

RMIT

Stayci Taylor

**Mounting the Men's film festival: a mockumentary web series
Webisode 1: Power cut**

Abstract:

This pilot webisode opens with an interview between two women, a filmmaker and an entertainment reporter. This is revealed to be a scene from a comedy film by rising Hollywood star Marty Madden – who exists in a world where our familiar gender roles are reversed. Marty in turn has reversed the roles of *his* world, thus presenting us with a version of the world *we* know as if it were an imagined satire. The context is the opening night of a Men's Film Festival, the brainchild of organiser Andy Lederman, whose journey through the week of his festival provides the arc of the series. *Mounting the Men's film festival* is set in a world where male filmmakers bristle at being called 'male filmmakers', where men are tired of being asked how they balance work and family and where women might take their privileged position for granted. As part of wider doctoral research into female perspectives in screen comedy, particularly the relationships between comedy, point-of-view and gender in dominant screenwriting models, this script speaks to the satirical device of using gender switch narratives, and puts into practice scholarly questions around the benefits and limitations of this approach.

Biographical note:

Stayci Taylor is a PhD candidate in the School of Media and Communication, RMIT University. A playwright and screenwriter, she has written for broadcast in New Zealand since 2003, credits including two comedy series, and the award-winning bi-lingual serial drama *Kōrero Mai*. She has worked as a consultant, script editor, storyliner and series creator, and currently teaches undergraduate screenwriting at RMIT. Stayci's previous publications include 'Arrested Development: Can Funny, Female Characters Survive Script Development Processes?' (*Philament: an online journal of the arts and culture*), and (with Craig Batty) 'Interrogating Writing Practices: Perspectives from the Screenwriting Industry' in *Writing in practice: the journal of creative writing research*.

Keywords:

Creative Writing – Screenwriting – Gender – Comedy

Power Cut

The Characters

ANDY LEDERMAN – The hardworking, enthusiastic and somewhat over-functioning director of the inaugural Melbourne Men’s Film Festival. Though an aspiring filmmaker himself, and with a degree in Cinema Studies, Andy’s strengths lend him to organisational roles and he has accrued a remarkable number of committee credits for his thirty years.

MARTY MADDEN – Charming and self-deprecating experimental filmmaker turned Hollywood rising star at the age of 24, Marty’s charmed ascension in a women’s world has not required him to compromise on his integrity - at least, not yet.

TROY MILLAR – 45 and of ambiguous sexuality, Troy is a rich, right wing and incredibly successful writer/director working out of Hollywood.

AMY AND JULES – Posturing and patronising house technicians at Andy’s local independent cinema.

Others include volunteers, festival attendees, filmmakers, technicians and Marty’s onscreen characters, Trina and Jenna.

Webisode 1: Power Cut

1. INT. TV STUDIO - DAY

On the set of a Hollywood entertainment show, JENNA interviews TRINA.

An image of TRINA, brandishing a statuette (which looks a bit like an Oscar with breasts), hovers on a screen behind them.

JENNA

Welcome, Trina - and
congratulations again on being the
first woman to win this coveted
filmmaking award.

CROWD LAUGHTER (MOSTLY MALE). However, neither woman is aware of an audience so the effect is a little surreal.

TRINA

Thank you, it's an honour.

Leaning in...

JENNA

You must be proud to be such a role
model for other female filmmakers.

CROWD LAUGHTER (MALE).

TRINA

(keeping her temper)
I don't see myself as a 'female
filmmaker' specifically.

MORE OF THE SAME LAUGHTER. A COUPLE OF CHEERS.

Leaning in a little further than is comfortable..

JENNA

Okay, but you might consider
yourself an inspiration for young
women wanting to make films.

TRINA

Of course.

JENNA

What would your advice be to them?

TRINA

To work hard and get on with it.
I've never asked for special
treatment and I think that's why
I've earned the respect I have.

TITTERS. GROANS.

JENNA

Now, you have two adorable
children...

TRINA

(softens)

Yes, I do.

And there they are, replacing her image on the screen behind.

JENNA

...so the big question is, with all
that you've got going on, how do
you balance work and family?

HOOTS OF RECOGNITION.

TRINA

Well, I'm lucky to get a lot of
support, but in a sense I'm just
like any other working mother.

MORE LAUGHS.

JENNA

And, of course, that's what your
award winning film is all about.

TRINA

Exactly. And it was a chance to
create roles for women other than
someone's wife.

MORE LAUGHS.

TRINA absent-mindedly winds at the ring on her wedding finger.

JENNA

Do you consider the film a womanist
story?

FRESH WAVES OF LAUGHTER.

TRINA
(bristles)
Not necessarily.

Reveal -

2. INT. INDEPENDENT CINEMA - NIGHT

- where an audience of mostly men watch this unfold on the big screen.

JENNA
*So you wouldn't call yourself a
womanist?*

TRINA
*No, I mean - well, I believe we're
all equal so, well, no... I don't
think we need those sorts of
labels.*

The audience is united in more laughter and groans of recognition.

No one's laughing harder than ANDY LEDERMAN, watching proudly from the side of the screen.

After a moment, he acknowledges the camera, documentary-style, with a thumbs-up.

TITLE UP: MOUNTING THE MEN'S FILM FESTIVAL

Meanwhile, onscreen, things are falling apart.

TRINA (CONT'D)
(standing up to leave)
Seriously, Jenna?

JENNA
Hey, I don't write the questions.

As TRINA tries to storm out, CREW and equipment are revealed as obstacles in her path.

TRINA
Where's my publicist?

A light stand comes crashing down as she clocks the image of a Hollywood hunk on the screen behind her.

ANDY laughs extra hard. Then checks to see if others near him are finding it as funny.

TITLE UP: POWER CUT

A glimpse of ANDY's t-shirt reveals a MELBOURNE MEN'S FILM FEST logo.

A punter reads an insert in their program: DON'T BE MIFFED, JOIN MIFT - MEN IN FILM & TELEVISION!

TRINA (CONT'D)

Right, so I suppose the next question was going to be about my much younger husband?

Throwing her notes in frustration...

JENNA

(snide)

Well, the whole world's wondering how you did it!

As the screening draws to a close, festival VOLUNTEERS (MEN) whisper into handsets.

Other struggle to keep a wonky merch table upright. Despite their efforts, piles of t-shirts start sliding. A MMFF mug rolls to the floor, branded with #AskHimMore.

AUDIENCE MEMBERS fan themselves with programs. A few are taking notes.

Two in-house venue techs (AMY and JULES), obliged to be there, are bemused by the proceedings.

TRINA

(leaving)

I'm terrific at blowjobs!

More laughter as the onscreen story cuts to a new scene - but soon the audio cuts out, and the visual is replaced with the MMFF logo.

As the cinema lights come up, ANDY's on the mic.

ANDY

A big round of applause for our special festival guest, Marty Madden!

Find MARTY, sitting in a side front row, smiling modestly.

Then mouthing a self-conscious 'hello' to camera.

As the clapping and cheering subsides...

ANDY (CONT'D)

For those who don't know me, I'm
Andy Lederman, Festival Director...

One VOLUNTEER attempts to start a fresh round of applause but,
caught on camera, quickly backs off.

ANDY (CONT'D)

So before we continue with the rest
of the festivities, Marty's
generously agreed to take some
questions.

As MARTY joins ANDY at the mic, AMY and JULES are joined by
some more FEMALE VENUE TECHS. They chat inaudibly, banded
together, occasionally shuffling their feet, or looking around
to check out the punters. One strokes distractedly at the
two-way radio on her hip.

CUT TO:

3. INT. MMFF OFFICE - EARLIER

Looking off camera to an unseen interviewer, ANDY's excited
about the big night ahead.

ANDY

Tonight's opening event is all
about celebrating men's voices, and
men's stories onscreen.

Behind him, a group of his VOLUNTEERS (MEN) are huddled around
a computer monitor, laughing at a classic comedy routine
involving two women moving a piano up the stairs.

ANDY (CONT'D)

Personally I've been a big fan of
Marty Madden for years - have you
seen his experimental foreskin
films? ...No, anyway -

As ANDY talks, the camera picks up cutaway.

VOLUNTEERS (MEN) taking phone calls.

Making copies.

Some are amusing the children they've brought with them to the office.

One is desperately trying to add the missing apostrophe to a MELBOURNE MENS FILM FESTIVAL banner.

ANDY (CONT'D)

He's been picked up by HBO now, as you know, but he's *still* prepared to travel all the way to our little festival, *with* an exclusive preview of scenes from his new movie, so whomever wants to say he's 'sold out' - can!

(beams)

No tickets left!

An unattended CHILD (GIRL) draws boobs on a man's picture in the festival program.

CUT TO:

4. INT INDEPENDENT CINEMA - NIGHT

MARTY's Q&A continues.

MARTY

And there I am, in a room full of women, trying to pitch a film that sends up the fact that they're always in charge! But we got it made - somehow.

Friendly laughter - but the previous QUESTION ASKER is still holding the audience mic.

QUESTION ASKER

(cynical)

Because they assigned you a female mentor?

MARTY

Yeah, maybe - but a female mentor committed to helping develop my voice.

A WOMAN, one of the few in the audience, sits more upright in her seat.

ANDY

(hasty)

Another question? Okay, yes, you
on the right...

A VOLUNTEER awkwardly runs the mic to someone else.

QUESTION ASKER 2

Thanks Marty, um, just wanted to
ask how much is drawn from your own
life?

MARTY

Look, none of those characters are
me; but of course the script was a
place to channel my own
frustrations - like why the media
make such a big deal out of me
dating a younger woman!

Spontaneous applause.

MARTY (CONT'D)

So that's also a point of
frustration for Trina, my
protagonist.

ANDY

Even though she's not a 'womanist'?

He flicks his eyes quickly to the audience, happy to be
rewarded with their laughter.

MARTY

That's right.

(beat)

I still think there could be a
better word for that...

A new QUESTION ASKER has procured the mic.

QUESTION ASKER 3

Is Trina based on Troy Miller?

Laughs of recognition. MARTY laughs too, shaking his head
noncommittally -

CUT TO:

5. INT PERSONAL STUDY - DAY

TROY MILLAR sits at his desk, talking to an unseen interviewer.

Awards are displayed behind him.

A framed cover of Good Housekeeping magazine screams TROY MILLAR - MAN OF THE YEAR.

TROY

Look, I declined to attend that little Men's Film Festival because I don't want to be limited by my gender. You know what, I'm not even that comfortable in the company of other men.

(proud)

I like to think of myself as just one of the girls. Y'know? They have each other's backs.

CUT TO:

6. INT INDEPENDENT CINEMA - NIGHT

VOLUNTEERS (MEN) are pouring cask wine into glasses in the foyer.

One surreptitiously pours some into his #AskHimMore mug.

In the theatre -

ANDY

Now after the break don't forget our world premiere of 'Stud Shaming' by Justin Harris!

Find JUSTIN in the crowd, among a few friends giving supportive whoops.

ANDY (CONT'D)

So, while we get that set up...

A VOLUNTEER at the back looks blank. Then indicates to ANDY that he's on it.

ANDY (CONT'D)

...I think we have time for one more question.

The big screen displays a computer desktop, magnifying the awkward machinations involved in getting the digital file up for *Stud Shaming*.

The VOLUNTEER runs the mic to QUESTION ASKER 4, almost tripping in their haste for a smooth transition.

QUESTION ASKER 4

I know we were only able to see a few scenes, but there didn't seem to be any men in the cast.

Another of the few WOMEN, there with her MALE PARTNER, rolls her eyes. So does he.

MARTY

No, not so many *main* roles for men - I mean, we do meet the husband, but... because, you know, in my world it's *women* who are the underdogs. That's, like, the point. And what makes it funny.

QUESTION ASKER 4

But, aren't you just creating even more roles for women in comedy than there already are?

Pause.

MARTY searches for a response.

ANDY waits.

The MALE VOLUNTEERS wait.

The MALE PUNTERS wait.

Eventually...

MARTY

Well, without wanting to give too much away, there are some pretty funny cameo roles for men...

The power goes out.

There's a collective gasp before the dim emergency backup lights come up and the VENUE TECHS (WOMEN) kick into gear, ushering VOLUNTEERS (MEN) aside.

OVER CLOSING CREDITS:

ANDY looks in despair at the black screen, while MARTY taps on the dead mic. The VENUE TECHS have formed a chorus of ladder-erecting, torch-shining, ceiling-pointing, technical-gibberish-spouting saviours.

AMY

Yeh, I reckon the amp blew out the transponder.

JULES

Nah, mate, too much juice in the sub-woofers...

ANDY tries to interrupt.

ANDY

Isn't it just a fuse?

AMY

Okay, love; has anyone ever explained to you the concept of three-phase power?

Another FEMALE VENUE TECH approaches.

FEMALE VENUE TECH

(accusing)

Was everything tagged?

ANDY

Yes, look, I'm sure it's just...

FEMALE VENUE TECH

(ignoring ANDY)

Apparently they're trying to run things from dodgy laptops up there and all sorts.

JUSTIN approaches ANDY.

JUSTIN

What's happening? What about my screening?

AMY

(to ANDY)

If you could just get your people to file out and leave it to us...

General confusion and battle of wills as -

FADE TO BLACK

OVER BLACK:

JULES

I don't know why they need their own festival anyway. Men are everywhere these days.

AMY

I know. Where's the *women's* film festival? I'd like to see that...

END OF SCRIPT

Research statement

Research background

The script reflects the author's current PhD research on developing comic screenplays. It draws from scholarship relating to comedy – particularly its reliance on perspective (Horton 1991) and deviance from what is considered the norm (King 2002, Mills 2005). While 'gender switch' may succeed in exploiting perspective – creating new norms from which to depart – it might also reinforce the same binaries it sets out to challenge. The script is a creative expression of those concerns, and a response to scholarship on screenwriting practice and gender (see, Jacey 2010).

Research contribution

The script is situated within a growing scholarly field of screenwriting practice, as well as wider bodies of work on gender in comedy and on screen. A creative articulation of questions around essentialism and subjectivities addressed by Moi (2001) and others, it offers new ways of thinking about gender hierarchies in comedy (Mizejewski 2014). At the same time, it expresses a gendered critique of dominant screenwriting models, reversing the arguably default (male) perspective inherent in those structures (Dancyger and Rush 2007, Mulvey 1975).

Research significance

This original work is unique in offering a multi-layered, scholarly informed approach to the 'gender switch'. The world of the webisode reverses gender hierarchies, while also reflecting our own world back at us, double flipping the binaries it seeks to critique. It creatively answers the questions raised within its own text, deliberately employing 'otherising' as a narrative device, while also questioning its effectiveness. As a critique of dominant screenwriting models, the gender switch device is tested through practice. The device risks reinforcing those models' generic, hyperindividuated protagonists – especially those specific to comedy whereby the comic outsider is more easily negotiated as masculine (Mizejewski 2014) while still emphasising arguments around gendered, comic perspectives.

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