

If David Leyonhjelm hasn't apologised to Sarah Hanson-Young by the time parliament resumes next month, the Senate should tell him to do so.

The recalcitrant Liberal Democrat senator might tell his upper house colleagues to go jump, but the Senate needs to take a stand for the sake of its own reputation.

The outraged Greens have already flagged they'll move a censure over Leyonhjelm's smearing of their senator.

This matter goes beyond the actual stoush between the two. It raises the issue of when parliament should call out unacceptable behaviour by its members. It has also triggered questions about the media's role.

Let's go back to the start. Last Thursday Hanson-Young told the Senate that during a motion relating to violence against women, "senator Leyonhjelm yelled an offensive and sexist slur at me from across the chamber.

"After the vote on the motion was complete, I walked over to the senator and confronted him directly. I asked whether I had heard him correctly. He confirmed that he had yelled, 'You should stop shagging men, Sarah.'

"Shocked, I told him that he was a creep. His reply was to tell me to 'f... off'," she said.

Earlier, Greens leader Richard Di Natale had approached Senate president Scott Ryan about the incident. Ryan spoke to Leyonhjelm. Leyonhjelm wouldn't apologise.

Subsequently, Leyonhjelm gave his version in a [media statement](#), saying during the debate Hanson-Young had interjected "something along the lines of all men being rapists. [She says

her interjection was 'putting more tasers on the streets would not make women more safe from men']].

"I responded by suggesting that if this were the case she should stop shagging men."

Adding more provocation, Leyonhjelm said in his statement that while not prepared to apologise "I am prepared to rephrase my comments. I strongly urge senator Hanson-Young to continue shagging men as she pleases."

The incident has blown up especially because of what followed at the weekend. Leyonhjelm was interviewed on Sky and on 3AW on Sunday morning. On each program he cast a particular slur on Hanson-Young's reputation.

On 3AW he was challenged by the presenters. On [Sky's Outsiders](#) it was a different story. He fitted the vibe of a program, that stretches to breaking point the limits of the permissible. A strap line was put up of his words, "SARAH HANSON-YOUNG IS KNOWN FOR LIKING MEN THE RUMOURS ABOUT HER IN PARLIAMENT ARE WELL KNOWN".

Then, all hell broke loose.

Within hours Sky [apologised](#) to Hanson-Young for "broadcasting appalling comments ... and for highlighting them in an on-screen strap". It said a producer had been suspended, ahead of an internal investigation.

Multiple Sky presenters distanced themselves in tweets. Hanson-Young [announced](#) on Monday that she was seeking legal advice. Letters [have been](#) sent to Sky, 3AW and Leyonhjelm. She could only sue in relation to what happened outside parliament.

Ryan - who did his best on the day - has explained that he doesn't have power to force an apology.

He [said](#) on twitter on Friday: "As the comments were not part of the formal proceedings of the Senate, they are not recorded in Hansard and therefore I have no authority to require a withdrawal, nor do I have the power to demand an apology from any senator or apply a sanction such as suspension."

Leyonhjelm, who is railing against misandry (hatred of men) [told](#) Fairfax Media it would be easier to apologise but that would be "insincere... because I don't think I have anything to apologise for".

If Leyonhjelm really believes that, he is totally out of touch with reasonable standards of behaviour, let alone how ordinary people think their representatives should conduct themselves, whatever their disagreements.

His conduct is at the extreme end of the discourteous, sometimes boorish, discourse that too often is characterising political exchanges. And politicians then wonder why so many people are angry at them.

As for Sky, its response has been less than convincing – some might say it is hiding behind a petticoat.

Di Natale opined that Sky's "apology rings hollow when the man who made the offensive comments goes unpunished, the male producers who booked him go unpunished, the male executives who set the tone and pay their salaries go unpunished and the only one held accountable is a junior producer who also happens to be a female member of staff."

Suspending a producer, over the strap line, is tokenism. The fact the strap line "highlighted" what was said is hardly the point. Leyonhjelm himself said on Monday "the producer was not responsible for my comments" and pointed to Sky fears about losing sponsorship.

View from The Hill: Parliament should care about its reputation even if Leyonhjelm doesn't value his

Written by Michelle Grattan, Professorial Fellow, University of Canberra

Forget the producer - wasn't it for the the hosts, Rowan Dean and Ross Cameron, to challenge, or stop, Leyonhjelm? Yet Cameron wound up the segment with the words, "senator David Leyonhjelm, we appreciate your advocacy of the individual to be defended against the sludge of the collective". (Later in the program - presumably after someone twigged - Dean started the damage control, saying Leyonhjelm's views "are not the views of Sky News".)

There was not a word about the presenters in the Sky apology - which was not issued in anyone's name.

As for an internal investigation, is that needed? Aren't things pretty obvious? Leyonhjelm was invited on to be controversial. He did exactly what was wanted but when it didn't work out too well, Sky failed to confront the real issue for the network – a low rent program.

Cameron and Dean on Monday night [admitted](#) that a line had been crossed and they disassociated "ourselves from the use of unverified rumour and innuendo". Pity they didn't see the line when Leyonhjelm crossed it in their plain sight.

Michelle Grattan does not work for, consult, own shares in or receive funding from any company or organization that would benefit from this article, and has disclosed no relevant affiliations beyond their academic appointment.

Authors: Michelle Grattan, Professorial Fellow, University of Canberra

Read more <http://theconversation.com/view-from-the-hill-parliament-should-care-about-its-reputation-even-if-leyonhjelm-doesnt-value-his-99225>