

**Media Advisers – Shadow Players
in
Political Communication**

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Government and International Relations

The University of Sydney

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Media Advisers – Shadow Players in Political Communication

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Media Advisers – Shadow Players in Political Communication

**A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy**

Except where appropriately acknowledged, this thesis is my own work, has been expressed in my own words and has not previously been submitted for assessment.

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DEDICATION

To the coming generation who deserve – and, we hope, will promote – cleaner politics and more perceptive journalism: to Amber, Graham, Aaron, Christian, Oliver and Uluru.

SYNOPSIS

It is a commonplace in political communication that the news media mediate wider political realities to their audiences. The extent to which that news content is itself mediated by others is a more ambiguous and problematic area. Perhaps because it is rarely directly visible to the public, the work of media advisers or press secretaries has become the subject of much speculation, with sweeping claims about their power.

This thesis systematically explores the role of media advisers, a backroom group sometimes labelled spin-doctors or minders. Until now, this pivotal group in democratic political communication has not been the focus of academic investigation in Australia. This thesis redresses the situation by survey research and qualitative interviews across the nation from Canberra to Perth, as well as cases when they have become the focus of public attention or controversy. By studying their flesh-and-blood routine activities and their relationships with employers and with journalists, it seeks to demystify some of the speculations about their power, and to give more precision to their strategic role.

The research establishes who these political shadow players are; mainly young (70 per cent under 40), well-educated (72 per cent with university degree), mainly males (67 per cent). For most, this is a second or later career position with the largest group having transferred from journalism. Survey and interviews investigate their daily work patterns.

The thesis pinpoints their professional satisfactions and frustrations (an exciting and challenging, well paid job close to power, but uncertain and stressful, with little recognition). For both voluntary and involuntary

reasons, this secret tribe of advisers exhibits a high degree of turnover, although a few have made a long-term career in media advising.

Their external effectiveness depends firstly on having a cohesive internal base. The thesis examines their relations with their ministerial employers, others on the political staff and in the public service. Many found the closeness of working relations one of their major satisfactions. Even though they are sometimes critical of the results, all advisers stressed the importance of honesty and (relative) openness in their relations with journalists. Similarly the overwhelming view was that their positions were honestly presented in most media, and relationships mainly cordial. Nevertheless the thesis also examines many cases where public relations strategies badly misfired, and controversies where advisers have lost their jobs, even if the central fault was not necessarily theirs.

Advisers were found to have divergent views on some burning topics in political communication – on why restrictions on the right to publish are important, whether for state security or politicians' privacy; how responsibly they think policies and personalities are reported, and what could be done to improve communication between ministers and political reporters. On these issues, their views are as diverse as exist among journalists or among the more educated in Australian society. On the whole, however, despite the negative stereotypes, they suggest, perhaps because of their journalism backgrounds, that media advisers are, more often than not, a force for greater public disclosure within government.

The mostly unwritten rules under which advisers operate are examined and ways in which these could be codified and strengthened are proposed. Codes without means of enforcement serve no purpose beyond window-dressing and most advisers were not in favour of having to make a stressful job more arduous by having to adhere to a set of externally-imposed ethical guidelines.

ABBREVIATIONS

ABC	Australian Broadcasting Corporation (Commission before 1983)
ACT	Australian Capital Territory
AD	Australian Democrats
A-G	Attorney-General
AJA	Australian Journalists' Association (now MEAA)
ALP	Australian Labor Party
BBC	British Broadcasting Corporation
CAAMA	Central Australian Aboriginal Media Association
CoS	Chief of Staff
LP	Liberal Party of Australia
L-NP	Liberal-National Party coalition (N-LP in Queensland)
MEAA	Media, Entertainment & Arts Alliance
NP	National Party
NSW	New South Wales
NT	Northern Territory
NZ	New Zealand
PRIA	Public Relations Institute of Australia
Qld	Queensland
SA	South Australia
SBS	Special Broadcasting Service
Tas.	Tasmania
UK	United Kingdom
US	United States of America
WA	Western Australia

Chapter 1

Politicians, advisers and the media – adversaries yet accomplices

Media advisers to ministers are hidden instruments of political power. They help any government achieve a better communication with the mass and niche media. The advisers (once called press secretaries) put out press releases; stage news conferences; coach and train their masters in the finer points of presentation; they are minders, in the wings at every ministerial encounter with the media; they try to stay one step ahead of what journalists need and provide it in time to make the hourly and daily deadlines.

This thesis charts systematically the careers of this secret tribe who plot a path through the media jungle for governments and oppositions while remaining largely invisible to the electorate: it investigates where they come from and with what background and qualifications; their satisfactions and frustrations, and then their exits to a usually better-paid and less stressful future. Sometimes the exit involves sacrifice for the greater good of their political tribe: they resign or are fired, sometimes for no sin of their own, but as a scapegoat, to preserve the reputation of their political masters.

A second aim of the thesis is to find out exactly what the advisers do each day: how they survive the perils and crises, how they relate to ministers, departmental staff and reporters – are they really “spin-doctors” or just information providers? Are they always trying to massage the truth, buff up a faded image, and are the Australian journalists so gullible that they can be deceived continually by the spin woven by communication witchdoctors?

A third aim of the thesis is to set out the advisers’ views on the ethical basis of their activities behind the scenes in parliament, working for not their own advancement but the greater glory of their ministerial masters.

In Australia, media advisers to ministers are faceless people. They rarely make the news; if suspected of dereliction of duty, they are not normally called before parliamentary investigating committees. In only one government, that of Western Australia, do they operate under a code of conduct. They get derided occasionally in the popular press as flacks, minders or spin-doctors but are little studied by researchers, or reported on in academic journals. Each year they grow in number – Australia's nine parliaments mean that in 2002, at one or more for each minister, there are 200 or more of them. Not one is a public figure.

By contrast, the advisers overseas are in the public eye. In the United States, the president's spokespeople appear on television, fronting regular news conferences: their work is well known and has spawned such fictional TV drama series as *West Wing*. In Britain, the prime minister's and opposition leader's media advisers are also well-known. Their work is highlighted in the daily press and fictionalised in such TV shows as *Yes Minister*, where minister, adviser and departmental secretary take part in an elaborate and comical game bearing some resemblance to what really happens.

No individual politician, or party, can be blamed for the fact that considerations of image and style are today as important to political success as the detail of policy, and none can be blamed for participating enthusiastically in 'the game' as it is now played (McNair, in Kieran, 1998).

'The game' referred to by British researcher Brian McNair is the battle for image dominance in the media and public mind. It is really two intersecting games: the struggle between politicians competing with each other for public support, and the continuing battle between politicians and the media to reshape the news. A third participant, the one rarely visible in Australia, is present: the media adviser or press secretary. This shadow player, also called by the slang terms of minder or spin-doctor, is the focus of this thesis. Media advising is a subset of public relations and its supporters and detractors agree on one thing: PR is a powerful industry, often effective in its methods, an influential – if hidden – force in setting political and journalistic agendas:

A single public relations professional with access to media, a basic understanding of mass psychology and a fistful of dollars can unleash in society forces that make permanent winners out of otherwise-evident losers – whether they be products, politicians, corporations or ideas (Mark Dowie, in Stauber and Rampton, 1995: 4).

Critics of the public relations industry say that some of its proponents neglect ethical considerations in favour of strategic and tactical ones: that the worst ones are not afraid to foster a lie when they consider the occasion warrants one. In the most infamous example, Stauber and Rampton cite Hill and Knowlton, then the world's largest PR consultancy, as having coached a 15-year-old Kuwaiti girl, Nayirah, in powerful but false testimony to an October 10, 1990, congressional committee about invading Iraqi forces pulling babies from hospital incubators. Soon after, the US Senate voted to allow President George Bush Senior to unleash the Desert Storm war in January 1991:

On January 12, the US Senate voted by a narrow, five-vote margin to support the Bush administration in a declaration of war. Given the narrowness of the vote, the babies-thrown-from-incubators story may have turned the tide in Bush's favor. Following the war, human rights investigators attempted to confirm Nayirah's story and could find no witnesses or other evidence to support it (ibid.: 173, 174).

Nayirah was later revealed to be a member of the Kuwaiti royal family, daughter of Kuwait's ambassador to the US and not in Kuwait at the time claimed. H&K later claimed it had been duped; that at the time it had believed the girl was telling the truth. Whoever was responsible for deceiving whom, the story was politically effective. US media tended to accept her story at face value since Nayirah herself was unavailable for comment before or after the war. Later, Canadian Broadcasting Corporation journalists tried but could not get past her father the ambassador. The 'babies pulled from incubator' story was a lie:

It is possible that Hill and Knowlton were unaware of this in late 1990. But even so, this episode illustrates the highly political nature of some public relations campaigns. It also suggests that the line which the public relations profession would draw between propaganda and public relations is a very fine one, which is easily crossed (Ward, 1995: 157).

In Australia, cases of ethical breaches by public relations people have not had the same publicity. The few occasions where the industry has disciplined one

of its own have been kept quiet for legal reasons. But in 2001, incidences of “astroturfing” by members of the Public Relations Institute of Australia (PRIA) received strong criticism, notably from former political advisers Keith Jackson, John Wells and Grahame Morris of the public affairs and public relations consultancy Jackson Wells Morris. “Astroturfing” is the practice of orchestrating artificial campaigns falsely claiming to represent grass-roots public opinion on a particular issue. The JWM firm resigned from membership of the PRIA because of what it saw as “insufficient action” on such instances as a series of health seminars organised under the auspices of a seemingly independent organisation set up by a pharmaceutical company to promote its products. Another case involved phoney letters to newspapers registering “concern about the activities of the Daily Mirror Group in Australia” (*The Well* newsletter, May 2001: 4). A determined investigative reporter might have been able to challenge or expose the client behind these letter-writers.

The metaphor of political journalists as watchdogs recurs in academic and popular analysis of the scene (Tiffen, 1999). But watchdogs can be kept on a leash – Negrine refers to today’s media-dominated democracy as “the public relations state” where the media watchdogs are shepherded by “experienced dog-handlers”, the public relations people (1996: 10). He claims the public relations state became entrenched in Britain in the 1980s. Michie (1998) credits Sir Tim Bell, former managing director of advertising firm Saatchi & Saatchi and later of rival agency Lowe-Howard-Spink, with propelling Margaret Thatcher to power in Britain in the general election of 1979 and helping to keep her Prime Minister during the 1980s. Bell later told industry trade publication *PR Week*:

I would rather be called a spin-doctor than a hidden persuader. Actually I rather like the term. After all, doctors are qualified professionals, and putting the right spin on things is exactly what we do (Michie, op. cit.: 48).

Ministerial advisers are hidden persuaders because they can be more effective if the media spotlight focuses on the politicians, not on their advisory team.

Negrine and others hold that government views are promoted, privileged and facilitated so that the desired interpretation is more likely to emerge, rather than the media's own potentially more critical views, or those of opponents. Rather than change their policies and practices so as to earn a better reputation, governments have been accused of emulating large corporations in using public relations to counter negative public perceptions: "It is easier and less costly to change the way people think about reality than it is to change reality" (Morris Wolfe quoted in Nelson, 1989: 7).

The main way public relations enters media and political science academic analysis is as a propaganda-for-hire impediment to democracy – as a secret, manipulative force allowing the powerful to get their way. This thesis aims not to overturn this moral position but simply to study media advising at senior government and opposition level as a flesh-and-blood human activity, a media and public relations function where the advisers act as intermediaries between their ministerial employers and political journalists. The relationship has rarely been studied in detail. Few have documented the activities of this relatively new group of communication experts close to the heart of power in any democracy. There are often mystical claims about the effectiveness of media advisers (sometimes called flacks or minders) but in real life they are practising well-known PR techniques which sometimes succeed, sometimes fail; their opposition counterparts, although fewer in number, are also well-versed in the same strategies. The political journalists also are becoming aware of PR strategies and, where there is an intent to deceive, are less easily led astray by the spin.

Wolfsfeld and others have stressed the advantages which political power brings to those seeking media attention: the principle of cumulative inequality states that those who most need the news media are those who find it the most difficult to penetrate: the rich get richer and the poor remain poor (Gamson et al, 1992, and Wolfsfeld, 1997: 24). "Political power leads to political and social status, organisation and resources, the ability to carry out

exceptional behaviour in the positive sense of the word, more direct access to political decision-makers, and less need for external support to achieve political goals.” By contrast, Wolfsfeld explains, the politically powerless find themselves in the same trap as all members of the underclass: they lack the clout to gain resources and they lack the resources to gain clout. The ability of the antagonist to control the political environment can be understood in terms of these three variables:

- the ability to initiate and control events
- the ability to regulate the flow of information, and
- the ability to mobilise elite support.

When governments have the situation under control, they also have the ability to control the story. If the powerful are forced to react to events, others are setting and framing the media agenda (*ibid.*: 25).

Media advisers or secretaries are the public relations people of ministerial offices but (mostly without public relations background or training) have a limited view of their capabilities. They focus more on information distribution to mass and niche media. Their role has evolved from the time when they were the only people on a minister’s staff brought in from outside the bureaucracy; they tended to develop a close relationship with their masters, not only as advisers but as minders. Although the press and broadcast mass media are very concentrated, commercialised and conservative, Australian journalism is becomingly much more assertive; ministers and leaders are not accorded the deference they once were. This makes media advisers increasingly important as the reporters’ point of first contact and gatekeeper.

The role of the chief government media adviser was described by Sir Bernard Ingham, press secretary to British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher, as having three major aspects, to:

- serve as spokesman for the prime minister and, as the occasion requires it, the government as a whole
- act as adviser to the prime minister on his or her presentational program and to the government as a whole on the overall presentation of its policies and its measures
- coordinate, at official as distinct from ministerial level, the government's presentational program – to conduct the government's communications orchestra (Ingham, 1991: 177).

But in other moments, Ingham saw the role in less high-minded terms. In 1990, he pictured the relationship between government and media as “essentially cannibalistic. They feed off each other but no one knows who is next on the menu”. Mancini (1993: 33) says the media/politician relationship is fundamentally ambivalent, oscillating between trust and suspicion. Harold Wilson, twice British Prime Minister, is alleged to have said that public relations was “degrading” (*The Economist*, July 17, 1999: 29).

While the media advisers' activities are pictured by many commentators as a threat to the democratic process, it can be argued their rise is in fact one indication of a vigorous democracy. The need for political leaders to resort to spin control is testimony to the fact that more direct means of exercising power are not available to them and also that the presence of the media is a factor they must deal with, whether they like it or not. The media adviser's role is a necessary one if ministers are to deal with the ever-present, insistent and increasing demands of mass and niche media which must be met on their own terms. Despite the spin-doctors' excessive powers of persuasion and behind-the-scenes media manipulation recorded in some of the wilder claims, media advisers do exercise some power and are a fascinating, strategic and under-studied group.

In this key role, often under stress in a ministerial office, advisers come and go quickly. In Australia, almost all the media advisers to the government of Prime Minister John Howard when he came to power in 1996 have moved on, up or out by 2001. When affairs of state go badly and mistakes have been made, it is often the advisers who are punished and dismissed. This was

dramatically illustrated by two cases in Australian politics in 2001. In February, two key advisers from Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Transport John Anderson's office were sacked "for failing to warn the Government it had been caught breaking the law over fuel taxes and road spending" (Seccombe, *Sydney Morning Herald*, February 12, 2001: 3). Mr Anderson said he had decided to "terminate the services" of his principal adviser Stephen Oxley and another long-term adviser, Peter Walsh, because they had not alerted him to an Australian National Audit Office report on national highways funding and because of this the Government had been "unable to mount the timely and comprehensive response needed".

The error in accounting went back at least seven years to the time of Prime Minister Keating's Labor government. The advisers could be excused for thinking, since total spending on all roads was well above what it needed to be, the error was more one of book-keeping and would not make the headlines. In politics, timing is crucial and on this occasion the headlines went against the government at the worst possible time – just before the crucial West Australian state election at which the coalition lost office, thanks particularly to a vote against it in rural areas, where roads funding is a vital issue. Advisers have several tactics at their disposal to delay or suppress bad news; over the roads issue they were not employed effectively.

The second case which gives a glimpse into the behind-the-scenes work of media advisers grabbed the headlines in April and May 2001 in New South Wales. Speaking in parliament on April 10, Education Minister John Aquilina commented on the contents of a Sydney high school student's handwritten diary detailing, he said, plans to replicate the shooting at a United States high school. After the statement in parliament, journalists were informed that the depressed teenager had access to a gun owned by his father but NSW Police Commissioner Peter Ryan later refuted this: no gun had been found at the boy's house. The boy's father denied he had a gun or had ever held a gun licence (McIlveen, *The Australian*, April 20, 2001: 4). It

did not help that Mr Aquilina was on a trip to London as the media storm broke and did not return early to face his accusers.

Journalists often proclaim they will go to jail rather than reveal sources – but in this instance they were quick to blame the Premier’s media adviser, Walt Secord, and the Education Minister’s media adviser, Patrick Low, for information that a gun was involved. An editorial headed “The pitfalls of opportunistic politics” in the *Weekend Australian* (April 21-22, 2001: 20) said Premier Carr should explain “why he considers it right for Mr Low to pay ‘a high price for getting it wrong’ when his own senior adviser, Walt Secord, keeps his job”. The minister’s motives for quoting from the boy’s diary in parliament were questioned – was there a need to “frighten the community with images of a potential Columbine High School shooting in Sydney”? As Mitchell commented (*Sun-Herald*, April 15 2001: 33):

Much of the [Carr government’s] time and energy is devoted single-mindedly to capturing the headlines in newspapers, radio bulletins and television news . . .

Government spin doctors primed the TV networks and were basking in self-congratulation when the story started to come apart – there was no gun – and the community began to debate seriously what was going on.

The affair kept getting elaborated in editorials, cartoons and comment while the Education Minister was overseas and when he eventually returned from London. He tried to send a letter of formal apology to the boy and his parents but was unable to do this at first because lawyers had become involved: “The minister, meanwhile, has been accused of lying to parliament and using staffers as scapegoats” (McIlveen, *The Australian*, May 4, 2001: 5). Only one news outlet named the school at first: the Channel 7 TV network: “Reporter Megan Miller said Mr Aquilina’s office confirmed the school involved was Cecil Hills High School in Sydney’s west. Before the minister’s speech, Carr Government staffers also told television reporters to start retrieving file footage of the Columbine High School massacre in August 1999” (McIlveen, *Weekend Australian*, May 5-6, 2001: 5):

Despite Miller repeatedly telling the minister his office was the source of the school's identity, Mr Aquilina vowed yesterday [May 4] he had done everything to protect it. "My media adviser told me that the media were already on to this," he said.

The Australian journalist covering the story, Luke McIlveen, twice enlarged the story with items under his byline labelled "Comment", the first on April 20 headed "Is sorry so hard to say?", the second on May 5-6 headed "Millstone of mateship". The latter called for the resignation of Mr Aquilina as Education Minister, or his sacking by the Premier, Mr Carr (ibid.: 4). In the *Sydney Morning Herald*, Jennifer Hewett (April 20, 2001: 22) was just as critical in her comment column headed "How not to handle a school crisis: give Aquilina an F". Only Piers Akerman in the *Sunday Telegraph* (April 22, 2001: 83), "Tough call in an unforgiving world") pointed out that "the media would have been the first to condemn a government – any government – for not acting . . . had the worst taken place with no warning having been given, despite prior knowledge through such diary entries – would the government have been found to be appallingly and criminally negligent?" The potential massacre story broke at the same time as the Education minister revealed plans to close four inner-Sydney schools. If the intention was to divert media attention from school closures, it succeeded – the proposed school closures received very little press coverage. *The Australian's* Newspan (May 4, 2001: 8) headed "Crisis fails to dent Carr" showed that support for the NSW Labor government remained at 46 per cent, 11 per cent clear of the coalition whose support dropped three per cent to 36 per cent in the same period. Yet former Opposition Leader Kerry Chikarovski had been active in attacking the government over the schoolboy diary incident – criticising not the advisers involved but their ministers, Aquilina and Premier Carr:

Mr Aquilina has behaved in a shameful and irresponsible way which has invaded the privacy of the boy, his parents and classmates. I am amazed he has been allowed to leave the country when there is so much anger over what happened. He should have been grounded by the Premier (*Sun-Herald*, April 15, 2001: 33).

Mr Aquilina deserves to be sacked for his gross incompetence, which has done an enormous amount of damage to the school involved, not to mention the anger and distress it has caused parents, teachers and other students at the school (*The Australian*, April 18, 2001: 4).

Patrick Low the media adviser may never get the chance to tell his side of the story but Aquilina's blunder may not have been wholly Low's fault. It is clear that media advisers face an open-ended challenge, with a potentially hectic pace and a long workday. They face personal and workplace dilemmas simply because of where they are, close to power. Their ministers can never be shown to be wrong, or placed in a bad light, not if the advisers can take the blame. Advisers try to present difficult, abstract ideas in simple terms that lay people preoccupied with their own lives can understand and take to heart. If they get facts wrong (for instance, recommending that NSW television networks pick up inappropriate US school massacre footage) and if they can be shown by the media to be at fault, they could lose their jobs. If ministers falter in their dealings with the media, advisers must cover for them or take the blame. That is in the unwritten contract. In the case of the schoolboy's massacre diary, it was the adviser, Low, who was blamed by the minister for writing the speech to Parliament and for not checking properly all aspects of it (Wainwright, *Sydney Morning Herald* May 4, 2001: 2): "There were two errors of fact in the ministerial statement". Wainwright added: "He [Aquilina] defended the speech, saying he had not named the student, identified the school or mentioned a gun." His adviser was unavailable for comment in the week after the speech: "Mr Low is on holidays in Singapore and could not be contacted." (Doherty, *Sydney Morning Herald*, April 18, 2001: 3.)

The incident and the role of adviser Low, the only person to be shot by the non-existent gun (he resigned on April 20), was still news in June after release of a departmental briefing note in which the boy is alleged to have said his uncle had a gun: "The family has since said there is no gun held by any uncle" (Julia Baird, "Aquilina exonerates Cecil Hills principal", *Sydney Morning Herald*, June 5, 2001: 2). A chronological list of selected press cuttings with headlines helps tell how the story unfolded (see pages 26 and 27 at the end of this chapter). It is interesting that only the more junior adviser, Low, resigned over the incident when the Premier's adviser, Walt Secord,

was also named by the press as the source of the gun rumour. Secord received no public reprimand. In fact, the doctrine of ministerial responsibility, if applied in this case, would have seen Aquilina himself take responsibility for the misdeeds of his staff.

Advisers promote discussion of political issues and also the human-interest aspects – the public faces of ministries and shadow ministries. With the permission of their political masters, advisers sometimes release glimpses into the more flattering aspects of their politicians' private lives but they get upset when journalists attempt to dig further. When advisers are thrust by circumstances into the limelight of media exposure it is almost always because something has gone wrong. Even if not, it puts the focus at risk because they know that in Australia, it is their leaders who should be making the headlines. That is the convention here. By contrast, in the United States, viewers get to see and hear the president's spokespeople on the broadcast media daily and read their reports on the front pages of the newspapers:

The evolution of the office of press secretary, while gradual, has been a vital aspect of the modern presidency . . . The outlook is that presidents will choose their press secretaries from now on with great care. As well they might, because the press secretary stands at that crucial point of initial contact between the president and the public in many instances. Even when the president speaks to the public without a mediating figure like the press secretary, he has doubtless sought his advice (Spragens, 1980: 233).

In the 22 years since 1980, the office has become even more firmly established in the US. In Britain also, advisers to the prime minister and opposition leader also become well-known. Here, occasionally advisers' backroom dealings are exposed in newspaper and magazine features. But until now, who they are, where they come from and the way they work has not attracted the attention of many academics, except for passing references in studies that have focused mainly on politicians and the media. Advisers are the shadowy third force in the politics-media triangle and their activities deserve to be investigated thoroughly, as what happens behind the scenes close to political power is intriguing and puzzling.

In Australia, their presence may be shielded from public gaze but it is clear that communication specialists in government are needed and much valued. The name varies with the state; some conservative governments have in the last five years clung to the term press secretary, although they deal of course with all media – mass and niche, broadcast and print, commercial, government-funded and other non-profit, electronic mail and worldwide web-based communication. At this thesis goes to press, Labor has gained power in every state and territory parliament in Australia and the title has changed to media adviser or media secretary. At federal level, the national parliament has opted to retain the media adviser title inherited from the Keating Labor government. New South Wales has opted for the US spelling, “advisor”.

The adviser’s duties are wider than the mass media. At present, “politicians are struggling to cope with a tidal wave of electronic mail from grassroots lobbyists and other organisations”: Australian federal members and senators receive up to 200 emails a day; in February 2001 there were 410,000 internet emails (up from 370,000 in March 2000), not counting 110,000 internal to internal emails (S. Mitchell, 2001: 43). There is no way that individual politicians could respond to all emails addressed to them from the media, constituents and lobbyists: ministers in particular, with greater volumes of correspondence, have to rely on their advisers to deal with them. Only the personal messages and the more unusual or difficult emails require the minister’s own comments.

In some ways, the wider term media adviser is still a misnomer, since these ministerial office members are communication specialists, getting involved in everything from doorstep interviews, questions in parliament, face-to-face meetings with industry and voters, to video conferences and See-You-See-Me sessions using desktop computers. Occasionally they get to offer policy advice, especially where media and public perception of policies is being considered.

Advisers are not only communication consultants proposing and testing courses of action, they are workhorses who do whatever the minister or shadow minister decides needs to be done quickly and efficiently behind the scenes. Some ministers have two or more; some have none but the role is incorporated into other jobs, such as chief of staff. Advisers as minders are present at most media interviews – off-camera, off-microphone, not quoted but ready to offer counsel or discreetly refresh a politician’s memory if needed. Some states such as Victoria under former Premier Jeff Kennett have had a pool of media advisers, with only the Premier and his deputy employing their own nominated media advisers.

However, politics is not like private enterprise, where public relations people are said to outnumber journalists two to one (Perrett, 2001). There is a wide variation in numbers of state media advisers, from Victoria and Tasmania the least to Queensland and Western Australia the most; however state ministries have fewer media advisers in their information offices than political journalists frequenting parliamentary lobbies. Before the latest round of consolidation in Australian press gallery offices, only by adding the number of public relations staff in departments could the numbers be said to be approaching balance. The federal government did have a slight advantage, in that not all news outlets send reporters to Canberra. Compared with oppositions, governments at federal and state level dominate in numbers of advisers, but governments also have more work for their advisers to do.

Advisers are important because without them, leaders would have to be their own promoters; they would find it difficult to win or retain power. Some ministers, premiers, prime ministers and presidents have had the skill and experience to be their own media adviser but they would not have had the time:

In recent administrations, the need for the president to delegate this portion of his responsibilities to a press secretary has increased, rather than diminished. As Pierre Salinger noted, “President Kennedy could have been his own press secretary if he had had the time” (Spragens, op. cit.: 232).

Advisers look after their ministers and explain the government to the media and people. They are expected to speak accurately for the minister when he or she is not available. They also act as a lookout for trouble and help explain the people and media to the rulers. They are the public relations people of parliamentary politics and, like this discipline, are a relatively new development.

US public relations academic and theorist James Grunig posits four stages in the growth of public relations: press agency/publicity (the propaganda stage, from 1850 on, when complete truth is not essential); the public information stage (mainly from 1900, one-way communication when the truth in communication becomes important); the two-way asymmetric mode (from 1920 on, the era of scientific persuasion; and the two-way symmetric model (from about 1960 on, where communication relies more on negotiation of meaning and development of mutual understanding). By this theory (Grunig and Hunt, 1984), political communication in the United States and Australia today has developed little from the one-way models of propaganda, press agency/publicity and public information. Even in the sphere of business and industry, Grunig estimates that no more than 15 per cent of public communication is truly in the two-way symmetric mode. The adversarial nature of most political communication in a democracy keeps it stuck in the propaganda, public information and persuasion modes.

Media advisers look at their relationships with the media as a type of game in which they try to win. Game theory views one player's decision-making/communication as a strategy designed to cope with the diverse strategies of other players. Politicians frame strategies relative to the desires of various voters and publics. So in situations such as the political conflict/media jousting/resolution process, game theory can be used to analyse the situation and select a preferred outcome (Murphy, in Botan and Hazelton, 1989). In the Aquilina case history referred to earlier, specialist political journalists on the *Sydney Morning Herald* and *The Australian*

wrote that in their view (in separate comment pieces attached to their bylined news items), the then NSW Education Minister had to resign. For them, it was not enough that his media adviser, Low, had resigned. For the journalists' opinions to win, the minister had to lose. If the minister did not resign and continued to retain the confidence of the Government and Premier, those journalists were likely to lose – the minister and his advisers were unlikely to favour them with scoops. This was an unusual situation as most media-adviser-minister interchanges have as their aim a win-win situation, where all players benefit to a greater or lesser degree and keep their communication on friendly terms.

Cheney and Tompkins attempt to categorise effective communicators based on Kenneth Burke's concept of "identification" – a "shorthand description of the process of communication. An ethic of identification must account for both explicit and implicit forms of linking one's interests with those of others" (C&T, 1984: 6). The media advisers, with a dual interest in keeping their political masters happy and also contributing useful material to the political journalists, are experts in communicating the government or opposition message in the most effective, persuasive and intelligible way. Ingham acknowledges that news-management happens all the time:

Journalists see us as consummate Machiavellis . . . Of course, I tried to manage the news . . . to ensure that ministers spoke with one voice . . . that ministers were aware of what each other was doing and whenever they were likely to cut across each other. But news management, in the sense of ensuring that nothing is allowed to get in the way of the story the Government wants to get over, is impossible in the modern world. A chief information officer can plan and plot and generally bust a gut in trying to clear the way for an important announcement. But he is not in charge of events, or journalists (Ingham, *op. cit.*: 177).

Ingham said it was television, not the media adviser or press journalism, which predominantly dictated news values for the masses these days: "either there are pictures or there are not; if there are not pictures there is no news" (*ibid.*: 188). This statement downplays the extent to which advisers can help create news by creating camera opportunities, items with visual appeal. Advisers' PR "is a major flow of information between rulers and ruled, and

when democracy is seen as an information system about public goods, its contribution is important" (Moloney, 2000: 106). Their 24-hour proactive management of news "builds a news agenda and tries to avoid reacting to one"; the agenda was pushed at the media in the United Kingdom through twice-daily briefings and selected ministers for interview. Moloney added that the high standing of the British Labour government up to 1999 was matched by its continuing emphasis on news management: Labour doubled the number of advisers employed by the Conservatives, bringing the new total to more than 70 – with centralised control over all government public relations, directed from Downing Street. The Prime Minister's press secretary had become more influential than some cabinet members (ibid.: 106).

EVOLUTION OF THE RELATIONSHIP

More than 30 reporters covered the opening of the first Federal Parliament in 1901 in Melbourne. If there were press secretaries before World War 1, the record of their presence in the first 13 years of federal parliament has been lost. Political leaders preferred either direct contact with reporters or sharing the media work among their office staff. Without minders to protect ministers, the journalists, if they were brave enough, had the opportunity to catch the politicians off guard in the old Commonwealth offices at the corner of Collins and Spring Streets. Bert Cook (1877-1968), a political journalist with the Melbourne *Herald* at the turn of the century and for many years after, recalled that once he had the temerity to quiz Australia's first prime minister, Sir Edmund Barton, in the toilet "which was intended chiefly for the use of ministers, but which friendly pressmen had voted themselves the privilege of using":

One day when I was there, Sir Edmund Barton came in to use the adjoining convenience. In my embarrassment, I asked some ordinary political question. Sir Edmund did not immediately respond, then with a sense of dignified humour, he quietly said: 'Cook, I have been interviewed all over Australia from Cape York to the Leeuwin, but this is the first time I have been interviewed in a lavatory.' (B.S.B. Cook, 'Memoirs of a pioneer pressman', in Lloyd, 1988: 47)

In the first two decades of last century, press arrangements and news releases were handled by the minister's staff seconded from departments: ". . . at this early stage, there was little distinction between loyalist and mandarin, and court politics could be overtly played within the bureaucracy introduction of press secretaries [led to] development of two groups within the [prime minister's] office, namely departmental officers – bureaucratically organised and 'internal' to institutional politics – and press officers, loosely organised, usually personally appointed and 'external'" (Walter, op. cit.: 41). He states that at a certain point in the evolution of modern societies, "political leaders begin to doubt the tractability of their bureaucracies". They need a kitchen cabinet sharing the same values and priorities. They blame the bureaucracy for impeding their policies, if not by design then by inertia; they want organisers and handlers – young, highly educated and energetic, sharing the same sense of humour, able to look after party and media issues before they become crises, keeping the leader as far away from trouble as possible (ibid.: 111).

Prime ministers were the first to obtain dedicated press help, then much later, the leading ministers in cabinet. The Melbourne press, "moulding and moulded by public opinion in that great city" said Billy Hughes, exerted a profound influence on Federal Parliament, influencing politicians from other states as well as Victorian ones:

Every day members were gibbeted on the javelins of hostile and biting criticism or, more rarely, covered with heartening eulogy. All this had its effects. No matter how self-reliant, how confident in the justice of the cause he champions a man may be, censure falls on him like acid on a raw wound. He is prepared to bend a little to avoid it (Hughes, *Sydney Morning Herald*, May 9, 1927, in Lloyd, op. cit.: 41).

In 1918, Hughes invited Cook, former president of the Australian Journalists' Association, to set up the first federal press bureau in the prime minister's department. Walter called the move "a recognition of the importance of the press, and the first of many attempts to give it an institutional locus within the chief executive's orbit" (Walter, op. cit.: 41). The first press officer to a

prime minister appears to have been Lloyd Dumas, who at the height of the war was released from the federal press gallery in Melbourne by his newspaper, *The Argus*, to work with Billy Hughes. Hughes had a minder as well: his private secretary Percy Deane who had been invalided out of the Army in 1916. Dumas toured Australia with Hughes, prime minister 1915-23, in the bitter 1916 conscription for overseas military service campaign which split the government (the deputy leader and three ministers resigned). The referendum was narrowly defeated; men already called up had to be discharged. Another referendum the following year was also defeated, by a larger majority than before (Fraser, op. cit.: 345). Hughes evidently did not blame his press secretary for this failure to win over the electorate: Walter says Dumas struck up a close working relationship with the prime minister, going with him to the Imperial Conference of 1918 in London, issuing Hughes's statements and news releases. After Dumas came such notable press secretaries as Cecil Edwards (Bruce), Irvine Douglas (Lyons), Dick Dawson (Lyons and Menzies) and Don Rodgers (Curtin and Chifley) – most of them coming to the attention of the prime minister because they had been leading journalists, poachers turned gamekeepers.

Walter claims that from the 1920s on, “the provision of political advice [to prime ministers] fell increasingly to press secretaries”; permanent secretaries were “less likely to play a loyalist role after Deane” who “continued to play the role of minder rather than mandarin” even after he moved up to head the Prime Minister's Department in 1921. Then, “the bureaucracy was small and was not encouraged to grow” (Walter, op. cit.: 42). In the US, “the first man to hold the title of press secretary, even in an ad hoc fashion, was appointed in 1929” and the first permanent one came on board during the time of Franklin D. Roosevelt, president 1933-1945 (Spragens, op. cit.: 6, 232).

With radio starting to broadcast news from the late 1930s and 1940s on, plus television news outlets from 1956, the specialist media advising staff to ministers increased in number at federal and state level. In the last decade,

add a large number of new magazines plus other new media such as electronic mail. No longer are media advisers merely information officers, pointing reporters in the direction of important news stories. Journalism itself became much more than news gathering: bylined items came to dominate, with the growth of opinion and comment pieces, educational and human-interest stories, documentaries and quality feature writing about politics to add to the sensationalism of the tabloid press (Guerke & Hirst, 1996: 122). As communication specialists, the media advisers had to evolve too and be much more sophisticated in their attempts to influence the media than merely putting out news releases.

These twin trends, to a much more incisive and belligerent journalism and a much more sophisticated approach to influencing the media generally among public relations professionals, has led to development of a very substantial political communication industry in a great variety of roles in state, territory and federal parliaments. During the seven years of this research study, government media advising in most parliaments here and abroad has expanded. When the research was begun in 1995, Australia's National Media Liaison Service (NMLS, nicknamed aNiMaLS), which served the Hawke federal government as a 22-strong team, had been strengthened by Bob Hawke's successor as Prime Minister, Paul Keating, with advisers located in Canberra and in state capitals. Under both Hawke and Keating it had a media monitoring role and was quick to supply Press Gallery journalists with transcripts of gaffes made by Opposition shadow ministers:

Spin . . . requires a good filing system, and a very good monitoring system . . . everything said by the Coalition was monitored all over the country. The press gallery was supplied with a constant stream of transcripts (Grattan, 1998).

The Opposition was most unhappy with the NMLS and promised to abolish it on gaining government, which it did immediately it won office in 1996. However, incoming Prime Minister John Howard approved additional media advisers to ministers; the new team the press gallery journalists called "baby animals". By 2000, Howard's ministers, while two fewer than the Keating

team of 1996, had five more advisers (see Appendix C). The pattern was repeated in most states, including Western Australia, Victoria and Queensland: where an incoming government inherited a large unified system of media advisers, the new Premier promised to dismantle it. On gaining office, this promise was sometimes carried out, with reductions also in departmental PR staff; but the new team of advisers quickly built up in size:

Mr Carr has declared war on the proliferation of image makers, public relations experts and information disseminators who take a larger chunk out of the public purse each year . . . "I don't want to upset the Public Service Association again, but on becoming Premier, I find it hard to believe that we've got to have 60 publicity officers in the NSW Department of Agriculture – and that's one example of the waste that's been allowed to grow up in the government sector" (Vass, *Sydney Morning Herald* August 28 1995: 4).

New staff eventually replaced the old at ministerial level. In Western Australia for instance, under the headline "Media office still growing", the Opposition was quick to accuse the Government:

Opposition Leader Jim McGinty said that despite a promise in 1993 to cut the size of the Government Media Office – which Mr Court once described as a huge and sleazy propaganda machine – he had poured more money into it . . . The Budget papers say the allocation for "communications" in Mr Court's office will increase from \$1.4 million this financial year [1994-95] to \$1.84 million next year. The number of full-time communications staff budgeted for will increase from 22 to 26 (Quekett, *West Australian*, February 5, 1994).

This research set out to survey and interview a wide range of media advisers and chiefs of staff, some in relatively junior roles, some senior and some at the apex of the centralised systems set up in larger states and at federal level. The younger advisers were not usually part of the decision-making clique, not in the early stages of their careers. The thesis looks at all types of media advisers. A few of them are at the level of former British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher's press secretary and later head of UK government media relations, Sir Bernard Ingham, or former US President Bill Clinton's Mike McGarry. But unlike their high-profile counterparts in Britain and the United States, here they have taken great care to stay out of the public eye. The general run of media advisers in Australia are not regarded as Machiavellian news manipulators: most of the time, they are doing a fairly uncontentious job quietly and capably.

RESEARCH DESIGN

The aim was to survey media advisers in Australia in federal, state and territory government ministries, plus former advisers and advisers to shadow ministers, to find out who they are, where they came from, what their work day included, their relationships with minister, department and journalists, and what their opinions were on political communication issues.

The survey was followed up with 71 extended, face-to-face interviews in Canberra and all Australian states except Tasmania. The main questions asked are set out in Appendix B (not including questions that arose during the interviews).

All ministerial media advisers and some policy advisers in the nine Australian parliaments in the years 1995-99 were surveyed once; 152 useable replies were received and processed using the computer program Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). The two-page, 25-question survey is reproduced as Appendix A. Quantitative evidence was obtained on four aspects of the role: Part I investigated media and senior advisers' position, background, career, remuneration and professional assistance. Part II studied their work patterns, including organising news conferences and briefings, arranging interviews, off-the-record comment and social occasions, also issuing news releases; plus how effective they thought these strategies were in achieving their aims. Part III questioned issues in media advising work and senior advising, including influence with the media, with the minister and advisers' relationships with public relations staff in their ministers' departments. Part IV delved into their dealings with the media, asking them how strongly they agreed or disagreed with eight statements about ethical questions involving censorship, privacy, negative news, honesty, influence, reporting of issues, journalists' dependence on major news sources and whether the media tended to support the status quo. Answers were cross-tabulated against such criteria as age, gender, education, work background,

remuneration, political party of minister, whether state or federal, number of staff supervised.

Table 1.1 Advisers surveyed and surveys returned; advisers interviewed

Advisers surveyed (Survey form, Appendix A)		Surveys returned (58.4%)		Advisers interviewed (For names, see Bibliography*)	
Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
66.9%	33.1%	67.1%	32.9%	69.0%	31.0%
n=260		n=152		n=71	

* 71 face-to-face interviews (one adviser interviewed in 1996 and 2000)

The figures above show that the response to the survey was in gender balance, 67 per cent male and 33 per cent female, exactly the same as the total of surveys sent out (all 260 media advisers in all states and territories, plus federal advisers and some policy advisers). The 71 advisers interviewed included 49 men (69 per cent) and 22 women (31 per cent). One adviser, Caroline Lacy, was interviewed twice in Perth, in 1996 and again in 2000 when she was working for a different minister. Of those surveyed, just under half were working for ministers from Australia's conservative (coalition) parties and just over half worked for ministers from the Australian Labor Party:

Table 1.2 Surveyed advisers' employer in federal and state politics

Party	Per cent
Coalition	46.7
Australian Labor Party	52.6
Crossbench	0.7

n = 152

A total of 71 interviews were conducted and 66 people did not object to being named in the thesis (for names, job titles and ministers employing them, see Bibliography). Five interviews were conducted (with four men and one woman), where the person interviewed did not wish to be identified. All were employed in ministerial offices: four were media advisers and one was a ministerial research officer. The 71 interviews were 47 per cent of those 152 advisers who returned surveys, but some of those interviewed claimed not to have received a survey, or did not send it back in time for processing. The interviews were conducted in Canberra and every state except Tasmania. Survey forms were sent to advisers in the Federal Parliament and to every state and territory adviser. Victoria was under-represented in responses, since under the Kennett government ministerial media advising was centralised and concentrated into a pool, with fewer advisers than in other states:

Table 1.3 Location of advisers surveyed in federal, state and territory politics

Location	Per cent
Federal Parliament	38.2
NSW	19.1
Victoria	2.0
Queensland	25.7
South Australia	5.3
Western Australia	2.6
Tasmania	0.7
ACT (territory govt)	3.9
Northern Territory	2.6

n = 152

Most advisers surveyed were media advisers (press secretaries):

Table 1.4 Surveyed advisers' job title

Job title	Per cent
Policy adviser/CoS# etc	23.0
Media adviser/secretary	77.0

Chief of Staff

n = 152

The face-to-face interviews were conducted in Canberra, Sydney, Melbourne, Brisbane, Adelaide, Perth and elsewhere, using the adviser's parliament house office, departmental office or nearby restaurant. The names included some who had not replied to the survey. A few of those interviewed were former advisers who had moved back into journalism, returned to their

government department, found a completely new career in public relations or some other field, or retired. Each interview took about 45 minutes and some were as long as one hour 30 minutes. These interviews were transcribed in full and pinpoint the occupational hazards and dilemmas, including the problem that some communication strategies and tactics in politics conflict from time to time with principles of ethical conduct in journalism and public relations, also that some practices of political reporters cut across generally accepted ethical conduct for journalists.

As well as these formal systematic research strategies, Australian and overseas data has been collected from media reports, writings by journalists, political leaders, scholars and critics to elucidate the role of advisers and reveal what highlights and insights those closest to them can contribute.

OUTLINE OF THESIS

This research is designed to address the central questions about why politicians employ media advisers and what use they are to journalists: their careers, work routines, relationships both internal and external, their strategies for influencing the media and ethical issues surrounding them.

CHAPTER 2, *Media Advising: Unusual Career, Precarious Profession*, investigates advising as a vocation, from entry to advisers' satisfactions and frustrations with their lot, to exits into other lines of work, usually in communication. The work has few of the usual characteristics of a profession, although advisers have to be highly qualified and experienced to gain entry. The chapter investigates who the advisers are, their education, where they come from and where they are going. They have a diversified role, not confined to media relations, in an environment where they could be out of a job tomorrow, next week or next month, often through no fault of their own. Their employment normally ends with the life of the parliament, when elections are called or if their government loses its majority in the

lower house. They may be rehired for the term of the next government, if it again wins office. The chapter investigates salary structure and notes that advisers are mainly men, yet in other areas of public relations, women predominate.

CHAPTER 3, *A Janus-faced Job I – Interaction with Ministers, Parliament and Departments*, looks at the work of advisers, their routines and practices in a fragmented day fraught with conflict, especially when parliament is sitting. The chapter also studies their key relationships within government: how they rate their influence with their minister and how they get on with others in parliament, also with public relations people in the minister's departments and authorities. Those who have formerly been journalists offer useful insights into behind-the-scenes relationships in politics. In most cases, the adviser has chosen not to pursue politics in the public forum but to work as speechwriter and editor, trainer and minder, behind the scenes. The work of preparing for such public occasions as Question Time is probed, what advisers do to organise travel within Australia and abroad, and their activities in scripting (sometimes hosting) a range of meetings, briefings and openings.

CHAPTER 4, *A Janus-faced Job II – Relations with Media and Publics*, explores the external and major part of the media adviser's role: as the third person in the relationship between ministers and media. Much of the information in the public sphere is unnoticed by the media unless attention is drawn to it by people in and out of power. The chapter examines the awkward but mutually advantageous relationship between media and advisers, how news items are placed or planted off the record, and the art of entertaining reporters and befriending sources, particularly the novice journalists. Advisers' and ministers' use of sanctions against political reporters is examined, also occasions when their attempts to downplay or kill a negative story backfire. The work of publicising and preparing for the "off-the-cuff" ministerial doorstep interviews is investigated, also arranging of

photo opportunities and meet-the-people walks (which have gone disastrously wrong on occasion).

CHAPTER 5: Ethical Dilemmas in Communicating Political Information, considers some of the dilemmas in placing and reporting political information: the ethics of directing or limiting its flow, lying as a tactic in political communication, the limits of loyalty and whether codes of ethics help in making sensible choices. The chapter examines limitations on political journalists' right to publish, including attitudes to censorship and how far advisers think their ministers' private lives should be probed. Often people in politics are cunning in news placement by leaking information, seeking to take advantage of friends and novices and of journalism's code of ethics which protects sources. They play on the competitive nature of the parliamentary press gallery and journalists' love of scoops.

CHAPTER 6: Conclusion, considers limits to the persuasive process and finds that within ministerial offices, most media relations people are not strange Svengalis with near-mystical spin-doctoring powers but skilled communication strategists who have great success in improving the effectiveness of their ministers and building rapport with mass and niche media, most of the time. Their role is a growing one, since it has proved so effective in many diverse ways, but observers have claimed that there is an urgent need of an enforceable code of conduct, so that advisers' powers and responsibilities could be balanced with a means of accountability to parliament and publics.

Case history: The non-existent gun which shot a media adviser

(See pages 8-10. A selection of Sydney press headlines in date order shows how the saga involving a minister and two NSW government media advisers unfolded from April to June 2001)

McIlveen, L., Chulov, M. & Denney, M., Teenager plotted massacre at school, *The Australian*, April 11: 1, 3

Noonan, G., & Stevenson, A., TV soap under fire for plot on moody boy, *Sydney Morning Herald*, April 13-15: 3

Chulov, M., & McIlveen, L., Police gagged on gun to protect Aquilina, *Weekend Australian*, April 14-15: 3

Mitchell, A., Aquilina in the dock: Privacy probe into 'plot' diary, and It's all about trying to corner headlines (comment), *Sun-Herald*, April 15: 33

Chulov, L., & McIlveen, L., Why massacre plot revelations baffled police, *The Australian*, April 18: 4

McIlveen, L., Gun theory inquiry for Carr staff, *The Australian*, April 18: 4

Doherty, L., Carr staffer fed media false story of student gun, *Sydney Morning Herald*, April 18: 3

McIlveen, L., Education's officials blamed for gun story, *The Australian*, April 19: 9

Davey, P., & Gibbs, S., Police shoot down gun story, *Sydney Morning Herald*, April 19: 1

McIlveen, L., Ryan rebuts minister's gun claims, *The Australian*, April 20: 4

Editorial, Master shoots himself in foot, *Daily Telegraph*, April 20: 23, plus Letters to editor – Innocent victims in sorry saga; plus Warren cartoon – "Is that a gun in your pocket or are you just making it up?"

Noonan, G., Moore, M., & Connelly, E., Never any mention of a gun: Ryan speaks out over schoolboy 'threat', *Sydney Morning Herald*, April 20: 3

Moir cartoon – "Dear Diary", *Sydney Morning Herald*, April 20: 17

Hewett, J., How not to handle a school crisis: give Aquilina an F, plus Wilcox cartoon, *Sydney Morning Herald*, April 20: 22

McIlveen, L., & Chulov, M., Massacre diary boy's family will sue state, *Weekend Australian*, April 21-22: 11

Editorial, The pitfalls of opportunistic politics, *Weekend Australian*, April 21-22: 11

Carlton, M., Minister goes abroad to stand in the corner, *Sydney Morning Herald*, April 21-22: 26

Noonan, G., & Moore, M., How the tale of a massacre spun out of control, Kennedy, L., & Jacobsen, G., ICAC launches search for smoking gun, *Sydney Morning Herald*, April 21-22: 4

Editorial, Aquilina must go, *Sydney Morning Herald*, April 21-22: 36

Letters, Truths about Aquilina's facts, *Sydney Morning Herald*, April 21-22: 37

Maye, V., Diary of an unhappy boy who did no wrong, *Sun-Herald*, April 22: 9

Editorial, Aquilina's contempt for voters, plus Pez cartoon "Gun – what gun?", *Sun-Herald*, April 22: 48

Lübbecke, cartoon "Found the gun yet, John?" *Sunday Telegraph*, April 22: 82

Akerman, P., Tough call in an unforgiving world, *Sunday Telegraph*, April 22: 83

- Moir, cartoon "The weakest link", *Sydney Morning Herald*, April 23: 15
- Moir, cartoon "Return of the prodigal hero", *Sydney Morning Herald*, April 24: 15
- Letters, Expel Aquilina, *Sydney Morning Herald*, April 25: 17
- Noonan, G., Aquilina faces rally from angry inner-city parents, *Sydney Morning Herald*, April 30: 15
- McIlveen, L., Massacre mess not my fault: Aquilina, *The Australian*, May 4: 5
- McIlveen, L., Crisis fails to dent Carr, *The Australian*, May 4: 8
- Wainwright, R., I'm sorry but I won't quit, says defiant Aquilina, *Sydney Morning Herald*, May 4: 2
- Noonan, G., A minister struggling to stick to his guns, *Sydney Morning Herald*, May 4: 2
- Editorial., The minister is a dunce, *Sun-Herald*, May 6: 20
- McIlveen, L., Reporter denies Aquilina claim, *Weekend Australian*, May 5-6: 9
- No byline, Aquilina faces his victim, *Sunday Telegraph*, May 6: 11
- McIlveen, L., Boy's family rejects Aquilina's regrets, *The Australian*, May 7: 3
- McIlveen, L., Aquilina sends new apology, *The Australian*, May 8: 3
- Peatling, S., Noonan, G. & Cornford, P., Aquilina's letter of apology to family proves elusive, *Sydney Morning Herald*, May 8: 3
- McIlveen, L., Boy's lawyer's set Aquilina deadline, plus comment: Millstone of mateship, *The Australian*, May 9: 4
- McIlveen, L., Lawyer wields boy's diary as weapon, *The Australian*, May 10: 3
- Editorial, Lawyers, politics and Aquilina, *The Australian*, May 10: 10
- Baird, J., Doherty, L., & Jackson, A., Aquilina given diary ultimatum, *Sydney Morning Herald*, May 10: 5
- Baird, J., Aquilina exonerates Cecil Hills principal, *Sydney Morning Herald*, June 5: 2
- [For other references in text, see Bibliography]

Chapter 2

Media advising: unusual career, precarious profession

Media advising is a relatively new but rapidly growing occupation. It remains an unusual one, without a professional entry path or a clearly defined career structure. Duties may vary widely, with only the obligation to look after the media relations of the minister a common theme. For ambitious young people (and they are mainly in their 20s and 30s, as survey data shows), the job has plenty of satisfactions – but also, stresses and uncertainties aplenty. Overwhelmingly, advisers report that they find great fulfilment in being in a well-paid position close to power but the job has many frustrations, in particular a heavy workload. They have an open-ended role in an uncertain environment.

This chapter examines the career structure of advisers – their backgrounds, the career paths and events which lead them to become advisers, their satisfactions and frustrations with the work, and the methods of leaving this role, one with a high turnover rate. The first section – Entry – looks first at the occupational backgrounds of advisers and their routes into what is typically a second or later job. It then examines the processes by which they decide to go into an advising role, and how they are recruited, including the range of skills their new employers are seeking. The last part of the section on Entry examines the socio-demographic profile of advisers – their composition by gender, age group and educational qualifications. Having established who the advisers are and how they got their jobs, the middle section – Satisfactions and Frustrations – looks at what the advisers like and dislike about their position, and how the actual experience differed from their expectations. Despite the fact that the great majority of advisers report they find the work rewarding, there is a very high turnover rate.

The final section of the chapter examines their exits from their position. Partly their departure is involuntary – if the ministers step down or lose their jobs, so do the advisers working for them. But the rapid turnover also reflects the short-term orientation and wish for a variety of experiences that many of them, especially the younger ones, express. Moreover, despite its rewards, many find the work exhausting and in particular state that it interferes too much with family and personal life. The uncertainty of career structures within media advising is also reflected in the variety of their destinations after they leave.

ENTRY

The paths into media advising are varied. A few joined the ministerial office straight from university as a research assistant or in a clerical role but it was found to be usually a second or later job; most started in another career. For more than half of those surveyed their previous job was in journalism. Advisers were usually young and tertiary-qualified. Word-of-mouth was as important as advertising to the process of entering the field. Many decided to apply for these advertised jobs on the basis of a previous connection with the minister. They may have been a friend of a friend or have met at a party function. A more likely meeting, if they were once journalists, was when they interviewed the minister for their newspaper or radio/television station (“Why don’t you come and work here in the ministerial office?” the minister or one of his or her colleagues would say). In most cases there was a formal application and job interview, sometimes there was not – just a discussion with the minister, perhaps over lunch, after mutual friends had brought them together. The formal application and acceptance came later, if ever: “I was never asked to put in an application or sign any forms,” one former Queensland adviser stated (interview, December 8, 2001).

Relatives are sometimes employed to advise in the minister's office or in the office of other ministers – this nepotism inevitably attracts unwanted media attention (*A Current Affair*, Channel 9, February 19, 2002, 6.30pm). In Australia's federal ministry, Prime Minister John Howard has banned the practice of hiring spouses or family but it flourishes in the federal and state sphere, particularly at backbench level, in the offices of coalition, Labor and minor party members. Close relatives of a minister are barred from employment in the office of their own or another minister except with the specific approval of the Prime Minister (see Federal Ministerial Code of Conduct, Appendix G). These were some of the ministers, ex-ministers and backbenchers discovered with family working in federal parliament:

- Prime Minister Howard employed Willie Herron, daughter of former Aboriginal affairs minister John Herron, as a media adviser
- Shadow Minister for Justice, Daryl Melham, Labor, employed sister-in-law Gail
- Veterans Affairs Minister Danna Vale employed husband Bob in her electorate office
- Mary Wooldridge, sister of former health minister Michael Wooldridge, was a senior adviser to then industry minister Nick Minchin from February 1999 to June 2001
- Labor MP Julia Irwin (salary \$90 000 plus \$27 000 electorate allowance) employed husband Geoff (salary \$35 000 plus pension as former NSW MP of \$46 000 a year)
- Independent Senator Mal Colston employed his wife, sons and one son's fiancée
- Dick Adams, Labor MP, Tasmania, employed wife Dee Alty
- Peter Andren, independent MP, NSW, employed a family member in an electorate office
- Senator Winston Crane, Liberal, Western Australia, employed wife Thea White
- Senator Brenda Gibbs, Labor, Queensland, employed her daughter Toni
- Senator Kay Denman, Labor, Tasmania, employed her son Paul
- Senator Ross Lightfoot, Liberal, WA, employed his wife and daughter
- Senator Shayne Murphy, independent, Tasmania, employed wife Jacquie
- Senator Andrew Murray, Democrat, WA, employed his wife in his office
- Jill Hall, Labor MP, NSW, employed son Chris part-time (Cox & Cumming, *Sun-Herald*, February 10, 2002: 30)

Some backbenchers said they were saving the taxpayer money. Labor MP Julia Irwin stated:

[My husband Geoff] is good value for money. He has an MBA, he's dedicated to the electorate – plus, he sleeps with the boss (*ibid.*: 30).

The ability to get on well with the minister was valued highly and was one reason given for selecting family. Criticism of nepotism in parliamentary offices has a venerable history. The Whitlam Labor government received much flak from opposition and media over this. Back in 1975, employment by Australia's deputy prime minister and federal government treasurer Jim Cairns of two people close to him contributed to his eventual dismissal by Labor Prime Minister Gough Whitlam. The two were his office coordinator, Junie Morosi, for whom he admitted in an interview with the Sydney *Daily Mirror* "a kind of love", and his stepson, Philip Cairns. Liberals in the New South Wales Parliament stated that Junie Morosi's business affairs were being investigated by the NSW Corporate Affairs Commission, a claim later denied by Premier Askin (Freudenberg, 1977: 320) and, using what were apparently forged cables, *The Age* attacked Philip Cairns for his "unauthorised activities in a Melbourne land development project" (ibid.: 356):

Whatever the truth about the activities of Philip Cairns while a member of Dr Cairns's staff, it is certainly unusual for someone to fabricate cables about a ministerial staffer's business dealings, and even more unusual for these to appear on the front page of *The Age*, and for no one to seem at all contrite about publishing a forgery (Tiffen, 1999: 144).

The mere existence of a familial or special relationship in a minister's office provided a point of attack for hostile opposition and media. What could not be proved could often be hinted at:

The Opposition and the media wanted the public to read between the lines and detect a sexual innuendo in the reports of the Morosi affair. Which the public duly did. . . . Even when the Whitlam Government has looked at its best, a recurring flaw has spoilt the image. This flaw has been the atmosphere of petty venality, minor nepotism and bureaucratic extravagance (*National Times* editorial, December 9, 1974).

Australian Prime Minister John Howard has stated that the "ideal" ministerial adviser is from a public service background but politically sympathetic to the government:

Ministers are entitled to depend on their staff to a considerable degree. It is appropriate that they have staff around them with whom they can properly discuss both policy and political issues and from whom they can receive advice that would be inappropriate for a departmental public servant, acting in a non-

partisan way, to give (Howard's speech marking centenary of Federal public service; Grattan, 2001: 10).

He was speaking mainly of policy advisers and chiefs of staff, positions to which media advisers often aspire: "Some of the finest ministerial staff . . . had previous careers within the service," he said, pointing to his chief of staff Arthur Sinodinos. "In many ways, it's the ideal – someone who understands the detailed workings of a government but is fully attuned to the Government's political and policy objectives" (ibid.: 10). Survey results showed 27 per cent of policy advisers were from a public service background, compared with less than two per cent of media advisers.

Media advising differs from journalism in that there is no cadetship or internship. Salary structure is higher than for the same age and qualifications in journalism. Federally, senior media advisers (on \$97 000 or more plus allowances) earn more than backbench members of parliament (on \$90 000 plus electorate allowance: Cox & Cumming, 2002: 30). The same is true in the state sphere. Advisers are mainly men, yet in areas of public relations outside politics, women predominate.

Except for this short-term nature, the work of media adviser has much in common with that of publicist or public relations officer in a large company or consultancy. Usually but not inevitably, he or she has had a close connection with the media. In response to the question on their occupational background, 52 per cent of 150 respondents replied, journalist (or reporter, editor or other position closely allied to journalism):

Table 2.1 Work background of advisers in federal, state and territory politics

'Your background was a) mainly politics b) mainly public service
c) journalism d) mixed e) none of these'

Work background	Per cent
Mainly journalism	52.0
Mixed*	21.1
Mainly politics	16.7
Mainly public service	7.3
None of these	2.7

n = 150

Background (%)	Male	Fem.	20-29	30-39	40+	Media advise	Policy advise	Fed.	State	Party: L-NP	ALP
Mainly journalism	53.5	49.0	45.2	51.4	57.8	62.6	17.6	45.6	44.6	51.4	51.9
Mixed*	16.8	30.6	19.4	25.7	15.6	20.9	20.6	19.0	22.8	18.6	24.1
Mainly politics	16.8	16.3	32.3	16.2	6.6	14.8	23.5	20.7	14.1	20.0	13.9
Mainly public serv.	8.9	4.1	0.0	4.1	17.8	1.7	26.5	12.1	4.3	4.3	10.1
Not these	4.0	0.0	3.2	2.7	2.2	0.0	11.8	1.7	3.2	5.7	0.0

* A range of occupations including journalism, the public service and politics

Note: Percentages add vertically.

More female respondents (31 per cent) had worked in a variety of roles than the men (17 per cent), who were a little more likely to have come from journalism. Those who came to advising from politics were more likely to be under 30 (32 per cent as against 16 per cent in the 30-39 age group and seven per cent in the 40 plus group) and to be working for coalition parties (20 per cent) rather than Labor (14 per cent).

Respondents were also asked about the job they had just before becoming an adviser. Again, about the same percentage (53 per cent) revealed that they had worked as a journalist in print, radio or television, but some also said they had worked in related occupations such as the public affairs or public relations group (17 per cent) or in law-related jobs (10 per cent). In describing their previous position, those from communication tended to call themselves media or public affairs people or press secretaries, never public relations staff.

The survey showed the remaining 11 per cent of advisers were previously in more than 30 other occupations (besides the media and public communication) including advertising account manager, army officer, barrister, campaign organiser, company director, consultant, copywriter, diplomat, electorate officer, executive assistant to managing director, field worker for a political party, hospitality manager, lawyer, lecturer, legal clerk, linguist, lobbyist, marketing officer, music promoter, performing arts person, personal assistant, police officer, policy officer in the public service, research officer, retail sales manager, senior executive, social welfare officer, solicitor, speechwriter, teacher, union official, and university student.

A former West Australian media secretary to a Labor minister, in a submission to the WA Commission on Government inquiry into the Government Media Office, doubted that a background in journalism should be the main criterion for the job:

The main criteria are that you understand how the media works and then how to make it work for you and your minister. . . Their main role is to protect their minister in times of crisis and to promote them in good times – by whatever means (Peter Rosendorff, in Meertens, 1996: 10).

Table 2.2 Previous occupation immediately before becoming an adviser

'What was your previous occupation before becoming an adviser?'

Last job	Per cent
Journalism/media¶	52.7
Public relations*	16.7
Legal work	9.9
Federal/state politics	7.3
Public service position	2.0
Other occupation	11.3

n = 150

Last job (%)	Male	Fem.	20-29	30-39	40+	Media adviser	Policy adviser	Fed.	State	Party: L-NP	ALP
Journalism¶	51.5	55.1	50.0	51.4	56.5	63.7	12.1	47.3	55.9	48.6	53.0
PR*	14.9	20.4	25.0	18.1	8.7	19.8	6.1	17.5	16.1	24.3	10.1
Legal work	10.9	8.2	6.3	5.5	19.6	5.2	27.3	10.5	9.7	5.7	13.9
Politics	8.9	4.1	6.3	8.3	6.5	4.3	18.2	12.3	4.3	4.3	10.1
Public serv.	3.0	0.0	0.0	2.8	2.2	0.9	6.1	0.0	3.2	2.9	1.3
Other job	10.8	12.2	12.5	13.9	6.5	6.0	30.3	12.3	10.8	14.3	7.6

Note: Percentages add vertically. ¶Includes those who replied announcer, editor, producer or newsreader.

*Includes those who described their previous position as corporate or public affairs.

Most of the media advisers (64 per cent) worked as journalists before becoming an adviser. Another 20 per cent came to the minister's office from a public relations job. Most policy advisers came from law, politics or other areas. However, 18 per cent had worked immediately beforehand in journalism or public relations.

There is considerable interchange between journalists and public relations

people: a survey of 243 Australian reporters and investigative journalists by Julianne Schultz (1998) revealed that 27 per cent of them had worked before full-time in government or politics. Schultz's survey also asked, "If you were offered a suitable job in government or politics that offered greater opportunities than your present job, what is the likelihood that you would take it?" 41 per cent of the journalists replied that they would probably take it (ibid.: 275). While most ministers looked for high-profile journalists as their media advisers, some also considered whether they had tackled public relations work also. A mix of journalism and public relations backgrounds in media advisers was thought to add to their effectiveness, especially in places such as Victoria where the advisers all worked from one central office:

All but two of us have come from media jobs: one was a federal politician's researcher and one in the finance industry. A journalism background is essential; a PR background as well adds a valuable extra dimension (Kevin Balshaw, in 1996 press secretary to then Premier of Victoria Jeff Kennett).

Particularly for those with a background in journalism, personal contact was often given as the reason why a career switch into political communication was made:

I was one of the first young journalists to be a press secretary in Australia (to Prime Minister Robert Menzies). I started as a copyboy with the *Adelaide Advertiser* in 1938. I transferred to the Melbourne Herald in 1945; spent five years in Melbourne, Canberra and London where I met Menzies in 1948 – he impressed as an accomplished, relaxed Leader of the Federal Opposition (Stewart Cockburn, from 1951-54 press secretary to Prime Minister Robert Menzies – interviewed in Adelaide, 1995).

When he got back to Australia there was a letter from Menzies thanking him for an article he had written. By then Menzies had become Prime Minister. In 1951 Cabinet decided it was necessary for the PM to have a press officer. The position was offered to senior Canberra political journalists but they all said no – there was an election coming up, a double dissolution and they thought the Liberal/Country Party coalition would be defeated: "I was 28 by that time but still wet behind the ears," Cockburn said. Menzies had only two questions for me: 'Can you do the job?' and 'Will you be loyal?' Until 1949 I'd never voted anything but Labor. The question of how I voted didn't come up

and I got the job.” Contrast the ease with which Cockburn found his first job in media advising back in 1951 with the competition facing applicants in the 1990s:

I came to Canberra straight after the 1993 elections. I used to be public relations manager for the Australian Broadcasting Corporation in Tasmania. There were 200 applications for the media adviser job with the Minister for Trade, Senator Bob McMullan. In the end they picked me (Carolyn Betts, in 1995 media adviser to Senator John Faulkner).

Her 1995 post became available after Senator Faulkner was promoted to the Cabinet. The more usual route to Canberra for those interviewed in 1995 was not from public relations, as with Betts, but from journalism:

I began in journalism as a one-year cadet in the finance section of the Sydney Sun, then moved to the press gallery in Canberra. I was Bob Hawke’s press secretary and I’ve been with Michael Lee from May 1993 on (Bob Bowden, in 1995 media adviser to Michael Lee, Federal Minister for Communications and the Arts).

Others agreed with Cockburn that one did not have to be a supporter of the party of one’s employer to be an effective adviser but on the Labor side of politics this was definitely an asset, enabling one to move up quickly:

Most media advisers to the Keating government come from journalism but some, like myself, had a varied career before this. I have been political adviser, media adviser, industrial advocate. I had no formal career in the media, although I did freelance work after a journalism cadetship (David Epstein, in 1996 director, Federal Government Ministerial Media Group).

Many of the more senior political journalists had experience in public relations. Sekules’s directory of Canberra lobbyists showed that about half had had experience as ministerial staffers, and most of the rest had been public servants and journalists:

The ministerial staff constitute a pool fed by a number of tributaries, but opening out into the mainstream. Service there is a means of transition for the intelligentsia from positions of little account to positions of influence and sometimes of power (Walter, 1986: 186).

Walter wrote that the corporate identity of the minders (and mutual recognition of what their experience gave them to sell) came to transcend party divisions. Although most advisers had previously been journalists, it

was common for them to have made an intermediate step into public relations, public affairs or advertising before joining their minister's communication team:

I worked as a radio journalist, then moved to advertising at George Patterson 1981-91. I left advertising in 1991 to pursue a career as a drama writer, then got a job as speechwriter for the Premier (Hugh O'Brien, in 1997 senior media adviser to Queensland's Minister for Public Works & Housing David Watson).

A pattern was evident where most advisers spent short spells with several employers. Sometimes their public relations work was with a government department or agency but consultancy work or a previous position in communications with a large company was also common:

I joined the *Courier-Mail* in 1973, and later worked overseas. I was information officer with the Department of Mines and Energy for six years. I've done consultancy work with Turnbull Fox Phillips (Gary Stubbs, in 1997 senior media adviser to Queensland Minister for Mines & Energy Tom Gilmour).

Stubbs could promote this ministry from life experience: he worked with Mount Isa Mines for seven years and his father was a coal miner. A similar pattern showed through in other advisers: their previous work had often been in an industry connected with their minister's portfolio.

Despite having to move from job to job, most took the opportunity to improve their qualifications before entering media advising. By the time they joined the minister's office most (72 per cent) had obtained a university degree. Of these, 21 per cent had a degree plus postgraduate qualifications:

Table 2.3 Formal education of journalists and ministerial political advisers*Schultz (1998) survey of journalists compared with Phillipps survey of federal and state advisers*

Level of education	News reporters (%)	Political advisers (%)
Some secondary school	2.0	2.7
All secondary school	23.0	20.4
Some uni., TAFE etc	30.3	5.3
University degree	38.9	52.0
Uni. degree + postgrad	5.7	20.4

n=244

n=152

Education (%)	Male	Fem.	20-29	30-39	40+	Media advise	Policy advise	Fed.	State	Party: L-NP	ALP
Some secondary	1.0	4.1	0.0	1.4	4.3	1.7	2.9	1.7	2.1	2.8	2.5
All secondary	25.5	10.2	25.0	13.7	28.3	23.3	11.8	13.8	24.5	21.1	20.0
Some uni., TAFE etc	6.9	2.0	3.1	4.1	8.7	6.0	2.9	1.7	7.4	5.6	5.0
Uni. degree	46.1	65.3	59.4	60.3	34.7	51.7	55.9	67.2	42.6	50.7	52.5
Uni. degree + postgrad	20.5	18.4	12.5	20.5	23.9	17.3	26.5	22.3	12.5	19.7	20.0

Percentages add vertically

Ministerial advisers 40 or older were much less likely to have a degree (35 per cent as against 60 per cent in the 30-39s and 59 per cent in the 20 to 29 group).

An Australian survey a decade earlier showed that in government and business communication then, 36 per cent had a university degree or a degree plus postgraduate qualifications (Phillipps, 1986: 66). A government department or authority employed one third of the 180 respondents to that survey.

While 72 per cent of ministerial advisers had completed a university degree, only 44 per cent of news reporters had done so. The Schultz survey asked reporters whether they had undertaken some university study and more than

30 per cent had done so (whether these studies were abandoned or still in progress was not indicated). For most, journalism was the career move before entering government advising, so it is probable that some journalists' education was still in progress at the time of the Schultz survey. But also, those who chose to go into advising were the ones with better academic qualifications. Kevin Balshaw says: "Advisers need to be better read than the usual run of journalists, with a good grasp of the historical perspective of politics." As table 2.4 shows, most advisers considered their formal education was useful in preparing them for work as an adviser. But only eight per cent were prepared to rate their education as excellent and almost one third saw it as either fair, poor or not applicable to their present role:

Table 2.4 Usefulness of formal education to ministerial advisers

How useful was your formal education in preparing you for your present job?

Formal education was. . .	Per cent
excellent	8.2
very good	21.8
good	37.4
fair	17.7
Poor/not applicable	14.6

n = 147

Formal education was..	Male %	Fem. %	20-29 %	30-39 %	40+ %	Media advise	Policy advise	Fed. %	State %	Party: Lib/NP	ALP
excellent	7.2	10.2	6.5	9.5	7.1	8.9	5.9	8.8	7.8	10.0	6.6
very good	22.4	20.4	3.2	24.3	19.1	20.5	23.5	28.1	17.7	15.7	26.3
good	40.8	30.6	48.4	27.0	47.6	37.5	38.2	38.6	36.7	40.0	35.5
fair	17.3	18.4	25.8	20.3	7.1	17.9	17.6	14.0	20.0	15.7	19.7
poor/not applicable	12.2	20.4	0.0	18.9	19.1	15.2	14.7	10.5	17.8	18.6	11.8

Percentages add vertically

There were minor differences only in perception of their education's usefulness, by gender and party of their minister. But the differences were more marked in analysis by age group: 34 per cent of the 30-39 group rated their own education as very good or excellent in preparing them for their adviser role, compared with 26 per cent of the 40+ group and only 10 per cent of the 20-29 age group, some of whom were still studying part-time or considering returning to study after their present job).

By contrast, many of those under 40 felt that their own education was only fair, poor or not applicable preparation for advising (39 per cent in the 30-39 age bracket, compared with 26 per cent in the 40+ group). More federal advisers (37 per cent as against 26 per cent of state ones) considered their education was very good or excellent preparation for advising.

Table 2.5 Usefulness of advisers' formal education/level of education

Formal education completed compared with considered usefulness of formal education in preparing advisers for their present job

(federal and state survey: crosstabulation)

Formal education	Excellent/ Very good %	Good %	Fair/poor %
Some secondary	33.3	0.0	66.7
All secondary	18.2	68.2	13.6
TAFE, college etc	33.3	33.3	33.3
University degree	24.7	46.6	28.8
Degree + postgraduate	64.3	14.3	21.4

NB: Read percentages across.

n = 133

Generally, this suggests that the more education they had, the more they appreciated it. Those with a university degree plus postgraduate qualifications were most enthused with the usefulness of their formal

education. Some advisers interviewed considered that their formal education had not included enough study of politics; if they had studied government and politics at high school it was taught in a boring way.

None of the advertisements for advisers (sample in Appendix K) mentioned educational requirements for the position, an unusual omission for such high-paying jobs. The advertisement for media advisor [sic] to the New South Wales Attorney-General, Bob Debus, merely said that “salary will recognise qualifications and experience”. At the time, Debus was also Minister for the Environment and Minister for Emergency Services. This particular advertisement (*Sydney Morning Herald*, February 9-10, 2002: 14) stated under “Selection criteria”:

Extensive knowledge of media practices and extensive experience in implementing media management activities. An understanding of parliamentary and political processes would be highly regarded. Applicants must be capable of working to tight deadlines and be flexible in their work arrangements. Weekend duty and after-hours on-call will be necessary.

Communication skills and proven experience were emphasised in all advertisements, not education. During the interviews, advisers were asked, “What type makes the best advisers?” Replies emphasised the variety of the work and the range of skills needed:

Media advisers are a mixed lot. Some of the more junior ones just act as a postbox until they get the hang of the job, handing out news releases, answering telephone calls and undertaking all the mundane aspects of media relations well. Others graduate to speechwriting and media policy work. They get to know the journalists well and cater to their needs before they are even aware of them (David Epstein, in 1995 director, Federal Government ministerial media group).

What is the socio-demographic profile of Australian political advisers? The survey replies from 152 advisers, plus interviews with 71 of them, revealed that they were mostly young, mostly men, mostly very well educated and almost invariably of white, Anglo-Celtic background parents, not at all representative of the Australian population.

Table 2.6 Age of advisers to ministers and opposition shadow ministry

Age range	Per cent
20-29	21.1
30-39	48.7
40-49	23.0
50-59	5.3
60+	2.0

n = 152

Age range (%)	Male	Fem.	Media adviser	Policy adviser	Fed.	State	Party: L-NP	ALP
20-29	18.6	26.0	24.8	8.8	17.2	23.4	28.2	15.0
30-39	40.2	66.0	51.3	41.2	53.4	45.7	45.1	51.3
40-49	30.4	8.0	17.9	38.2	27.6	20.2	19.7	26.3
50-59	7.8	0.0	4.3	8.8	1.7	7.4	5.6	5.0
60+	2.9	0.0	1.7	2.9	0.0	3.2	1.4	2.5

Percentages add vertically

Most advisers were younger than their ministers. Table 2.6 revealed that 70 per cent of advisers surveyed were under the age of 40. Only a few were older than 50. No advisers were under 20.

Women advisers were more likely to be much younger than the men (92% of women advisers were under 40 as against 59 per cent of men). This could be the start of a trend to more women advisers than men, as in the rest of the communication and public relations industry, especially as more women than men are now studying journalism at university and public relations courses are now 90 per cent women students.

Among the younger men and women, most advisers did not have family commitments. The few that did have children needed an understanding partner:

I'm one of the few media advisers with a young family – I have two children and need to get home to them in the evening (Claire Tedeschi, in 1995 Media Adviser to Federal Minister for Administrative Services Frank Walker, now speechwriter for the Governor-General, Dr Peter Hollingworth).

In the federal sphere, the conservative Howard governments chose to employ mainly male advisers, in contrast to the previous Labor government of Keating, whose advisers were 59% female (see Appendix H). The number of main media contacts for federal ministers at first stayed about the same but by 2000 had crept up to 35 (30 under Keating). The big collapse from Keating's ministry (when contacted in Canberra in September 1995) to Howard's administration after the election in 1996 was in total number of ministerial staff: from 219 with Keating in 1995 to 161 with Howard in 1996, a fall of 58 or 27 per cent. In 2002, federal ministerial staff now total 350, including secretarial staff but not the 72 departmental liaison officers – or another area of rapid increase, consultants. Steketee (2002) claims that the number of staff in Prime Minister Howard's office alone is now 40, 10 more than Paul Keating had when he left office. Federally, the number of female media advisers has dropped away, from 14 in 1993 (47 per cent) to eight of 34 in 1998 (24 per cent) and nine in 2000 (26 per cent).

In the years the survey was conducted, most (about two thirds) of the state media advisers were male (see Appendix H). Only Tasmania employed more women advisers than men. The various Queensland governments at the time of the surveys had many more male ministerial advisers than female (85 per cent men in the case of the Borbidge government).

In all states and federally, government ministries are dominated by men. The only female leaders in the survey period were in the Australian Capital Territory, where Kate Carnell was Chief Minister, and Clare Martin, Northern

Territory Chief Minister. Carnell had an equal number of male and female advisers, five of each (including policy advisers). Only the Keating ministry of 1993 approached that balance in media advisers (16 men, 14 women).

Table 2.7 Gender balance of ministerial advisers surveyed

Gender	Per cent
% male	66.9
% female	33.1

n = 151

Gender	20-29	30-39	40+	Media adviser	Policy adviser	Fed.	State	Party: L-NP	ALP
% male	59.4	55.4	91.3	60.7	88.2	69.0	66.0	69.0	65.0
% female	40.6	44.6	8.7	39.3	11.8	31.0	34.0	31.0	35.0

Gender	Per cent in each salary group					Staff supervised (% in each group)			
	Under \$30k	\$30k - \$49k	\$50k - \$69k	\$70k - \$99k	\$100k +	None	One or two	Three - nine	10 or more
% male	50.0	41.7	61.7	72.6	100.0	59.7	61.9	73.3	94.4
% female	50.0	58.3	38.3	27.4	0.0	40.3	38.1	26.7	5.6
Total n	2	12	60	62	9	62	42	30	18

Percentages add vertically

Correlating gender with age groups, we see that from 40 onwards women comprise only nine per cent of advisers, approaching parity with men only in the 20-29 and 30-39 groups. Among policy advisers surveyed, many more (88 per cent) were male than among media advisers (61 per cent male). The percentage of male advisers was only slightly higher federally (69 per cent) than in the states (66 per cent) and in advisers to coalition ministers (69 per

cent) than to Labor ministers (65 per cent). The differences were much more marked when survey results correlated gender with salary: from \$30 000 a year upwards, women were progressively less represented in each salary group and no woman was paid more than \$100 000 a year. The same pattern held true when gender of advisers was correlated with number of staff supervised: the more staff to look after, the fewer the percentage of women in charge. In the group supervising one or two staff, 38 per cent were women; in the group supervising 10 or more staff, only six per cent were women.

In private enterprise, women are making up an increasing percentage of the public relations workforce. Many more women than men are now entering the field, so that it has become female-dominated (Serini, Toth, Wright & Emig, 1997: 109). Some hold that women by nature are better practitioners:

Public relations is a highly intuitive business. The ability to recognise what sort of behaviour brings about what kind of response is a talent inborn in little girls and developed to a high degree of sensitivity by the time they are through their teens. It's an invaluable asset in public relations (R. Smith, 1968: 26).

Some scholars claim that the most effective public relations grows out of an entire world view that is feminine (for instance, J. Grunig, 1992). "That is, public relations practised as balanced, two-way communication between an organisation and its stakeholder groups stands to make the greatest contribution to organisational effectiveness" (L. Grunig, Toth & Hon, 2000: 59). Women were now educationally and by nature well-equipped for careers in public relations: "They display self-confidence, assertiveness, risk-taking attitudes and accountability necessary for business success, but are less career-oriented, fully expecting to take family leaves, to limit work hours and to interrupt their careers for family duties" (Wilcox et al, 1998: 94).

In political communication, women are unlikely to dominate as in private industry, at least in the immediate future, since the positions in politics do not provide a long-term career and are not family-friendly because of their long hours and stressful nature. They could, however, be reconfigured to

provide for less after-hours work: say by job-sharing. Gender balance in the federal parliament's press gallery is similar to that of ministerial media advisers, 69 per cent men and 31 per cent women in 1995. Although Queensland has more women media advisers than most states, this is because it is the state with the most media advisers in proportion to ministers, as the previous figures for the Goss, Borbidge and Beattie ministries show – far in excess of any other Australian government, state, territory or federal. The Queensland Goss ministry (Labor) had 18 ministers and 39 advisers; the Borbidge ministry (National/Liberal) had 16 ministers and 22 media advisers; in 2002 the present Beattie government (Labor) has 19 ministers and 32 media advisers.

Do women make good media advisers? Yes, said some including the 1995 senior media advisers in Canberra to Trade Minister Peter Cook, Gary Quinlan, and Environment Minister Senator John Faulkner, Carolyn Betts:

Quinlan: "Some of the better people in the media adviser job are young women. They have great inner strength."

Betts: "In the last few years more women have become media advisers. They tend to have excellent interpersonal skills. Training in public relations helps."

Women who with outstanding careers as journalists and editors were sometimes lured to the media adviser role, if the position was high-profile enough: for instance, West Australian journalist Amanda Plattell, who went to London and rose to become deputy editor of *Today*, acting editor of the *Sunday Mirror*, then Mirror Group managing editor, finally editor of *Express on Sunday*. There she ran a feature headed "Princess Tony", showing British Prime Minister Tony Blair had exploited identical picture opportunities to those used by Princess Diana. After she resigned, or was sacked by the *Express's* proprietor, Lord Hollick, a Labour peer, Plattell became senior media adviser for then British opposition leader, head of the

Conservative Party William Hague:

She is very, very, very attractive. Totally charming, totally beguiling. And for that reason people tend to under-estimate her . . . she has excellent journalistic instincts, sound judgement and is a firm, fair manager (former *Express* colleague Andrew Pierce, in Huxley, 1999).

The female advisers interviewed (and most of the males) shared this first characteristic: they were very charming. They hid any stress very well. Although they all had held down demanding jobs in the past, few of the younger ones had had the chance to be editors. In Queensland and some other states, a pattern developed where the senior media adviser has a dedicated media assistant adviser. This scheme helped young journalists make the transition to political public affairs.

The Australian Broadcasting Corporation (traditionally a low payer) was the starting point in media for several of those advisers interviewed. One such was media adviser to Gary Punch, then Federal Minister for Defence Science and Personnel:

I started with the ABC in Kalgoorlie. Later in Perth I worked in commercial radio news, then joined Burswood Casino as public relations manager, picking up a lot of meet-and-greet skills (Sally Rowe, Canberra, 1995).

Public relations work, besides paying much better than the ABC, was great training for the media adviser's role: "It was quite a change from journalism; public relations concentrates on getting other people into the limelight." Jim Bonner, in 1995 Media Secretary to South Australian Premier Dean Brown, also came into advising from the ABC: "I went to Prime Minister Malcolm Fraser from 1981 to 1983, with David Barnett and Owen Lloyd. I came to Adelaide after Fraser lost to the ALP and Bob Hawke."

The extra pay was a big motivator for others too, also the chance to get out of a regional rut; for instance the media secretary to Kevin Minson, then Western Australia's Minister for Mines, Works, Services, Disability Services:

The Premier came down to present the South-West media awards. One of her

staff asked me to apply for a job. I've been in Perth ever since. I was keen to see up close how government worked, and besides, it was an extra \$10,000 a year! (Caroline Lacy, Perth, 1996).

Several advisers had worked in state or territory politics before moving to Canberra. Others had worked in more than one state or territory, and had switched between journalism, public relations and political media advising at a relatively young age. They had in common a restlessness and a willingness to move to a different city, state or country to get a range of experiences while they were still young, for instance the 1995 media secretary to then South Australian Premier Dean Brown, Kevin Donnellan: "I left the *Adelaide Advertiser* in 1979 at age 27 to join the Northern Territory government. I was based at Alice Springs for a year. The money was good and I had a car plus flat and travelling allowance. They had to give you something to get you there!" A common route to media advising was through political reporting and the extra money, with not much night work, was enough to tempt journalists to make the switch.

Other advisers moved to the minister's office after a time with a department. This background was held to be most useful, especially when the minister needed information quickly on what was going on in the bureaucracy. One of several advisers with this background was in 1995 Media Secretary to South Australia's Minister for Transport and the Arts Diana Laidlaw, Mark Williams: "I had one year with the *Adelaide News* as a graded journalist, then wrote newsletters and reports for the State Transit Authority. When the people there left, I got the media job. From there I moved into politics as media adviser." He was in the right place at the right time, with the right background.

Not all journalists were able to make an easy transition to advising. Ministers' staff usually took the trouble to check references, just as do people in public relations consultancies:

One ex-journo's name that often comes up among clients seeking references is followed by 'he seems OK, but the journos hate him' (Perrett, 2001: 48).

Perrett added: "If they cannot be trusted, it usually does not endear them" to the journalists, or do the client (in this case, minister) any long-term good.

A job as a lobbyist (a position where trust and responsibility go hand in hand with political acumen) is one way of catching the eye of those in power, for instance the 1996 Press Secretary to Victorian Premier Jeff Kennett, Kevin Balshaw: "I used to be a journalist, then I ran a PR agency of my own which undertook lobbying of state and federal politicians. Then in 1990 I became a press secretary to Victorian Nationals leader Pat McNamara. In 1992 we became a team of three media staff for Premier Kennett and his deputy."

Another example of lobbyist turned ministerial aide was in 1995 Chief of Staff to Dale Baker, South Australia's Minister for Mines and Energy, Resources and Development, Jeannie Ferris (now a Senator). She said: "In Canberra I lobbied for the National Farmers Federation, then media adviser for shadow Minister for Industry and Commerce Ian McLachlan. In 1994 I began working for Dale Baker." Also from the ABC was the 1995 Media Secretary to Bruce Such, then South Australia's Minister for Employment, Training and Further Education, Kim Wheatley: "I come from Darwin where I was a year with ABC Radio and three years with commercial TV; joined the Minister in July 1995 after working for Channel 7 in Adelaide for 18 months."

Chiefs of staff are expected to coordinate the minister's office and to be able to offer policy as well as media advice. Smaller offices, such as those for federal parliamentary secretaries, combine the roles, as the advertisement for media and policy adviser to Senator Ian Campbell, Parliamentary Secretary to the Treasurer, demonstrates:

The successful applicant will be required to prepare and analyse existing and proposed policy briefs, interview briefs and speeches . . . Excellent oral and written communication and media liaison skills are essential (*The Australian*, February 14, 2002: Media 8).

Occasionally, ministers will grab the chance to bring in communication expertise from other countries; for instance, the 1997 Media Adviser to David Watson, then Queensland's Minister for Public Works & Housing, Virginia Fett: "I'm American and have been two years in Australia. I did research for a consulting firm and worked for ABC News in New York and Washington." Another import from abroad was in 1997 Senior Media Adviser to Russell Cooper, then Queensland's Minister for Police, Corrective Services, & Racing & Gaming, Jim Kershaw: "I've been 30 years in public relations and journalism. I started on a UK newspaper and here in 1967. I edited business magazines, worked in PR and marketing and before this job worked for Thompson media."

A few from overseas had high qualifications; among those interviewed, one had a PhD. In 1995 he was media secretary to John Olsen, then South Australia's Minister for Industry, Manufacturing, Small Business and Regional Development.

Rudolph Teuwsen: "I've been a PR consultant. In Australia I taught journalism at Deakin University and philosophy at Bond University. After gaining my doctorate I lectured in Germany. While a consultant there I met the then leader of the SA opposition, later Premier." Teuwsen had been looking to return from Germany to Australia and heard about a vacant position in Adelaide. A direct approach was successful and he became communications adviser to Olsen in 1994.

Some advisers had travelled the world for their organisation before entering advising, for instance the 1979-82 press secretary to David Tonkin, the former South Australian Premier:

I began in journalism as a cadet on a Maidstone, Kent, newspaper. I worked in TV for four years, then did my military service and came to Australia. Here I worked for the ABC: in News, as a regional manager, a sports reporter, on This Day Tonight in South Australia and as ABC South-East Asia correspondent, based in Bangkok, on the trail of drug-runners and such (Nigel Starck, Adelaide, 1995).

The catalysts for switching to political media advising were often a chance meeting with those in power, the challenge of doing something different and exciting, plus the opportunity to make more money. That was why the press secretary to former Premier Don Dunstan and subsequent South Australian governments entered politics – Tony O’Reilly: “At the Adelaide Journalists’ Ball in 1968 I was offered a job with Don Dunstan, then opposition leader – I made \$65 a week as a D-grade. I asked for \$75, a lot for age 22; *The Advertiser* offered \$70 so I went with Dunstan.” O’Reilly now runs his own public relations consultancy in Adelaide, as does the principal of Michels Warren, once press secretary to former Premier of South Australia Steele Hall. Darryl Warren said: “I started in newspapers and in 1967 came to Channel 9 here. I was not happy and when Steele Hall needed a media adviser in 1968 my news editor, Peter Middleton, landed the job. Later Peter phoned me and said, ‘We need help.’ I was press secretary to the Cabinet. The job was hell on wheels. There was an extra paper in Adelaide then. I had to look after everyone – write speeches, organise media appearances. Later my position was replaced by eight people.”

Another who felt overworked and under-rewarded had an easier time first for the Labor government in Victoria, then the South Australian Labor government. When interviewed in 1995, Jill Bottrall was media adviser to SA Labor Opposition Leader (now Premier) Mike Rann. She said: “I was with the *Centralian Advocate* in Alice Springs. I met Joan Kirner when she was Minister for Conservation and was her speechwriter for two years.” Before Kirner became Victorian Premier she returned to Alice, working for the ABC and Aboriginal broadcaster CAAMA, also part-time for her old newspaper:

Labor Attorney-General in South Australia Chris Sumner asked me to come and work for him in 1991. It’s been a steep learning curve since then. There was an election in 1993. A total of 40 support people including 13 media secretaries lost their jobs and it was reduced to a tiny opposition, with room for only one media adviser. I landed the job (Jill Bottrall, Adelaide, 1995).

Other advisers also showed their restless spirit: for instance, Kerry White, in 1997 Senior Media Adviser to Queensland's Minister for Environment Brian Littleproud. White said: "I joined a Toowoomba paper in my late 20s, moved to the *Sydney Morning Herald*, then the *Northern Star* in Lismore, next a Kingaroy newspaper, edited the *Dalby Herald* and later was chief of staff of *The Chronicle*. Then came public relations for RSL War Veterans Homes."

A couple of advisers had been politicians before starting their new line of work: one was John Pasquarelli, adviser to Pauline Hanson when she was elected independent member for the federal seat of Oxley in 1996. He had been a member of the Papua New Guinea parliament. He was sacked because Hanson "didn't like his bossy attitude", then offered a job again in February 2001 during her bid for a Senate seat. She said:

He still believes in me . . . I've always maintained he's very good, very astute; he's very politically wise and I need that (Meade & Keenan, 2001: 5).

Pasquarelli lasted nine months as Hanson's adviser the first time hired; the second time it was nine months from the job offer to Hanson's failed Senate bid at the November 2001 federal elections. Pasquarelli did not have great rapport with political journalists; Margaret Simons recalls a 1998 trip to parliament house in Canberra at the time when press gallery reporters were watching a midday television talk-show on which Pasquarelli (after being fired by Hanson in 1997) was guest:

He has just published a book on his former boss. Gallery members gather around the monitors. Host Kerri-Anne [Kennerley] accuses Pasquarelli of being a liar. The gallery roars and claps. She does it again, and they cheer (Simons, 1999: 10).

Most advisers showed a career pattern which was one round after another of short-term, challenging but well-paid jobs. They did not want to stay in journalism so they moved to advising. Some had already tried public relations and fitted easily into a new role as part promoter, part researcher, part confidant and minder. Few expected to serve more than one term.

SATISFACTIONS AND FRUSTRATIONS

What are the joys and sorrows of media advising, rewards and disappointments? The satisfactions of media advising could be summarised as:

- the excellent rate of pay compared with journalism and other previous occupations, also the daily variety and challenge of the work
- the joy of being the conduit for information before it is made public, then choosing the best way of releasing it
- the thrill of being close to power, playing an important part in the business of communicating politics
- the pleasure of promulgating good news, not the negative stories they chased when political reporters; and, for most,
- the chance to travel with the minister, if they had not travelled much in their previous job.

During interviews, each adviser would prioritise the last four pleasures differently but all mentioned their satisfaction with the salary structure and the challenge and variety of the work. One thing that brightens the week of most advisers is the chance to travel with the minister:

I'm off to Hong Kong shortly. There is mental stimulation and variety – a lot of different issues, especially on the industrial front. It keeps the brain from going numb. I like being part of a team that's new and keen (Catherine Bauer, 1995)

One benefit is travel. I had three weeks working abroad with the minister this year. (Jeannie Ferris, 1995).

The five main frustrations were:

- the long working hours, especially when parliament was sitting, plus the requirement to be always on call, after normal business hours and even on weekends

- related to the first reason, the job-related stress and the attacks from all sides (even from the minister) when any mistake was made, even if it was not the adviser's fault
- for former reporters, the lack of any recognition when any media event, feature or news item was placed and was accorded an outstanding success – the byline would be the reporter's and the glory the minister's
- for those who were in a difficult portfolio with an unblooded minister, the chore of being a tutor and minder to someone who was usually many years their senior; and finally,
- the uncertainty of the role which might end tomorrow prematurely – at the whim of the minister, the caucus, government and prime minister, or the party and voters, if the minister lost preselection or his seat at the next election.

Another frustration for former reporters was the loss of journalistic impartiality, always having to write or rewrite a good story from the government's point of view though up close they can see its imperfections.

Before starting the job the most commonly expected satisfactions were higher pay, travel to interesting places in Australia and abroad, less night and shift work than if they worked in radio, television or morning newspapers, being close to the political action and putting out positive stories, instead of having to hunt for negative news as in journalism. The promise of less shift work proved of mixed value, if they had a run of early starts and late nights; in their eyes, the \$12 000 or so allowance in absence of overtime did not fully compensate them for having to be on call at all hours. Many media advisers mentioned that they were happy with the rate of pay which was more than they could have expected, had they remained in broadcasting or newspapers. Some thought that at their relatively young age, they were earning much more than their colleagues who had remained in the media. Indeed, the

reason some gave for the shift from journalism into political communication was that they were “sick of being poor”. Director of the Federal Government ministerial media group under Prime Ministers Hawke and Keating, David Epstein, said: “The pay rate helps us attract quality candidates. To compensate for the stress somewhat, the standard of pay by 1996 was extremely good. But it used to be extremely poor.”

The survey data bears this out. All except seven of the 152 advisers surveyed replied to the question on salary which asked for their yearly remuneration (salary and other benefits). Compared with the Schultz survey of reporters, results did support the contention that advisers are much better paid:

Table 2.8 Yearly remuneration of reporters and advisers (salary + benefits)

Remuneration range	News reporters %	Ministerial advisers %
Under \$40,000	23.3	3.5
\$40,000-\$59,999	47.6	25.5#
\$60,000+	28.1	71.1

Percentages add vertically

Schultz: n = 245

Phillipps: n = 145

Most of this group, if resurveyed in 2002, would be in the \$60 000+ category, judging by current advertised starting salaries

One Canberra adviser mentioned that he thought the question of pay should not have been included in the survey: “Mind your own business! This is only of prurient interest.” But most federal advertisements for media adviser positions list the salary which applies: for instance, a February 2002 advertisement (see Appendix J) for media adviser to the Commonwealth Attorney-General, Daryl Williams, gives the applicable salary range as \$75 000 to \$97 000 with an additional \$12 000 a year paid in lieu of overtime, total top-of-the-range pay of \$109 000. Advisers to parliamentary secretaries and backbenchers are much lower down the pay scale. Every few months here and abroad, editors commission features on how much political advisers are

paid compared with back-bench members of parliament. In Britain back in 2000, salaries of 72 special advisers to the Blair Labour government ranged from £27 500 to £110 000 (\$79 750 to \$319 000). Then, Downing Street chief of staff Jonathan Powell was on £98,000 (\$284 200) and so was Downing Street press secretary Alastair Campbell, prompting the London *Daily Mail* headline: “Blair ignores calls to cull his army of spin-doctors” (Deans, May 31, 2000: 29). The following week the London *Sunday Mirror* promoted a similar story to page 2: “Blair’s £1 billion on spin-doctors” (McLaughlin, 2000). This time, the reporter was talking about consultancy earnings of experts, highlighting what could be done with that amount of money: building 14 new hospitals, doing 142 000 hip operations, hiring 65 000 more nurses or 52 000 more police officers. The opposition was quick to make promises. The headline read, ‘I’ll sweep away spin,’ says former Chancellor:

Kenneth Clarke promised to sweep away Downing Street’s army of spin-doctors and political aides and put parliament back at the centre of political life if he became prime minister (George Jones, *Weekly Telegraph*, 2001).

South Australia’s media secretaries were not impressed by a similar attack in the *Sunday Mail*: “Next time you politicians talking, arguing, laughing, yelling, damning, keep in mind the words they’re using were probably thought up by someone else,” wrote John Church (1995). He called them “the government spin-doctors – witchcrafters of words who can somehow manage to contort a total political disaster into a glowing indictment of government achievement . . . how much is too much when it comes to governments promoting themselves?” The article costed their salaries at \$6 million a year and featured pictures of nine media advisers’ faces:

It’s when press secretaries bend the truth, and that does happen, and don’t answer questions or answer questions untruthfully that it becomes manipulation: the media doesn’t have the resources that it used to, to dig around for information.

Most advisers liked the work but realised quickly that they were open to such attacks from their former media colleagues, attacks difficult to rebut. Most said that before taking the job they had underestimated its scope and range, also the hours they’d be spending defending the interests of their minister or

shadow minister. They felt there was an after-hours invasion of privacy – all had to carry a pager or mobile phone. Most media also had the silent home phone number. Advisers from journalism had to come to terms with the change from reporters and investigators to government boosters and apologists:

Certainly, there's an element of public relations in the job. We have to sell a product, irrespective of the negatives about it, just as the public relations people do. You have to convince the voters that the government's way is best. You can't toss out all your qualities and skills as a journalist overnight and don a salesman's hat; you'd be regarded as an imposter (Bob Bowden).

Media advisers are a key part of the team, part of what public relations theorists such as McElreath (1997: 14) call the "dominant coalition" or major decision-makers. The importance of communication experts to the team has been established by Australian and overseas researchers (Grunig, 1992: 66; Gregory, 1996; Irwin & More, 1994). They cannot do their jobs effectively if they are not part of the organisation's decision-making executive:

I have to be in every meeting . . . I don't have enough time in the day to get everything done because he [the Senator] has made me part of the senior staff! I have a beeper and he has my home number. But it's important to him and he sees [the press operation] as a vital part of what he does to communicate his message (US press secretary interviewed by Downes, 1998: 271).

Because mass media and new media are much more complex and governments now need many more advisers than in the post-World War 2 years of the mid 20th century, their coordination becomes vital. They are the boundary-spanners, reaching beyond the narrow confines of the ministry, acquiring information from the outside world and seeing that their minister is represented adequately to the media and citizens (Irwin & More, op. cit.: 86). It's important that there be teamwork between media advisers:

You don't want a clash of major announcements on the one day. We plan our work a week in advance, using a big whiteboard. We meet often for 20 minutes at the start of each day. Where there is a potential clash we try to shuffle events. These meetings are a good chance to get to know the other media advisers (Mark Williams, Adelaide, October 1995).

Another who emphasised how interesting the job was, and how essential

teamwork was to keep on top of things, was a senior media adviser to Queensland's (in 1997 National-Liberal) Minister for Public Works and Housing, David Watson:

We work as a team but we can never control our day. Some days nothing happens, on other days all hell breaks loose. We have to prepare thoroughly for Question Time. The job is unrelenting. You can't go home on Friday and relax for the weekend (Hugh O'Brien, Brisbane, November 1997).

Some suggested that media advisers tend to have the same personality as their ministers (there are a few exceptions). They had to get along with the minister otherwise the week would not go calmly amid the clamour and they were quickly out of a job. Some advisers had administrative as well as media liaison roles; some also sat in on planning or coordinating meetings and offered advice, especially where it concerned media and public perceptions. They enjoyed the break from media work but long meetings tended to be classified as a chore.

What is the typical work day of a media adviser? Using excerpts from a range of responses, interviews revealed this weekday pattern:

- **6 am or earlier:** "The first phone calls come in, particularly from radio station reporters wanting political news for their breakfast bulletins. The gallery journalists look to us every day for stories: 'What's new? What's happening? Have you got a good story for me?' A lot of news comes out of Canberra each day, and it affects every part of the country."
- **7am:** "We check the main daily newspapers while having breakfast and monitoring radio's early news and current affairs, particularly ABC's AM program."
- **8am:** "We arrive at Parliament House or our minister's office and launch into a series of meetings, sometimes over coffee and croissants: with office staff, other advisers, our minister. We try to set the day's news agenda. You have to convince the journalists that you have a

good product, an interesting story One advantage of being on the government team is the chance to put out good news, instead of having to be on the lookout for bad or bizarre news as in daily media work.”

- **9am:** “We set about devising media strategy, preparing news releases, drafting speeches, helping to organise topics and responses for Question Time if parliament is sitting that day. Sometimes we have 100 answers ready. The one question asked might be the one you’ve not prepared for! There are media and public queries to answer, copy for booklets, brochures and direct mail campaigns to check or write.”
- **10am-12.30pm:** “No day is ever exactly the same. Most ministers are very busy people, off to do openings, sell government policy, endless meetings. We usually tag along, particularly to keep an eye on what is said in places where the media might be in attendance – plus an ear on commercial radio talkback. There can be traps for us or the opposition in that.”
- **12.30-2pm:** “Lunch is often in the office, watching and listening to what is going on in the house if parliament is sitting. Sometimes we host a lunch meeting for reporters and editors, or we might we get taken out to lunch by people wanting a comment or an interview with the minister.”
- **2pm-4pm:** “Usually media work: reporters get more pushy as deadline approaches. Maybe we’ll have to line up a doorstep interview for the minister and let the gallery know when he’ll be coming in. If he’s not available, we try to comment providing the topic is in our minister’s orbit. The minister is good at keeping me informed on what’s going on. We are continually responding to journalists’ deadlines, trying to find out what they want to know, redirecting them if they’ve reached a dead end and trying to get them to air or print on time.”

- **4-5pm:** "If parliament's not in session or even if it is, our minister or the other staff might ask advice on policy, say on how the media or publics will respond to an issue, or the best way our policies could be presented. I'm not in the party; they think I'm likely to give an unbiased assessment. I try not to be a yes-minister type."
- **5pm-7pm:** "The ministerial office is a family unit: in this job there has to be teamwork, unlike journalism or in the normal business office. This is a little family. You don't think of heading for home if there's work to be done. The office staff might have gone but those left will all help with the chores of faxing or photocopying. That's not so say there aren't a few groans and moans along the way."
- **8pm – 10pm:** "If parliament is sitting, the minister might ask us to hang around and put out a statement. I have a home to go to and a partner waiting for me, so I'm not too keen on that."
- **10pm – 11pm or later:** "Media phone calls tend to taper off towards midnight. If we're in the international spotlight, say over the asylum-seekers issue, you might get woken by an early-hours phone call from some journalist in London or Washington. The minister might set off my pager."
- **Weekends:** "Just because the weekend is coming up, you can't unwind. Sunday is a good day to launch things because it's often a quiet news day. You get a better run in the Monday print media. If you have bad news to put out, one ploy is to wait for a really busy news day. But I think the editors are getting awake up to that strategy. I don't like to put bad news on hold – some opponent, not necessarily in the opposition, might get to hear and leak it first."

On busy days you have to be here before the journalists and minister in the morning and you might be still fielding questions and putting out statements between seven and 10 at night (Carolyn Betts, Canberra, September 1995).

Advisers admitted in interviews that life was not always that hectic; that some days were slow and boring and most weekends did pass without much interruption via pager or mobile phone. They were inclined to dwell on the dinner party interrupted, the family outing ruined. No day is ever exactly the same as the one before: this is one reason advisers say they enjoy the work, despite its stress and long hours.

Even greater stress and longer hours await them when an election was called, especially if the minister does not have a safe seat. Advisers resent the aggression of today's politics and the hostility with which reporters sometimes confront them:

Media advisers have to be on their toes, particularly with the electronic media. The office needs summaries of radio and TV morning news by 11 o'clock every day. We must ensure we get people on radio to give the government point of view. We have to be alert every waking moment, there's so much aggression out there (Gary Quinlan, Canberra, September 1995).

The media can be hostile at times and so can the unions, but we are making gains in this portfolio, especially in tourism (Catherine Bauer, Adelaide, October 1995).

Why is media advising so stressful? "The hours are long and work intrudes into your personal life. Your beeper might go off in the middle of Sunday lunch, for instance. But I try to keep my personal and working life apart. My fiancé is a journalist with the *Adelaide Advertiser* but we agreed early in our relationship we wouldn't talk about what we'd been doing at work at the end of the day." Bauer said it's important **not** to treat the news media as the enemy. Her government had brought in a lot of changes: "People are critical of change and are reticent to change but we've got the best interests of the state at heart. We've been able to make the necessary changes without undue hardship." Everything she puts out has to be in the minister's best interests, and information needs to be released as promptly as possible. If something goes wrong she doesn't feel personally attacked. She enjoys the work despite the stress:

"I'm off to Hong Kong shortly. There is mental stimulation and variety – a

lot of different issues, especially on the industrial front. It keeps the brain from going numb. I like being part of a team that's new and keen.

Journalism doesn't depend on teamwork, it's quite competitive," Bauer said.

The team is quite a large one, even in the smaller states:

In South Australia alone, the 13 state ministers enjoy the attention of more than 150 direct support staff, from key advisers to driver and receptionists, including departmental appointments (Church, 1995, op. cit.).

Advisers are inclined to look to their chief of staff or chief government information officer if they needed help. Few have the time to attend courses and few attend any conferences except their own weekly meetings with other advisers. In other occupations, much professional support comes from associations and unions. Most ministerial advisers surveyed were not enthusiastic proponents of the value of unions. Some had not kept up their membership, after moving from their previous job. Some had moved around so often, it was difficult for the union to keep track of where they were. The Commonwealth Public Service Union attracted most criticism (54.6 per cent of the few who had been members rating it poor or useless). The Media, Entertainment and Arts Alliance came in for the most emphatic criticism (8.4 per cent calling it poor and 44.5 per cent useless). Only 12 advisers had some acquaintance with the Public Relations Institute of Australia; 41.6 per cent of them thought it poor or useless.

In some professions, the union is a useful point of contact when gaining a position in the field, supporting the member educationally or if a dispute arises with the member's employer. Generally, when it came to advice, media advisers did not think of their unions as useful. They commented that they needed to work closely with their boss (that was the main point of being an adviser) and a union might just get in the way. They couldn't go on strike, even if everyone else in the union was on strike; they couldn't really get the union to intervene in a dispute with their minister, not if they wanted to keep their job:

Table 2.9 Professional support: usefulness of unions to advisers

'How useful have you found membership of unions and professional organisations?'

	MEAA Per cent	PRIA Per cent	CPSU Per cent	Other unions Per cent
Very useful	11.8	0.0	9.1	12.0
Useful	11.8	33.3	27.3	40.0
Fair	23.5	25.0	9.1	16.0
Poor	8.4	33.3	36.4	16.0
Useless	44.5	8.3	18.2	16.0

Percentages
add vertically

n=119

n=12

n=11

n=25

Advisers in the Keating government said they looked for advice to David Epstein, head of the Ministerial Media Liaison Unit. Epstein was the key person there from 1990 to 1996 – a long term, since advisers usually come and go quickly. But by 1996 the Labor Government was not so volatile, in power in the national parliament since 1983. He claimed that the shelf life of a political adviser used to be nine to 12 months: "After that they started to go off – it's a very stressful job and there's a high burn-out rate. I've seen two nervous breakdowns and two near things. But this government is quite long-lived in ALP terms."

A short period as an adviser in a minister's office was useful for those who wanted to stay in the public service; a long stint in politics might impede their progress if they were intent on a departmental career:

As a career public servant it doesn't do to get out of the mainstream for too long – if you are seen to be politicised it will adversely affect promotion. But being here for 18 months or so is fine. You get a range of experiences [as a ministerial adviser] and a variety of contacts you wouldn't get in a department until you reached the most senior levels. You get an insight into what happens to policy at the political end. You get a much more real sense of what community perceptions are. All of these things are to your advantage when you return to your department, and the department heads recognise it (Labor staffer, 1983, quoted in J. Walter, 1986: 184).

In the years since the author's first survey in 1995, the rate of change in federal government departments and the turnover in ministerial offices has increased. There is some evidence to show that federally, Labor's long stay in power from 1983 to 1996 caused many media advisers to stay in their minister's office for more months and years than those advisers in the Howard ministry from 1996 to 2001. (See Chapter 3, tables 3.6 and 3.7 showing turnover in advisers in the Keating and Howard ministries.) Part of the reason could be the early 1990s recession in the Australian economy, when it was more difficult to find other employment in public relations or journalism than 10 years later, when the Australian economy is relatively strong.

Media advisers tend to become exhausted quickly, whether in government or opposition, particularly if their minister's portfolio was in the spotlight, or the minister himself (or herself) was not performing well:

Advisers cop a lot from their minister. The tensions are much greater than in journalism. Ministers are under enormous pressure to perform and to be seen to be performing. If the media adviser starts to lose the wavelength of the minister, it's time for him or her to move on (Gary Quinlan).

On the other hand, the dangers were as great if the adviser got on too well with the minister and became romantically involved. The attraction for young women of working for older, powerful men could be a trap:

It helps to be youngish, single and without a family. You need to stay professional and not develop liaisons, especially not within the office, the media or politics. People would have a hold on you and I wouldn't like that. Canberra is a great place for gossip; you're in a high-profile job and word would soon get out if you started, say, dating the minister (Sally Rowe).

In interviews, several cases of ministers employing attractive, personable and seemingly intelligent advisers and later dating them, developing a liaison,

were mentioned. The fact that the ministers were already married did not seem to stop either party – propinquity and distance from home were cited as factors, also the attraction of power. Liaisons caused tension sometimes in the ministerial office, especially if improprieties over use of ministerial expenses were suspected. In the 1990s, three Queensland ministers had to face the Independent Commission Against Corruption there because of misuse of expenses and feathering of “love nests” (see Chapter 5). One adviser in another State took his minister aside and warned him frankly of the dangers of pursuing a liaison and suggested he return to his wife, if he wanted to have a long and happy career in politics. The adviser expected to be punched in the mouth or sacked for his trouble, but to his surprise the minister agreed and gloomily strode from the room, later breaking off the affair.

The fact that now there are many more women serving as media advisers, and men working for women ministers, is not a problem: most ministers are wise enough to be at least circumspect in their affairs. But there will always be a few politicians who will bonk around, no matter what their minders advise. They usually realise quickly that it is not sensible to bonk their office staff! (Dr Stephen Stockwell).

Advisers liked the camaraderie of the ministerial office where people worked as a team, more so than in broadcasting studios and newspaper offices:

Unlike journalism, there are no competing egos, not the back-stabbing you often see in newsrooms. This is more like being part of a family. Women have equal input, unlike most media offices where the men tend to dominate (Lisa Brett).

In Canberra, where media from almost every Australian city are represented, also international media, the pressures were greater than in state capitals.

The pressures were endurable only through office teamwork:

This office is great for working as a team. The hours are long, you are on call virtually 24 hours a day, thanks to the mobile phone and pager. The quietest times are Sunday afternoon and Tuesday morning. The key is, don't start panicking (Sally Rowe, Canberra, 1995).

The teamwork was particularly noticeable in states such as Victoria under Premier Jeff Kennett where all advisers worked out of the one office and most had a journalism background. For some, the job was so satisfying, with every

day a different challenge, that they stayed on for more than one ministerial master. Few survived for three different leaders:

I'm a former journalist who has served three Liberal Party leaders. I've been working for the Liberals since 1988 (Nick Maher, in 1996 Victorian Cabinet Press Secretary).

Where things were going well, the job was easier. A pattern developed and advisers built up a close relationship with their employer. Not all felt they had to move on after a few short months or years:

I'm the longest-serving WA media secretary. I was Sir Charles Court's press secretary for 10 years from 1977 – the former Liberal leader was Premier for more than 20 years. I worked for Ray O'Connor and Bill Hassell for 18 months when they were in opposition. I managed a public relations firm [in between politics] (Hugh Ryan, in 1996 Media Secretary to Western Australia's Minister for Finance, Racing & Gaming Max Evans).

It was possible for an adviser to be recognised as highly skilled at her job and for that professionalism to transcend party politics:

Four media secretaries from the Labor Government were kept on by the Liberal Government of Richard Court when it won office in 1993. I was one of them – I worked for one of Carmen Lawrence's Ministers for six months but was not in the Labor Party and not ideologically committed to any party (Caroline Lacy).

For most, 18 months to three years was enough. After that, they wanted a life of their own where they were not on 24-hour call. These two interviews in Melbourne were among the many stressing this point:

Serena Williams, in 1996 a Victorian Cabinet press secretary, said, "I like the pay and the challenge but the long hours are a problem." Her colleague, Anne Stanford, said, "I enjoy the work but it cuts into one's social life. At first we had a hard time here. We had some difficult decisions to announce and we worked very late into the night."

A few advisers saw their minister as less than competent and ended up making decisions for them on occasion:

There is a danger in that, but they've got to remember that they are there as a hired mouthpiece, not as a person who exerts any power. They mustn't start thinking they are the elected member (former press secretary Nigel Starck, in Church, 1995).

For some advisers, the main satisfaction came from a love of politics. They gravitated naturally into the political sphere from having politicians in their family: for instance, Bruce Mills, the senior adviser in 1997 to Mick Veivers, Queensland Minister for Emergency Services and Sport: "There are a lot of politicians in my family. My father was branch president of the National Party for many years. I spent 20 years in rural journalism. In 1983 I was adviser and election campaign strategist to John Sharp, National Party candidate for the seat of Gilmour, then a marginal Labor seat. Sharp won that election with my help, then hung on at subsequent elections."

Scott Sturgess, in 1997 senior policy adviser to Howard Hobbs, Queensland Minister for Natural Resources, also got a lot of satisfaction from his involvement in politics: "I chaired my Liberal Party branch and stood for election in Cairns, representing the seat of Malgrave in 1992-93. Then I came to Brisbane as executive officer of Queensland Landcare – boring work; after one year I was jack of it. Politics is much more interesting."

Joe Veraa, in 1997 media and policy adviser to Tom Barton, then Queensland Shadow Minister for Police and Corrective Services, was also there because he revelled in politics: "I'm looking for a career path in politics but so far the ideal long-term job has eluded me. When Labor was in power, I worked for Deputy Premier Tom Burns for four years. I once ran for Mayor of Logan City, gaining 10,000 votes but I missed out by 340 votes."

The margin between success and failure – a secure job for three to four years and a spell out of work, or working much harder in opposition – might only be a few votes. The short-term nature of the position was accepted but a definite cause for frustration: a few advisers were just getting the hang of the job when they or their minister came to grief. There was no assured career path and few people to turn to for advice when things went wrong.

EXITS

Media advising is a high-turnover job. Why do they get out and where do they go? After a short time advising the top players in government, most advisers decide that they will wear out if they stay too close to the wheel of power for too long. They think about their next career move. Since advisers are usually hired for the life of the parliament (four years, three years or a shorter term), in the first year they are settling into the job. In the second year, many are already contemplating their exits, applying for and arranging positions for the next stage of their careers. They meet a range of interesting and persuasive people not directly connected with politics – people coming to see the minister about a project they are planning or some concession they want the government to provide. Sometimes, helpful advisers are rewarded with public relations roles in the company.

There are notable transitions to roles in and out of politics – for instance, Bob Debus, was once an ABC Radio executive and later a media adviser; he is now the New South Wales Attorney-General, Minister for the Environment and Emergency Services. South Australia's Mike Rann was once a journalist and media secretary to former Labor Premier John Bannon, and is now Premier. Jeannie Ferris, a State Liberal minister's chief of staff who combined the duties of policy adviser with those of media secretary, is now a Senator representing South Australia in the Federal Parliament. Ferris, in 1995 chief of staff to South Australian Minister Dale Baker, was one senior adviser who was not content to stay a backroom adviser: she had been preselected for a winnable spot on the Coalition's federal Senate team at the next election. She had more political experience than most. In Canberra she was lobbyist for the National Farmers Federation, then media adviser for then shadow Minister for Industry and Commerce, Ian McLachlan. Early in 1994 she began working for Dale Baker. For her, Baker combined the duties of media and policy advice. She ran the office and had a staff of 10, some recruited from the department and some appointed by the Minister. Radio and television had

an insatiable appetite, she said: "We are the animal trainers and feeders in this zoo of media and politics. Sometimes we have to get in the cage with the lions. Media advising is an excellent training ground for politics. Chiefs of staff make good candidates; the previous person in my job is now a state Member of Parliament."

She said she had to be aware of everything the Minister is handling and be able to do his job, especially when he was not in the office. Media advisers often complained that they didn't know what was going on or that their minister didn't. It shouldn't be that way, she commented. The work was good training for the Senate: "You have to be constantly seeing what's coming across the horizon and this is where intuition becomes important. You need to see something before it hits, not after."

Other media advisers from all sides of politics have returned to pick up their careers in their former job, but not so often in journalism, once they have finished their stint in ministerial offices. Sometimes they move on to careers in public relations or advocacy.

I was dazzled by being so close to power. I wouldn't have missed those years for anything. I got to go to South Africa with Menzies and spent nine days sailing back with him. Going back to journalism was an anticlimax (Stewart Cockburn).

After being ordered to bed for three weeks, Cockburn took up the less strenuous job of feature writer on *The Advertiser*, Adelaide.

A pattern has developed where women drop out of ministerial advising (or are forced out or not reappointed) when they begin to have children.

Although not specifically questioned about their family, only two women mentioned their children during interviews. One former adviser, interviewed at home in the suburbs, was bitter that she was not reappointed as media adviser after an election, when she was ready to take up the job again and her former minister was re-elected: "One child to be cared for should not bar me from the work I love doing. My husband is helping look

after our baby." There was no legal redress as she was employed only for the term of the government.

Most advisers regarded the position as a short-term one. The contacts helped greatly, later in their career:

There is life after politics. When I was 30 I went into public relations – I was looking for security. Soon we opened an office in Sydney. We've grown steadily and now we have the largest public relations business in Adelaide (Darryl Warren).

Many of the advisers interviewed had been only a short time in the position but were already contemplating their exit. Some would have their departure forced on them by their party losing the next election or by their minister falling from grace. Some wanted to just have a break or return to study:

I won't stay on here if we win the next elections. I'm only 25 and too young to feel tired all the time. Win or lose next elections, I'll quit (Carolyn Betts).

Illness brought on by the stress of the job sometimes forced media advisers to seek a quieter life. Stewart Cockburn was told by his doctor to spend three months in bed:

When Parliament was sitting, I used to stay until the end of the sittings. It was a seven-day-a-week job. Deputy Prime Minister Artie Fadden christened me Atlas – he said I seemed to have the whole government on my shoulders.

Cockburn went to see Keith Murdoch: "I told him I needed to be back in journalism. I went back to South Australia and took up the less strenuous job of feature writer on *The Advertiser*. I would never have come back but for the health problem."

I must hang in here for the last 12 months – I can't jump ship and leave the minister and the government in the lurch. But after this job, I might go back into journalism or multimedia (Bob Bowden).

Most tended to see their job as apolitical, not likely to jeopardise employment back in journalism or elsewhere:

Kim Wheatley: "Returning to mainstream news media shouldn't be a

problem. I'm not in a position of power and shouldn't be tainted by my time with the government. Later I'd like to work in serious journalism such as for *The Bulletin* or *The Australian Financial Review*."

Jim Bonner: "I'm not a party hack and so expect few problems in later employment – I'm not tainted because I've worked for the Liberals. Once you've worked on the side of the Government and return to the media you bring an added level of analysis to the job of political reporting. And you have a much wider circle of contacts."

If you're a true believer (an avid party supporter) you can't do your job properly (Church, 1995).

This is why most advisers feel that the role is apolitical to a great extent and seen as such by future employers, especially if the adviser has been only a short time in the job.

A pattern has developed where women drop out of ministerial advising (or are forced out or not reappointed) when they begin to have children. Although not specifically questioned about their family, only two women mentioned their children during interviews. One former adviser, interviewed at home in the suburbs, was bitter that she was not reappointed as media adviser after an election, when she was ready to take up the job again and her former minister was re-elected: "One child to be cared for should not bar me from the work I love doing. My husband is helping look after our baby." There was no legal redress as she was employed only for the term of the government.

For other women and some men, going back to the shift-work and lower pay of newspapers, radio or television held no appeal. These were a few of the main reasons:

Lisa Brett: "I'm tired of journalism – I would like to write books later from

home. I've done freelance work before and could do so again."

Suzanne Irvine: "Every seven years I like to take a year off from media work. It helps keep me in touch with what's real. Seven years ago, I did child care work for a year."

John Austin: "I'm not keen to get back into the media as a reporter after this. I'd rather work in corporate public relations."

Gary Stubbs: "I'm keen to move on to policy adviser. Corporate public relations is good and I'd like to go back to that some time, if the company has enough resources to pay me well."

Why did relatively few advisers say they would like to go back to journalism? That profession is, according to Edmund Burke, the fourth estate (the bishops were the first, then the lords temporal and the commons) – it is part of the machinery of government (Whale, 1972: 106). The news media almost by definition are set up to interrogate, expose, throw light on matters those involved would sometimes leave hidden. This can be an extremely negative pursuit – not often building up, sometimes tearing down political parties and players. Advisers tended to agree that this was how it should be, but after a period working for the government, they were not so ready to return to an opposing role, even if as critics they would be still a key part of society's decision-making process:

The idea that journalists are a part of government make a number of politicians uneasy – particularly politicians whose sayings and doings are excluded from journalistic reports, or reported with unfavourable comment. Both exclusion and comment are a criticism. The politician denounces the critic as self-appointed. The denunciation is not wholly fair (ibid.: 106).

Whale was making the point that journalists work for an organ which the reader, listener or viewer has chosen, even if from a limited selection; although 40 000 people voted for the MP, he or she was selected as part of an equally narrow choice. So the media can claim to represent their

constituency, just as politicians do. But having worked for a time for the government, some advisers say they could not go back to their former life as a journalist, where for most of the time he or she would be part of the system's most effective opposition. So where were they looking for future employment?

Bruce Mills: "I'd find it almost impossible to go back to mainstream media now . . . I'd love to get into trouble-shooting for a large firm. A job at BHP would be less demanding [than here]. I could promote McDonalds – I eat there. I could work for a brewery. But I couldn't work for a cigarette company. I used to smoke 100 a day and I've had two operations on my throat."

Rudolph Teuwsen: "This job is a very interesting one but eventually I will want other challenges. I have some inclination for a political life but this would entail disruptions to my personal life. A second career path would be corporate public relations: a third, consulting work. I enjoy issues and crisis management. It would be interesting to do some research on the recycling of journalists and media people in Adelaide. I think there is too much of that!"

In the Australian states, some media advisers do go back to mainstream journalism. In Adelaide Tony Baker, for instance, the leader writer for *The Advertiser*, used to be Don Dunstan's media adviser. David Mitchell, the news chief at Channel 7, used to be John Bannon's media secretary. Alex Kennedy, the journalist and political commentator, is a former media adviser. Others go into public relations consultancy work: Peter Baker, a director of Michels Warren, worked as a media adviser for both Liberal and Labor state governments.

Exits from media advising were varied but occasionally they were back to political journalism, often into public relations or lobbying and in one or two cases to academia. Cases of translation to policy advising or to a bid for an

elected political position were rare but the media job was considered to be good training for such a career move.

A few advisers have made spectacular exits, hitting the headlines in the process. Andrew Kilvert, media adviser to Clare Martin, now Northern Territory Chief Minister, finished as a government media adviser on March 8, 2002, after falling out with one of the Chief Minister's close advisers. Kilvert handed in his parliamentary electronic all-areas access card that day, then went out drinking with his partner. They returned through the Opposition foyer that night about 9pm and made the national papers in the following days for "having sex on the Speaker's chair" (Toohey, 2002: 7). Kilvert broke the convention that advisers should stay out of the headlines themselves, no doubt deciding he never wanted to be a media adviser again. The NT Opposition described the act as a "desecration at the high altar of our democracy" and was particularly upset that the pair had gained access through their offices.

Another who made the headlines on resignation from the media adviser role was Australian journalist Amanda Platell, former head of the British Conservative Party's media unit. She made a secret video diary revealing the highs and lows of the party's last disastrous election campaign, screened throughout Britain on Channel 4 as *Unspun: Amanda Platell's Secret Diary*:

Tory MPs were angry at what they saw as a breach of trust by someone so close to the party leader. Former Armed Forces minister Nicholas Soames said: "What she has done is a disgrace. It amounts to a grotesque betrayal to do this behind William Hague's back during the election campaign. It is absolutely outrageous" (G. Jones, 2001: 12).

Before her departure, Ms Platell had "reportedly stopped talking to whole sections of the press, prompting *The Times* to ask whether she is actually a liability for her side" (Walker, 2001: 8).

Media advisers caught up in federal coalition ministerial resignations included Penny Farnsworth, adviser to David Jull; Simon Troeth, adviser to Geoff Prosser; Adam Connolly, adviser to John Sharp, and Carmel Christensen,

adviser to Peter McGauran. As in most cases the incoming minister brings with him or her a new set of advisers, the old ones find themselves out of a job suddenly, move to another minister or have to return to their substantive positions in the public service. All they can do is get a framed copy of the most biting cartoons of their minister, to take with them as a souvenir of their time in Parliament House. Of the four advisers listed above, Penny Farnsworth found a new berth in parliament: as media adviser to the Assistant Treasurer, Senator Rod Kemp. Adam Connolly joined Tony O'Leary and David Gazard as media adviser to Prime Minister Howard, replacing Anthony Benschel.

For some, the job was so satisfying, with every day a different challenge, that they stayed on to serve more than one minister. Others needed to keep their ear to the ground, in case they were forced to make a quick exit from parliament. When John Brogden ousted Kerry Chikarovski on March 28, 2002, as New South Wales opposition leader, former Radio 2UE Sydney journalist Lance Northey was suddenly out of a job:

He'd been on the former opposition leader's staff for only a couple of weeks . . . within 10 minutes of the challenge being announced, on the blower to Northey was his former 2UE colleague, Justin Kelly. Kelly, no stranger to quick turn-around employment, having been press secretary to Police Commissioner Peter Ryan for the blink of an eye before taking up the news director's job at 2GB, proffered Northey a job at 2GB (McClymont, 2002: 18).

One adviser said she was very grateful to her minister for being chosen from the hundreds of applicants, even if, as appeared likely, the government in her state would be tossed out of office in six or nine months:

"This job has given me a wider vision of myself," she said. "I've been able to get journalists interested in some innovative policies, plus also a few rather mundane ones; inveigled them into attending some unusual photo opportunities. We've had so many crises in just the few months I've been here and I've been in the thick of devising a solution. I didn't think I was capable of working so hard for so long and I think it's been in a good cause, even if I've had to deal with some rather obnoxious and demanding people (not all of them

journalists, either). I've made some good friends and great contacts," she added. "I'll never forget this experience."

CONCLUSION

Media advising is a highly sought-after and well-paid job, with 200 applications for the one position being common. Seventy per cent are under age 40 and two thirds of them are male. This is a career at which women excel but they dislike the long hours. It seems unlikely that women will become the main force in media advising, as they are in public relations in most areas of business and non-profit work, until there are more women in the press galleries and state and federal ministries. The excitement of being close to power was the main satisfaction, with every day offering a different challenge. But despite higher pay than in journalism, the stress of being always on call was resented, also the loss of journalistic impartiality, always having to promote the government point of view.

Those entering media advising are better educated than most journalists – nearly three quarters of them have a university degree. They were often hired not only because of their educational qualifications but because they had met the minister and impressed with their ambition, their flair for the job, their ability to get along with others and with the minister. A few advisers had some previous association, via family (nepotism is not unknown in Australian ministerial offices) or party.

The post is becoming a recognised stepping stone to a better-paid career than journalism but the vocation is still without a clear professional vision of how it should be developing or of any long-term future in the role for its practitioners. Many advisers do see the link with public relations and contemplate either moving into that field after a short stay in the minister's office; a small number decide to return to journalism or the public service.

There have been notable transitions to a political career, but these are few in number. The fact that advisers move on quickly to other occupations in communication would indicate that they do feel the stress of the job, and the relatively high remuneration does not compensate them adequately for this in their eyes. But advisers (when asked to recount their work days) tended to emphasise the worst that could happen – the occasional dinner party interrupted, the need to carry their pager or mobile phone everywhere.

Most reported that the stresses were outweighed by the satisfactions in being part of the reins of government. They felt that the teamwork of the ministerial office was better than the competition and backstabbing that was an inevitable part in journalism.

Chapter 3

A Janus-faced job I – interaction with ministers and departments

Media advisers have to look both ways in their intermediary role as ministers' offsiders – outwards to the media, but also inwards to their direct employers: the government, minister and political leader – also to their immediate entourage, plus their counterparts in the public service, the departmental public relations and liaison officers. They need to keep a close relationship with them and with other ministerial advisers, to see that departmental promotions and media opportunities are timed so as not to clash, and to match the minister's own desire to maximise publicity. A few advisers (two per cent, according to the author's survey) come from the departments and will probably return to the public service after their current interlude. A few advisers help their minister in political party or electorate matters as well as handling media relations.

In this chapter the adviser's key relationships are explored: how they work with their minister and other ministers, with other ministerial office staff, with departments and statutory authorities and their public relations and ministerial liaison personnel. This side of the adviser's duties can be an open-ended role which takes up a quarter or more of his or her time, more than most wish as their main duty is to the media.

Survey data reveals the adviser's internal role as a generalist team member, also the special skills the adviser brings to the team, including the work of organising the minister's public performances. Advisers rated their influence with their own minister and assessed their relationship with departmental public relations staff. The survey brings to light information on advisers'

work patterns – how often they arranged such occasions as news conferences, other group briefings, social occasions, issued news releases, arranged or gave interviews, and placed items off the record. These themes were expanded in the 71 interviews.

THE KEY RELATIONSHIPS OF AN OPEN-ENDED ROLE

These include advisers' relationships with their minister and other ministers, with other staff in the ministerial team, with the minister's departments and especially with departmental public relations staff. As one adviser commented:

The ministers are all different – all have their own personalities. Sometimes the situation with the private secretary, the media secretary and the minister is so like the *Yes Minister* TV series it's amazing! (Caroline Lacy, in 1996 media secretary to Western Australia's Minister for Mines, Works, Services, Disability Services Kevin Minson).

Do ministers take advice readily from people usually a decade or two their junior? The evidence points to most ministers involving all their office staff on at least some decisions and calling on their expertise daily, whether or not they have the official designation of policy adviser:

It's fabulous being actively involved in the whole area of health. I take part in meetings deciding policy and in briefings where public relations strategy and media tactics are discussed. The minister appreciates another mind being involved (Peter Rice, in 1995 media secretary to South Australia's Minister for Health and Aboriginal Affairs Michael Armitage).

Media advisers are not usually members of the minister's political party and for this reason can be seen as sources of dispassionate advice, key members of a closely-knit team:

I've never before worked in such a close office. Some offices [in Parliament House] are different, not so close. There needs to be that rapport. The media advisers are often closest to the ministers. The minister becomes the other man in your life. You travel with the minister a lot, usually write the speeches (Carolyn Betts, in 1995 media adviser to Federal Minister for Environment, Sport & Territories Senator John Faulkner).

The author's survey asked (question 16), how influential advisers felt with their minister. A range of responses from one ("very influential" to five ("not very influential") was provided for. Of the 150 responses to this question, 85 per cent circled "very influential" or "quite influential":

Table 3.1 How advisers rate their influence with own minister

'How influential with your minister do you see your role as adviser?'

Influence	Per cent
Very influential	36.9
Quite influential	48.3
Average	12.1
Sometimes/not very influential	2.7

n = 150

Influence (%)	Male	Fem.	20-29	30-39	40+	Media adviser	Policy adviser	Fed.	State	Party: L-NP	ALP
Very influential	40.0	30.0	28.1	37.0	42.2	33.6	48.5	44.6	29.5	35.2	38.5
Quite influential	45.0	54.0	46.9	47.9	48.9	49.1	42.4	48.2	50.0	47.9	48.7
Average	10.0	16.0	18.8	12.3	6.7	13.8	6.1	5.4	17.0	14.1	10.3
Sometimes/not very influential	5.0	0.0	6.3	2.8	2.2	3.5	3.0	1.8	3.4	2.8	2.6

Percentages add vertically

Whether the adviser was male or female did affect a little their self-assessment of influence with their minister (a greater percentage of men – 40 per cent of men, 30 per cent of women – saw themselves as very influential), but age was more important: older advisers (40+) were much more likely to consider themselves very influential. Federal advisers were much more likely than state advisers to claim they were very influential; likewise policy

advisers as against media advisers. Advisers to ministers in ALP governments were a little more sure of their influence than advisers to ministers in coalition governments.

The title of media adviser no longer fits the job description, according to the media group director for the Keating Federal Government:

The job title media adviser or media secretary is an outmoded work description – many media advisers are better described as ‘communications adviser’, a role better reflecting information exchange in a modern society (David Epstein, 1995).

Most advisers have a fascination with the spectacle of politics and the closeness to leading figures in state and federal politics. Being a backroom operative such as a media adviser or speechwriter is “the oddest of professions”, as Graham Freudenberg has said (he was speaking at a University of Sydney function, November 10, 2000, to commemorate 25 years since the dismissal of the Whitlam government). He began in politics as Labor Opposition Leader Arthur Calwell’s press secretary, 1961-66 but resigned in protest at the time the ALP federal executive was threatening to expel Whitlam from the party over a difference with it on state aid for private schools. Freudenberg spent a year back with a newspaper, then on the day Whitlam was elected leader, Freudenberg was appointed his press secretary and remained with him until Whitlam’s 1977 resignation on his electoral defeat, two years after the dismissal and anti-Labor landslide:

He was the talker-through with Whitlam of the continuing political stream. In working with Gough it was important not only to share his basic political outlook, but also to have a feeling for those things that were important to him, like history, opera . . . Graham had that. [He had] that empathetic warmth that makes the relationship work (Race Mathews, in Walter, 1986: 173).

Freudenberg’s was the hand behind the landmark speeches of the Whitlam era. From 1972 on, the press secretary “did maintain a role in press relations” but switched to being more a backroom adviser and speechwriter: “I wasn’t cut out for public life . . . I quite quickly decided that this sort of role, the backward role if you like, the advisory role, particularly with the element I

injected into it myself, namely the speechwriting element, was just what I was suited for" (ibid.: 172).

Many advisers come to realise that while they themselves do not wish to remain in a political party and fight for preselection, they do enjoy being a key part of government:

One of the best things about the work is being so close to power: it is a privilege to be so close to where decisions are made (Claire Tedeschi, in 1995 media adviser to Federal Minister for Administrative Services Frank Walker; now speechwriter to the Governor-General, Dr Peter Hollingworth).

Indeed, one former adviser who did decide to stand for parliament, left Whitlam's staff in 1972 and got elected to the House of Representatives, later regretted his decision to leave the prime ministerial office:

I just made an appalling mistake when I decided to go into federal parliament. I should have stayed on the staff. I would have been infinitely more useful as private secretary [to the Prime Minister] than I could ever have been as a backbencher (Race Mathews in Walter, op. cit.: 140).

Some advisers – more on the Labor side of politics than on the conservative side, according to those interviewed – do remain deeply committed to the ideals of the party and retain a strong sense of social justice despite now being in a very well-paid elite group. Like Freudenberg, they enjoy the challenge of helping build policy and translating it into stirring speeches:

What do I like most about the job? I love being part of the team developing strategy, packaging policies like products, being part of important decisions that are going to change lives. I love the speechwriting (Carolyn Betts, 1995).

The media advisers could and did turn to departments for information but those interviewed claimed communications advice and speechwriting as an important skill. They liked to show off their skill at making boring topics interesting to listeners in parliament, preferably interesting enough to rate a media mention. Claire Tedeschi said in 1995: "A lot of the work is not directly connected with the media but in the broader role of being a communications adviser. From time to time the job gets very busy, even

though my minister is not in the cabinet – there is quite an adrenalin rush then.” She added that writing was her primary skill: “writing and rewriting speeches on often boring topics, trying to make them come alive.”

Some including Walter (1986) have speculated that the basic difference between ministers and their minders is that while advisers share the need to be where the political action is, they deal with aggression and conflict in a different way, content to display their specialist expertise and not push egotistically for a place in the political limelight. The adviser’s role remains a subsidiary one, a role which takes delight in the minister’s success. The minder part of the job remains important and is part of the challenge:

Often it’s hard to contact all elected members, particularly this mob [National Party] as they are based in rural electorates and they spend a lot of their time there. Sometimes they go missing for days on end. You leave messages at the council, in the local shops, at the local paper and hope they make contact. Some ministers get into trouble on their own. They say something that sounds good and it ends up as part of the page one negative story (Peter Jackson, Perth, 1996).

Jackson added: “I enjoy being a media secretary. It’s not a depressing job.” Advisers sift through the papers and briefings that come the minister’s way, summarising and offering advice. They chase up further information and have the right range of contacts to turn up missing details quickly. Here those who have been journalists, knowing how to meet deadlines, knowing how to do speedy and accurate research, have an advantage:

They [advisers] will be expected to be informed devillers, with the skill to chase ideas through ‘ideas networks’ (research institutions, libraries, archives and other experts . . . Having marshalled information, they may be expected to be able to abstract themselves in order to think through debates and issues, and then to provide relevant commentary (Walter, op. cit.: 131).

Advisers are the minister’s news gatekeepers, leavening a huge inflow of information: the media monitors provide James Baker, in 2001 adviser to federal Trade Minister and National Party Deputy Leader Mark Vaile, with 30 or more news items each day. Then there are 80 or more emails and a flood of information from the department: “If the minister doesn’t get something

right, it comes back to you. We are the pace men and women. We bring our own perceptions to the task, leavening this inflow of information, offering up ideas.”

The adviser’s role includes the facilitator’s task of “making important links for a minister between bureaucracy, cabinet and party factions” (Walter, 1986: 130):

A private staff member can serve a leader as a sounding-board and confidante, a comrade on the leader’s side in battles with political peers and bureaucrats, perhaps a confidante in inside jokes that relieve the pressure of daily confrontations which elsewhere the politician must represent as serious (ibid.: 130).

Sometimes advisers represented ministers at meetings, speaking for the minister, being extra eyes and ears, sometimes “floating ideas outside the office to assess reactions without these being directly connected with the minister” (ibid.: 131). They could be in contact with the minister’s departments more often than the minister could, since the minister had many electorate, parliamentary and party duties. Advisers also have busy schedules: electronic mail has speeded the process of consultation with departments. They could keep tabs more easily on what departments were doing to implement government policies. An adviser who came from one of the minister’s departments was seen as a valuable asset in communicating more closely with the department, since he or she had formed friendships and be more likely to know what was really happening back on the home turf. But whether the adviser came from journalism or the public service, he or she needed to know who in the departments and authorities to reach for quick, reliable answers:

You need a direct link with the key decision-makers. In my career I’ve made it a rule not to ring the third person down the line but go straight to the top. Always contact the boss (Sally Rowe, in 1995 media adviser to Federal Minister for Defence Science & Personnel Gary Punch).

Other advisers also stressed that they needed to go to the chief executive in their quest for information, bypassing departmental public relations staff:

I have a close relationship with the department heads. This is necessary because crises can arise quite quickly. Yesterday one union called a stopwork meeting, for instance (Mark Williams, in 1995 media secretary to South Australia's Minister for Transport, the Arts & Status of Women Diana Laidlaw).

Advisers are expected to keep in touch with what is happening at a political level in the departmental area of expertise – in the minister's electorate, in his or her home state, and at national and international level in the department's field. They are also called upon to give a generalist's view on expert reports commissioned by the department that are sometimes not easily understood by ordinary people.

The thesis survey asked (question 17): "How would you describe your relationship with public relations staff in your minister's departments?"

The survey sought a range of answers from "very friendly", "friendly" and "OK", to "guarded" and "frosty". A total of 139 advisers responded to this question and 71 per cent replied "very friendly" or "friendly":

Table 3.2 How advisers assess their relationship with departmental public relations staff

'How would you describe your relationship with public relations staff in your minister's departments?'

Relationship	Per cent
Very friendly	29.5
Friendly	41.0
OK	24.5
Guarded/frosty	5.0

n = 139

Influence	Male %	Fem. %	20-29 %	30-39 %	40+ %	Media adviser	Policy adviser	Fed.	State	Party: L-NP	ALP
Very friendly	30.1	28.3	34.4	27.1	30.0	32.1	20.0	30.8	27.1	30.7	28.8
Friendly	41.9	39.1	41.4	38.6	45.0	40.4	43.3	44.2	42.0	38.5	42.5
OK	22.6	28.3	20.7	25.7	25.0	21.1	36.7	21.2	24.7	26.2	23.3
Guarded/frosty	5.4	4.3	3.4	8.6	0.0	6.4	0.0	3.8	6.2	4.6	5.5

Percentages add vertically

The younger the adviser, the greater his or her perception of a very friendly relationship with the department; also media advisers saw themselves on better terms (the reverse situation to that indicated in table 3.1, relationship with minister).

One reason for the friendly nature of the departmental relationships was the common background of most advisers and most departmental public relations officers in journalism. The departmental staff had much more permanency in employment and did not usually feel threatened by the advisers who were not looking to the departments for their future career. Similarly, departmental staff were not usually attracted to the stressful and

uncertain life of a media adviser in a ministerial office, even on short-term secondment. In general, the profile of ministerial media advisers and their career patterns were found to be far different from the profiles and career paths of public relations people in the bureaucracy. As ministerial aides they earned far in excess of what most departmental public relations officers could command. Advisers to ministers were:

... not just ordinary or regularly mobile individuals but people who have been catapulted into a position at the peak of a political pyramid. These are men on the make, who have positioned themselves strategically, to ensure that they will be at the right place at the right time (L. Seligman, in J. Walter, op. cit.: 114).

Often advisers came from well-connected, privileged backgrounds; they were young and highly educated, as reported in chapter 2, table 2.3. They willingly put up with much more stress and much longer work hours than their departmental colleagues. They usually had a mobile phone or beeper and were liable to be contacted by the media or their minister at almost any hour of day, night or weekend. Departmental public relations staff rarely took their work home with them in the evenings, rarely got interrupted by the media at breakfast or dinner, rarely had to take work messages at weekends. Except at times of crisis, at statutory authorities such as the Australian Broadcasting Corporation, where the author worked in journalism and public communication for 21 years, public relations staff rarely had to field queries from managers or media late at night or weekends.

Advisers are the "secret sharers" in modern politics, according to Walter (ibid.: 182), since the credit for what they do "should go to their political masters". Much the same holds true for departmental public relations officers: credit for what they do, the speeches they write, the solutions to communication problems they propound, will in most cases go to their minister or head of department. Some advisers have been credited with being the brains behind their minister. Allen Callaghan, press secretary to former Queensland Premier Joh Bjelke-Petersen of the National Party, "did such a good job that he was the man Labor and even Liberal politicians saw as

their main enemy”:

In 1974 the ALP leader of the Queensland opposition, Percy Tucker, criticised the premier for being propped up by ‘speech-writers and public relations men’ to such an extent that ‘the sort of things emitting from him are not his thoughts but those of others’ (Lunn, 1987: 109).

Many times, Bjelke-Petersen could not elaborate on what he’d announced the day before because the statement had not come from him at all. In the same way, Lance Barnard, Deputy Prime Minister and Defence Minister in the ALP Federal Government of Gough Whitlam, was believed to depend heavily on the team he gathered around him, despite the disapproval of senior departmental staff:

In the event of visible clashes between public service and ministerial staff personnel, the latter seemed to lose: for instance, in January 1973 Clem Lloyd, long a trusted ALP adviser and then press secretary to Defence Minister Lance Barnard, resigned after he had been excluded from a meeting with the British Defence Secretary on the instructions of the head of the Defence Department, Sir Arthur Tange (Walter, *op. cit.*: 56).

A new minister will sometimes inherit advisers from the previous incumbent and can be expected to take them on. In many cases he does but if the interaction is awkward, the minister will try to move the advisers on and recruit his own. This is easier if advisers come from departments and can return to their permanent position. Some ministers and their advisers don’t have a high opinion of the willingness of departments to do ministerial bidding:

I’m state secretary of the Queensland Consumers Association. This has given me a different perspective on issues to the bureaucrats. Public servants tend to promote what’s easier for their departments to administer, not what’s government policy or what’s best for the people. A lot take the attitude that governments come and go but departmental staff stay on forever (Joe Veraa, in 1997 media and policy adviser to Queensland’s Shadow Minister for Police & Corrective Services Tom Barton).

The adviser’s role includes attending to any area for which the minister has no time or inclination: the work could include evaluating a range of policy and media options, including the policies and tactics adopted by other state governments, the Federal Government and oppositions. In Australia on

many policy issues, governments and oppositions are quite close – policies espoused by governments and criticised by oppositions may be adopted when the rival party wins office:

Part of the adviser's job is analysing what the previous government did and putting out your minister's vision of how things will change. The strange thing is that Labor was moving down the same path of school-based management of education (Paul Turner, in 1997 senior media adviser to Queensland's Minister for Education Bob Quinn, National/Liberal Party).

The media adviser usually works closely with policy advisers and is qualified to provide information on how the media are likely to receive new policies and revisions of old ones:

Senior media advisers can be very useful to the minister as an alternative set of advisers to their policy gurus, people with their ear to the ground, to what the media and publics are saying about issues. The vast bulk of media advisers work in closely with policy advisers and a good rapport develops (David Epstein, in 1995 ministerial media group director for the Keating Federal Government).

Former advisers pointed out, however, that media advisers could on occasion offer the wrong advice, going outside their area of expertise:

Media relations jobs seem to have multiplied since I was in political communication. Some ministers are relying on their advisers for strategic advice – advice they are not always competent to give (Darryl Warren, press secretary to the Liberal Premier of South Australia Steele Hall 1968-70).

Most present-day media advisers interviewed did claim to advise on policy, especially on how it might be received by the media and voters:

In offering policy advice, one has to take account of the views of all groups: sometimes protest groups line up against big business. In this job you have to be aware of everything the Minister is handling and be able to do his job, especially when he's not here. Media advisers often complain that they don't know what's going on – or that their minister doesn't. It shouldn't be that way (Senator Jeannie Ferris, in 1995 chief of staff to South Australia's Minister for Mines, Energy & Primary Industries Dale Baker).

Part of the job of senior advisers was to organise the ministerial office efficiently and make sure that departments were running along the lines the minister wished, not the way that was most convenient for the bureaucracy. Ministers were elected to parliament on the basis of being skilled in electoral

politics. Few had been managers before reaching the government benches:

The idea that ministers can manage is a nonsense: none of them is trained to manage anything; they are not interested in it; they have got so many other things to do . . . if one is in business and has a non-executive chairman, one has a professional managing director (Sir Frank Cooper, in Bruce-Gardyne, 1986: 234).

The media adviser was one of an inner circle. Some saw their role, in part, as being the manager, memory and even conscience prompter of their ministers. Under pressure of day-to-politics, their employers were apt to forget party policy on matters, or overlook their own and their leader's previous responses on issues, or propose statements or courses of action likely to be impolitic or wrong in principle. But ministerial advising was a short-term job, for the term of the government only; those who thought short-term were also likely to overlook the medium-to-long-term ethical and other implications of decisions. The few advisers from the civil service had a longer period of expertise in the minister's portfolio than the minister did, with a longer-term view of the issues.

Sometimes advisers attended meetings on the minister's behalf, responding to inquiries, delivering statements or even appearing or being heard on air as spokesperson when the minister was not available or did not wish to put in a personal appearance. They acted as "extra eyes, ears and points of contact for the minister" (Walter, *op. cit.*: 131). Most media advisers contacted were highly educated but tend to be generalists, not usually technicians or experts. As detailed in chapter 2, 72 per cent of respondents to the survey had a university degree; including 20 per cent with a degree plus a postgraduate qualification. If they did not know the background to a policy or procedure, they knew how to get the answer quickly. They were expert communicators, most with wide general knowledge: they knew how to prepare news releases and the best time to release them; they could draft speeches, organise events, contact opinion makers and suggest the most effective ways of influencing public opinion.

Media advisers who were knowledgeable about the politics of the national electorate, inter- and intra-party conflict and the politics of the bureaucracy might graduate to the roles of policy adviser or chief of staff. Those well-versed in these matters went on to prove themselves “adept at assessing the changing ground of electorate opinion, of what the public will ‘wear’ and what polls mean, and these have become significant campaign strategists” (Walter, *op. cit.*: 132).

Advisers could move freely about the press gallery, finding out information on party attitudes and political conflict. They mingled easily with opposition staffers in the bars and dining rooms of parliament and around Canberra or other capitals. They became acquainted with the factional workings of their party and the internal politics of their minister’s department, sometimes of other departments too. They saw many more voters each week than a minister was able to, although if they were stuck in Canberra they absorbed a view of their thinking far different from people in the minister’s electorate. The ministerial office “is a support system responsive to the minister’s political imperatives and capable of leaving him/her free to act on them unencumbered by the housekeeping”:

A minister’s primary concern is to stay in power, and to ensure this he must pay attention to party factions, to the demands of the party generally, to his constituency, to the media, and so on. So the amount of time he devotes to his portfolio is probably less than 50 per cent . . . One of our multiple functions, an important one, is the efficient management of time – ensuring that the minister’s time is not wasted, and that his attention is focused on essentials (Labor staffer, 1983, *ibid.*: 144, 145).

The two most frequent duties were issuing news releases and arranging or giving interviews. These occasions were part of most days for most advisers. Placing items off record was the next most frequent activity, followed by arranging news conferences, as Table 3.3 on the next page shows:

Table 3.3 Advisers' work patterns*'If you arrange the following types of occasions, how often?'*

Occasion	Daily to weekly	Fort-nightly	Mon-thly	Less often
News conferences	46.0	15.8	18.7	19.4
Other briefings (groups)	36.9	18.1	18.1	26.8
Social occasions	14.8	7.4	23.0	54.8
Issuing news releases	88.1	6.3	1.4	4.2
Arranging/giving interviews	83.4	7.6	2.8	6.2
Placing items off record	54.6	15.6	9.9	19.9

n = 135-145: not all advisers responded to all items

Percentages add horizontally

Arrange news conferences:%	Male	Fem.	20-29	30-39	40+	Media advisers	Policy advisers	Fed.	State	Party: L-NP	ALP
Daily to weekly	49.9	38.8	50.0	47.8	37.5	48.3	31.8	37.3	50.6	50.0	43.2
Fortnightly	16.7	14.3	15.6	16.4	15.0	17.2	4.5	9.8	19.5	10.9	20.3
Monthly	15.6	24.5	21.9	16.4	20.0	19.8	13.8	31.4	11.4	18.8	17.6
Less often	17.8	22.4	12.5	19.4	27.5	14.7	49.9	21.6	18.4	20.3	18.9

n = 139

Percentages add vertically

A greater percentage of male advisers (50 per cent) arranged news conferences daily to weekly, compared with women advisers (39 per cent). The younger the adviser, the more often he or she was in charge of arranging frequent conferences. It was surprising that policy advisers had any news conference responsibilities but 32 per cent of them claimed to be involved, daily to

weekly. The survey (see previous page) found 51 per cent of state advisers arranged conferences daily to weekly, compared with 37 per cent of federal advisers. By party, 50 per cent of advisers working for coalition ministers arranged daily to weekly conferences, as against 43 per cent of Labor advisers.

Table 3.3 Advisers' work patterns, by how often they arrange occasions (continued)

Briefings of groups: %	Male	Fem.	20-29	30-39	40+	Media adviser	Policy adviser	Fed.	State	Party: L-NP	ALP
Daily to weekly	45.5	20.8	38.7	34.8	39.5	31.8	55.6	44.2	30.4	36.5	37.9
Fortnightly	13.3	27.1	29.0	13.0	18.4	20.9	7.4	15.4	7.6	19.0	17.6
Monthly	18.9	16.7	19.4	18.8	15.8	17.3	22.2	19.2	5.1	12.7	23.0
Less often	22.2	35.4	12.9	33.3	26.3	30.0	14.8	21.2	56.9	31.7	21.6

n = 138

Percentages add vertically

Social occasions: %	Male	Fem.	20-29	30-39	40+	Media adviser	Policy adviser	Fed.	State	Party: L-NP	ALP
Daily to weekly	9.1	19.1	22.6	12.1	5.3	13.1	11.1	17.0	9.8	14.5	11.1
Fortnightly	9.1	4.3	3.2	9.1	7.9	8.4	3.7	7.5	7.3	11.3	4.2
Monthly	22.7	23.4	41.9	21.2	10.5	26.2	7.4	13.2	29.3	16.1	29.2
Less often	53.2	59.1	32.3	57.5	76.3	52.4	77.8	62.3	53.7	58.3	55.6

n = 135

Percentages add vertically

Issuing news releases: %	Male	Fem.	20-29	30-39	40+	Media adviser	Policy adviser	Fed.	State	Party: L-NP	ALP
Daily to weekly	77.5	94.0	90.6	83.8	76.1	96.6	35.3	74.1	88.3	78.9	86.3
Fortnightly	6.9	4.0	6.3	5.4	6.5	1.7	20.6	12.1	2.1	9.9	2.5
Monthly	4.9	2.0	3.1	1.4	0.0	0.9	2.9	0.0	2.1	0.0	2.5
Less often	13.7	2.0	0.0	9.5	17.4	0.0	26.5	13.7	7.4	11.2	8.8

n = 143

Percentages add vertically

Table 3.3 Advisers' work patterns, by how often they arrange occasions (continued)

Interviews: %	Male	Fem.	20-29	30-39	40+	Media adviser	Policy adviser	Fed.	State	Party: L-NP	ALP
Daily to weekly	74.5	90.0	90.6	78.4	73.9	89.7	44.1	72.4	84.0	78.9	80.0
Fortnightly	7.8	6.0	0.0	9.5	8.7	6.8	8.8	8.6	6.4	5.6	8.8
Monthly	3.9	0.0	6.3	2.7	0.0	0.9	8.8	3.4	2.1	2.8	2.5
Less often	13.8	4.0	3.1	9.5	17.4	2.6	38.2	15.5	7.4	12.7	8.8

n = 145

Percentages add vertically

Placing items off the record	Male	Fem.	20-29	30-39	40+	Media adviser	Policy adviser	Fed.	State	Party: L-NP	ALP
Daily to weekly	55.9	40.0	50.0	56.8	41.3	58.1	26.5	56.9	46.8	50.7	50.0
Fortnightly	12.7	18.0	18.8	14.9	10.8	14.5	14.7	10.3	17.0	15.5	13.8
Monthly	13.7	14.0	9.4	9.5	8.6	7.7	14.7	6.9	10.6	9.9	8.8
Less often	21.8	28.8	21.9	19.0	39.3	19.7	44.1	25.8	25.5	23.9	27.5

n = 141

Percentages add vertically

Other briefings of groups and social occasions were arranged less frequently.

Table 3.3 analysis on the previous page shows that almost half – 46 per cent – of the male advisers were arranging daily to weekly briefings of groups, compared with only 21 per cent of the women. This was an activity that concerned 56 per cent of policy advisers daily to weekly, but only 32 per cent of media advisers. Federal advisers (44 per cent) were much more likely to arrange daily to weekly group briefings than state advisers.

In analysing advisers' organising of social occasions (see previous page), it was clear that there were marked discrepancies between genders age groups and , states versus Canberra. For instance, 19 per cent of female advisers were

likely to arrange social occasions daily to weekly, compared with only nine per cent of male advisers. The younger advisers were the more likely ones to be given the job of arranging social occasions daily to weekly: 23 per cent of the 20-29 group, compared with only five per cent of the 40 plus group. 17 per cent of federal advisers arranged social occasions daily to weekly, compared with only 10 per cent of state advisers. State advisers claimed that this was because Canberra has more federal money to socialise, also fewer social activities outside the parliamentary axis than in the state capitals.

In analysing the issuing of news releases (see Table 3.3 on page 97), all except policy advisers reported that this was a major activity: daily to weekly, for 91 per cent of women surveyed and 78 per cent of men; for younger advisers, 20-29 (91 per cent) more than for the 40 plus group (76 per cent); for more state advisers (88 per cent) than federal ones (74 per cent), and for more advisers with ALP ministers (86 per cent) than those with coalition ministers (79 per cent). When a news release has to be got out, the policy advisers get involved too. For 35 per cent of them, this is a daily to weekly activity. Only 26 per cent of policy advisers said they were involved in issuing news releases less often than monthly. "When the place is busy, the whole office has to knuckle down and help," one Canberra media adviser said: "Even our minister knows how to use our state-of-the-art photocopier!" Most ministers and parliamentary secretaries are familiar faces in the press galleries. They call in for interviews and have been known to distribute their own news releases when the media adviser was absent from the building on other duties, and no other staff member can be spared.

Arranging and giving interviews (see Table 3.3, previous page) is almost as important to most groups of advisers as issuing news releases. The lowest percentage in the daily to weekly activity category, 44 per cent, was for the policy advisers – and for 38 per cent of them, this was something that happened less often than monthly. The distribution was similar to that for

issuing news releases. The Phillipps interviews with advisers confirmed that this was an activity they enjoyed doing, on most occasions.

Placing items off the record (see Table 3.3 analysis, page 98) was a daily to weekly activity for 58 per cent of media advisers, 27 per cent of policy advisers and about half the advisers in other categories. One discrepancy was in gender: for 56 per cent of men this was a daily to weekly activity but for only 40 per cent of women. In cross-tabulation by age, the 30 to 39 group was prominent here, with 57 per cent of them admitting to placing items off the record daily to weekly, as against 50 per cent of their younger colleagues and only 41 per cent of their older ones. Canberra won the title of Australia's off-the-record capital: 57 per cent of federal advisers stated they placed items in this way daily to weekly, compared with 47 per cent of state-based advisers.

One survey surprise was in the amount of time policy advisers claimed to be involved with media liaison. Both roles overlapped in a busy office: a media adviser, for instance, could not be on duty 24 hours a day so it was inevitable that others in the office, including policy advisers, senior advisers and chiefs of staff, would from time to time have contact with the media.

An important duty was to read everything the press wrote about the minister and see that the broadcast media were monitored too. Ministers did not carry out their own monitoring; they relied on their staff to bring anything they needed to read to their attention. As the former ALP opposition leader said:

Time is a problem, as it takes a while to read a newspaper. The other side of it is particularly if you think you're under attack you do not want to leave yourself psychologically damaged, [as it's already] hard enough to face the day. You know full well that your minders are going to come in if there's something really important that you should read . . . you've got to channel your information in a way that doesn't deplete your performance, and newspapers don't actually fit into that (Kim Beazley, in FitzSimons, 1998: 441).

As well, depending on what their employer required, advisers might write speeches or at least prepare dot points to fill out an off-the-cuff speech; they

had to make sure their minister's policies and reasons for actions were understandable to the media and voters; they supervised junior media staff in larger offices and they planned travel and other arrangements to media and public meetings throughout the country and abroad. Most also fulfilled the functions of minder, shielding their ministers from any potential trouble, encouraging them and seeing that they had everything they needed to function effectively.

One adviser commented: "Prime ministers, premiers and their ministers are now all more active as public performers, regularly exposed to television, routinely caught up in providing off-the-cuff comments on radio news and talkback programs; interviewed at length in the daily newspapers. We must prepare them thoroughly for these encounters, even for what to say and how to behave in doorstep media hellos." Politics had become less about policies and more about the people implementing these policies: "Modern media exert a pressure to personalise" (Seymour-Ure, in Tumber, 2000: 160). Leaders had less privacy than they once did, since media advisers needed to make their ministers more interesting and accessible to the media:

While organised to protect an area of privacy around the chief executive, media management tends to eliminate the distinction between public and private. [It] . . . defines the private to fit a public image (ibid.: 161).

The chief executives of politics expect to have their media advisers accessible at almost all times of the day and night. The politicians too should be reachable by their advisers at any time, as Campbell-Fraser explains:

When I joined [former West Australian Premier] Peter Dowding, I outlined two principles to him that I stuck by:

- first, never ask me to lie to the media – my own credibility is important to me
- second, I must have direct access to you when and where I want it, not when you want it.

He agreed with these rules. I prefer to put out a campfire, not a bushfire (Colin Campbell-Fraser, interviewed in Perth, September 2000).

To some media advisers interviewed, managing issues and helping in the

process of policy formation was much more interesting and challenging than the routine of contact with political journalists:

Media advising is just a component of the job. Giving policy advice is more important. Days can go by when I have nothing to do with the media. I enjoy managing issues and crises (John Austin, in 1997 senior media adviser to Queensland's Minister for Economic Development & Trade Doug Slack).

Advisers treasured the non-media behind-the-scenes activity of the job and the only time they became disillusioned and unhappy was when there was severe tension within government ranks. Leadership challenges and ministerial shake-ups were among the most difficult times. Jostling for power within the party is a difficult situation for any adviser to handle. They could do little more than offer sound advice from the sidelines and seek to expose weaknesses in the opponent's position:

You can spot a wounded minister, everyone can. A smell goes through the place. With Bob Hawke, one faction of the party was determined to get him. This is relatively unusual in the Labor Party, more common in the Liberals. Wherever you come from in politics, you realise that if the other side has a skeleton in the cupboards, you must uncover it. That's part of the game (Bob Bowden, 1995).

The experienced adviser became more aware of the importance of studying and questioning people's motives. All parties placed great stress on the need for unity but at times of leadership challenge this was difficult to achieve.

In this job you need to understand the reasons why people behave the way they do. Unity is important and the ALP has been going through some internal haemorrhaging for some time. Disunity in the ALP was one of the reasons the Liberal-National coalition had 23 years in power with a clear but diminished majority over time. There were tremendous upheavals which should have swept us to power earlier (Gary Quinlan, 1995).

Advisers as a group tended to respect and value honesty in the office team and in their employer, but honest politicians were not always the most successful ones:

Steele Hall was one of life's honest politicians. He eventually lost office [in 1970] because of his honesty over the water supply issue. He thought the proposed Dartmouth Dam would be the best option for the [Murray] River. But Dunstan campaigned for Chowilla. When elected, Dunstan ratified the Dartmouth agreement. This illustrated for me the cynicism of politics (Darryl Warren, 1995).

In his autobiography *Whatever It Takes*, former Senator Graham Richardson was candid about the grubby manoeuvres in which he was involved during his time as a minister – he claimed at the launch of his book in 1994 that the Westminster system requires ministers to tell lies. Former Finance Minister Peter Walsh denied this (Walsh, 1995: 277) and claimed Richardson and his former leader, Bob Hawke, were “careless about facts”.

The great advantage of travel was to get away from any backroom plotting and see the larger picture. When the minister travelled within Australia or abroad, the media adviser as minder accompanied him or her and was the key part of the “fix-it” team if things went wrong:

I've been in some strange situations with ministers and premiers, but none more stressful than when I was travelling with Ray O'Connor, his wife and 12-year-old son. We were in Italy, bound for Korea and due to change planes in Bangkok. We were sitting in Rome airport that Sunday morning, watching the time go by and realising the schedule was shot to pieces.

Ray said, “Fix it, Hugh!” I had to get a message to Korea that we would be late for dinner. This was in the days before faxes and mobile phones. The Qantas office was shut. But eventually I found a Qantas guy who sent a telex off to Perth explaining the situation. Perth was to relay the message to Korea and also try for a different connection in Bangkok. Fortunately all the messages got through and at 9.30 that night in Seoul we got the red carpet treatment (Hugh Ryan, 1996).

Advisers claimed they could meet any eventuality and potential crisis but few actually rehearsed crisis scenarios with their employer, apart from media ones. Few rehearsed scenarios or proactively explored current issues for potential crises, as did the advisers in industrial relations portfolios:

My minister's previous portfolio was Industrial Relations. That was a particularly volatile scene. You had to be on a war footing on the industrial front, tracking what they were saying and giving radio station interviews every morning (Gary Quinlan, in 1995 senior adviser to Federal Minister for Trade, Senator Cook).

Some media advisers claimed that in their demanding jobs they have no free time to get involved in crisis planning but for Quinlan, it was just part of the range of tasks to be done. Others tended to be more reactive than they wished. Demonstrations within Australia that they had covered as journalists were mostly tame affairs but they realised the potential for

violence. In the past, Australian security provisions were woeful:

One guard on duty on the 11th floor used to fall asleep – he never had anything to do. We never had any threats against us. I came to realise later how many lunatics there are in society. Security then in Adelaide [1970] was extremely lax. Once we were locked in when union workers occupied the top floor of our offices. Sometimes Parliament House was picketed (Nigel Starck, 1995).

The crises could be external ones, sometimes they came from within the minister's own party:

The first week I was with Prime Minister Malcolm Fraser's media unit [1980] the Qantas pilots went on strike. Against the advice of the industrial relations advisers, the RAAF was called in to bring back people from New Zealand. The ACTU and Cliff Dolan was making a lot of noise but nothing came of their bluster. We had other crises to deal with – a leadership challenge by Andrew Peacock, for instance, a challenge which failed; also the activities of the Razor Gang when government spending had to be cut hard. An election was called; Fraser got back, against the odds (Jim Bonner, 1995).

In interviews, advisers commented that one thing they enjoyed about the work was its unpredictability: they never knew exactly what the new day would bring, what challenges to be overcome, what opportunities to be exploited. There were office routines which became more hectic when parliament was sitting, or an election was looming. But there was an amazing degree of different ways these days for ministers to get their message across – or, for that matter, get into trouble. Politics as played in Australian parliaments "encouraged the exaggeration of difference" (Tiffen, in Tumber, 2000: 192): "a constant search for publicity and for partisan point-scoring" which "lends itself to posturing and shadow play". This competition for publicity put a lot of responsibility on media advisers to keep coming up with new ideas for winning the hearts and minds of voters, also for denigrating opponents.

ORCHESTRATING OCCASIONS

The media adviser is the behind-the-scenes conductor and prompter for the minister's public performances in parliament and outside it. The job has elements of a fixer – in the sense of improving and embellishing, making things work, even if the minister is a poor performer in some situations. The adviser is called upon to highlight just how superior his party's policies are to those of the opponents; how much more wise, principled and personable are the ministers or shadow ministers. All this has to be done without drawing attention to the adviser's own efforts at making it all happen in the most newsworthy way. The shadow player must remain behind the curtain and it is the minister who must take the spotlight at all important occasions. Those who look off to one side may spot the media adviser close at hand, waiting in the wings as encourager, arranger and prompter, ready to intervene if called upon, a recorder and witness of what was said in case the minister wishes to dispute later the outcome of a media encounter. The adviser is quick to offer advice in a whispered aside.

One important function of the adviser was to help the minister rehearse answers to parliamentary questions with and without notice. Most of the information was provided by departments via their liaison officers, but the adviser may get involved in this task, contacting departments with problems in the information, coaching the minister on his or her reply in Parliament and the associated television appearance; even advising as to who would appear in the television image, seated behind the minister. During Question Time, advisers might be in the gallery, ready to give prearranged hand signals if the minister glanced up.

Before each Question Time in Parliament, we needed to feed our back-bench some information they could use in questions and in debate (Gary Quinlan, in 1995 senior adviser to Federal Minister for Trade, Senator Cook).

Governments had two significant advantages in Question Time: they could

organise their departments to provide plenty of information, and organise their own backbenchers to ask half the questions. Ministers could then plan their often long-winded replies to these “Dorothy Dixers” (so named after magazine lonely hearts columnist Dorothy Dix, said to have made up letters to respond to when the incoming mail was slow.

A minister will only use information which shows the government in the best possible light. Access to an unlimited supply of information is an advantage which applies regardless of which party holds office (Parker, 1990: 121).

Sometimes the ministers had so much data at their fingertips that it was hard to find the right answer among the mass of papers. Ministers had to be operating at their best for long periods, especially when one of their departments was under attack. Advisers could coach their minister and arrange to rehearse the business of having an appropriate answer ready. Question Time is the new minister’s first major parliamentary ordeal: “It is, perhaps, a little like one of those ritual canings by headmasters which used to be a hazard of public-school life, in that the experience is a great deal less alarming than the preparations. Even so, things can and do go wrong,” as a former British Minister for Finance, pointed out:

The truth is that a ready grasp of a handful of statistics designed to show how splendidly the government is doing, and how wretchedly the opposition did when they were running things, will usually see you through more effectively than all the laboriously prepared answers to all eventualities in the folders. The right one can all too easily be overlooked in the heat of the moment (Bruce-Gardyne, 1986: 132).

Back in 1946, ABC journalist and Canberra reporter Warren Denning wrote, “Parliament is not primarily a vaudeville stage for slapstick amusement though sometimes it may resemble one.” There, sincere people “come together to deal with the nation’s affairs reasonably, intelligently and durably: not for the sake of amusement, though some may achieve it; not for the sake of heroics, though some would make you think so” (Denning, 1946: 115). The 56 years since Denning’s book have seen the focus shift much further to entertaining the audience, whether in television programs about parliament or in newspaper columns on politics. Advisers often helped their minister

find an entertaining peg on which to base a story, reminding them of how interested political reporters were in the drama and human conflict of parliament, not so much in the outlining of policies. Not all government business could be made to sound exciting but the media advisers did their best to drum up interest in their minister's activities.

Some media secretaries have problems with ministers who won't listen to advice. And sometimes a section of the media will be completely uninterested in what your minister is doing, won't discuss the issues of commercial trade for instance, or small business. So you have a challenge to make an issue interesting, highlight a problem or a division in the opposition. The media have a fascination with conflict. But government policy is not usually about conflict (Peter Jackson, in 1996 media secretary to Western Australia's Deputy Premier and Minister for Commerce, Trade and Small Business Hendy Cowan).

Advisers developed a wide range of contacts in institutions with an interest in the minister's portfolios. They prepared the minister for speeches, researching who was likely to be in the audience and what their sensitivities were likely to be. They studied the level at which the speech was to be pitched and whether the function was such that overtly political messages would not be well received. No matter how thorough the preparation, mistakes could often be made in the delivery. Sometimes all the media adviser could do was to suppress a laugh:

When I first came to the media secretary job, I probably expected the ministers to be less human than they are. They are just as capable of making mistakes as most of us. I remember one breakfast meeting with the media when a minister had to announce a major overhaul and review. He slipped when getting to his feet and fell face down into the scrambled eggs! (Caroline Lacy, 1996).

Apart from the usual round of media relations and managing the office, another part of the job from time to time was organising special events, including royal tours, security checks and on-site visits for ministers and other dignitaries:

I've had quite a varied career in media advising. I've organised 14 or 15 royal visits and visits of other VIPs such as the Pope, run the media side of anti-terrorist exercises, ran the 150th jubilee in Adelaide and 130 towns and cities throughout the state and organised a huge number of on-site news conferences. Dunstan liked them; they were a little novel then. He liked to get out of the briefing room and be seen among the people (Tony O'Reilly, 1995).

The fact that an appearance at an event might draw demonstrators was no

reason to rule it out, said former Victorian Premier's press secretary Kevin Balshaw. Sometimes the seeming likelihood of rowdy or hostile participants could be turned to Kennett's advantage and make for exciting television coverage:

An event may draw protests and demonstrators but this possibility is not necessarily a reason for ruling out the participation of the Premier. For instance, the opening of the Melbourne Exhibition Centre worked well, as did the Albert Park Motor Racing Circuit. These were very successful, despite the presence of some demonstrators. (Balshaw, Melbourne, 1996).

Important events needed to be staged at regular intervals. If government news was not forthcoming, journalists would hunt around for other news sources, so timing of releases by advisers was crucial to their success or otherwise. Balshaw added:

We have to watch the timing of events and announcements. Leaders have a tendency to accept more engagements than they can fit comfortably in the one day. They are often overloaded. Sometimes the Premier is asked to attend events but really it's not worth his time being there.

The business of organising special events could have its comical side. One media adviser who did not want to be named recalled an international conference in Sydney put on by a statutory authority. The end of the financial year was coming up, with more money left in the publicity budget than the public affairs manager wished and no possibility of it being carried over to next financial year. "I was there because my minister was to give the opening address. The public affairs guy got a skywriter to put a big welcome to the minister, opposition shadow minister and delegates in the air above the Opera House: the conference slogan, I think. He was delighted when the day dawned fine. The plane was on schedule. But at 10am, conference opening time, a strong wind sprung up and blew the words away over the city before most delegates had time to notice them! I saw the disappointment on his face and ribbed him about his novel way of literally blowing the budget." The minister and opposition rival didn't notice and no questions were ever asked about it in the House, the adviser said. Despite his fears, the statutory authority's public affairs manager was able to enjoy the same publicity budget in the coming year as in the previous one, plus 10 per cent for inflation.

CONCLUSION

It takes a special kind of personality to be a shadow player, a team-focused person close to power yet not letting it overpower him or her. These people were found to be obsessive minders and organisers behind the scenes; on call at all hours yet able to think through the best solutions to issues and crises. They were willing to be self-effacing in public, shunning the glory of the journalist's by-line because their best work is done by keeping the spotlight on the minister. They had to be able to handle the temptations that come through being close to high office, whether it be lavish entertaining or the sudden transition to a very high salary for their age.

Media advisers as a group spent up to a quarter of their time, or more, focusing on matters other than media relations. They orchestrated a wide range of activities, from security, issues and crisis management to organising such affairs as papal and royal visits, breakfasts, travel (usually accompanying their minister on intra- and interstate and overseas trips); they liaised with departments and authorities and had to be on good terms with the departmental heads and officers in the departments and authorities. Advisers worked close to power and enjoyed the experience. They paid attention to the policy agenda and influenced it, particularly when it came to offering advice as to how government policies would be received.

Advisers depended a great deal on material received from departments but most of those interviewed claimed to write or rewrite speeches and to rehearse them with the minister, to make sure they were tailored to suit each politician and each occasion. Orchestrating the minister's public performances was a vital behind-the-scenes activity. Question Time was an important highlight for advisers when parliament was sitting and it was as essential for the minister to be calm and well-rehearsed for these appearances before the television cameras as it was for him or her to be fully briefed.

Chapter 4

A Janus-faced job II – relations with media and publics

The main focus of the ministerial media adviser is acting as the go-between in dealings between the minister and the mass and specialised media – press, radio, television, internet and so on. The role extends beyond the media to interacting with various publics, particularly lobby groups and voters. The adviser is also the minister's media minder, media trainer and media spokesperson when the minister is not – or chooses not to be – available. The media minder role involves being the third person at press, radio and television interviews, ready to supply missing information if asked or expand on difficult concepts to grasp, putting them into language the media will grasp easily. As the minister's private media coach, the adviser is on hand to prepare and counsel before each interview, rehearsing possible questions and answers. As spokesperson, the adviser can take the flak when hard questions are being asked and the minister does not want to be under direct, sustained attack, or has to be elsewhere. When there is good news to announce, the minister, premier or prime minister will be there to take the credit for it in person.

In this chapter we investigate ministerial and advisers' formal and informal relationships with the media – how journalists are informed, educated about the minister's portfolio and sometimes entertained. Survey data shows what advisers think of the effectiveness of various types of communication they organise, including conferences, briefings, social events, issuing news releases, arranging interviews or placing items off the record. Ways of promoting good news and containing bad news are considered, with attention also to the problems of communicating when in opposition. We investigate occasions when public relations campaigns

prove counter-productive. The survey and interviews pointed up advisers' perceptions of the media and what can be done when communication breaks down. Finally the chapter considers whether spin-doctor is an appropriate label for the adviser's media relations role.

RELATIONSHIPS WITH THE MEDIA

A wide range of attitudes to the media, from cynicism and hostility to praise, was found among the 71 advisers interviewed. In the "shadow play of political conflict" (Tiffen, in Tumber, ed., 2000: 203), advisers had to be in the game. They needed to be on speaking terms with the main media and those that specialised in the minister's portfolio, if they were to get their messages across to readers, listeners and viewers. All advisers interviewed felt it was important to get to know reporters interested in the minister's areas of expertise, as then they would cover stories about his or her departments more favourably. Sometimes the ice was broken already: 52 per cent of advisers surveyed were found to have come from journalism and might have worked with the reporters before (see chapter 2, table 2.1). Despite its adversarial nature, the relationship was in most cases cordial but did not necessarily proceed to friendship, as a US interviewee explained:

While you want to maintain the relationship, at the same time you can't count on the media to be your friend . . . It's a working relationship – they're never going to be your friend (US press secretary, in Downes, 1998: 278).

This relationship thrived on truths shared between politicians, advisers and the media. The watchdog role expected of the media "locks government and journalism into a symbiotic relationship. Neither can get along without the other; neither can survive if the other becomes dominant. Such a healthy symbiosis between government and journalism is essential and life-sustaining not only for the partners but for a third entity – democracy" (Merritt, 1998: 29).

Advisers provided a mediation point in the symbiosis between ministers and journalists. They were the first port of call when it came time for reporters to “check it out”. All the advisers interviewed professed to believe that honesty was the key to a successful relationship: “Great hazards confront governmental attempts to hide failures, ineptitude or mistakes. Openness is essential to effective government public relations” (Baskin & Aronoff, 1992: 411). Nevertheless, relationships with the media were based on a guarded honesty. In a US study, one Congressman’s press secretary explained her role in this way:

I can’t try to spin reporters in some direction. I have to level with them and I have to show them the numbers and I have to tell them how it is. Now, having said that, we do try to put a positive spin on certain things we do (Downes, op. cit.: 280).

Downes’ 17 interviewees admitted to a selective approach to the truth, seeking always the most positive angle to the story for them. Journalists are used to seeking out news angles, in fact they appreciate advisers doing the same: “I don’t object to advisers trying to put the best spin from their point of view on a story,” one Australian journalist (who did not wish to be named) said. “You can’t expect them to do otherwise. Sometimes we go along with their approach. They don’t usually get too upset when we cover the story from a different angle, as long as we get our facts right” (interview, Sydney, September 2001).

Most advisers claimed that it was bad policy to lie to the media:

You cannot lie to a reporter. I’ve seen people do it for short-term gain, and it turns out to be a disaster. You never win a reporter’s trust again (Downes, op. cit.: 279).

It was the journalist’s responsibility to ask searching questions; advisers normally did not extra information that might put their minister in a bad light. Journalists also said that they valued honesty. Sheila Tate, then press secretary to US first lady Nancy Reagan, ran an informal survey among Washington correspondents. “Some 92 per cent rated candour as a key quality” in media advisers. The same percentage said they would be more likely to deal with public relations people they knew personally. Without government media advisers, the news media could not report on governments as effectively and economically as they do (Baskin, op. cit.: 413).

The survey research revealed that advisers saw themselves as influential with the media:

Table 4.1 Adviser's own perceived influence with the media

'How influential with the media do you see your role as adviser?'

Degree of influence	Per cent
Very influential	20.9
Quite influential	52.7
Average	17.7
Sometimes influential	8.1
Not very influential	0.7

n = 148

Influence (%)	Male	Fem.	20-29	30-39	40+	Media advisers	Policy advisers	Fed.	State	Party: Lib/NP	ALP
Very influential	18.4	26.0	28.1	19.4	18.2	21.7	15.6	23.2	17.4	19.7	21.3
Quite influential	52.0	54.0	46.9	54.2	54.5	57.4	37.5	42.9	60.5	53.5	50.0
Average	17.3	18.0	18.8	19.4	13.6	17.4	18.8	25.0	14.0	19.7	13.8
Sometimes/not very influential	12.2	2.0	6.3	6.9	13.6	3.5	28.1	8.9	8.1	4.2	2.5

Percentages add vertically

A large majority (74 per cent) felt that they were very influential or quite influential with the media. 80 per cent of women answering the survey saw themselves as very influential or quite influential, compared with 70 per cent of men.

Advisers tried to anticipate what the media need to fill out their story, suggesting angles and extra sources:

Be one step ahead [of the media] and they are very grateful. These people work on a crazy deadline that breathes down their necks . . . If the reporter doesn't have access, he's not going to get anywhere, so I try and accommodate him (US press secretary interviewed by Downes, op. cit.: 277).

"No contest was ever won from the sidelines," wrote public relations manager Ronald Rhody in Cutlip et al (1985). "Be players, not spectators." Cutlip nevertheless counselled against too liberal entertaining of the media – reporters' time was precious; excess food and alcohol consumed at lunch would not help generate news or feature copy penetrating enough to pass muster with the editor. Advisers tended to keep exclusive stories for the reporters they knew and trusted but also went out of their way to meet the neophytes, the ones easier to manipulate.

One survey question asked, "Do you entertain political journalists at your home? For most, the answer was clear – in general, no:

Table 4.2 Ministerial advisers entertaining journalists at home

Frequency	Per cent
Frequently	1.4
Often	3.5
Sometimes	18.3
Rarely	23.9
Never	54.9

n = 142

Entertained at home ...	Male	Fem.	Age:			Media Policy		Fed.	State	Party:	
			20-29	30-39	40+	advise	advise			L-Nat	ALP
Frequently	1.0	2.0	3.1	1.4	0.0	1.7	0.0	1.7	1.1	4.3	2.1
Often	2.0	6.0	3.1	4.1	2.9	4.3	0.0	8.6	0.0	4.3	3.4
Sometimes	16.7	18.0	18.8	20.3	10.8	16.2	20.6	20.7	14.8	21.7	17.9
Rarely	26.5	14.0	18.8	18.9	30.4	24.8	11.8	19.0	24.5	15.9	23.4
Never	53.9	60.0	56.2	55.4	56.0	53.0	67.7	50.0	59.6	53.6	53.1

Percentages add vertically

A large majority (77 per cent) rarely or never entertained journalists at home. The cross-tabulation above shows that unexpectedly, women advisers were a little more likely to do so – 26 per cent admitted to doing so sometimes, often or frequently. Men were more reserved – less than 20 per cent entertained journalists at home sometimes or more often. This indicates that women were somewhat more likely to strike up friendships with the reporters they met through work. Advisers under 40 were more likely to entertain journalists at home than those over 40. 30 per cent of coalition advisers admitted to entertaining at home sometimes or more often, compared with 23 per cent of advisers working for Labor politicians.

But it was a different story with the question, "Do you entertain political correspondents or other journalists at restaurants?"

Table 4.3 Ministerial advisers entertaining journalists at restaurants

Frequency	Per cent
Frequently	7.3
Often	14.0
Sometimes	38.7
Rarely	28.7
Never	11.3

n = 143

Frequency	Male	Fem.	Age: 20-29	30-39	40+	Media adviser	Policy adviser	Fed.	State	Party: L-Nat	ALP
Frequently	7.8	6.0	9.4	10.8	0.0	8.5	2.9	8.6	6.4	8.5	7.4
Often	12.7	16.0	18.8	13.5	10.9	15.4	8.8	12.1	14.9	18.3	14.1
Sometimes	36.3	42.0	40.6	37.8	36.9	38.5	38.2	36.2	39.3	40.8	38.9
Rarely	29.4	26.0	21.9	24.3	39.1	26.5	32.4	34.5	24.5	28.2	28.2
Never	13.8	10.0	9.4	13.6	13.0	10.2	17.6	8.6	14.8	4.2	11.4

Percentages add vertically

A large minority (39 per cent) sometimes entertained journalists at a restaurant; another 21 per cent did so often or frequently. Free meals for journalists at restaurants were not as frequently provided as expected, from an acquaintance with public relations practice in other fields. The rarity of advisers entertaining journalists at home, plus the far from universal entertaining at restaurants, indicates that close friendships outside work were not often established and that both sides tended to maintain a suitably

guarded, if cordial, relationship.

Again, female advisers (64 per cent) were more likely to take reporters to a restaurant sometimes, often or frequently than male advisers (56 per cent), as were media advisers compared with policy advisers, and coalition advisers compared with Labor ones.

To guard against reporters getting too friendly with politicians and their advisers, Knowlton (1995) claimed that a principle of journalism on most publications was for editors to rotate journalists: "After some period of time – a year, two years or sometimes longer – the reporter is apt to have made personal friends among the regular news sources on the beat and be unable to cover them objectively, that is, with neutrality and fairness." On the other hand, such rotation could be a force for superficiality:

The reporters just come and go; by the time they learn something about us they are shifted to another beat. . . . The stories she writes about us are so oversimplified and distorted we'd rather not have any coverage at all (two sources in Haiman, 2001:23).

The parliamentary press gallery, advisers claimed, was a beat that was more complicated than most and one that took a greater time to master. A new player was apt to make serious mistakes or simplify too much, avoiding issues he or she did not understand.

PROMOTING GOOD NEWS AND CONTAINING BAD NEWS

How then in this wider media jungle, where politics is far from the top audience interest, is the government able to make its mark, get its policies and strategies into public notice and debate? Successful media placement is “much more than a mechanical process; it is something of an art. Practising this art requires a multitude of talents: a flair for creativity, an eye or ear for the interesting or unique story, an understanding of the media and a solid knowledge” of the policy or issue being presented to the media as newsworthy (Dilenschneider & Forrestal, 1987: 101).

Much of the information in the public sphere is unnoticed by the media unless attention is drawn to it by people in and out of power. There is far too much political news available to fit into the daily press or into the brief broadcast news. The news and events worth reporting cannot all be covered:

The central dilemma of political journalism is how to meet requirements for completeness against huge and often unreasonable limits on time and space (Woodward, 2000: 142).

Only the most exciting and controversial information makes it to prime-time news or to the front pages of the papers. Good news is harder to place than bad news:

Scandal has a thousand stringers, but good news can't even find the editor's phone number . . . Most of the world is populated by decent people trying to do the best they can. Writing about them, done right, is not puffery. It is in-depth examination of institutions or programs or people who are doing their jobs properly (William Raspberry, *Washington Post*, in Haiman, 2001: 38).

While advisers shy away from using the term “manipulation”, they do stress that their job is about communication management:

There are good days and bad days – the job is not all black and white. It's all about communication management. You plan for maximum impact, right down to the time your story is to be released (former Hawke and Keating government adviser Bob Bowden, interviewed in Canberra, 1995).

Even seemingly off-the-cuff interviews are carefully managed and scripted, as a Melbourne-based adviser explained:

With good news it's best to be on the offensive. The public relations industry is putting out thousands of news releases every day and few get reported word for word. Set speeches are rarely reported in full – journalists are much more interested in doorstep interviews. We try to rehearse these beforehand (Victorian government adviser Nick Maher, Melbourne, 1995).

When asked to pick out highlights of their time with the minister, advisers often mentioned the feeling of contributing something worthwhile. Jim Kershaw, in 1997 senior media adviser to Queensland's Minister for Police, Corrective Services and Racing Russell Cooper, talked in marketing terms: "We have a good product and I'm proud to promote it." He enjoys the theatrics of staging events:

We get a lot of favourable coverage for helping business to expand and grow. You can put on a good show at events and there are plenty of photo opportunities (Kershaw, Brisbane, November, 1997).

He said the government had been accused of putting money in the wrong places: "Any chink in the armour, especially over grants, and the opposition will take it and try to run with it. But a lot of things this government does, the opposition did when it was in government. I enjoy the game. Basically we're trying to do good things for the state. My minister is outgoing, a doer – and the more you do, the more you risk being knocked down."

With more ministerial advisers than any other state, Queensland politicians could be accused of overkill: swamping the available outlets. The problem is not only with the quantity of political information coming through, but also with its quality. While advisers remain the source of most political news, reporters will trawl government and opposition media teams for quotations, playing one off against the other, looking for controversy. As one adviser interviewed in Perth said:

One of the most worrying things about this job is that you can be set up by the media. They may know something that's happened and you don't. Then they ask you to comment without this knowledge. It pays to be cautious.

Radio and television have an insatiable appetite. We are the animal trainers and feeders – the media and politics are the zoo. Sometimes we have to get in the cage with the lions (Jeannie Ferris, interviewed in 1995 when she was chief of staff to a South Australian government minister, before she became a senator).

The advisers agreed that they were always on the look-out for newsy angles or spin and did attempt to put the best gloss on their party's activities, but most rejected the idea that they packaged and sold their politicians as though they were marketing a product. However, they did try to make the story more appealing:

The art of being a media adviser is to make sure the one sound bite they use is your line. Keep the story short and sweet. You can't control what they use but you need to get your minister to mumble less and give them [the media] a good quote (Hugh O'Brien, interviewed in Brisbane, 1997).

Ministers were criticised for paying too much attention to the polls and what was happening in the news, particularly talk-back radio – for trying to be what voters wanted them to be, rather than being themselves. Their advisers monitored the media and helped ministers understand what voters wanted and expected, while helping them gain public attention and support. But this two-way communication was an essential part of representative democracy (Baskin & Aronoff, op. cit.: 416).

Unlike the chief executives in major corporations, ministers risked getting voted out of office, or removed by their leader, every three or four years or less. They had an opposition to contend with and were scrutinised by the media and public much more closely than their business counterparts. They needed strategies in place for containing bad news, if only because there was so much of it. Advisers stressed it was important to be aware of all media criticism and be quick to counter it. Former Victorian Premier Jeff Kennett's team were adept at doing that, and they got plenty of practice:

Sometimes the Premier has to ward off criticism, for instance of the Kennett family's former advertising agency KNF. He was pursued by *The Age* over that, also on the Casino issue and the Grand Prix. There has to be a huge effort to manage the debate day by day (Kennett press secretary Kevin Balshaw, interviewed in Melbourne, 1996).

Advisers were sometimes directed to defend what they considered to be policies or outcomes likely to attract a bad press. But those interviewed said they tended to be optimists who felt it was their duty to remain cheerful; even bad news could have its positive aspects:

Running a big department is hard for a minister. It's like a big ship, hard to turn around quickly. But it can help so many people – good things happen here. Some people let power go to their head. But it's important to stay real, stay normal. Sure, we have to handle bad news, but honestly. Some look at a glass and say it's half-full, to others it's half-empty – we have to look at the positives. We must focus on what we have, not on what we don't have (Suzanne Irvine, 1997).

The advisers all rehearsed strategies for containing bad news; sometimes they worked and at other times, harm could be minimised. If something bad happened and the media got wind of it, advisers told their ministers to get the story out of the way in full as soon as possible:

One example of a bad-news story was the news that the Royal Commission into the Hindmarsh Island bridge was greatly exceeding its budget of \$1 million. It needed another \$800,000. The reporter from the *Adelaide Advertiser* who got hold of the story was a former media secretary with the government. We agreed to give them an exclusive on the story but were able to attach certain conditions (South Australian government adviser Lisa Brett, Adelaide, 1995).

Other local and interstate media outlets did follow up the story next day but it died quickly, Brett said. This willingness to do deals with sources was criticised by advisers as a failing in journalism today. Relationships with politicians and advisers were cordial at most times but according to one adviser, reporters are too trusting:

Most reporters do their job fairly well, but lot of reporters will take a couple of sources that they hear quite often and they trust them – so they'll take whatever angle you put on it and that's the angle they'll base their stories on (US press secretary, in Downes, op. cit.: 278).

Occasionally (according to those interviewed) a report will provoke a complaint to the journalist concerned. Australian advisers corroborated British research which showed that in political reporting, fewer stories called for corrections than in most other fields (with the exception only of foreign news). Tunstall claimed that few British specialist reporters had experienced tough sanctions: "negligible proportions had experienced these even once –

elimination from mailing list, prohibition from attending briefings”.

Sanctions were mentioned during interviews as having been applied by some irate Australian politicians on occasion, but were usually lifted after a time through intervention of the media adviser: “Sources tend to regard us as part of the same world, and accept that they have to live with us – and may one day need our sympathy” (London reporter, *ibid.*: 170).

Table 4.4 Use of sanctions by news sources against specialists (from Tunstall, 1971)

Percentage of specialists saying they have personally encountered sanction at least once

Sanction	Foreign %	Political %	Mixed %	Audience %	Advertising %	All %
Insistence that correction appear in print	31	32	57	58	62	46
Request for apology from you privately	10	13	19	33	35	20
Complaint or threat to go to Press Council	2	8	21	28	12	14
Letter of correction/complaint to editor	38	58	67	67	77	56

n = 199

Tunstall, 1971: 169

Some sanctions are unwise right from the start and cannot be sustained:

[Former Liberal Premier] SteeleHall got on well with most journalists but when Clive Hale fronting *This Day Tonight* made some comment about Hall not turning up, Steele retaliated by banning ABC-TV – against our advice. There was a nobility about Hall and it worked in his favour – showed that he wouldn’t be pushed around by the media (Darryl Warren, press secretary to former Premier Steele Hall, Adelaide, 1995).

Ministers such as former federal Treasurer John Dawkins, also former Prime Minister John Gorton were apt to issue instructions to their media advisers to black-ban certain media and not to talk to their reporters (Max Walsh, 2002: 32). Former federal Finance Minister Peter Walsh (1995: 286) quoted Robert Haupt of the *Australian Financial Review* as saying that former Prime Minister Paul Keating conducted “lengthy, abusive direct telephone

calls to journalists who had crossed him, [also] calls to management to damage the careers of individual journalists.”

Sometimes, political reporters seem certain that the advisers are hiding an important story, shielding their ministers unduly. “Their minds seem made up before they have even checked with sources, perhaps relying on hearsay,” one Canberra adviser said. They have a preconceived thesis:

The hardest thing to do is to persuade a reporter that there simply is no big story here (politician quoted in Haiman, 2001: 57).

Reporters “fall in love” with their bad-news stories. Attempts to deflect them with factual information or even bad-news tips about the opposition are not enough for them to break off this hot pursuit: “They can’t admit that sometimes there’s no story.” A police prosecutor concentrates on putting criminals in prison but his investigation might also uncover information that clears the innocent. “Don’t investigative reporters look at it like that, too?” (ibid.: 59).

It’s not often that one is able to kill or downplay a negative story. One item had appeared in an internal Health Department newsletter. The news journalist got hold of the newsletter and saw the sensational element in a decision involving reallocating one million dollars worth of resources (Peter Rice, in Adelaide, 1995, when he was media secretary to the South Australian Minister for Health)

Rice said that many people would have been helped by this change but the journalist went ahead and published the story. The resultant controversy “totally undermined the program and the government decided it was wisest to close it down”. Sometimes even a page 8 or page 9 story in the media, plus a few phone calls and letters to the editor, were enough to change people’s minds about what many would consider a worthwhile program. Opposition attacks could also undermine government efforts, especially if the journalist took an opposition news release and rewrote it as his or her own:

It’s good to get third party endorsement for your articles. I don’t mind the

journalists using my copy and putting their names to it. It's good to get ordinary people into the news: 'My sister died because of Kennett's cuts to the hospital system' carries more weight than a host of figures. Figures don't mean much (Victorian Opposition media adviser Aileen Muldoon, 1996).

Oppositions valued particularly the opportunity to reach a wide audience through radio. The medium was important in setting the agenda: "We like to get a story on the ABC's AM program because it sets you up for the day. Other stations pick up on it. It's good to get talkback radio going on an issue, especially if there's a negative message for the government," Muldoon said. Opposition parties often concentrated on television news also, since so many people obtained their daily news from the broadcast media:

The Labor Party here is more successful with television than print. There is usually one political story a day and we try to make sure we run the agenda. *The Advertiser* envies our success with TV. Often our line is right and they are wrong.

Radio will absorb almost anything and we are prepared to give them lots of stories. We make sure our spokespeople are available from 6.30am each day – usually the appropriate shadow minister, often Mike Rann [now Premier] himself (South Australian opposition adviser Jill Bottrall, interviewed in 1995).

Even though they had fewer props on which to build a story, opposition parties needed to spread the news load around and make sure there was something for all media, even nighttime radio. But they targeted morning radio which was well listened to: "We berate *The Advertiser* as much as we can," Ms Bottrall said. "The journalists know what's going on and try to edit out our comments but if you're clever you can make this hard to do."

Advisers to opposition leaders and shadow ministers had a harder task in some ways, since they were far fewer in number and felt greatly overworked, but easier in that the opposition's role was more to attack government policies and people – and not explain fully how their alternative policies would be put into effect:

I like to light little [Opposition] bushfires in the media and the Government has to work hard to put them out. In Government the stories can have more weight and you have the resources to be more creative (Aileen Muldoon, Melbourne, 1996).

She said the [then] Labor opposition tried to target the media with stories they were likely to use, keeping in mind their audience. Channel 9 in Melbourne tended to appeal more to an upper middle class audience and might not run upsetting health stories. She claimed Channel 7 appealed more to a younger audience, so the parties devised stories to suit them. Channel 10 in Melbourne had more blue-collar viewers. The ABC audiences tended to be better-educated and perhaps left of centre. Naturally the stories for the Special Broadcasting Service (SBS) tended to focus on multicultural issues.

Radio could be remarkably effective for oppositions and other government opponents. In November 2000, New South Wales Environment Minister Bob Debus cancelled a program of aerial culling of brumbies from national parks after being warned by his advisers of an outcry over it on Sydney talkback radio. What was more remarkable was his admission at a news conference that the program had been cancelled because of public concern in the media, despite his department's scientists having advised that it was the most humane and effective way of eradicating the animals:

[Debus] has encouraged these misguided equestrophiles by implying that talkback radio callers influence him more than scientific advice on the subject of feral horses. (Morison, 2000: 2)

Most advisers said that the best strategy when the media got a story wrong was to phone the journalist first, then if necessary the editor. Few thought a formal complaint wise. Some reporters were willing to correct the error:

I call the press [when they get a story wrong] and sometimes that's tense, but the reporter understands as well as I do that it can't remain a problem. We get over it (Downes, op. cit.: 274).

A participant in the Downes focus group of US press secretaries said it wasn't so much the media errors that upset her, it was the constant digging for dirt:

One of the problems with the press nowadays is they're always looking for a scandal; too many want to be like Bob Woodward [*Washington Post's* Watergate exposé]. . . they're always writing the worst things instead of writing the good stories.

Advisers who were confident their ministers could handle television interviews (and were reasonably presentable) coached and encouraged them to concentrate on this method of news delivery. Neville Wran, as a smart young New South Wales lawyer, was a poised and fluent television performer who did not need much coaching. In Bowman's view (1988: 7), Wran, when NSW leader of the opposition, seduced the press gallery and "climbed into office over the supine bodies of admiring journalists".

[NSW Premier Neville Wran] had a love-hate relationship with the media. He loved the adoration; he hated the scrutiny. Not surprisingly, he was most comfortable with the electronic media, particularly television, which has little opportunity to scrutinise ((Steketee & Cockburn, op. cit.: 161).

Wran had "good looks, neat dress, clear diction, theatrical background and barrister's training" but he also brought in a TV journalist, Laurie Power, to coach him . . . "A politician who could master the art of the interview could dominate the medium; not so with newspapers" which analyse and editorialise, things television rarely does (ibid.: 161, 162). But if issues of honesty or ministerial corruption came to the fore, the previously good relationship could deteriorate:

Wran's strategy of 'get the proprietors on side because you can't always trust the journalists' was probably vindicated in his eyes in the years after the 1981 election. As corruption issues began to dog his government, there was a noticeable change in Wran's relationship with much of the press gallery. The departure of Brian Dale in mid-1981 to a position within Murdoch's television operations was one factor. His successors . . . were not as adept at cultivating the gallery as Dale had been (Steketee & Cockburn, op. cit.: 173).

In 2002, most politicians prefer to release their news via live broadcast interviews, advisers said. They could be confident that the questions would be limited in scope and short in duration; the questioning might be tough but it would not be sustained for long because all that was required were a few short grabs. The politician being interviewed could usually impose

some constraints on the range of questions, even vet them beforehand, as a condition for appearing on the show. This was preferable to the old scenario when, at a general news conference, some reporters could hammer away at the detail, seeking a weakness, looking for a quote to fit a predetermined story line (Jones, *op. cit.*: 20). Print reporters complained at the tactic which they saw as blatant manipulation and were not pleased to be referred to a transcript of what was said at the interview. Ministers were used to doing multiple broadcast interviews daily:

Different ministers have different attitudes to the media but mine keeps himself accessible. I handle smaller interviews but he might do five, 10 or 15 interviews in the one day. I do the follow-up work. The media have direct access to him independently of me. Radio particularly requires this actuality; newspapers are not so demanding (Peter Rice, interviewed in Adelaide, 1995).

Other ministers were wary of going to air live, having been caught out once or twice before:

I make sure the media give me their fax number and I fax through the story to them. That way, they are more likely to get the facts right. Television is past master at taking 10 seconds out of a 10-minute interview and changing the story around completely. My minister won't go on TV current affairs programs – they've stuffed him up more than once. He has more to lose than gain by going on TV (Queensland government adviser Paul Lineham, Brisbane, 1996).

Cutlip (*ibid.*, 432) claimed that it was not wise to favour one news outlet or one medium at the expense of others: "When he or she gets caught [doing this], one risks losing the confidence and goodwill of those others. The publicity tune has to be played straight across the keyboard. This is not easy in a cacophony of stiff competition."

Any whiff of conflict in government, and reporters would quickly sniff out a bad-news story. Barry Galton, senior media adviser to former Queensland Premier Rob Borbidge, stressed that it was important for any government to make sure conflicts were sorted out in the party room and that ministers spoke to the media with one mind, not opposing each other. He said: "When parliament's sitting there's not much time for news conferences and the journalists are satisfied with that. Most of the ministerial staff are ex-

media people and understand their needs. There is a big turnover in advisers as it is an intensive job, especially with the proliferation of media in the last few years." He added:

We take up to 16 calls a day from the ABC alone, not just ABC-TV's 7.30 Report. As many as six different departments of the *Courier-Mail* are interested in us when parliament is sitting. We meet with other media advisers when cabinet is in session and work out strategies, trying to coordinate news releases so ministers are not all jumping at the same time. (Galton, interview in Brisbane, November 19, 1997).

WHEN PR PROVES COUNTER-PRODUCTIVE

Where media advisers did not sort out disagreements beforehand, the results can be disastrous. An example was with the media team that Tony Blair had gathered around him in 1994 which included Labour director of communications David Hill, political columnist and broadcaster Alastair Campbell and Peter Mandelson, who although by then elected to parliament in his own right, kept his involvement as a spin-doctor. Campbell made a difficult transition from political columnist and broadcaster as he wanted to keep up his work in the media as well as the public relations role. Journalists covering the Labour conference in 1995 "found it difficult to work out which spin-doctor was in charge" "The spectacle of Labour's spin-doctors competing for attention became a news event in itself." (Jones, 1995: 169.) In Australia, oppositions, like governments, aimed to speak with one voice. They usually made sure that their media staff kept to the shadows and did not become personalities, no matter how high-profile a position they had with the media before their transition to the minister's office. But in the USA and Britain, the press people to leaders found it hard to avoid the spotlight:

Most press secretaries assigned to party leaders and ministers try to avoid personal publicity. They realise that if they were ever considered celebrities in their own right they might easily get distracted or become preoccupied about their own appearance, rather than remaining vigilant on behalf of their charge. In some situations this could endanger the politicians they were employed to promote.

In the 1992 [British] general election Campbell's predecessor, Julie Hall, embarrassed Neil Kinnock with an emotional outburst during a chaotic news conference . . . correspondents could not recall an occasion when a party leader was upstaged so comprehensively by a press officer or when the sight of Kinnock losing his cool had been immortalised so clearly on television (ibid: 163).

At photo opportunities, media advisers could be spotted standing a few paces to one side of their leader, to keep within earshot but not clutter up the picture for the television cameras and press photographers. They tried to confine any advice they gave their minister to when journalists were not watching or listening, knowing that otherwise they could be charged with manipulating and over-minding:

We arrange suitable photo opportunities for the minister and try to forestall photographers' ambushes. We hope sub-editors will use our captions, or at least some variation on them, and so be less likely to think up a damaging caption (media adviser, Canberra, 1997).

Advisers screened requests for photo opportunities carefully. Some that went horribly wrong in Britain (immortalised in a 1995 text by Nicholas Jones) included the agriculture minister John Gummer who appeared to be force-feeding a beefburger to his young daughter Cordelia at the height of the scare about eating beef during the panic over mad cow disease; the time in 1990 photographers bought a bottle of champagne and handed it to left-wing Labour MP Ron Brown already opened (it spurted everywhere); UK corporate affairs minister Neil Hamilton photographed holding aloft a large biscuit (he even suggested a caption, "The man who takes the biscuit!"), an unfortunate image given that Hamilton was at the time the centre of "cash for questions" allegations and had to resign five days later; and new UK Chancellor of the Exchequer Kenneth Clarke whom photographers and television crews got to pose with Chief Secretary Michael Portillo, a Morecambe and Wise double-act that he said made the two of them look

like "a couple of mafia bosses who had just taken over a nightclub". (Jones, op. cit.: 106, 107).

One photo opportunity and meet-the-people walk that went disastrously wrong was by then opposition leader Bill Snedden in Adelaide in 1974. Snedden was to walk, with a crowd of Young Liberal women in white tee-shirts and the slogan "I'm a Liberal lover". They emerged from Liberal headquarters and set off at a brisk pace to stroll four blocks along North Terrace. A man called Rob Bray attached himself to the group, as leader. Bray was wearing a tall Uncle Sam hat, a false paunch, a sign around his neck saying "Mr Foreign Company" and a placard on a pole saying "Billy wants to sell me Australia". Bray and his supporters were out in front calling out "Vote Liberal, voter multinational". "Snedden's press secretary Geoff Allen pretended to be a reporter and tried to draw Bray off; the Liberal lovers surrounded Bray and tried to isolate him from Snedden. But nothing worked, and Bray triumphantly led them" (MacCallum, 1994: 202). The event was nearly over before someone reminded Allen that it was meant to be a meet-the-people walk; Allen rushed up to Snedden and told him to meet a person. Snedden turned into a side street and tried to meet a person but "unfortunately the side street was the headquarters of the Adelaide stock exchange, which Bray pointed out with vigour". Then Snedden tried to meet another person who was mending the footpath; the workman said, "Piss off, I've got to work!" (ibid.: 203).

Another meet-the-people walk and photo opportunity which went horribly wrong was in 1977 by then Prime Minister Malcolm Fraser at the Electrolytic Zinc plant in Hobart. Fraser and his party went to one part of the plant but his police escort, his staff and the media drove off at high speed to another. They then

... drove off at even higher speed to another wrong place and finally to the right place, just as Fraser was leaving. The two parties came together for the second part of the tour, which consisted of walking several hundred yards past metal plates in a shed apparently devoid of human habitation. After some time, the manager found a very small token worker. There was some speculation among the press as to whether he was in fact a dwarf. The local Liberal member,

Michael Hodgman, came over to the press and said, "If you call him a dwarf, I'll sue you." . . . After a while he came back to the press and said, "The trick is that the dwarf's deaf, and doesn't have to listen to what Fraser is saying" (ibid.: 227.)

That was one meet-the-people opportunity that attracted more adverse comment than favourable coverage.

Every detail in a photo opportunity or casual meet-the-people walk needed to be planned carefully. In Nowra, NSW, for the 1993 federal campaign, Paul Keating took the advice local Labor candidate Peter Knott held a media event at a bakery. He was keen to capitalise on opposition leader John Hewson's gaffe when asked what the coalition's planned GST would do to the price of a birthday cake. The simple new tax turned out to be not so simple if the cake was decorated; add in the tax on birthday candles. "Keating already had the line 'Even Marie Antionette didn't put a GST on cake' but the event degenerated when the bakery owner endorsed Hewson's tax plan" (Seccombe, 2001: 35). The owner turned out to be a strong Liberal supporter. He said he could employ two or three more staff if he didn't have to pay Labor's "immoral" payroll tax of \$45 000 a year which the coalition planned to abolish when the GST came in:

Keating was livid. Knott was afterwards known to colleagues as "the Pieman", although Keating also called him "the candidate from hell" (ibid.: 35).

Photo opportunities and visits to institutions had to be vetted closely too, advisers stressed. In 1990, adviser David Epstein was planning Prime Minister Bob Hawke's visit to the Atherton Tableland to launch Labor's environment policy during the federal election campaign. One stop was to be at the CSIRO research station, where the scientist in charge was an expert in a small specimen of local fauna, the noxious rat:

My mission was to ensure the cameras would get pictures of rain forest as a backdrop. So we were walking along, me trying to show great interest in the research station, but really just looking for beautiful trees, parking lots where you could accommodate 50 media vehicles, etc. (Epstein, ibid.: 35).

The scientist was thinking Hawke was coming to see researchers at work; Epstein was thinking the fun the media would have, juxtaposing the Prime Minister and a noxious rat:

The scientist kept going on about how the PM would be interested to look at it – he said it was a very friendly and pleasant animal. Then he put his hand in the cage and it bit him.

Epstein said that thanks to preparation at this level of detail, Labor's environment policy launching was successful: "The trees were so photogenic, Hawke climbed up and hugged a giant fig." The noxious rat was well hidden.

State advisers had the same problems with photo opportunities:

Where what was required of Premier Kennett seemed unseemly – for instance, if he was asked to climb on a camel – we were quick to say, "No, thank you!" (Balshaw, Melbourne, 1996).

Suzanne Irvine, in 1997 senior media adviser to Queensland's Minister for Families, Youth & Community Care Kevin Lingard, said that in the field of child care, the media and ministerial staff had to be careful to avoid photographing or filming children without parental consent. She said:

This is an always contentious portfolio. There are human issues confronting those who make the decisions and no one's ever going to agree on everything. You have to act for the child's best interests.

When I first came I couldn't believe the vilifying and mud-slinging that goes on over some issues – for instance, the location of a community centre. It's so unfair. The minister really does care about the issues and tries to find the best solution. (Interview in Brisbane, November 20, 1997.)

Irvine added, "Some people teach that the end justifies the means but I don't work that way. Some journalists believe you can be as rude and obnoxious as you like as long as you get the story but I say, you can catch more flies with honey than with vinegar." She said polite journalists who do the right thing stick in one's memory: "Of course you help them all and try to treat them the same and answer them on time. Sure, we have to handle bad news sometimes, but honestly. This job is like being a media firefighter; we promote fire safety but don't light a fire. If one starts, we try to

put it out quickly before it burns down the government.”

ADVISERS' PERCEPTIONS OF THE MEDIA

Advisers have a wary relationship with the media – they enjoy the daily interaction with journalists (for a majority, their former colleagues). But, while trying to help them promptly to get a suitable range of political stories, they realise that unlimited disclosure could harm the government and cost them their jobs. They consult with colleagues and their ministers to make sure journalists in their probing are not exploiting any weakness and that a consistent party line is being adhered to by all.

How do media advisers rate the journalists they deal with daily? Some are highly critical of them and say they concentrate on obtaining negative news, are natural supporters of the status quo, tend to uncritically reflect the views of major news sources and are more interested in scandal and gossip than on getting to grips with the major policy issues of their minister's portfolio.

Most advisers pointed to the power of the broadcast media particularly to influence perceptions, especially if the theme was negative one:

It's fascinating to watch how an issue gets reported and how gradually (sometimes quite quickly) opinion can shift on issues (Keating government adviser Carolyn Betts, interviewed in Canberra, 1995).

The older generation that was still buying newspapers was influenced greatly by print media, since what made the headlines set the agenda for what they talked about, even if its readers did not agree with the paper's line. The press still had the advantage when it came to outlining policy options.

The author's survey asked advisers to comment on the claim: "Journalists are dependent on major news sources and tend to uncritically reflect their views." Since most advisers were part of the government system, the

“major [political] news source”, it is not surprising that results showed almost half (49 per cent) disagreed or strongly disagreed with that statement:

Table 4.5 ‘Journalists depend on major news sources, tend to reflect their views’

Degree of agreement	Per cent
Strongly agree	5.3
Agree	32.7
Can't say	13.3
Disagree	42.0
Strongly disagree	6.7

n = 150

Degree of agreement (%)	Male	Fem.	20-29	30-39	40+	Media advisers	Policy advisers	Fed.	State	Party: Lib/NP	ALP
Strongly agree	5.0	6.1	9.4	5.5	2.2	6.1	2.9	3.5	5.7	2.8	7.7
Agree	30.7	36.7	37.5	34.2	26.7	34.8	26.5	29.8	35.6	28.2	37.2
Can't say	13.9	12.2	3.1	12.3	22.2	11.3	20.6	19.3	10.3	12.7	14.1
Disagree	44.6	36.7	40.6	41.1	44.4	40.9	44.1	40.4	41.4	47.9	35.9
Strongly disagree	5.9	8.2	9.4	6.8	4.4	7.0	5.9	7.0	6.9	8.5	5.1

Percentages add vertically

A somewhat smaller minority (38 per cent) agreed or strongly agreed with the statement, with 13 per cent unwilling to commit themselves either way.

There was a marked variation by age: the younger they were, the larger the minority agreeing with the statement. Of ALP advisers, 45 per cent agreed or strongly agreed with the statement, compared with 31 per cent of coalition advisers. Women were fairly evenly divided as to whether they should agree or not; men had more on the “disagree” or “strongly disagree” side (51 per cent). The differences between federal and state advisers on this issue were

not significant, except that more federal advisers (19 per cent) could not decide one way or the other.

A further statement probed advisers' perceptions of the media and this provoked much wider disagreement:

Table 4.6 'Journalists are natural supporters of the status quo'

Degree of agreement	Per cent
Strongly agree	1.0
Agree	6.8
Can't say	18.4
Disagree	59.2
Strongly disagree	14.6

n = 103

Degree of agreement	Male	Fem.	Age: 20-29	30-39	40+	Media advise	Policy advise	Fed.*	State	Party: Lib/Nat	ALP
Strongly agree	1.4	0.0	0.0	0.0	3.6	0.0	5.6	0.0	1.2	0.0	2.0
Agree	5.8	8.8	4.3	11.5	0.0	7.1	5.6	0.0	7.0	3.7	10.2
Can't say	20.3	14.7	43.5	11.5	10.7	15.5	27.8	0.0	19.8	18.5	18.4
Disagree	58.0	61.8	47.8	63.5	60.7	64.3	38.9	90.9	57.0	61.1	57.1
Strongly disagree	14.5	14.7	4.3	13.5	25.0	13.1	22.2	9.1	15.1	16.7	12.2

Percentages add vertically * The first trial questionnaire to federal advisers omitted this question.

A total of 74 per cent disagreed with the proposition, feeling that Australian news media are not in the pockets of governments and major corporations and are not afraid to trash their advisers' good-news stories if and when it suits them. Federal advisers all disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement – among their state counterparts, 72 per cent thought the same.

Advisers to Liberal and National Party ministers (78 per cent) were somewhat more likely to disagree or strongly disagree, compared with 69 per cent of their Labor colleagues. There was a marked discrepancy between the views of media advisers (77 per cent disagreed or strongly disagreed) and policy advisers (only 61 per cent were against it). The federal and state results, although showing a marked discrepancy, could not be compared because the first federal survey omitted the status quo issue as a separate question.

Politicians, premiers and governments have gone out of their way to break down what they saw as the status quo of support for a previous administration, to cultivate proprietors, editors and cultivate reporters. Some were spectacularly successful in their media relationships right from the start. The Labor government of Neville Wran, particularly in its early years, focused on winning over the usually conservative mass media. It won favour with the Murdoch and Packer media empires by awarding them the contract to run the immensely profitable Lotto gambling via newsagents. Wran went out of his way to court political journalists too. He held power from May 1976, winning four elections until his resignation mid-term in July 1986:

... it was Wran's intuitive feel for the media, not capable press secretaries, which explains his domination of the press gallery . . . His sense of newsworthiness and his judgement of the impact of issues and announcements would be matched by few news editors. His press secretaries [Brian Dale and Peter Barron] have always acknowledged that he is the best press secretary in the business (Steketee & Cockburn, 1986: 161).

Once in power, Wran exploited all the advantages of media management available. Critics including Peter Manning put a contrary view to the above statement, condemning "the growing fusion of media, business and politics":

Neville Wran's incredibly well-oiled media machine follows in form and scope those of his counterparts in Queensland and South Australia. Above this machinery exists a network of relations between the Wrans and the Frasers and the Bjelke-Petersens and the Packers, Fairfaxes and Murdochs which is quite frightening. Wran has clearly decided that if you can't beat 'em, join 'em (Manning, in Windschuttle, 1981: 298).

The advisers tended to agree with another survey statement:

Table 4.7 'Most journalists concentrate on obtaining negative news'

Degree of agreement	Per cent
Strongly agree	21.2
Agree	53.6
Can't say	3.3
Disagree	20.5
Strongly disagree	1.3

n = 143

Degree of agreement	Male	Fem.	Age:			Media Policy		Fed.	State	Party:	
			20-29	30-39	40+	adviser	adviser			L-Nat	ALP
Strongly agree	18.6	26.0	21.9	20.3	21.7	23.1	14.7	20.7	21.3	25.4	17.7
Agree	52.9	54.0	56.3	51.4	54.3	52.1	58.5	50.0	55.3	54.9	51.9
Can't say	2.9	4.0	9.4	2.7	0.0	3.4	2.9	3.4	3.2	0.0	6.3
Disagree	22.5	16.0	12.5	23.0	21.7	19.7	20.6	24.1	18.1	18.3	22.8
Strongly disagree	3.0	0.0	0.0	2.7	2.2	1.8	2.9	1.7	2.1	1.4	1.3

Percentages add vertically

The 74.8 per cent who agreed or strongly agreed with the statement were echoing the view of Gay Talese, former *New York Times* reporter:

Most journalists are restless voyeurs who see warts on the world, the imperfections in people and places. The same [calm] scene that is much of life, the great portion of the planet unmarked by madness, does not lure them like riots and raids, crumbling countries and sinking ships, bankers banished to Rio, and burning Buddhist nuns – gloom is their game, the spectacle their passion, normality their nemesis (Talese, 1969).

On this question, there was broad agreement across party lines. Women (80 per cent) were more likely to agree or strongly agree than men (71 per cent); also coalition advisers (80 per cent for) compared with ALP advisers (69 per cent for). The only disparity by age was that nine per cent of younger (under 30) advisers were undecided, as against no 40-plus advisers undecided.

Advisers interviewed claimed that much of their interaction with the media was reactive: hosing down inaccurate or exaggerated reports. They were trying to offer what they considered was a fair assessment of government programs and proposals; what they saw reflected back at them was a mosaic of half-truths, personality clashes, exciting-sounding items containing only the most colourful fragments of what was happening in Canberra and the state capitals. Advisers criticised the news emphasis on conflict, the tendency to minimise socially constructive events and sensationalise what they saw as small mistakes by their political masters:

The media have changed a lot and I don't believe professional standards are anything like as good as they were. That's a generalisation, of course – there are exceptions. Too often the media are not prepared to make the distinctions in meaning that they should be making. They use cliches and let them expand like a marshmallow. There is not that discipline of getting it right (Hugh Ryan, WA government media secretary, Perth, 1996).

Ryan added two other criticisms: that people who made accusations of outlandish conduct often were not challenged to show the basis, or the accused people asked to respond. Journalists resented having to justify their words: "If they are talking about your minister, you wonder, 'Has this reporter ever met the minister?'," Ryan said. His third criticism shifted the blame for the gaffes of his political masters to reporters: things could be said in anger and reported on, without the media checking to see if that was what was really meant. The proper thing would be to wait until the person had calmed down and check – the present tendency validated anger, attack and outrage.

Headlines are often written which are attacking and angry, the report of interview edited to back up the headline – yet the position of the person

interviewed might be a rational one which is neither angry nor attacking. This type of reporting breeds vindictiveness and personal animosity: "It's a bit more subtle in influence than violent videos and guns, but just as wrong," Ryan pointed out. Another veteran journalist turned public relations practitioner, Kerry King, backs up these views: "The ideal of objective reporting has gone out of the window in far too many cases. If you are not on the same side of the fence as the editorial page, your chances of being heard are minimal. In many newspapers there is no attempt to balance the news . . . Dramatic pictures, often less important than hard news, are given preference by television news shows" (Cutlip, *op. cit.*: 429).

Where does all the negative news come from? Certainly not from the media advisers; although they do from time to time put out negative statements about political opponents, most of the time their releases are positive ones.

The press has grown frighteningly dependent on public relations people . . . like an alcoholic who can't believe he has a drinking problem, members of the press are too close to their own addiction to PR to realise there is anything wrong.

(Jeff & Marie Blyskal, in Michie, 1998: 3.)

If the Blyskal statements were true, we would see an upsurge in positive news and a withering of the negative.

The reverse is true: the Phillipps December 2000 survey of 10 Australian and overseas newspapers indicated that for the period surveyed, negative news predominated. Not only that, but in the political sphere, negative news was much more dominant than in general news. Ten publications were researched, nine of them daily newspapers, four in Australia and six overseas. What this author considered the top 10 news stories were studied by headline, first paragraph and illustrations to assess the initial impact on the reader, whether positive, negative or in between. Another coder was called in to check and although a few stories were in doubt, overall it made no difference to the result.

“Many scholars deride the notion of an adversary press,” says Gadi Wolfsfeld: they argue that “any criticisms against the government tend to be weak and superficial” but “there is an opposing school of thought that emphasises the negative, cynical aspects of journalist culture . . . Patterson [1993] found that press coverage of elections changed dramatically between 1960 and 1992. There has been a consistent tendency to publish more bad news about candidates than good news” (Wolfsfeld, 1997: 37).

This welter of negative news is likely to drive Australians to even more cynical yet moralistic stances against their politicians, who from time to time display the same human characteristics as the rest of us:

What cynics feel righteous about is the need to expose hypocrisy: to point out yawning gaps between our ideals and our practice. It is no trouble finding these gaps, they open up almost everywhere. Since most reformers are human beings, they can usually be convicted of inconsistency. Sooner or later, they can be caught tolerating things which should not really be tolerated, things which may be every bit as bad as the evils they are attacking. (Mary Midgley in Kieran, 1998: 37)

She says it is tempting for journalists to search for disreputable hidden motives, concentrating on suspicions such as those of the *Mail on Sunday* journalist who published a story about Conservative British politician Peter Bottomley’s sexual inclinations after he had tried to help a social worker (see Snoddy, 1992: 1-8). Bottomley’s sexual proclivities were quite irrelevant to the story (Kieran, op. cit.: 38).

Just how strong is the media accent on the negative? Australian newspapers were assessed via hard copies and the overseas ones via their websites. With broadsheet newspapers, stories were listed from page one into the paper until 10 had been studied (usually from pages one to four or five). Tabloids usually required further search into the centre of the paper.

Table 4.8 Top 10 news and political stories, Australia and overseas

Newspaper#	All +	All -	Pol +	Pol -
The Australian	2.6	6.8	1.5	7.8
Sydney Morning Herald	4.0	5.3	2.6	6.5
Daily Telegraph, Sydney	3.0	6.1	2.2	6.5
The Age, Melbourne	3.9	6.0	2.8	6.5
Christian Science Monitor, Boston	4.6	3.6	3.1	5.0
New York Times	3.5	4.5	3.1	4.5
Time magazine	3.0	5.0	2.0	5.0
The Times, London	2.0	5.0	3.0	4.5
The Observer, London	4.0	6.0	4.0	6.0
South China Morning Post, Hong Kong	4.0	6.0	5.0	5.0
Average over 10 publications	3.7	5.6	2.9	5.7
Per cent of stories positive or negative	37%+	56%-	29%+	57%-

#The day's top 10 all news stories & top 10 political stories were coded positive, neutral or negative but so few were neutral that they have not been included in table. Where + and - do not add up to 10, rest were coded 0 or neutral.

Table 4.8 above shows that with general news stories, the top 10 items are likely to include (based on a sample of one week) 3.7 positive stories and 5.6 negative ones. Considering just political news, there is more emphasis on the negative with 2.9 positive stories on politics and 5.7 negative stories.

Based on stories in the first week of December 2000, Australian newspapers were more negative in tone than overseas ones. The average number of positive stories in the top 10 was 3.2 and negative stories, 6.3. Analysing the top 10 Australian political stories, they were found to be on average 2.4 positive and 6.8 negative. Overseas publications in this very limited sample were found to be, in top 10 general news, 3.5 positive and 5.0 negative.

Overseas, political news top 10 stories were 3.3 positive and 5.0 negative. For details of the stories and how they were assessed. With newspaper websites, stories were listed from the main or home page, but could not be judged as to their placement in the printed version. They were classified into home country or world news, and further broken down into political stories. No attempt was made to plumb the depth of negativity of gloomy stories.

Although from only a one-week sample, these figures in table 4.8 go a little way towards substantiating political media advisers' claims that journalists tended to seek out negative news (see table 4.7).

McNair argued that overemphasis on negative news has had at least three implications for the conduct of politics in any democracy:

- style and content of political journalism is not, as it should be, supplying the citizenry with useful information, but on the contrary is actually obstructing the communication of political messages
- political actors no longer formulate their policies on grounds of principle and rational argument, but do so in consideration of the perceived need to 'play well' in the media, and to please 'public opinion', itself often argued to be largely a media creation
- communicative work of both journalists and politicians has become distorted by the influence of what Edward Bernays in 1923 called 'press counsellors', and who are better known today as 'spin-doctors', 'communications advisers', 'media consultants' or 'PR gurus' (McNair in Kieran, 1998: 50).

Reviewing the dissolution of trust in British politicians during a time when "the press became less like the collective organ of the Conservative Party", McNair pointed out that it was one of "unprecedented reportage of political scandal", usually affecting the Conservative Party itself: it was "the tabloidisation of political journalism" (ibid.: 58) "As we enter the era of digital television and the internet, we face another expansion of the political media, as hundreds of new channels come on-air or on-line with space to fill" (ibid.: 64). McNair urged a greater vigilance about journalists' and politicians' standards, with more media education in schools and

universities on critical reading and viewing, also the responsibilities of citizenship. Advisers interviewed felt that the thrust of negative and hostile reporting was blunted, if they got to know political reporters better.

Knowlton claimed that an "objective" reporter-to-source relationship was almost impossible when the source is someone the reporter sees regularly: "When two people encounter one another on a daily basis, even if it begins purely professionally, eventually the two will come to like or dislike each other. Moreover, a polite civil distance is not even desirable when a reporter is cultivating sources to provide tips, background information, reliable context and so on. Such information comes only with trust, and trust has to be mutual" (Knowlton, 1995: 181).

From the adviser's perspective, it was important to get stories out that reflected the best interests of the state and reported clearly on the issue itself. In the reporter's view, editors and audiences looked for stories that were negative, damaging, even scandalous. Advisers did not hesitate to pressure editors to kill stories they thought would harm their government, replacing them with stories that showed ministers in a good light. Also, they sought to quash items that maybe were just released prematurely:

Sometimes a negative story can be killed or modified by quick action on the media adviser's part. I remember one story which was inadvertently released to the press. The editor was asked to pull it – and he agreed to do so that one time, in the interests of good relations with the department (South Australian government adviser Peter Rice, Adelaide, 1995).

This view was echoed by a Queensland government media adviser who considered that it was a practical matter of putting the government's interests first, not an issue of censorship. Virginia Fett, in 1997 media adviser to then Queensland Minister for Public Works and Housing David Watson, agreed with this cooperative approach:

My attitude is to try and cooperate with the media as much as possible. Media advisers should always be available and try to return all calls, even to the lowliest journalist in the safest National Party seat. One day that person may be working on a metropolitan paper. You don't want them believing you only care about them for what they can do for you (interview in Brisbane, November 19, 1997).

She added that it was also important to be sensitive to the need to try to kill a negative story and replace it with something more positive. Although she admitted to occasionally pressuring the local press to tone down or change a story, she did not agree with the view that compared with the rest of Australia, the Queensland media was very docile. As Queensland University of Technology political scientist Peter Coaldrake asserted about Queensland under Joh Bjelke-Petersen as Premier:

The ABC has been the only media outlet consistently to have been critical of the Queensland government. This is significant, because, being a nationally based broad-caster administered from Sydney, it was the one media organisation not vulnerable to the informal sanctions which it might be feared the state government could apply against locally owned or locally administered media organisations. The only stick the state government could wield against the ABC was a defamation action. (When pursued, these actions were invariably taxpayer-funded.) (Coaldrake, 1989: 98.)

Coaldrake stated that for the most part, in that era the Queensland media was disinclined to confront the National Party when it was in government: "For a long time in Queensland, the political environment has not made room for critical debate and the parties of political opposition and the media have failed the public in their responsibility to provide such a critical perspective."

The state government is still the largest employer of journalists in Queensland, and also offers many of the better-paid jobs. The salary package of a senior media adviser is usually more than that paid to the top reporters on the *Courier-Mail*. With a job in government an eventual likely career move, Coaldrake asserted that journalists there tended to perceive themselves as part of the system, not adversaries (ibid.: 101). "There has been no serious attempt to articulate a 'public interest' independent of that conveniently formulated by the government. In fact, significant elements of the media may even have come to believe that government interest did equate with public interest" (ibid.: 103). A decline in interest in politics was evident: some claimed that large sections of the audience in the broadcast media and print found politics and elections uninteresting: the "first reaction [for many] is to switch off or turn to the crossword" (Franklin, 1994: 224).

There was so much information overload that even for those interested in the issues it was “spiritually debilitating”, especially the concentration on negative news:

Faced with such a [media] deluge, the instinct is to withdraw. We are not capable of thoughtfully testing the overwhelming barrage of information bit by bit through discussion or deliberation. We thus reflexively sort out truth and falsity, importance or irrelevance, and caring or not caring through our individual instincts and values; a frantic triage in the overloaded emergency room of the mind (Merritt, 1998: 9).

Franklin claims that in today’s so-called media democracy, “citizens’ voices are barely audible. They are as silent as the politicians featured in the photo opportunity . . . citizens become passive receivers, no longer active participants, in the dialogue of democracy (op. cit.: 12). The relationship between politicians and the media is symbiotic, at first glance adversarial but both with needs best achieved by cooperation: “Each set of actors is crucially dependent on the other and the packaging of politics has both reflected and, in turn, nurtured this mutual reliance” (ibid.: 15).

“Opinion polls show that politicians have never been held in so little esteem,” Cook (1995: 126) stated. “Never” seemed an overstatement but she added a striking turn of phrase from UK Labour politician Paul Flynn: “Some MPs have their noses in the trough so far you can see the soles of their feet.” Government ministers in Britain “continually banged on about public morality, Victorian values and so on, only to be revealed as tacky adulterers and/or the fathers of children born to those castigated single mothers. Few people expect politicians to live lives of blameless sexual rectitude, but blatant hypocrisy sticks in the gullet” (ibid.: 127). Negrine criticised British newspapers for being “eager and willing to volunteer their commitment to political parties” especially at election times. This had the effect of reinforcing voters’ political choices.

The sometimes too cosy relationships between politicians and the media could swing wildly after a honeymoon that could last the whole term of a

new government – or be in tatters after 100 days. There were examples where the government–media corps relationship is unusually sour. Bowman (1988: 7) says Australian politicians in power have reached an accommodation with the press “on an unimaginable scale: ‘Square ‘em or squash ‘em’ is said to have been Lloyd George’s maxim for dealing with the press.

Other political leaders claimed the press-politician relationship was not cosy enough: they were not happy with the way the media treated them. Former NSW Liberal Nick Greiner, after he resigned from office (because of a finding of the Independent Commission Against Corruption, which he as Premier set up) was particularly critical of the mass media’s role in political communication (*Sydney Morning Herald*, December 11, 1992: 12):

A commitment to the truth is one of the things most obviously lacking in Australian journalism . . . in my experience, the relentless drive to “get a story up”, especially with bylines commonplace, easily wins out over the truth both as to facts and, more importantly context and significance.

Greiner had six main gripes: that conflict is “exaggerated where it exists and created or simulated when it does not” (ibid.: 12). “Analysis completely overwhelms the reporting of news . . . The whole culture is smart-alec and cynical beyond rhyme or reason . . . Reliance on interest groups is excessive and selective . . . The herd instinct is overwhelming in both the federal and state press galleries . . . There is a remarkable sensitivity to criticism”. Under the “herd instinct” accusation, he added:

The blood lust which is the media’s version of the tall poppy syndrome [is] a remarkable game of build ‘em up and tear ‘em down played with leaders, be it in politics, business or sport with little or no concession to dictates of fairness or merit (ibid.: 13).

Writing of the Keating challenge to Hawke as leader, Richardson (1994: 310) said the role of the press gallery was crucial: “What the gallery reports as fact is accepted by the great majority; what the gallery proffers as opinion is accepted by many. Even if it is not accepted it becomes a topic of conversation. A prime minister cannot survive a challenge over a 12-month period if the

gallery is hostile.”

The generation gap between most members of parliament and most journalists was a factor in their sometimes hostile relationships:

In small markets the [journalism] staff is overwhelmingly young people. When you're 24, it's a matter of life experience. You haven't lived enough life to understand how to be compassionate or how to address a delicate issue . . . You're dealing with youth and inexperience and insensitivity – and you're dealing with a deadline. That combination is deadly (television reporter quoted in Westin, 2001: 38).

One member of the New Zealand parliament described his inquisitors as “pimplly-faced boys and girls barely past puberty”. Speaking on the NZ Close-Up television program, he said:

I lament the fact that people of such inexperience and political immaturity are in positions to drastically affect the lives of MPs, and all public figures for that matter. It is my view that the National [party] must closely address the conduct of the media. Their professionalism leaves much to be desired. . . . The media in this country is not well regarded by the public at large. People can see through the prejudice (Meurant, 1989: 202).

Governments are the media's “most important social actors” . . . the assumption that the media are a guarantee against government secrecy and abuse of power, and thus freedom of information in the service of responsible government, is misplaced, according to Traber (1995). He said the romantic image of the adversarial press was a myth: readers' and viewers' interpretation of events could be altered by the system of having news briefings to guide reporters through complex documents and issues. Sometimes the media advisers managed to put a gloss on the matter that obscured exactly what was said (Tiffen, 1989: 113). By being helpful, governments helped themselves; it might not be a “spin” or twist. But skating over the bad news and highlighting the good would do the same thing. In this way, public relations for governments was just the same as for most other institutions. As former *Quadrant* editor Robert Manne claimed, “. . . many of the ordinary struggles of modern institutional politics are dominated by the desire to cultivate and maintain positive image and to

suppress anything or anyone who threatens to tarnish it" (Manne, 1993: 6).

Ministerial media advisers tried to get close to political journalists, to make them colleagues rather than adversaries. One critic of the then Labor federal ministry, Parker, a former public servant and later a political and media consultant in the private sector, charged: "The Hawke government's media strategy was aimed at drawing the press gallery into the process of corporatist government, by blurring the distinction between the party's and the nation's interests" (1991: 55). Solomon (1986: 133) illustrated that role of political journalists in Australian governments: "Ministerial statements in the Parliament are timed to allow the minister to hold a press conference elsewhere in Parliament House which can be recorded by radio and television for almost immediate use in news bulletins throughout the country. The press conference has become a far better medium for publicity than the parliamentary debate. Parliament House is the centre for the reporting of national politics, but the focus of that reporting is not the Parliament itself."

John Howard's landslide victory at the Australian federal elections of 1996 in the face of what his biographer felt was an "unsympathetic or hostile" Australian Broadcasting Corporation and print media indicated that people's voting decisions do not hinge on what they absorb from the mass media. Barnett was sure that throughout 1995 and into the election year, "the sympathies of the journalists employed by the major media groups, News Limited and the Fairfax papers, along with the ABC, were with Keating" and the Australian Labor Party (1997: 701).

Members of parties on both sides of politics criticised political journalists for a lack of sympathy with their ideals, and, worse, an antipathy. They also criticised the political reporters for their elitism and the way they mixed mainly with their own lot, cut off from the world of ordinary people:

The media are dominated by a powerful subculture that repels outsiders and powerfully conditions insiders to its rules and values. In recent years, the media have grown increasingly conscious of their vast influence: they take pride in it but

do not know quite what to do with it. They are more comfortable when criticising others than when being criticised, and they tend to be thin-skinned, prickly and defensive. (Yankelovich, 1991: 14.)

The failure to relentlessly link choices and consequences in political reporting often leaves readers under-informed about how things work – or don't work – or gives them a free pass from personal responsibility. US media stories about the antics candidates go through to raise campaign money, for instance, allow readers to say, "Look at those jerks and what they do!" and "retreat into their cocoon of cynicism and distrust" (Merritt, op. cit.: 123). The same "cocoon of cynicism" exists here on a smaller scale perhaps but its extent is hard to establish, given the Australian system of compulsory voting.

In America with its voluntary voting, percentage of electors bothering to vote in presidential and congressional elections has sometimes dropped below 50 per cent, thanks to strongly negative campaigning: positive Senate campaigns had average turnout rates of 57 per cent; in mainly negative Senate campaigns turnout dropped to 49.7 per cent and mixed-tone Senate campaigns had average turnout rates of 52.4 per cent (Ansolabhere and Iyengar, 1995: 204):

The negativity of the news only further contributes to the withdrawal of the electorate. By constantly questioning the sincerity and motives of politicians, journalists add to Americans' cynicism about their own government. (ibid.: 155).

Stories about attack advertisements repeated the messages voters had already heard in the commercials: ad-watches actually benefited the candidates whose messages were being scrutinised by the media, the Ansolabhere and Iyengar study found. Candidates did everything possible to attract such coverage. Publicity and media space (positive or negative) became ends in themselves:

Power today has little to do with how much property a person owns or commands. It is instead determined by how many minutes of prime-time television or pages of news-media attention he can access or occupy (Rushkoff, D., in Cadzow, J., 2001: 24).

US research suggested that voters were less tolerant of political attacks on an opponent's personal life and more tolerant of attacks on policy positions (Jamieson, 2000: 78). They were also less tolerant of inflammatory and misleading attacks. Australian interviews indicated that here, advisers were

more selective, preferring to accentuate the positive: not all news was good news. Paul Lineham, in 1997 senior media adviser to Queensland's Minister for Transport and Main Roads Vaughn Johnson, was one who believed that it was vital for any government to make the most of the good-news stories and not be too concerned about attacking the opposition. He said:

We generate plenty of good-news stories. Bad stories include the road toll but lately we're quite pleased because so far the toll is well below last year's record low figures, thanks to such things as speed cameras (Lineham, 1997).

He said his minister paid a lot of attention to media relations: "The hardest part is coming to grips with the issues. The opposition often disagrees with our policies on party lines but in this portfolio we are just carrying through their policies. [This job is] a bit of a culture shock for media advisers who come straight from journalism. Soon they realise we're not all mad or charlatans, and that politics is not black and white but shades of grey. Facts get in the road of ideology."

Advisers' perceptions of the media were coloured by what they saw as reporters' continual emphasis on negative news. This perception of negativity was checked against 10 New South Wales, interstate and overseas publications and was found to be correct, at least for one week in December 2000. Advisers tried consistently to come with positive stories about their government or party and were disappointed when editors continually rejected them

CONCLUSION

The relationship between ministerial advisers and the media is one of and guarded mutual respect. Mostly the connection tends to be cordial, too much so for some media commentators. Journalists call their political informers "spin-doctors" and the advisers retaliate that reporters are always looking for newsy "angles". Advisers dispute that "spin-doctor" is an appropriate label, although most do admit to trying to put their minister in the best possible light.

“Spinning” a story is not necessarily doctoring it, just as the journalist’s approach of seeking the most newsworthy “angle” or approach is not inherently unethical.

Were the terms ‘spin-doctor’ and ‘minder’ appropriate for advisers?

Advisers were asked whether they disliked the terms ‘minder’ or ‘spin-doctor’ and the extent to which they attempted to persuade the media that their minister’s version of the truth was best – where did persuasion verge on manipulation? And were political journalists so naive that they could be manipulated? Most media advisers disliked the term spin-doctor and felt it did not apply to them. Advisers did not like to see themselves as manipulating the news, although they did admit to putting the best gloss on it from their minister’s point of view:

Some people might call us spin-doctors but I reject that term. We don’t have power or money. Some ministers are better at communicating than others, true, but we don’t become surrogate ministers. Any media adviser who thinks so is headed for trouble. I’m doing the same job of media adviser in government that I was in opposition. In fact, it’s harder. The media still have this residual embarrassment over the homage they paid to John Bannon and are trying to wipe that out by caning the hell out of us (SA government adviser Kevin Donnellan, interviewed in Adelaide, 1995).

A few advisers conceded that from time to time their work involved spin or gloss and that balance was not what this type of work was about, but none had ethical qualms on this score – the one-sided approach was part and parcel of politics:

Sometimes the term spin-doctor is appropriate. Here in Adelaide I’ve found it a much more political job. You are with the leader most of the time. You have to know about all the issues. Although I’m a party member I’m not in any faction; I’m not involved in the party political processes (SA Opposition media adviser Jill Bottrall, interviewed in Adelaide, 1995).

Another Opposition adviser agreed that all advisers tried to put their politicians in the best possible light:

I put out well-researched, informative articles but as a press secretary I’m not interested in balance. The journalists have to provide that. You put your arguments the best way you can, use spin if you like, put your party in the best light. It’s important to set the agenda and during the [1996] election campaign we tried to focus on gambling and gaming issues, health with the Kennett cuts to hospitals, and increases in taxes and charges (Former Victorian Labor Opposition

media adviser (Aileen Muldoon, interviewed in Melbourne, 1996).

Ms Muldoon stressed that the mass media were essential for those in opposition, as they had so few resources for advertising or for reaching people through issues-based departmental campaigns: "We had to attack through the free media. We were always looking for something new, with a human element so people could relate to what we were saying," she said: "For instance, people dying while waiting for an ambulance. It's important to always document your stories."

The view of the media adviser role as that of spin-doctor starts in academia and the media. It is an unusual atmosphere here in Parliament House. The sheer proliferation of demands on ministers and advisers means we don't have time for grand conspiracies. The media contact us and we state our case as best we know how. Information has to be released in a timely way, otherwise the media would lose interest and it might never reach audiences. A good media adviser will of course attempt to put the best spin on a situation but political reporters have an inbuilt skepticism, which is as it should be (former Hawke and Keating Government ministerial media group director David Epstein, interviewed in Canberra, 1995).

Some even rejected the term "spin" and any suggestion of manipulation:

I don't think media advisers are there to protect ministers or to put a better spin on what they say. It's not necessary to manipulate the media to get a good run. Not many politicians or media advisers go out of their way to lie (former South Australian government media adviser Tony O'Reilly, Adelaide, 1995).

Younger advisers than O'Reilly didn't mind the spin-doctor label and were more realistic about what they do, admitting the bias and attempts at manipulation:

Media secretaries can be manipulators, but only if they wish to be. The same with the media. Senior reporters can't be manipulated easily, but the danger is with younger journalists and particularly those on country newspapers. More of them have degrees these days but they are not necessarily more worldly-wise.

Media secretaries give only the government's view and have to be biased. The job does have an element of spin-doctor about it. You try to bury bad news and good journalists are on their guard against this. I rather like the spin-doctor or minder label – it implies flair, that you are good at what you do (WA media secretary Caroline Lacy, interviewed in Perth, 1996 and 2000).

Some advisers felt that one word for their occupation, "minder", came from the media and was not appropriate, since most ministers knew how to look

after themselves. But not all ministers were able to do this and even the most experienced could get into trouble with the media sometimes:

The term “troubleshooter” or “minder” is appropriate for media advisers, especially to those with more unruly ministers. I recall advising one politician that the best thing he could do for his girlfriend’s campaign to retain her seat was to go back to his own electorate and be seen and photographed with his wife. I expected a punch in the mouth for my trouble, but the politician morosely agreed and did return home. I remember the comment of Dennis Atkins, media manager for Goss in 1992 (now back at the *Courier-Mail*) to the EARC Review of Government Media and Information Services: “Journalists make good media minders to ministers; always get the poacher to become the gamekeeper!” (Former political campaign manager Dr Stephen Stockwell, Queensland, 1998)

Advisers sometimes encouraged reporters to approach the opposition for an interview on an important issue, knowing that a hint of controversy would ensure the story got a better run. This advice was not always heeded. The quest for news, with a deadline fast approaching, often means that reporters cut corners and relied on only one source:

The idea of two sources these days in breaking news of national significance is often a luxury that you can’t afford . . . When you get back to the office, do they ask if you have three sources? No. What they ask is, ‘Do you have the interview? Do you have this footage? Can you do a minute-and-a-half?’ (TV reporter, in Westin, 2001: 62).

The search for negative and sensational news troubles advisers but they tended to have the upper hand in the relationship, with news releases the source of many stories according to research by Butler, Zawawi and others. The too-simplistic approach of present-day journalism is a reason for criticism by advisers and commentators. Jana Wendt has argued that Australian journalism has lost its way, that it has been swamped by entertainment values. The world is becoming more complex, but much journalism reduces “issues to cardboard cut-outs, a shadow play of good and evil” (Schultz, 1998: 232). The survey of Australian daily newspapers suggested that for the week studied in December 2000, political news was 24 per cent positive, 68 per cent negative. In politics, the accent on the negative, much to the chagrin of governments, suggests that ministerial media advisers will have to work harder to earn their keep.

Chapter 5

Ethical dilemmas in communicating political information

The process of media advising – of influencing the information which becomes public – poses numerous and important ethical issues. Media advisers are at a pivotal point in the political communication process. So ethical issues with which they are concerned range from great principles about what restrictions there should be on public dissemination of information in a democracy to the micro-morality of how to conduct personal relationships with journalists and their employing ministers. In between are a range of other ethical problems – concerning for example the conduct of political conflicts and the seeking of partisan and personal advantage and the packaging of information both by advisers and by the media.

This chapter explores advisers' views of these issues and some of the cases which illustrate their dimensions. It does so first by examining the principles governing what the media can publish, and restrictions especially to do with national security and personal privacy. The consideration of such principles often arise however in situations where there are contrasting political and personal interests in disclosure.

The second part of the chapter examines the ethical dimensions of media advisers' interactions and relationships with journalists. The relationship between adviser and journalist is inherently one of both mutual need and mutual conflict, manifested not only at a few moments of high principle, but in frequent, perhaps daily, issues of revelation and secrecy. This involves

media advisers' attitudes to issues of truth telling and the limits of deception and frankness. Because of the competition between journalists, there is also scope for favouring some over others, especially in giving 'exclusive' and background information.

In discussions of these ethical issues, the usual academic and public discourse is to set the media on a pedestal as the heroes and ministerial media advisers in the gutter as the villains of political communication, spin-doctors, enemies of democracy. The real picture is much more complicated: advisers are often first-hand observers and even the victims of less than professional or less than ethical conduct by journalists. So the third section of this chapter examines the ethics of media packaging – how they convert their information into stories.

The fourth and final substantive section of the chapter examines the ethics of advisers' relations with their employers. As in any relationship this involves issues of loyalty and its limits, when there may be transcendent principles involved, especially in a position so pivotal to the exercise of political accountability.

The chapter concludes by considering a code of ethics for media advisers. Several professions and professional bodies have such codes, including journalists (Appendix E) and the Public Relations Institute of Australia (Appendix D). Neither of these is easily applied to the peculiar demands of media advisers.

RESTRICTIONS ON WHAT THE MEDIA MAY PUBLISH

Should advisers shield the private life of their ministers from media exposure? Media advisers' protection of their minister's private life was seen as important

by just over half (51.3 per cent) of advisers surveyed, qualified by the view of a large minority, 34.8 per cent, that some exposure of this was inevitable, particularly if the media exposed scandal or corruption. It was not their place to shield the minister if wrong-doing had been committed or if he or she had infringed government policy, particularly if there had been breaches of the ministerial code of conduct (see appendix G).

Table 5.1 Public officials' rights to privacy

'Journalists should not delve into the personal lives of public officials': advisers' responses

Degree of agreement	Per cent
Strongly agree	9.2
Agree	42.1
Can't say	13.8
Disagree	30.9
Strongly disagree	3.9

n = 152

Degree of agreement (%)	Male	Fem.	Age: 20-29	30-39	40+	Media	Policy	Fed.	State	Party: L-Nat.	ALP
Strongly agree	10.8	6.0	6.3	9.5	10.8	6.8	17.6	10.3	8.5	8.5	10.0
Agree	42.2	42.0	43.8	41.9	41.3	41.9	44.1	39.7	40.4	42.3	42.5
Can't say	11.8	18.0	15.6	16.2	8.7	14.5	11.8	12.1	14.8	9.9	17.5
Disagree	30.4	32.0	31.3	31.1	30.4	31.6	26.5	36.2	27.7	35.2	26.3
Strongly disagree	4.9	2.0	3.1	1.4	8.7	5.1	0.0	1.7	5.3	4.2	3.8

Percentages add vertically

Results by categories were fairly uniform: a slightly greater percentage of male

advisers (53 per cent) compared with female advisers (48 per cent) agreed or strongly agreed that public officials had a right to privacy; more women (18 per cent) were in the “can’t say” category. The main difference was between media advisers (49 per cent) and policy advisers (62 per cent) who agreed or strongly agreed with the statement. Julianne Schultz asked the same question in her 1998 survey of journalists. Placing advisers’ responses to the Phillipps survey alongside hers, the results are:

Table 5.1a Public officials’ rights to privacy: advisers’ and journalists’ views

‘Journalists should not delve into the personal lives of public officials’

Degree of agreement	Per cent of advisers	Per cent of journalists
Strongly agree	9.2	8.7
Agree	42.1	12.9
Can’t say	13.8	10.7
Disagree	30.9	25.6
Strongly disagree	3.9	42.1

n = 152 n = 242

An overwhelming majority of journalists, 67.7 per cent, felt they **should** delve into public officials’ personal lives, compared with 51.3 per cent of advisers who felt they should not.

Sometimes press invasions of a minister’s privacy are so outrageous that the storm of protest from readers advantages the minister and makes a ministerial response less important. For 19 consecutive years, John Howard spent his summer holidays at Hawks Nest north of Newcastle. During the second summer after becoming Prime Minister, Howard’s privacy was invaded when the *Newcastle Herald* ran a series of ‘Dear John’ articles and editorial complaining that Howard’s policies had helped put thousands of

locals out of work: the unemployment rate in Newcastle was 13.5 per cent compared with the national average of 8.4 per cent. The articles included directions to Hawks Nest and pictures of the apartment where he was staying with his family, where to bump into him on his walks, on the beach or at the golf club. Prime Television news covered the story in its main evening bulletins, interviewing the *Newcastle Herald's* editor-in-chief and three "randomly-selected" members of the public, one "disappointed" with the articles, one who said that politicians should be able to shrug off such material without offence, and a third who said it was clear to him that the articles were "tongue in cheek".

Four complaints were lodged with the Press Council, one pointing out the danger the detailed articles posed to the Prime Minister:

Surely this is journalistic irresponsibility at its worst, encouraging the lunatic element or unstable, disturbed individuals like Martin Bryant in Tasmania. . . the entire article was totally unprofessional and a gross misuse of an editor's power and position (extract read at University of Western Sydney public lecture by Australian Press Council's Jack Herman, March 19, 2002).

The Press Council upheld the complaints, finding that the Prime Minister was entitled to enjoy his vacation in peace, even if he had invited some members of the media to his holiday home for a photo opportunity. The newspaper printed a large number of letters, including one from the Prime Minister's media adviser, and almost all of them were critical of the stories it published, saying Howard's privacy should not be invaded. The Council said the initial coverage had breached rule 3 of its Statement of Principles.

Former New South Wales opposition leader Kerry Chikarovski claimed she attracted intrusive and offensive media attention just because she was a woman:

She urged the media to focus on her policies rather than her private life, saying she faced sometimes "stupid" questions because she was a female rather than a male politician (Harris, 1999: 6).

Chikarovski added, "Who I am going out with is totally irrelevant to your

assessment of whether I can be the leader of the opposition, really. Yet I get constantly asked. It's an incredibly boring answer: no one." She was upset at media speculation during her two-week overseas holiday in the USA when she visited her daughter: "I query whether they would have done it to a man," she said. "I found it, I suppose, ironic that it happened in the same week that Tim Fischer resigned as federal leader of the National Party so he could spend time with his young family." However, Chikarovski did not complain about her sympathetic interview with Kate Cox, *Sun-Herald*, March 4, 2001: "No dates, but time for God" – the feature was all about the former Liberal leader's private life.

An adviser to former federal Minister for Sport and Tourism Jackie Kelly was critical of the way some in the mass media tried to intrude too much into his minister's personal life:

The worst offenders are the women journalists, yet they are the first to complain about there not being enough women in politics (Sam Spurrett, Canberra, 2001).

Australian National University's Dr Jonathan Kelley claimed in an interview with Adele Horin that women are much more tolerant than men, and younger people are more tolerant than older people: attitudes to homosexuality, for instance, provided a good barometer of tolerance. Australians "don't expect their leaders to be moral exemplars," Horin stated, but whether they would shrug off (as the French did of Francois Mitterand) "revelations of a prime minister's mistress and love child" had not been tested:

Our Canberra press gallery has an 'unspoken pact', says the political writer Mungo MacCallum, not to report on politicians' private lives unless they impinge on their ability to do the job (Horin, 2002: 33).

This 'pact' is not always adhered to. Advisers felt it was unethical of reporters, while not actually invading the privacy of minister's home and family life, to comment on the way politicians dressed and socialised away from parliament. Media people got hung up on appearances; advisers to both main sides of politics at federal and state levels agreed on this:

Ros Kelly was the victim of some unfair comment from the *Sydney Morning Herald* and the *Canberra Times*. Margo Kingston and Jodie Brough of the *Herald* assumed a prosecutorial role, as active political players. Ros didn't fit their feminist image; she was the sort of blonde chick who was happy to hang around with the football team. Their comment pieces on her stepped out too far from legitimate commentary (Keating Government media director David Epstein, interviewed in Canberra, 1995).

Epstein had some sympathy for the way one Liberal Party activist was portrayed:

Noel Crichton-Browne was one example of someone whose appearance told against him, from his hair style to what he liked to eat and drink. We can't all be models of elegance all the time. I'm not arguing against personality pieces; a lot of political reporting is applied gossip. But private lives should be respected where they are beyond the scope of what affects political actions and abilities. (Same interview.)

The time when governments try to invoke a supposed rule that the media should not invade ministers' private lives is when the media are finding some part of those lives intensely interesting. One case involving the private life of a British government minister, Tim Yeo, was highlighted by BBC political correspondent Nicholas Jones. He had heard that despite the Conservative government of John Major stressing the importance of family values, Yeo had fathered a "secret love child" as *News of the World* put it in its Boxing Day edition of 1993. Yeo had put out an immediate statement confirming he was the father of a five-month-old daughter by an unmarried Conservative councillor but that he regarded this matter as an entirely private one which had no bearing on the political duties of either parent. Yeo said his wife and family were aware of the extra-marital affair. Jones took the opportunity of extending an interview with the Conservative Party chairman, Sir Norman Fowler, about the government's 1994 prospects to ask him about Yeo. Fowler said what had happened to Yeo was a private matter. The position of two private individuals should be respected: "It would be a great mistake if we went down the course of trying to pillory people for their own private lives . . . we should have compassion and understanding . . . I do not believe it is part of our role, and I don't think it is part of the media's role either, to go into the private lives of individuals, unless it has a dramatic effect on the role that the minister is carrying out" (Jones, 1995: 5). The following day *The Sun* awarded Fowler its 'Poppycock of the Year' award for having suggested that the media should keep

their noses out of cases where ministers committed adultery. Voters based their judgement on the public image of MPs: "That's why so many politicians include happy family photos on their election literature. And that's why MPs don't like the press spilling the beans when they're caught out not practising what they preach." Mrs Aldine Horrigan, Conservative Mayor of Haverhill, largest town in Yeo's constituency, wrote to *The Times* claiming Fowler's plea for compassion was misjudged because "immoral politicians" were "potentially untrustworthy". After providing the media with some spectacular shots in and out of airports trying to dodge the cameras, Yeo resigned three days later. Reflecting on his own part in Yeo's downfall, Jones concluded that while he regretted the distress caused to the women and children caught up in the affair, he had no sympathy for Yeo: "He belonged to a political party which, like its opponents, sought to exploit and manipulate the media." Journalists had been briefed by the Conservatives' media officer Tim Collins that John Major was intent on "rolling back the permissive society" (ibid.: 8). The Conservatives had prepared their own bed of nails.

Privacy concerns not only what is reported but how the information was obtained. A more recent development in privacy invasion is electronic eavesdropping and phone tapping. The era of mobile phones makes interception of calls easier but still illegal. The classic example of illegal interception making the news was Victorian Premier Jeff Kennett's midnight call via his carphone to then Federal Opposition foreign affairs shadow minister and former leader Andrew Peacock on March 21, 1987. Kennett was upset by some of the things Opposition Leader John Howard had been saying; their conversation peppered with expletives and unflattering comments about Howard was taped by a member of a left-wing group using a scanner and the tape passed on to the *Melbourne Sun News-Pictorial*. Howard sacked Peacock from his front bench, citing the car phone conversation as disloyal to Howard and damaging to the Liberal Party (Barnett, 1997: 458). Kennett and Peacock should have known how easy it was to monitor car phones, especially as "former state politics reporter for *The Age*, David Broadbent, said he had warned Kennett several years earlier about the dangers of

eavesdropping after a radio station had monitored their conversation on Kennett's car phone" (Hurst and White, op. cit.: 128). Then Attorney-General Lionel Bowen decided not to prosecute the *Melbourne Sun* as under the Telecommunication (Interception) Act of 1979 it was not then illegal to publish the text of an illegally-recorded telephone conversation. Bowen introduced amendments to the Act in May 1987 to close this loophole (ibid.: 129).

By contrast, the *Canberra Times* was given but refused to publish an illegally recorded 1988 mobile phone call between then Environment Minister Senator Graham Richardson and Treasurer Paul Keating, in which Keating used a stream of invective against Prime Minister Bob Hawke:

The apparent double standard between the media's responses to the two intercepted telephone calls is consistent with the view of many Liberals at the time that there was a pro-Labor media bias. A more likely explanation involves the different editorial attitudes and standards of the two newspapers (Tiffen, 1999: 88).

Also, Bowen's changes to the Telecommunication (Interception) Act would have been a deterrent. Keating remained Treasurer and Deputy Prime Minister until his leadership challenge in June, 1991, when he retired to the back benches until elected leader of the Labor Party (and so Prime Minister) in December of that year (Edwards, 1996: 449). Had the *Canberra Times* chosen to do as the *Melbourne Sun* had done and published the taped phone call, the Hawke-Keating partnership could have been cut short three years earlier.

Clandestine eavesdropping was not usually a worry for advisers in their work – they did not usually concern themselves about surreptitious taping of their telephone conversations. They suspected that media offices tended to do this as a matter of course, without informing the person on the other end of the line that the conversation was being recorded. As one media company executive stated:

The most efficient and foolproof way to make sure that a news reporter can prove the accuracy of an important interview is to have made a tape – with or without the consent of the person whose conversation was recorded (Ginsberg, 1984: 16).

Certainly at media interviews, advisers usually make sure that the reporter knows their interview with the minister is being recorded by the adviser so that the actual words spoken can be matched up against the story if necessary.

At the other end of the information scale are issues of national security: these were also probed in the survey.

Media advisers were asked to give their views on whether they believed that government officials should be able to censor news items they thought would harm the national interest.

Table 5.2 Governments and authority to censor the media

'Government officials should have authority to stop publication or broadcast of a news story they believe is a grave threat to national security'

Degree of agreement	Per cent
Strongly agree	17.2
Agree	48.3
Can't say	11.9
Disagree	19.2
Strongly disagree	3.3

n = 151

Degree of agreement (%)	Male	Fem.	Age:			Media Policy		Fed.	State	Party:	
			20-29	30-39	40+					Lib./ Nat.	ALP
Strongly agree	15.7	20.0	25.0	16.2	13.0	18.8	11.8	17.2	17.0	21.1	13.9
Agree	48.0	48.0	37.5	48.6	54.3	47.9	47.1	48.3	47.9	40.8	55.7
Can't say	10.8	14.0	12.5	14.9	8.7	12.0	14.7	10.3	13.8	11.3	12.7
Disagree	20.6	16.0	21.9	16.2	21.7	18.8	20.6	19.0	19.1	25.4	12.7
Strongly disagree	1.0	0.0	3.1	4.1	2.2	2.6	5.9	5.2	2.1	1.4	5.1

Percentages add vertically

Most advisers (66 per cent) agreed or strongly agreed with the statement. A sizeable minority (23 per cent) did not. Perhaps surprisingly, more advisers

There are legitimate reasons for some government information being off-limits, according to the media adviser to the Minister for Foreign Affairs, Alexander Downer:

Because of delicate country-to-country negotiations, or issues of privacy for Australians who get into trouble abroad, much of our information has to be protected, confidential or secret and that state of affairs is anathema to most journalists (Matt Francis, Canberra, 2001).

A secret report "is a red rag to a bull – its very existence is a challenge to any journalist," Francis said. He pointed out that some things had to remain confidential – discussions between countries could not be conducted in the spotlight of media coverage: "You can't negotiate treaties through the media."

However, journalists are often suspicious that such claims tend to become inflated – they feel that considerations of secrecy or public knowledge are often governed by much more venal political considerations. Governments often classify as confidential or secret information which is not a genuine security worry: they try to hide it because its disclosure might prove politically embarrassing at that time. Politicians sometimes leak such material because they believe to release it is in their own, their party's or the public interest.

New South Wales ministerial offices, departments and agencies have been criticised as "going to extraordinary lengths to suppress contentious documents":

...there is no limit on the amount NSW government bodies can charge to process FOI [Freedom of Information] applications, so huge charges are levied against applicants (Clark, 1999: 13).

An Ombudsman's survey found that several agencies still thought they had 45 days to determine FOI applications, when the period was reduced to 26 days back in 1994. Nine agencies thought they could exempt documents from release if they were more than five years old, a provision of the act that was

repealed in 1992. In 1999, "the Premier's Department had the worst record of any of the 129 departments or agencies when it came to full refusals of FOI applications: 55.5 per cent of applications were refused (ibid.: 13).

Battles over secrecy and disclosure are often part of the war between political parties. Politicians and officials in Australia have a obsession with secrecy: in government, with trying to enforce it; in opposition, with trying to pry open deeds, documents and data locked away from public gaze. Ministers restrict reports, or fail to table them in parliament in a timely way. Oppositions are enthusiastic supporters of press freedom. But soon after taking office, governments perceive that it is better to swamp negative news with positive stories, if they want to be seen in a good light by the mass media consumers who elected them. Selective secrecy and timing are both more important than they had realised in opposition. They and their advisers find it hard to suppress all that they wish to keep secret, and that is how it should be:

In every parliament house in Australia a paradox may be observed: living side by side are politicians who try to keep secret much of what they say and do, and political journalists whose aim is to penetrate the secrecy which politicians and officials try to maintain (John Bennetts, in Reville & Roderick, 1965).

In the years since 1965, it has become progressively easier for mass and niche media to get at the truth via leaks, whistleblowers, photocopied documents and electronic mail – but politicians are still obsessed with secrecy. Frank Costigan, QC, said he was amazed when presiding over the Royal Commission into Painters and Dockers at how often the "Secret" stamp had been used on government documents. The government didn't want the public to know what was going on. Discussing the "children overboard" affair on a nationwide SBS-TV program, and the claim that ministers and advisers had either inadvertently or deliberately misled media and public into thinking that asylum seekers had thrown their children into the Indian Ocean from a leaky boat in Australian waters near Christmas Island, rather than have the Australian Navy return the vessel to Indonesia, Costigan said:

There's a more serious issue than a lie here: the question is, why didn't John Howard

and his two ministers [Defence, Peter Reith, and Immigration, Philip Ruddock] seek out the truth? Did they let the message get through to those advising them that they didn't want to know the truth? (*Insight*, March 14, 2002).

A gag was imposed on Defence officials talking to the media. Defence photographs of people in the water (published at the time to prove the story) turned out to be of when the boat was sinking two days later. No children had been thrown overboard. Another panelist, Jennifer Hewett of the *Sydney Morning Herald*, said Australian governments have always had an obsession with secrecy. Now they had spin-meisters to help them: "There's nothing wrong with that – ministers do need good communication and image skills. But where the system gets corrupted is that underneath [the image] sometimes there is no truth."

These issues concerning the legitimate bounds of secrecy and its potential for abuse have long been debated by journalists and analysts. As long ago as the 1960s, US journalism's professional association set up a committee to inquire into allegations of excessive secrecy in government. Its report posed these questions to be asked before it passed judgement on allegations that politicians and officials were improperly withholding information:

1. Are officials given enough protection against inaccurate, adolescent, or outright malicious treatment of so-called "sensitive information" in the media?
2. Are the stories a reporter writes about public affairs published as written or are they jazzed up to the embarrassment of the reporter and his sources?
3. Do media which complain of excessive secrecy have consistent records for trying to cover governmental news with intelligent, knowledgeable and trustworthy reporters? Or are the media asserting their traditional right to gather information with personnel who are demonstrably unfit to treat it with balance, perspective and comprehension?
4. Is the information sought and published in an objective manner, or is it treated as an instrument of media management policy?
5. Are media alert enough and consistent enough in their insistence on obtaining all the news that is fit to print? Or do some media invite official indifference to the release of news by neglecting official bodies on which they are supposed to keep a sharp eye? (*ibid.*: 158).

Where there are competing moral reasons for governments insisting on secrecy or opting for openness, then a balance has to be struck on the basis of reasons (Professional Standards Council, 2002: 34). There needs to be a

balance between secrecy and publicity; journalists desire more light to be shed on the processes of government and this is reasonable, since hidden matters can conceal corruption among politicians and officials.

THE ETHICS OF ADVISERS' RELATIONSHIPS WITH JOURNALISTS

The survey of advisers and face-to-face interviews with them confirmed the view that as a group, they did not dwell on the ethical implications of their relationships with journalists. They are a pragmatic lot, thinking about what works best for them and their minister. They do not have the time for ethical reflection in a demanding, time-pressured work environment that does not support or promote ethical decision-making practices. When in government, advisers are in a position to apply considerable pressure on reporters and editors. But are wary of overplaying their hand, lest they have their threat of sanctions publicised as censorship. Advisers are also in a position to release material selectively and in stages, timing and restricting access to information.

For advisers, the main ethical temptations are to:

- put a gloss on their government's and minister's activities
- not highlight or, worse, conceal anything that might be misinterpreted or tarnish this image
- keep a flow of information positive to the government before the media and voters (whether or not there is anything new and interesting worth reporting), and
- make sure everyone realises how bad the opposition is (no matter how effective they really are).

Injunctions such as the Golden Rule (do unto others as you would want them to do to you) do not usually apply in politics, unless there are promotional advantages in abiding by them. The adviser tries to make sure his or her minister is always seen in the best possible light. This flow of favourable information is an important power resource (McNair, in Kieran, ed., 1998: 50). That is the nature of the job. Interruption to this flow of propaganda, because of any ethical scruples of the adviser, is likely to court dismissal. In a liberal democracy, "politicians . . . are supposed to communicate (professionally, at least) for the purpose of ensuring good government, presenting citizens with political choices, laying claim to political power, and informing citizens honestly and openly about the administration of government" (ibid.: 50).

Media advisers and ministers who conceal the whole truth are operating in the same way as a public relations person. Harold Burson, founder of the world's biggest public relations firm, said:

I do not have the same motivation that [a journalist] does in trying to find out the entire story. I tell you that part of the story that I think is truthful and that serves my client's interests (Voumard, 1988: 1).

This could involve concealing or not drawing attention to facts, but "this is a far cry from being untruthful. There's frequently a time when facts, if disclosed, can be very, very harmful in the negotiating process." Journalists seek out but are sometimes unable to uncover fully all aspects of matters that they think should, in the public interest, be publicised.

Journalists appreciated the way advisers could clear a path to their ministers but resented it when they interfered with administrative processes for political gain:

In a recent case involving this newspaper [*The Australian*], a federal minister's press secretary gave documents sought under freedom of information to a rival publication the day before their release through the proper process. It was payback for asking questions the minister was not happy with. He's done his minister no good service (Fagan, 1997: 11).

What ethical issues arise in information-gathering and dissemination? How

should the news media present the issues of the day? Are reporters so used to digging out the bad news that they exaggerate problems, driving worthwhile information to the news margins – any good news relegated to the inside pages, a column of amusing snippets such as the *Sydney Morning Herald's* Column Eight, or a feel-good segment, last item on a news telecast of mainly gloom and doom? Advisers were surveyed for their views of a statement on how the media should present the issues:

Table 5.3 Fair presentation of political issues

'Journalists should make sure they report the main issue positions of political parties in much the same way as the parties themselves present the issues'

Degree of agreement	Per cent
Strongly agree	2.0
Agree	19.1
Can't say	13.8
Disagree	49.3
Strongly disagree	15.1

n = 151

Degree of agreement (%)	Gender		Age			Media Policy		Level		Party	
	Male	Fem.	20-29	30-39	40+			Fed.	State	Lib/ Nat.	ALP
Strongly agree	1.0	0.0	3.1	2.7	0.0	1.7	2.9	3.4	1.1	2.8	1.3
Agree	21.6	14.0	15.6	17.6	23.9	19.7	17.6	15.5	21.3	21.1	17.5
Can't say	10.8	22.0	28.1	9.5	13.0	17.9	2.9	10.3	17.0	18.3	11.3
Disagree	51.0	46.0	40.6	54.1	47.8	35.3	61.8	60.3	42.6	47.9	50.0
Strongly disagree	14.7	16.0	12.5	16.2	15.2	15.4	14.7	10.3	18.1	9.9	20.0

Percentages add vertically

There was broad disagreement with the statement: 64% disagreed or strongly disagreed, although a large minority, 21%, agreed or strongly agreed with it. Many more advisers to Labor ministers (70%) disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement than did advisers to coalition ministers (58%). Julianne Schultz asked a similar question in her 1998 survey of journalists. Placing advisers' responses to the Phillipps survey alongside hers, the results are:

Table 5.3a Fair presentation of political issues: advisers' and journalists' views compared

'Journalists should make sure they report the main issue positions of political parties in much the same way as the parties themselves present the issues'

Degree of agreement	Per cent of advisers	Per cent of journalists
Strongly agree	2.0	36.5
Agree	19.1	27.1
Can't say	13.8	11.9
Disagree	49.3	16.4
Strongly disagree	15.1	8.2
	n = 151	n = 244

The markedly different response to this question is hard to explain. Perhaps journalists feel they **do** usually present the issues the way political parties themselves do; advisers feel strongly that they do not. In the interviews, advisers mentioned that ministers often railed at journalists' attitudes.

In politics, each side attempts to market its own package of ideas and personalities to the mass media and public (Wolfsfeld, 1997: 31). It is a contest over meaning. "The media serve as public interpreters of events and as symbolic arenas for ideological struggle between antagonists" (ibid.: 54). Governments translated their political power into cultural power through

their enhanced ability to enthrone journalists and their resources to plan, execute and package events in ways that would appeal to each of the media and their reporters. This is a battle for political legitimacy in the eyes of news gatherers and audiences, with ministerial and opposition media advisers the strategists marshalling their key players. Advisers had to sell the mass media reporters, and through them the voters, on the idea that the government's way was best. They could not abandon all their qualities and skills as a journalist overnight and don a publicist's hat; they would be regarded as imposters, as a former Labor federal government adviser explained:

Certainly, there's an element of public relations in the job. We have to sell a product, irrespective of the negatives about it, just as the PR people do. Sure, our package is larger and concerns the national interest but it's still PR (Bob Bowden, Canberra, 1995).

"You have to convince journalists that you have a good product, an interesting story," Bowden said. There are good days and bad days – the job is not all black and white. Advisers have to be ready to contribute ideas on policy development and put as good a spin to the media on government plans as they can: "It's all about communication management. You plan for maximum impact, right down to the time your story is to be released." Epstein agreed that politics was not about black and white but shades of grey. It was about making least worst choices, the resulting decisions not necessarily the best ones but compromises. A lot of dirt tended to be tossed:

Parties need to be united if they are to continue winning elections. From time to time federal politics gets dirty. It's been particularly dirty at federal level lately. This is a sporadic thing; not a good development. I feel there's a relative absence of corruption in the federal political scene and reasonably clean campaigning (Epstein, Canberra, 1995).

Epstein highlighted one unwelcome development in information dissemination – push-polling, borrowed from America: "We saw it in the 1994 US congressional elections and now it's becoming a regular occurrence there, instigated especially by the hard right of the Republican Party. I expect their campaign manuals are in the hands of conservative politicians here,"

he said. "But Australians have an antipathy to that kind of campaigning." Push polling surfaced in two territories – the Australian Capital Territory and the Northern Territory. A pollster would arrange for many phone calls ostensibly about voters' attitudes to the candidates, but in reality to implant in their minds information detrimental to one candidate. Some of the information would be correct, much of it misleading.

Carolyn Betts felt that there was more accountability and transparency these days: people outside could find out quite easily and fast what was going on. There had to be a higher degree of accountability when major decisions were being taken. Advisers said they had a responsibility on most occasions to disseminate information in a fair way, not playing favourites unless there was a good reason to do so, since this would be likely to antagonise sections of the press gallery. But most had no qualms about releasing snippets of exclusive information to a reporter thought to be sympathetic to their side of politics. Most would not consider omission of a part of the story that reflected badly on the government to be unethical: "I would never tell an outright lie. But I have sometimes not told the whole story," one Canberra adviser said. "The negative stuff is for the reporter to ferret out. They are good at that."

Detached observation by journalists is not synonymous with objectivity. It is impossible to avoid unconscious bias but the best journalists are aware of their own prejudices and make a particular effort to understand those news sources and opinions towards which they are not naturally sympathetic (Hurst and White, 1994: 31). Advisers criticised some news outlets, particularly the tabloid daily newspapers, for mixing editorial comment with news coverage, "slanting the news to suit the paper's editorial line" (Perth adviser, 1998) and always looking for sensation and scandal, even when there were none of either around.

One critic of political journalists, author Margaret Simons, said that in Canberra in particular, the press gallery reporters were more inclined to serve

their sources rather than the public. One of the problems with the press gallery was off-the-record comment, where the political contact passed along information that could not be attributed to that contact:

So reliance is built up on the contact, and that contact has some say on the way the journalist operates. It's a whole culture between politicians and the journalists – it's unhealthy for them and for us (Simons, 1999: 26).

She said that people were fascinated by politics, but not politics as determined by journalists.

Should advisers be able to talk freely with reporters off-the-record, without fear of being recorded or reported? Most of the media advisers surveyed and interviewed had reservations about the value of off-the-record briefings for political journalists; all could recall incidents when something said had been reported later. A few reporters they would trust with their life but for the most part they felt that they had to be very careful what they said, especially at unofficial, off-the-record briefings. Maurice Dunleavy, federal government information director in South Australia, was caught out by a reporter who recorded him and sent his comments to a Melbourne radio station. During the 1983 federal election campaign he was with journalists and camera crews on the tarmac at Adelaide airport, waiting for then Prime Minister Malcolm Fraser to arrive. They were discussing comments made the day before by Liberal Senator Don Jessop, who had criticised the way the Liberals were conducting the campaign. Dunleavy made disparaging remarks about Jessop off the record, including calling him a 'fuckwit'. In Victoria, radio station 3AW commentator Derryn Hinch replayed the comments next day, identifying Dunleavy as the speaker. Believing the broadcast had put his career in jeopardy, Dunleavy offered to resign but the offer was not accepted. He complained to the Australian Journalists' Association that although unwise, under no circumstances could his chatty remarks have been interpreted by the journalists as a form of briefing. Adelaide radio journalists denied responsibility and Dunleavy was unable to be certain who had taped

his comments. The AJA judiciary committee agreed that making the tape available to an interstate radio station was “totally despicable” and a clear breach of the code of about fair and honest methods of obtaining news ethics (see appendix E for an updated version of the code applying in 1983). It added:

If reporters and political aides are unable to talk privately, “off the record”, among themselves without the possibility of such disgraceful disclosure, then political journalism as well as journalistic ethics will be the poorer (Hurst & White, 1994: 180).

The committee said it would have recommended the maximum fine or even expulsion from the AJA if it could have established the identity of the person who passed on the tape to 3AW.

Journalists worried about whether to accept information off-the-record because what they might be offered with conditions, they might be able to get without conditions later and be free to publish, without being accused of breach of confidence. The leak might be on offer because the politician concerned fears the information will reach reporters anyway through other means. Prior disclosure could be made in more favourable terms. Advisers questioned about this strategy of releasing information off the record said they would prefer not to be a party to it – their fear was that reporters would feel resentful and used, if they found out that they had been manipulated in this way.

One Canberra adviser gave an example of an off-the-record offer which was rejected. He recalled it was when journalists waiting at the doors of an ALP federal conference were told they could come in – as long as they stayed for the whole conference and agreed to publish only those parts of it declared on the record. The reporters refused, feeling that any parts where delegates were rowdy and showed up divisions in the party would be declared off-the-record. Only those sections where delegates could be sure of being portrayed in a good light would be cleared for publication or broadcast. Reporters are less inclined these days to accept information off the record or in confidence, mainly

because of their experience with ministerial attempts to manipulate the release of the news for party advantage.

UK Prime Minister Harold Wilson's press secretary Joe Haines, interviewed on British television in October 1994, complained that it was no longer possible to have a confidential relationship with a journalist and be sure it would stick. He singled out radio and television reporters as the worst offenders, because of their "compulsion to reveal all" (Jones, 1995: 221).

Stories that are fast-moving and spicy, with plenty of fresh and often conflicting information coming to hand, can frequently be sensationalised when inventive reporters hunt around for people on all sides of politics to be the unsuspecting sources. Then minister's media adviser is left with no way of acting except (with the approval of his or her master) confirming the bare facts. The more candid politicians and their advisers are, "the more likely they will quickly and effectively resolve ethical problems" (McElreath, 1997: 82). With a negative story, McElreath contends that best practice is full disclosure of all the material in the shortest possible time, to avoid giving day-to-day continuity to the story. This is also the most ethical way. When the book *Spycatcher* was banned in Britain, everyone there wanted to read it and often paid several times the cover price to obtain illicit copies smuggled out of Australia. When the ban was lifted and the book went on sale, few wanted to read it. The less you tell people, the more they want to know; the more you tell them, the sooner they lose interest (Bland, 1998: 165).

Few politicians or their advisers indulge in crisis planning, hoping that crises will never affect them. Because it is natural to want to influence a crisis situation to one's advantage, political dynamics will escalate: "people will want to side with the 'winners' and have a say in any possible outcomes" (Travers in Bland, *op. cit.*: 149). The news media are naturally interested in reporting crises. Their presence and demands can heighten ethical dilemmas for politicians, escalating the crisis.

Media advisers' relationships with journalists were in general cordial but guarded, hampered by the knowledge that they were on different sides of the divide that separates information purveyors from information gatherers. Politics is not noted for fairness when it comes to campaign battles over issues and personalities; neither is political journalism always conducted in a straightforward and honest way. Advisers were seeking to portray their politicians' activities in the best possible light, even though they did not always deserve praise; political journalists were keen to get inside the guard of the politicians, looking for the sensational expose or the occasional unwise comment.

THE ETHICS OF MEDIA PACKAGING

Journalists have a responsibility to "monitor, report, scrutinise and analyse the politicians' actions and rhetoric" (McNair, in Kirean, ed., 1998: 50). This is their "fourth estate" role. But increasingly they are under pressure to liven up their reporting, to package it in a more gripping, entertaining way, at the expense sometimes of the factual content of the report. And once the story leaves their hands, editors and sub-editors are under competitive pressure to jazz it up further. Understandably, they try hard not to rely on the pleasing images provided in carefully staged photo opportunities. Sometimes, according to advisers, the media misrepresent present-day reporting by combining it with out-of-date images. For instance, the way sub-editors repackage a journalist's positive story, illustrating it with old, out-of-context photographs, was a persistent theme in interviews. This technique was criticised by the media adviser to Alexander Downer:

The story [by Cameron Stewart, *Weekend Australian* magazine] was strongly positive, revealing Downer as an excellent foreign minister, but one infamous photograph plus cartoon from six years ago when he was opposition leader, showing him in skirt, fishnet stockings and high heels, was an embarrassment he would rather not have had dredged up (Matt Francis, Canberra, 2001).

Sometimes the choice of words in a story was an example of inaccurate media packaging. Francis said that diplomacy had a language of its own: certain words can mean certain special things: "Which would you consider strongest: a complaint, protest or representation? Naturally the media prefer to go for the strongest words, the most colourful language." He said it was hard for minister and media adviser to keep a strong message for Australian audiences without causing upset and confusion overseas. The world that journalists were covering today was much more complex than it was a decade or two ago; some reporters and sub-editors did not have adequate specialised knowledge to gather and package their stories properly. On a complex issue, reporters could cut down on their error rate if they would check their facts with the media adviser after they had written the story:

Journalists ought to give us a chance to look at what they have put together. I know checking back with the source is anathema to most of them. But at least they would get it right more often (Adelaide adviser, 1998).

One trouble is that many journalists no longer have shorthand skills to record what is said accurately and, with further editing back at the office, the result can be far from the truth:

Reading quotes back has to be handled carefully; while a worthwhile practice for fairness and accuracy, it can result in sources trying to improve quotes by doctoring them . . . Statements made in public forums, speeches or public utterances by politicians, should not be read back or revised (Jerry Ceppos, former editor *San Jose Mercury News*, in Haiman, 2001: 27).

Reporters worried that "reading back stories to politicians gives them a chance to spin or retract in ways that serve them more than they serve readers" (ibid.: 28). Australian journalists' attitude was usually that reading even parts of a story back to a source was asking for trouble. Suddenly, sources want to go off the record or alter what they have said to make them look better. On this issue, advisers encouraged reporters to check back with them if they had any doubts as to what was said or meant.

If political reporters value honesty in ministerial advisers, it's true to say that

the advisers looked for and expected honest reporting in the press gallery:

Table 5.4 How the Australian mass media packages political news

'Most of the time, our releases to the media are treated honestly and straightforwardly'

Degree of agreement	Per cent
Strongly agree	5.3
Agree	73.7
Can't say	5.9
Disagree	13.8
Strongly disagree	1.3

n = 152

Degree of agreement (%)	Male	Fem.	Age:			Media/Policy		Fed.	State	Party:	
			20-29	30-39	40+					Lib/ Nat.	ALP
Strongly agree	3.9	8.0	6.3	5.4	3.9	6.0	0.0	1.7	7.4	7.0	3.8
Agree	75.5	70.0	75.0	70.3	78.3	72.6	79.4	77.6	71.3	60.6	85.0
Can't say	5.9	6.0	6.3	8.1	2.2	7.7	0.0	6.9	5.3	9.9	2.5
Disagree	12.7	16.0	9.4	16.2	13.0	12.8	17.6	12.1	14.9	21.1	7.5
Strongly disagree	2.0	0.0	3.1	0.0	2.2	0.9	2.9	1.7	2.2	1.4	1.3

Percentages add vertically

There was widespread agreement with the statement: 79 per cent agreed (a few strongly), only 15 per cent disagreed or strongly disagreed.

There was little difference in perceptions of men and women, in age groups or between media and policy advisers. The biggest difference in percentages

agreeing or strongly agreeing was between coalition advisers (68 per cent) and ALP advisers (89 per cent): 23 per cent of coalition advisers thought that their releases were **not** treated honestly and straightforwardly.

In interviews, most advisers agreed they were covered adequately. A few accused journalists of slanting the news against the government of the day:

Some media people are incompetent or underhanded. They fabricate the bulk of the story and just use the minister's throwaway quote at the end. Then they wonder why we feel hurt or unhappy. I've never asked anyone to write a biased story and I expect my minister to be faithfully represented in the media (Paul Lineham, Brisbane, 1997).

Advisers were well acquainted with the moral principle of reciprocity or fair dealing. In their relationships with political journalists, media advisers stressed the need for fair dealing (at least with those reporters who dealt fairly with them), an exchange of information and reciprocity. They complained about media bias, which they saw as a breach of moral imperatives, in particular fair dealing, by reporters. When people talked about media bias they usually meant deliberate bias over political reporting:

Framing questions about the political role of the news media solely in these terms [alleging bias] constricts the inquiry, largely focusing on unproductive areas while omitting the most important political and theoretical questions (Tiffen, 1989: 3).

Labor sympathisers meant anti-Labor bias, coalition supporters thought reporters' bias is mostly against the conservative side of politics. When the Whitlam Labor government was elected in 1972, many members of the Canberra press gallery were pleased but editorially most newspapers were opposed (Schultz, 1998: 186). Many of the advisers surveyed were too young to remember clearly the events of federal politics in 1975 (70 per cent of those surveyed for this thesis were in the 20 to 39 age bracket). That election with its prelude in the dramatic dismissal of the Labor government on November 11 was the most polarised in Australian post-war history. Media were bombarded with accusations of bias against the ALP; even reporters from other media felt News Limited's flagship *The Australian* was blatantly biased

(Hurst & White, op. cit.: 31). *The Age* editor Greg Taylor recalled:

I believe they were slanting the news and they were doing it so obviously. Let's say that I'd been on *The Australian* in 1975 and had taken it into my head to slant news, I hope it wouldn't have been nearly as obvious as they were. It was just so obvious it was ridiculous and of course it became widely known that journalists were being pushed into certain directions (Edgar, 1979: 8).

The December 8 1975 strike at *The Australian* after journalists complained that management was tampering with their copy was the first ever strike over bias and raised the issue of conflicting loyalty – should journalists put loyalty to their employer ahead of fair reporting? Journalists argued that owner Rupert Murdoch's bias against the ALP had spread from editorials into news pages, affecting story and photo choices, headlines and placement. The journalists conceded that management had the right to set political guidelines for its newspapers but they objected to the way the guidelines were being applied. Murdoch said at the time:

Journalists were showing bias and we cut bias out of their stories, which is a different thing. We cut the bias out and they said that was biased because we cut the bias out (ibid.: 8).

The ALP boycotted *The Australian* and many journalists resigned. The paper's circulation declined for several years and it was a decade before its circulation was back up to the level of the 1970s (Schultz, op. cit.: 188). Except for a strike at the *National Times* over a professional issue in 1984, Australian newspapers since then have been able to steer clear of such internal conflict but have occasionally aroused accusations of bias in news treatment and editorials. Towards the end of the 1980s, Fairfax journalists were organising public campaigns about newspaper ownership and editorial independence, claiming that journalism as a profession had a clear duty to act in the public interest. Owners and managers saw this as a threat to their control over newsrooms (Schultz, op. cit.: 124).

In interviews, media advisers for Labor politicians tended to make the point strongly that they felt the editorial policies of most mainstream media were

against the left side of politics. By contrast, media advisers to Liberal and National Party ministers felt that the majority of individual political reporters and the Australian Broadcasting Corporation tended to favour Labor. Several advisers interviewed were sure that reporters covering their area were biased against the government, interested mainly in furthering their own agendas, those of their management or the opposition:

News people in this state are in league with the opposition. They ask simple questions about highly complicated subjects and don't want the full answer, just a 15-second grab. It's simple dishonesty, designed to mislead readers and viewers. If my minister gave such answers in parliament he'd be accused of misleading the house (former Queensland government adviser Paul Lineham, Brisbane, 1997).

Opposition advisers sometimes took the reverse view that the media was biased in favour of the government:

The Labor Party's major handicap is that South Australia is a state with only one daily newspaper, *The Advertiser*. It supports the Tories. Its view is jaundiced and biased; it doesn't run bad news about the Government, or buries it at the back of the paper. The suburban chain *The Messenger* is more independent, has more credibility and more sense of what needs to be said. It is good and fair (former SA opposition adviser Jill Bottrall, Adelaide, 1995).

Advisers on both sides of politics pointed to what seemed to them an obsession of Australian journalists: finding an entertaining angle to their stories, if possible a negative or scandalous one:

The focus in the selection is on personalities, unusual events and situations, and recurring ceremonies such as elections, inaugurations, holidays, and crimes: in short, on entertainment and features that will attract an audience for advertising (Edelman, 2001: 76).

Edelman added: "The discouragement and emptiness that marks the lives of a great many people contribute to the same result" [the expectation that the news will be entertaining]. We need news that entertains because it diverts attention from the distressing world around us. Issues that politicians and their advisers defined as interesting and worth communicating received attention – but not as much attention as celebrity scandal and crime. In Australia, entertainers and journalists are now grouped in one union: the Media, Entertainment and Arts Alliance is an association that includes

journalists, photographers, and a wide range of musicians and other entertainers. Journalists, under pressure from their editors to come up with lively stories, were apt to adopt their union's dichotomy and mix the show-business style of hype and dramatic licence with the strict news values of earlier years. News and commentary for some reporters was laced with entertainment values, according to criticisms by media advisers. "They are not in show business: they should keep their reports factual, not fictional," one Canberra adviser (one of the seven who preferred not to be named) said. "If they want to increase ratings or draw more readers, let them do it by legitimate scoops, not unsubstantiated rumour."

Another form of reporting criticised was the quick safari into the world's more troubled places from comfortable home bases, with no attempt to do the groundwork. In the foreign affairs area, not enough journalists followed overseas issues all the way through, according to the media adviser to the Minister for Foreign Affairs, Alexander Downer:

We don't hear much from some hotspots of great interest and concern to us. There are not that many Australian foreign correspondents based overseas. Reporters here would rather indulge in parachute journalism. They fly in, expect a result in the two days they've scheduled to be there and fly out, with them and their audiences not much the wiser (Matt Francis, Canberra, 2001).

Francis said that despite unethical practices in foreign affairs news gathering, he had no blacklist: "You quickly find in this business you can't be everyone's best friend. Those journalists who have done the wrong thing can be accused of sloppiness or laziness, not bias against one or other side of politics. Some I find are less helpful in getting our stories across; irrespective of what guidance I provide, I find my help disregarded." All he could do was keep the lines of communication open as much as possible, he said.

Media advisers rarely suggested outright banning of media outlets that refused to adopt what the ministers saw as a fair approach to reporting and comment. A former Labor federal government adviser said:

I've seen ministers and their media advisers black-ban papers for reporting their

news in a nasty way but it doesn't work. John Dawkins when he was Treasurer didn't cooperate with the *Sydney Telegraph* and the *Sydney Morning Herald*. For a time he spoke only to the *Australian Financial Review*. I try not to complain about the slant reporters put on my stories. I tell them if I think they've got it wrong, of course (Carolyn Betts, Canberra, 1995).

Betts added that it was necessary to help journalists a lot with media kits and background briefings: "When I do that thoroughly I find they are more likely to run what I want. It's fascinating to watch how an issue gets reported and how gradually (sometimes quite quickly) opinion can shift on issues."

Public figures liked to be guests on broadcast programs where they would not be quizzed. This style of program, ABC-TV's *Australian Story*, where the interviewer does not appear, could be very damaging if the star was not rehearsed thoroughly by his adviser. The packaging allows the person featured to shine through, warts and all. Australia's Governor-General, Dr Peter Hollingworth, agreed to be filmed for this nationwide show, which was extended to 45 minutes for him to put his point of view in the face of a storm of media and public accusations about his previous role as Archbishop of Brisbane. The Governor-General does not normally give media interviews. He has as speechwriter a former reporter with the *Sun-Herald*, *Sydney Morning Herald* and *The Australian*, Claire Tedeschi (interviewed in 1995 when she was media adviser to Federal Minister for Administrative Services Frank Walker). He also has an official secretary, Martin Bonsey, and a former press secretary to prime ministers and later the Liberal Party's federal director, Tony Eggleton. Bonsey said his office had realised the public had a misleading perception about the Governor-General: *Australian Story* seemed like a suitable program with a good format for countering this, removed as it is from the cut and thrust of politics. But executive producer Deborah Fleming said:

I'm an advocate of the confessional style of interview which is a complement to the adversarial interview, the dominant one. The thing about confessional interviews is, people often go somewhat further than they intend to (Brook, 2002).

The program was the most damning of coverage of Hollingworth's treatment

of sexual abuse cases within the Anglican Church, when he was an archbishop: on air he made comments he later regretted about the relationship between a 14-year-old girl and a clergyman, implying some of the blame lay with the girl. Tony Wright, national affairs editor of *The Bulletin*, said it was astonishing the program had damaged Hollingworth so badly, considering its intent to reveal a public figure's hidden side. The coverage was discussed on SBS-TV's *Insight* produced by Ruth Dexter, *Truth in Public Life*, aired March 14, 2002. One of the panelists, image management consultant Anthony McClellan, said:

Hollingworth was advised absolutely incorrectly. He was totally non-prepared for *Australian Story*. Before you go on a show like that, you rehearse what you are going to say.

Publicist Harry M. Miller, who was also an *Insight* panelist, agreed: "Someone told Hollingworth to go on that show, put that hat on and ride around the grounds of Government House. Why go on that show? Why go on the ABC at all? He should have read a book for the afternoon."

By contrast, an ABC-TV *Four Corners* current affairs program, in which reporter Liz Jackson aggressively questioned the Prime Minister about the "children overboard" affair, drew fire from 250 viewers afterwards. Almost all the calls were on Howard's side – "his minders were not complaining":

She gave the impression she was not going to let him answer the questions. People may not be on the side of the politician but the general experience in this trade is that they tend not to be on the side of the journalist either (government source quoted by Dunleavy, 2002: 8).

Politicians prepare carefully for television: they rehearse answers to the curly questions; the coverage is usually limited to a few short phrases, with no time to develop an argument. But cameras at interviews can be intrusive in unexpected ways: the alert media adviser will be able to guard against this. One adviser recalled a case which gave him great concern at the time and was a lesson to him in how careful advisers have to be in camera placement.

Channel 9 journalist Laurie Oakes was at the centre of the controversy. A camera operator standing behind then federal Treasurer Paul Keating at a Canberra news conference in August 1990 was able to film a confidential memo on the lectern, a memo about changes to Telecom and the Overseas Telecommunications Commission. By freeze-framing the memo, Oakes was able to discover that its words did not match what Keating was saying; in fact, outlined that the government was set on a different course over proposed telecommunications reforms. Channel 9 that night highlighted this by telecasting the freeze-framed memo. Tom Mockridge, then a Keating adviser, complained that filming the confidential memo was an invasion of privacy.

The safest thing to do is to make sure you do not have anything embarrassing in front of you, but that does not mean you can dismiss private documents as "fair game" just because they are held in public forum (Hurst and White, *op. cit.*: 186).

Oakes later denied that any subterfuge was involved. "Quite often the camera picks up things you are not aiming for," he said:

I don't think there was any breach of ethics. It wasn't deliberate. The problem was that what Keating was saying seemed to be the opposite of what he was doing. Our crime was to expose that. We were absolutely open about what we did. It was only after the event that the general ethical issue came up (*ibid.*: 186).

Keating put in a complaint to Channel 9 and, according to Oakes, Nine decided not to do that sort of thing again. "Nevertheless, street-smart politicians like Keating know that very little of what public figures do in public life goes unnoticed by the media," Hurst and White add. When he was Treasurer, Keating was always careful to make sure that only the previous year's budget papers were on his desk when photographers arrived to take preview pictures on budget eve. At that 1990 news conference, he dropped his guard.

Were press gallery journalists and political commentators sometimes perceived to be active players and participants in the political scene, rather than merely reporters of it? The survey probed advisers' attitudes:

Table 5.5 Perception of journalists' influence on political conflict

'Journalists should make sure they are not perceived as trying to influence the outcome of the conflict between political parties over issues'

Degree of agreement	Per cent
Strongly agree	33.8
Agree	57.0
Can't say	4.0
Disagree	5.3
Strongly disagree	0.0

n = 151

Degree of agreement (%)	Male	Fem.	Age:			MediaPolicy		Fed.	State	Party:	
			20-29	30-39	40+					Lib./ Nat.	ALP
Strongly agree	30.4	40.0	40.6	35.1	26.1	35.0	29.4	31.0	35.1	32.4	34.2
Agree	58.8	52.0	50.0	54.1	65.2	57.3	52.9	56.9	56.4	60.6	54.4
Can't say	4.9	4.0	6.3	6.8	0.0	2.6	8.8	3.4	4.3	1.4	6.3
Disagree	5.9	4.0	3.1	4.1	8.7	4.3	8.8	8.6	3.2	5.6	5.1
Strongly disagree	1.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.9	0.0	0.0	1.1	0.0	0.0

Percentages add vertically

The degree of agreement was stronger with this statement than with other attitudes surveyed: 91 per cent agreed or strongly agreed, with only five per

cent disagreeing and none strongly disagreeing. There were slight variations in the breakup by age, gender or party – only in job classification was there much difference, with 92 per cent of media advisers agreeing or strongly agreeing, compared with 82 per cent of policy advisers. Having less to do with the media, policy advisers were somewhat less inclined to prescribe how journalists and their employers should be performing, ethically.

Julianne Schultz asked a similar question in her 1998 survey of journalists. Placing advisers' responses to the Phillipps survey alongside hers, the results are:

Table 5.5a Perception of journalists' influence on political conflict: advisers' and journalists' views compared

'Journalists should make sure they are not perceived as trying to influence the outcome of the conflict between political parties over issues'

Degree of agreement	Per cent of advisers	Per cent of journalists
Strongly agree	33.8	69.8
Agree	57.0	15.7
Can't say	4.0	7.0
Disagree	5.3	5.4
Strongly disagree	0.0	2.1

n = 151

n = 242

Journalists were much more ready to strongly agree with the statement than were advisers, although overall, more advisers (90.8 per cent) agreed or strongly agreed, as against 85.5 per cent of journalists.

In the interviews, there was some thought that a few newspaper managements and their journalists were actively campaigning against the

conservative state governments then in power:

There's an attitude that this is not a legitimate government, that we're here by default. The opposition is pushing for an early election. One *Courier-Mail* journalist, Wayne Sanderson, seems to have a predetermined attacking approach and won't be changed by anything you have to say. He has an extreme environmental point of view – he's a mouthpiece for Drew Hutton, leader of the Queensland Greens (former Queensland government adviser Gary Stubbs, Brisbane, 1997).

Stubbs said he had kept all clippings of stories by him and "it's just self-indulgent bilge attacking the portfolio's senior political adviser and me – it's defamatory. It amazes me the guy keeps writing the same sort of stuff. He says the Criminal Justice Commission heard about evidence of corruption in the Department of Mines and Energy. The CJC found no evidence of corruption but by inference, according to Sanderson, we were corrupt."

Media advisers interviewed questioned the ethics of editing in print, radio and television. Events and reports had to be condensed in most media and in the cutting there were opportunities for making the material more interesting, more to the point and sometimes there was also the opportunity for slanting the report to convey a view that differed from what the interviewee wished. Most times, any deviation from the proper sense of the story was unintentional but in politics it sometimes happened that media motives in editing for a crisper story were questioned.

In Australia as in other countries, the growth of the media, particularly the broadcast and internet media, have done much to make the work of ministerial media adviser more arduous and constant. These days, they rarely have time to sit back and reflect on the ethics of what they do, or whether the media are presenting political news in an ethical, responsible way. British journalist Duncan Watts considers that the biggest change came with the advent of television: governments appreciate television's power to reach almost every household and they have developed the management of the supply of information into an art form. While much of the information

is bland, they try to ensure sympathetic coverage of the main stories:

Managing the media involves keeping a careful eye on what information is made available, when it is released and how it is presented. Ministers legitimately seek to persuade people of the validity of their viewpoint, but in the process they are often 'economical with the truth', only conveying facts which are beneficial or at worst neutral to their reputation and concealing those which are detrimental (Watts, 1997: 100).

Advisers said it was wise to accompany their minister to the studio, not usually to take part in the interview but to watch that events proceed smoothly and fairly. As observers they could provide another record of the occasion, and keep track of the debate so that the event could be reviewed afterwards in private, to see how the interaction might have been improved from the minister's point of view.

Advisers were awake to most tricks of the trade, including editing quotations to make them neater. Would they still reflect the speaker's intent? Sometimes in the broadcast media, reporters would edit the tape to insert a question that had not been asked at the time (a reverse question, so called). This allowed neat editing of the interviewee's reply. But viewers could not tell whether the wording of the reverse question was exactly the same as that originally put, or if the minister's response matched what was actually said. The textbook example of this problem happened on March 4, 1987, when Prime Minister Bob Hawke was being interviewed by John Pilger. The interview went on for 22 minutes, but the ABC time limit for the item was nine minutes. The day after the interview, the Prime Minister's media adviser, Barrie Cassidy, wrote to ABC deputy chairman Wendy McCarthy, raising four complaints about the interview as telecast on ABC-TV's 7.30 *Report*. Cassidy said the claim in his closing remarks that Hawke had admonished him at the end of the interview were untrue. He disputed that Pilger had asked Hawke a question about Aboriginal affairs that Hawke had refused to answer and complained that Pilger had reframed and recorded questions and his introduction after the interview. (*The Age*, March 6, 1987.)

ABC managing director David Hill replied a fortnight later, saying that an investigation by ABC management had found the interview fell short of professional standards (*The Age*, March 16, 1987). "Pilger countered with claims that political pressure had been applied to the ABC because the corporation's controller of news and current affairs, Bob Kearsley, had at first rejected complaints about the handling of the interview." (Hurst and White, op. cit.: 192.) Pilger devoted the best part of eight pages in his 1992 book to the interview. He made some telling points about press secretaries (media advisers) and their interaction with their political masters and the Canberra press gallery:

My request [for a 7.30 *Report* interview] had gone originally to Paul Ellercamp, who subsequently resigned as Hawke's press secretary. This was not surprising, as Hawke reportedly had a habit of clicking his fingers at Ellercamp and yelling 'Cigars!' His replacement was Barrie Cassidy, who a few weeks earlier had been the ABC's chief political correspondent in Canberra. This sudden shift from journalism to parliamentary 'public relations' is common practice in Australia; journalists slip in and out of political service with such ease that an inner circle of politicians and members of the Canberra press gallery are often indistinguishable in their machinations. The level of this incest is such that a vice-president of the Australian Journalists' association, Gary Scully, can claim to be defending his members' professional independence while he is part of the Prime Minister's propaganda unit (Pilger, 1992: 297).

Pilger said Cassidy contacted him several times before the interview, trying to ensure that the interview was relaxed and conversational, and even went so far as to rearrange the chairs in the Prime Minister's outer office in Parliament House. As it turned out the PM was running late and had to set a strict time limit. He was far from relaxed. The pervading atmosphere was hostile on both sides.

Pilger rejected all criticism of his handling of the interview, writing that "the separate filming of 'reverse' or 'cutaway' questions is standard television practice when there is only one camera" (Ibid: 301). He claimed that he had asked a question at the end about Aboriginal land rights "and there I lost him. He got up and walked off, 'You've had your time!' he shouted from across the room. 'You took up a lot of time on an issue on which you were obviously

wrong' – Murdoch's dominance of the press – 'You asked the wrong questions on the wrong issues. You should learn!'" Pilger says he negotiated an extra minute of air time and sought to retain the essence of each of Hawke's answers to his questions. He claimed that his attempt to write to *The Australian* and *The Sydney Morning Herald* setting out his side of the controversy which erupted after the program went to air had been stifled by ABC controller of corporate affairs Keith Jackson, "himself a member of the Labor Party's right wing and a Mate of Hawke", who contacted the papers stating that under New South Wales libel laws, Pilger's reply was "potentially defamatory". "Both papers heeded the warning and dropped the story," says Pilger (ibid: 302).

Hurst and White concluded that the ending of the interview, the most controversial point of it, was not properly conveyed in the edited version. Certainly if a second camera recording questions had been there, part of the controversy could have been avoided: although separate filming of reverse questions is standard practice, "what may be changed in the re-recording and editing . . . raises ethical questions about misrepresentation." (Hurst and White, op. cit.: 194.) In preparing for the interview, Cassidy made all arrangements well in advance and managed his part in it well, except ensuring that the Prime Minister got there on time. He could also have tried to ensure that filming of reverse questions would not take place, knowing that the ABC was in the habit of doing just that. Pilger tried to take the high moral ground over this incident but clearly his strong opposition to the government's policies at the time influenced the way he conducted the interview and filming of reverse questions later. The rights and wrongs of this encounter are intertwined with the heat of the political battle. Neither party could claim that the issues were discussed calmly and rationally.

Advisers were particularly critical of the media where ownership by a political opponent was evident:

One newspaper here is owned by the [Labor] Mayor of East Fremantle. That's not a good set-up, where the owner has direct political influence over how things are written. I rang up to complain and next thing, the page one story was their run-in with me! *The Australian's* media supplement ran a page on this story two months ago. This is one of the few times I've been critical of the media and the matter has reached the public. We don't want to get into the limelight ourselves (WA Government Media Office director Barry Thornton, interviewed in Perth, 2000).

Ten years ago, former New South Wales premier Nick Greiner delivered the Sir Earle Page Memorial Lecture in Sydney and used the occasion to attack journalists' ethics and conduct:

The media have moved from observers to active participants in politics, taking positions, seeking outcomes, interviewing each other to build momentum in a particular direction; and, indeed, often writing for 'each other', that is, to seek affirmation and approval (from edited version of speech, *Sydney Morning Herald*, December 11, 1992: 13).

These were Greiner's eight main criticisms, (here abridged) and they were echoed in interviews with a majority of ministerial media and policy advisers:

- Reporters were more interested in boosting the significance of their story than in being accurate: "a commitment to truth is one of the things most obviously lacking in Australian journalism"
- Conflict was the basis for news coverage, exaggerated when it existed, created or simulated when it did not: "when legislation itself is not worth reporting, a conflict between ministers or interest groups about it is"
- Analysis completely overwhelmed reporting in the news pages in such newspapers as the *Sydney Morning Herald*: "News and opinion have become hopelessly mixed and many inexperienced and inexpert reporters parade their views and prejudices in their news reports"
- The tone of the media, especially the Australian Broadcasting Corporation and Fairfax press, had become unremittingly negative: "John Button, often the victim of media abuse of his tendency to honesty, once said of Australia's political reporters they were all trained on police rounds and they still believe the only good story is an accident"
- The whole culture was "smart-alec and cynical beyond rhyme or reason" and "headline writing is the art of being smart or sensational, regardless of the accuracy or relevance to the story itself, much less the facts"
- Reliance on interest-groups was excessive and selective: "healthy cynicism of interest group views is no doubt desirable but only if applied with objectivity and balance"

- The herd instinct was overwhelming in both federal and state press galleries: “there is a mind-numbing uniformity of approach on even the most controversial situations”
- There was a remarkable sensitivity to criticism: “Don’t shoot the messenger” was “an easy out for many a journalist sprung preferring a wrong story to no story. If politicians displayed the same thin-skinned reaction to criticism of inaccuracy, straight error, arrogance or rudeness as do many journalists, they would be rightly castigated in the press” (ibid.: 13).

Greiner claimed that a majority of journalists were left of centre in personal values and that in New South Wales the daily press was against the government – any government, Liberal or Labor. But he added that Australian journalists did go out of their way to avoid attacking politicians’ personal lives and that they guarded their independence well – from media proprietors as well as politicians:

So I don’t believe in the conspiracy, bias and invasion of privacy theories. The problem is one of professional culture and competence, often accompanied by poor management or none at all (ibid.: 13).

Greiner’s reference to Labor Minister for Industry and Commerce John Button points up the fact that the two former politicians were poles apart on the question of whether the media behaved ethically or not most of the time. Button rarely criticised political reporters, even though the commentators were often critical of him. In his book *As It Happened*, Button wrote: “The media provides ministers with a means of publicising policies and attitudes. At the same time it poses the constant threat of exposing their incompetence, errors of judgement and human frailty. At heart most political journalists are like motor-accident reporters. Smooth-flowing traffic and a low road toll are boring. They like a good bingle” (Button, 1998: 200). Button loved “a good bingle” himself – his main recreation was going to Australian Rules football matches – and, although often under unfair media attack, never reacted in the strong way that Greiner did. Greiner blamed a good part of his downfall on unfair media reporting rather than his own actions, policies and ministers; he did not question whether his media management team were as skilled as the team of his Labor predecessors, especially the advisers to Neville Wran.

Greiner's bitter analysis of the Sydney and national press had an earlier parallel in that by John Howard when in opposition: a detailed full-page analysis of the federal parliament's press gallery. As general influences, some of them unwholesome, Howard mentioned:

- first, "the incestuous isolation of Canberra"
- secondly, the emergence of the transmedia journalist who writes in the press and does regular radio or television interviews: "This has reinforced the position of some as herd leaders"
- thirdly, the information explosion: "It has fed a lot more information to the public" and "allowed far more journalists to write with far greater confidence about the economy"
- fourth, the activities of the Australian National Media Liaison Service [the Federal Government then was a Labor one] "which feeds on a selective basis anti-coalition radio and other media interview transcripts to the gallery. Many gallery members realise this is a selective feed. But some are too lazy to worry or only too happy to promote the government's cause, or both"
- finally, Howard lists the gallery members' political sentiment: "The overwhelming majority of Canberra journalists are left-liberal by instinct and personal disposition. Most concede this" (1989: 19).

"No senior mass media journalist in Canberra is a neo-conservative," Howard said then, although this was the line espoused by most in the coalition parties at that time. David Barnett of *The Bulletin* was one but its "smallish circulation limits its influence". Howard then lists the main Canberra journalists by disposition. The influence of government and opposition media

advisers was not highlighted but under the subhead "THE CRANKY ELDERS" Howard details Max Walsh, an economic rationalist, and:

[Alan] Ramsey of the *Sydney Morning Herald* is a totally political writer. He has obvious Labor sympathies. If that seems unfair, I point out that he worked for five years with a Labor Party leader, Bill Hayden. It is impossible for anyone to work with a party leader as press secretary without sharing at least broadly the political philosophy of that leader and his party. To be fair to Ramsey, he demonstrated over recent months that he also has impeccable Liberal sources (Howard, 1989: 19).

Howard in his "insider's view on the Canberra press gallery" stated that it had "a lot of influence on federal politicians . . . they often take more notice of the gallery than they should. Major gallery figures influence the business community through what they say in print. What they say privately through the growing number of confidential briefings to business gatherings is also important." He said that fortunately for his side of politics, there was "a valuable neo-conservative counter-culture on Sydney talk-back radio" ready to treat the Canberra gallery with disdain. He added:

If a politician wants to appeal over the heads of the gallery, it must be done through talk-back radio or in television interview. There is great love/hate in the relationship between journalists and politicians. At the end of the day they need each other (ibid.: 19).

The same "neo-conservative" talk-back kings, John Laws and Alan Jones, are still in Sydney radio today, 13 years since those words were penned by Howard, although tarnished ethically by the "cash-for-comment" scandal involving a deal to boost Australian banks without announcing they were being paid handsomely to do so (Allard and Davies, "Banks ready to dump Laws", *Sydney Morning Herald*, July 17, 1999; Shelley Gare, "Avarice undone is a heartening sight", *Weekend Australian*, July 17-18, 1999, and "Ah, the minefield of truth", John Hewson, *Australian Financial Review*, July 16, 1999). The former Liberal opposition leader said:

It should come as no surprise that John Laws "runs agendas". I ought to know, as I was the victim of at least one major one – his relentless campaign against cuts in tariffs, especially tariffs on motor vehicles. It was just a coincidence that Laws was

paid a very significant amount of money by the Toyota Motor Corporation. (Hewson, 1999).

Hewson recalled one difficult interview in the 2UE Sydney studios when he noticed that questions he was being asked on tariffs were being read from faxes under a Toyota letterhead. Laws denied it and offered to give him copies of the faxes from listeners, but they never came. He did admit he did advertisements for Toyota.

In the interviews with advisers, radio talk-back commentators were frequently complained of:

One radio commentator in particular [Alan Jones of 2UE Sydney] seems to have a vendetta against my minister; Jones has become personal on occasions. It seems at times that some media are unwilling to give balance to a story. I don't identify with those who hold dogmatic, black and white views of the political scene. (Claire Tedeschi when she was a Keating government adviser, Canberra, 1995)

Some advisers who had worked in the media no longer trusted their former colleagues:

Some senior journalists have an agenda of their own – I can see now why in general politicians hate the media. I now have a lack of trust [of some in the media] which I didn't think I'd have (Doug Cunningham, in 2000 media secretary to WA Minister for Transport Murray Criddle).

In the opinion of another group of advisers, the main trouble with journalists was that many were young, egocentric and occasionally incompetent:

Media people are a bit like the advertising mob, they are an egocentric lot. You need a strong editor to rein in some of the errant reporters. They are not normally stupid or vindictive but just get a bit carried away. Their opinions can have an enormous effect. Some journalists are too immature to be in Canberra. They are just young kids, not interested in remaining in journalism for the rest of their lives. They ask elementary questions; they don't understand the structure of political institutions (Keating government adviser David Epstein, Canberra, 1995).

The political journalist was once exhorted to treat material "in an objective manner" (Bennetts & Spratt, in Revill & Roderick, 1965: 158) but the idea of objectivity has been challenged on the grounds that the craft is not in the business of value-free scientific observation; objectivity is not essential, only

to be fair:

There is no such thing as a good objective journalist. If you are not sensitive enough to feel for your subject, to have a point of view, to suffer joy or agony or sympathy about a story you are covering, you will never be a good journalist. Don't strive to be objective, strive to be fair (Deamer, in Whittington, 1977: 73).

The "rent-a-quote" technique, which has been around for some time, is an example of where journalists are not following the Deamer ideal of striving to be fair. This syndrome is where reporters phone around their friendly contacts among ministers, advisers and others to get them to lend weight to an unsourced story.

News media packaging of stories was criticised by ministerial advisers as one prime example of unethical behaviour by political journalists and their editorial counterparts. Editors went out of their way to package a positive story with hostile headlines and extremely unflattering photographs. Some media were biased against the government of the day, not only because of the attitudes of owners and management, but also because of the journalists' own political leanings.

ETHICAL PROBLEMS IN RELATIONS WITH THE MINISTER

Employment Minister Tony Abbott calls media advisers the "unseen pillars" of the political system:

To work extremely hard for someone else to get the credit, to be completely frank with your boss but utterly discreet with everyone else, to be deeply involved in politics without becoming a political player oneself and constantly to judge not what's right so much as what's right for the boss takes a special kind of vocation (Abbott, 1997: 11).

Abbott was formerly John Hewson's press secretary. This necessity to compromise personal ethics and think in terms of "what's right for the boss" shows the extent of the dilemma facing advisers daily and hourly. A first-class media adviser could transform a politician, making him or her seem

better than in real life:

Don Watson's speeches made Paul Keating seem (occasionally) like a statesman, Peter Barron stopped Hawke getting too big for his boots. David Barnett sometimes made Malcolm Fraser seem (almost) media-friendly (ibid.: 11).

Is such work an ethical sort of occupation, reshaping reality, gilding the lily? For the advisers concerned, it is – this is what they do and they have no qualms about accepting the assignment. If the resultant image is convincing, that is the main thing – the politician then has to live up to the ideal person they have created. Not that the media advisers themselves are beyond reproach. Abbott added that indiscretions of advisers had cost ministers their place on the front bench and had caused considerable grief to their governments.

Most advisers interviewed maintained a strong loyalty to their minister and to the government and only rarely would they think about a duty to society, professional standards or universal ethical principles. They obeyed the rules, especially, in the case of present advisers to the Howard ministry, the Howard government ministerial code of conduct which includes guidelines to be followed by the staff of ministers, including staff of their private office, departments and Senior Executive Service (see Appendix G).

Occasionally, discussions with the minister included advice on ethical issues. Advisers were in a position to stop their minister from making mistakes. Applicants for the post of media adviser to the former Goss government in Queensland faced this standard question:

If your minister is going to call a press conference to fly in the face of policy, what do you do? To answer that you would serve your minister, according to the terms of your contract, rated a fail. A promise to contact 'central command' to stall his action rated a pass (Fagan, 1997: 11).

Advisers interviewed claimed that ethical issues rarely surfaced in their day-to-day work. Most got along well with their minister. If they did not, they

took the first opportunity to switch ministers. James Baker, adviser to Trade Minister and National Party Deputy Leader Mark Vaile, said the first minister he worked for was former National Party leader, Deputy Prime Minister and Trade Minister Tim Fischer: "It was hard work but I learnt a lot from Tim." He admired Fischer's media savvy as well as his ethical approach to the business of politics which does not always seem to list questions of right and wrong high on the agenda. Then Fischer resigned unexpectedly, deciding to put his young family before politics. Baker had to look for a new berth:

My forte is Foreign Affairs; it was a logical move from Trade. But in the media adviser role, you and the minister need to be close. [Foreign Affairs Minister] Alexander Downer and I weren't. I was six months with Downer, then moved back to Trade (James Baker, Canberra, 2001).

Lies, half-truths, exaggerations and obfuscations had "always been an occupational hazard" of politics, according to Laurie Oakes, head of the Channel 9 team in federal parliament. Deceit was no more prevalent now than when he started in the Canberra press gallery 33 years ago:

Politicians believe the public have shorter memories, that the consequences of lying are not what they used to be (Oakes quoted by Humphries, 2002).

Competing forces impeded the ideal of honesty in public life according to John Warhurst, politics professor at the Australian National University:

The political system sends mixed messages about honesty. Voters demand it, though they don't really expect it. Parliamentarians advocate it, but are subject to the demands of adversarial politics. The media do not encourage it, because they punish harshly what are really minor misdemeanours. Voters rarely reward it, preferring politicians to promise them the world (Warhurst in Humphries, 2002).

Advisers tended to have a pragmatic and intuitive view of approaches to ethical matters. Some adopted the view that if it was likely that the truth of a situation would emerge, it was better to tell the truth early in any crisis.

The advisers showed themselves to be surprisingly uniform in attitudes and characteristics. Most appeared to be in ethical terms non-relativists: they believed firmly that issues of right and wrong should not depend on the

situation in which one found oneself, that there were fixed rules of conduct with which should strive to abide. Some advisers who had had occasion to think deeply about ethical issues admitted that in some perplexing situations there seemed to be no appropriate rule except the one which said, "How could I explain this if the situation were uncovered?" The women advisers were more willing to discuss human relationships and the interaction of advisers with office colleagues and mates in journalism.

One trap for men and women in politics is the Australian ethic of mateship – Australians in general are claimed to rely on friendship as a basis for decision-making (Phillipps and Stanton, 2002: 19). Advisers also developed close two-way relationships and empathy with the journalists on their ministry's beat but all were ready to disagree with former Senator Graham Richardson's view that a politician had to do "whatever it takes" and that lying was the appropriate course on some occasions (Richardson, 1994). He resigned from Prime Minister Paul Keating's cabinet in 1992 over the Marshall Islands affair, where he had mixed ministerial and private roles in attempting to help a mate (Tiffen, 1999: 166). He was reinstated by Keating after the 1993 election: "When I returned to the ministry less than 12 months later, none of the journalists (who had been pursuing me the previous year) took the slightest exception. The Marshall Islands affair wrapped up the fish and chips for many a family meal, and Australia moved on" (Wilkinson, 1996: 344).

Media advisers also have had their career terminated over favours for mates and casual acquaintances:

A junior press secretary to then New South Wales opposition leader, Mrs Chikarovski, has been sacked after only three weeks in the job because he took two 16-year-old boys to her parliament house office in the middle of the night without permission (Kennedy & Doherty, 2001: 3).

The adviser, Errol Atlas, denied any wrongdoing: he took them to the office so they could phone home. Security staff who had let the trio into the building, thinking the youngsters were relatives of Atlas, found the boys later

wandering the corridors. The opposition leader's media adviser said Atlas had breached office protocols and had been dismissed immediately.

During the federal election campaign in 2001, a case involving advisers, the "children overboard" affair, played a prominent part. Asylum-seekers off Australia's Christmas Island were said to have thrown children into the Indian Ocean to stop their boat being returned to Indonesia. Photographs released to the media were supposed to support the story that these refugees were not the sort of people Australia wanted as immigrants. It turned out since that the photographs were of the boat sinking two days later. No children were thrown overboard, a fact made known by phone to advisers in the Defence Minister's and the Prime Minister's offices during the election campaign. Former Army chief Lieutenant-General Laurie O'Donnell, AC, said of the breakdown in communication between Defence and ministerial staff:

It is of concern to me what happens to the information once it gets to the ministerial staff. Is it being passed on correctly? These days it is verbal advice; there is no paper trail to follow, no briefs in writing (*Insight*, SBS-TV, 2002).

Former adviser to the Prime Minister Grahame Morris, also a panelist on the *Insight* program, said there was advice given and it was wrong: "Is it important to find out the truth of what happened, or to find a scapegoat? We all know what happened; it was a stuff-up." The Prime Minister has refused a Senate inquiry's request for the ministerial advisers to appear before it:

Howard and his ministers have been shown to be inept or downright dishonest. No one seems to have checked the facts. . . . [Defence Minister] Reith made a decision not to change the public record until he had conclusive proof. To make sure he wasn't contradicted, he put a media gag on Defence officials and personnel. So a minor slip-up turned into a sordid cover-up (*Sun-Herald* editorial, February 17, 2002: 20).

Professor Meredith Edwards, now of the National Institute for Governance, said communication between department and prime minister was always a problem:

When I was in the Prime Minister's Department there was no way I could get directly to the Prime Minister. I was heavily reliant on people like Grahame [Morris, another panelist] and others to get a message through. What we are missing at the moment are systems which ensure that the truth remains intact (*Insight*, SBS-TV, 2002).

We had to hear from the government's advisers to get at the truth. She said what was needed was a code of conduct for ministerial advisers: "These people are under a different Act [to the Public Service]. Their way of operating between public servants and their minister is not clear and needs clarification." Uniting Church minister Dorothy McRae-McMahon disagreed:

I don't think this is about systems but about the flow of political information and propaganda. When the government is put under pressure by the media, we can see a close-up of the ministers looking a little bit anxious and uneasy when they tried to answer these questions. It's a matter of the will to be honest. If it's clear that ministers have misled parliament and people, I would not have confidence that they would resign (*Insight*, 2002).

Grahame Morris resigned from the Prime Minister's staff in September 1997 to avoid embarrassing the government over a conversation he could not remember. There had been "a string of travel scandals that had first surfaced the previous February" (Tiffen, 1999: 176). Liberal Senator Bob Woods resigned "to spend more time with his family". His former mistress revealed on the *Sixty Minutes* television program that they had holidayed together in France at taxpayers' expense. Next, the former Labor, then independent Senator Mal Colston was revealed to have also rorted his travel allowances:

The Department of Administrative Services invited all MPs to check their travel claims. John Sharp then reduced his claim by \$8750, or 47 nights, and later secretly repaid the money. Administrative Services Minister David Jull did not disclose the changes on May 29 when he tabled in parliament MPs' travel payments (*ibid.*: 177).

An unknown bureaucrat then sent journalist Laurie Oakes the details plus a photocopy of Sharp's repayment cheque: Sharp and Jull both had to resign. A staff member from Jull's office revealed he had told the Prime Minister's office back in May about the secret repayments. Morris's last piece of advice to the Prime Minister is supposed to have been, "Sack me" (Abbott, 1997: 11). An unwritten code of conduct is that the minister or prime minister takes the

credit for great speeches and progressive, popular moves; the advisers take the blame or get the sack for mistakes, omissions, lies or cover-ups. These days “no one’s to blame. No one’s carrying the can. . . . They told us something that was not true and that they themselves didn’t for a moment believe – but that was yesterday. Today? With one bound, they are free!” (Brian Matthews, *The Australian* magazine, November 27-28, 1999: 16). A Dunn cartoon headed “Resignation over matters of principle in Australian politics” sums up the situation: “I’ve resigned myself to the fact that politicians never resign themselves!”).

Ministerial advisers are usually prevented from appearing before parliamentary committees to reveal what they know of the truth. The “children overboard” incident before the 2001 federal election, when the coalition government claimed asylum seekers coming to Australia by boat had tossed their children overboard, provoked a Senate inquiry. Prime Minister John Howard has said that three ministerial staff members involved – his foreign affairs adviser Miles Jordana, and advisers to former Defence Minister Peter Reith, Mike Scrafton and Ross Hampton, will not appear. Howard denied that he had misled Parliament or people about his knowledge of the children overboard incident:

What we are doing in relation to this issue is following the convention. And the convention is that ministerial staff don’t appear (Howard statement in Federal Parliament, March 13, 2002).

Howard was relying on rulings by the Whitlam Labor government in 1975 during Senate inquiries into the Khemlani loans affair, the *Sydney Daily Telegraph* pointed out that Howard and his then Defence Minister were ignoring another accepted convention of the Westminster system, that ministers accept responsibility for the actions of their departments and staff:

This was a convention both Mr Howard and Mr Reith chose to ignore as they blamed ministerial staff for allegedly not passing on information. Mr Howard cannot have it both ways. Either he allows the staff members to appear before the

inquiry or he and Mr Reith accept full responsibility for misleading the Australian public (editorial, *Daily Telegraph*, March 13, 2002: 32).

The practice has become more common in recent years of ministers disowning the actions of their staff:

In several issues that have plagued the Federal Government this year [2002], the Prime Minister has claimed that he wasn't told. The fault appears to lie with his staff, but I think the problem lies with this government's culture (Brinkworth, *Weekend Australian*, 2002: 18).

The "spin-doctor culture encourages laziness and an inability to deal with the real world," Brinkworth continued. "Rather than seek out the truth, staffers seek the best 'spin' on an issue, whether it's the children overboard claim or Senator Bill Heffernan's allegations. Any information that does not fit with the spin is ignored or distorted." Writing the same weekend in the *Sydney Morning Herald*, commentator Mike Carlton compared former Senator Richardson's political modus operandi of "whatever it takes" with an "anything goes" approach of the Howard Government:

In the third term of this administration, no deceit is too outrageous, no accusation too malicious, that it cannot be pressed to meet the Government's political ends . . . the images of vile Islamic queue jumpers murderously hurling their kiddies into shark-infested waters entirely suited the Coalition's chief election campaign theme of a not-too-subtly coded echo of the White Australia Policy. That the story was false mattered not a whit. It was manna from heaven, a gift such as rarely comes in politics. Nobody bothered to check the facts – or, in the case of Peter Reith, the facts were deliberately concealed – because the story hit too many hot buttons to be discarded (Carlton, 2002: 28).

Carlton went on to discuss the allegations of Senator Bill Heffernan, "with his manic urge to destroy Justice Michael Kirby. Again, the tale was just too good to be untrue: poofster judge of liberal views trawls the gutters of Darlinghurst by night, ferries hired catamites about in the taxpayers' limousines." The paper to prove it was quickly proved a forgery, and a statutory declaration discredited. Senator Heffernan apologised in parliament to the High Court judge. But fallout from the allegation is likely to continue, with the revelation that the forged Commonwealth Car docket came from a former driver of the Prime Minister. Heffernan has resigned his office as

Parliamentary Secretary but for now has kept his seat in the Senate.

Royal commissions and other parliament-sanctioned inquiries interview advisers about their work, and whether their ministers are as honest as they claim. Before employment, advisers are asked to swear on oath that they will keep secret all that their government requires to be kept secret, including any information not required to be published and all details about the conduct of the ministerial office. This oath is a disincentive against speaking out.

Philip Castle was never asked to swear to secrecy when he became an adviser in August 1996. Now a media lecturer at Queensland University of Technology, Castle was senior media adviser to Deputy Leader of the Queensland National Party and Minister for Families, Youth and Community Care Kevin Lingard. On August 20, 1996, Castle and his wife Carole were guests at a \$538 dinner for eight at Ryans on the Park, Brisbane: he was under the impression that the minister was going to pay but the meal did not meet all the guidelines for legitimate expenses. Then on August 28 the same year, Castle was one of four as dinner guest of Lingard at Skylites Uptown Restaurant, Rockhampton. This meal also did not meet ministerial expense guidelines but the form was altered and a fifth person added, "Charlie Doyle, local chamber of commerce". The Rockhampton Chamber of Commerce did not know of a Doyle and said it had not been represented at the dinner. Castle said:

I clearly remember there were four of us. We were the only ones in the restaurant. The dinner was a social get-together for ministerial staff and should never have been represented as departmental business.

(Interview with Chris Griffith, *Sunday Mail*, February 18, 1998: 4)

Castle travelled to Cairns on September 17, 1996, to join a trip by Lingard and his policy adviser, Wendy Howard, to Torres Strait. That night he attended a \$700 to \$800 dinner at the Cairns International Hotel. The guests were Lingard, Howard, Mulgrave MP Naomi Wilson, her husband Ben and two of

Mrs Wilson's staff. During the meal Howard asked Castle if he would put the meal on his government American Express card on the understanding it would be personally reimbursed by Lingard. But two weeks later back in Brisbane, Castle found out that the bill had been charged to the government. An office junior asked him who were the journalists he had entertained in Cairns. He challenged Howard about it:

I told her this was totally unethical and I wouldn't go along with it. I said, "Wendy, if there's a problem with the bill, I'm happy to pay for my meal and the others can pay for their meal, too!" (ibid.: 4).

Castle said this was the beginning of the end of his working relationship with Lingard: "Kev and I argued over what was the truth. My policy is that if you can't tell the truth, don't say anything." He was asked to put \$200 of drinks on his government Amex card at a Conrad International Hotel meeting after the Budget session on September 26, 1996. On several occasions after that he refused to use his card. He resigned his very well-paid position in November 1996, even though he did not have another job to go to.

The Queensland Criminal Justice Commission interviewed Castle after his name was mentioned in press comment. In all, he had four extended interviews with them. Then on Friday February 13, 1998, Lingard was called in by the Premier but refused to resign, so Borbidge sacked him. He went to the backbench and stayed there. Castle kept very extensive diaries ("I always have done") and the CJC asked for them. A superintendent and senior sergeant of the Queensland Police interviewed him over ministerial misuse of credit cards but Lingard was never charged:

The CJC sent someone around to see me and said they wanted to prosecute but couldn't; that I could take some satisfaction from Lingard's resignation. On four occasions Lingard had wanted me to lie – I had intense discussions with him. I explained that it was my belief that there was never any reason to lie. There has never been an occasion in my career when I have had to lie and I didn't want to break a lifelong habit (interview with Castle in Perth, December 2001).

At the same time, in a triple whammy involving ministers' personal lives, Borbidge also accepted the resignations of Primary Industries Minister Trevor Perrett, who had been criticised for not telling police soon enough that he knew a prostitute whose naked and decomposing body had been found in her Brisbane home, and of Natural Resources Minister Howard Hobbs, who resigned to spare the government embarrassment over his "messy" divorce (Martin Daly, *The Age*, February 16, 1998: 1):

It is simply unacceptable that the taxpayer should continue to fund salaries, first-class air fares and accommodation throughout the country of young female staff members employed by these ministers when there is so obviously a very intimate and unprofessional relationship involved. One must also question the credibility of cabinet ministers who can lie to and cheat on their wives who love them. How can they expect their constituents to trust them?

(Extract from letter to the Premier from Hobbs' estranged wife, Marilyn, *ibid.*: A2)

The Castle case is one of the rare examples where an adviser has walked away from a lucrative job because the minister's ethics clashed with his own. Duty to tell the truth was more important to Castle than loyalty.

Media advisers get caught up in a royal commission or other inquiry from time to time and sometimes their evidence will contradict that of their minister. In Perth back in 1986, Brian Easton, a Labor-aligned public servant, and his wife Penny, a Liberal-aligned lawyer, separated. Penny claimed that Brian had "hidden" from the property settlement a \$200 000 payment from the Western Australian government. In 1987, Penny got Liberal MLC Ross Lightfoot to ask questions in parliament about the payment. Brian and Penny divorced in 1988; in 1989 Brian went into voluntary bankruptcy. He complained to the Official Corruption Commission that Penny had committed perjury before the Family Court. In 1991 the property settlement after their divorce was set aside. In 1992 police informed Penny that they did not believe she was guilty of perjury. On November 5 that year, Brian got Labor MLC John Halden to table a petition against Penny Easton and her family; on November 9 Penny committed suicide. Then Premier Carmen Lawrence told parliament a few days later that she knew the thrust of the

petition only on it being tabled. In February 1993, Lawrence's state government lost power and in March 1994 she was elected to Federal Parliament. In 1995 WA Liberal Premier Richard Court announced the establishment of a royal commission to find out if Lawrence lied about her involvement in the Easton petition (Walsh and Richardson, 1995: 17). Her own advisers at the time gave evidence that she was told about the petition before it was tabled. Interviews in Perth almost 10 years after the event touched on the affair. Then director of the Government Media Office, John Arthur, was reluctant to revisit the subject:

The Penny Easton affair and later inquiry was a traumatic time. I gave very little evidence to the royal commission. I believe a course of action was set by a person in the Premier's office, operating in a vacuum. The person who needed to have control of these actions didn't. Once a course has been set, it's hard to do a U-turn. Mistakes tend to compound. On poor advice, Carmen got herself involved in a bit of arse-saving. During hot moments in politics, you need a cool head (John Arthur, interviewed in Perth, September 2000).

Arthur claimed that journalist Zoltan Kovacs, who was not available for an interview that week, was seared and burnt by his experience – as Carmen's media secretary, his memory of events differed from the memory of Lawrence and her colleagues. He was caught between a rock and a hard place. Kovacs is highly regarded for his integrity:

I don't think that time can now be revisited successfully. You are relying on people's memories. I have a fear of recalling too specifically what happened as memories fog over. I don't go back into the past unless I'm sure that's what happened. We tend to remember what we want to remember (Arthur, Perth, September 2000).

Another point of view was provided by a WA government media adviser:

The Eastman Royal Commission showed how important it is for ministers always to be truthful in their words and actions at all times. At least eight cabinet ministers of Carmen Lawrence's government knew she'd lied to Parliament but none of them spoke up at the time and said, "You can't do that." But the media secretaries did – they told her, "You've got to go back and correct that." None of the others did (Hugh Ryan, September 2000).

Carolyn Betts said that if there is something going on that should not be

revealed to journalists, it's much better for the advisers not to know about it – to say "I'm not aware of that." She added: "If you do know but have been told to say nothing, you have to say, 'I know but am unable to tell you'."

Media advisers are more acutely aware than ever before of the importance of telling the truth, not only because it is the honest and easiest thing to do but also because one day a lie might catch up with them or their ministers in court.

The idea that by investigative reporting the news media can make and break governments has become an article of faith among journalists following Watergate . . . the myths of Watergate have overwhelmed the reality (ibid.: 237).

Media techniques which present politicians as mostly villains put the public in the role of bemused or disgusted spectator. According to voters, the quality of our federal MPs was much poorer in the 1990s than two decades earlier: "52 per cent disagreed with the statement that MPs now are better than their predecessors in the '70s" (Walsh & Richardson, op. cit.: 15). Only 20 per cent (at the time the survey was conducted in 1995) thought that the average MP was of higher calibre than in the 1970s. Liberal Senator Nick Minchin, previously a campaign director for the South Australian Liberal Party, said:

I've been involved in campaigning since the 1977 election, and I think the greatest change is that voters simply don't believe what we say anymore (ibid.: 15).

Politicians who vilify their opponents can expect to be vilified in return, motives blackened and the whole political system suffers from an image problem, a former WA adviser said (John Arthur, Perth interview, 2001). The regular media exposés merely expose, with little attempt at solutions. The questions journalists ask do not always allow for right of reply:

Journalists were full of self-importance, fulfilled in what we saw as our natural and singular calling: the relentless uncovering of wrongdoing, no matter its ultimate importance either to the public or the great scheme of things. Not surprisingly, the self-reinforcing emphasis on killer journalism coincided with a decline in consumer appreciation of the effort (Merritt, 1998: 63).

Bob Bowden, media adviser to Minister for Communications and the Arts and Minister for Tourism Michael Lee in the years 1993-96 – and before that Bob Hawke's press secretary – said politics itself, the way it was practised in Australia, was partly to blame for the public and media cynicism:

I've seen some dirty politics in my time in Canberra – I thought Fraser, Anthony, Nixon and Sinclair always fairly robust in the way they played the game. Personal attacks are part of the scene, unfortunately. I've heard some ferocious debates in parliament, personal attacks, intrusions into people's private lives.

You can spot a wounded minister, everyone can. A smell goes through the place. With Bob Hawke, one faction of the party was determined to get him. This is relatively unusual in the Labor Party, more common in the Liberals. Wherever you come from in politics, you realise that if the other side has a skeleton in the cupboards, you must uncover it. That's part of the game (interview in Canberra, September 1995).

The skeletons can be dragged out of long-forgotten closets: state-based issues dog ministers long after their translation to federal politics, Bowden pointed out. Liberal deputy leader and then Treasurer Phillip Lynch had a secret interest in some rezoned land in a place in Victoria called Stumpy Gully (Walsh, 1995: 36). The deal came to light inopportunistly during the 1977 federal election campaign. Prime Minister Malcolm Fraser called an inquiry and forced Lynch to resign, then reappointed him after the election. "After the election, when the inquiry found Lynch had not acted illegally, it was impossible for the ALP to mount a politically effective attack again." (Tiffen, 1999: 98.) But the land deal did him enormous harm; leaks from his office showed that not all his staff had the same attitude to ethical issues:

Prime Minister Fraser's press secretary, David Barnett, recalled that 'Lynch, when he was Treasurer, would, it was said, cast an eye over advice coming to him about tax avoidance, murmur "These are our friends" and discard the note'. (Ibid.: 203.)

Bowden also highlighted the 1977 problems faced by Ian Sinclair, then National Party deputy leader, over the winding up of his father's funeral parlour business and a forged signature on company accounts. The New South Wales Labor government appointed a judicial inquiry; from this report in 1979, Sinclair was charged with forgery but found not guilty. In these

potential scandals, advisers do some of the digging but often counsel caution as flung mud has a habit of coming back on the accusers. In the early 1980s there was the Asia Dairy scandal; Sinclair was the relevant minister and a Senate inquiry found he had probably been aware of the apparent breaches. Large sums of money were unaccounted for; the implication was that in promoting exports to Asia, overseas markets had been won through bribery of foreign officials. Journalists did not seem to pursue the issues as actively as is usual in political scandals, perhaps because “the episode involved technical detail in an area of limited public and journalistic knowledge”. Reporting involved high risks as the allegations transgressed into legal questions, and “there were no authoritative accusers whose prosecution could be used as the basis for reporting. ‘One ALP frontbencher had a gibe at us about Asia Dairy. He claimed we were protecting the National Party. It was so complicated to write for radio and television. It was complex and boring,’ [a Canberra reporter said]” (ibid.: 65). Such crises give the media adviser caught up in them great ethical problems, adding to the usual stress of the job.

A CODE OF ETHICS FOR GOVERNMENT MEDIA ADVISERS

During inquiries into the way governments work, there is a usually a call for a more ethical approach to political communication, criticising “dirty tricks” by politicians, their advisers and journalists. There were several submissions to the Queensland Electoral and Administrative Review Commission in 1993 which produced a report on government media and information services. In Western Australia, after the political and financial scandals of WA Inc. and a royal commission, there was a 1996 Commission on Government (chairman was Jack Gregor) which investigated all areas of concern, including media secretaries and the Government Media Office.

We came out of that reasonably well and adopted some of its recommendations, including a suggested conduct code for media secretaries and the GMO [see Appendix H]. We took them up on that (WA Government Media Office director Barry Thornton, interviewed in Perth, 2000).

On October 15, 1996, the Western Australian Government Media Office issued its code of conduct for government media secretaries and, in the same document, a code of conduct for the Government Media Office. These were the first such codes for media advisers in Australia. Guiding principles enunciated are honesty, openness and accountability, since in a democracy the government should be accountable to the people it governs: "Communication is a key element of accountability."

The media advisers are there to facilitate that communication. The code makes these seven points (here abridged): Media secretaries

- will respect the truth and the public's right to information
- will ensure their communication skills are used to give the media an understanding of government decisions and actions
- shall respect all confidences, explicit and implied, received as a function of their work
- will facilitate direct and indirect communication between media and minister, with appropriate regard for deadlines, confidentiality and particular interests of various news outlets
- are not normally expected to speak for a minister but if placed in that position they have the same public obligations, saying only what they would expect the minister to say
- work for the government, not the associated political party, are not part of the party's resources and are not to undertake work for the party
- have an obligation to use their communication skills to present the government's point of view on the issues of the day: "It is ethical to advance personal opinions during internal discussions, but it is unethical to use one's position to advance those opinions publicly in opposition to the government's point of view," the code states.

If an adviser and a minister have a difference of opinion about how this code is applied, the matter is to be referred to the director of the Government Media Office for discussion and resolution; if there is still no agreement, the

matter is to be referred to the chief executive of the Office of State Administration as the employer.

There are some points of comparison with the codes of other communication professionals. Panelists in a Canadian study suggested these points to improve communication ethics:

- Be honest at all times
- Convey a sense of business ethics based on your own standards and those of society
- Respect the integrity and position of your opponents and audiences
- Develop trust by emphasising substance over triviality
- Present all sides of an issue
- Strive for a balance between loyalty to the organisation and duty to the public
- Don't sacrifice long-term objectives for short-term gains. (Wilcox et al, 2000: 75.)

The above points would be useful for media advisers to adopt as professional standards of conduct and not be yes-men or yes-women, if there was any way of enforcing them. As it stands, they remain pious platitudes. Advisers would, of course, have trouble with the requirement to "present all sides of an issue" since they are there to convey the government's point of view. But Wilcox insists: "Many a practitioner has resigned rather than submit to a compromising situation" (ibid: 75). He would caution media advisers never to knowingly disseminate false or misleading information. In his view, they should retain a sense of responsibility not only to their minister and party, but also to the standards of professional communication, to society and the public interest.

Canadian politician and radio commentator Stephen Lewis said:

There is a tremendous jaundice on the public's part about the way things are communicated. People have elevated superficiality to an art form. Look at the substance of what you have to convey, and the honesty used in conveying it (ibid.: 74).

Advisers who remain members of the Media, Entertainment and Arts Alliance would have trouble following the WA code for media secretaries and also the MEAA code (see Appendix E), particularly those aspects of it which encourage fairness, independence and respect for the rights of others. The MEAA code calls on journalists to "report and interpret honestly, striving for accuracy, fairness and disclosure of all essential facts. Do not suppress relevant available facts, or give distorting emphasis. Do your utmost to give a fair opportunity for reply." The advisers' code calls for media secretaries to "use their communication skills to present the government's point of view on the issues of the day". But it is strangely silent on ethical and unethical ways of doing this, except to stress that advisers should not advance their own opinions publicly in opposition to the government's point of view. To be effective, codes of conduct need a means of enforcement (referring possible breaches to an independent arbiter), plus also more explanation. The process of constructing a code of ethics for advisers is almost as important as what it contains. Ideally, advisers themselves should be consulted so that they have some ownership of the outcome:

The process by which a code of ethics is drafted, or redrafted, ought to involve not only consultation regarding the basic principles and ideals, but also research into ethical problems confronted by members, and some attempt to have members ratify or otherwise indicate their acceptance of the code once it is finalised (Miller, 2002: 8).

Building on the WA code of conduct (suggested additions in italics), we could add that media advisers:

- will respect the truth and the public's right to information; *will advise their minister to correct at the earliest opportunity any misinformation that enters the public domain about his or her portfolio*
- will ensure their communication skills are used to give the media an

understanding of government decisions and actions; *and will not discriminate between journalists, releasing information in a timely and fair manner*

- shall respect all confidences, explicit and implied, received as a function of their work; *and avoid the practice of leaking information that cannot be attributed*
- will facilitate direct and indirect communication between media and minister, with appropriate regard for deadlines, confidentiality and particular interests of various news outlets; *and will not knowingly disseminate false or misleading information*
- are not normally expected to speak for a minister but if placed in that position they have the same public obligations, saying only what they would expect the minister to say
- work for the government, *not solely for the minister or the associated political party*, are not part of the party's resources and are not to undertake work for the party; *they should counsel the minister if they believe any proposed statement is contrary to government policy or practice*
- have an obligation to use their communication skills to present the government's point of view on the issues of the day, *furthering the ideals of open government and ready access to information.*

While "the specific content of codes of ethics are always matters for dispute" (Miller, 2002: 1), a code for advisers could give guidance on desirable attitudes and courses of action. A code could offer advisers, if asked to do something unethical, a means of defence and enable a rethinking of what is right in the circumstances.

CONCLUSION

Two-thirds of ministerial advisers surveyed (and most of those interviewed) believed that on some occasions, and particularly when the interests of the state were threatened, it was appropriate for the government to censor the news. But advisers, particularly those who had come from journalism, also believed that the mass media were the primary means of safeguarding citizens' interests against the state and that freedom of the media was important. Although most advisers surveyed felt that politicians should be entitled to the privacy accorded anyone else, a large minority of advisers

(almost 35 per cent) conceded that journalists should delve into the personal lives of their employers, the ministers. The follow-up interviews probed their reasons: investigations were appropriate where wrong-doing may have been committed, for instance. Advisers said that legitimate reasons for secrecy included defence and national interest but politicians should not expect 100 per cent protection of privacy – by standing for public office, they had given up at least part of the rights to privacy enjoyed by ordinary people.

Many advisers saw it as their government-sanctioned duty to minimise or kill any stories which would reflect badly on their side of politics. Advisers would set out to do this by what they saw as a straightforward method of replacing negative stories with positive ones, badmouthing the negative stories as old news or items that would harm the reporter's future access to ministers.

Advisers criticised some reports as inaccurate, adolescent or malicious treatment of government information: many stories are jazzed up by sub-editors, to the embarrassment of reporter and sources. Political journalists complained from time to time of excessive secrecy but did not often take full advantage of freedom of information laws and whistleblowers to penetrate that secrecy. Occasionally, advisers complained of media controlled by their opposition or of management biased against them. The media serve as public interpreters of events and as symbolic arenas for ideological struggle between antagonists, according to Wolfsfeld and other theorists. There was broad disagreement among advisers with the view that the media should report the struggle in much the same way the parties themselves present the issues: two thirds of respondents disagreed, although a large minority, of 21 per cent agreed. At least one political journalist (Alan Reid) saw his role as zoo-keeper, keeping his charges honest, healthy and fit for public inspection. Reporters should not get too friendly with the animals. Those with intimate connections were advised to follow the rule of one South Australian ministerial adviser:

I've come across no ethical dilemmas. I try to keep my personal and working life apart. My fiancé is a journalist with the *Adelaide Advertiser* but we agreed early in our relationship we wouldn't talk about what we'd been doing at work at the end of the day (Catherine Bauer, Adelaide, 1995).

A code of conduct for state media advisers was compared with other codes and (like the others) was found to be a toothless tiger, full of pious platitudes. The Western Australian code did have a useful provision for dispute resolution. But although ideally any code should have some way of administering sanctions for breaches (Miller, op. cit.: 52), since advisers were not universally members of one professional association, it is difficult to envisage any way of enforcing adherence, even if a universal Australia-wide code was to be eventually adopted.

Despite the daily ethical dilemmas inherent in building an image for their minister that was above and beyond reality, advisers seemed to be ethical non-relativists – most tried to abide by fixed rules and principles in their work:

The trouble with the point of view that ethics is only a question of finding the right rules is that there are no rules that can cope with all possible life situations (Seedhouse, 1988: 64).

While in most cases trying to stick to the Golden Rule – “Do as you would be done by” – in general they preferred the more pragmatic TV Rule – “Do only those things you could explain to a national television audience” (Phillipps & Stanton, 2002: 19). Cases where their ministers had come to grief were usually ones where they had neglected to follow the TV rule. For instance, the Australian ethic of mateship was seen as a problem for many political communicators – too often, they tended to rely on friendship as a basis for decision-making. Advisers also developed close two-way relationships and empathy with the journalists on their ministry's beat but they were ready to disagree with former Senator Graham Richardson's view that a politician had to do “whatever it takes” and that lying was the appropriate course on some occasions. The upshot of the Penny Easton affair in Western Australia was that advisers involved considered then Premier Carmen Lawrence had been

ill-advised and that advisers had done the right thing in stating to an inquiry what they believed to be the truth: "On poor advice, Carmen got herself involved in a bit of arse-saving. During hot moments in politics, you need a cool head," was the view of John Arthur, the Government Media Office director at the time.

Bob Bowden commented that the competition to stay ahead of the opposition and the media, the ethical dilemmas, crises and challenges of being a media adviser made it a most unusual and demanding job, one that few had the physical or mental stamina to pursue for long:

There's an adrenalin rush almost every day of your life, always something interesting and entertaining, the challenge of dealing with the media and the press gallery (Bowden, Canberra, 1995).

While governments had tremendous advantages over oppositions, the underdogs could compete and exploit news media opportunities; journalists could penetrate walls of secrecy and attempts to replace negative stories with positive ones. In a democracy, no government can maintain complete control over the news media for extended periods and that is how it should be – ministerial media advisers themselves were the first to agree. Most once were poachers, now as gamekeepers they were willing to concede a few birds to the opposition.

Chapter 6

Conclusion

Most governments would love to have more influence and control over the press: as Napoleon is reported to have said, "If I loosened the reins on the press, I would not stay in power three months." He was explaining why he decided to control the newspapers of Paris and appoint himself editor-in-chief of his own house organ, *Le Moniteur* (Hausman, 1992: 3).

Governments down through history have tried to establish direct control over the press. In democratic countries, the mass media enjoy much freedom from political interference. Even though media advisers as spin-doctors are invariably talked about as a threat to democracy, on one level their very existence demonstrates its strength. They would not be needed in countries with tight controls on the media; there they are replaced by a range of sanctions including censors, licensing, intimidation, heavy taxes, trials, jail and assassination for the more outspoken. Nevertheless, in relatively free societies governments have great advantages in the political communication stakes. They have the advantages of power but they cannot impose their will on the media. They must court the journalists to get the coverage they want.

Rather than improve their policies and practices so as to earn a better reputation, governments have been accused of emulating large corporations in using armies of public relations tacticians to counter negative public perceptions. Because they function as advocates, advisers often admitted attempting to withhold information that did not suit their purposes, especially where it was unlikely that the damaging information would surface later on. If it did come to light the advisers hoped to be able to

release bad news at a time when much else was happening on the world or local scene, so that the story would be buried.

The principle of cumulative inequality has been explored, where political power brings with it status, organisation and resources, the ability to carry out exceptional deeds, direct access to decision-makers, and less need for external support to achieve political goals. By contrast, the politically less powerful lacked the clout to gain resources and they lacked the resources to gain clout. But they were not totally without reserves, as long as they had at least one media adviser among the opposition ranks. There was the David and Goliath scenario where tactics and reliance on primitive weapons (also divine help or belief in right and fairness) counts for a lot; plus the aid that some in the media and the community would give to the underdog.

The first aim of this thesis was to chart systematically the career patterns of ministerial advisers, a strategic but erratically visible and grossly under-researched group: who they are – how well educated, their age, gender, how recruited and paid; where they come from, how long they stay, where and why they go.

The second aim of the thesis was to describe accurately and in detail the daily work, satisfactions, frustrations and relationships of the media advisers. Advisers were found to be not merely conduits of news between ministers and media but serve as behind-the-scenes strategists, minders and trainers.

The third aim of the thesis was to explore the advisers' views on the ethical basis of their activities in this highly fraught area. The survey asked questions on influence; the right to publish and its limits, including censorship and privacy; journalists as supporters of the status quo; whether

they concentrated on obtaining negative news; honesty in reporting, and journalists as active participants in news events.

The first thesis task of reviewing the survey data and information gleaned during interviews, revealed that the salary (\$50 000 to \$97 000 or more, plus allowance of \$12 000 for after-hours work) was one means of attracting a more highly qualified person than those working for the media. Some were paid more than backbenchers. Advisers were found to be young – 70 per cent were under the age of 40. While 72 per cent of advisers had completed a university degree, only 44 per cent of journalists had done so. The more education advisers had, the more they appreciated it. Another 20 per cent had gone on to achieve postgraduate qualifications.

Two-thirds of advisers were male, despite women dominating this age group in public relations outside parliament. One reason for this was that an important recruitment area, the press galleries, were found to be more than 60 per cent male in most parliaments. Another reason could be that many more ministers were men and preferred male advisers.

Ian Ward has observed that the whole institution of federal parliament has a dominant masculine air about it, from the structure of the new parliament house to the portraits which adorn its walls to the suits and ties which are the common form of dress, to the gym (but no child-care facility):

In fact, most of the parliamentarians occupying parliament house are men. Only 33 of the 148 MHRs elected in 1998 were women. In this sense the House of Representatives is quite unrepresentative of the wider population. So is the upper house, in which two in every three senators are male, and the ministry, whose members are drawn from parliament (Ward, in Henningham, 1999: 29).

The long-term trend is to more women in politics. When Gough Whitlam was prime minister (1972-75), there was not a single woman Labor

parliamentarian anywhere in Australia. By 2001 there were 121. Before the 2001 elections, federal parliament was 25 per cent female. The last Queensland poll elected 27 women, so the Labor caucus there is 40 per cent female (Summers, 2001: 12). When there are more women ministers, the percentage of women media advisers is likely to increase.

Communication management is held to be a highly intuitive business, a discipline at which women do particularly well, with arguably better skills in relationship management. In 2002, female political reporters are much more visible than they were decades ago – back in the early 1980s the federal press gallery was 75% male and in the 1970s was “overwhelmingly” male (Edwards, in Windschuttle, 1981: 230). Slowly, more women are making their mark in media advising, especially at state level (34 per cent of advisers in the states were women, as against 31 per cent in federal parliament). Over all, media advisers were 61 per cent male but by contrast, policy advisers surveyed were 88 per cent male; men dominated the higher salary groups in both media and policy advising. The men also supervised more staff.

A mix of journalism and public relations backgrounds was seen as useful in media advising: more than 30 per cent of the women surveyed had obtained public relations and other experience before joining their minister, compared with 17 per cent of the men, who were more likely to have come straight from journalism. A capacity for working long hours under pressure was expected – even longer than the hours worked by press gallery staff (themselves more hard-working than other journalists). Reporters spent late nights in the parliamentary press gallery, then had late starts, around 10.30am or lunchtime next day (Simons, 1999: 26). Advisers started early and worked late, especially when parliament was sitting. Few women in this group had children: the long hours worked made it difficult to make time for a family, unless they had an understanding partner, one with flexible hours. Advisers were hired for the term of that parliament: if they

did become pregnant, they were not rehired after an election had been won, as one disenchanted adviser explained, not relishing her relegation to home duties.

A few joined the ministerial office from university as a research assistant or clerk but media adviser was usually a second or later job. Of policy advisers surveyed, 27 per cent were from a background in law, compared with five per cent of media advisers. Most advisers were younger than their ministers. More than 90 per cent of women advisers surveyed were under 40 as against 59 per cent of men. Few women saw advising as a long-term career and men also tended to move on after 18 months to three years: advisers were shown to be ambitious and restless job-hoppers. Their career pattern to date was one round after another of short-term, challenging but well-paid jobs.

Although media advising is a short-term job, some advisers did come from the public service and so could have had a longer period in the department than the minister or any of his other aides, with a longer-term view of the issues. It was surprising that so few of them were seconded from departments or authorities. Despite the security of being able to return to the civil service once their term ended or their minister lost office, only two per cent of all advisers surveyed came from departments, and most of those went into policy advising. When questioned about this, advisers said the cultures of public service and ministerial office were different: the nine-to-five permanent public service culture contrasted markedly with that short-term media advisers and press gallery journalists, working hard and playing hard, and this made such a transition more difficult.

Advisers highlighted the incestuous nature of parliamentary work and play, especially in Canberra. Several had partners working in the press gallery –

advisers met each other and reporters frequently, drank together in the same non-members' bar, had lunch in the same restaurants:

They are part of a tightly-knit group, a parliament house group of journalists, ministerial staff and politicians who talk together, work together, drink together and eat together during the week; then play cards together, fish together, punt together, ski together and go to each other's parties on weekends (Edwards, in Windschuttle, op. cit.: 230).

The group is not as overwhelmingly male as in Edwards's day but is still predominantly a "university-educated, young, middle-class, liberal-minded and ambitious group, intellectually, socially and sexually promiscuous, but wholly engrossed in politics to an extent that even journalists in other specialist areas consider obsessional" (ibid.: 230). People are more spread out in the new parliament house but ministerial staff and journalists still see a lot of each other during the day, eat together, drink together and socialise together at weekends: the Grange Hotel in Manuka is the scene of "many affections and defections" according to Margaret Simons . . . "The young reporters and young staffers go there and it's useful if you're new, to develop contacts and hear what is going on" (Laura Tingle, in Simons, op. cit.: 97).

Nepotism was rare in ministerial media work but not unknown in the rest of the office – in more than a dozen recent cases, a federal parliamentarian was found to employ a spouse, son, daughter or other relation as an adviser or secretary (Cox & Cumming, *Sun-Herald*, and *A Current Affair*, Channel 9, February, 2002). A close personal relationship with a staff member (Junie Morosi) contributed to the downfall of Labor Deputy Prime Minister Jim Cairns in 1975, also romancing staff and rorting travel money brought the fall from grace of three ministers in the Borbidge coalition government in Queensland. Advisers had to work closely with their ministers but not too close or gossip could undo them.

Notable transitions to a political career were uncovered, but these were few in number. For the most capable and determined advisers such as Bob Debus in New South Wales or Mike Rann and Jeannie Ferris in South Australia, the position became a proving-ground and rallying post for political preferment. Ferris went on to become coalition Senator for South Australia in Federal Parliament; Rann the ALP opposition leader, in 2002 Premier, in the South Australian Parliament. Bob Debus became a cabinet minister in the Carr government. But few advisers held visions of one day seeking preselection for a seat in parliament. Most advisers were ambitious and even though their minister's party seemed entrenched in power, few intended to stay long in the job. The career path for most was either back into journalism at a higher level or into public relations, lobbying or some other form of communication management.

They stayed for a year or two and then – just as they are coming to grips with a demanding role – moved on and up, quit or were forced out by their minister's transition to another role, or fall from power. There was found to be great competition for this key job which calls for high levels of strategic media management (some journalists claim the right term is manipulation). Others with whom they dealt daily, particularly the political reporters, were eager to take over in return for a big boost in salary. A third group of understudies were found already in parliament house or electorate offices, working full-time or part-time, at much lower salary levels, in the offices of upper and lower-house backbenchers.

The fact that advisers moved on quickly to other occupations in communication and management indicated that they did feel the stress of the job, and the relatively high remuneration did not compensate them adequately for this in their eyes. But advisers (when asked to recount their work days) tended to emphasise the worst that could happen – the occasional dinner party interrupted, the need to carry their pager or mobile

phone everywhere. Most reported that the stresses were outweighed by the satisfactions in being part of the reins of government. Several explicitly contrasted the teamwork of the ministerial office with the competition and backstabbing that occurred in journalism.

In the close-knit parliamentary office, most ministers take policy advice from departments and weigh it against advice from any staff member: media or policy designations do not matter so much. Media advisers claimed to be involved in policy matters 10 to 20 per cent of the time. Some said they liked this part of the job the best – they "loved being part of the team developing strategy, packaging policies like products, being part of important decisions that are going to change lives" (Carolyn Betts, a former adviser to a Federal minister). Policy advisers claimed to spend on average 20 per cent of their time looking after media inquiries.

The second task of the thesis was to investigate advisers at work – their role, satisfactions, frustrations and relationships. In earlier years they were officially called press secretaries, in slang terms flacks or experts in puffery. Now the new derogatory term is spin-doctor; interviews showed that it was not one most welcomed. Ministerial advisers are hidden persuaders because they can be fully effective only if the media spotlight focuses on the politicians, not on their advisory team. Government views are promoted, privileged and facilitated so that the desired interpretation is more likely to emerge more often than the media's own potentially more critical views, or those of opponents.

The work activities included arranging news conferences, lining up briefings of smaller groups, devising or attending social occasions, issuing news releases, arranging and giving interviews (including the minister's so-called

unscripted doorstep interviews – and making sure journalists knew when they would be scheduled), planning photo opportunities and placing items off-the-record.

The work of advisers, their routines and practices was found to have much in common with that of the publicist or public relations officer in industry. The public relations field tried to overcome its journalistic origins and subsequent guilt feelings at switching basic roles, to allow it to base ethical and moral judgement on a role emphasising persuasion rather than the objectivity of its journalistic concerns. For a large minority (48 per cent) the change from political reporting to media advising was not a problem – in their previous working life, many were more persuaders than reporters.

Five main satisfactions were:

- 1) the much higher pay than in their previous job
- 2) travel with their minister to interesting places in Australia and abroad
- 3) the pleasure of promulgating good news and worthwhile policies
- 4) not having to chase the negative, bizarre and sensational as in journalism, and also
- 5) the sense of being in an important and valued role, close to power.

Five main frustrations of media advisers were:

- 1) the long hours, from dawn when the first journalists started to phone, to late at night when parliament was sitting, plus weekends on call
- 2) the stress, also the blame if any media story went wrong
- 3) no recognition, since all the focus had to be on the minister

- 4) the “minder” part of the role, if their minister needed a lot of minding
- 5) the uncertain nature of the job, also its intrusion into social life.

Another frustration for some was the loss of journalistic impartiality, always having to promote the government point of view even though, since most are not one-eyed party members, they can see its imperfections at close hand.

Some advisers saw their ministerial role as a short cut to political preferment or other influential positions, aiming not for a long period of service but for a temporary stay before moving to more important and better-paid roles in the public service, politics and public relations. The media adviser position remains an excellent starting point for entry into a political career, if the communicator joins the party and becomes thoroughly immersed in party politics. Advisers mentioned that some ministers did not wish their advisers to become active party members and discouraged their ambitions in that direction, perhaps seeing them as a future threat. Others went out of their way to give impetus to their adviser’s career in politics.

The post was becoming recognised as a stepping stone to a better-paid career than journalism but even the vocation’s old hands seemed without a clear professional vision of how the role should be developing or of any long-term future in political communication for its practitioners. Many advisers did see the link with public relations and contemplated either moving into that field after a short stay in the minister’s office, or else returning to journalism or the public service.

Since there was such a rapid turnover in the job, few advisers stayed long enough to become well-rounded experts in all aspects of political communication, including ministerial office direction and policy advising. Some did graduate to senior policy adviser or chief of staff roles, offering

advice on political issues beyond media story quality and placement, since they were in a position to find out what would be the likely news impact of proposed policies.

Interaction of advisers with ministers and departments was quite complex. Advisers who erred in some way – not remembering a key bit of departmental advice, not relaying it correctly to their minister or neglecting to chase up some aspect – could find themselves out of a job if there was an inquiry later. Examples included Grahame Morris, a key adviser in the Prime Minister's office, sacked over his part in allegedly covering up for a time the travel rorts scandal; and Stephen Oxley and Peter Walsh, key advisers sacked from the Deputy Prime Minister's office for failing to warn the government it had been caught breaking the law over fuel taxes and road spending.

Ministers tended to blame the bureaucracy for impeding their policies, if not by design then by inertia; they wanted organisers and handlers – young, highly educated and energetic, sharing the same sense of humour, able to look after party and media issues before they become crises, keeping the leader as far away from trouble as possible. They grew to be not ordinary communicators but people who had been catapulted to work near the top of the political pyramid. The minder was not only well educated but learned to become also a political operative. The adviser had, however, chosen not to pursue politics in the public forum but to work behind the scenes. Some advisers saw their role as part memory, part conscience and prompter for their ministers. A few went on to succeed in a front-of-house role, as members of parliament, although some of these later regretted their transition, feeling that they had been much more effective as a key adviser to a prime minister than as a lowly backbencher.

Media advisers as a group did spend a quarter of their time, or more, focusing on matters other than media relations, according to survey data. They were involved in a wide range of activities, from security, issues and crisis management to organising such affairs as papal and royal visits, breakfasts, travel (and usually accompanying their minister on intra- and interstate and overseas trips); they liaised with departments and authorities and had to be on good terms with the departmental heads and public relations officers in the departments and authorities. Advisers were close to power and generally enjoyed the experience. They paid attention to the policy agenda and indirectly influenced it, particularly when it came to offering advice as to how government policies would be received.

Advisers tended to be more reactive than they wished. They depended a great deal on material received from departments but most of those interviewed claimed to write or rewrite speeches and to rehearse them with the minister, to make sure they were tailored to suit each politician and each occasion. Speechwriting was an important part of the work of advisers. Media advisers claimed to write the minister's speeches, or rewrite them in suitable style from material put together by the departments. Some ministers did not want their speeches written out in full but spoke from dot-point notes. Another important task was preparing draft answers for the minister's Question Time duties. When Parliament was sitting, Question Time was an important highlight for advisers and it was as essential for the minister to be calm and well-rehearsed for these appearances before the television cameras as it was for him or her to be fully briefed.

Media advisers to ministers spent a lot of time and effort getting to know the press gallery journalists. The more experienced advisers advised, however, against too liberal entertaining of the media. Media advisers tended to keep exclusive stories for the reporters they knew and trusted but also went out of their way to meet and befriend the neophytes, the ones easier to persuade to

their point of view. A polite civil distance was not desirable when a reporter was cultivating sources to provide tips, background information, reliable context and so on:

Developing personal relationships was very important to getting stories. 'Contacts are everything. You live and die by your contacts,' said one [political reporter] (Simons, op. cit.: 50).

Several advisers had political journalists for partners or spouses and had to be careful about how much behind-the-scenes information they revealed if discussing their work at home. Some adopted the rule not to indulge in pillow-talk about politics.

Relationships between politicians and the media that had been remarkably cosy or unusually sour were investigated. Governments are the media's "most important social actors" . . . the assumption that the media are a guarantee against government secrecy and abuse of power, and thus freedom of information in the service of responsible government, is misplaced, according to Traber (1995). He claimed the romantic image of the adversary press was a myth. By being helpful, governments helped themselves; it might not be a "spin" or twist. But skating over the bad news and highlighting the good did the same thing.

The relationship between ministerial advisers and the media was shown to be one of favours and paybacks, guarded mutual respect. Mostly the connection tended to be cordial, too much so for some media commentators. The search for negative and sensational news troubled advisers but they tended to have the upper hand in the relationship, with news releases the source of many stories:

All political minders played the game of brinksmanship. The successful media manager gave information that was controversial enough to interest the media, without being so controversial that it created scandal, political mayhem, or made either the minders or their bosses look stupid. And not so controversial that the journalists were tempted to push the ethical boundaries, to push the understanding of what 'off the record' meant (Barry Highland, former media adviser to Minister for Aboriginal Affairs Robert Tickner, in Simons, op. cit.: 52).

Highland added, "Too often, it comes down to writing about who has stuffed up, who has put a foot wrong, rather than what the issues are." The too-

negative, too-simplistic approach of present-day journalism was a reason for criticism by advisers and commentators. In politics, the accent on the sensational and negative, much to the chagrin of governments, suggested that ministerial media advisers would have to work harder to earn their keep. However, Butler (1999), relying on statistics collected mainly at election times, has argued that an ever-increasing share of press and broadcast media news content came to readers and audiences direct from the departmental public relations people and from ministerial media advisers, with minor changes only. Political reporters and commentators on the major dailies might dispute Butler's statistics but some advisers tended to agree – although they pointed out that while their news release may have suggested the story, by the time it got to reader, listener or viewer it had been often turned against the issuing party by adding a grab from the opposition. Much news did have the national capital as its source:

You only have to look at the evening television news, or the morning dailies, to realise how many of the stories come from Canberra. Why is this? Because it's so easy and cheap to gather here. That's why *The Age* has 10 journalists in Canberra and News Limited has 20 or 30. So much comes from reports we've launched here. They'll write, "Sources said . . ." but most of the time we, the media advisers, are the sources (Carolyn Betts, interviewed in Canberra, 1995).

The "sources" were the media advisers, in most cases. The method could be a tip-off via phone call or meeting, more often it was a news release.

Political releases were readable and usually competent, more precise than the hurried notes taken by political journalists at news conferences.

Research indicated that much political news did not come from journalists assigned to political rounds or by them observing the legislative process in parliament but had been rewritten from government or opposition advisers' handouts (Butler, 1998: 36). Zawawi (2001) wrote that reliance on handouts can be put down to the fact that, while newspapers and magazines are getting thicker, staff and resources in newsrooms are dwindling:

Journalists scabbling to fill more and more pages are increasingly reliant on press releases and phone calls from PR people because they don't have time to dig up stories for themselves (Zawawi, in Cadzow, 2001: 24).

Zawawi analysed the content of three metropolitan broadsheets – *The Sydney Morning Herald*, *The Age* and *The Courier-Mail* – and found that excluding political news from ministerial media advisers, public relations people were the source of 60 per cent of stories in the front news sections and 80 per cent in the business sections. The figures tally with results of similar research in the United States and Britain (ibid., quoting from Zawawi’s unpublished PhD research) but since political news seems to be excluded, her research does not cut across the data here.

Advisers quickly learned to put the best gloss on their government’s and their minister’s activities. They looked for newsworthy angles or spin and on occasion they were keen to twist a story to their government’s advantage and deflect attention from any defects or imperfect presentation by their minister. Some admitted that the term “minder” was appropriate. A large majority of them would serve only one party and spoke up strongly for their side of politics, but very few admitted to being members of a party. A small number showed that their skill and objectivity were well accepted by their peers and that they could work for either side of politics. They had served both Labor and coalition as ministerial media advisers and were so good at their job and so expert in their field that they were kept on by the incoming minister of a different political persuasion.

The third thesis task, to explore advisers’ views on ethics, found fairly uniform opinions on some issues but divided ones on other topics, from the right to publish to honesty in reporting to journalists as active participants in the political process. On influence, the ministerial adviser-media relationship was revealed as about the politics of mutual advantage as much as it is information-sharing or investigative journalism. 74 per cent of those answering the survey felt that they were very influential or quite influential

with the media. They provided access to their minister and tried to stay one step ahead of their needs. They even suggested angles and alternative sources if needed, so the story would be balanced and more likely to run. Advisers were quick to befriend new and young journalists and provide them with leads to favourable stories for their government, or unfavourable ones on their opponents. Few media advisers entertained journalists at home, although they would take them to a bar or out to lunch at restaurants on occasion.

In chapter 5, the media's right to publish was discussed: 66 per cent of advisers surveyed (and most of those interviewed) considered there should be limitations, especially where there was a grave threat to national security. Surprisingly, more advisers to Labor ministers (70 per cent) supported strong restrictions on the right to publish where security was at stake than did coalition advisers (62 per cent). Those who had come from journalism believed that the mass media were the primary means of safeguarding citizens' interests against the state and that freedom of the media was important. Many also saw it as their government-sanctioned duty to minimise or kill any stories which would reflect badly on their side of politics. They would set out to do this not by lying but in what they saw as a straightforward method of replacing negative stories with positive ones, badmouthing the negative stories as old news or items that would harm the reporter's future access to ministers.

Advisers criticised some reports as inaccurate, adolescent or malicious treatment of government information, echoing the American journalism professional association's review: many stories are jazzed up by sub-editors, to the embarrassment of reporter and sources. Political journalists complained from time to time of excessive secrecy but did not often take full advantage of freedom of information laws and whistleblowers to

penetrate that secrecy. Occasionally, advisers complained of media controlled by their opposition or of management biased against them.

Do people in the public eye, such as ministers of the crown, have a right to privacy? Asked to comment on the statement, "Journalists should not delve into the personal lives of public officials", advisers were divided. A small majority (51 per cent) agreed or strongly agreed, 35 per cent disagreed or strongly disagreed, the rest replied, "Can't say". More of the older advisers (tended to agree than younger ones and many more of the policy advisers (62 per cent) than media advisers (48 per cent). This time, party affiliation did not show up much difference.

Advisers were intensely protective of their ministers and strove to shield their ministers' private lives and failings from media scrutiny and negative news reporting. However, there were limits. In general, advisers would not protect their ministers if they lied or if they went against government policy. An example of this occurred in Western Australia when, at a 1995 royal commission, advisers to the former Premier, Dr Carmen Lawrence, contradicted her version of events over the tabling of a petition (the Penny Easton affair). The upshot of the Penny Easton affair was that advisers involved considered Lawrence had been ill-advised and that advisers had done the right thing in stating to an inquiry what they believed to be the truth: "On poor advice, Carmen got herself involved in a bit of arse-saving. During hot moments in politics, you need a cool head," was the view of John Arthur, the Government Media Office director at the time. Another example involved the Deputy Leader of the National Party in Queensland, Kevin Lingard, and his senior media adviser, Philip Castle (see Chapter 5). The adviser revealed details of his minister's unethical practices, especially with entertainment expenses.

Advisers interviewed thought that the *Newcastle Herald's* publication in 1998 of where to contact John Howard at his Hawks Nest holiday home was unfair. The Prime Minister had been holidaying there for 19 years and was entitled to his summer vacation. But some invasion of privacy was permissible, where the minister's personal life was interfering with performance of his duties. They thought the media were right to focus on affairs at work – especially if the lovers were spending taxpayers' money through travel allowances. But most criticised the *Sydney Morning Herald* journalist (Paul McGeough, not from the Canberra press gallery) who first wrote of Cheryl Kernot's affair many years ago with a former student in a *Spectrum* story titled "The other side of Saint Cheryl" (December 13, 1997). The gallery had known of the story for weeks as it had been touted to journalists by a coalition parliamentary secretary (Simons, op. cit.: 19) but all had refused to take it up. McGeough did not name the student but next day the *Sun-Herald* did and published his photograph as well under the headline "Kernot's secret past".

Freedom of the media to interview and expose politicians was shown to be a limited one, as journalists needed the goodwill of politicians and their advisers if they were to continue to gain access to the corridors of power in Canberra and the state capitals. Those journalists such as John Pilger (see Chapter 5) who offended the powerful could count on being carefully scrutinised in future by the media advisers and often excluded from further contact with our political leaders. Their protests might be met with powerful indirect censorship through the tight connections federally and in some states between leaders, members of cabinet and media proprietors.

Advisers identified closely with government and minister, less so with the minister's political party. They communicated the most favourable interpretations of what their political masters were doing, looking always for interesting and reportable angles, putting the best gloss on their

government's activities. Advisers from journalism tended to retain strong ties to their former profession and most aimed to give reporters as much access to their minister as possible, if the minister would allow it, especially when they were confident the journalist would be more likely to report favourably on what they and their government were doing. Media advisers to ministers quickly became skilled at massaging the media, but some tended to claim they were non-party-political.

Most rejected the term "spin-doctor", feeling it harked back to the earlier terms of puffer or flack. They admitted to polishing stories, looking for the newsiest angle, as do journalists – they tried to make the government's news a little better but they did not admit that what they were doing was doctoring or spinning a yarn, propagating a lie. Most learned to use all the tricks of persuasion in the lexicon of public relations. Political journalists returned the favour by employing a few manipulative tricks of their own, including getting ministers and advisers known to be part of the "rent-a-quote" brigade to lend weight to an unsourced story, seeking out sources in departments (whistleblowers) and sometimes paying to unearth information via freedom of information legislation. Political sources did not usually require payment but journalists were known to loosen the tongues of contacts by buying them drinks, taking them out to lunch or entertaining them at home. But still, despite use of these journalistic strategies, most advisers considered that in general, political journalists treated their releases honestly and straightforwardly most of the time.

Media advisers were shown to be in the forefront of trying to keep politicians in step with public opinion on issues, finding out from journalists what topics were coming up in the media, what stories they were working on – and what feedback they were getting via email, talkback radio

and the internet from readers, listeners and viewers. Where their government was attempting to move ahead of public opinion, advisers tried to place stories that would change it in their favour, as did Neville Wran's advisers in the New South Wales of the 1980s:

Whereas some Labor governments in the past rushed in and tried to do everything at once, we tried to keep pace with community opinion. When the community didn't have an opinion, we'd endeavour to create an environment whereby the community would accept it as if they'd thought of it themselves (Wran, in Steketee and Cockburn, 1986: 334).

Steketee added, "There was little evidence of Wran creating a climate for reform, despite his claim. He seldom placed himself in the vanguard of change . . . Wran was always very conscious of community opinion." He did reform the NSW Legislative Council, however, so that it reflected one vote, one value, and introduced four-year fixed terms for parliament: these changes needed much promotion to win voters' approval.

The role of media adviser to ministers was shown to have developed in importance in the last 50 years as politicians responded to the growth in news media and increased competition for favourable news treatment of political issues and personalities. By the mid-1990s the verb "to spin" was being used to describe the efforts of advisers to put their masters' policies, issues and characters in the best possible light – to move from merely conveying political information to promoting policies and leaders. As spin-doctor, the media adviser was in a position to reinterpret policy where it seemed unclear or not interpreted by the media in the way the government wanted (Moloney, 2000: 109). The role for persuasive, aggressive advisers was interpreted by its critics as more manipulative than before.

On whether the journalists were natural supporters of the status quo, most advisers thought not; but commented that when times were tough for the media, with not much advertising about, their editors tended to slash costs. The press galleries tended to suffer most, having to depend more on ministerial material: that the news media had "changed profoundly" in

2001, with many consolidations and closures:

Many older, more experienced journalists have been replaced by younger ones, and so institutional memory has been lost. We are seeing more news content coming straight from the wire services. (Matthew Anderson, in McIntyre, 2002, Media 7: "PR fills widening editorial gaps").

There was talk that soon in 2002 that *The Age*, Melbourne, and the *Sydney Morning Herald* Canberra bureaux in the federal press gallery would merge. Such a merger made economic and political sense but would leave one less group of people who could investigate what was going in federal parliament. The media remain the main daily scrutineers of government strengths and weaknesses, especially when parliament was not sitting. If press gallery numbers are low, ministerial media advisers will play a bigger role in informing about public policy while at the same time promoting and defending it. They become to a greater extent gatekeepers of political news, advising on when and how information will be released to (or withheld from) the media and publics.

The media adviser job was shown to include other roles: as counsellor, trainer of politicians in media skills, minder, organiser of answers to questions in and outside of parliament, liaison officer with other ministers, ministerial advisers and government departmental public relations staff, interpreter of public opinion on issues, and occasionally as leaker of information on ideas the government wanted discussed, or of material that would disadvantage political opponents in the same party or in opposition parties. Advisers were expected to monitor the main media for news that would affect their minister, as the minister rarely had time to do this.

The other side of the media adviser's role, as the third person in the relationship between ministers and the media, was found to be a particularly difficult one. Far too much political news is available to fit into the daily press or into the brief broadcast news. Whether unrehearsed or staged, the

news and events that advisers thought worth reporting could not all be covered. Only the most exciting and controversial information reached prime-time news or the front pages of the daily newspapers. The thesis considered what turned political information into news and the wiles advisers adopted to get their material published. Photo opportunities and meet-the-people walks were one way and sometimes these could go disastrously wrong.

There are many dilemmas in placing and reporting political information. The thesis investigated the moral dimension of political communication and decided that, based on replies to the survey and the 65 interviews, most media advisers were at an intermediate stage of moral development. They are likely to be at the stage of loyalty to their government and minister, placing a lower importance on adherence to a duty to society, to a social and legal contract or to universal ethical principles. In their dealings with the media they tended to be mainly at the stage of fair deals, exchange and reciprocity.

Ethical dilemmas facing journalists, advisers and their ministers did not surface much in daily workplace discussion but there were questionable practices on both sides, government and media. Often the people in politics were cunning in news placement by leaking information, seeking to take advantage of friends and novices and of journalism's code of ethics which protected sources where it suited the media, even in the face of demands by courts to reveal them. Insiders may have had their suspicions about the source but there was no proof. Where journalists felt they had been misled by advisers (as in the case of advisers to the New South Wales government during the Cecil Hills high school massacre scare) they had no hesitation in revealing the names of sources.

Tip-offs to great political stories had been used often by advisers to help their minister test the water for changes to regulations or innovations in the government's legislative program. They played on the competitive nature of the parliamentary press gallery and journalists' love of scoops. Release of this information, usually unsolicited, primarily served the interests of the leaker. The covert manoeuvre of leaking, a form of destabilisation or guerilla warfare in politics, was investigated. "The identity and intentions behind a leaked story are often transparent to other participants" (Tiffen, 1989: 166). "If anything, this heightens rather than lessens their impact." The conclusion was that this technique, although widely used, did not make for ethical behaviour by those who leaked or by the journalists on the receiving end. Information was not shared fairly among media outlets. Leaking might not necessarily have involved releasing confidential or secret information – it might be just have been a case of highlighting information already in the public domain, but hidden under a welter of other material. Standard operating procedure was no basis for ethical action and neither was providing junkets with doubtful news value, extravagant parties, expensive gifts or personal favours for preferred political journalists. In receiving leaks, journalists and leakers risked running foul of section 70 of the Crimes Act, which made it an offence to publish any fact or document that had not been released to outside persons. Several journalists had been fined or jailed for failing to disclose sources of information – the journalists' code of ethics had no legal standing to protect them in cases where a court demanded disclosure.

Ministers and public servants also leaked, sometimes to the greater glory of their party and government, occasionally very much to the contrary – sometimes from personal motives but less often from a sense of duty to the community. Another technique of dubious morality was to fob off inquiring journalists with the message that the story they were chasing was old, stale news, and provide them with another story which was more

positive to the minister and his or her department. Withholding unpleasant facts and releasing only the good news was not obeying the edict "to be honest at all times" although timing was everything. The release of bad news could be timed to say a Friday night, when much other news was available. The release of good news would be timed for Sunday when little political news was normally available. If the story was really bad news, when the information was eventually uncovered the damage could well be much worse. As a technique it also failed to build up trust among journalists and if uncovered as deceit would rebound on the adviser in the long run.

Media advisers from journalism retained strong loyalties to their old vocation but found the journalists' code of ethics impossible to live by. Only one government, Western Australia, had a code of conduct just for media advisers and the government media office: this code was full of motherhood statements, without examples of how to apply or enforce it. Advisers federally and in states other than WA were strongly against the idea of having a code of ethics, especially one with harsh enforcement provisions. A code without such details is useless: in the United States the large energy company Enron had a fine code of ethics which did nothing to stop its management behaving unethically, bringing the company to collapse in 2001. A majority of present-day advisers had not been trained in the art and science of public relations, except through their own private study or brushing up against practitioners of this field earlier in their journalistic career. They did not know about the public relations industry code of ethics, and were doubtful whether it could offer much guidance to them.

From the start of their new careers, they had to respond to largely unexpected challenges including new practices and standards of conduct (some of them anathema to a conscientious journalist), the need to be on their guard against former colleagues, and the urgent requirement to come

to terms with issues and crisis management. Few had obtained previous experience as counsellor and minder to powerful people, usually much older than they were. This strange situation in which they found themselves was mostly a challenge they enjoyed, even though many complained it was exhausting.

The role of media adviser was found to be only intermittently very stressful – although advisers did not highlight this, at times the role was not overly pressured (when parliament was not sitting, when departmental activities were not newsworthy or when the minister was on summer holidays, for instance). At present, political reporting concentrated not so much on the issues and rather more on the jousting of government, opposition and crossbench politicians: if this emphasis were reversed, advisers said their work would be more rewarding. Media advising had to offer more opportunity for advisers to become communication strategists, with clear standards of professional conduct, rather than an echo of ministers' short-term goals and interests. It deserved to be practised as a professional discipline, with better solutions for political communication problems. But before it could rise in academic and public esteem, journalism itself would need to be recognised as a profession. What former Prime Minister Sir Robert Menzies had to say about the press could still be said to apply today:

Why are newspaper reporters so frequently crude, illiterate and lazy! Pride of craftsmanship seems to be dying out fast among these people, who once . . . essayed to style themselves as a profession. How can that be a profession which connotes neither training, scholarship, real intelligence nor independence? (Menzies diary entry, February 21, 1935, in Lloyd, 1988: 6).

The journalist who so annoyed Menzies and sparked the entry did show persistence and a willingness to confront a formidable figure, certainly not lazy. Educational standards have risen since 1935, with many university courses in journalism, politics and public relations, but for journalists and media advisers there is still no agreed entry level or examination. The

journalists' code of ethics has been strengthened, however media ownership has become much more concentrated in the 67 years since those words were written, calling into question journalists' independence. The occasion for the diary entry shows why media advisers were needed even then and are much more needed now, with many more news outlets reporting on politicians and parliament: a journalist interrupted Menzies while he was shaving "and one actually chase[d] Henry Gullett into his bathroom for an interview" (ibid.: 6). Political people need confronting, claimed David Marr – they needed to be pursued especially when "governments and individuals attempt, or succeed in, acting unlawfully" and there was far more to good journalism than a reporter's political leanings:

The much more interesting division is those that are comfortable with authority and those who are skeptical of authority . . . for journalists, what matters is, are you comfortable or skeptical with the authority that those political parties and those governments represent? I am amused, in a raucous way, by journalists and commentators who tell us that there are things we should not know (Marr, in Tabakoff, 2002: 5).

If journalism is "about telling people what other people don't want them to know" as Marr suggests (ibid.: 5), then media advising is about making sure the journalists get it right, in time to make their deadlines, without resort to painting all in authority as out to mislead, cover up or exaggerate.

Media advising would be held in higher esteem by the media and public if it too could become a profession, with agreed educational entry levels, codes of conduct and some level of independence permitted in adhering to accepted practice. The Western Australian code of conduct for media advisers was examined and compared with other codes. Ethics codes were not effective without means of enforcement and examples of what high-flown phrases mean in practice. Advisers seemed to be ethical non-relativists – most abided by fixed rules and principles in their work. The Australian ethic of mateship was seen as a problem for political communicators – they tended to rely on friendship as a basis for decision-making. Men and women

advisers developed close two-way relationships and empathy with the journalists on their ministry's beat but the women were more ready to disagree with former Senator Graham Richardson's view that a politician had to do "whatever it takes" and that lying was the appropriate course on some occasions. Sometimes there was the problem that the adviser had to act against his or her conscience. This was one more reason why the turnover in advisers was so great. The money was good, but only rarely did media advising become a long-term career.

The positions could be made less stressful, with more opportunity for a professional ethic, more openness on the part of ministers and governments, and more concentration by all parties on issues rather than personalities and trivialities. It was found to be a well-paid field, deservedly so. It has remained a behind-the-scenes operation, since the minister has to stay in the spotlight, but journalists are becoming more willing to reveal sources of information if they think they are being used or misled. Advisers are the ones who get fired or moved on, even if their minister is partly or wholly to blame.

There was broad disagreement among advisers with the view that the media should report the political struggle in much the same way the parties themselves present the issues: two thirds of respondents disagreed, although a large minority, of 21 per cent agreed.

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Some such as and Deacon and Golding (1994) have argued that we are witnessing the emergence of a "public relations state". This is an exaggeration since media advisers and other public relations professionals, while experts at persuasion, are not in control of the dominant forms of mass and niche

communication. Political journalists are increasingly on their guard against the tactics employed by experienced advisers.

In western-style democracies, three overlapping ages of political communication have been proposed. The first age was the two decades after the second world war, with stronger political party loyalties; the second from the 1960s, when television "enlarged the audience for political communication" (Blumler and Kavanagh (1999: 213) and voters became less partisan, more open to alternative messages. Certainly, what they term the third age of political communication nowadays is highlighted by the "intensified professionalisation of political advocacy". In Australia, as in comparable democracies abroad, the media are "moving to the centre of the political process". For most, a huge range of media is available constantly, everywhere at the same time, arriving at great speed. Homes have "multiple television and radio sets, video recorders, compact disc players, video games and camcorders" (ibid.: 213); most Australians, even those too young to vote, have mobile phones and can send and receive messages. Political and other news can be accessed and spread via the home computer. The numbers of media advisers to politicians have certainly exploded in the last two decades in response to the increasing media outlets and greater demands on their time. Advisers are forced to be much more professional in their approach and also to train up their employers, the ministers and shadow ministers, for media calls at most hours of the day and night: "To politicians, the third-age media system must loom like a hydra-headed beast, the many mouths of which are continually clamoring to be fed. When something happens, they are expected to tell the media what they are going to do about it well before they can be fully informed themselves" (ibid.: 213).

While governments have tremendous advantages over oppositions, in Australia the underdogs can compete and exploit news media opportunities; journalists can penetrate walls of secrecy and advisers' attempts to replace

negative stories with positive ones. Opposition advisers interviewed could point to a range of tactics available to them and claimed some success, even against commercial media philosophically opposed to their party's platform. In a democracy, no government can maintain complete control over the news media for extended periods and that is how it should be – ministerial media advisers themselves were the first to agree. Most once were poachers, now as gamekeepers they are willing to concede a few birds to the opposition. Many of the media advisers interviewed are advocates within government for giving out more information about the political process and for maintaining better channels of communication with the media and voters.

Media advisers play an increasingly important role in Australian political communication, bridging the divide between politicians and journalists, but it is an ambiguous and morally fraught role. Media advisers are a secret tribe, hitherto rarely studied by academics, working for warring clans of government ministers and opposition shadow ministers. Within the tribe they have tended to specialise, especially at the most senior ranks. Prime Minister John Howard's staff of 18 includes a senior communications adviser, a senior media adviser and a press secretary. Political communicators joined the tribe from diverse backgrounds, in particular from the mass media. Yet advisers, no matter their background or which side of politics they work for, were found to have much in common in that they were doing basically the same behind-the-scenes work of angling for best possible news about their minister and government in the mass and niche media. Their work is essential in a democracy, is highly valued and rewarded and needs more professional status: an agreed, enforceable code of ethics, more responsibility for what they do and – for the leading shadow players at least – recognition. It is time for media advising to come out of the shadows.

APPENDICES

Appendix A – survey forms

Canberra '99: survey of media and senior advisers

Part I: Position, background and career

1. What is your job title?
2. Formal education. You completed: *(Please circle the appropriate numbers)*
 1 some secondary 2 all secondary 3 TAFE, college etc 4 university degree 5 degree + post-grad.
3. How useful was your formal education in preparing you for your present job?
 1 excellent 2 very good 3 good 4 fair 5 poor 6 not applicable
4. Background: 1 mainly politics 2 mainly public service 3 journalism 4 mixed 5 none of these
5. What was your previous occupation before becoming an adviser?
6. Your age: 1 under 20 2 20-29 3 30-39 4 40-49 5 50-59 6 60+
7. Gender: 1 Female 2 Male
8. Do you supervise staff? Yes/no If yes, number of employees that you supervise:
9. Your yearly remuneration is: 1 Under \$30,000 2 \$30,000-\$39,999 3 \$40,000-\$49,999
(include salary + other benefits)
 4 \$50,000-\$59,999 5 \$60,000-\$69,999 6 \$70,000-\$99,000 7 \$100,000+
10. How useful have you found membership of unions and professional organisations? *(Please list):*
- | Organisation | Very useful | Useful | Fair | Poor | Useless |
|---|-------------|--------|------|------|---------|
| a) Media, Entertainment and Arts Alliance | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| b) | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| c) | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| d) | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

Part II – Your work patterns

- 11a. If you arrange the following types of occasions, how often? 11b. And what do you think of them: how effective in achieving their aims?
- | | Daily to weekly | Fort-nightly | Monthly | Less often | Good | Fair | Poor |
|---------------------------------|-----------------|--------------|---------|------------|---------|------|------|
| 11.1 News conferences | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| 11.2 Other briefings of groups | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| 11.3 Social occasions | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| 11.4 Issue news releases | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| 11.5 Arrange/give interviews | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| 11.6 Place items off-the-record | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 1 | 2 | 3 |

(A few more questions overleaf)

2. If you are a media adviser, what % of your work time involves other duties other than media? (speechwriting, policy advice, clerical tasks, public relations/inquiries, research/survey work, etc)%
3. If you are a senior adviser, what percentage of your time involves media advice/liaison?%
4. Do you entertain political correspondents or other journalists at your home or restaurant?
- | | Frequently | Often | Sometimes | Rarely | Never |
|---------------------|------------|-------|-----------|--------|-------|
| 4.1 At home | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 4.2 At a restaurant | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

Part III – Issues in media and senior advising

- | | Very influential | Quite influential | Average | Sometimes | Not very influential |
|---|--------------------|-------------------|---------|--------------|----------------------|
| 5. How influential with the media do you see your role as adviser? | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 6. How influential with your minister do you see your role as adviser? | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 7. How would you describe your relationship with public relations staff in your minister's departments? | Very friendly
1 | Friendly
2 | OK
3 | Guarded
4 | Frosty
5 |

Part IV – Dealing with the media

Please indicate how strongly you agree or disagree)

- | | Strongly agree | Agree | Can't say | Disagree | Strongly disagree |
|---|----------------|-------|-----------|----------|-------------------|
| 18. Government officials should have authority to stop publication or broadcast of a news story they believe is a grave threat to national security. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 19. Journalists should not delve into the personal lives of public officials. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 20. Journalists are dependent on major news sources and tend to uncritically reflect their views. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 21. Most journalists concentrate on obtaining negative news. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 22. Journalists should make sure they report the main issue positions of political parties in much the same way as the parties themselves present the issues. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 23. Most of the time, our releases to the media are treated honestly and straightforwardly. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 24. Journalists should make sure they are not perceived as trying to influence the outcome of the conflict between political parties over issues. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 25. Journalists are natural supporters of the status quo. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

Thank you for participating.
There should be a reply-paid envelope with this. *If no longer attached, please return to:*

Richard Phillipps, Communication & Media
University of Western Sydney
PO Box 10
Kingswood NSW 2747

By return mail or
(if poss.) Mar. 26, 1999

Appendix B

Questions raised at interviews with media and senior advisers

These were the questions prepared in advance for face-to-face interviews with advisers. Other topics came up and more questions were put, as time and circumstances permitted.

- How did you come to be in your present job? How long have you been here? Where else have you worked – were things very different there?
- Could you give me an idea of your daily or weekly routine?
- Since working as an adviser, has your view of the media changed? In what ways?
- How good a job generally do you think the media are doing in covering politics? Exceptions?
- Are media advisers and their releases the source of most political news in any one week? How influential with the media do you see your role as adviser?
- What is the most challenging aspect of your job? What have been the highlights?
- Since you started here, what has been the worst thing that has happened?
- How would you describe your relationship with public relations staff in your minister's departments? And with political journalists?
- Does your minister sometimes seek policy advice from you? Do you write speeches?
- Are there other public relations duties which are part of your position as media adviser? What parts of the work do you like most, and what parts are the most challenging?
- Are journalists dependent on major news sources and mostly uncritical of them? Are political reporters natural supporters of the status quo?
- Do you feel most journalists are obsessed with obtaining negative news? Why is that?
- Media advisers have been accused of trying to manipulate the media, selective leaking and spin-doctoring. How do you react to these charges?
- Do you have views for or against politicians' "kite-flying"?
- Do you think the media play it pretty straight or do they push their own agendas?
- Can you give examples of government or opposition media and public relations efforts which have had a big impact on media coverage?
- Who among your colleagues has been your main inspiration? Who do you look up to or turn to for advice, and why? Are there any bad ones? What's bad about them?
- Do you think the media try to intrude too much into your minister's privacy and personal life? What about you? Have you been in the news?
- Are there dangers in getting too friendly with political journalists?
- What have been the main changes and trends you have observed in communicating politics? What does the future hold for media advising as a career?
- What are the major strengths and weaknesses of government & opposition public relations performance? Have you come across any examples of political "dirty tricks"?
- What are the main satisfactions & frustrations in this job? Is there much professional advice and assistance? Is union membership a help?
- After your present job, do you want to continue in this field? Will you still be working in media relations in five years? What work would you like to take up or return to?
- What type of person makes the best adviser? Why do women make good advisers?
- How do you unwind after work? What are your interests and hobbies?
- Do you think advisers should be members of the political party they work for?

Appendix C

Gender balance of advisers

1) Gender balance of federal ministers and media advisers

Federal Ministry	Male %	Female %	Total n
Keating 1995 Ministers Advisers#	90.0 53.3	10.0 46.7	30 30
Howard 1996 Ministers Advisers#	85.7 66.7	14.3 33.3	28 30
Howard 1998 Ministers Advisers#	89.7 76.5	10.3 23.5	29 34
Howard 2000 Ministers Advisers#	85.7 74.3	14.3 25.7	28 35

#Main media contact for each minister

2) Gender balance of state/territory ministers and media advisers

State/Territory Ministry	Male %	Female %	Total n
NSW Carr Ministers Advisers#	85.0 68.0	15.0 32.0	20 25
Vic. Kennett Ministers Advisers#	73.7 75.0	26.3 25.0	19 12
Vic. Bracks Ministers Advisers#	60.0	40.0	20
WA Court Ministers Advisers#	88.2 55.6	11.8 44.4	17 18
WA Gallop Ministers Advisers#	71.4	28.6	14
Tas. Groom Ministers Advisers#	42.9	57.1	7
Tas. Bacon Ministers Advisers#	62.5	37.5	8
Qld Goss Ministers Advisers#	88.9 76.9	11.1 23.1	18 39
Qld Borbidge Ministers Advisers#	93.8 85.7	6.2 14.3	16 21
Qld Beattie Ministers Advisers#	73.7 68.7	26.3 31.3	19 32
SA Brown Ministers Advisers#	92.3 50.0	7.7 50.0	13 14
SA Kerin Ministers Advisers#	76.9	23.1	13
ACT Carnell Ministers Advisers#	80.0 50.0	20.0 50.0	5 10
ACT Stanhope Ministers Advisers#	100.0 50.0	0.0 50.0	4 10
NT Stone Ministers Advisers*	100.0 60.0	0.0 40.0	9 20
NT Martin Ministers Advisers	71.4	28.6	7

#Main media contact(s) for each minister

* includes policy advisers

Appendix D

Public Relations Institute of Australia code of ethics

The Public Relations Institute of Australia is committed to serving the community through efficient, planned, mutually beneficial, two-way communication between organisations and individuals. All members are duty-bound to act responsibly and ethically and to be accountable for their actions.

The word "members" in this Code of Ethics means, and the code binds, all members of the Public Relations Institute of Australia.

1. Members shall deal fairly and honestly with their employers, clients and prospective clients, with their fellow workers including superiors and subordinates, with public officials, the communication media, the general public; and with fellow members of the PRIA.
2. Members shall avoid conduct or practices likely to bring discredit upon themselves, the Institute, their employer or clients.
3. Members shall use care to avoid disseminating false or misleading information and shall not knowingly do so.
4. Members shall safeguard the confidence of both present and former employers and clients, including confidential information about employers' or clients' business affairs, technical methods or processes, except upon the order of a court of competent jurisdiction.
5. No member shall represent conflicting interests nor, without the consent of the parties concerned, represent competing interests.
6. Members shall refrain from proposing or agreeing that their consultancy fees or other compensation be contingent entirely on the achievement of specified results.
7. Members shall inform employers or clients if circumstances arise in which their judgement or the disinterested quality of their services may be questioned by reason of personal relationships or business or financial interests.
8. Members practising as consultants shall seek payment only for services specifically commissioned.
9. Members shall be prepared to identify the source of funding of any public communication they initiate or for which they act as a conduit.
10. Members shall, in advertising and marketing their skills and services and soliciting professional assignments, avoid false, misleading or exaggerated claims and refrain from comment or action that may injure the professional reputation, practice or services of a fellow member.
11. Members shall inform the Board of the Institute and/or the relevant State/Territory Council(s) of the Institute of evidence purporting to show that a member has been guilty of, or could be charged with, conduct constituting a breach of this Code.
12. No member shall intentionally injure the professional reputation or practice of another member.
13. Members shall help to improve the general body of knowledge of the profession by exchanging information and experience with fellow members.
14. Members shall act in accord with the aims of the Institute, its regulations and policies.
15. Members shall not misrepresent their status through misuse of title, grading, or the designations FPRIA, MPRIA and APRIA.

PRIA

2nd floor

51 Pitt Street, Sydney NSW 2000

Appendix E

Media, Entertainment and Arts Alliance code of ethics

Respect for truth and the public's right to information are fundamental principles of journalism. Journalists describe society to itself. They convey information, ideas and opinions, a privileged role. They search, disclose, record, question, entertain, suggest and remember. They inform citizens and animate democracy. They give a practical form to freedom of expression. Many journalists work in private enterprise, but all have these public responsibilities. They scrutinise power, but also exercise it, and should be accountable. Accountability engenders trust. Without trust, journalists do not fulfil their public responsibilities.

MEAA members engaged in journalism commit themselves to:

- honesty
 - fairness
 - independence
 - respect for the rights of others.
1. Report and interpret honestly, striving for accuracy, fairness and disclosure of all essential facts. Do not suppress relevant available facts, or give distorting emphasis. Do your utmost to give a fair opportunity for reply.
 2. Do not place unnecessary emphasis on personal characteristics, including race, ethnicity, nationality, gender, age, sexual orientation, family relationships, religious belief, or physical or intellectual disability.
 3. Aim to attribute information to its source. Where a source seeks anonymity, do not agree without first considering the source's motives and any alternative attributable source. Where confidences are accepted, respect them in all circumstances.
 4. Do not allow personal interest, or any belief, commitment, payment, gift or benefit, to undermine your accuracy, fairness or independence.
 5. Disclose conflicts of interest that affect, or could be seen to affect, the accuracy, fairness or independence of your journalism. Do not improperly use a journalistic position for personal gain.
 6. Do not allow advertising or other commercial considerations to undermine accuracy, fairness or independence.
 7. Do your utmost to ensure disclosure of any direct or indirect payment made for interviews, pictures, information or stories.
 8. Use fair, responsible and honest means to obtain material. Identify yourself and your employer before obtaining any interview for publication or broadcast. Never exploit a person's vulnerability or ignorance of media practice.
 9. Present pictures and sound which are true and accurate. Any manipulation likely to mislead should be disclosed.
 10. Do not plagiarise.
 11. Respect private grief and personal privacy. Journalists have the right to resist compulsion to intrude.
 12. Do your utmost to achieve fair correction of errors.

Guidance clause: Basic values often need interpretation and sometimes come into conflict. Ethical journalism requires conscientious decision-making in context. Only substantial advancement of the public interest or risk of substantial harm to people allows any standard to be overridden.

Revised February 1999

Appendix F

The Age code of conduct

Introduction

The Age code of conduct is an important statement about how we behave in our professional lives – about how we relate to newsmakers, sources, contacts, colleagues and the public. It gives guidance as to the high ethical standards expected of *The Age*. The overriding principles are fairness, integrity, openness, responsibility and a commitment to accuracy and truth. Sustaining the highest editorial standards is essential to us retaining the trust of the community, and the freedoms and responsibilities afforded to us by the community.

The code is issued by the Publisher and Editor-in-Chief of *The Age*, and applies to all editorial employees. It seeks to uphold the principles of merit, responsible management and professional competence and efficiency within the company. Staff unsure of appropriate action to take in a particular situation should consult with colleagues, senior editors or the Editor.

Our code does not conflict with the code of ethics for journalists issued by the Media, Entertainment and Arts Alliance, and does not remove any rights our employees have under other agreements or laws.

Professional practice

1. Staff should seek to act always in the best interests of the public and the maintenance of good faith with the community we serve, rather than for the benefit of sectional interests.
2. The public interest includes investigating and exposing crime, serious misdemeanour and seriously antisocial conduct, and investigating and exposing hypocrisy, falsehoods or double standards of behaviour by public figures or institutions. It also includes protecting public health and safety.
3. Staff should seek to present only fair, balanced and accurate material.
4. Direct quotations should not be changed to alter their context or meaning.
5. Where a significant inaccuracy or distortion has been published, *The Age* should publish a correction or clarification promptly.
6. Photographs should be a true representation of events. Photographs should be used in context, captions should be fair and accurate, and digitally enhanced images and illustrations must be clearly labelled.
7. Where they relate to *The Age*, judgements by the Australian Press Council and other such bodies, and the outcome of defamation actions, should be reported promptly.
8. Editorial material should distinguish for the reader between that which is comment, that which is verified fact and that which is speculation.
9. All commentary and analysis should meet the same standards of factual accuracy as news reports.
10. Sources promised confidentiality must be protected at all costs. However, where possible, the sources of information should be identified as specifically as possible.
11. Only fair and honest means should be used to obtain material. Misrepresentation and the use of concealed equipment or surveillance devices should be avoided. The use of deceptive methods or subterfuge may be condoned only where the Editor is convinced that the potential story is of vital public interest and there is no other way of obtaining the story.
12. People's privacy should be respected and intrusions on privacy should be published only if there is public interest.

13. Caution should be exercised about reporting and publishing identifying details, such as street names and numbers, that may enable others to intrude on the privacy or safety of people who have become the subject of media coverage.
14. People should be treated with sensitivity during periods of grief and trauma and wherever possible, be approached through an intermediary.
15. Care should be taken when producing and publishing material on the anniversary of traumatic events or crimes not to cause undue distress to the victims or their families.
16. Photographs of victims or grieving people should not be published unless due consideration has been given to issues of sensitivity and privacy. Any restrictions placed on the use of photographs supplied by family or friends should be honoured.
17. Gratuitous references to the state of a victim's body or body parts should not be published.
18. The Age will not publish individual cases of suicide, unless issues of public safety or the wider public interest justify it. Care should be taken when reporting methods of suicide.
19. Extortion threats should not be published, unless issues of public safety or the wider public interest justify it.
20. The Age will not publish details of the manufacture or use of firearms or other weapons, or of illegal drugs, unless issues of public safety or the wider public interest justify them.
21. Special care should be taken when dealing with children (under the age of 16). The Editor must be informed when children have been photographed or interviewed without parental consent.
22. The Age does not condone chequebook journalism. It will disclose any instance when it has paid for information. Payment for information should be avoided, unless an appropriate senior editor believes there is a strong public interest and there is no alternative to payment. In cases where payment is deemed by the Editor to be in the public interest, the fact of payment should be published.
23. The Age does not condone staff breaking laws in the course of performing their duties. Nor is the paper liable for any such action.

Personal behaviour

1. The Age should ensure that staff have equal opportunity to develop their skills.
2. The company is obliged to provide a healthy and safe working environment. Staff are to have due regard to the health and safety of work colleagues, and observe occupational health and safety laws.
3. The Age values its reputation for independence and integrity. Staff are reminded that some activities outside work hours could have an impact on the standing of The Age.
4. Alcohol should not be consumed while at the work station. Staff members should not be under the influence of illegal drugs or alcohol while at work.
5. No one should be harassed or discriminated against on the grounds of gender, sexual preference, race, colour, nationality, religious belief, impairment, age, height, weight, marital status, pregnancy or being childless or having children. The Age supports and adheres to state and Commonwealth equal opportunity and anti-discrimination legislation.
6. Staff should immediately inform the Editor if, as an employee of The Age, they intend to:
 - give evidence to any court
 - chair public forums or seminars arranged by professional conference organisers
 - take part in interviews or debates for other media organisations

- undertake any outside employment likely to conflict with their professional duties at The Age.
7. Managers with access to personal information relating to other members of staff are required to treat such information as confidential, and not disclose it to anyone except in the course of discharging formal responsibilities.

Conflict of interest

It is in the best interests of The Age and staff of The Age that real and perceived conflicts of interests be eliminated. Staff should be alert to real and perceived conflict of interest and take all reasonable steps to ameliorate same.

1. Staff should not use their position to obtain private benefit for themselves or others.
2. Staff should not be influenced by family or other personal relationships in fulfilling their editorial responsibilities.
3. Staff should neither buy nor sell shares in John Fairfax Holdings Ltd, or any other company, at a time when they possess information that could, if publicly disclosed, affect the market value of such shares.
4. Staff should be alert to conflicts of interest that may arise and declare to the Editor or an appropriate senior editor any real or perceived conflict of interest that arises or is foreseen.
5. Staff involved in a story who believe they have an interest that could be seen to influence their views on the issue at hand should acknowledge that interest during preparation and at publication of the story.
6. Staff have the right to join any community or political organisation or activity but should be aware that such participation may create, or be seen to create, a conflict of interest and reflect on the credibility of The Age and the staff member. However, staff participation in protests and demonstrations, or in decision-making or fund-raising capacities in organisations that do or could generate news, should be declared where their involvement could be an issue.
7. Staff in doubt as to whether a conflict exists should consult an appropriate senior editor.
8. The Age and its staff will not allow any payment, gift or other advantage to undermine accuracy, fairness or independence. Any attempts to induce favoured editorial treatment through the offer of gifts or favours should be reported to the Editor. Where relevant, The Age will disclose these payments, gifts or other advantages.
9. Only the Editor and appropriate senior editors can accept offers of free or subsidised travel, accommodation or other benefits on behalf of The Age. Acceptance of any such offer is conditional on The Age being free to assign and report any resulting story as it sees fit. Any such story so generated should carry an acknowledgment of the free or subsidised benefits.
10. The Age will ensure that material generated as a condition of the placement of an advertisement or advertisements should be labelled as "advertisement" or "advertising feature". Staff should not be influenced by commercial considerations in the preparation of material.
11. The Age will ensure that stories that specifically relate to an advertiser should, where possible, not be published on the same page as that advertiser's advertisement.

Plagiarism

1. Staff must not reproduce other people's material without attribution.
2. The source of published material obtained from another organisation should be acknowledged.
3. Bylines should be carried only on material that is substantially the work of the bylined journalist.

October 1998

Appendix G

Australian Government ministerial code of conduct

A guide on key elements of ministerial responsibility

Prime Minister

Canberra – April 1996

Additional copies of this publication are available from Government Division,
Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, Canberra, ACT

FOREWORD

This ministerial *Guide* is intended as a source of quick reference for ministers, parliamentary secretaries and ministerial staff. It sets out in summary form the main principles, conventions and rules by which government at the Commonwealth level is conducted.

The emphasis in the *Guide* is on the necessity of adherence to high standards by people occupying positions of public trust. The Australian people have this as their entitlement and I seek the co-operation of all ministers, parliamentary secretaries and their staff in maintaining these standards.

The *Guide* does not seek to provide answers to questions of detail. It does, however, refer where necessary to other handbooks and guidelines which provide more comprehensive information.

(signed) **John Howard**

1. THE CONSTITUTIONAL AND LEGAL FRAMEWORK

Distribution of Powers

The framework for Australian government is set out in the Constitution, with Commonwealth functions separated broadly into legislative, judicial and executive. Executive power is vested primarily in the Governor-General acting with the advice of the Federal Executive Council. The Constitution provides that all ministers are Executive Councillors and the practice has been to appoint all parliamentary secretaries to the Council as well. As members of Parliament, ministers also take part in the exercise of legislative power, including in the introduction of proposed legislation to Parliament for consideration.

Ministers and Departments

Acting on advice, the Governor-General appoints ministers, establishes departments, then formally allocates executive responsibility among ministers through Administrative Arrangements Orders published in special issues of the *Commonwealth Gazette*. The Orders specify the department which is to be responsible to each minister and list both the specific Commonwealth Acts and the broad functions to be administered in the portfolio. In accordance with the Administrative Arrangements Orders, most of the general executive powers of the Commonwealth are exercised by ministers or their departments without the direct involvement of the Governor-General or Executive Council. Many enactments also vest decision-making powers directly in ministers. However, some important powers, such as regulation-making and many appointments, are vested in the Governor-General in Council.

Cabinet

While not mentioned in the Constitution, Cabinet is the central organ for collective consideration of issues by ministers. Although the recorded outcomes of Cabinet discussions are often referred to as

decisions, the holder of legal authority to make the decision is often the Executive Council, an individual minister or an official with specific statutory powers.

Parliament

Under the Australian system of representative government, ministers are responsible to Parliament. This does not involve ministers in individual liability for every action of public servants or even personal staff. It does however imply that ministers accept two major responsibilities: first for the overall administration of their portfolios, both in terms of policy and management; and secondly for carriage in the Parliament of their accountability obligations to that institution.

2. THE MINISTRY

Portfolio Ministers

Some ministerial portfolios contain only one minister. In other cases, however, to enhance ministerial control over complex and diverse functions, more than one minister administers a portfolio. In those cases the Prime Minister will determine the minister who is to have ultimate responsibility for the portfolio (the portfolio minister).

The portfolio minister, subject to any general views of the Prime Minister, determines the matters that will be the responsibility of any other minister in the portfolio. The portfolio minister is, subject to Cabinet, responsible for the direction of policy and the public presentation of it. The portfolio minister will represent the interests of the portfolio in Cabinet,

- but other ministers in the portfolio will be entitled to bring forward submissions related to their allocated areas of responsibility; and to be present when Cabinet discusses those submissions.

The principles of collective responsibility set out in the Cabinet Handbook apply. In summary, they are:

- decisions of Cabinet are reached collectively and, unless in exceptional circumstances, bind all ministers as decisions of the government. In exceptional cases ministers who were not present for a discussion may, if they believe there are difficulties of which Cabinet would have been unaware, seek to reopen discussion;
- all ministers must give their support in public debate to decisions of the government; and
- ministers are expected to refrain from public comment on Cabinet committee decisions which are not operative until endorsed by the full Cabinet.

In the Parliament,

- the portfolio minister is ultimately accountable for the overall operation of his/her portfolio. Other ministers in the portfolio, however, also have a clear accountability for areas of responsibility allocated to them and are required to answer questions in relation to those areas; and
- with the agreement of the portfolio minister concerned, other ministers in the portfolio may also, in relation to the whole portfolio, take legislation through, and respond to matters of public importance.

The Prime Minister sets out his priorities and strategic direction for each portfolio in a letter sent to respective ministers shortly after they are appointed. This letter may also indicate in broad terms how the Prime Minister sees functions being shared by ministers in the portfolio.

Parliamentary Secretaries

Parliamentary secretaries may also be appointed to help particular ministers deal with the heavy work in a portfolio. They are not appointed under the Constitution to administer departments as ministers are, and do not answer parliamentary questions or represent ministers at Senate estimates hearings.

The duties parliamentary secretaries may undertake are allocated following consideration and discussion with the respective portfolio ministers. The duties carried out by a parliamentary secretary may include:

- policy development work in nominated areas of the portfolio;
- considering and signing replies to correspondence as appropriate;
- carriage of legislation in the Parliament;
- chamber duty;
- representing the minister at official engagements; and
- attending Executive Council meetings in accordance with arrangements coordinated by the Executive Council secretariat.

The Attorney-General's Department has advised that it is desirable for ministers to provide written authorisation in cases where they wish parliamentary secretaries to exercise powers under legislation which those ministers administer. The authorisation may be in a letter or expressed in a formal instrument. A parliamentary secretary in any such case exercises a statutory power for and on behalf of the minister and should sign over a signature block reflecting that fact.

3. CABINET

Cabinet Handbook

The following is a general description of Cabinet and its procedures. More detailed information is set out in the *Cabinet Handbook* issued from time to time by the Prime Minister and available from the Cabinet Office.

Composition

It is the Prime Minister who decides on the size of the Cabinet and who determines which ministers are to be included in the Cabinet.

Collective Responsibility

The principle of collective responsibility for the decisions which are taken in Cabinet is fundamental to effective Cabinet government. From this principle flows the convention that what is discussed in Cabinet and in particular, the views of individual ministers on issues before the Cabinet, are to remain entirely within the confidence of the members of Cabinet.

Similarly, the papers considered by Cabinet and the minutes recording the outcome of the Cabinet's deliberations, are regarded as confidential to the government of the day. Separate procedures apply to the handling of all Cabinet documents and the convention has been adopted by successive governments that the Cabinet papers (and deliberative documents generally) of a government are not available to its successors.

Committees

It is usual for the Prime Minister to establish a number of committees of the Cabinet. Committees are commonly used for dealing with especially sensitive issues (for example, security and revenue; for testing potentially controversial developments where discussion in full Cabinet would be premature; for dealing with matters where there is a lot of detail to be dealt with (economic statements or budget outlays are an example); and where matters are relatively routine (for example the approval of the weekly government business programme by a Parliamentary Business Committee).

Meetings and Attendance by Ministers

The Cabinet and its committees meet as and when required, consistent with the Prime Minister's wishes. Generally, Cabinet meets on a weekly basis and committees meet less frequently but may undertake extensive bursts of activity (for example in the preparation of the Budget or major policy statements).

Subject to unavoidable parliamentary or executive council commitments, attendance at meetings of the Cabinet or its committees takes priority over all other engagements and the Prime Minister should be informed if for any reason a minister is unable to attend.

Business

Business comes before the Cabinet primarily by way of submissions and memorandums, but also as a result of correspondence to the Prime Minister.

Submissions are papers containing recommendations by the responsible minister(s) on action to be taken by the government. Departments will normally provide drafts of submissions for their ministers' consideration. Memorandums are submitted by departments to Cabinet for its information and do not include recommendations. Other matters may be brought forward only with the agreement of the Prime Minister and the general practice is for ministers to write to the Prime Minister explaining that the matter is urgent and is sufficiently straight-forward not to need the preparation of a Cabinet submission.

Appointments are also brought to the Cabinet by way of correspondence from the responsible minister to the Prime Minister. Decisions on whether an item should be considered in Cabinet and what business should be considered at a particular meeting are taken by the Prime Minister.

Business Rules

Various rules for the handling of business are determined by the Prime Minister and are set out in detail in the Cabinet Handbook. These relate to matters such as the content and presentation of papers for Cabinet, requirements for consultation with other ministers and their departments and deadlines for the lodgement of submissions in advance of meetings to ensure that ministers have a sufficient opportunity to familiarise themselves with their content.

Minutes

Cabinet officials take notes of the discussions that take place in Cabinet and its committees and produce minutes recording the outcome of those discussions. The minutes indicate the matters to which the Cabinet has agreed and the significant matters it has noted. They neither record the general arguments expressed nor the views of individual ministers. Cabinet minutes are generally issued to all ministers although there are some which are given a more limited distribution.

Committee Minutes

The general practice is for minutes of committees (other than those of either a particularly sensitive or routine nature) to be submitted for endorsement at a later meeting of the Cabinet before they are accorded any final authority. Ministers not involved in the committee's deliberations who wish to address issues raised by the committee's decision in the Cabinet should give prior notice to the Prime Minister.

Cabinet Policy Unit

The Cabinet Policy Unit, located in the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, provides the Prime Minister with advice on issues before the Cabinet and on the strategic policy directions of the government. The unit is staffed from within and outside the public service. The head of the Cabinet Policy Unit is the Secretary to Cabinet.

4. EXECUTIVE COUNCIL**Constitutional Background**

Section 62 of the Constitution provides that:

There shall be a Federal Executive Council to advise the Governor-General in the government of the Commonwealth, and the members of the Council shall be chosen and summoned by the Governor-General and sworn as Executive Councillors, and shall hold office during his pleasure.

By virtue of section 63 of the Constitution, the Council is involved whenever the constitution vests a power in the 'Governor General in Council'. The Council is also involved whenever legislation vests a power in the Governor-General.

Purpose

The purpose of the Council is to provide the forum through which ministerial advice is provided for action to be taken by the Governor-General.

The business undertaken by the Executive Council includes:

- the making of proclamations (notice given under an Act by the Governor-General of a particular matter such as the commencement of the Act on a specified day);
- the making of regulations and ordinances (under delegated authority under an Act);
- the making and terminating of appointment to statutory offices, boards, commissions, courts and tribunals;
- changes to the Administrative Arrangements Order, including the creation and abolition of government departments (Constitution section 64);
- the issuing of writs for the election of members of the House of Representatives (Constitution, sections 32 and 33), and Senators for the Territories (*Commonwealth Electoral Act 1918*, section 151);
- the authorisation of Australian entry into international treaties; and
- the commissioning of officers in the Defence Force and termination of those commissions.

Composition

All ministers, and in recent years all parliamentary secretaries, are sworn in as Executive Councillors. Executive Councillors maintain that capacity for life although only Councillors who are ministers or parliamentary secretaries in the government of the day are summoned to attend council meetings.

Vice-President

A member of the ministry is appointed by the Governor-General to be Vice-President of the Executive Council. The Vice-President may from time to time be required to preside at Executive Council meetings.

Meetings

Meetings of the Executive Council are held as required and at the Governor-General's convenience. Generally there is a meeting about every fortnight but where the need arises special meetings can be arranged at short notice.

The established practice is that two Executive Councillors are required to attend the meeting to provide a quorum. The meetings are generally presided over by the Governor-General, or in his absence, for example overseas, by the Administrator of the Government of the Commonwealth. In urgent circumstances, with the Governor-General's concurrence, a meeting may be presided over by the Vice-President or, if he or she is unavailable, by the most senior minister available. Again, two Executive Councillors are also present to constitute a quorum.

Meetings are generally held at Government House, although they may be held elsewhere, (for example at Admiralty House in Sydney) if the circumstances require.

Attendance by Ministers and Parliamentary Secretaries

All ministers (both within Cabinet and in the outer ministry) and also parliamentary secretaries are required to make themselves readily available on request to attend meetings of the Executive Council. A roster is generally developed for attendance at the more regular meetings. Where a special meeting is urgently required the onus falls on the minister seeking the meeting to arrange attendance by Councillors.

Papers

Papers for Council meetings are prepared by departments. The secretary to the Council, who is an officer of the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, circulates them in advance to those attending the meeting.

The Governor-General may seek assurance from the councillors attending that the recommendations being made are appropriate. Ministers should therefore familiarise themselves with the general nature of the matters being considered. Often questions requiring more detailed knowledge will be dealt with by the secretary of the Executive Council, who may undertake to obtain further information for the Governor-General.

The practice at Executive Council meetings is for the Governor-General to refer to each of the matters raised and to seek the assurances of the Councillors attending that he should proceed on the recommendations that are in the papers. The Councillors both sign a schedule confirming this advice and the Governor-General signs the schedule indicating his approval of the advice received.

It is then often the practice for the Governor-General and the Councillors to engage in informal discussion of the issues of the day.

Announcement of Decisions before Executive Council Meetings

Courtesy to the Governor-General requires that matters coming before the Council, particularly appointments, not be announced in advance of the Council's meeting. In exceptional cases where it is considered imperative for there to be early announcement, the Governor-General's agreement would be sought by the secretary to the Executive Council. Early announcements should always make it clear that what the minister is announcing is his/her intention to recommend the proposed action to the Governor-General.

Further Information

Further information is included in the Executive Council Handbook available from the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet.

5. MINISTERIAL CONDUCT

It is vital that ministers and parliamentary secretaries do not by their conduct undermine public confidence in them or the government.

- Ministers must be honest in their public dealings and should not intentionally mislead the Parliament or the public. Any misconception caused inadvertently should be corrected at the earliest opportunity.
- Ministers should ensure that their conduct is defensible, and should consult the Prime Minister when in doubt about the propriety of any course of action.

Along with the privilege of serving as a minister or parliamentary secretary there is some personal sacrifice in terms of the time and energy that must be devoted to official duties and some loss of privacy. Although their public lives encroach upon their private lives, it is important that ministers and parliamentary secretaries avoid giving any appearance of using public office for private purposes.

The nature of their duties is such that they may need to have regard to the interests of members of their immediate families (to the extent that ministers know their interests) as well as their own when ensuring that no conflict or apparent conflict between interests and duties arises.

- Ministers (this and subsequent references to ministers should be read as including parliamentary secretaries) must not engage in any professional practice or in the daily work of any business. They must not accept retainers or income from personal exertion other than that laid down as their remuneration as ministers and parliamentarians. Notes on the meaning of 'personal exertion' are included in the explanatory notes which the Prime Minister sends out with statements of interests forms.
- Ministers are required to resign directorships in public companies and may retain directorships in private companies only if any such company operates, for example, a family farm, business or portfolio of investments, and if retention of the directorship is not likely to conflict with the minister's public duty (eg, a minister should question the retention of a directorship in a company in which share holdings extend beyond the minister's own family).

- Ministers are required to divest themselves of all shares and similar interests in any company or business involved in the area of their portfolio responsibilities. The transfer of interests to a family member or to a nominee or trust is not an acceptable form of divestment.
- Ministers are not precluded from making investments on the stock markets or other financial and trading markets, but they should not operate as traders and should exercise careful personal judgment in respect of transactions.
- Ministers are required to make statements of interests in accordance with arrangements determined by the Prime Minister. The Prime Minister writes to ministers outlining these arrangements.

Ministers should perform their public duties uninfluenced by fear or favour – that is, by any expectation that they will benefit or suffer as a consequence.

- Ministers should not accept any benefit where acceptance might give an appearance that they may be subject to improper influence (eg because the giver has or seeks to have a contractual relationship with government or has any other special interest in government decisions).
- Ministers may accept benefits in the form of gifts, sponsored travel or hospitality only in accordance with the relevant guidelines (provided by the Prime Minister when he writes to ministers about their statements of interests).

Ministers should not exercise the influence obtained from their public office, or use official information, to obtain any improper benefit for themselves or another.

- Particular attention needs to be paid to ensuring that the scope for adverse comment is minimised if it is proposed to appoint someone who is the close relative or associate of a minister.
- Subject to provisions in legislation or other formal documents relating to the establishment of government bodies or positions, government appointments are to be made on the basis of merit, taking into account the skills, qualifications, experience and any special qualities required of the person to be appointed.
- If the approving authority (which may be Cabinet or a minister) is satisfied that this condition is demonstrably met, then spouses, parents, children or other close relatives of ministers, parliamentarians, ministerial staff or heads of departments or agencies should not be discriminated against in selection processes on account of family relationships.
- There is a longstanding practice that ministers do not appoint close relatives to positions in their own offices. In addition, close relatives of a minister should not be appointed to any other minister's office irrespective of the level of the position, except with the specific approval of the Prime Minister. And a minister's close relative should not be appointed to any position in an agency in that minister's own portfolio if the appointment is subject to the agreement of the minister or Cabinet.
- Appointment proposals should identify the elements of merit, skills, qualifications, experience and special qualities on which they are based.

Ministers are provided with facilities at public expense in order that public business may be conducted effectively. Their use of these facilities should be in accordance with this principle. It should not be wasteful or extravagant. As a general rule, official facilities should be used for official purposes. The distinction between official and personal conduct is not always clear (eg, in relation to the provision of hospitality/entertainment and use of car transport) but ministers should ensure that their actions are calculated to give the public value for its money and never abuse the privileges which, undoubtedly, are attached to ministerial office.

6. MINISTERS' RELATIONS WITH DEPARTMENTS

The Australian Public Service (APS) exists to provide advice to the government, and give effect to its policies. The Service is based on a number of important principles, including: high standards of honesty, integrity and conduct; equitable service to the public; provision of frank and comprehensive advice to ministers; a strong emphasis on responsiveness to the government, the Parliament and the community; party-political impartiality; and staffing based on merit.

It is important that there be trust between ministers and public servants, and each must contribute to the establishment and maintenance of the trust. Ministers should be scrupulous in avoiding asking

public servants to do anything that the APS principles do not permit, and in particular should not ask them to engage in activities which could call into question their political impartiality.

Ministers will obtain advice from a range of sources, but primarily from their private office and from their departments. There is clearly no obligation on ministers to accept advice put to them by public servants, but it is important that advice be considered carefully and fairly. It is not for public servants to continue to press their advice beyond the point where their ministers have indicated that the advice, having been fully considered, is not the favoured approach. Public servants should feel free, however, to raise issues for reconsideration if they believe there are emerging problems or additional information that warrant fresh examination.

Accountability

The secretary of a department is, pursuant to the Public Service Act, responsible "under the minister" for the general working of the department and for advising the minister in all matters relating to the department.

This does not mean that ministers bear individual liability for all actions of their departments. Where they neither knew, nor should have known about matters of departmental administration which come under scrutiny it is not unreasonable to expect that the secretary or some other senior officer will take the responsibility. Ministers do, however, have overall responsibility for the administration of their portfolios and for carriage in the Parliament of their accountability obligations arising from that responsibility. They would properly be held to account for matters for which they were personally responsible, or where they were aware of problems but had not acted to rectify them.

Ministers' direct responsibility for actions of their personal staff is, of necessity, greater than it is for their departments'. Ministers have closer day-to-day contact with, and direction of the work of members of their staff. Furthermore, ministerial staff do not give evidence to parliamentary committees, their actions are not reported in departmental annual reports, and they are not normally subject to other forms of external scrutiny, such as administrative tribunals.

Ministerial staff provide important links between ministers and departments when the minister is unable to deal with departmental staff personally, and add essential political dimensions to advice coming to ministers. A close and productive relationship between a minister's staff and the department maximises the minister's effectiveness. Ultimately, however, ministers cannot delegate to members of their personal staff their constitutional, legal or accountability responsibilities. Ministers therefore need to make careful judgements about the extent to which they authorise staff to act on their behalf in dealings with departments.

Departmental Secretaries

The Public Service Act provides that the Governor-General in Council appoints departmental secretaries, in accordance with recommendations from the Prime Minister. The Prime Minister's recommendation follows receipt of a report on the filling of the position from the Secretary to the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet (or, in the case of that department, the Public Service Commissioner). Before preparing his report, the secretary (or Commissioner) is required to consult the relevant minister(s). Cabinet usually considers proposed appointments of secretaries.

Ministers and departmental secretaries have complementary roles. The strength of the relationship between minister and head of department, in terms of clarity of understanding of the minister's priorities and the free exchange of ideas, can be a significant factor in the achievement of portfolio goals. It is therefore incumbent upon both to maximise the opportunities that flow from productive working arrangements.

Secretaries are appointed for fixed terms, usually five years. In general, it is expected that a secretary will not remain in a particular post for more than five years but would be rotated into another secretary position after that time. Appointment to another office after the expiration of the term is entirely at the discretion of the government. The government is able to terminate a secretary's appointment before the expiry of the term if performance is unsatisfactory but this would not be undertaken lightly, involving as it would formal action by the Prime Minister under the Public Service Act and the payment of compensation.

Senior Executive Service (SES)

Recruitment to and within the SES is merit-based. The Public Service Commissioner makes all SES appointments after receiving recommendations of the departmental secretary, who in turn receives reports from a selection advisory committee. These procedures are designed to protect the merit principle and the ongoing political impartiality of the senior ranks of the APS.

7. ADMINISTRATIVE DECISION-MAKING BY MINISTERS

Background

Ministers may have to account for the exercise of their administrative powers, not only to Parliament (or its committees) and the Auditor-General, but also at law. The courts may review the legality of administrative decisions or actions taken by ministers. Some decisions can be reviewed on the merits by tribunals. The Ombudsman, while excluded from investigating a minister's own actions, can and often does investigate the adequacy of advice on which that action is based.

Review of decisions can be initiated by individuals or organisations whose interests are affected, including by "special interest" groups. Many decisions will have sufficient commercial, environmental or other consequences to make such challenges likely if there is any doubt about the soundness of the decision-making process or the decision itself. Any legal challenge can have acute implications in terms of lost opportunities, delay and additional cost. Adverse decisions by courts also often give rise to public criticism.

Statutory Decision-Making by Ministers

The grounds for challenging administrative decisions made under legislation are set out comprehensively in the *Administrative Decisions (Judicial Review) Act 1977*. They give a clear indication of the basic requirements for decision-making. In essence:

- each decision needs to be within the scope of the power provided by the legislation
- the procedure for reaching the decision needs to meet basic standards of fairness, allowing all sides to present their cases, and must also comply with any special requirements set by the legislation
- each decision needs to be made on the merits of the case, with the decision-maker unbiased and acting in good faith
- conclusions must be soundly based in reason, in particular they must reflect a proper understanding of the law, draw on reasonable evidence for findings of fact, take account of all relevant considerations and exclude irrelevant considerations.

Ministers clearly need to have careful regard to the legalities of each decision, with recourse to professional legal advice where appropriate:

- It may not be sufficient to adopt the same approach as has been adopted in the past – changing circumstances may lead to challenges affecting processes which have previously gone uncontested.
- The process for making complex or sensitive decisions needs to allow plenty of time for due process including proper consultation – starting too late may lead to pressure for shortcuts which involve legal risk.
- The decision-making process needs to be carefully documented to allow for statements of reasons to be prepared or for the defence of a decision on review. All relevant documentation may need to be disclosed in the course of review processes, or in some cases in response to requests under the *Freedom of Information Act 1982*.
- Although government policy can be, and often is, an important factor considered in making statutory decisions, it is important to recognise that policy does not of itself have the force of law. Should there be any inconsistency between the application of the policy and the legal requirements for making the decision, the legal requirements prevail.

Delegation of Statutory Powers

Many statutory powers vested primarily in ministers may be delegated to departmental officers or others. While the delegate will take direct responsibility for individual decisions taken under

delegated power, the minister may still be held to account for the overall adequacy of the decision-making arrangements and the achievement of acceptable standards. A minister who has issued a delegation may still exercise the power personally in appropriate cases, but cannot dictate the outcome where a decision is made by a delegate:

- Ministers should consider carefully the structure of proposed delegations, the level to which particular functions are to be devolved and the general arrangements for ensuring delegates are equipped to perform the task. Any classes of decision to be handled at particularly senior level, or by the minister personally, should be identified.
- In some cases there may be scope for general guidance to delegates in the form of policy statements or guidelines provided they are consistent with the legislative scheme.
- A minister may ask to be notified promptly of decisions made under delegation. This may be particularly important where the decision could attract public comment to which the minister might be expected to respond.

Non-Statutory Decisions

While the paragraphs above deal specifically with decisions made under legislation, non-statutory decisions, such as a decision under the executive power to award a contract on behalf of the Commonwealth following a tender process, may also be subject to legal challenge. As with statutory decisions, care should be taken to ensure the decision-making process and the decision made are sound in law. Ministers should seek professional legal assistance about the decision-making process and ensure adequate time is allowed for all necessary steps.

Policy Changes

A minister's role in administering portfolio legislation includes development of proposals for policy change. This may involve proposing amendments to portfolio legislation. Notwithstanding proposals for legislative change, administrative powers need to be exercised on the basis of the existing legislation until the proposed change becomes law.

Further Information

Further information on the particular decision-making functions in each portfolio and their legal framework is available from each department. Legal advice on the application of administrative law requirements to particular decisions can also be obtained through the department, with the Attorney-General's Department or external legal advisers involved as appropriate.

8. FACILITIES AND SERVICES FOR MINISTERS

Ministers are provided with support primarily from three sources. The division of responsibility for services is described below.

Department of Administrative Services

The department has responsibility for:

- payment of the minister's additional salary and travelling allowance;
- payment of salaries and allowances of consultants and personal and electorate staff employed under the *Members of Parliament (Staff) Act 1984*;
- cost of all travel (except official car transport) within Australia by the minister, staff, spouse or nominee and dependent children;
- cost of a private plated vehicle in the minister's electorate;
- cost of the minister's official overseas visits including personal staff and spouse or nominee (but excluding departmental staff) and hospitality of a personal nature;
- electorate office accommodation for the minister and three electorate staff;
- office accommodation in the minister's state capital;
- backbench postage entitlement;

- management of office accommodation in the ministerial wing of Parliament House including parking in the basement car park;
- security within the ministerial wing;
- provision and maintenance of the secure communications network (ministerial communications network);
- computer training for electorate staff.

Minister's Home Department

The minister's home department is responsible for:

- costs of official cars, including a private plated vehicle in Canberra, for the minister and spouse;
- additional furniture and equipment for the minister's offices both in the ministerial wing and in the State office;
- security measures for offices (outside the ministerial wing) and private residence necessitated by the minister's portfolio responsibilities;
- office requisites, including crockery, cutlery, Artbank fees, petty cash, briefcases, luggage, business cards;
- relief arrangements for personal staff absences of less than 12 weeks;
- unlimited postage for use in relation to ministerial duties;
- costs of official residential telephone and fax services and telephone credit cards for the minister;
- portfolio-related hospitality overseas;
- official hospitality within Australia (including when a staff member represents the minister);
- mobile telephones for the minister and staff;
- official commemorations (eg. wreaths);
- membership fees of business organisations related to portfolio or ministerial functional responsibilities;
- provision of semi-official residential telephone services and telephone credit cards for senior ministerial staff nominated by the minister;
- payment of conference and training fees for ministerial staff.

Parliamentary Departments

The parliamentary departments are responsible for:

- payment of ministers' basic salary and electorate allowance;
- standard issue of facilities and equipment in the ministerial suite.

9. MINISTERIAL STAFF CONDUCT

Ministers (and parliamentary secretaries) are responsible for the conduct of members of their staff (including consultants), who act at the minister's direction and, to the extent that they have the minister's authorisation, take action on his or her behalf. For this reason, the rules of conduct applying to members of staff are in many respects similar to those applying to ministers.

Further advice on matters covered below is available in the handbook, *Ministerial Staff Entitlements*, produced by the Department of Administrative Services (DAS).

Members of staff must divest themselves of sensitive interests such as shares or similar interests in any company or business involved in the area of their ministers' portfolio responsibilities. The transfer of interests to a family member or to a nominee or trust is not an acceptable form of divestment. Like ministers, members of staff should take care to avoid conflicts of interests if they make investments on the stock markets or other financial and trading markets.

A member of staff must have no involvement in any outside employment or in the daily work of any business, and must not retain any directorship in a company, without the express agreement of the employing minister. Members of staff should not contribute to the activities of interest groups or bodies involved in lobbying the government, if there is any possibility that a conflict of interests or the appearance of such a conflict may arise. They are required to disclose membership of professional and recreational associations where any conflict or the appearance of a conflict of interests may arise.

At the time of commencing their employment, ministerial consultants and members of ministers' staff (including electorate officers) are required to complete statements of private interests on forms supplied by DAS. The employing minister endorses the statement in writing after satisfying him or herself that there is no conflict of interests. The signed and endorsed statement is forwarded to DAS. Access is strictly limited, and when a statement is updated or when a person ceases to be employed by a minister, the statement is destroyed.

The DAS handbook sets out circumstances in which members of staff may be obliged to declare that they or their ministers have an interest in a matter under consideration.

Gifts, sponsored travel or hospitality should not be accepted if acceptance could give rise to a conflict of interests or the appearance of such a conflict.

On some occasions a member of staff may incur hospitality expenses at the minister's direction. Any claim for reimbursement should be endorsed by the minister indicating that the staff member was acting as directed and in accordance with the hospitality guidelines.

10. PARLIAMENTARY BUSINESS

Parliamentary Questions

There are two kinds of Parliamentary Questions requiring written answers:

- Questions on notice which appear on the Notice Paper printed each day Parliament is sitting; and
- further information on a question without notice.

Questions on Notice

The Parliamentary Questions Officer in each department examines the Notice Papers each day Parliament is sitting for new questions asked of ministers. A draft response is then submitted to the minister for clearance. Once cleared, it is returned to the department where it is processed for lodging with the relevant Table Office.

Time constraints

Each house can set its own time limits for management of answers to questions on notice. The Senate has historically been more rigid about time limits than the House of Representatives. Irrespective of such limits, it is in the interest of ministers to respond to questions in a timely manner, and for answers to cover particular points raised in the questions, so that the need for follow-up questions is minimised.

Questions without Notice

In general, questions asked at question time are answered fully by ministers. From time to time, a minister may undertake to provide further information during question time. This undertaking is regarded as taking the question (whether in part or in whole) 'on notice'. The minister may provide the further information or answer:

- by letter to the member/senator concerned (a response conveyed in this way will not appear in Hansard); or
- by having it delivered to the Clerk in accordance with the normal question on notice process (a response conveyed in this way will appear in Hansard); or
- by leave at the end of question time (the response will automatically be recorded in Hansard; in the Senate it is also possible to seek leave to have the answer incorporated).

Corrections

Any answer which may be found to be incorrect should be corrected as soon as the error is found, using the procedures of the House concerned.

More detailed information relating to Parliamentary questions can be found in the *House of Representatives Practice*, 2nd edition, pp 507-531 and *Australian Senate Practice*, 7th edition, pp 498-514.

Legislation Process

Legislation is often required to give effect to policy changes. Ministers should:

- at an early stage give clear instructions to their department on the policy direction, bearing in mind that:
 - Cabinet approval is required for major policy issues, and
 - the Prime Minister's approval is to be sought for matters with minor policy implications
- give authority to the department for the necessary legislation to be drafted;
- when legislation impacts on other portfolios, ministers should initiate consultation with relevant ministers throughout the development of the legislation, and take their views into account;
- allow adequate time to clear the legislation, the explanatory memorandum and the second reading speech before introduction into Parliament;
- take into account the practice that a bill be introduced in one sitting for debate in the next; thus unless a bill is time critical, adequate time must be allowed for it to be considered by Parliament prior to commencement; and
- whenever possible, be present in the Chamber to guide the legislation through the various stages of debate.

The minister should be present in the Chamber during the debate of his/her bill. If the minister's absence at the time of the debate is unavoidable, the minister should ensure that a deputy minister or a parliamentary secretary is sufficiently briefed on the detail of the legislation in order to guide the bill through the Parliament in the minister's stead.

As there is likely to be pressure on the legislation program, it is important that ministers develop a forward plan of legislation for their portfolio and allocate the appropriate priority to bills they wish to have included on the program for a particular sittings. More detailed information on the procedures and process involved in the preparation of legislation programs can be found in the *Legislation Handbook*.

In order to facilitate effective management of the legislation program, ministers should nominate a senior member of his/her office as a legislation contact officer to liaise with his/her department and with the Parliamentary Liaison Officer in both Chambers to ensure ministers' priorities for the preparation of legislation are adequately taken into account, and to assist the orderly presentation and flow of legislation.

11. MINISTERIAL CORRESPONDENCE

As a matter of routine, ministers receive correspondence from other ministers, Premiers, federal members of parliament and senators, State and Territory members of parliament, constituents, organisations, political groups and the general public, including children.

It is open to ministers to determine how they prefer to have their ministerial correspondence handled. For example, ministers might decide that mail received from their constituents would be handled differently from mail received from the general public. It is not possible or desirable in most portfolios, for ministers to answer all correspondence personally.

Some general points of principle in handling ministerial correspondence are:

- it is the expectation of the people who write to ministers that they will receive a reply, however brief;
- correspondence should be handled expeditiously and, where a timely reply is not possible, an interim acknowledgment giving reasons for the delay should be sent;
- replies should contain an expression of genuine appreciation of the correspondence and make specific reference, however minimal, to at least some of the key points or issues raised; and
- replies should be signed by someone at an appropriate level.

It would be normal for departments to have in place procedures for the handling of ministerial correspondence. Ministers should consult with their departments at an early stage to indicate any personal preferences they might have in the handling of ministerial correspondence.

12. OVERSEAS TRAVEL

Ministers may need to travel overseas for a variety of reasons, eg., to undertake negotiations and discussions with overseas counterparts, to put Australia's view at international meetings, to represent Australia on significant occasions and to gain first hand experience in areas of relevance to Australia.

The Prime Minister is responsible for approval of official overseas travel by all ministers, their spouses and their staff.

He writes to ministers, normally twice a year, asking for advice about travel proposed over the following twelve months. If a proposal receives his approval in principle, it is placed on the program of visits for the year and the minister is advised to write seeking confirmation of his approval three weeks before the date of departure. Guidance on making travel arrangements is available from the Department of Administrative Services.

In developing proposals ministers should take the following into account:

- (a) proposals should include only the highest priority visits, where the purpose of the visit and involvement at ministerial level can be clearly and publicly demonstrated as essential;
- (b) the duration of absences and the costs of visits should be kept to a minimum;
- (c) priorities should be set and visits minimised through consultation within and across portfolios. Wherever possible, ministers who regularly attend international meetings should tie their other essential travel in with these meetings;
- (d) absences should be planned around Parliamentary sitting periods, Cabinet and other (eg Budget) commitments;
- (e) where there is more than one minister in a portfolio, no more than one should be absent overseas at any one time.

Ministers are entitled to be accompanied by their spouses during official visits. The government will meet the cost of fares, accommodation and meal expenses incurred by spouses during official visits.

Ministers are on duty full-time when travelling overseas, although their itineraries may include rest days:

- (a) if a minister is accompanied overseas by children or any family member other than the spouse, it must be at the minister's own expense and the presence of others should not be allowed to interfere with the minister's capacity to attend to business;
- (b) ministers may request approval to take leave while overseas, but the period on leave must not be excessive and the visit must be clearly defensible in terms of the official business undertaken. All costs associated with a minister's leave are to be met by the minister.

Ministers are normally entitled to be accompanied by one staff member during official visits. Additional staff support is rarely required.

Appendix H

Code of conduct for Western Australian Government media secretaries and the WA Government Media Office

Code of conduct for WA Government media secretaries

In a democracy there is a requirement for the Government to be accountable to the people it governs. Communication is a key element of accountability.

The media secretaries' role is to facilitate Ministers' communication with the public and in particular that part of their communication which is conducted through the media.

Within that framework and with honesty, openness and accountability as the guiding principles, media secretaries should observe the following guidelines:

- Media secretaries will respect the truth and the public's right to information.
- Media secretaries will ensure that their communication skills are used to give the media an understanding of Government actions and decisions. However, Ministers have the responsibility for deciding the flow of information from their office.
- Media secretaries shall respect all confidences, both explicit and implied, they receive as a function of their work.
- Media secretaries will facilitate direct and indirect communication between the news media and their Minister with appropriate regard for deadlines, for confidentiality between media, and the particular interests of various news outlets. However, neither Minister nor media secretaries have an obligation to allow the Ministers' communication with the public to be limited or distorted by media deadlines or other limitations.
- Media secretaries are not normally expected to speak for a Minister, but if they are placed in that position they have the same obligations to the public as a Minister, saying only what they would expect the Minister to say.
- Media secretaries work for the Government, not for the political party associated with the Government. While they cannot avoid being involved in political debate in the course of their work for the Government, they are not part of the Party's resources and will not undertake work on behalf of the Party.
- Media secretaries have an obligation to use their communication skills to present the Government's point of view on the issues of the day. It is ethical to advance personal opinions during internal discussions, but it is unethical to use one's position to advance those opinions publicly in opposition to the Government's point of view.

Grievance resolution

If a media secretary and a Minister have a difference about the application of this Code of Conduct, the matter may be referred to the Director of the Government Media Office for discussion and resolution. If it is not resolved by this process it may be referred to the Chief Executive of the Office of State Administration as the employer.

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Code of conduct for the WA Government Media Office

The Government Media Office is the central administrative point for the employment of media secretaries and their assignment to the Premier or Ministers.

The GMO is the central point through which the media can contact media secretaries and obtain information about current and past government news and information.

The Director of the GMO is responsible for the recruitment of media secretaries, who are on contract to the Chief Executive of the Office of State Administration on behalf of the Premier of the day.

The Director has overall responsibility for the day-to-day operations of media secretaries, such as ensuring they are aware of current stories which may affect the Premier or a Minister, and has an ongoing role in ensuring that media secretaries perform professionally and ethically.

The GMO is the central distribution point for all media statements by the Premier and Ministers and the Director shares the responsibility for the accuracy and delivery of that information to the media.

The Director also has a duty to ensure this information is in keeping with the Government's policies and objectives and that there is no conflict where a number of portfolios are involved in a particular issue.

The Director of the GMO has a direct role in coordinating the physical presentation of information at media events, such as news conferences, and in gaining maximum media interest in these events.

The Director of the GMO is covered by the Code of Conduct for Media Secretaries in dealings with Ministers, media secretaries and the media as well as by the Code of Ethics and Code of Conduct relevant to public sector officers employed in the Ministry of the Premier and Cabinet.

October 15, 1996

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These advisers were interviewed in person in face-to-face sessions, 45 minutes on average, some as long as one hour 30 minutes (seven others were also interviewed but did not wish to be named):

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- Bauer, Catherine, Media Secretary to South Australian Minister for Tourism & Industrial Affairs Graham Ingerson, coalition (Adelaide, October 1995)
- Betts, Carolyn, Media Adviser to Federal Minister for Environment, Sport & Territories Senator John Faulkner, Labor (Canberra, September 1995)
- Bishop, Stephen, Principal Media Adviser to Queensland Opposition Leader Peter Beattie, Labor (Brisbane, November 1997)
- Bonner, Jim, Assistant Media Secretary to then South Australian Premier, Dean Brown, coalition (Adelaide, October 1995)
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- Castle, Philip, Senior Media Adviser to Queensland Minister for Families, Youth & Community Care Kevin Lingard, August to November 1996 (Perth, December 2001)
- Cockburn, Stewart, from 1951 to 1954 Press Secretary to Prime Minister Sir Robert Menzies, coalition (Adelaide, October 1995)
- Cunningham, Doug, Media Secretary to Western Australian Minister for Transport Murray Criddle, coalition (Perth, September 2000)
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- Quinlan, Gary, Senior Adviser to Federal Minister for Trade Senator Peter Cook, Labor (Canberra, September 1995)
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