

2016/01: Sexism in sport: was the reaction of the Australian sporting community to Chris Gayle's treatment of Mel McLaughlin appropriate?

What they said...

'So hopefully we win this game so we can have a drink after. Ah, don't blush, baby'

Chris Gayle, Big Bash League player for The Renegades

'I'm not blushing'

Mel McLaughlin, Channel Ten sports journalist

The issue at a glance

On January 4, 2016, Chris Gayle, the former West Indies' Test captain, hit 41 runs from 15 deliveries during the Melbourne Renegades' Big Bash League win over the Hobart Hurricanes.

In a subsequent interview he complimented Ten Network sports journalist Mel McLaughlin on her eyes and suggested they might have a drink after the game.

McLaughlin did not respond to Gayle's invitation and apparently sensing her rejection or discomfit said, 'Don't blush, baby'.

Gayle's comments have met with widespread criticism. The Renegades have fined him \$10,000 for inappropriate and unprofessional behaviour. There has also been talk of Gayle no longer being a part of the Big Bash League and calls for the Renegades to sack him.

Gayle's defenders have condemned the media furore as a massive over-reaction, with some even claiming that there is an element of racism in the way Gayle's behaviour has been castigated.

Background

(The following is a transcript of the Chris Gayle/Mel McLaughlin interview of January 4, 2016. A video of the interview can be accessed at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ona6zP7c6KM>

It runs for approximately one minute)

McLaughlin: I do have Chris Gayle. Congratulations. I mean were you just not in the mood to run today.

Gayle: It's a bit cold to be honest with you and it's a good wicket and the ball's standing up and I went the ball shots... ah... I mean it's all about reading. The first ball I get eight for four and then everything else really flew after that and it was fantastic and to be able to bat out here with Finchy {Aaron Finch} as well. It was the last game so we want to entertain the crowd.

McLaughlin: Incredibly aggressive approach for you two. It looks like you're absolutely just smashing this innings.

Gayle: Yeah, definitely, I mean I want to come and have an interview with you as well. That's the reason why I'm here so just to see your eyes for the first time, it's nice. So hopefully we win this game so we can have a drink after. Ah, don't blush, baby.

McLaughlin: I'm not blushing. Ah. Any injuries? The boys were saying maybe you picked up a bit of a twinge in your hamstring.

Gayle:[laughing through McLaughlin's last question] Yeah, no it's my back, I've been struggling a bit with my back. The weather panned out well. It cleared up a bit so anyway I'll get some physio work done. Hopefully I finish the tournament so I'm looking forward to recovering well and look in your eyes.

McLaughlin: And we'll leave it on that note and well done. Thanks.

Gayle: Ah, sorry. [Laughs again.]

Internet information

On January 24, 2016, The Footy Almanac published a comment by Michael Viljoen titled 'Chris Gayle: Hitting across the line, or colouring only between them?' in which he suggests that Chris Gayle has been overly condemned for conduct the Big Bash League actually encourages.

The full text of this article can be seen at <http://www.footyalmanac.com.au/chris-gayle-hitting-across-the-line-or-colouring-only-between-them/>

On January 11, 2016, the Jamaican newspaper The Gleaner published a letter from the editor written by Gordon Graham and titled 'Chris Gayle Doesn't Know Boundaries'.

Graham argues that Gayle seems unaware of the behaviour required of an international cricketer.

The full letter can be accessed at <http://jamaica-gleaner.com/article/letters/20160111/chris-gayle-doesnt-know-boundaries>

On January 10, 2016, The Jamaican Observer published a report by Jediael Carter titled 'Caribbean women journalists and those testy moments with men'. The report interviews a number of Jamaican female journalists for their views on what shapes the nature of male-female relations in their society.

The full text can be accessed at http://www.jamaicaobserver.com/news/Caribbean-women-journalists-and-those-testy-moments-with-men_48235

On January 10, 2016, Nirmukta published an opinion piece by Yogi Ashwiki titled 'Chris Gayle, workplace sexism and power structures'. The comment gives a careful consideration of a variety of reasons for condemning Chris Gayle's behaviour.

The full text can be found at <http://nirmukta.com/2016/01/10/chris-gayle-workplace-sexism-and-power-structures/>

On January 8, 2016, The Sydney Morning Herald published a comment by Malcolm Knox titled 'The trouble with being Chris Gayle - it all comes down to respect'

Knox used a parodied Jamaican patois to criticise Gayle for lacking respect and empathy for Mel McLaughlin. Knox's comment has been condemned as racist.

The full text can be found at <http://www.smh.com.au/sport/cricket/the-trouble-with-being-chris-gayle--it-all-comes-down-to-respect-20160108-gm1tiy.html>

On January 8, 2016, the Jamaican newspaper The Gleaner published an opinion piece by Chelan Smith titled 'White Beauty and the Black Beast'.

Smith argues that part of the motivation behind criticism of Chris Gayle's conduct is based on racism.

The full text of this comment can be accessed at <http://jamaica-gleaner.com/article/commentary/20160108/white-beauty-and-black-beast>

On January 7, 2016, the ABC's current affairs opinion site, The Drum, published a comment by Dale Hughes titled 'Chris Gayle and our addiction to public shaming'.

While not condoning Gayle's behaviour, Hughes argues that the media reaction to it has been excessive and unnecessarily punitive.

The full text of this comment can be done at <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2016-01-07/hughes-chris-gayle-and-our-addiction-to-public-shaming/7072898>

On January 7, 2016, Bettina Arndt published a comment on her blog titled 'Flirting with confected outrage fails to impress women'

Arndt argues that Gayle's behaviour was harmless flirtation and that the reaction to it has been excessive.

The full text of this comment can be accessed at <http://www.bettinaarndt.com.au/news/flirting-with-confected-outrage-fails-to-impress-women/>

On January 7, 2016, the Irish newspaper The Journal published a comment by Lorraine Courtney titled 'Was Chris Gayle being sexist or was it a bit of fun?'

The comment places the Chris Gayle incident in the context of sexual harassment in the workplace.

The full text can be accessed at <http://www.thejournal.ie/readme/chris-gayle-sexual-harassment-2535021-Jan2016/>

On January 7, 2016, The New Daily published an opinion piece by Tom Heenan, a lecturer in sports studies at Monash University. The comment is titled 'Chris Gayle is a jerk and should be sacked'.

Heeley criticises Gayle's conduct past and present and argues that there is no place in contemporary cricket for someone who behaves as Gayle has.

The full text can be accessed at <http://thenewdaily.com.au/sport/2016/01/06/chris-gayle-jerk-sacked/>

On January 6, 2016, The Guardian published a comment by Marina Hyde titled 'Chris Gayle controversy: sexist, not sexy - and certainly not funny'. Hyde condemns Gayle's behaviour during the Mel McLaughlin interview and explains the difference between 'sexy' and 'sexist' behaviour.

<http://www.theguardian.com/sport/blog/2016/jan/06/chris-gayle-controversy-sexist-women-cricket>

On January 6, 2016, The Roar published an opinion piece by sports commentator Debbie Spillane titled, 'Shooting the Gayle-farce breeze' in which she complained about the industry wide tolerance of poor treatment of women.

The full article can be accessed at <http://www.theroar.com.au/2016/01/06/shooting-the-gayle-farce-breeze/>

On January 6, 2016, Fox Sports ran a report titled 'Big Bash League 2016: Chris Gayle set to be banned from playing in future BBL tournaments' which suggests why Chris Gayle's behaviour may lead the BBL to ban him permanently as unsuited to its target audience.

The full text of this report can be found at <http://www.foxsports.com.au/cricket/big-bash-league-2016-chris-gayle-set-to-be-banned-from-playing-in-future-bbl-tournaments/news-story/db496a7d1caabaf022a9c4e30225f102>

On January 6, 2016, Daily Life published a comment by sports reporter Erin Riley titled 'Chris Gayle is a symptom of a much larger problem in sport'.

Riley places Gayle's behaviour and the various reactions to it as part of a much larger problem of misogyny within sport. The full text can be accessed at http://www.dailylife.com.au/health-and-fitness/dl-sport/chris-gayle-is-a-symptom-of-a-much-larger-problem-in-sport-20160105-glzyxd.html?&utm_source=facebook&utm_medium=cpc&utm_campaign=social&eid=social:fac-14omn0101-optim-nnn:paid-25/06/2014-social_traffic-all-postprom-nnn-dailylife-o&campaign_code=nocode&promote_channel=social_facebook

On January 6, 2016, ABC News published a report titled 'Chris Gayle apologises if Mel McLaughlin was uncomfortable during Big Bash League interview'

The report details Gayle's apology and includes a number of comments on the initial incident and on the apology. The full text can be accessed at <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2016-01-05/chris-gayle-apologises-for-comments-to-mel-mclaughlin/7067750>

On January 5, 2015, The Conversation published an opinion piece by David Rowe, Professor of Cultural Research at the Institute for Culture and Society, Western Sydney University.

The piece was titled 'The game is changing, baby: Chris Gayle and sexism in cricket'.

Professor Rowe argues that although shifts in attitude are slow there has been a gradual acceptance of women within sport in both Australia and overseas.

The full text of this comment can be accessed at <https://theconversation.com/the-game-is-changing-baby-chris-gayle-and-sexism-in-cricket-52748>

On January 5, 2016, the ABC's current affairs opinion Internet site, The Drum, published a comment by James Maasdorp titled "'That's just Chris Gayle for you" doesn't cut it'

The opinion piece gives a range of reasons why Chris Gayle's behaviour was inappropriate.

The full text of the comment can be accessed at <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2016-01-05/maasdorp-that-s-just-chris-gayle-for-you-doesn-t-cut-it/7067904>

On January 5, 2016, The Independent published a comment by Charlotte Gill titled 'Social justice warriors angry with Chris Gayle for flirting with a reporter should remember Maria Sharapova did it first'

Gill argues that the critical reaction to Gayle's comments was an over-reaction.

The full text can be accessed at <http://www.independent.co.uk/voices/social-justice-warriors-angry-with-chris-gayle-for-flirting-with-a-reporter-should-remember-maria-a6796336.html>

On January 5, 2016, the ABC ran an Internet News report titled 'Chris Gayle was a bad influence on younger team-mates, says Chris Rogers'.

The report gives the view of a former teammate on the adverse effects Gayle's behaviour could have on other players. <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2016-01-05/chris-gayle-chris-rogers-bad-influence/7069092>

On January 5, 2016, The New Daily published a report by Anthony Colangelo titled 'Chris Gayle's playboy past comes back to haunt him'. The report features claims by a number of female sports reports that Gayle had behaved toward them in the manner he did to McLaughlin.

The full text can be accessed at <http://thenewdaily.com.au/sport/2016/01/05/chris-gayle-interview-sexism-melmclaughlin/>

On January 5, 2016, The Telegraph published a report titled 'Former Australia batsman Chris Rogers admits he's "not a fan" of Chris Gayle after his attempts to flirt with presenter '.

The report features Rogers's comment that Gayle has spoken inappropriately to female sports reporters in the past.

The full text can be accessed at <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/sport/cricket/12081816/Chris-Gayle-apologises-for-sexist-comments-to-Mel-McLaughlin-but-still-fined-by-Melbourne-Renegades.html>

On January 5, 2016, Euro Sport published a comment by Carrie Dunne titled 'Ghastly Chris Gayle not an isolated case - sport devalues women' in which Dunne argues that Gayle's problematic behaviour is in fact only symptomatic of the attitudes generally shown within an entire sporting culture.

The full text can be accessed at http://www.eurosport.com/cricket/ghastly-chris-gayle-not-an-isolated-case-sport-devalues-women_sto5048253/story.shtml

Arguments that the reaction to Chris Gayle's behaviour was appropriate

1. Chris Gayle's behaviour was sexist

Those who condemn Chris Gayle's behaviour as sexist rather than light-heartedly flirtatious argue that the workplace context should preclude such sexual banter.

According to this argument there is generally a power differential in workplace flirtations or affairs. It is usually the woman

who has less power in the situation so that any sexual advance made toward her carries with it an element of coercion. The context often does not leave her free simply and openly to reject the sexual overture. This point was made by James Maasdorp in an opinion piece published on the ABC's Internet site on January 5, 2016. Maasdorp stated, 'Gayle's model of flirting - where he's the superstar looking to cash in his chips on starstruck TV reporters - is not a level playing field.'

Maasdorp further explained, 'Gayle put McLaughlin in a terribly difficult situation, one in which he most likely stood to add to his laddish reputation, and McLaughlin risked having a pretty stellar career tarnished. With Gayle's reputation, and with so much coloured history of a woman's supposed job on television, the temptation for McLaughlin to accept Gayle for being Gayle, and feign a fawning reciprocation of the flirt, would likely have been there.'

Yogi Ashwini also noted on the Internet site Nirmukta 'This is not a social setting like a bar, a club or a post-match bash where such comments may be acceptable. In addition to this, when the presenter looks down, obviously feeling uncomfortable, Gayle adds 'Don't blush baby', thus crossing the line of mere unprofessionalism to making personal comments about the TV presenter.'

It has further been argued that when unsought sexual overtures are made toward women in the workplace it undermines women in their role as workers. This argument maintains that men who make such overtures demonstrate they are unable to see women as anything other than sexual objects. They do not show respect for women as full human beings performing a job upon which their gender has no bearing. It has been claimed that such disrespect for women is a particular issue in many, if not all, sporting codes.

Yogi Ashwini has argued that marginalising and trivialising women is a particular problem in cricket. Ashwini has stated, 'Gayle's interview is only one incident and viewing women as eye-candy is a larger problem in cricket that needs to be addressed. Cricket is hardly a gender-equal place, with women often being a part of the sport only to be cheerleaders and often end up being sexualized in the process.'

Ashwini concluded 'When the environment in sport is already so skewed against women professionals, such comments are not only crass but can also send a harmful message: No matter what they do, women are often seen as sexual objects first and serious professionals later.'

2. Australian workplaces impose penalties on sexist behaviour

The Australian Human Rights Commission defines sexual harassment as 'any unwanted or unwelcome sexual behaviour where a reasonable person would have anticipated the possibility that the person harassed would feel offended, humiliated or intimidated. It has nothing to do with mutual attraction or consensual behaviour.'

Sexual harassment is unlawful under the Sex Discrimination Act in different areas of public life, including employment, service delivery, accommodation and education. Some types of sexual harassment may also be criminal offences. Some organisations choose to have a single workplace policy which prohibits discrimination and harassment on a range of grounds, including a person's sex, race, disability, age or sexual orientation. Others may decide there is a need for an additional stand-alone sexual harassment policy, particularly if this is a common or recurring problem in the workplace.

In addition, organisations may have a separate policy on the appropriate use of electronic communication in the workplace.

A person who sexually harasses someone else is primarily responsible for their behaviour. However, in many cases, employers can also be held responsible for sexual harassment by their employees towards other staff, clients and customers. This is called 'vicarious liability'.

All incidents of harassment require employers or managers to respond quickly and appropriately. The concept of 'vicarious liability' helps to explain why the Melbourne Renegades fined Chris Gayle for his comments to Mel McLaughlin. Had the club not taken action against Gayle, it could have been seen as endorsing his behaviour, where its legal responsibility is to discourage and penalise such conduct.

Among the measures that sporting bodies typically take in response to a club member sexually harassing someone are: verbal and/or written apology; counselling to address behaviour; withdrawal of any awards, placings, records, achievements bestowed in any tournaments, activities or events held or sanctioned by our club; suspension or termination of membership, participation or engagement in a role or activity; de-registration of accreditation for a period of time or permanently; a fine; or any other form of discipline that the club considers reasonable and appropriate.

The Renegades' chief executive, Stuart Coventry, made a statement in which the Club acknowledged, 'The club would like to extend a formal apology to Mel McLaughlin...'

Chris's comments were completely inappropriate and disrespectful and there is simply no place for these kinds of comments at the Melbourne Renegades or the broader community across any sport.'

The club also required Gayle to apologise and imposed a \$10,000 fine upon him. Such penalties have been defended as standard practice to punish and discourage sexual harassment in Australia.

3. Australian sporting bodies are attempting to promote an equal and gender inclusive policies within the different codes

Many predominantly or exclusively male sporting codes have acknowledged the need to increase female participation at all levels and in all capacities within their game.

Tennis Australia chief executive Craig Tiley, four AFL CEOs - Richmond's Brendon Gale, St Kilda's Matt Finnis, Collingwood's Gary Pert and Greater Western Sydney's David Matthews - Swimming Australia's new boss Mark Anderson, Basketball Australia's Anthony Moore, John Lee from the NRL's South Sydney and A-League club Melbourne Victory's Ian Robson are among the foundation members of the Champions of Change group. The Champions of

Change are a body of influential men drawn from many areas of Australian society who have committed themselves to taking action to increasing female participation and equality within their respective areas of influence.

As evidence of increasing moves toward gender equality within the Australian Football League (AFL), the AFL commission chairman, Mike Fitzpatrick, and newly appointed CEO, Gillon McLachlan, have both identified the need for greater diversity within their game.

Fitzpatrick has stated that the shift needed to 'start from the top down'. The introduction of the Gender Diversity Strategy, run by AFL General Manager for Customer, Community and People, Dorothy Hisgrove, is designed to see more women appointed in leadership roles within the AFL.

Female AFL commissioner, Samantha Mostyn, has suggested aiming to have at least three AFL clubs headed by women within the next five years. Ms Mostyn has stated, 'I think we should be bold and think about where those women are and can we start building succession within the industry...'

Beverly Knight, a director at Essendon Football Club from 1993 until 2010, was the first female board member in the AFL. In 2013, Peggy O'Neal became the AFL's first club president, at Richmond.

On the level of player involvement within the game, the AFL plans to have a female league begin in 2017.

Similar sentiments and initiatives are evident within Australian cricket. In 2015, Cricket Australia's chief executive officer, James Sutherland, stated, 'For cricket to continue to be Australia's favourite sport we must ensure we reach deep into our communities, providing every Australian, no matter their gender and background, the chance to get involved in cricket.'

Cricket Australia has a formal policy of gender inclusion. It encourages cricket clubs at all levels to appoint 'a designated Member Protection Officer to be the central contact for any concerns or information about harassment, sexual abuse and/or inappropriate behaviour.

A Member Protection Officer would ensure your club handles complaints in an appropriate and consistent manner.'

It is the general policy of the Australian sporting community that women receive equal and inclusive treatment in all areas of sport. Critics of Chris Gayle's conduct claim that formal action had to be taken against him in support of this policy.

4. Chris Gayle's behaviour could damage the reputation of the Big Bash League

The Big Bash League has expressed concern that Gayle's conduct could damage the reputation of the competition. It has been suggested that Cricket Australia will not approve Gayle to play as a part of the Big Bash competition in 2017.

Sports journalist Robert Craddock claimed on Inside Cricket on January 6, 2017, 'There's a feeling that he will be banned. He will not return next year. Cricket Australia will not sanction it and they will take a very strong stance on it.'

Craddock further noted, 'Let's not underestimate the market we're pitching to here. It's the same market as the Wiggles. Kids between 5-7-9 years old. A lot of those kids would have woken up this morning saying: "Dad, what's this mean about Chris Gayle exposing himself to a woman?... Chris' behaviour has been sleazy. He's got a stripper's room in his house. He's got a mirror on the ceiling. He flaunts it. And if you flaunt it you've got to be judged by it when things go wrong. I just can't have any sympathy for him...'

Chris Rogers, a former team mate of Gayle's, has also suggested that Gayle's conduct sets a bad example for younger players.

Rogers has stated, 'I was very wary of the role he was setting for the younger guys, and I spoke to them quite a bit about it - "do you think this is good behaviour, would you do this kind of thing?'

And all of them, all the young guys to give them credit were like "No, we don't think this is right".'

Rogers further stated, 'The reason I think he hasn't played in the BBL for quite a while is because that was what was said. To stay away from Chris Gayle because he brings more trouble than he's worth.'

Big Bash League chief executive, Anthony Everard, has stated, '[W]e've made it very, very clear to [Gayle] that in our view his comments were completely inappropriate and disrespectful, entirely inconsistent with the broader approach of what BBL is trying to do which is to engage families, women and children.'

On January 5, 2016, the ABC's current affairs opinion Internet site, The Drum, published a comment by James Maasdorp in which he stated, 'He cheapens the sport... The Big Bash League is enjoying arguably its best season, with record crowds, booming TV audiences (amid a slow Test summer), and a growing belief that Twenty20 cricket could one day take over from the five-day game as the preferred format of the sport. But by resorting to the winks and flirts, he only adds to old criticisms of Twenty20 being a circus and a pale imitation of "proper" cricket.'

5. Chris Gayle has a history of sexist behaviour toward women journalists

It has been claimed that there was nothing accidental or incidental about the comments Chris Gayle made to Mel McLaughlin.

Other reporters have noted that Gayle has behaved in this way before. Speaking to ABC Grandstand, Fox Sports journalist Neroli Meadows stated, 'He's done it before, he's done it to me, he's done it to several women - he does this constantly. He is a creep, he has creepy behaviour.

Chris did this to me five or six years ago when he first joined the [Sydney] Thunder... He's a big guy, it makes you feel intimidated.'

Nine News reporter Yvonne Sampson has also claimed that Gayle had asked her on a date after watching her carry out an interview.

Sampson stated, 'I had a notification via Twitter that Chris Gayle would like to take me out to dinner. I'd never met him...'

A former team mate of Chris Gale's, Chris Rogers, has stated that inappropriate comments to female journalists are a common pattern of behaviour for Gayle. Rogers has stated, 'From my time at the Thunder I was very disappointed with

his attitude and his behaviour, and I've not been a fan since.

People see these one-offs, but this is a pattern of behaviour. If you know the guy, you see it over and over. To defend it, I think, is not right at all.

I listen to that and I don't think it's funny at all - he says it's just a joke, well it's not just a joke, is it?'

It has also been claimed that Gayle has been even more inappropriate in comments made to Jamaican female journalists. During the 2014 Caribbean Premier League, Gayle was questioned by a female journalist on the 'feel' of the wicket. Gayle responded: 'Well I haven't touched yours yet so I don't know how it feels.' He then added, 'I like your smile; that's nice.'

A more serious accusation has also been made against Gayle. After the comments Gayle made during the McLaughlin interview sparked debate, an Australian woman working around the West Indies team during a Sydney training session at last year's World Cup has claimed that she entered the team dressing rooms believing no one was there. She claims she found Gayle and another player in the rooms and that Gayle deliberately partially exposed himself to her.

Arguments that the reaction to Chris Gayle's behaviour was inappropriate

1. The reaction to Chris Gayle's flirtatious behaviour was exaggerated

Those who see the fine imposed on Chris Gayle as excessive and who believe that the response to his comments as exaggerated claim that Gayle's behaviour was no more than flirtatious banter.

Bettina Arndt commented on her blog on January 7, 2016, 'Such harmless flirtation is not sexual harassment and luckily there are many in our community who resent the constant intrusion into enjoyable male/female interaction by thought police determined to stamp out any hint of what Helen Garner famously described as "Eros - the spark which connects and ignites."'

Arndt further noted, 'There are women who regret efforts to brand all compliments about their appearance as inappropriate and who want to retain the right to make their own choices about whether they enjoy male/female sexual banter and what they choose to do if it becomes offensive.'

Though Chris Gayle has apologised to Mel McLaughlin for any offence she may have taken he has also indicated that he had not intended to give offence. Gayle stated, 'There wasn't anything meant to be disrespectful or offensive to Mel. If she felt that way, I'm really sorry for that.'

There wasn't any harm meant in that particular way... It was a simple joke. The game was going on. Entertainment, things get out of proportion.'

It has also been noted that even for those who may find the flirtatious comments inappropriate the media response and the fine are an excessive reaction.

On January 7, 2016, the ABC's current affairs opinion site, The Drum, published a comment by Dale Hughes in which he stated, 'We are living in the age of the social media lynch mob, where crime and punishment is dictated via the emotions of the masses. A cricketer makes a clumsy advance on a reporter and then we are subject to an entire week's worth of analysis. The dirt file will be dug on Gayle's past exploits, and no doubt other exaggerated claims of inappropriate comments and behaviour will be offered in a fine cornucopia of disgust to feed the insatiable appetites of the Twitter brigade.'

Hughes further noted, 'The public reaction around these sorts of events is not healthy. It is, to quote from Gayle himself, blown out of proportion. Accepting that the comments were misplaced and apologising is not enough. He has to be dragged through the mud, fined, sanctioned, and sacked from contributing columns in the media. He is the modern day equivalent to the witch of Salem, forced to publicly repent his sins to satisfy the public's thirst for blood.'

2. Chris Gayle has a history of philanthropy and made an apology to Mel McLaughlin

Supporters of Chris Gayle who claim that the response to his comments is an over-reaction note that Gayle has a history of public spirited actions and that he offered McLaughlin an apology which she has accepted.

Gayle's supporters have noted that in his own country of Jamaica he has been honoured by political leaders, including the nation's female prime minister, and has a history of generous donations to advance Jamaican cricket and overcome social disadvantage.

In a comment written by 'Jack the Insider' and published in The Australian on January 20, 2016, the author notes that most media have focused on very negative constructions of Gayle, ignoring much evidence of his substantial public good works. 'Jack' states, 'What we can find if we bother to look hard enough is Chris Gayle being attributed ambassador status and given a diplomatic passport from the Jamaican Government led by Portia Simpson-Miller, Jamaica's first elected female prime minister. Simpson-Miller and Jamaica's Minister for Sport, Natalie Neita-Headley were photographed handing Gayle his shiny new diplomatic passport.'

The same opinion piece also noted '[Gayle] donated more than \$500,000 to the [Lucas] club [where he first played cricket] which now boasts the Chris Gayle Nursery and has a new lease of life.'

The revival of Lucas is just one of the activities associated with the Chris Gayle Academy, which in association with British-based charity organisations, Cricket For Change and Comic Relief and a raft of corporate sponsors, launched a program to train young people at risk, using sport as a tool in developing education, leadership and vocational skills, aiding them to find meaningful employment in Jamaica.'

Re the supposed offence given to Mel McLaughlin, Gayle has noted that he attempted to apologise to McLaughlin shortly after the interview during which he made the remarks that have been objected to by many commentators and that he was unsuccessful in his bid to do so. Gayle has stated, 'No, I didn't get a chance to. I tried to reach out to her last night but it didn't happen.'

During an interview the next day Gayle stated, 'There wasn't anything meant to be disrespectful or offensive to Mel. If she felt that way, I'm really sorry for that. There wasn't any harm meant in that particular way, to harm any particular person in any particular way like that.'

Gayle's supporters also note that McLaughlin has accepted the apology and would prefer that the media and others simply moved on from the incident. After the apology McLaughlin commented, 'I love my job and I'd just rather be talking about that.'

Gayle and his supporters have claimed that he does not have a history of making such remarks. Gayle has also specifically rejected the allegation that he exposed himself to a woman in the West Indies team dressing room in Sydney last year.

3. The punishment makes no allowance for Chris Gayle's cultural background

It has been claimed that Chris Gayle's cultural background may have made him less aware of the behaviour that would be acceptable to Australian sporting journalists and the wider Australian sporting community.

The Renegades chief executive officer, Stuart Coventry, described Chris Gayle's controversial interview with a female reporter as a 'one-off scenario' which happened because of 'cultural differences'.

A similar claim was made in a letter to the editor from Gordon Graham published in the Jamaican newspaper *The Gleaner* on January 11, 2016. Graham stated, 'This recent incident in Australia just underlines the reality that he [Gayle] lacks a sense of boundaries and an understanding of public behaviour which, while dismissed in Jamaica, is unacceptable in the wider developed world.'

Some of Gayle's supporters claim that he may need to be educated about appropriate behaviour in the different countries he tours as a cricketer, but that he should not be punished or condemned for behaving in ways that would be acceptable within his own country.

It has been suggested that the more casual and less equal nature of male-female relations in Gayle's country-of-birth may have made it more difficult for him to have realised what was appropriate during a television interview with an Australian female journalist.

A female Jamaican sports commentator has stated, 'I think it has to do with our cultural upbringing... I do feel the way that we are brought up as men and women in Jamaica does impact how female broadcasters are seen, female broadcasters are treated; the respect that we gain or not gain because of our gender.

Culturally, we have become accustomed to men behaving like Gayle. Not sure it is a good thing or bad thing, but I would laugh it off and ignore it...'

Another female Jamaican reporter commented on the role of the country's media in shaping what behaviour Jamaican woman (and by extension men) are prepared to accept as normal. She states, 'The media actually portrays women as sex objects, always in skimpy clothing, always being targeted by men; you know, in the songs we are objectified and all of that, so I guess we become so unaware that we are being treated unfairly, we actually accept it when we shouldn't. In some of the countries those things cannot happen, so I guess the media has a big role to play in that.'

4. The punishment is inconsistency as worse behaviours have been sanctioned, ignored or punished less

It has been claimed that Chris Gayle has been made an example of in a way that ignores the prevalence of far worse instances of the type of behaviour for which he has been punished. His supporters, and others, have suggested that this is unfair.

In an opinion piece published in *Euro Sport* on January 5, 2016, Carrie Dunne states, 'You have to feel sorry for him because he's being treated as an isolated case, when it's not in the least. Sport and society as a whole continue to devalue women and their contributions.'

Dunne goes on to claim, 'Cricket as presented to the public tends to treat women as eye-candy. If a woman is at a cricket match and fits the 'conventionally attractive' bill, or is leaping into the air celebrating a six, or is dressed appropriately for extremely hot conditions, expect the TV cameras to linger over her face and figure, and perhaps an approving word or two from the commentator. (As yet, there are no recorded similar objectifications of men sitting in a stadium, simply wanting to watch a match.)'

Dunne concludes, 'Gayle's behaviour is a symptom, not a cause.' According to this analysis the origin of the problem is systemic. It is something which afflicts the whole sporting culture and needs to be addressed on this level, rather than the focus being artificially placed on one man.

In an opinion piece published in *The Roar* on January 6, 2016, sports commentator Debbie Spillane noted, 'The problem is... a multitude of idiots who think it's funny to watch a woman have to deal with an unwanted sexual advance in the workplace.'

The Big Bash League organisers, in particular, have been accused of sending mixed messages and of developing a competition where overtly sexual and indeed sexist behaviour is encouraged.

In an opinion piece published in *The Footy Almanac* on January 24, 2016, Michael Viljoen focused on the extent to which the Big Bash organisers have used sex to promote their product. Viljoen describes their sales ploys and the confusion such techniques may have created in Gayle's mind. Viljoen states of their strategies 'Focus the BBL cameras on fans in the crowd and encourage them to kiss the person next to them. The Channel 10 commentary team can join the fun. They offered a joke about the "over use" of his groin as Gayle bends over showing some discomfort during his innings in Hobart. With all this and the summer sea breeze coming in off the Derwent River, Gayle could be excused for believing he might be somewhere near Jamaica's Montego Bay, where beach goers don't get uptight about too much.'

A number of commentators have compared Gayle's comment to McLaughlin with far worse conduct which has gone

unreprimanded. Some have mentioned former footballer and current Footy Show commentator Sam Newman who in 2008 stapled a photograph of Age leading football commentator Caroline Wilson onto the body of a bikini-clad cardboard mannequin which he then handled suggestively while dressing. Newman refused to apologise for this behaviour, though called on to do so by a number of key women in AFL management, and remains a member of the Footy Show to the present.

Some of Gayle's defenders have condemned the furore surrounding his behaviour as confected and misplaced given the general culture of disrespect and objectification which they claim has been allowed to threaten women who venture into traditionally male-dominated sports in any capacity.

It has also been noted that the criticism directed at Gayle is sexist in its own right as a number of sportswomen have made sexual overtures to male reports with apparent impunity. In January 2014, tennis player Maria Sharapova flattered an Australian presenter, saying to him on television, 'You have so much good self-esteem when you speak, it's really nice', before adding, 'I was just admiring your form'. Sharapova's comments were treated as humorous and no reprimand or penalty was given.

5. There has been a racist component in the criticism that Chris Gayle has received

It has been claimed that a number of those who have criticised Chris Gayle's behaviour have done so in racist terms, as though suggesting that his offence was in some way compounded by his being a black man trying to flirt with a white woman.

The Sydney Morning Herald published a comment by one of its sports writers, Malcolm Knox, in which he criticises Gayle's conduct using a parody of Jamaican patois.

Some commentators have found this offensive.

On January 9, 2016, Dr Zuleyka Zevallos published a response to Knox's comments on her blog, *The Other Sociologist*. Zevallos states, "'Satire" does not mean that White people get to be racist to teach Black men a lesson. The fact that this was published in a national paper is yet another daily reminder that racism is both reproduced and celebrated by the media.'

It has further been suggested that there is an element of racism in the objections to Gayle's behaviour. It has been claimed that Gayle's dark skin has caused some bigots to regard his attempts to attract a white woman as particularly offensive. According to this line of argument, some criticisms have been made not because Gayle was sexist but because his critics were racist.

On January 8, 2016, the Jamaican newspaper *The Gleaner*, published an opinion piece by Chelan Smith titled 'White Beauty and the Black Beast'.

Smith claims, '[A]t the base of this uproar is the disbelief that a rich, black athlete would have the audacity to flirt with a white woman, on air at that! How dare he?!

The ugly fact is that throughout history, society has constantly positioned the white woman as someone to be protected from the powerful and harmful black man. We've seen it with Emmett Till in 1955, who was killed for flirting with a cashier, and we see it today in 2016 with Chris Gayle.'

A similar comment was made in a reader's post in *The Australian* on January 20, 2016. The poster 'Gerald' noted, 'I am convinced that what was at play here was not male chauvinism, against feminism but racism.'

I will ask the simple question would the furore have been so widespread, indeed would there have even been any, if Chris Gayle was a white male cricketer and used the same words? Not one of Australia's finest moments...'

Further implications

There is truth on both sides of this issue - those who see Gayle's breach of appropriate standards of conduct as minor and those who are outraged by it have a case to make.

In reality, the issue is probably not that of Gayle's conduct on this particular occasion per se. Some of those who note that he did no more than compliment the journalist on her eyes and tentatively ask her out wonder what the fuss is about. The whole exchange lasted for only one minute, within which time Gayle was comprehensively rebuffed by McLaughlin's reaction to his invitation.

However, what makes the exchange significant in the eyes of many people is the broader context within which it occurred. Numerous commentators have used this incident as an opportunity to draw attention to the sexism and misogyny which they claim still mar Australia's sporting culture.

It has been noted that women have to struggle to achieve any sort of genuine credibility when they seek to play a professional part in Australia's sporting scene. Attention has been drawn to the secondary status given most women's sport - the reduced financial rewards, the limited media coverage and the relative lack of sponsorship. Attention has also been focused on the lack of respect often shown to those women who seek to work on an equal footing within male-dominated sporting codes.

Women reporters, commentators and administrators have complained of being made to feel like outsiders and of being subjected to sexual abuse and innuendo and sometimes the force of outright aggression and intimidation.

Such observations paint the Australian sporting culture as one which has not yet adapted to women operating within it on equal terms. Despite public relations campaigns intended to attract and retain women as spectators at many sporting competitions, their fuller participation is still not always welcome and accepted. Those men playing, administering and reporting on many sports still seem to see their codes as boy's own enclaves where women have no function other than as camp followers.

Critics have noted that women seem to be afforded a place primarily to the extent that they can act as 'eye-candy'. The

focus on the physical appearance of the WAGS in both AFL and Australian cricket can be seen as a case in point, as can the apparently ubiquitous requirement that any female sports reporter be young and conspicuously attractive. It is in this context that Chris Gayle's flirtatious invitation to Mel McLaughlin has caused such consternation among many commentators, especially female commentators. It serves as a reminder that within many areas of the sporting industry women are still not treated as equals. They are objectified and belittled and are there on sufferance - either to decorate a screen or to help win a female audience.

Good humoured banter is only possible among equals. For male commentators a joke from a colleague or interview subject may just be a joke. For female commentators it is more likely to function as a reminder of their secondary, subservient status.

In all this Gayle may simply have been unlucky to have touched a raw nerve. That said, his remarks remain ill-judged. Whatever one's view of Gayle's behaviour and its significance there should be no place for racial stereotyping in the popular or media response to his conduct. Gayle should be judged as an individual and neither condemned nor excused on the basis of his cultural and ethnic background.

Newspaper items used in the compilation of this issue outline

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<http://www.canberratimes.com.au/comment/gayle-behaviour-20160110-gm2q2l.html>

Herald-Sun: January 8, 2016, page 31, comment by Rita Panahi, 'Gayle hysteria turns an idiot into a victim'.
<http://www.heraldsun.com.au/news/opinion/rita-panahi/chris-gayle-big-bash-league-hysteria-turns-an-idiot-into-a-victim/news-story/f80bfa4a3dcc44442fae0f7548bb898a>

The Australian: January 7, 2016, page 10, comment by Bettina Arndt, 'flirting with confected outrage fails to impress women'.
<http://www.theaustralian.com.au/opinion/flirting-with-confected-outrage-fails-to-impress-women/news-story/13b5e0c486c037fce7f0a3fd625f801b>

The Age: January 7, 2016, page 14, letters, (with cartoon) incl 'Heeding the message of respect for women / Cultural understanding'.
<http://www.theage.com.au/comment/the-age-letters/heeding-the-message-of-respect-to-women-20160105-gm04r1.html>

Herald-Sun: January 6, 2016, page 24, comment by Beverley O'Connor, 'Times have changed, so grow up' (with editorial on Gayle, 'Crossing the line').
<http://www.heraldsun.com.au/news/opinion/beverley-oconnor/times-have-changed-so-grow-up/news-story/d430618843f994d1bc8eceeceae298394?login=1>

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<http://www.theage.com.au/comment/chris-gayle-interview-the-day-the-west-indies-superstar-made-a-pass-at-me-20160105-glzjy7.html>

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The Age: January 6, 2016, page 5, comment by Andrew Webster, 'Off-field interview shows how far we still have to go'.
<http://www.smh.com.au/sport/cricket/big-bash/chris-gayles-interview-with-mel-mclaughlin-shows-how-far-australian-sport-coverage-has-to-go-20160104-glzehr.html>