

The Conversation receives a lot of comments each day and you can't read everything – it being a new year certainly doesn't change that. That's why we occasionally end the week with a selection of community highlights: comments we enjoyed or thought interesting. Read on for five comments and discussions I thought worth highlighting to start 2016.

[Explainer: what does the 'male gaze' mean, and what about a female gaze?](#)

Rosemary Overell and the article's author Janice Loreck discussed a cultural perspective on visual media and the "male gaze".

[Rosemary Overell](#) :

This is a timely article Janice! Mulvey often gets a bad 'wrap' but as you point out we still see the objectification of women in contemporary cinematic representations. This is certainly true of other media (TV and music videos too) as well. I also liked your point around the gendered division between visual and 'other sensory' experiences. From a cultural studies perspective though - and perhaps to be provocative (an old provocation, but I still think relevant) - what about audience agency? In the current moment, more and more people are being raised to feminist consciousness and might be quite reflexive about the sexist representations onscreen.

[Janice Loreck](#) :

This is certainly a relevant point. Gaze theory imagines the viewer as very passive—as helplessly coerced into watching and interpreting a film in a certain way. Film and cultural studies scholars acknowledge that audiences are active in making meaning, bringing their own subjectivity and context to the text. I also agree that feminist consciousness seems to be very fashionable nowadays amongst certain groupings (with the rise of the feminist 'blogosphere', popular feminist websites like Jezebel and so on...). I hope this indicates that audiences are more reflexive and critical, but there still seems to be plenty of pushback against it...

Community highlights

Written by The Conversation USA

To sum up: I think understanding audience reactions is important. But I also think that scrutinising narrative/visual aesthetics in media is also important. They are both key to understanding the relationship between media and gender

[Female doctors in Australia are hitting glass ceilings – why?](#)

[Louise Baur](#) shared her experience in medicine and the challenges faced by women:

Thank you for your very thoughtful article. Your comments make much on-the-ground sense to any health professional - especially a medical practitioner - working in the health system in Australia.

I graduated in medicine from the University of Sydney in 1981, in a class that was approximately 50% female. There should have been enough time for the lag effect to have worked out since then, but, as you point out, it remains extremely patchy.

We can learn from the examples of successful gender equity implementation and appropriate mentoring and sponsorship of talented men and women in health systems around the country. These include having male and female senior champions of gender (and ethnic) equity in the health workplace and having flexible career training pathways. Senior health management & Board support and prioritisation of gender and ethnic equity is also vital.

There are additional challenges for those younger doctors wanting to follow a clinical academic training pathway, because of the additional time for research training required on top of clinical training. Different medical specialty colleges - and also different University departments - offer variable support for this career pathway. And we can see even clearer gender and ethnic disparities in senior academic clinicians than amongst senior doctors more broadly. .

Ultimately, the more gender and ethnic diversity/equity there is within our medical and clinical academic workforce, the better it must be for the health system generally, for patients, and for

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the health of the nation. Getting this right must be a major medical & academic workforce priority.

Families shouldn't be allowed to veto organ donation

[Holly Northam](#) offered up a counterpoint to William Isdale and Julian Savulescu's article:

This argument is valid only if consent is informed and health care practices and communication are of a standard that meet the needs of those they serve. Most people are unaware of the processes required for organ donation after death- their time frames and the implications for families at the bedside. Some families are put through considerable suffering, and even sacrifice in order to allow donation to proceed. Most people want to support their loved ones decision to donate and most Australians want to donate. Therefore, the only thing stopping them is often what they discover for the first time in the hospital. Internationally we know that Spain and other countries have high rates of donation because families are given expert care at the time- the onus of responsibility is on the health care team. We need to fix our hospital processes and build expertise in our health care teams before we consider over-riding families natural fears for their dying relatives. It is an abrogation of our health care responsibilities to bully grieving families and blame them for our health care system deficiencies.

What it feels like for a girl: Dutton and Briggs remind us of politics' endemic sexism

[Cris Brack](#) provided some history on the insult "witch" and its political uses:

In the Dark Ages, female leaders in communities were denounced as witches as a way of getting them out of the way. There is indeed a whole section on the history of Europe where matriarchies were over-run by patriarchies, and the denouncing of witches was used as an effective tool in the assault. Then again, in the TV series "Horrible Histories" we learn that the Witch Finder General just declared any woman in his way (including in front of him in a queue) as a witch so he could move forward. This is obviously the way in which Dutton is using the term - a strong female is in his way and he can use any tool at his disposal to get her out of the way.

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So when Dutton calls someone a witch, take it as a compliment that he considers you a strong woman who is able to stand in his way. He is threatened by you and fears your influence. Take pity on him and his fears, but in the words of Monty Python just “turn him into a newt”.

[Our democracy can learn from China’s meritocracy](#)

[David Kemp](#) offered up some thoughts and experiences with China’s model of political leadership and how it compares to Australia’s:

Thanks Mark for a good article and one that captures many of the thoughts that those of us who have worked in China have. Yes China has problems and it’s not perfect, but their leaders are capable politicians who do respond to public issues. Though like ours we may not always think they have responded to the more important issues.

The Chinese meritocracy does obviously pay dividends and you can see the current system as the modern, updated version of the old Confucian system that had been in place for 2500 years. I always thought CP Fitzgerald argued the case well decades ago, when he concluded that successful revolutions / dynasty changes, occurred when the scholars (i.e. the trained public servants), peasants and military all supported a change. If one group didn’t then the ‘new’ Government failed.

We are supposed to have an independent public service where the ‘scholars’ are, but in China today they are mixed up with the political system.

It has always been refreshing when you meet a Minister in China who has come up through the ranks of science or engineering for 20 years or so, before shifting to a more political position.

We now have a system where party hacks rise / float to the top, but the only ‘merit’ required is to play politics and not to have shown any skill in Government. The few politicians who have done something else are obvious among the present lot. Of course having real-world experience doesn’t always mean that people don’t descend into grubby politics.

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The Chinese system also allows for long-term planning, moreso than we have. One doubts that the success of the 'new' China in lifting people out of poverty could happen in Australia where a week is about the average planning horizon.

So how do you build consensus in our system? Transparency and open discussions are always important, but then political leaders need to be better able to evaluate options and offer constructive criticisms. Polarising views rarely work as the aim then is more to win a vote than achieve anything tangible. Democracies that have several parties and a view to achieving a consensus have some appeal - the ability of the Norwegians to establish the model for a Sovereign fund from North Sea oil is a classic case. In China those divergent views are handled through the Party system and that is realistic in a country that has never had a democratic tradition.

Read a comment you thought interesting? Let me know during the week. You can leave a comment below or send me an [email](#).

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