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Comic investigation and genre-mixing: the television docucomedies of Lawrence Leung, Judith Lucy and Luke McGregor

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In the twenty-first century, comedians have come to serve as public commentators. This article examines the relationship between genre-mixing and cultural commentary in four documentary series produced for the Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC) that centre on established comedians. These series are *Lawrence Leung's Choose Your Own Adventure* (2009), *Judith Lucy's Spiritual Journey* (2011), *Judith Lucy is All Woman* (2015) and *Luke Warm Sex* (2016). Each series combines the documentary and comedy genres by centring on a comedian's investigation of a theme such as spirituality, gender or sex. While appearing alongside news satire, these docucomedies depart from the latter by eschewing politics in favour of existential themes. Embracing conventions of personalized documentaries, these series use performance reflexively to draw attention to therapeutic discourses and awkward situations. Giving expression to uncertain and questioning views of contemporary spirituality, gender and mediated intimacies, the docucomedies of Lawrence Leung, Judith Lucy and Luke McGregor stage interventions in contemporary debates that constitute forms of public pedagogy.

Documentary comedy

These series can be identified as documentary comedies, or docucomedies, which combine humour and non-fiction representation without adhering primarily to either

genre. Although the relationship between comedy and factual screen works has received little sustained attention, notes Paul Ward, a program can combine both genres (2005, 67, 78–9). Docucomedies differ from mockumentaries, such as *The Games* (1998–2000, ABC) and *We Can Be Heroes* (2005, ABC), which as fictions refer to the world ‘obliquely or allegorically’ whereas documentaries ‘directly’ reference the existing world (Nichols 2010, 7–8). In *Lawrence Leung’s Choose Your Own Adventure* (henceforth *Choose Your Own Adventure*), the eponymous comedian explores life skills and their relationship to identity. The series is adapted from stage performances by Lawrence Leung, a comedian and writer who was already well-known from his live shows in Australia and abroad. Judith Lucy’s television series similarly build on her persona as one of Australia’s most well-known comedians, having performed since the early 1990s in live solo shows and on television and in the 2000s in feature films. In *Judith Lucy’s Spiritual Journey* (henceforth *Spiritual Journey*), she seeks to understand existence by investigating spiritual approaches, and in *Judith Lucy is All Woman* (henceforth *All Woman*) she surveys experiences of and ideas about gender. *Luke Warm Sex* draws on Luke McGregor’s persona as an Australian stand-up comedian and comic actor who had come to prominence in live shows and television during the 2010s. In his series, he investigates knowledge and techniques in order to ‘get better at sex’.

While depicting comedians in their real-world identities, the investigation of larger themes distinguishes these docucomedies from biographical documentaries about performers, such as *Kathy Griffin: My Life on the D-List* (2005–2010, USA) and *Joan Rivers: A Piece of Work* (Ricki Stern and Anne Sundberg, 2010, USA). The series featuring Lawrence Leung, Judith Lucy or Luke McGregor can thus be situated within a wider range of non-fiction programs that feature comedians as presenters, including

series that include little or no humour, such as *Shaun Micallef's Stairway to Heaven* (2017, SBS), *Hannah Gadsby's Oz* (2014, ABC) and *Lawrence Leung's Unbelievable* (2011, ABC). These series form part of an array of works that position comedians as public commentators.

Television that combines humour with serious topics has been increasingly evident since the 1990s. Influential in this context is the work of Michael Moore, such as his satirical first series *TV Nation* (1994–1995, BBC/NBC, UK/USA), which was followed by an international proliferation of television docucomedies that centre on comedians. Examples are the British series *The Mark Thomas Comedy Product* (1996–2003), *Dave Gorman's Important Astrology Experiment* (2002) and *The Mark Steel Lectures* (2003–2006). The period has seen a proliferation of news satire, a comedy subgenre that is both distinct from, and forms part of the context of, docucomedy. Examples are the American news satire programs *The Daily Show* (1996–) and *The Colbert Report* (2005–2014) and the Australian series *The Election Chaser* (2001, ABC), *CNNNN: Chaser Non-Stop News Network* (2002–2003, ABC), *The Chaser Decides* (2004–2007, ABC), *The Chaser's War on Everything* (2006–2009, ABC), *Newstopia* (2007–2008, SBS), *Shaun Micallef's Mad as Hell* (2012–, ABC) and *Planet America* (2012–, ABC).

Although television satire has existed since the 1960s, its prominence in the twenty-first century is linked to a widespread shift in public discourse. Megan Boler identifies the United States' invasion of Iraq in 2003 as a 'convergent moment' in which deceptive propaganda coincided with the public's increased access to new media and dissemination of 'dissenting political commentary' (2006). The result was 'a cultural shift' that reflected a 'renewed' public 'desire for truthfulness and accountability'

(2006). At the same time, notes Paul Achter, the wider impact of 9/11 challenged writers to create ‘comedy in unfunny times’ by devising ways to deploy humour while broaching serious topics (2008, 276). For some audiences, particularly youth, news satire has supplanted traditional news sources (Achter 2008, 278). Indeed, a *Time* magazine poll identified the comedian Jon Stewart as ‘America’s Most Trusted Newscaster’ (Linkins, 2009). Similarly, Rebecca Higgie notes that in Australia, ‘audiences have come to expect not only “joking” from satire, but also “truth-telling”’ (2015, 73). While being products of an era in which satirists have been positioned as commentators on television, docucomedies about topics such as religion or gender also form alternatives to the latter.

The comedian documentaries of Leung, Lucy and McGregor exist in counterpoint to the work of the satirical comedy team The Chaser.¹ In particular, the first of these docucomedy series, *Choose Your Own Adventure*, signalled an expansion of the ABC’s comedy programming. On the one hand, *Choose Your Own Adventure* was linked to The Chaser by being produced by Chaser Broadcasting, and through Lawrence Leung’s earlier work as writer on two seasons of *The Chaser’s War on Everything*. On the other hand, Leung’s series eschews political, including sensitive, topics in a period in which The Chaser faced charges for entering a restricted area, during a stunt that involved staging a fake motorcade during APEC Australia 2007. The announcement of Leung’s series coincided with the year-long break between the second and third seasons of *The Chaser’s War on Everything* (King 2008, 108), a period in which the charges were dropped. In this context, Leung’s series emerged as an alternative to what Sue Turnbull describes as The Chaser’s ‘capacity to offend’, propensity to ‘overstep the mark’, and flaunting of the possibility of being ‘taken off the ABC’ (2007, 78). Eschewing political

themes, *Choose Your Own Adventure* and other docucomedies diverted attention from controversy during years when the ABC faced negative publicity because of *The Chaser* and accusations of biased political reporting (Jolly 2014, 6–7, 27–32).

The series featuring Leung, Lucy or McGregor also reflect ABC initiatives to target contemporary audiences. Tony Moore observed in 2008 that the ABC's share of viewers aged below forty had dropped but that in comedy the broadcaster retained a capacity to be 'risky, dangerous, intellectually challenging and experimental' (80). Just as Turnbull notes that *The Chaser* was 'in tune with the zeitgeist of the time, with definite appeal for the 16–39-year-old demographic' (2007, 77), *Choose Your Own Adventure* targeted youth with a promotional website and a YouTube profile. The series' inclusion of Lego people and Rubik's cubes, combined with music in the style of vintage video games, suggest cross-generational targeting of young and nostalgic older audiences. *Choose Your Own Adventure* also led these docucomedies' association with the newly-launched online platform, ABC iView, reflecting the ABC's goal to become 'a multi-channel narrow-caster' (Moore 2008, 78). The ABC's aim to be a successful producer of 'timelessly funny' content that can be sold over a longer period (Turnbull 2007, 78) was met by the subsequent releases of *Luke Warm Sex* on DocPlay and all four docucomedy series in the iTunes Store and on Google Play.² Although the docucomedies of Judith Lucy and Luke McGregor are less overtly targeted at youth than *Choose Your Own Adventure* is, *Luke Warm Sex* and *All Woman* unmistakably address contemporary audiences by broaching the issue of online pornography, as will be seen. *All Woman* also appropriates conventions of contemporary YouTube reaction videos in a scene in which Lucy delivers a running commentary while watching pornography.

As free-to-air television formed only the initial stage of these series' release, their popularity is not readily quantifiable in terms of ratings. Rather, each series' impact is inextricably linked to the comedian's ongoing career, including subsequent television work. Moreover, this article argues that the series' impact extends to contributing to debates about gender, spirituality and sex. Each series thus suggests potential for a comedian as commentator to accrue a cultural authority that may exceed the textual boundaries of a television series. In Lucy's case, in particular, her role as comedic commentator has continued beyond television to include a docucomedy podcast, *Judith Lucy – Overwhelmed & Dying* (ABC, 2020), which explores such topics as wellness, ageing and relationships. Television docucomedies extend the genres of non-fiction representation and stand-up comedy, by centring on presenters whose use of humour mimics stances of expertise while challenging conventions of documentary objectivity (Nichols 2010, 168–9).

These series' participation in public discourse can be situated in the context of earlier local television that combines humour with serious topics. An example is *The Money or the Gun* (1989–1994, ABC), in which Andrew Denton deploys his comic persona in investigating themes such as heroin, disability and prostitution. Nominally a talk show, the series' inclusion of material filmed outside the studio, such as at a CanTeen weekend in 'The Topic of Cancer' (1993), positions *The Money or the Gun* as a precursor to twenty-first-century comedian documentaries. Australian docucomedy was also subsequently developed in the work of John Safran, including the series *Music Jamboree* (aka *John Safran's Music Jamboree*) (2002, SBS), *John Safran vs God* (2004, SBS) and *John Safran's Race Relations* (2009, ABC). Although Safran came to

television as an unknown documentary-maker in *Race Around the World* (1997–1998, ABC) and not as an established comedian, his series prefigure the comedian documentaries of Leung, Lucy and McGregor by combining a thematic focus with interviews, commentary and comic stunts. Safran's work significantly extended the thematic ambition of local docucomedy; whereas *The Money or the Gun* features episodes about different themes, for example, Safran's exploration of a theme over the course of several episodes forms a model for the comedian-centred documentaries of Leung, Lucy and McGregor.

These docucomedies combine conventions of non-fiction representation and humour. By situating Leung, Lucy or McGregor in the role of narrator, each series uses the expository documentary convention of direct address to imbue authority in 'the spoken word' (Nichols 2010, 167–168). The roles of writer and presenter are thus conflated to position the comedian as the implied film-maker, even though each series is directed by someone else.³ On the other hand, each series also displays conventions of stand-up comedy, such as the combining of direct communication with comic behaviour and dialogue (Mintz 1985, 71–2). The cycle's increasingly self-conscious mixing of genres is exemplified by the invoking of the comedian's occupation. In the first episode of *Choose Your Own Adventure*, for example, the jocular tone of Leung's narration alludes only implicitly to his background in comedy as he describes his childhood attachment to the 'love triangle between a man, a woman and a desktop computer' in the film *Electric Dreams* (Steve Barron, 1984, USA/UK). It is not until the final episode that he explicitly refers to his profession of comedian, by revealing that his family of lawyers and doctors wonders 'what I actually do'. By contrast, the later series actively flaunt their juxtaposing of comedic discourse and serious matters. This is evident in the

opening scene of *Spiritual Journey* when Judith Lucy appears at a convent wearing a nun's habit and declares, 'why is a funny lady like me banging on about religion and spirituality?' Equally, the first episode of *Luke Warm Sex* fuses McGregor's profession to his role as presenter when he introduces himself as a 'stand-up comedian from Tasmania' and the scene cuts to an excerpt from one of his live performances. The combining of discursive authority with humour in these series positions comedians as public commentators.

Personalized documentary and comic participation

These series span not only genres but also distinctions of cultural value. Docucomedies have proliferated in what John Corner terms the 'postdocumentary' era, which has seen a 'radical dispersal' of documentary conventions across a range of programs and the development of 'a performative, playful element' in 'popular factual' or 'reality' formats (2009, 37–41). Moreover, post-documentary developments are more diverse and significant than is implied by the frequent derision of 'reality TV' (Hill 2014, 3). For example, the mixing of genres in forms such as docudrama and documusical is situated alongside respected historical and poetic forms of representation (Paget 2016, 3; Holdsworth 2013, 2). Docudrama is a term for a range of 'fact-based drama' forms that present actual events through staged sequences (Paget 2016, 10–11) whereas documusicals use 'purpose-composed' lyrics and music as part of a non-fictional discourse in a documentary setting (Paget and Roscoe 2006, n. p.). In the context of a proliferation of genre-mixing, the docucomedies of Leung, Lucy and McGregor bridge categories of cultural value in television. By investigating themes such as religion and gender, for example, these series adhere to the ABC Act's (1983, 2017) requirement of content that is informative and educational, as well as entertaining. Yet these series also

have affinities with popular factual television, such as makeover programs that link physical transformation to an ethos of personal improvement.

The docucomedies of Leung, Lucy and McGregor exhibit characteristics of personalized documentaries. In their book about reality TV, Anita Biressi and Heather Nunn define personalized documentary as centring on 'subjective experience' in its content and frequently in its 'perspective' (2005, 71). They attribute a proliferation of personalized documentaries since the 1980s to 'the post-Thatcherite/Reaganite era in which social mobility and media visibility have become the touchstones of individual achievement' (2005, 4). Personalized documentaries frequently employ strategies associated with the participatory mode of documentary representation. Defined by Bill Nichols, the participatory (aka the interactive) mode is characterized by interaction on screen between the filmmaker (or presenter) and subjects, such as interviewees (2010, 179). Having a close historical relationship with broadcast media, including talk shows, the participatory mode shares with personalized documentaries an emphasis on 'bodily presence' and the use of autobiographical and confessional approaches (Nichols 2010, 182–4). However, participatory documentaries can also encompass topics larger than an individual's subjectivity and achievements. Comedian-centred docucomedies, like personalized documentaries, issue from an individualistic culture, but as participatory documentaries they also have a capacity to explore topics larger than the individual.

The docucomedies of Leung, Lucy and McGregor exemplify narcissistic and confessional aspects of personalized documentary. Biressi and Nunn situate the latter within a contemporary, narcissistic society that seeks to bolster 'a sense of one's self' and efface a lack of meaning by embracing 'therapy culture' and a confessional mode of

address (2005, 100, 103). Myra Macdonald defines the confessional as an ‘expression of experience’ that ‘is configured individualistically and ontologically’ (1998, 109). In the docucomedies of Leung, Lucy, and McGregor, for example, the central topic issues from the comedian’s private life. This is consistent not only with stand-up comedy, in which performers commonly draw on their private experiences, but also with an individualistic media culture in which ‘the ordinary person’ can be a celebrity and the celebrity ‘an ordinary, supposedly knowable person’ (Biressi and Nunn 2005, 4). For example, *Choose Your Own Adventure* chronicles Leung’s enactment of his unfulfilled childhood goals after he questions what he has achieved by his late twenties. In *Spiritual Journey*, Lucy’s exploration is motivated by her parents’ deaths, her history of substance abuse and her Catholic upbringing. In *All Woman*, she reflects on her boarding-school education, her life choices and the lives of her birth mother and adoptive mother. Similarly, *Luke Warm Sex* develops from McGregor’s confession that at the age of thirty-four, he has ‘had almost no sex’ and continues to be anxious about intimacy.

Each series centres on a personal quest in which the comedian guides the audience through a pursuit of knowledge and skills. As will be seen, the combining of the comedian’s own story with confession forms a basis for how each series explores contemporary ideas about a topic such as sex or religion. In personalized documentaries, an emphasis on ‘therapeutic discourses’ in relation to ‘ageing, ill health, psychic stress or social/relationship/career flaws’ includes the implication that ‘everything can be fixed by career or lifestyle coaches’ (Biressi and Nunn 2005, 101). Similarly, expert consultation is a recurrent motif in these docucomedies. In *Choose Your Own Adventure*, Lawrence Leung seeks advice from seduction gurus, music

industry professionals, a martial arts master, a wrestler, a conflict resolution expert, a speedcuber, and a sword swallower and suspension performer. In *Spiritual Journey*, Judith Lucy consults a psychic, a grief educator, Indigenous people and a Buddhist nun, undergoing rebirthing, vibrational sound therapy and tantric massage. In *All Woman*, she is tested for fitness and maternal capabilities and advised about cosmetic surgery and dressing for the workforce. In *Luke Warm Sex*, McGregor consults sex therapists and educators, sexologists, a men's relationship coach, a sexual empowerment guide, a Taoist masseur, a Liquid Crystal practitioner, a Body Awakening therapist and a male escort. By embracing ostentatiously an array of therapies, these series present participation as spectacle.

The positioning of a comedian as both commentator and participant places emphasis on performance. Macdonald argues that the confessional address commonly obscures spectatorship, when the viewer is 'refused a point of contact' with the confessor and becomes a voyeur in 'a position of detachment from the experiences offered to us as spectacle' (1998, 109–110). When confession is situated in a context such as a talk show, however, voyeurism 'may be contextualized into political significance by the host' (Macdonald 1998, 110). Similarly, documentaries that position a comedian as both commentator (host) and participant draw attention to performance as spectacle. For example, these docucomedies emphasize the therapeutic cliché of the 'journey of self-discovery' (Biressi and Nunn 2005, 74–7) by incorporating scenes that resemble comedy sketches. Lucy dons facial hair and a prosthetic penis to socialize as a man in *All Woman* and McGregor practises orgasmic breathing in public places in *Luke Warm Sex*. In *Choose Your Own Adventure*, Leung's journey of self-discovery is rendered alternately confessional and comical when he takes lessons in breakdancing to remedy

his problem that he is 'not cool'. The problem is linked to Leung's belief that his Chinese Australian identity lacks the allure that he perceives in other ethnic groups, such as the Puerto Rican-African American breakdance star Shabba Doo, of whom he enquires earnestly, 'Do you think I'll ever be cool?' While having a serious motivation, however, Leung's self-improvement is rendered absurd when he and his crew of 'the nerdiest dancers ever' compete in a breakdancing competition. Effectively a comedy performance comprising amateurish and uncoordinated moves, their dance routine both reinforces the dilemma of being uncool and stages a comic triumph over the problem.

A more complex juxtaposition of the comedian's persona with diegetic performance occurs in *Luke Warm Sex* when McGregor reads his work at a literary soiree. His first foray into writing erotic literature, the scene is linked to his therapeutic goal to 'increase my vocabulary' and have 'more honest conversations about sex'. As a performance to a diegetic audience of strangers, the reading draws attention to how McGregor's self-effacing comedic persona can be viewed as a construction. During his reading, for example, he invites laughter by telling the audience, 'This is my first erotic fiction ever. Just to warn you, it's terrible', and incorporating a jocular reference to the ubiquity of pizza delivery employees in pornography. The scene can be read in relation to Biressi and Nunn's argument that personalized documentaries position the self as being 'only ever the performance of a role' (2005, 101). They draw on Slavoj Žižek's analysis of the cultural significance of 9/11, which he argues both positioned world events as spectacle and highlighted 'the falsity of "reality TV shows"' (Žižek 2002, 11–12). This convergence of the virtual, the public and the intimate is echoed in *Luke Warm Sex* when McGregor later confesses that his erotic reading made him more nervous than

doing stand-up, confounding the notion that his reading was simply another comic performance.

However, these docucomedies do not simply suggest that ‘real social life’ has acquired ‘the features of a staged fake’ (Žižek 2002, 14). While drawing attention to comedic performance in encounters with people in their real-world identities, these docucomedies venture beyond artifice to explore the awkwardness of lived experience. For example, the humour of uncomfortable situations is invoked in *Luke Warm Sex* when McGregor interviews his parents about their sex life, and in *Choose Your Own Adventure* when Leung is rejected by the object of his childhood crush, who says she is embarrassed by his serenade. In *All Woman*, awkwardness is addressed through humour after Lucy interviews a surgeon while he performs a procedure on her genitals. Her advice to us in a later episode, ‘don’t interview somebody if their hand is inside you’, can be read not only as a flippant one-liner but also as suggesting that the awkwardness of having such an encounter on television has a lasting impact. Convergences of confession and performance are central to how these series reflect on contemporary society.

Contemporary society and mediated intimacies

These docucomedies draw on traditional functions of stand-up comedy to highlight uncertainties about such topics as spirituality, gender and sex. Lawrence E. Mintz writes that comedians have long contributed to highlighting, questioning and rearranging shared values for purposes of ‘cultural affirmation and subversion’ (1985, 73–4). In a

period in which organized religion has come under scrutiny, for example, *Spiritual Journey* considers Catholicism in comparison to ancient spiritualities, New Age approaches and debauchery. The series enacts what Sophie Sunderland (2009) terms an unravelling of assumptions of neutrality. In an analysis of *John Safran vs God* and Andrew Denton's *God on My Side* (2006, ABC), Sunderland argues that 'to unravel the assumptions of secular neutrality through an explicit focus on the embodied enactment of participation with the religious' posits an alternative to 'certitudes offered by the politics of us/them' (2009, 215). Echoing the 'Religious Road Test' segments in *John Safran vs God*, Judith Lucy's juxtaposing of her Catholic youth and adult ambivalence in *Spiritual Journey* reveals uncertain and questioning ideas about religion. Indeed, uncertainty and questioning characterize all of these docucomedies. In *All Woman*, Lucy questions the relevance of traditional ideas about gender in light of contemporary transgender experiences, domestic work, cosmetic procedures and ageing. *Choose Your Own Adventure* questions preconceived ideas about life success and being Chinese Australian. *Luke Warm Sex* centres on the uncertainty of being a sexually-inexperienced adult male in a society in which this predicament is not often addressed openly. These series use humour to call into question certitudes of contemporary society.

Gender is a central focus of *Choose Your Own Adventure*, *All Woman* and *Luke Warm Sex*. All three series focus on 'subordinated masculinities' or women, which R. W. Connell positions as alternatives to hegemonic masculinity (1987, 183–5). Connell argues that an absence of clear definitions of femininity and subordinated masculinities has prevented these gender identities from 'gaining cultural definition and recognition' (1987, 183–186). However, docucomedies have a capacity to explore subordinated gender identities by exploiting the comedian's traditional exemption from expectations

of 'normal' behaviour and their capacity thereby to explore 'ambiguity and ambivalence' (Mintz 1985, 74). For example, the series featuring Leung and McGregor centre on the subordinated masculinities of adult men who lack physical aggression, social ascendancy or sexual mastery. Whereas Connell identifies male youth as a temporary form of subordination (1987, 186), these adult male comedians are presented as occupying ambiguous relationships to the distinction between youth and maturity. For example, Leung confesses in *Choose Your Own Adventure* that 'I'm not a man, I'm a wimp' and that he still sleeps in a bunk bed and resides with his parents. Equally, McGregor's masculinity is presented as tenuous in *Luke Warm Sex* when he confesses that his anxiety exacerbates his social frustrations as an inexperienced and sexually ignorant man. These expressions of subordinated masculinity are reinforced by the confessional mode of address, which is often associated with femininity (Macdonald 1998, 109).

Judith Lucy's outspoken and sarcastic assertion of her gender forms a contrast with Leung's and McGregor's earnestness. Each comedian's work can be situated within gender conventions of comedy. For example, the implication in *Choose Your Own Adventure* and *Luke Warm Sex* that the comedian has not attained adult masculinity is consistent with a comedic tradition of adult male childishness (Seidman 1979, 100–101), whereas Lucy can be situated within a history of verbally aggressive women in comedy (Rowe 1995, 19). Yet these docucomedies reflect more specifically on twenty-first-century ideas about gender. For example, *All Woman* opens with a discussion of feminism that affirms the latter's continuing salience in light of persistent gender inequality (Giuffre 2015, 66–7). The series' allegiance to second-wave feminism is evident in its cover version of Helen Reddy's 'I Am Woman', and identified by Liz

Giuffre in affinities between Lucy's persona and Germaine Greer as the first Australian 'celebrity feminist' (Giuffre 2015, 57; Lilburn, Magarey and Sheridan 2000, 335).

Yet *All Woman* also presents a diverse range of contemporary ideas about gender. In light of Connell's observation that femininity involves strategies ranging from compliance to 'resistance or forms of non-compliance' with male interests (1987, 183–4), *All Woman* juxtaposes an array of stances that highlights the complexity and contradictions of gender. In a scene in a bridal shop, for instance, the unmarried comedian is reluctant to try on wedding dresses, prefers a black gown, and remarks pungently that 'I'd actually feel more comfortable getting fitted for a contraceptive device'. The scene exemplifies the recurrent resistance to orthodoxies of marriage and domesticity in Lucy's work. Yet the series also eschews a singular or resolved standpoint, instead emphasizing participatory documentary's propensity for 'confrontation' (Nichols 2010, 179). For example, the comedian's stance is challenged in a scene where a young wedding planner comments that she expected Lucy, in her forties, to be in favour of weddings. A loudly comical argument ensues in which Lucy aggressively rejects being stereotyped as a conservative older person: 'Do you know nothing about my generation? I was taking heroin when I was your age'. In *All Woman*, female verbosity and non-compliance both highlight and question gender orthodoxies.

These series' exploration of gender and sex can be examined in relation to an earlier cycle of Australian films that combine non-fiction and entertainment but resist easy labelling as comedies or documentaries. In particular, the cycle of Australian films of the 1970s that includes *The Naked Bunyip: A Survey of Sex in Australia* (John B. Murray, 1970) and *The ABC of Love and Sex* (John D. Lamond, 1978) can be identified

as an antecedent to the series featuring Leung, Lucy or McGregor. At first glance, twenty-first-century ABC documentaries may appear to have little in common with *The Naked Bunyip* and *The ABC of Love and Sex*, which are sexploitation films, closely associated with the Australian film industry and cultural climate of the 1970s, and drew objections from censors (Murray, 2006; Murray 1978, 97). By contrast, the docucomedies of Leung, Lucy and McGregor do not feature graphic images of sex or nudity and were screened free-to-air on the ABC without apparent controversy. Nevertheless, two distinct affinities with the cycle of exploitation films can be used to highlight the cultural functions of the docucomedies of Leung, Lucy and McGregor. The first is that each cycle appeared in a period when screen depictions of sensitive topics, such as sex, had become more widely available. The 1970s witnessed a proliferation of pornographic films and the early twenty-first century saw increased access to pornography online.

The second affinity is in the textual strategy of combining non-fiction conventions with entertainment. In particular, *The Naked Bunyip* and *The ABC of Love and Sex* sought to attract wider audiences (Murray 2006; Murray 1978, 96–7) by combining expository information and interviews with sexual subject matter for the purported goal of educating viewers about sexuality. Although the mixing of genres by Murray and Lamond has been overshadowed by the labelling of their films as ‘Ozploitation’ in Mark Hartley’s *Not Quite Hollywood: The Wild, Untold Story of Ozploitation!* (2008, Australia/USA), they are nonetheless precursors to twenty-first-century docucomedy series. Docucomedies have adapted the premise of investigating a topic in an entertaining way. Indeed, the premise of a comical market researcher in *The Naked Bunyip* is echoed in *Choose Your Own Adventure* and *Luke Warm Sex* in scenes where

Leung and McGregor consult experts on seduction. These docucomedies thus join a history of Australian depictions of subordinated, sexually nervous men that includes Graeme Blundell's performances in *The Naked Bunyip* and *Alvin Purple* (Tim Burstall, 1973).

In the work of Leung and McGregor, however, nervous masculinity is linked to contemporary mediated intimacies. The term mediated intimacy is applied by Feona Attwood, Jamie Hakim and Alison Winch to both 'the ways discourses of intimacy have been mediated in popular media' and 'the range of intimacies that have [...] been constrained and made possible by [...] networked technologies' (2017, 249–250). The series featuring Leung, Lucy or McGregor involve mediated intimacy both as personalized documentaries that offer simulated closeness and in exploring subject matter of how relationships are shaped by technology. In *Choose Your Own Adventure*, for instance, Leung's professed shyness is juxtaposed with the online availability of information and social opportunities. He is presented as intellectually adept but socially naïve in his continuing attachment to Angela, whom he knew in primary school, and when he consults his much younger cousin about coping with a crush. Failing to locate Angela on the Internet, Leung seeks assistance through the medium of an international, online 'seduction community' involving pick-up artists who claim to know the secrets of seducing women. After being coached by Californian seduction gurus, he successfully obtains a woman's phone number, but describes some of the advice he receives as 'creepy' and concludes that he has not yet learned how 'to win' women's 'hearts'. Thus exploring networked opportunities for finding love, *Choose Your Own Adventure* uses humour to question what is acceptable in contemporary life and the effectiveness of learning social skills through websites and books.

The mediated intimacy of pornography is examined in the docucomedies of Judith Lucy and Luke McGregor. Both *All Woman* and *Luke Warm Sex* respond to a context in which online pornography has prompted public discourse that often focuses on negative concerns about ‘exposure and effects’ (Attwood, Smith and Barker 2018, 3740). By contrast, a study of young people’s pornography consumption by Feona Attwood, Clarissa Smith and Martin Barker advocates understanding how such ‘media might be significant for the construction of sexual identities’, and rejects ‘narrow models of healthy sex and media consumption’ (2018, 3740, 3752). This stance of examining rather than wholly dismissing pornography is echoed in *All Woman* when Lucy interviews women, female pornographers, and teenage girls and boys, whose diverse views contradict the notion of the passive media consumer.

All Woman also parodies conventions of pornographic representation. For example, the series opens with a sequence in which Lucy reclines on carpet beneath a naked man, whose face and voice are neither seen nor heard. She asks him, ‘Who are you?’, then continues to speak to the camera, later turning to slap the man’s backside and quip, ‘Thanks, sugar-tits’. In another scene, Lucy reclines in black underwear for a demonstration of digital manipulation of her photograph. In a further example, a male pole dancer performs in the foreground while Lucy expounds to the camera about politicians’ neglect of non-traditional households. This scene enacts a gender reversal of sequences in *Not Quite Hollywood* in which a female pole dancer performs in the background during an interview with John D. Lamond, director of *The ABC of Love and Sex*. *All Woman* thus situates Lucy’s commentary about gender and sexuality in the male-centred tradition of Australian exploitation films.

Luke Warm Sex places more overt emphasis on education than the series featuring Lawrence Leung or Judith Lucy do. Echoing the purportedly educational functions of *The Naked Bunyip* and *The ABC of Love and Sex*, this series includes an instructional segment about contraception and uses animation and acted scenes to impart information, including a short film in which comedians portray sexually-transmitted infections. In contrast to the ideal of collective liberation that fuelled films of the 1970s, however, *Luke Warm Sex* reflects on a twenty-first century in which individualism prevails but unmediated intimacy is often overlooked. In an era in which therapeutic discourses have supplanted the countercultural ethos of hedonistic liberation, *Luke Warm Sex* highlights the role of popular media as public pedagogy. As Emma Rich argues, reality TV programs about the body and health participate in public pedagogy, a recognition that learning takes place outside formal education and includes entertainment (2011, 3).

Luke Warm Sex enacts a public pedagogical intervention in debates about online pornography. In particular, the series responds to concerns that pornography has come to serve as what the activist Cindi Gallop terms ‘default sex education’ for young people. In an interview with McGregor in *Luke Warm Sex*, Gallop’s stance that the problem is not pornography, but society’s lack of open discussion of sex, forms a focal point for the series’ goal to generate open discussion about all aspects of sexuality. Indeed, McGregor links his own ignorance and lack of experience of intimacy to the prevalence and limitations of pornography: ‘Almost everything I’ve learned about sex prior to filming this series came from watching porn’. By positioning the comedian as a participatory investigator and cultural commentator, *Luke Warm Sex* engages in public

pedagogy about mediated intimacy. By extension, the series also draws attention to how this cycle of docucomedies contributes to public discourse about topics of contemporary salience.

In a context in which comedians have been positioned as public commentators, the docucomedies of Lawrence Leung, Judith Lucy and Luke McGregor use humour and non-fiction representation to explore contemporary and shifting ideas about topics from spirituality to gender and sexuality. Central to these series is the comedic commentator who serves as participant, therapeutic subject and performer. These series reflect on life goals, loss and anxiety, relationships and mediated intimacies. Using humour to explore uncertainties about what is acceptable today and to confront awkward situations, these docucomedies draw on traditions of Australian screen humour and non-fiction representation to offer public pedagogy about twenty-first-century concerns.

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¹ One of the most prolific Australian satirical comedy teams, The Chaser first appeared in 1999 in their eponymous newspaper and are creators of a succession of TV programs commencing with *The Election Chaser* in 2001, as well as working in radio.

² *Choose Your Own Adventure* was released in the USA as *The Lost Adventures of Lawrence Leung*.

³ *Choose Your Own Adventure* is directed by Craig Melville, *Spiritual Journey* by Brendan Fletcher and Tony Martin, *All Woman* by Anna Bateman, and *Luke Warm Sex* by Hayden Guppy.