

Case Study 4: Media article transcripts

Article one: [The Age, 1 September 2005.](#)

Brogden's breakdown sparks reflection – and fierce debate

By DAMIEN MURPHWY, ANNIE LAWSON and MEAGHAN SHAW

JOHN Brogden's cry for help from his electoral office in the northern Sydney beach suburb of Mona Vale on Tuesday night was a personal tragedy that exposed a brutality peculiar to NSW politics and shocked the state.

It also shattered the lives of his wife, Lucy, their son and their families – Mrs Brogden's grief magnified by the knowledge, as she tended his wounds, that her husband's apparent suicide attempt was a victory of punitive justice over restorative justice.

Mr Brogden was released from Royal North Shore hospital yesterday afternoon and admitted to a psychiatric clinic. Yesterday became a time for reflection and regret as people pondered who or what had pushed him over the edge. There were many opinions, but no answers. Liberal MPs deferred electing Peter Debnam as Mr Brogden's successor as a sign of respect.

Messages of sympathy flooded in from political leaders across the country. Prime Minister John Howard said he was distressed by Mr Brogden's actions. "I want to say to Lucy, the thoughts of the Liberal family are very much with her and with her husband," he said. "There are a lot of people, myself included, who not only want to see John restored to health and peaceful in himself, but also resuming an active public life."

On Monday, after a weekend of media stories about his behaviour, Mr Brogden resigned as Liberal leader, admitting that he had propositioned female journalists and called Helena Carr, the Malaysian-born wife of former NSW premier Bob Carr, a mail-order bride.

On Tuesday evening, after Sydney's Daily Telegraph contacted Brogden staffers with allegations of predatory sexual behaviour, Mr Brogden left his Bilgola home, called briefly at Sacred Heart Church in Mona Vale, and then locked himself in his nearby office. Later, when a staffer was unable to enter the office, Mrs Brogden called police and they found Mr Brogden unconscious with what they called self-inflicted wounds.

Talkback radio yesterday was jammed with calls expressing shock, sadness and disgust with a political system and media that could be so callous. Liza's email to Sydney radio ABC702 was indicative: "I don't think his comments about Carr's wife deserved this amount of attention...I hope everyone who helped this poor man into the position he's in feels really badly about themselves." On Monday, after learning of the



slur on his wife, Mr Carr said Mr Brogden had no character and was “a featherweight mediocrity who ought to be voted out of the leadership” Yesterday he urged Mr Brogden to put the past behind him. “We’re a forgiving society,” Mr Carr said. “Bob and Helena Carr forgive what was said about Helena.”

Mr Debman, who will be elected state Liberal leader today, said Mr Brogden should have been given credit for doing the honourable thing. “Instead, he has suffered another devastating front page yesterday, Tuesday, and was about to suffer another devastating front page this morning,” Mr Debman said. News Ltd spokesperson Greg Baxter defended yesterday’s Telegraph story, which was recast for the second edition after Mr Brogden’s attempted suicide. He said the fresh raft of allegations were of “legitimate public interest” given that Mr Brogden had indicated he would remain an MP, and that he had claimed the incidents that forced his resignation were isolated.

A prominent academic blamed Mr Brogden’s demise on sensationalist reporting that he said came from commercial pressures on media outlets. “There is a hysteria element to the media that unfortunately has human consequences,” said Glenn Withers, professor of public policy at Australian National University.

Media ethicist Denis Muller said much of the coverage was justified until the Telegraph’s shame file was published. “I don’t think there was any public interest justification for it and it and its effect on Brogden and his family can only have been hurtful.” Australian Press council chairman Colin McKinnon supported the high level of media examination. “I think such an extraordinarily racist and sexist comment deserves the kind of analysis and utter repugnance that it generated,” he said. News Ltd coverage of the story sparked the resignation of The Australia’s state political reporter, Andrew West.

According to the journalists’ union, the MEAA, Mr West objected to his name being placed on a story that he did not write and which contained unsubstantiated material about Mr Brogden’s alleged indiscretions.

Article two: The Age, 1 September 2005

Fragile egos and dirty tricks make heady brew

By DAVID WROE, Canberra

POLITICS equals long hours, separation from family, backstabbing and constant media scrutiny. The feeling of failure, or even a daunting setback, can be crushing for an ambitious politician, especially when it is played out in humiliating detail as it was for John Brogden. Politicians agreed yesterday they were in a brutal business that could dent the hardest heads, yet none were under the illusion that that would change Democrat Andrew Bartlett, himself the subject of a public grilling after he abused another senator while he was drunk, said politicians were conditioned to attack, not defend each other.

Politics is seen as a “combat sport”, which was bad for the country, he said. “It’s not just about the people who buckle under the pressure. The difficulty is as much what it does to the people who survive. You actually get people who are literally sociopaths,” he said. Federal Health Minister Tony Abbott, whose life became news when he found his long lost son, who turned out not to be his, said politicians copped it from

all sides. “Politicians give each other no quarter, the media are relentless, intrusive, ruthless... and frankly the public are very judgmental.”

In 2000, Victorian federal Labor MP Greg Wilton killed himself after his family broke up. Labor finance spokesman Nick Sherry attempted suicide in 1997 amid claims he had rorted the Parliamentary travel allowance. Former Liberal staffer Greg Barnes said such a frequency of mental health problems showed politics needed to change. “People who go into politics tend to be highly strung in any event and they are also people who often have mood swings and... their mental state is probably accentuated because it’s a high-risk, high-pressure occupation,” he said. “This is a workplace where there is high stress and where there ought to be much more regard given to people’s mental health and that means at times the media backing off.”

Former premier Jeff Kennett, now chairman of the national depression initiative beyondblue, said Mr Brogden should have been left alone once he’d resigned. “I simply ask the question: do you have to make an attempt to take your life before the community will accept an apology?” he said.

Article three: The Daily Telegraph, August 31, 2005

BROGDEN IN SUICIDE BID- Disgraced liberal leader collapses at electoral office – BREAKING NEWS

By JOSH MASSOUD and SIMON BENSEN

John Brogden was rushed to hospital last night after an apparent suicide attempt. The disgraced former state leader of the Liberal Party collapsed at his electoral office in Mona Vale. He was carried out on a stretcher by paramedics about 10.50pm. It was believed the 36- year-old, who was unconscious, had harmed himself. Emergency calls to police were made by family members and friends.

Police last night said Mr Brogden was in a stable condition in Royal North Shore Hospital with “minor injuries”. Only hours before the drama, he had been warmly welcomed home with a kiss from his wife Lucy – with whom he has a son – before he headed back to work. He stopped briefly at Sacred Heart church on his way.

Declining to respond to the latest allegations that he has harassed other women, he had rushed into his office at the rear of the building, locked the door and refused to emerge.

Police arrived at the premises about 10.15pm.

The Daily Telegraph saw Acting Inspector Rick Janssen knock on Mr Brogden’s door several times but there was no answer. He then made a full inspection of the premises, including a search of the side and rear of the building. Mr Brogden’s secretary helped police enter the building.

She raised her hands to her head and became distraught when Mr Brogden was found lying on the floor in the shower at the rear of the premises. It is understood he had been drinking heavily from a bottle of gin.



Minutes later two ambulances arrived and paramedics treated him with lifesaving equipment. Paramedics covered him with a white blanket, with his face still showing and full of colour, before driving him to Royal North Shore Hospital. His wife Lucy was by his side in the hospital's intensive care unit early today. Mr Brogden was also visited in hospital by his deputy, Barry O'Farrell, about midnight. Prime Minister John Howard, Premier Morris Iemma and Liberal colleague Peter Debnam were all advised of the developments last night.

Mr Brogden was forced to quit the NSW Liberal leadership after he admitted to sexually harassing two female reporters and making a racist joke about Helen Carr being a 'mailorder bride'. Liberal sources had told The Daily Telegraph that, apart from these incidents, Mr Brogden had also decided to exit the leadership because a raft of fresh allegations of sexual misconduct was set to destroy his career. They include propositioning women for group sex and harassing his own staff and other opposition employees at State Parliament.

Despite spending the weekend denying the allegations surrounding the Helen Carr comment and his harassment of the female reporters after an Australian Hotels Association drinks function on July 29, Mr Brogden relented late on Sunday and confirmed everything.

Even with his admission, Mr Brogden did several radio interviews on Monday morning, when he again admitted to and apologised for his behaviour, but gave no sign he was going to quit the job. Then, at 11am on Monday, he held a snap press conference, where he resigned.

This followed the loss of support from Mr Howard, who made it plain in public comments that he was not going to assist Mr Brogden, saying his future was a matter for the NSW Liberal Party.

The Daily Telegraph can reveal today that Mr Brogden also exited the leadership in record time because the harassment of three female journalists and his racist Helen Carr jibe was only a sample of his poor behaviour towards women. It emerged yesterday that Mr Brogden had made inappropriate comments to other women in recent years.

Two women came forward yesterday with claims about a Christmas party in 2003, although they had not planned to go public until details of Mr Brogden's drunken behaviour emerged this week. It also emerged that he was seen in the company of a blonde woman at an exclusive party for last year's David Jones spring fashion launch. The fashion industry worker told friends she was romantically involved with Mr Brogden and paid him special attention at the party in August 2004, which was attended by supermodel Linda Evangelista.

The Daily Telegraph can also reveal that the father of Mr Brogden's wife, Lucy, had serious concerns about young female staffers. Sources close to Mr Brogden and Lucy's father, former Liberal Party state treasurer Frank Hooke, advised him to move 25-year-old Suzanne Tulloch out of his office in 1999 because colleagues had begun to speculate about their relationship. Ms Tulloch denied they were anything but friends.