

# Mail-order insult shows women still lack respect from society

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The slur against Helena Carr should be condemned as much for being sexist as it was racist, writes Anne Summers.

Why is it that in Australia today the racial slur is seen as far more offensive than the sexual one? In July, Bryan Fletcher was fined \$10,000 and stripped of the captancy of the South Sydney Rabbitohs for calling another player a "black c---". It was the "B" word that was deemed to be the insulting one.

Likewise, John Brogden's comments about Helena Carr are being denounced for their implied racism, not for being sexist. One newspaper headline yesterday labelled Brogden's words "My racist disgrace".

Brogden's gratuitous categorisation of the Malaysian-born Helena Carr as a "mail-order bride" was so breathtakingly insulting, not to mention grossly inaccurate, that it almost beggars belief. But was it racist?

Mrs Carr came to Australia in the mid-1960s as a schoolgirl. She married Bob Carr, a Sydney journalist who would later become the state's premier, in 1973. In the decades since she has run several businesses, evidently with a good deal of success.

There is no possible way that Helena Carr's story could be characterised by what is generally understood by the term "mail-order bride".

The term applies to women who marry foreign men they barely know in order to achieve a better economic future for themselves in their husband's country, generally so they can support families they have had to leave behind at home.

The stereotype of the mail-order bride in this country is of an Asian woman, often from the Philippines, whose economic circumstances are so dire that she feels no choice but to enter into a so-called mail-order marriage. Such women these days are just as likely to come from Russia or Eastern Europe. In other words, what characterises a mail-order bride is not that she is Asian but that she is poor. Oh, and that she's a woman.

Brogden might have had in mind to racially slur Helena Carr, and his comments have been described by her husband, Bob, as a "cruel insult against all Asian women" but let's not forget that they were also deeply sexist. A smear of Helena Carr will of course risk having racist overtones because she is Asian, but she is also a woman and entitled to equal respect as such.

The comments were made during an inebriated evening when Brogden, who is married and has a young child, pinched one woman journalist on the derriere and is said to have propositioned another. These approaches were unwelcome, it has been reported, and were spurned by both women.

Yet it was not such sexual predatory behaviour that led to his political immolation; rather it was the perceived racism of attacking Mrs Carr. Shouldn't it have been both?

It's good to see that racist remarks attract such swift and unanimous condemnation from our political leaders but let's hope we can be equally outspoken against sexist comments and behaviour, be it in politicians or footballers - or anyone else for that matter.