen how the denouncer builds on previously agreed information in the light of blame deflections by the perpetrator to recover the point of alignment and restart the blaming. The nature of the accounts the former provides challenge the denunciations made against him preventing him from engaging in what otherwise might become hostile disagreements. Their production is evidence of the fact that the guest has been put in a defensive position. We have observed how the panelist built up the grounds for blaming the guest, and how this, in turn, allowed the latter to deflect blame before it was eventually assigned. Both the evidence put forward and the grounds against it were constructed from a moral plane.

## **5. Public denunciation and the moral infrastructure of public life**

The foregoing analysis offers us an example of blaming as a member's method for

moralizing whereby common moral ground is co-constructed and reaffirmed (Gunthner 1995: 171). It depicts a type of oppositional talk in which one of the panelists attempts to extract some sort of a confession or a display of remorse from a guest who is being publicly degraded on the basis of moral wrongdoing. The alleged perpetrator, Mitch Winehouse, seeks to attract and mobilize the support of third parties by falsifying the offences that have been attributed to him, as it is only when moral agency can be attributed to the perpetrator that blaming can be successfully performed, especially by those not directly involved (Malle, Guglielmo and Monroe 2014: 171). It also shows how the denouncer, Jane Moore, relies on third parties publicly denounce Mitch and, at the same time, how Mitch attempts to rally support from the audience to repair damage to his moral self and deny responsibility. It thus constitutes a method for sustaining the moral infrastructure of the community the panelists take themselves to be representing.

The panelists thus express disapproval of Mitch in terms of his perceived rights as a father who has violated the normative ideals of a father-daughter relationship (Bennett 2013) contributing thus to the musical icon's demise. In so doing, the panelists seek to maintain a contested set of standards in relation to Mitch Winehouse's actions as a father, something which he resists (Dovey 2000). The selected episode has thus provided us with an apposite context in which to explore the relationship between public denunciation, blaming, and (alleged) infringements of the moral order. Jane paints a picture of Amy as a victim of her father's actions, that is, as bereft of agency. She emphasizes the dependency of the deceased to her father, thereby lowering the offender's moral standing with respect to the basic norms that a parent-child relationship should entail. This helps her to depict Mitch as responsible for his daughter's self-destruction, thereby legitimizing their public denunciation of him.

We have also seen that blaming constitutes a negative judgment of wrongful conduct where the perpetrator is made responsible for performing actions that contravene presumed behavioural norms. It carries damaging face implications and is a potential vehicle for causing offence or for establishing that an offence has taken place. It is thus in the interests of the alleged perpetrator to rebut or deflect the grounds on which his blameworthiness is based. This is because the negative evaluations rest on the infringement of social expectations and, it is only when agency, responsibility for particular happenings including those in which others involved may have rather limited capacity to influence (Laidlaw 2010:163), can be attributed to the perpetrator that blaming can be successfully performed or an offence claimed to have taken place, especially by those not directly involved.

Blame consists of holding someone accountable for behaviour that transgresses perceived moral expectations (Buttny 1993). The case of blaming examined in this paper was evidently an affront on Mitch, in particular to his moral standing as a father. Mitch reacted by defending himself, thus signaling his interpretation of the exchange as offensive insofar as it is close to a public shaming (Bramall 2018). The analysis has also shown that the moralizing judgments on which the accusations were based depend largely on concerns about blame rather than ability, that is, on issues of agency. So, concerns about blame play an important role on how we understand social obligations and offensive behaviour.

However, we have also suggested that the attempts by the panelists to assign blame to Mitch Winehouse for his role in enabling his daughter's downfall amount to more than simply threats to his face or moral standing. As Garfinkel (1956) noted in his initial characterization of public denunciations, "the work of denunciation effects

the recasting of the objective character of the perceived other: the other person becomes in the eyes of his condemners literally a different and *new* person. It is not that the new attributes are added to the old ‘nucleus.’ He is not changed, he is reconstituted” (Garfinkel 1956: 421, original emphasis). In this case, the public denunciation of Mitch Winehouse in which the panelists engage amounts to a ritual destruction of his moral self.

Prior work from a social psychological perspective has suggested that moral criticisms, such as those accomplished through blaming and public denunciation, are primarily a means of social control or regulation (Malle, Guglielmo and Monore 2014). However, it is not clear what the panelists on *Loose Women* would gain from attempting to control or regulate Mitch Winehouse’s behaviour. Günthner (1995) suggests that by reproaching a third party for violating some kind of moral norm, one demonstrates “identification with the violated norm and hence, implicitly treat the moral norm as valid” (p.171). In other words, “in finding fault with another’s conduct, a speaker in effect formulates some *normative standard(s)* that the other’s behaviour has transgressed” (Drew 1998: 303). Thus, by engaging in a public denunciation of Mitch Winehouse, the panelists are thereby reaffirming the moral infrastructure of public life, as well morally positioning themselves with respect to the common moral ground (Günthner 1995).

A broader question remains, however, as to *why* public denunciations occur so frequently in public life; that is, “why [do] members of a community react with rejection and strong indignation when they hear about morally deviant actions which do not directly affect themselves” (Günthner 1995: 170). This question lies at the heart of the moral turn in public life we are arguably witnessing, as constraints on publicly denouncing immoral behavior appear to be on the wane. Earlier work in ethnomethodology by Douglas (1970) may provide some insights into this question. He suggests that every individual is necessarily “concerned in all situations with his [sic] moral worth relative to the moral worth of other individuals”, and so is “necessarily committed to a competitive struggle to morally upgrade himself and morally downgrade others (not identified with himself)” (Douglas 1970: 6). Notably, “each individual gains in moral worth to the extent that others lose in moral worth, and vice versa. (To this extent, at least, moral evaluations constitute a ‘zero-sum game’.)” (Douglas 1970: 6). The stakes in this game, as we have seen in recent years, can be very high indeed. Recent work by psychologists would suggest, however, that the potential social risk of engaging in moral criticisms of others is countered by the benefits for moral standing that accrue to self (Jordan, Hoffman, Bloom and Rand 2016).

A deep abiding concern for one’s moral worth is clearly nothing new, as the ongoing discursive struggle over the moral value of self (and others identified with self) over other is immanent to the moral infrastructure of public life. What appears to be changing, then, is not the phenomena of degrading the moral self of others in order upgrade one’s own moral self as such, but rather the extent to which members of the Anglo-societies we have examined, such as Britain, Australia, New Zealand and the U.S., are entitled to publicly judge others. While moral criticisms, such as accusing, blaming, denouncing, reproaching, and so on, are evidently oriented as sensitive actions in the public sphere, it appears the previous moral imperatives for avoiding public denunciations are undergoing significant change. It remains an open question the extent to which this evident moral turn is part of a broader global trend. We suggest it probably is, but this remains a question for further empirical work.



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