

Questions from Media Watch:

1. Why was The Australian's coverage of the Lehrmann saga almost entirely favourable towards a man who has been found to be a rapist and serial liar?
2. Why was The Australian's coverage relentlessly critical of Lehrmann's victim Brittany Higgins, and The Project, which published her allegations of rape, now found to be true.
3. Given the Australian's obvious reliance in several of its 'Exclusives' on leaked text messages, emails and audio recordings that were supplied to participants in the criminal trial – some of which also surfaced on Spotlight – was The Australian in receipt of confidential material from Bruce Lehrmann or anyone else that was in breach of the Harman undertaking?

Response from a spokesperson for The Australian:

Your loaded questions reveal you have no interest whatsoever in providing your viewers with a fair or balanced assessment of our reporting on this issue.

The Australian's public interest journalism exposed serious issues concerning the proper administration of justice in the ACT, the extent to which now-debunked allegations of a political cover-up were weaponised for political purposes and the grave impact of the falsehoods on Fiona Brown, while simultaneously fighting in the Queensland courts to unmask Bruce Lehrmann as facing separate rape charges.

Regarding your particular questions:

1. Our coverage was not “almost entirely favourable towards a man who has been found to be a rapist and a serial liar”. Our coverage overwhelmingly focused on the right to a fair trial and repeatedly exposed gross failings in that regard. The fact that you are unable to distinguish between the two speaks volumes about your journalism.
2. Our coverage was not “relentlessly critical of Lehrmann’s victim Brittany Higgins and The Project.” Our coverage exposed concerns about the veracity of many of Ms Higgins’ allegations, particularly her claims of a cover-up by Linda Reynolds and Fiona Brown. Virtually all of those concerns were echoed by Justice Lee in his judgment, and in particular in his complete demolition of the cover-up allegations against Reynolds and Brown.
3. It is frankly appalling that you think it appropriate to demand that we identify a source - an indictment of how far some in the media appear to have now moved from the foundational principle of journalism that we do not ever reveal sources. We cannot hope to hold institutions and people who wield power to account if this principle is now expendable.

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It takes courage to argue for an important principle such as the rule of law when the subject may prove to be of poor character.