

Community highlights

Written by Cory Zaroni, Community Manager, The Conversation

The Conversation receives a lot of comments each day and you can't read everything. That's why we occasionally end the week with a selection of community highlights: comments we enjoyed or thought worth discussing.

Why the world needs superheroes

Superheroes are more popular than ever. Liam Burke explored why that is and, by extension, why the world needs them:

Despite their fantastical abilities, what many fans celebrate is the connection to their heroes' humanity. Jessica Jones' star Eka Darville described growing up in the Northern Rivers of Australia as the only black kid in his school:

When we'd play Power Rangers they were like, 'You have to be the black Power Ranger,' but I secretly wanted to be the red one [traditionally the leader]. So when I booked the role of Scott Truman, Red Ranger, I was, like, 'Yeah, vengeance is mine'.

Such diversity is necessary given the superhero's increasingly important role as escapist fantasy, cross-generational icon, and aspirational figure. One fan, heroically braving a Melbourne winter in a Little Mermaid costume, articulated the feelings of many:

I think superheroes today are a symbol of hope, making yourself a better person and using that in your everyday life.

Chris Harries [posted](#) a question about the world's need for villains to go alongside our heroes:

Question: If the world needs superheroes, does it also need matching villains? I ask this in the context of American culture that has spawned no end of civilisation-saving heroes and hero stories, but there always seems to be the arch villain in there too.

We could take this good-bad dichotomy all the way back to the biblical Archangel and the Devil, but we can also look to Bin Laden or Kaddafi or Moriarty or any number of other arch villains that seem to be needed as contrasting identities that help to legitimise the super hero's *raison d'être*.

[Unfaithfully yours: what happens when virtual reality affairs get real?](#)

As technology advances, its potential influence on our relationships increases. In an article this week, David Evans Bailey explored what happens with virtual reality affairs get real:

What happens in cyberspace does not necessarily stay in cyberspace. The emotions and feelings of intimate contact felt in VR will be carried over into the real world. So if a partner is being “unfaithful” online, the emotional consequences and impact on their existing relationship are clear.

In the comments, Anita Spinks [discussed](#) whether or not “cheating” in “fake romantic scenarios” was unethical (and just what people are searching for romantically):

Shortly after the invention of the printing press followed by the first novel, human beings have been imagining themselves in fake romantic scenarios. This is just its logical extension given our technical capabilities. I don't see it as necessarily a bad thing and doubt that I'd feel betrayed in the hypothetical event that I found a partner “cheating”.

I've been an avid follower of the Scandinavian series ‘Humans’ and its equally absorbing UK version. In this, we're forced to envisage a world in which every second being is synthetic in

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origin. Predictably, sex is one of the primary functions of these constructions. When I delve right down into my heart of hearts I find it hard to find an ethical objection, though I'm sure to be overwhelmed by those ready to 'put me right'.

At the moment, we have more than enough 'actual' humans; >7.4 billion at last count, so in reality there should be more than enough scope. As humans, we're probably in search of an ideal! One that can't be accessed in our day to day reality.

[How 'Alfred' the whale lost its teeth to become a giant filter feeder](#)

Felix Georg Marx, David Hocking and Travis Park explained the history behind one of the most distinctive features of whales: the baleen in their mouths.

Living whales feed by filtering vast numbers of small fish and krill directly from seawater. This is a rather clever strategy that allows them to cut out predatory middle men and feast directly on the abundance at the bottom of the food chain.

Modern whales are toothless and so capture their prey using their hallmark adaptation: baleen, a series of horny filtering combs that line the upper jaw. Baleen is the key feature that allowed whales to grow big.

From the time baleen first appeared, most whales grew to body lengths of four to eight metres and, ultimately, became the ocean giants we know today.

Cobie Brinkman asked a question about a whale's baleen plates from a structural perspective: I was wondering about this last week when looking at a full skeletal mount of a humpback whale and observing how long the baleen plates were, and that they must be very flexible to enable this whale to close its mouth (unlike some species like the right whales that always seem to be depicted showing the baleen - is this so?); as well, the baleen was very dark brown, making me wonder what kind of tissue they were. If they derive from the jaw, are they a specialised form of

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cartilage? Fibrous tissue? Both? What is the histology?

2 days ago Report EmailAll comments>Delete Reply Recommend To which David [replied](#) :
Great question! Rather than being adapted from the teeth or jaw bone, baleen is actually derived from elaboration of the gums. It is a flexible soft tissue made of similar material to our hair or fingernails. “Whale bone” is actually so strong and flexible that in the whaling days before plastics it was often used in [products like Umbrellas](#)

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[Women don’t always get what they want from labiaplasty](#)

“Labiaplasty has become increasingly popular over the last 10-15 years in Western countries,” according to Gemma Sharpe and Julie Mattiske’s recent article. But the outcomes aren’t always positive:

Labiaplasty is often advertised online as a way for women to restore self-confidence and esteem, and improve their sexual relationships: our results suggest this is not necessarily the case. Instead, it appears although labiaplasty allows women to stop worrying about their genital appearance, it does not radically change how they view themselves and their intimate relationships.

Our research was the first to examine preoperative characteristics of women who are likely to be dissatisfied with their surgical outcomes. We found women who were more psychologically distressed – showing depression and anxiety symptoms in particular – or were currently involved in an intimate relationship were more likely to be dissatisfied after labiaplasty.

Kadee Meoz [raised](#) the point of people undergoing labiaplasty who were “born XY instead of XX”:

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My comment is not frivolous so i do hope will be taken seriously, albeit it might appear to come out of left-field for some/many readers. There is another cohort of women for whom labiaplasty is a vital component within a larger suite of surgical corrections, which themselves form a part of an even greater whole. That is, the women unfortunately born XY instead of XX, but who have the subsequent good fortune to be able to arrange circumstances to rectify at least some of the unwanted effects of that chromosomal error. Whilst i would agree with any proposition that women generically should not be unfairly judged or criticised should they choose labiaplasty for their own carefully considered reasons, this smaller subset is especially reliant on this procedure [amongst many others]. It can truly be a life-saver.

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