

6 The Putative Reader, Persuasiveness, and Relations of Solidarity/Affiliation in Mass-Communicative Opinion Writing

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6.1 Introduction

In this chapter I deal with relations of affiliation/solidarity (both familiarity and alignment) in a collection of journalistic opinion pieces and news reports which were triggered when the high profile, much celebrated captain of the Australian women's football team, Sam Kerr, was arrested in London in January 2023 for "racially aggravated harassment" of a police officer. The arrest and subsequent charging of Kerr provoked an outpouring of news reporting and journalistic commentary in the UK, Australian and the US, firstly when the charging was eventually made public in March 2024, then in the lead up to Kerr's trial in London in early 2025, and finally when the jury delivered a verdict of "not guilty" in February 2025.

A central concern of this volume is the proposal that it is useful to identify multiple axes or dimensions to what has variously been termed interpersonal relations of affiliation, solidarity, or rapport. Accordingly, as outlined in [chapter 1](#), this volume's authors have chosen to identify two main subdimensions related to implications of affiliation – termed *familiarity* (linked with Poynton's "contact" – [Poynton, 1985](#)), and *alignment* (the sharing/not sharing of attitudinal and affectual postures). While these two dimensions may simultaneously be in play communicatively (for example, when an experiential token of attitude signals an authorial assumption of addresser-addressee familiarity), there are reasons to deal with them separately in textual analysis when the purpose of the analysis is to fully capture what is at stake in terms of this relation of affiliation and the ultimate rhetorical workings of a text, especially in its relation to the social context in which their meanings are immanent.

Obviously, the opinion pieces and news reports which are the focus of the chapter were conditioned by social contexts in multiple national settings, especially those of the UK and Australia. In Australia, Kerr, who is gay and of South Asian background on her father's side, was a household name, a national icon and held up as an inspiration for young female athletes everywhere. In the UK, she didn't have quite the same elevated profile but was nevertheless well known on account of her success in UK and European women's football and was a leading goal kicker as a star striker for the Chelsea football team. Also, of significance for the social context in which this journalism operated were several recent highly controversial cases in the UK involving people of colour being charged with racially aggravated offences. Additionally, an inquiry into the London Metropolitan Police Force (which laid the charges against Kerr) had recently released findings that the force was "broken and rotten, suffering collapsing public trust and is guilty of institutional racism, misogyny and homophobia." In exploring how relations of affiliation are signalled in these opinion pieces and news reports, the chapter will also of necessity be exploring how these and other features of the social context shaped how the story was reported and the lines of argumentation the opinion writers pursued.

The arrest and subsequent charges resulted from words used by Kerr to police when being interviewed about a drunken taxi ride which had gone off the rails. The ride included Kerr vomiting out of the window of the cab, the cab driver locking Kerr and her partner in the cab, changing direction and driving the women to a police station without informing them and then Kerr's partner, fearing for their safety, kicking out one of the cab's windows in an attempt to escape from the cab. In the subsequent police interview (as revealed in a video recorded on the body cam of one of the officers and later released to the public) the officers dismissed pleas by the women to investigate the actions of the taxi driver and doubted their claims that they feared they were being "taken hostage". At one point, during a heated exchange, Kerr said of one of the officers: "You are literally a white privileged man." When told towards the end of the interview that she would be arrested for "criminal damage" to the cab, Kerr responded: "You guys are stupid and white. You guys are fucking stupid and white. This is the problem." As a result, the charge of "racially aggravated harassment" was laid and eventually taken to court in 2025 by the UK Crown Prosecution Service.

The diversity of viewpoints which the opinion writers advanced regarding this incident and its consequences can be grouped into two broad categories – those that are positively disposed to Kerr and those which are negative – although some have it both ways, being both positive and

negative about different aspects of incident. The “positively disposed” pieces variously defend her actions and/or are critical of the police and the UK legal system and/or reject that calling someone “white” is racist. In some cases, they advance the proposition she was the victim of discrimination on account of being “a woman of colour”. The negatively disposed pieces variously derogate Kerr and/or applaud the actions of the police and the UK Crown Prosecution Service and/or ridicule the suggestion that she was the victim of “white privilege”. In some cases, they affirm that “white” can indeed be a term of racist abuse. A subset of the negative pieces question the decision by the UK Crown Prosecution to bring the case to trial, in some cases advancing a negative view of Kerr and in other cases coming to her defence and advancing a positive view.

6.2 Affiliation in Single-Party versus Multi-Party Communications

These opinion pieces and associated news reports provide excellent material for an exploration of just what might be at stake in any consideration of addresser-addressee affiliation in written texts of this type. As outlined in other chapters (in particular see [chapter 1](#)), analyses of affiliation in single-party, non-interactive communications require a different approach from what is appropriate for multi-party, interactive communications. I briefly revisit these differences here.

In interactive communications, the analyst can obviously attend to the relationship between initiations and responses from those involved in the “conversation”. Do they, for example, use familiar terms of address, rely on each other’s knowledge of past shared experiences or deploy highly contracted forms of expression, thereby signalling a high degree of *familiarity*? Where in the conversation do participants support each other, concurring and agreeing, hence signalling *alignment*, and where do they do the opposite, questioning, disagreeing and countering each other, hence signalling *dis-alignment*. In such interactions, then, affiliation: alignment/dis-alignment is around the propositions being advanced in the “conversation”, enacted when one speaker either concurs with or dissents from what another speaker proposes or intimates. Obviously, there are no such exchanges between multiple parties to be observed in non-interactive, single-party texts of the type under consideration here – no actual acts of communicative alignment/dis-alignment to be observed between active communicative participants. Might this not lead us to question whether, in

fact, it makes sense to explore possibilities around interpersonal relations of affiliation, and especially the relation of affiliation: alignment in such texts. Obviously, the contributors to this volume, and many other scholars before us, believe the answer is “yes”. We, and those who have come before us, rely on the notion that all verbal communication (whether “monolog” or “dialog”) is “dialogic” or “dialogistic”. “Monologs” do not operate in communicative isolation, but rather engage *retrospectively* with prior speakers and what they have had to say on the current topic, and present as engaging *prospectively* with potential or “anticipated” responses to what the current text is advancing. (See, for example, Hoey, 2000, and of course, the scholarship of Bakhtin/Voloshinov has been foundational – Bakhtin, 1981; Voloshinov, 1973.)

This, however, doesn’t mean that we are immediately presented with a clear pathway to the analysis of writer-reader affiliation in “monologic” texts. As already dealt with in earlier chapters, analyses of writer-reader familiarity in such texts can attend to the presence or absence of certain key linguistic features typically associated with communication between those who are on intimate or familiar terms – such as informal and colloquial lexis, contractions, and direct address. And, as dealt with further in chapters 2 and 4, analyses of writer-reader familiarity in these single-party texts can also attend to authorial assumptions which co-position writer and reader as jointly knowledgeable vis-à-vis domestic, subcultural, fan-group, vocational, lifestyle, specialist or otherwise circumscribed or niche domains of human experience.

But developing such analyses of relations of alignment in “monologs” – an integral dimension of the relation of affiliation – is perhaps more challenging or at least hasn’t yet been fully thought through. How to deal with their apparent “single-partyness”? In what follows I will explore and demonstrate, by reference to extracts from the Sam Kerr pieces introduced above, aspects of a methodology for such an analysis, particularly in the social context of journalistic opinion writing. Thus, the aim of the chapter is to address this challenge – i.e. how to reach theoretically principled conclusions as to relations of writer-reader affiliation, with specific reference to alignment, in such texts. I will be drawing on prior scholarship and also providing some novel suggestions. I hope this will help elucidate the interpersonal workings of written opinion writing in general (with some reference to news reporting as well) and also provide insights to the interpersonal particularities of this collection of Sam Kerr pieces. Where appropriate, I will also consider how these texts position readers re relations of familiarity, since, being so intimately connected with relations of alignment, they have a key role to play in the more global relation of affiliation.

6.3 Affiliation: Alignment and Versions of Events (Experiential Postures)

By way of a few further preparatory remarks, I will be proposing that affiliation: alignment can be enacted or put at risk not only with respect to authorial attitudinal assessments but also with respect to authorial versions of events – the assertions the author makes with respect to experiential “reality” – what is said to have happened or to be happening. Along these lines I will propose that potential alignment can be a matter of either the author’s *attitudinal posture* (whether the text signals an anticipation that the reader shares or may not share the author’s viewpoint) or the author’s *epistemic posture* – whether the text signals an anticipation that the reader will regard the author’s version of events as established “knowledge” or alternatively may view them as open to question, not sufficiently substantiated, in tension with alternative versions of events, or in other ways problematic. To my knowledge this is not a proposition which has been very much dealt with in the prior Appraisal framework-based literature concerned with affiliation. It will be developed further below.

6.4 Lines of Inquiry for Analyses of Relations of Alignment and Persuasiveness in Single-Party, Mass Communicative Opinion Writing

In what follows, I discuss possible lines of inquiry for analyses of affiliation in single-party, mass communicative texts, with particular reference to the dimension of writer-reader affiliation: alignment, but also dealing with signals of affiliation: familiarity where appropriate. In this discussion, I use extracts from the Sam Kerr pieces to demonstrate these potential lines of inquiry while simultaneously applying these lines of inquiry to reach conclusions about writer-reader affiliation in the Sam Kerr pieces. Where appropriate, I will also offer some commentary on the bases on which the extracts under consideration might or might not be “persuasive” – i.e. what the reader would need to bring to the text in terms of attitudes, beliefs and susceptibility to argumentation to be persuaded of the merits of the viewpoints being advanced at that point.

Co-Positioning Writer and Putative Reader as Aligned

Such monologic texts may co-position writer and reader as “aligned” re one or more of the assessments, affectual responses and/or the versions of

events being advanced by the writer. This is through signals of authorial anticipation that the text's imagined or putative reader will view the writer's current attitudinal or epistemic posture as a "given", as "commonsensical", "self-evident" or "to-be-taken-for granted". This is frequently via the use of categorical assertion, or "bare assertion" – what the Appraisal framework terms "monoglossing", where no form of argumentative or evidential justification is provided. [Chapter 1](#) (this volume) offers further discussion of the notion of the putative reader and how it relates to prior literature on "writing the reader into the text" and notions of the "imagined", "ideal" or "virtual" reader, as well as further discussion regarding how texts may signal anticipation of writer-putative reader alignment, or "likemindedness".

We see this kind of categorical assertion in play in an opinion piece from Australia's *Herald Sun* newspaper written soon after the jury announced its not guilty verdict in February 2025. The writer, a regular columnist for this Australian tabloid, Andrew Bolt, is clearly negatively disposed towards Kerr and the defence/explanation she made in court for her actions. He signals an anticipation that the reader will unproblematically share this negative viewpoint by monoglossically asserting that she is "the **boorish** captain of our women's soccer team," providing no justification for this assessment of "boorishness." Later in the piece, in support of the proposition that "reverse racism" (i.e. anti-white racism by persons of colour) is a reality, he advances the following:

Many [Australians] feel they are losing power to the race-baiters, gender warriors, radical multiculturalists and hate preachers. Indeed, fear of being white helps to explain why tens of thousands of apparently white Australians now identify as Indigenous instead. ([Bolt, 2025](#))

There are multiple anticipations of reader likemindedness here. Firstly, there is the categorical assertion (without argumentative support) that this is indeed what many Australians feel – they feel that they are somehow losing their power. Then there is the presupposition that malign forces such as "race-baiters" and "hate preachers" are active in Australian society. Note the use of the definite article here – i.e. "feel they are losing power to **the** race baiters, gender warriors ..." rather than "feel they are losing power to race baiters." The use of presuming reference "the" here presents these as "given" entities, as identifiable entities already present in the current environment rather than entities conjured into existence by "many Australian's feelings."

We can say, therefore, that, without overtly indicating this, Bolt "retrospectively" signals his own attitudinal alignment with prior speakers who

hold that “whites” have somehow been losing out in terms of status or opportunities in Western society – echoes, indeed, of the “great replacement theory” being advanced by extreme right-wing politicians around the globe (also espoused by mass murderer Brenton Tarrant in his notorious anti-immigrant manifesto, as discussed in [chapters 1 and 5](#)). In presenting as self-evident and uncontested the proposition that “race baiters” and “hate preachers” are a regular feature of Australian society and that “tens of thousands of Australians ... now fear being white”, Bolt signals an anticipation that this is a view that the putative reader will share.

What, then, of the persuasiveness of this material and consequences for potential writer-reader affiliation? Arguably, it’s not persuasive at all – an obvious moment of what I have termed “flag waving” journalism ([White, 2021b](#)). For example, that tens of thousands of Australians “fear being white” is obviously highly contentious. No evidence is presented for this. There is nothing by way any material which might win over any reader who might doubt or reject such a proposition. Such material serves only to confirm or reinforce the views of those who already hold such opinions. It serves only to signal that, via these attitudinal assessments, they join with the writer in membership of what is an apparently well-founded community of shared value (i.e. one endorsed by the *Herald Sun*, one of Australian’s highest circulation newspapers).

With respect to writer-reader affiliation, as discussed across this volume’s chapters (and see [chapter 1](#)), we can only speak here of potentials. Keeping that in mind, we can say that solidarity is put at risk here, with any reader who rejects this view or even questions it likely to be alienated. By not only asserting this but doing so monoglossically (i.e. presenting it as self-evident, established knowledge) Bolt puts at risk solidarity with any reader who might be offended by being “taken for granted” attitudinally in this way – i.e. by not only advancing this view but treating it as a position that the reader will unproblematically concur with.

By way of another example of the co-positioning of writer and putative reader as aligned, consider the following extract. It is from an opinion piece by leading office holders of the Australian government’s Australian Human Rights Commission, published in the *Guardian* soon after the not guilty verdict was announced. The writers assert that rather than being racist, Kerr was herself the victim of sexism and white privilege. It begins with following headline

Would Sam Kerr have been charged if she were a man – or white – or straight? ([Cody & Sivaraman, 2025](#))

This is an instance of what is termed “concurrency” in the Appraisal framework (an option within appraisal’s “engagement” system of dialogistic positioning). It is a “leading” or “rhetorical” question by which the writer signals anticipation that the reader is so aligned as to be relied on to agree with the writer in supplying a particular answer – in this case the answer of “no”. By implication, then, the writers signal anticipation that the reader will find unproblematic the view that Kerr was only charged because she is a woman, a person of colour and gay, that she would not have been charged were she a man or a white or straight woman. This proposition is thus presented as a taken-for-granted, self-evident, given.

A few sentences on, the authors assert,

She is a well-loved and well-resourced woman of colour at the peak of her career. Yet despite all of this, she was ... dragged through the courts in a case that should never have proceeded. (Cody & Sivaraman, 2025)

Crucially here they categorically assert that the “case should never have proceeded” without any discussion of the legal complexities of the case nor argumentation as to its propriety. This question was extensively debated in a number of the other opinion pieces, with sometimes extensive justification given both for and against. Accordingly, we can say that, again the writers signal anticipation that the reader will necessarily be aligned with them in viewing the court proceedings as illegitimate.

The following series of propositions is typical of the piece:

In Australia, the more you fit into what society sees as “white”, the closer you are to power – and with this proximity to power you’re assumed to be credible, respectable, and deserving of protection. The further away, the more likely you are to be questioned, scrutinised and disbelieved. (Cody & Sivaraman, 2025)

From my own reading position, I personally find such propositions to have merit, to be extremely plausible, in general terms. Although I am a white, middle-class Australian male, as a journalist covering migrant communities in Australia over several years, I reported on cases where the concerns and needs of persons of colour were not taken seriously, or they experienced disadvantage, prejudice and double standards on the part of mainstream institutions. Nevertheless, in the current context it is necessary to note that these damning generalizations are provided with no evidence or other form of justification – no relevant statistics (for example the extremely

disproportionate number of First Australians charged with crimes and imprisoned), no examples (of which there are presumably many) of people being afforded less protection, credibility or respectability on account of not being white. Again, the authors signal anticipation that the reader will unproblematically align with the writers in viewing these assessments and versions of events as self-evident, as established “knowledge”.

It might be argued that there are also markers of assumed writer-reader familiarity here – for instance indicators of authorial assumptions that co-location in Australia and co-engagement with Australian current affairs mean that authors and the reader have shared knowledge of the research, statistics and examples by which these assessments and versions of events could be justified or verified. This is a possibility in terms of an analysis of how the piece manages writer-reader solidarity, and a possible way in which the text might be read and interpreted.

The authors in this way position themselves, and, simultaneously the putative reader, as dis-aligned with those prior speakers on the current topic who have condemned Kerr (and hence the wider community of those negatively disposed towards Kerr in this way). For example,

From the moment the allegations against Kerr surfaced, public scrutiny here and in the UK was quick and in many cases unforgiving. She was called aggressive, racist and her actions immediately criticised without context or understanding. (Cody & Sivaraman, 2025)

Here, the authors dis-align from these prior speakers by assessing their criticisms of Kerr as, in many cases, “unforgiving” and lacking “context” and “understanding”, but without offering any exemplification by which the validity of such assessments might be justified. (To my mind, there were plenty of extracts available in any number of opinion pieces which could have served this argumentative purpose.) Since the negativity of the authors towards these prior speakers and their views (views critical of Kerr) is monoglossed, the putative reader is construed as sharing this negative attitude to the prior speakers, and aligned with the authors in rejecting the views of those who have been criticizing Kerr as “aggressive” and “racist”.

From my own perspective, after many years of observing, analysing, editing, and composing opinion pieces,¹ this article reads to me as un-journalistic – in particular its almost complete lack of any substantive

¹ By way of my “credentials” for this proposition, I served multiple stints as editor of the *Sydney Morning Herald’s* op-ed pages.

exemplification or argumentative justification. I speculate that this may in part result from both authors having public roles as “commissioners” in the Australian Human Rights Commission. They state a position, rather than arguing for it.

This leads to the conclusion that the piece is not persuasive – and is perhaps not intended to be. There is minimal content provided which might win over those who are not already members of the community of shared value the authors are invoking. In this it is largely an exercise in “flag waving” rather than in what I have termed “advocacy” journalism (White, 2021b). In passing, I should add that I do not use “flag waving” as a pejorative term. When I personally agree with the “flag waving” being offered in a commentary piece, I enjoy and am uplifted by it as much as the next opinion journalism junkie.

In terms of writer and actual reader solidarity, the consequences are the same as for the Bolt piece just discussed. A relation of writer-reader rapport for those actual readers who come to the piece sharing the authors’ value position, and estrangement for those who hold the derogated view that Kerr’s behaviour was racist, aggressive and otherwise to be deplored.

Writer-Reader Solidarity and Experiential *Tokens* (*Invocations*) of Alignment

To the best of my knowledge, and apart from that canvassed by Don (2009, 2016, and 2019), what is termed *invoked* attitude (or attitudinal assessments activated or implied by experiential *tokens*) has not been dealt with in any great depth in terms of consequence for addresser-addressee affiliation – in the case of either single-party or multi-party communication. However, invoking attitudinal positioning is obviously of great consequence in terms of the construal of writer-reader affiliation. For example, Don (2019) remarks that: “writer strategies of ambiguity and implication at the same time greatly contribute to the construal of group affiliation, and to axiological or value alignments through assumptions of shared attitudes” (2019 p. 78).

This reliance on “shared attitudes” for implication of group membership is elaborated in Don (chapter 2, this volume) with a discussion of how tokens of attitude can function in the context of relations of writer-reader affiliation: familiarity, i.e. references to assumed familiarity can be read attitudinally, given the reader is indeed “familiar” with the reference.

Invoked attitude typically plays a key role in opinion writing. These, of course, are versions of events or descriptions of situations which, while free of any explicitly positive or negative lexis, nevertheless have the potential, in

context, to position the reader to adopt a negative or positive view of the people/phenomena thereby referenced. They are not assertions of authorial attitude, as such, but, rather, what are presented as, at least purportedly, “facts”.

Analysts need to deal with several issues when considering potential consequences for writer-reader solidarity they may give rise to. Firstly, there is the question of the epistemic status of these purported “facts”. Often these versions of events are categorically asserted as “givens” as established “knowledge” which is to be “taken for granted”. For example, here is a version-of-events from the opinion piece by columnist Andrew Bolt already discussed above: “she was drunk and vomited inside a taxi, and then refused to pay the Indian driver for the damage. When he drove her to a police station to complain, Kerr’s girlfriend kicked out his back window” (Bolt, 2025).

By this “categoricity” (i.e. bare assertion and no indication of the source of these assertions nor any indication that there were, in fact, alternative versions available of these events), the author signals anticipation that that writer and putative reader are epistemically aligned – for both, this version of events is to be taken as constituting the “facts of the matter”. If this were not the case, then the propositions asserting these “facts” would have been modalized (e.g. with formulations such as *according to police reports*, *I believe ... It seems ...* and so on) and supplied with some evidence or other justification. Of course, the question then arises as to the bases on which these “facts” do or do not give rise to some attitudinal interpretation, a question to be considered shortly. In the heteroglossic context in which the “facts” at issue in public debates circulate, their “truth” or “accuracy” is often extremely problematic. Consider the following statement delivered via social media by US President Donald Trump in February 2025. “We are successfully negotiating an end to the War with Russia, something all admit only ‘TRUMP’ and the Trump Administration, can do. Biden never tried” (in Matat, 2025). Crucially here Trump categorically asserts, without any supporting evidence that he was “negotiating an end to the war” (there seemed to be no evidence at all for this at the time), that it was universally held that he’s the only one who can achieve this outcome, and that former President Biden made no attempt to do this (counter evidence was widely available at the time). Thus, he projects onto the putative reader the view that this version of events is “established knowledge”. They are constructed as being in alignment with Trump vis-à-vis this particular “epistemic posture” towards past events. Thereby, of course, he puts at risk solidarity with any actual reader who may question or deny the accuracy or “truth” of the version of events being advanced. The proposal I am putting forward, then,

is that alignment/dis-alignment can turn on positioning vis-à-vis versions of events (epistemic posture) as well as on positioning vis-à-vis attitudinal assessments (attitudinal posture).

Once the first issue of the epistemic status of this attitudinal token has been established, the next question the analyst must address is whether and in what ways such tokens should be treated as co-positioning addresser and addressee vis-à-vis that attitude which appears to be at stake (i.e. as sharing the same attitude towards the target which the reader is being positioned to evaluate attitudinally). Should such versions of events/tokens of attitude be treated by the analyst as signalling an authorial anticipation that the reader will view the imputed attitudinal assessment as self-evident, to be taken for granted? Arguably, for a conclusion to be reached on this question, firstly the global textual context needs to be taken into account. What rhetorical purpose does it serve in the text?

Consider if the version of events provided in the Andrew Bolt piece discussed above had been located, not in this opinion piece, but in a news report which, for example, contained no explicit announcement of authorial point of view and which contained other versions of this event (which were indeed presented at the trial). It might then be concluded that the reporter is not conveying a personal attitudinal assessment and that likewise is not signalling anticipation that the reader will necessarily view Kerr either positively or negatively. This, of course, is not the textual arrangement we encounter in Bolt's opinion piece. The columnist preceded his version of events with the following explicitly evaluative material.

A London jury has found Sam Kerr not guilty of racially aggravated harassment for calling a policeman “f – ing stupid and white”. I doubt many Australians will be that generous to the boorish captain of our women's soccer team. If Kerr were a white male captain of a national team and not an Anglo-Indian woman, there's no doubt she'd have been dumped already. (Bolt, 2025)

Arguably, in this context, the version of events can be seen, not as an explicit assertion of authorial attitude, but nevertheless as an attitudinal imputation on the part of the author – i.e. a signal of anticipation that the reader will draw the same (negative) attitudinal inferences from these events as the author. If this were not the case, then the presenting of these “facts” at this point in the article would be incongruous, or at least confusing, serving no apparent rhetorical purpose and interrupting the text's unfolding argumentative “logic”.

As well, we need to note that what is being signalled here is not only an anticipation that the reader will share the author's negative view of Kerr, but that they will be subject to the same underlying cultural/normative frame as the author – i.e. norms by which refusing to pay for the cleanup after being drunk and vomiting in a taxi and then kicking out the window of the cab are reprehensible. We might see these as norms with very wide community reach, at least until some additional context is provided (for example, when information is provided that the window was kicked out when the women feared for their safety and felt they were being held hostage). Following the earlier discussion, we can see the author here co-positioning himself and the putative reader as having membership in a wider community of shared values and norms. The particular values in play here would appear to be of a rather a general nature – around what would very widely be seen as acceptable and unacceptable behaviour – and hence values grounded in the community at large, and therefore not in any particular political, religious, vocational, lifestyle, aesthetic, axiological, or ideological orientation.

In contrast, the cultural frame or intertextual reference by which an experiential token potentially invokes an attitudinal assessment may be much more narrowly distributed – for example, only “active” for more socially/culturally circumscribed communities of shared value – where the circumscription may indeed turn on specific religious, cultural, political, lifestyle, aesthetic or ideological etc. attachments and identities (e.g. see Don, [chapter 2](#), this volume, and [Don, 2016](#)). Consider the following command which several of the news stories and opinion pieces reported one of the police officers delivered to Kerr when the exchange became heated.

“You need to calm yourself down little missy” (substantiated by the publicly released video of the interview)

While I believe this version of events, if considered in isolation, has the clear potential to invoke a negative assessment of the officer, this, of course, depends on a cultural/normative frame by which this is an inappropriate, untoward way for a police officer to speak to anyone, let alone a 31-year-old woman. This was, indeed, how it was interpreted in the already mentioned favourably disposed opinion piece (from the Australian Human Rights Commission and published in the *Guardian*).

This case played out in the UK, but the broader issues are equally relevant in Australia: it showed example after example of systemic racism and sexism: **Kerr being patronised as “little missy”** while a white

man in power failed to recognise his privilege. (Cody & Sivaraman, 2025]

Arguably, there are alternative cultural/normative frames under which the use of “little missy” would not be so definitively untoward. It’s plausible that some might view this as entirely reasonable in the circumstances. In this regard I note that one piece from Fox News, headlined with “F***ing liar’: Kerr rants at police about Chelsea’s ‘best lawyers’ in explosive new trial video”, included the following.

The 31-year-old footballer at one point launched into a rant, saying: “I will have the best lawyers, don’t you f***ing worry. Because I would never f***ing say no to paying. [for the cleaning of the cab] “Listen to the recording. Listen to the recording. [made by Kerr during the ride] No, that’s f***ing bulls*** because he’s a f***ing liar. That’s bulls***. “He’s a f***ing liar and they’re listening to some f***ing black taxi man – a black cab or whatever they’re called, white taxi man, or whatever they’re called – over us two women. That’s a f***ing lie. I would pay whatever. [for the cleaning of the cab] That’s a lie. Why are you listening to a taxi cab over us two women.”

She went on to say: “I’m going to f***ing call my lawyer. I’m over these c**ts.”

After being told by Lovell (the police officer) that calling a lawyer would be “irrelevant right now”, Kerr responded: “No. I’m calling my f***ing lawyer. Because this is a f***ing racial f***ing thing. “Because you are not letting me go because you are believing that guy out the front over 50 pounds?” [the cost for cleaning the cab]

It is at that point in the released footage that Lovell tells Kerr: “You need to calm yourself down little missy.” (Brook, 2025)

The key point here is that, in signalling the assumption that a particular version of events will necessarily have activated the same attitudinal response in both writer and putative reader, the attitudinal token (“imputation”) may rely on culturally/normatively more circumscribed cultural frames or inter-textual references – in this case one frame in which a police officer speaking in this way is entirely unacceptable (and indicative of sexism, racism or white privilege) and another frame in which this is acceptable, given the circumstances. Thereby the text may co-position writer and putative reader as having membership in some presumed wider community of shared value which is potentially in opposition to other communities of shared value.

In conclusion to this section, my proposal is that versions of events (experiential tokens of attitudinal assessment) can, depending on context, be treated as signalling anticipations of writer-reader attitudinal alignment, and hence of affiliation– at that point in the text. This is on the basis that, in context, the “imputation” by which some positive/negative interpretation is reached is presented as unavoidable, as self-evident, to be taken for granted. The writer and putative reader are presented as aligned in reaching this attitudinal conclusion, on the basis of the “facts” being offered, which means there is also authorial anticipation that writer and reader have access to, and are subject to, the same underlying cultural/normative frame.

An additional issue needs to be attended to with respect the ways in which experiential tokens of attitude may signal authorial anticipation of putative reader alignment vis-à-vis the attitudinal assessment at issue. Consider the following version of events from the social-media tweet by Trump, already mentioned above. Recall that Trump had asserted that he was successfully ending the war in Ukraine, that everyone believes he is the only one capable of doing this and that President Biden had not tried to do this. He then added: “Zelensky wants to keep the ‘gravy train’ going” (Mattat, 2025). The issue here is the interplay of both experiential and attitudinal content. The experiential element in play here is with respect to the Ukrainian President’s purported mindset, that he “wants” to keep what, in experiential terms, is the supply of donated money, aid and weapons then flowing into his country. The attitudinal content is with respect to how this flow of material should be viewed. According to Trump this is “a gravy train” – i.e. unwarranted expenditure which results in undeserved, excessive financial gain. In terms of the Appraisal framework, this is an “appreciation” (a sub-type of Attitude) rather than a “judgement” (another sub-type of Attitude) – an assessment of a process rather than a person or their behaviour. However, the primary or ultimate target here, of course, is Zelensky, even though his behaviour itself is not overtly assessed. The negative assessment of his character is thus invoked rather than inscribed², by a token which co-positions writer and putative reader as sharing both the negatively attitudinal posture re the supply of support to Ukraine and the epistemic posture that this is, indeed, what Zelensky “wants”. We might also note in passing, that, as

² The invoked negative “judgement” of Zelensky is activated by the inscribed negative “appreciation” of this process which Zelensky reportedly “wants” – a process or activity characterised as a “gravy train”. Thus, an inscribed “appreciation” may invoke a “judgement” of any persons seen as responsible for, or associated with, the situation, process etc. being evaluated.

briefly alluded to in [chapter 1](#), this kind of “observed” affect [positive inclination towards some negatively viewed target] can function in context as a token of negative judgement of the “emoter” as well.

Writer-Reader Solidarity and the Uncommitted but Persuadable Reader

Central to the rhetorical workings of almost all opinion pieces are formulations which signal authorial anticipation that the putative reader may question or not necessarily accept a few/some/many/most of the writer’s attitudinal or epistemic postures. This is sometimes signalled by the framing of attitudinal and experiential propositions with modals of probability or related formulations (e.g. *possibly, in my view, arguably, evidence suggests*) but the key signal of authorial anticipation of potential reader unlikemindedness is the provision by the writer of what under the Appraisal framework is termed *justification* (an option within the sub-system of “engagement” – [White 2000³](#)), material which provides evidential or argumentative support for the position which the writer is advancing, material in support of the writer’s attitudinal assessments, affectual responses or versions of events. (See [White, 2000, 2003, 2006](#) and [chapter 1](#), this volume for more discussion and exemplification.)

By way of exemplification, consider the following extract from an opinion piece by Suzanne Wrack published in the UK *Guardian*. During the trial, Kerr gave evidence that, prior to the taxis arriving at the police station, she and her partner were genuinely in fear for their safety, fearing they were being kidnapped when the cab driver abruptly changed route and locked the cab doors. She told the court that during the ride they had called the police themselves and had been hung up on. She reported saying to the police officers during the subsequent interview at the police station: “put your shoes in a female’s shoes. We were trapped for 20 minutes in this guy’s car.” The prosecution, however, rejected this as an explanation or justification for how Kerr behaved once at the police station. They asserted that anything that preceded Kerr calling the police officer “stupid and white” (i.e. the taxi ride) was irrelevant. What she had said was “there for everyone to see on video”. In her piece, Wrack then advanced the contrary position – that what had happened during the taxi ride was, indeed

³ This “justification” option was not included in the system of Engagement provided in Martin & White 2005.

relevant. This position was supplied with the following extended sequence of “justifications”.

the context is everything. Start with the Metropolitan police, which was found to be institutionally racist, misogynistic and homophobic in a report less than two years ago and has a history (including a very recent history through the murder of Sarah Everard) of failing women, seemingly ignoring two women in significant distress. They were intoxicated but that does not mean they should not have their concerns taken seriously.

As Kerr and Mewis were sitting in the police station their claims were dismissed without investigation. The police did not subsequently request copies of emergency service calls, speed cameras and ANPR records were not checked, the taxi driver was taken at his word that he did not have a recording device in the vehicle and this was not checked. The taxi driver was not arrested or interviewed despite detaining the women in the taxi to drive them to the station (an action explicitly advised against in the Taxi Drivers’ Handbook which states: “Detaining passengers against their will in the back of a taxi over an unpaid fare, including locking the passenger in and driving to a police station, is not condoned by police and could get you in trouble.”) In addition, when the police saw a woman climbing out of a broken taxi window, they did not see the need to switch on body cams. (Wrack, 2025)

Here Wrack clearly does not present her position (that what happened in the cab was, indeed, relevant) as commonsensical, beyond doubt, self-evident or unproblematic. She signals anticipation that the reader may potentially not accept or concur with her and may need “persuading.” She thus provides, by way of justifications for her viewpoint, information about past behaviour of the police, the failure of the police to garner any evidence as to what actually happened during the cab ride, their failure to interview the cab driver and the fact that the Taxi Driver’s Handbook explicitly advises against the detention of passengers against their will. A clear case of “advocacy” rather than “flag waving” (White, 2021b).

Underlying Argument Structures and Assumptions of Writer-Reader Alignment

Determining where and with respect to which of the author’s propositions such justifications are provided can provide useful insights into the

rhetorical workings of a text and the directionality of the writer-reader affiliations being negotiated. But the analyst may have reason to choose to dig deeper, to go a step further and investigate consequences for writer-reader alignment of the assumptions on which such advocacy relies. This involves being cognizant that, when argumentative support (explicit evidence or reasoning) is provided by way of “rationale” for an evaluative position, this argumentation must ultimately rely on some typically unstated, assumed foundational premise (the “warrant” in British argumentation theorist Steven Toulmin’s (1958) terms). In “relying” on this premise in this way (i.e. assuming it unproblematically justifies the primary proposition) the author positions the reader as likeminded in this respect, as sharing the warrant with the writer. Consider the following argument, an invented text which maximally simplifies the central structural elements of an argument. (I have attached Toulmin’s labels to these elements.

(Claim/Thesis) The police officer rightly didn’t act on the women’s demand that he investigate the actions of the taxi driver

(Grounds) It was a busy night, the women were very drunk and the cabbie drove them to a police station.

(Some possible/plausible unstated Warrants by which the “grounds” can “logically entail” the thesis). Busy police don’t have time to investigate claims made by people under the influence. Those with evil or illegal intent don’t drive their “victims” to police stations.

Assumptions of Underlying Writer-Reader Alignment: The Andrew Bolt Piece

This can be illustrated further by considering, from this perspective, an actual argument from the Andrew Bolt piece mentioned above. In the piece, Bolt takes the position that “reverse racism” is plausibly a reality (i.e. racism by persons of colour against whites). He advances the position that, given racism is said to be about differentials in power and minority versus majority status, then Kerr’s labelling the police officer “white and stupid” was racist. His supporting justification (the “grounds”) is as follows:

In London today, the policeman was of a minority. White Britons now make up only 37 per cent of the population. (Bolt, 2025)

The unstated premise (warrant), of course, is that social/legal/political power and minority versus majority status is a matter of very simply calculated proportionalities in a given locality. Put another way, the “logic” or

the “rationale” is that the white policeman was less powerful than Kerr, and had minority status, and therefore Kerr’s language was racist, on account of “white Britons” making up less than half (37 per cent) of the population of London. It is somewhat difficult to believe that Bolt means this seriously, but here it is – offered by way of apparently serious argumentative support.⁴

This leads us to the key point of this section. In mounting arguments (“claims” justified by “grounds” based on “warrants”) opinion writers do initially signal anticipation that the putative reader may question, resist or even reject the primary claim (i.e. be un-aligned). However, frequently they present the grounds as necessarily “entailing” the claim (on the basis of the assumed underlying warrant). They signal an anticipation that the putative reader will regard this as sound, irresistible reasoning. Thereby they signal an anticipation that, once presented with this “proof” the reader, will inevitably be won over.

This, of course, is not the only way an argument can be mounted. Consider the alternative version of the “invented” argument I provided above.

(Claim/Thesis) In my view, the police officer rightly didn’t act on the women’s demand that he investigate the actions of the taxi driver

(Grounds) It was reportedly a busy night, the women have admitted to being under the influence and the cabbie drove them to a police station.

(Explicit – modalised warrants). In my experience very drunk people say all kinds of crazy things and it seems to me that if police acted on these they might not have had time to respond to genuine incidents. We could end up with real crimes going uninvestigated if police follow up false alarms. And I can’t imagine any circumstances when someone who had illegally detained a couple of women would then drive them to a police station and then present himself to the police.

While there are still some unstated underlying warrants in play here, the point is that all the propositions presented by way of rationale for the “claim” are modalized in some way, formulated in what Appraisal framework terms as “dialogistic expansion: entertain” – a form of expression by which the contingent subjectivity and conditionality of all utterances are

⁴ While it’s not actually relevant, I can’t help noting that the 2021 census found that non-British Europeans – presumably many of whom Bolt would have seen as “white” – constituted 20 per cent of the population of London.

recognised and by which the possibility of alternative propositions is recognised and legitimised. (See, for example, [White, 2000, 2003](#).) In my many years of considering opinion writing I have found argumentation of this type to be rare.

Since this device of construing the reader as potentially un-aligned (as in the role of persuadee) is so central to opinion writing I will now illustrate it in more depth, by reference to extracts from additional Kerr opinion pieces.

Advocacy and Underlying Assumptions of Writer-Reader Alignment: Sam Kerr a Victim of White Privilege?

I begin by considering an extract from a piece which was originally published in the UK *Daily Telegraph*, and then in the *Sydney Morning Herald*. It was headlined: “Sam Kerr the victim of white privilege? Pull the other one” and sub-headlined with “In echo of infamous Serena Williams incident, Australian’s behaviour is case of celebrity entitlement masked by politics of grievance” ([Brown, 2025](#)).

After dis-aligning with (contemptuously dismissing) prior assertions by leading Black and Brown athletes (e.g. tennis star Serena Williams) that they have been the victims of racism and/or “white privilege”, the author then turns to the Kerr case and advances the following.

Kerr’s demeanour in these exchanges was that of an obnoxious drunk. She belittled and condescended to PC Stephen Lovell, repeatedly threatening to engage “the Chelsea lawyers” (good luck with that at 3.15am). The post-hoc rationalisation, though, was that she was merely reacting to the two policemen’s perceived privilege over her. “I was trying to express that due to the power and privilege they had, they would never have to understand what we had just gone through and the fear we were having for our lives.” But would they not have held the same privilege over anybody they were questioning in the early hours, irrespective of the detainees’ sex or race? Surely it is intrinsic to the very job of policing that it involves power: the power to stop, to search, to detain, to arrest. As such, most law-abiding folk implicitly understand to be deferential to an officer and never, under any circumstances, to head down the “stupid and white” route. ([Brown, 2025](#))

The extract begins with the monoglossically asserted negative assessment of Kerr’s behaviour as “that of an obnoxious drunk”. No justification of this is

provided, not even by way of pointing to any specific episodes in the video recording of the police interview which might potentially have supplied such justification. Thus, the writer signals an anticipation of writer-reader alignment (as well as familiarity with the details of the incident) – that the reader will accept this assessment as uncontested and “self-evident”. But then he offers what is at least an incipient “argument” around the assessment that Kerr “belittled and condescended to” one of the officers interviewing her. The justification is by way of the attached version of events, that Kerr “repeatedly threatened to engage ‘the Chelsea lawyers’”. Note that “Chelsea lawyers” is a marker of broadly based cultural or locale-based familiarity in that it assumes the reader will share with the author the knowledge that “Chelsea” is a reference to a football team, and one of the most famous, well-resourced clubs in world football. Also to be noted is that this version of events is attitudinally coloured by the author choosing the term “threatened” to describe Kerr’s actions in saying she has access to these legal resources.

The unstated warrant in play here is that to signal that one may have access to a well-resourced legal team who might act on your behalf is in some way to necessarily diminish the role and standing of a police officer, to cast them as inferior, to dismiss or even ridicule them in some way. This entails obviously ideologically laden norms as to what is the “natural” standing of the police versus the citizenry and what is appropriate conduct for a citizen when taken into police custody. In assuming that this unstated warrant unproblematically applies here, the author thus signals the assumption that his and the putative reader’s values are conditioned by these particular norms around the behaviour of the police and the citizenry.

He then references prior utterances by Kerr (from the trial) that she was “merely reacting to the two policemen’s perceived privilege over her.” His purpose is to challenge and ultimately dismiss these – and thereby signal dis-alignment with Kerr vis-à-vis this proposition and hence with the wider community of shared value, the members of which have been declaring their support for Kerr generally and for this proposition more specifically.

The implied “thesis” that Kerr’s claims lack merit and should not be accepted is then justified (supplied with “grounds” in Toulmin’s terms) by means of the leading question: “But would they not have held the same privilege over anybody they were questioning in the early hours, irrespective of the detainees’ sex or race?” This, of course, is a “rhetorical” question of the type for which the writer anticipates they and the reader will supply the same answer – that they are aligned in being of this opinion. There are two levels or aspects to the unstated, underlying warrant. Firstly, that police

in every instance *always* exercise the same degree of control over citizens, regardless of their gender or race (i.e. it follows that these particular police would have acted according to this “norm” of police conduct and treated Kerr in the same way as he would have treated a white or male citizen). And then secondly, it was illegitimate for Kerr to react against this supposedly “standard” or customary exercise of police power. In Toulmin’s terms, the argument is as follows:

[claim/thesis] There is no merit to Kerr’s assertions that she acted in this way because she was reacting to the two policemen’s perceived privilege over her.

[grounds] These police officers were treating Kerr, a “woman of colour” in the same way they would have treated a white or a male citizen.

[unstated warrant] All police, on all occasions treat citizens, regardless of their race or gender, in the same way.

[associated unstated warrant] It was illegitimate of Kerr to push back against the police exercising power over her in the “customary” way and, following this, citizens have no right to react against being treated by police in this way.

Obviously the “assumptions” on which the argumentation relies here are highly ideological – a system of values as to how police *should* behave in the exercise of their power and as to how citizens *should* and *shouldn’t* respond. In assuming that this “logic” necessarily applies, the writer thus signals an anticipation that it will necessarily apply for the putative reader – he projects onto the reader this ideology. Tellingly, the writer does actually make explicit reference to the second part of the warrant, categorically asserting: “most law-abiding folk implicitly understand to be deferential to an officer.” – an assertion which is tellingly monoglossed/categorically asserted.

Advocacy and Underlying Assumptions of Writer-Reader Alignment: The Ballad of Sam Kerr

In a pro-Kerr piece published in Australia in the *Melbourne Age* and the *Sydney Morning Herald*, John Silvester makes the case that there is something seriously suspect in the decision by the UK Crown Prosecution Service to take the charge of “racially aggravated harassment” to court. The piece adopts a somewhat tongue in cheek tone but is ultimately serious. In it, Silvester asserts: “Let’s be clear. This case is the biggest attack on an Australian sports star from the mother country since Bodyline.” with the

piece headlined as “The Ballad of Sam Kerr” (Silvester, 2025). The lyrics for this ballad are provided at the end of the piece, reminiscent of the Australian “bush ballad” tradition (exemplified by the poems of Banjo Paterson) which celebrate the heroics of “Aussie battlers” – for example, the “jolly swagman” in “Waltzing Matilda”.

To begin, this is a piece in which writer-reader relations of familiarity have a key role to play. Writer and reader are constructed as connected through assumed shared knowledge of Australian sporting history narratives and notions of the Australian “national character”. Specifically, the projected sense of writer-reader solidarity is associated with “bodyline”, a series of cricket matches (a “test” series) played between England (the “mother country”) and Australia in 1932–33. Cricket has long had a central role in Australian culture and identity. In the series, the English bowlers adopted a new strategy of pitching the ball so that it bounced up and threatened the heads of batters (who in those days did not have any form of head protection). Although within the rules of the game, this was regarded by Australians as contrary to the spirit of the game – a perfidious form of cheating. It resulted in serious tension between Australia and Britain well beyond the cricket field. Australian media and public opinion turned against both the English cricket team and the British establishment, with the press fuelling nationalistic sentiment by portraying England’s tactics as underhanded and unworthy of the “gentleman’s game”. Australia lost the series, but the efforts by the Australian players to stand up to the “intimidation” were framed as a “moral” victory. It has taken on legendary status in Australian popular culture, with this “symbol of Australian resilience in the face of adversity” being represented in song, cinema and literature. Thus, the writer invites the reader to share in a moment of “nationalistic” solidarity around another case of an Australian sporting hero (“our” Sam Kerr) being bullied by those “perfidious Brits”. Of course this is, as suggested above, to some degree tongue-in-cheek, but nevertheless, through this, a sense of solidarity is invoked around national identity and thereby a positivity towards Kerr herself – this “Aussie battler”.

Perhaps unexpectedly, the piece begins by providing background on the eminent King’s Counsel who had been brought in to lead the prosecution of the case against Kerr:

The home of the English justice system is London’s Old Bailey, and one of their most respected King’s Counsels is William “Bill” Emlyn Jones. He has been given the prestigious Band 1 rating, the highest available. Get a load of this testimonial: “William is one of the most respected and able prosecutors at the Old Bailey in the most serious

and complex cases. His personable manner and charm should not hide his inner steely determination. He is a tough and astute cross-examiner and a master tactician.” The Old Etonian and MCC member with a weakness for fine food and wine is a specialist in homicide, serious organised crime, blackmail, fraud and people smuggling. In one high-profile murder case, three people were charged, but only Bill’s client was acquitted. He was the lead prosecutor in the dreadful case in which 39 Vietnamese died inside a refrigerated truck in Essex, and in another where the offender met victims through the Grindr app to drug and rob them, killing one in the process. So why was he appointed as the lead prosecutor in a pissy little case of a drunk woman who got lippy with a cop at a London police station? The reason is the woman happens to be Matildas captain Sam Kerr. (Silvester, 2025).

Note here that the merits of the case against Kerr are explicitly undermined by the writer assessing it as “pissy” and “little”. Any negativity towards Kerr’s behaviour is mitigated or even countered by her actions being described as “a woman getting lippy with cop” – carrying connotations which may vary from positive to mildly negative – from “cheeky”, through “argumentative” to “disrespectful”. Note in passing that the “reader being written into the text” is presented as on familiar terms with the writer – signalled by the use here of the casual conversational, “pissy” and “got lippy”, and numerous other instances of informal or colloquial lexis throughout the article.

At this point, the text introduces, without any specificity, what will turn out to be one of the primary positions for which the writer will argue – the proposition that the case was without merit, and the suggestion that Kerr is in some way the victim of hidden agendas in the British legal establishment. There is a reversal here of the usual sequencing of argumentation. As discussed, usually the author proposes some more or less controversial attitudinal assessment or version of events. This proposition is then followed by the argument’s “grounds”, the justification or motivation for that proposition. This, obviously, is presented as the rationale by which an initially unlikeminded reader might come to share the author’s viewpoint. But in this case, the order of the argument is reversed – the justificatory grounds (the extended detailing of the prosecuting King’s Counsel’s eminence) comes before rather than after the contentious proposition – the proposition that there is something untoward in this case being taken to court. The reader has been set up, in advance, to be won over to the author’s viewpoint. Despite this reversal of order, it’s still possible to see an unstated, underlying warrant being relied on for the “logic” of the argument, and which it is assumed the reader, the “putative” reader, will share with the

writer. The warrant is something along the lines of: “There is something necessarily untoward and suspicious about a barrister of such high standing and expertise being assigned to a case of “racially aggravated harassment”.

It might also be argued that there is a marker of writer-reader familiarity in play here. The argumentation might be seen to be assuming that the reader is subject to what, at least until recently, has been Australian popular cultural equivocation vis-à-vis the “mother country” – both a sense of historically based connection but also a suspicion that the Brits continue to look down on “us Aussies”.

The piece then provides its version of the events which lead to Kerr being interviewed by police. It is noteworthy that it is formulated in terms likely to mitigate the severity of any negative assessment it might invoke.

Kerr threw up in a London taxi, initially refused to pay compensation, argued the toss when the cabbie took her to a police station and called PC Stephen Lovell stupid and white. (Silvester, 2025).

Tellingly, Kerr is presented as only “initially” refusing to pay compensation, and all the altercation with the taxi driver is reduced to “arguing the toss”. No mention is made of the cab window being kicked out. And of course, it makes for an interesting comparison with the version of events provided in the anti-Kerr piece by Andrew Bolt, discussed earlier.

Extensive argumentative support is then provided for the suggestion that the decision to prosecute was the result of some hidden agenda. This includes the information that, in his initial statement after the interview, officer Lovell made no reference to Kerr’s “white and stupid” comment, and the brief of evidence was knocked back by the Crown Prosecution Service. It was only some eleven months later that Officer Lovell was asked to make another statement. In this he raised Kerr’s “stupid and white” comments, saying he was “shocked and upset” and was left feeling humiliated. It was only then that the Crown Prosecution added the charge of “racially aggravated harassment” to the charge of criminal damage to the taxi. Additional evidence is provided in support of the proposition that there was something suspicious about such an eminent King’s Counsel being briefed as an outside counsel to take the case. (In the vast majority of cases, the Crown Prosecuting Services’ own staff lawyers are used for prosecutions.). The author cites the following material from the Services own guidelines.

“King’s Counsel: The instruction of a KC is only merited where there is a significant and substantial complicating factor of gravity, sensitivity, complexity or responsibility. KCs should only be instructed in

the most serious and complex cases. There should be no automatic assumption that a KC should be instructed in any case, even when a defendant is charged with murder.” (in [Silvester, 2025](#)).

After this, further “justification” is provided for the proposition that the decision to take case to court is suspicious. The piece ends with what is the clearest statement offered in the piece of the author’s primary claim.

The Kerr prosecution has made headlines here and in Britain. There is no doubt someone decided to highlight the law [on racially aggravated harassment] with a high-profile head on a stick. ([Silvester, 2025](#)).

The author, however, doesn’t offer any clear statement of precisely what he believes as to the motivations or objectives of this “someone” high up in the British legal system might be. He does note at one point: “The Met is having its own battles at the moment. A recent inquiry by Baroness Casey found it was institutionally racist, misogynist and homophobic” [Silvester, 2025](#)). Perhaps the implication is that this is some sort of push back by the police.

This piece is clearly an instance of what I have termed journalistic “advocacy” (as opposed to “flag waving”: [White, 2021a, 2021b](#)). In offering multiple items of justification or evidence for the position the author is advancing, the putative reader is multiply positioned as potentially un-aligned, as potentially not yet having reached a position on these issues or even as potentially disagreeing with the author, but nevertheless as “persuadable”. Again, of course, this argumentation ultimately relies on underlying warrants which have not been overtly stated. The primary warrant relied on is that a King’s Council of this stature would not be brought in to take such a case unless there was some hidden agenda or ulterior motive in play. I believe most readers the *Age* and the *Sydney Morning Herald* would not have sufficient knowledge of the British legal establishment and its internal machination to definitively form a well-founded view on this. Possibly, then, the community of shared value into which the author aligns with the putative reader is one whose members are instinctively suspicious of the British establishment, ready to believe that the “poms” would have no qualms about sacrificing a young Australian sportsperson for their own untoward purposes.

6.5 Concluding Remarks

In this chapter I have sought to develop the central theme of this volume – the multidimensionality of what we term affiliation (or solidarity), an

interpersonal relationship of rapport, communality or togetherness which is enacted in multi-party communication or simulated in single-party mass communication. In several of the analyses presented in the chapter I demonstrated how journalistic opinion writers simultaneously anticipate relations of alignment and familiarity with their imagined readers. In support of their aim of winning the reader over to their point of view, they address the reader as if they are connected via membership in some social identity-based community of shared experience and knowledge.

In the chapter I have also sought to develop in several ways prior scholarship on approaches to the analysis of writer-reader affiliation: alignment in single-party texts. Firstly, I have proposed that signals of authorial anticipation of putative reader likemindedness or unlikemindedness can operate in connection with versions of events being advanced by the writer, as well as in connection with their attitudinal assessments. That is to say, “facts” as well as attitudinal assessments can be dialogically charged, with the writer signalling an anticipation, on the one hand, that the reader will view the version of events as uncontested, established, “knowledge” or, on the other hand, signalling anticipation that the reader may view the “facts” as still at issue, unproven or in tension with alternative versions of events. As we saw in comparing different accounts of Sam Kerr’s taxi ride, epistemic contentiousness may turn on the comprehensiveness or degree of detail provided in the version of events.

I have also addressed the question of how best to deal with experiential tokens of attitude in any analysis of writer-reader alignment – i.e. “factual” content which contains no explicitly evaluative lexis but nevertheless, in context, has the potential to position the reader to adopt a positive or negative view of some phenomenon (an attitudinal target). Should such material be treated as signalling anticipation of writer-reader alignment vis-à-vis the attitude being invoked or does the lack of explicit authorial attitude preclude such an analysis?⁵ I have proposed that in such cases it is firstly necessary to attend to the social context in which this token operates to determine whether this context is strongly conditioning the reader to share a viewpoint which the writer has elsewhere explicitly announced. Secondly, such tokens should be seen as signalling anticipation of writer-reader

⁵ It should be noted that I dealt only with attitudinal invocations which the Appraisal framework sub-classifies as “affording” or “evoking” attitudinal assessments. Invocations which the theory sub-classifies as “flagging” or “provoking” attitude (e.g. those which include intensification or indications of counter expectancy) raise additional issues which I haven’t sought to deal with.

likemindedness vis-à-vis the typically unstated cultural frame or intertextual reference by which the invocation receives its attitudinal charge.

Finally, I have proposed that even when texts signal anticipation of writer-reader unlikemindedness via the inclusion of justifications of contentious claims (attitudinal or experiential), these justifications may themselves include signals of anticipated writer-reader likemindedness – in terms of authorial assumptions that the reader will share the typically unstated, underlying warrant on which that justification relies. Here, of course, I am relying on the commonplace that ultimately all argumentation rests on some foundational premise, a proposition (or propositions) which the arguer takes for granted or holds to be self-evident.

By way of a final remark, I would like to briefly revisit a point which was first raised in [chapter 1](#). In the above discussion, I dealt with extracts from texts which were isolated from the wider co-textual setting in which they operated. Of course, we need to always keep in mind that such texts are made up of multiple instances of writer-reader alignment/misalignment and familiarity/distance and that accordingly the analyst needs to attend to how these points of affiliation/disaffiliation may relate to each other as the text unfolds. Just which are the wider communities of shared value and/or belief which the writer is referencing and just what network of social-identity based groupings is the author calling upon?

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