

## [Transcript] The News Agents / Bringing down Russell Brand

Before we start today's show, we should just say that from the very beginning, there are references to allegations of sexual assault, unrape and themes that you may find disturbing.

This is a Global Player original podcast.

It'd be very nice to meet you one day, Mr Jimmy Savill, just you know.

Well, if you've got a sister, you could meet me by bringing her along.

I mean, I haven't got any sisters.

I don't usually meet fellas, but if you've got a sister, that's okay.

I've got a personal assistant called Marsha, and part of her job description is that anyone I demand she greets, meets, massages, she has to do it.

She's very attractive, Jimmy.

Well, that's a good start.

What kind of start?

You could send her along to do some research.

Would you like her to wear anything in particular to Jimmy?

I'd actually prefer her to wear nothing.

Right, so you want Marsha and my assistant to meet you naked?

Okay, well, that's not going to be a problem.

That was Jimmy Savill speaking to Russell Brand in 2007.

And that is the archive for the ages, isn't it?

One prolific dead pedophile, joking about grooming with a man who this past weekend has been accused of rape and sexual assault, live on radio two, live on the most listened to radio station in the country.

This wasn't 1977 or 1987.

It was 2007, a period that we wouldn't consider to be so long ago or so different from our own time.

And yet, if anything is becoming clear from the brand story, is that it was to some extent.

And on today's show, we're going to be talking about the brand investigation from the Sunday Times, The Times, Channel 4, how they got to the point of being finally able to publish after four years.

The reaction to the story and what happens to Brand now.

Welcome to the news agents.

The news agents.

It's Emily.

It's Lewis.

And it's worth saying that Russell Brand denies strenuously all the allegations that we are going to be talking about in today's episode.

A little bit later, we'll be talking about Liz Truss, who's made her comeback speech,

and she strenuously denies any sense of responsibility for what happened on her watch almost a year ago.

But we're going to start with the brand story.

Extraordinary weekend, The Sunday Times, The Times,

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and Channel 4 all publishing their allegations about Brand in different forms.

There was the Dispatches documentary on Saturday, the series of stories that followed in the two Times newspapers. And all of them centering on four women, although they do say they've spoken to others as well, four women who are to a greater or lesser extent anonymous, and who have made allegations about Brand that range from rape to sexual impropriety to grooming. And one of the extraordinary things about, particularly the documentary on Channel 4 on Saturday, was some of the archive that was used and used to illustrate part of the story, where Brand makes jokes and suggestions and talks about the sort of things that he would like to do sexually.

It is quite nice, then blow jobs what you get sometimes. Never suggest it. If the girl does it, they ain't suggested it. I like them blow jobs, right, where it goes in their neck a little bit. I would never suggest it. I'm not suggesting it. It's the other idea. And obviously we kind of knew this story was coming on the Friday, all these rumors about it.

And Brand put his video out, he tried to scoop them all effectively, spiked their story, denied all the allegations, talked about this being a mainstream media conspiracy and all that sort of stuff. But what amazed me, obviously the content of the stories were shocking, what amazed me was the reaction.

The reaction so quickly, from some people who frankly, I mean they've got TV programs, they are themselves so-called mainstream figures, basically dismissing the story and coming to Brand's defense before they'd even seen the documentary or really read any of the allegations. So someone else who was surprised about the weird reaction to this story is Louisa Compton. She is head of Factual at Channel 4 and a big, big force behind the dispatches element, the documentary side of the story. This is what she told us about it.

You know, I think within minutes of Russell Brand pitching his video up on YouTube at about 10.30 on Friday night, I think Elon Musk tweeted to congratulate him and describe it being a kind of mainstream media conspiracy.

I was incredibly surprised by the kind of people who spoke out in favor of him. I do, as you both know, I do think Twitter is not a real reflection of what most people think. But I was also just surprised by how it became a talking point so quickly. It became a national talking point.

I like you both have been involved in, you know, similarly big stories in the past in my career, but I don't think I've ever been involved in a story that just became talked about so instantaneously.

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Before we'd even broadcast the documentary, I was getting messages from friends saying I'm in a restaurant and either side of the table is talking about how they're going to watch it tonight.

People at football matches were sending me pictures of people in front of them watching Russell Brand's video from a football match.

People were telling me they're on a train carriage and the people in front of them were all talking about how they're going to watch the program tonight.

So I think what surprised me was just how big a talking point it became so quickly.

And you've got to hope that with stories like this, it will clearly lead to meaningful change in our industry and that people feel empowered to speak out.

Yeah. And we should just, for those of you who haven't seen it, or who've kind of been in the hole for the last couple of days, we should say that there are allegations of rape in this documentary and in the investigation by the Sunday Times and Times.

There is allegations of sexual assault.

And there is also what you might call grooming behavior.

And for me, this is where I think the whole question becomes quite complicated because you can see where a criminal prosecution would go.

You could see where people might want to follow up in terms of finding charges to press.

But then there's this whole gray area, which is the stuff that he talks about on stage, the stuff where he, for one of a better phrase, just sounds like a dick and quite an aggressive narcissistic dick.

But it is not illegal behavior.

And he talks right at the beginning about blowjobs and he talks about making women gag.

And the investigation also talks about a 16-year-old who was made to leave her school lessons to come to his house.

And actually in the dark, the woman who they call Alice, raises the question of why is this legal?

Why is it legal for a 16-year-old to be having a relationship with a 30-year-old and should the whole age of consent change?

And I think it raises a lot of questions about these shadowy figures who we all know have been behaving appallingly because they've told us they've behaved appallingly and they've spoken about, you know, in inverted commas, sex addiction.

And yet the law wouldn't stop most of what Russell Brand was actually doing.

That's sort of an extraordinary place to be.

Yeah, and Alice, who has been speaking to the BBC today, has said that, you know, Brand's response to her allegations are insulting.

She says the idea that this is a mainstream media conspiracy is laughable.

She's also said that a BBC chauffeur-driven car was used to pick her up from school and take her to Brand's house.

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As always with any of these stories, everything seems to be inextricably always come back in some way to the BBC or there's a BBC sort of element to it. And there are like real questions here, both for Channel 4, BBC and elsewhere, other media executives about the kind of knowing about elements of Brand's behaviour and perhaps not the most extreme versions of it. But, you know, as the documentary said in Channel 4, when he was doing Big Brother, you know, producers going to talk to young women and asking them to go and meet him back in his, you know, after the show and so on. So there is this in-plane site idea and that's what the documentary is called. But I mean, I suppose the thing is, is that, you know, so many people have interviewed him. You've interviewed him. What are your impressions of him? I interviewed him when he just bought out this book about addiction. I think it was called Recovery. And to be fair, I went to that interview preparing to loathe him and he kept me waiting and I'm a really rigorous time. So one of his is like 2017, 2018, end of 2017. And I remember him being late and I remember having his own makeup room and sort of thinking, oh my God, you know, what a narcissist. I hate people who do the power play thing by, you know, making it a sort of an interview wait for no sort of apparent reason. And then in truth, he walks into the room and he is mesmerizing. He's funny. He's smart. He's linguistic. His language is magnetic and he's charismatic. He did to some extent. I mean, I still found myself taking out this idea of, you know, oh, you're a victim of addiction. You're a victim of sex. Anyone who sleeps with 100 women a day can choose not to, right? So let's just get past the idea that that is some terrible malady and illness. Of course, he wasn't addicted. It's behavior that you can change. But in the context of the interview, I'd be lying if I said, you know, of course, there isn't something about him. We know that there's something about him because he sells out shows. He reinvents himself. I mean, curious that just when this investigation was starting, he managed this whole kind of personal reinvention towards, you know, wellness. And wellness should ring a lot of alarm bells in this day and age because it tends to mean conspiracy, anti-vax. Was he getting ready to sort of, if you like, almost groom his audiences into thinking everything against him was a conspiracy? Was that why he was finding these new alternative audiences? Well, I think let's listen to a bit of your interview.

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When you look back at that promiscuous lifestyle,  
do you think, does that appall you?  
Do you think, God, I was disgusting.  
Do you look at your daughter now and think,  
I hope she never meets Russell Brown when she grows up?  
Don't get so worked up about it.  
It's only a rhetorical device.  
Does it appall you?  
No, my dear.  
I don't look back at the past and get all worked up about it like Ebenezer Scrooge.  
I simply think those are some things I've done.  
I've amended for them.  
And as for the likelihood of some sort of  
fousty and kick up the arse from future Russell,  
if my daughter meets somebody who's caring and sensitive and knows how to communicate,  
then I think that will be a good thing.  
He sort of swatted me down like a fly there.  
Well, he sounded to me like you touched a nerve, actually.  
Well, I'm thinking when you watch it, because I watched it yesterday,  
I just thought, actually, for the first time, he looked a bit irritated  
and that you had touched a nerve.  
But what do you get back?  
You get kind of Goethe, Dickens, these extraordinary erudite references.  
And what he tried to do after that bit was get it on to the I'm a great dad.  
Let me tell you some dad stories.  
And this was really weird, actually, because he's sort of telling me about his newborn  
and what it's like being a dad.  
And then he accuses me of tuning out.  
He says, you're editing this as I'm speaking, which was quite a perceptive.  
Yeah, quite astute, quite perceptive.  
I said, yes, you're right.  
I am because I didn't buy it.  
I'd been trying to talk to him about his behavior and his past behavior.  
And he was already kind of trying to sell himself, rebrand Ha Ha himself  
as this sort of cute loving dad.  
And there are some things that as an interview, it just kind of like,  
just don't stick.  
You sort of get rid of it altogether.  
But if you take that interview as a whole, yeah, he was out to charm.  
And I think that's what he did over and over again, which is why we had him on Newsnight.  
That was a Newsnight interview.  
He was hired by BBC.  
He was hired by Channel 4.  
Well, it was a period he became a sort of political savant, right?

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Completely.

He was voted one of the most intellectual minds by Prospect magazine.

Ed Miliband interviewed him and all this stuff.

There was that period in 2015, 2016.

He was everywhere.

He was everywhere.

And that's how it works.

And that's despite the fact, obviously, he'd had to leave the BBC in the late 2000s over the sort of Saxgate stuff.

I mean, we started the show with that, what I find is like jaw-dropping interview exchange between him and Savile.

And one of the problems, I suppose, when these sort of stories come out is that everything sometimes gets compared to Savile

because Savile was just the most horrendous case, probably in, well, modern British history.

But it is amazing that they have that conversation and that that goes out on radio too.

And I don't know what it says.

I don't know, to be honest, does it say something about the power of celebrity and charisma, which to some extent they clearly, or to a large extent they both had.

Does it say something about shifting culture?

Can it have shifted that much since 2007?

Or does it just say something about us?

And the fact that actually, you know, what, this weekend, 2000 people were still at his gig, despite the fact that they knew what was coming, laughing along and giving him a standing ovation.

Also, the Savile thing is really interesting because it speaks a little bit to how investigations are the kind that we're going to be talking about work.

And I remember at the time, I was at Newsnight, and I heard a conversation between executives saying, well, have we got enough evidence on the Savile stuff?

You know, I think he's only sort of touched a few women's breasts, right?

And that was how it was seen at the time.

Like, can we really go with this?

Is it strong enough?

And to be fair, as a journalist, you are looking, you know, you have to have a high bar.

You have to know that the stuff you...

Highest on something like this.

Really high, because he was this hugely popular, again, charismatic, family fun figure at the time.

And so this idea that you'd be weighing up, were his crimes bad enough?

That was essentially what you were doing.

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Were those crimes bad enough?

And have we got the evidence to show them?

If we had known then, how many more people would come out and tell us things?

You know, I'm going to pay tribute to Liz McGee and Maureen Jones, who were leading this investigation, who never got to put it on air.

But if we had trusted them in the way clearly, the Sunday Times editor has trusted its journalist to say, I know that what you're doing is touching a nerve of many, many more stories.

These cases are all watertight, but there will be many, many others.

The whole thing would have been very differently told, I think.

And this is what...

To go back to that question about the reaction, what, again, I found amazing about it.

Maybe I shouldn't have found it amazing, but I did.

This is what really wound me up about it, which is to say that Rand's got a huge following.

Like you say, Millie, it's a really interesting turn that he suddenly decides to make in 2018, 2019, where he starts attacking the mainstream media and who knows what he knew about what was coming.

But you know, you've got actually like genuinely kind of vaguely credible people or people within the mainstream media saying things like, well, why didn't they go to the police these women?

Or why have they all come forward at the same time?

It's like, hello, do you know anything at all about doing a story or working on a story?

And by the way, maybe some of them do, but nonetheless, they just want to have an opinion.

Or indeed, why women do or don't go to the police.

Well, quite so.

You know what?

And I think we, in their quote, mainstream media, I think we will have to be extremely robust about this in sort of shooting this down and not sort of playing into it.

In the sense that, you know, what you've got here is a meticulously researched story that has got all sorts of accompanying evidence in all sorts of different ways.

It's been worked on for four years.

Yes, brandonise it.

And it is important to make that clear at every turn.

But nonetheless, is it any surprise at all



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that women don't come forward  
when they are so comprehensively disbelieved  
by mainstream, quote, unquote, media figures?  
Before, by the way, many of them had even seen the documentary  
or even read anything that was in those newspapers.  
I found it astonishing just how quickly  
this became a sort of culture war cleavage.  
I don't believe for a moment that they didn't believe the story.  
I just don't believe that.  
But I will just quote Naomi Klein here,  
who's a guest that actually we're going to be speaking to  
in the next couple of weeks.  
And her line is this,  
conspiracists groom their followers  
to believe any attack on their hero  
is a conspiracy to take them down.  
It's a closed mental loop.  
And I think once you put that in context,  
you realise that possibly Russell Brand has found  
his kind of conspiracy nut jobs  
who are happy to go with him.  
So that if a story like this breaks,  
they're already on side.  
They've bought into him.  
They've got the happy juice.  
They don't have to question what journalists are saying.  
They don't have to question what many of their own papers are saying.  
It's Trump.  
You've already dismissed the institution,  
whether it's the rule of law or the Department of Justice  
or the mainstream media or the civil service,  
whatever it is, you've already dismissed them  
so that you're ready to go and say clearly,  
they're just out to get me.  
And by the way, what is so utterly disgusting  
about some of that stuff?  
And again, you can read the report  
and watch the documentary and make up your own mind about it.  
You don't need us to tell you.  
But you've got so many of those same people,  
those same people who told us,  
do you remember the BBC was a den of perverts  
because of the Hugh Edward story?  
A story which again, whatever you think about it,



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in terms of the evidential basis  
and what we're talking about and the allegations here,  
we're talking about something of a potentially  
quite different order of magnitude.  
So you know what?  
It is time with regards to these stories  
that people just left,  
stop treating them as means of prosecuting,  
A, either the culture war,  
or B, an attempt to sort of pedal  
your absurd kind of constant conspiracy fuel narrative  
and just treated them as for what they are.  
Otherwise, we'll never progress or go any further.  
Yeah, I think it is all part of the democratization of media though.  
And by that, I mean that just like the interviewer  
doesn't necessarily hold all the cards here.  
We saw that in the interviews with Elon Musk  
or with Andrew Tate where they could turn the tables.  
Someone else is waiting behind.  
Absolutely, both of them I think did.  
But don't forget Russell Brand  
has his own following on YouTube  
where he took on Friday night straight away  
when these allegations were about to drop  
to talk to six and a half million followers.  
And so that is your cult,  
that is your ready-made audience  
who you are trying to get on side  
to preempt anything that may come out afterwards.  
Absolutely, which is why so-called mainstream organizations  
really ought to be more careful.  
So, you know, you have like someone like Bev Turner  
who is a presenter on GB News tweeting out,  
you're being attacked at Rusty Rockets,  
ah, you Russell Brand.  
Establishment media don't know what to do  
with the fact you have six million subscribers  
and generate autonomous knowing an original content.  
You're welcome on my GB News show any time.  
Keep going, this proves you're winning.  
You're a hero.  
And that is before she'd read any of it.  
And indeed, to her fellow GB News presenter,  
Andrew Pierce's credit,

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on GB News this morning,  
there was this astounding exchange between the two of them  
because they just happened to host a show together  
on GB News mid-morning show.  
This is a little exchange that they had.  
You say you're a hero.  
Don't you think before you say someone's a hero?  
Why do you think he's my hero? Hang on.  
Don't you think before you say he's a hero,  
you should establish whether  
these very serious allegations are true?  
Well, before I tweeted that,  
I had spoken to several sources close to Brand,  
close to The Times, close to The Sun.  
I was confident that there is no smoking gun in this regard.  
Right.  
I remain confident, having watched the dispatches,  
if that is what they've got after four years  
of a joint investigation by The Times newspaper  
and Channel 4,  
those four flimsy allegations  
from women who choose to stay anonymous,  
so there is nobody that can counter their version of events.  
There's nobody who can say,  
well, hang on, I was there on that occasion.  
I was reminded, funnily enough,  
of the last time we covered this sort of story,  
was with the FT investigation to Crispin Odie.  
The fund manager in the city.  
The hedge fund manager,  
who is accused of rather similar things to Russell Brand.  
And a friend of mine said,  
oh, I remember you saying at the time,  
this is what happens when you have, you know,  
more women in editorial positions.  
And actually, if you look across now,  
and it's by no means only women,  
but you have Rula Khalif at the FT.  
You have Becky Barrow on the Sunday Times news editor desk.  
You have Louisa Compton at dispatches.  
I would even say Esme Ren, Jess Brammer at Newsnight,  
just somehow made these kinds of stories their priorities.  
And they didn't feel small.  
And I think that's really important

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that women have to feel  
that actually they might take something  
that doesn't look like very much at first glance.  
But most women would realize that if that's happened once,  
it's probably happened a hundred times.  
And if it's happened there,  
it's probably happened in other places.  
I just feel that actually what you're seeing now  
is what happens when you just get a more balanced,  
gender balanced editorial take on these stories.  
They become more important.  
Well, in just a moment,  
we're going to be speaking to one of those exact women,  
and indeed one of the women at the heart of this story,  
Rosamund Irwin, media editor at the Sunday Times,  
who wrote the story this weekend.  
Stay with us.  
This is The News Agents.  
Well, joining us now, as promised,  
is Ros Irwin, the media editor of The Sunday Times,  
who started this investigation in 2019.  
I mean, started four years ago.  
Maybe we should start there and just explain to our listeners  
why something like this can take so long.  
Yes, I first started working on this in 2019.  
And the reason these things take so long  
is because when you approach people,  
you very, very rarely find someone  
who really desperately wants to tell their story  
if it is the worst thing that has happened to them,  
and that's what they're alleging.  
And obviously, there's a lot of people for whom  
what they're alleging is the worst thing  
that has happened to them.  
And you have to be so careful to corroborate evidence.  
And then the challenge is obviously finding more people  
because it's very, very hard to do it on your own,  
to be the woman who speaks out on your own.  
And I know some people have done that,  
and they're very, very brave, and I commend them for that.  
But I think it's very, very difficult.  
And legally, unless they have exceptionally strong evidence,  
it's almost impossible to do it on your own.  
You are trying to encourage more women to come forward,

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presumably.

So you might hear a story, I'm guessing,  
that doesn't sound criminal,  
but you think might lead to something else, right?

I mean, is this how you're sort of putting  
jigsawing things together?

Yeah. So, you know, there is always this question  
I particularly think around me, too, stories of,  
does a bad date story, a really, really bad date story,  
but where nothing's actually happened  
that you could call criminal,  
but it has been so uncomfortable and so unpleasant  
that it is something that that person is really affected by  
and really remembers.

Is that in the public interest report?

Well, it may well be, yes.

And there were stories like that that we came across,  
and obviously we put those allegations as well.  
But in the end, we've really focused on the four strongest stories  
where people aren't, women aren't making allegations  
of sexual assault.

How did you first become interested in the story?

What was the genesis of it?

So, it became known to me  
that there were a lot of comedians mentioning in their sets  
these allegations.

So, they were saying things that I can't actually say,  
but you can get away with in a stand-up gig  
where they were accusing in very blunt terms  
Russell Brand of sexual offences.

And as a joke, it was part of their set.

Yeah, it was part of their set.

Yeah. So, and then they sort of do mic drop,  
you know, having said a statement that I can't broadcast,  
you know, I've got to be very careful.

They were putting their head above the parapet  
because they wanted it known, they wanted it out there,  
and they were uncomfortable with the fact  
that they felt their industry was covering up  
for a predator, an alleged predator.

And just looking at that timeline,  
because I interviewed Russell Brand in 2017,  
he just brought out this book on addiction.

So, he was doing the whole sort of self-flagellation

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or self-knowledge thing.

But then he seemed to change round about 2019.

I mean, just at the point where you are then doing this investigation, you're just starting to work on this investigation, he pivots, right?

He turns into a very different sort of being.

He's not doing the BBC.

He's not doing Channel 4.

He's been, I think, fired or, you know, shoved away from both those areas.

And he's now kind of reinventing as a wellness guru.

Do you think that that was a coincidence?

I think that's for other people to decide what I would say.

And Emily, you are one of the few people who actually asked him outright about his behaviour towards women in that interview.

I mean, I think that clip has gone round because you actually did ask him about this, because so much of this is in the public domain.

There is genuinely a passage in his book where he says, what kind of man was I treating women in this way?

And then he says, if this is what I'm admitting to, and I'm paraphrasing slightly here, but imagine what I'm leaving out.

And that was in his second set of memoirs.

And that was published.

So there's a definite hiding in plain sight thing here.

But in terms of the pivot, it is interesting to me that I began this in 2019.

And by 2020, you know, the anti-vaxxer stuff, all of that starts coming out.

Now, I think you're right.

There's a second element to that, which is that he wasn't getting those mainstream jobs anymore.

So he wasn't appearing on Channel 4 sort of comedy programs.

Although, I should note,

he was appearing quite late on those shows because he went on Celebrity Bake Off right before this period and baked a vagina cake.

But to be clear, in terms of this potential pivot and whatever his motivations were for that, he knew that you were working on this story?

I don't know that.

And but one always assumes that they know, don't they?

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I mean, you have to, as a journalist, assume that they are becoming aware of it, particularly as you get to people closer to someone because you're going to reach out to someone who will tell him. You just know that.

And I don't know exactly the exact moment that he became aware, but I should say I wasn't the only journalist sniffing around this either. So the point being, almost every newspaper and every media outlet tried to do a story at some point.

But you and Charlotte got the women to talk and you were probably constantly aware that for every moment you get somebody to actually tell their story, you're also ratcheting up a potential lawsuit if you get anything wrong.

Yeah, absolutely.

We have an obligation, obviously, to do everything in a way that, well, one, if there was a lawsuit, we would be able to defend exactly what we've done.

But also, I'm very aware that the Sunday Times and the Times, they have very established, impressive, extraordinary reputations globally.

And I don't want to be the idiot journalist who does some damage to that brilliant reputation.

I'm constantly aware of the legacy and history, and obviously the same goes for Charlotte at the Times, that we cannot do something that would be damaging and that would be financially damaging for the company too.

I mean, that's always a fear for people, isn't it?

Did you think he'd come after you?

You always have to have that possibility in your mind.

Yes, absolutely.

I mean, do you still think that now?

We'll see.

We'll see on that one.

I am very, very confident in our reporting.

And actually, Charlotte was the game changer on that.

So Charlotte Wayser at the Times came on board on this towards the start of this year.

So she's worked on it a shorter time, but in that time, she has been extraordinary.

And what she was able to do was find a level of evidence with this one particular woman who we've called Nadia,

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a level of evidence so strong.  
I've never seen anything like that on a Me Too story.  
I've worked on a number of Me Too stories,  
and almost invariably, you're always scratching around saying,  
but the problem is we can't prove this.  
We'll really struggle.  
Well, let's just run you through that text message exchange  
after the alleged rape takes place.  
Yeah, so this is back in July 2012.  
And this allegation from Nadia and the text exchange goes like this.  
Brand text, I'm sorry.  
That was crazy and selfish.  
I hope you can forgive me.  
I know that you're a lovely person.  
I know that you're a lovely person.  
Kiss.  
And Nadia responds, you scared the shit out of me.  
You're right.  
I am a lovely person.  
For you to take advantage of me like this is unexpected.  
You have a problem.  
You need help.  
It's dangerous.  
You think you can get your own way all the time.  
Do you know how scary you are when that glazed look comes over you?  
When a girl says no, it means no.  
Do I have to go and get myself tested?  
Last time you asked me, condom or no condom?  
When I say condom, that doesn't mean it's optional.  
You don't have the best reputation.  
I pride myself on being safe  
and trying to make the right decisions.  
Obviously, this was a bad one.  
I'm so disappointed.  
And sometime later, Brand replies, I'm very sorry.  
You don't need to get tested.  
I will make this up to you somehow with love and kindness.  
Not my original idea, which was more sex.  
You've been lovely to me and I'm embarrassed by my behavior.  
Sorry, kiss.  
And then sometime later again, he texts, will you ever forgive me?  
And we should just say that the Sunday Times team  
and Channel 4 have been clear that they have verified  
that that was indeed Russell Brand's number.



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I mean, evidentially, that is profound, isn't it?

I mean, as you say, Ros, I mean, actually, it's unusual to have that level of evidence in one of these cases.

Absolutely. But I'd go further, Matt.

She didn't just provide that.

Charlotte, she has been able to persuade this woman to hand over medical notes.

You know, she went to the rape crisis center the very next day.

So, you know, this body of evidence here is so profoundly strong, you know, photographs.

So, so much evidence.

Just on that, what's the latest you've heard, both from the LAPD, if you've heard anything at all, and the Metropolitan Police?

So I think we're at a point where they're sort of saying women if they want to come forward, but they haven't opened an investigation.

But what about more women?

Are they reaching out to you now?

I mean, they know where to find you and they know you're going to listen.

I'm wondering if, since publication, your inbox is now sort of filling up.

It is, but we have to be very careful that we were so extraordinarily rigorous in terms of the corroboration of these stories.

You know, we had to do quite intrusive things and ask incredibly intrusive questions, actually, and we have to make sure that we are meeting that same incredibly high standard of reporting because, as you've seen, there's plenty of people online who think this is some sort of mad conspiracy and we have to prove that we have done everything right and that we continue to do everything right in our reporting.

And obviously, that's difficult and that will take time.

So yes, we have had a lot of people come forward.

We've now got to go and corroborate their stories and meet them and some of them won't meet our bar.

I mean, I should say not every person that we spoke to who made an allegation is in the paper because there is a very high bar to publication in terms of providing evidence.

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You know, what we ask of people is so much, really. Did you have others who decided that you spoke to but who didn't want to go through the whole process of giving their stories to the paper?

Yes, and I'm willing to say that because I think it's really important that we acknowledge that it is a difficult process for these women.

The idea that somebody would do this because, I don't know, they want attention or whatever, but I mean, it is an unpleasant process.

You have to be, and obviously also we have to check that there's somebody who is credible.

And that's what I mean about intrusive questions, asking somebody if they've got a criminal record, that type of thing.

And then, you know, and obviously none of our women did, I should add, but also none of our women know each other because you can get cross-contamination of sources.

So that's a further consideration.

And then additionally, you know, you have to do this sort of level of corroboration, text messages, emails.

Have they told their story to anyone?

Dates, times, places.

Dates, times, places.

And if something happened a long time ago, that's very, very difficult, yeah.

You mentioned the reaction that there's been and some of the sort of conspiracy reaction online.

I guess it's worth saying that for many people, the first thing they heard about this story was actually Russell Brand's own denial on that YouTube video that surfaced what Friday night, Friday evening.

Did that surprise you?

Or did you kind of, did you guess that was coming?

No, we gave him eight days to reply in the end because we got a response on Thursday of last week and we had gone to him about a week before that.

And so he'd had actually a long time.

I mean, you know, some people may say, well, that doesn't seem long enough to them.

But if somebody came to me with allegations like that,

I could immediately deny them because they wouldn't be true.

And so we did get a legal response

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and our lawyers replied actually incredibly quickly.  
And then we heard nothing.  
And my brilliant colleague from the Times,  
Paul Morgan Bentley, was in charge of that  
because that's quite a terrifying,  
I think that's one of the most writing bits  
he's going to be able to reply as a journalist.  
He continued to chase a response and we didn't get one.  
And then we had to discuss the possibility.  
This wasn't someone who's going to play by the usual rules.  
And we had to discuss the fact that he might release a video.  
That did seem a logical thing to happen.  
And to get on the front page.  
Not just release a video,  
but almost unleash his sort of bandwagon  
of conspiracy supporters immediately to dismiss anything  
as kind of mainstream media vendetta.  
But that is why we wanted to be so watertight in our reporting.  
We met that standard.  
But that's why we had to do everything by the book,  
everything perfectly.  
Were you surprised by the extent of that sort of conspiracy  
fueled reaction, even from some,  
not just the usual suspects,  
but some people who have television programs,  
some people who have our more quote unquote mainstream.  
Yeah, look, I find it a bit disappointing  
that there are journalists.  
It's always columnists, frankly.  
It's not reporters that are the papers.  
Columns who were critiquing it without having read the story.  
And I would point out some of those columnists  
were people who their own newspaper  
was running on the front page with all of our allegations,  
all of our hard work.  
And the same time they've got a columnist somewhere saying,  
well, have they done all the work here?  
It's just women saying it type thing.  
And you think, well, hang on a minute.  
Look at our body of evidence here.  
Don't just-  
But they hadn't.  
No, no, no.  
One of them admitted to me she hadn't even read the piece.

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You talk about Alison Pearson here.

I am, yeah.

Yeah, I'm willing to say that.

And what do you think is in it for them?

Do you think-

Attention.

Do you want to see Russell Brand charged and convicted?

It's not up to me to say that.

It's an interesting question.

And I think one of the criticisms

that we get for doing stories like this

is, oh, you should have handed this dossier over to the police.

Well, one, I have no right to do that.

If women tell me something, they are telling me.

They are not telling the police.

And I think it has to be a part of journalism

that we always, you know,

the fundamental rule of journalism

is you protect your sources.

And that is so fundamental.

There is sort of, you know,

we have an industry where we're a bit more relaxed

about certain other rules.

But fundamentally, that is the one thing

that if you fail at, you have failed as a journalist.

And so it has to be their decision.

It's nothing to do with me, frankly.

And we shall see on that.

But people have good reasons

for not wanting to talk to the police, I would add.

And particularly, you know, we've had so many stories.

I mean, obviously Wayne Cousins

being the most extreme version of that,

but plenty of other stories

about why women wouldn't want to talk to the police

and why they might instead think

that journalism was a better way to get this out.

Rosamund, that's fascinating.

Thank you so much.

Thank you so much.

Thank you so much.

Anyone who believes they may have been a victim  
of a sexual offence, no matter how long ago it was,  
to contact us.

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We'll be back right after this.  
This is The News Agents.  
I was effectively forced into a policy reversal  
under threat of a UK meltdown.  
Now, some people say we were in too much of a rush.  
And it's certainly true  
that I didn't just try to fatten the pig on Market Day.  
I tried to rear the pig, fatten the pig  
and slaughter the pig on Market Day.  
I confessed to that.  
But the reason we were in a rush  
is because voters had voted for change.  
They'd voted for change in 2016  
and they voted for change again in 2019.  
And I wanted to deliver that change  
and I knew we had limited time.  
I knew with the level of resistance  
for the lack of preparation  
that things weren't going to be perfect.  
However, given the situation the UK was in,  
it was important to take action and not to do nothing  
because I went into politics to get things done,  
not to do public relations.  
Welcome back.  
So Liz Truss has been making a speech today  
to commemorate, if that is the right word,  
a year on from the self-imposed financial crisis  
that her government created.  
She was speaking to the Institute for Government in London  
about the importance of free market ideas and growth.  
Got to say one thing for her, she's consistent.  
It's quite interesting that in this speech  
she blames the political and economic reaction  
to her policies rather than the policies themselves.  
And I'm guessing that if the policies  
had been slightly more watertight  
than the, dare I say, political and economic reaction  
wouldn't have been quite so disturbed.  
When we say economic reaction,  
we should just remind our listeners  
that the Bank of England actually had to step in  
to uphold the pension market  
because the whole thing was tanking.  
Now where I think Liz Truss is on slightly firmer ground

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is where she basically castigates the Bank of England for not raising interest rates slightly quicker.

And I think whether you believe that or not, you can make an economic argument to say that they probably should have stepped in earlier to do that and it would have created a more stable atmosphere in which she could then work.

Does it stop her policies from being batshit crazy? It doesn't.

And I think it's kind of worth noting that Mark Carney, who is the former Governor of the Bank of England who was speaking Montreal over the weekend, has called her a lifelong politician, masquerading as a free marketeer with little experience of the private sector.

He's actually suggested that she created Argentina on the channel because she turned this country into a basket case with some of the things she was trying to implement.

Yeah, and look, there's another interesting thing about Truss, right, which is that she says there, why were we in a hurry?

And it's worth bearing in mind, she's never apologized for what happened.

The only thing that she's apologized for is sort of getting some of the communication wrong and maybe moving a bit too quickly.

She says that they were in a hurry because she only had two years, correct, but also that people voted for change and they voted for change in 2016 and 2019.

And I think this is the point that she has never really kind of internalized or addressed all her supporters.

Yes, she's right, people did clearly vote for change in 2016 and 2019 in one form or another.

It has never been clear, indeed, if anything, it is extremely clear, they did not vote for the sort of libertarianism and free market approach, the kind of reheated 1980s agenda that Truss was espousing.

The entire point of 2016 and 2019

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was that it was a shift in conservative political thinking.  
It was a shift towards the state.  
It was a shift towards the sort of political demography  
and areas and seats that were not comfortable  
with the so-called Singapore on Tangled Model  
that Mark Carney was referring to.  
The problem for...  
Actually, Singapore works.  
Argentina was the basket case.  
That was the 2000 crash,  
where Singapore is meant to be the model of low taxation  
that does work.  
It may well work, but the point is,  
or it works, might work for Singapore,  
although they actually have quite a big stake.  
But anyway, the point is,  
is that there was never a mandate for that.  
There was never any kind of mandate from the public.  
There was a mandate, perhaps,  
from conservative party members,  
or 100,000 of them or so.  
There was never a political mandate or appetite for,  
a shift from Johnsonism,  
because Johnson, to his credit,  
kind of intuited correctly  
that there had been this shift in conservative thinking  
and the sort of people who were voting conservative.  
But there was never a mandate to shift from that  
to a kind of reheated libertarianism,  
the sort of which that trust believes in.  
And she should therefore have expected  
that there would be political counterreaction to it,  
as well as economic counterreaction,  
given that she is the one  
who is supposed to understand the markets.  
And as we discussed many times at the time,  
the idea that the international markets  
were some form of establishment,  
left-wing establishment trojan horse  
was always just complete nonsense.  
Look, put that in context.  
There was never a mandate for Theresa May,  
who inherited from David Cameron.  
But there was, in a sense,



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because she was taking the Brexit mandate.  
And then she tried to seek one for herself in 2017  
and it didn't work.  
Yeah, but that's what I'm saying.  
She didn't get a mandate from the British people  
as their prime minister.  
Liz Truss didn't get a mandate  
from the British people as their prime minister.  
Brigid Sunak didn't get a mandate  
from the British people as their prime minister.  
This is surely part of the problem, isn't it,  
that we have now had five conservative prime ministers,  
only two of which have been voted into power by the country.  
And this is what happens.  
You start trying to talk about change.  
Who are you trying to change from?  
The last guy that was voted in,  
the guy that's going to come afterwards  
that won't be voted in?  
You know, you don't actually know  
who you're trying to differentiate yourself from anymore  
because it's all your own party.  
And I just want to say on this one issue,  
she's only had a 47-day stint in office.  
And over the weekend,  
Labour have appealed to Rishi Sunak  
to block any potential honours list.  
I say potential.  
They think she's got 14 honours to give out,  
which is about one every three and a half days.  
Not bad going.  
At most.  
And the pressure now is on Rishi Sunak,  
who has to decide whether he obeys convention  
or whether he goes, you're right.  
This is just another batshit crazy Liz Truss thing.  
Can I also link these two stories  
that we'll be talking about today?  
And people might not expect me to say that,  
and it is in a slightly sort of a bleak way,  
but I think it is important.  
The thing that Truss has started to extoll  
and talk about all the time  
is something that has become more and more common

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on the mainstream kind of centre-right  
and within centre-right politics in recent years.  
It is this idea which used to find more  
on the old sort of left of politics,  
this idea that there is conspiracy everywhere,  
that there is deep state,  
that there are forces,  
particularly in the mainstream media.  
We remember how often Truss  
attacked the so-called mainstream media and the BBC  
and elsewhere repeatedly during the election campaign.  
That there is a kind of left-wing cabal  
and agenda that is always conspiring  
to undo what the people really want.  
That the mainstream media,  
all of these sort of things,  
they don't represent the public,  
basically that they're lying to you.  
Well, that is the agenda of brand.  
That is exactly the kind of forces that he taps into  
and has tapped into over the course of this weekend.  
And this is why mainstream politicians of every stripe  
have to be really careful about their language.  
And this indulgence of these conspiracy-minded ideas  
that have become more and more common in politics,  
and as I say, particularly common on the right of politics  
in recent years, are really, really dangerous  
because it legitimizes them.  
When you've got someone like Liz Truss standing up,  
you know, who's Prime Minister of this country,  
she was Foreign Secretary of this country,  
she was Trade Secretary of this country,  
she's been in politics for a long time,  
basically saying that there are all of these forces  
within society that are constantly trying  
to conspire against me and our ideas  
and against the public and so on.  
It is a dangerous set of ideas.  
And although power, yeah,  
we've always got to have a little scrutiny about power  
and as journalists, we've always got to make sure  
that we're scrutinizing power properly  
and be slightly suspicious of power.  
This idea constantly that conspiracy,

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becoming such a central part of our politics and culture,  
it's not only depressing, it's dangerous.  
Lewis, it's called populism.  
It's how it works.  
You set up an elite who don't understand you and the people.  
And whether it's Russell Brand saying,  
the elite is the mainstream media,  
but my lovely followers on YouTube,  
the wellness guru people will all believe in me and follow me.  
Or whether it's Liz Trust saying,  
it's the people who live in London Townhouse  
or do podcasts or have dinner parties  
or the media, the political elite, whatever.  
It's a way of saying,  
you want to take away the institutions.  
You want to take away, if you like,  
the standard bearers and the gatekeepers of our institutions  
because you, the populist,  
just want to speak directly to the people.  
And of course, that's a trick.  
We've seen that time and time again.  
And you're right.  
If you're not kind of conscious of how it's working,  
how it's operating,  
then everyone starts checking themselves out  
for the conspiracy, right?  
That's how it's happened.  
It's only Monday.  
Roll on Tuesday.  
Come away.  
See you tomorrow.  
Bye for now.  
The news agents with Emily Maitlis,  
John Sopo and Lewis Goodall.  
This has been a global player original podcast  
and a Persephoneka production.