

**‘Tumultuous Relationships’:
Reporting Intimate Partner Homicides in
Australia**

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Introduction

In 2005 one in five women in Australia identified as experiencing physical or sexual violence by a current or former partner since the age of fifteen.¹ In 2009 the cost of domestic violence to the economy was estimated to be \$13.6 Billion.² Seventy-eight percent of female victims of homicide in 2007-08 were killed by an offender with whom they shared a domestic relationship.³ *Intimate partner violence* (IPV) is a serious societal issue in Australia and the way it is reported in the media needs to reflect that.

The media has a strong influence on public opinion, which can in turn lead to public pressure for policy implementation and change for broad societal issues. Therefore media outlets have a responsibility to report intimate partner violence in a way that presents the issue as a community problem in need of a community response. This will shift the public's focus from the violent actions of one individual to the broader societal context of men's violence against women.

The following two case studies analyse newspaper coverage of the murder of Lisa Harnum and the attempted murder of Jessica by their intimate partners.* The reporting of both cases brings up many different issues associated with reporting IPV. Each of the articles was analysed using a framework of ten questions to determine the efficacy of the articles in reporting the incident. These questions were:

1. Does the article report broader social context of intimate partner violence?
2. How are the victim(s) portrayed?
3. Is the victim blamed?
4. How is the perpetrator portrayed?
5. Is the perpetrator excused?
6. Is there specific mention of family violence terms?
7. Is there mention of a previous history of violence?
8. Is there mention of her resistance?
9. Is it portrayed as a tragedy/love story?
10. What sources does the journalist use?

When viewing the articles through this framework a different picture emerges. We begin to see how public opinion towards men's violence against women may be shaped through the influence of media publications. We can also begin to understand how important responsible reporting of IPV is.

* "Jessica" is a pseudonym used to protect the identity of the victim, a court suppression order was put in place for this reason.

The Lisa Harnum Case

On the 31st of July 2011 Lisa Harnum fell 15 storeys from the balcony of her apartment in Sydney, following an argument with her fiancé, Simon Gittany. Simon Gittany was charged with murder, he was released on conditional bail in January 2012. The Magistrate noted that the Mr Gittany had an arguable defence, a close relationship with his family that meant he was unlikely to fail to attend court, and that it would be a long time before his Supreme Court trial.

There are witnesses who heard the couple fighting and Ms Harnum call for help minutes before the incident. There is CCTV footage of Mr Gittany putting his hand over her mouth and dragging her back into their apartment after she tried to leave. A witness saw Mr Gittany throw what he thought was a suitcase off the balcony.

Seven newspaper articles, from different publications (a mix of metropolitan and national newspapers, both tabloid and broadsheet from News Limited and Fairfax publications) covering these events were analysed.

Articles:

Woman screamed for help before death fall: Court Hears⁴

The Sydney Morning Herald. 6:29pm August 3 2011

Vincent Morello

Murder Charge over fiancée's fatal fall⁵

The Australian. 12:00am August 04 2011

Jodie Minus

Was apartment death fall murder?⁶

The Daily Telegraph. 12:00am 04 August 2011

Lisa Davies

Ballerina may have leapt off balcony, court told⁷

The Sydney Morning Herald. 1:06am 30 September 2011

Louise Hall

Crashing sounds before ballerina's death fall in CBD⁸

The Daily Telegraph. 2:38pm January 19 2012

Amy Dale

Man accused in balcony-throw murder 'jealous', Sydney court told⁹

The Australian. 2:44pm 19 January 2012

Author Unknown

Man accused of throwing ballet dancer off the 15th floor balcony gets bail¹⁰

The Age, 7:14pm 19 January 2012

Paul Bibby

Simon and Lisa- how much do we know?

We are given the following information about Mr Gittany:

- 37 years old
- Ms Harnum told her psychologist that he was "Very spiritual"
- He had strong family support throughout the court hearings, his family offered \$600,000 surety for his bail.

We are given the following information about Ms Harnum:

- 30 years old
- Professionally trained dancer- ballerina
- Canadian
- Weight: 55kg
- Height: 170cm tall
- Long hair
- Bulimic

Australia has strict court reporting rules, journalists who break these rules faced being charged with contempt of court. These prevent any information being published that may prejudice the trial of an accused.¹¹ This means that while we know very little about Mr Gittany we are given some of Ms Harnum's most personal details, her height, weight and the eating disorder she suffered from. The defence was able to exploit these details to strengthen their case. The victim's life is dissected down to the smallest and most intimate details, she is not offered the same protections that Mr Gittany is. This may allow assumptions to be made about her behaviour and excuses to be made about his violent actions. Although these reporting rules are meant to prevent the judicial process being influenced by the media, it means journalists can say much more about the victim than the person charged with the crime, especially when the victim has died.

Framing

All seven articles reported the case as an isolated incident through an episodic frame, as opposed to a thematic one. There was no mention of the broader social context surrounding IPV. There was no information provided on resources for people who may be suffering, or know someone suffering, from abuse by an intimate partner.

Court reporting rules prevent journalists from reporting anything that is not said in court until a person is found guilty, making it difficult to name IPV for what it is if the prosecution does not present the case as family violence. The use of expert witnesses, particularly a family violence expert, may allow the prosecution to frame the case within a context of IPV and in turn allow journalists to report it as such. Court reporting rules also prevent any sources outside of the court hearings being used when reporting a case. This may make it difficult for the public to fully understand the issues they are reading about. If the prosecution has not presented the case as one of IPV then journalists are unable present the case as part of this wider social issue. This may minimise the violence for both the victim and perpetrator, shifting the focus of the case from a wider social issue that needs to be addressed by the government and community, to an anomaly perpetrated by a violent individual.¹²

A search was performed for key words relating to IPV to understand if and how the media were naming family violence. It is important to understand that the public, media and community sectors use a number of different terms when referring to family violence, this may cause a disconnect between the language the public is familiar with and that used within the community sector. The broader terms for family violence were searched for to see if any of the articles identified the case as IPV.

None of the articles contain the words intimate partner violence, violence against women or intimate partner homicide. One article uses the term domestic violence stating “He [Mr Gittany’s lawyer] also disputed police claims that Mr Gittany had a history of domestic violence.”

Portrayal of the Victim

There were three initial articles published within four days of Ms Harnum’s death.

These articles describe Ms Harnum as Canadian, 30 years of age, living in a luxury apartment and the fiancé of Mr Gittany. There is no mention of her profession, or training as a dancer.

In *Woman screamed for help before death fall* there is little reportage of the prosecution’s case, while much weight is given to the defence’s case. This casts doubt as to whether the victim is actually a victim, or in fact climbed over and slipped off the balcony.

Murder Charge over fiancée’s fatal fall similarly details the defence’s case, although this is balanced by the case of the prosecution, giving less credit to the claims made by the defence.

Was apartment death fall murder? Goes in to much further detail about the relationship between the victim and perpetrator. It portrays Ms Harnum as the victim trying to leave a controlling relationship. Despite this the relationship is never referred to as abusive. The article includes police witness testimony that Mr Gittany was extremely controlling of Mr Harnum, monitored her movements, SMS and email and rarely let her leave home. She had also told her friends that she wanted to leave the relationship and had a bag with her passport in it hidden away from the apartment. By detailing this history of abuse, the article casts doubt on the defence’s case and alludes to a wider context of IPV. Some readers may see the case as an escalation in an already abusive relationship, although the public may not consider psychological abuse as a form of family violence.

From this point onwards the portrayal of Ms Harnum shifts. Mr Gittany’s defence claims that Ms Harnum climbed over the railing of the balcony, slipped and fell to her death, and that he was trying to prevent her from falling. Forensic investigators found none of Ms Harnum’s fingerprints on the balcony railing. Mr Gittany’s lawyers claim that as a trained ballerina she could have leapt onto the railing without using her hands. This is the first mention of Ms Harnum as a ballerina. Of the following four articles, three refer to Ms Harnum as a ballerina or ballet dancer in the headline. The “ballerina-type leap” then becomes a main focus of the case.

Ballerina may have leapt off balcony, court told details the exchange in court: “Justice Kirby said “the person has got to physically get up on the railing and over it and how you do that without grasping and leaving fingerprints is difficult to see.” Mr Richter replied: “she was a ballerina. If she did a ballerina-type leap she could do it quite easily.”

There is no indication as to whether the prosecution attempted to dispute this claim with expert witness testimony, or whether there was any further research into Lisa’s training as a dancer. A later article published in the Sydney Morning Herald, on

March 31st 2012, clarifies the extent of Ms Harnum's dance training. "However, her family said while she took "dancing lessons when she was younger, she was not a prima ballerina". "She just enjoyed the chance to dance and entertain, something she was passionate about from a young age," they said."¹³ Lisa was, in fact, not a ballerina at all.

It is at this point the defence also introduces the idea that Ms Harnum's bulimia may have affected her state of mind. The three most recent articles all include this detail. Again there is no indication of expert witness testimony used to dispute this claim. This shifts the blame onto the victim, and away from the bigger picture of IPV, and more importantly from Mr Gittany's behaviour.

The defence also questions the reliability of the witness, who saw Mr Gittany throw what he thought was a suitcase off the balcony, and claim the physics of her fall make it impossible for her to have been pushed.

Resistance to violence

Lisa's voice is lost in the reporting of this case. We are given glimpses of the ways in which she tried to resist abuse, but never a clear view of how she reacted to the violence she experienced. The inclusion of resistance by the victim is important in understanding violent acts as unilateral actions performed without the consent of the victim.¹⁴ When resistance is omitted so too is a crucial aspect of the story, one that highlights the lack of mutuality and consent of the interaction. This can be extremely misleading, as only one side of the story is made visible. The inclusion of Lisa's resistance is particularly important in this case as a balance to the defence's claim that Lisa climbed over the balcony herself.

"CCTV footage showed Ms Harnum screaming as she exited the front door of the unit when Gittany allegedly reached around her head and put his hand over her mouth and brought her back into the unit." (*Woman screamed for help before death fall*) Here we are given our first glimpse of the resistance Ms. Harnum showed against Mr Gittany's violence. One other article also describes this incident but attributes it to a neighbour looking through their peephole, rather than CCTV footage. It is unclear whether this is inaccurate reporting or a separate piece of evidence.¹⁵

Lisa also screamed for help just prior to being dragged back into the apartment, a neighbour heard her screaming "Please help me, God help me". Three of the articles state this explicitly and one mentions neighbours hearing an argument.

Ballerina may have leapt off balcony, court told describes how Ms Harnum was packing her bags to leave following the argument. Another article *Was apartment death fall murder?* also details the resistance Lisa had shown earlier in the relationship. It describes how Mr Gittany was controlling, checking her emails and SMS. "She had also told friends she wanted to end the tumultuous relationship- and had "secreted a travel bag and passport in a location away from her home unit" police said." This is the closest the court comes to naming the case IPV, by referring to it as a "tumultuous relationship".

Portrayal of the Perpetrator

The portrayal of Mr Gittany varies with each article. Mr Gittany's history of violence and abuse is reported inconsistently. Reporting a history of violence places the incident in a broader context of a continuum of abuse, rather than an isolated incident.

"The crown told the court Mr Gittany had a "history of violent offences", including malicious wounding and assaulting police, for which he was sentenced to two years' periodic detention. He had breached his parole conditions." (*Murder Charge over fiancée's fatal fall*) This is the only article that mentions Mr Gittany's prior conviction.

Man accused of throwing ballet dancer off the 15th floor balcony gets bail mentions that

"...Mr Gittany allegedly broke Ms Harnum's finger last year, though she did not report the incident to police." Again the only article to include this.

Man accused in balcony-throw murder 'jealous', Sydney court told and *Was apartment death fall murder?* both detail the controlling nature of the relationship and *Ballerina may have leapt off balcony, court told* briefly refers to this as well. Despite mentioning this abuse they do not go so far as to call it IPV, domestic violence, or violence against women.

Woman screamed for help before death fall states:

"They certainly had their ups and downs," Mr Price [Mr Gittany's lawyer] said. "Any dispute was always a verbal argument." This implies that non-physical forms of abuse are not as serious as physical ones. *Crashing sounds before ballerina's death fall in CBD* makes no mention of Mr Gittany's violent history. Mr Gittany was also portrayed as a grieving partner in the earliest three articles, although this was not mentioned in later articles. This may cause the reader to empathize with him. Mr Gittany has been released on bail due to, what the magistrate referred to as "exceptional circumstances" and the "strong case" he had against the charges. (*Man accused of throwing ballet dancer off the 15th floor balcony gets bail*)

The inconsistency in the reporting of Mr Gittany's history of violence causes an important element of the story to be lost. Including all these details would clearly present the story as an escalation in an abusive relationship, not a tragic ending to an argument. It would also give more weight to the seriousness of the crime, rather than speculating over "ballerina-type" leaps.

Conclusions

The inconsistency in the reporting of this case may skew public perceptions of not only this incident but IPV in general. As none of the articles include any further information on IPV the incident is seen as an isolated event, rather than a broader social issue. This shifts ideas of responsibility from the government and community, to punishment of one individual. Prosecutors need to name the behaviour- men's violence against women- for what it is so that journalists can report the case within

this context and audiences can understand what they are reading about. If there is no specific reference to family violence in court journalists can also use what has been said in court as context without using specific terms. As the case progressed Mr Gittany's history of violence was detailed which could allow journalists to frame the case as family violence without being prejudicial.

The portrayal of Ms Harnum as a bulimic ballerina, who was "not in the right state of mind" casts doubt on the reliability of witnesses, and indicates that women who accuse their partners of abuse can not be trusted. While journalists have a responsibility to cover the defence's case, this needs to be balanced with coverage of the prosecution's case. By focusing on the "ballerina-type leap" attention is shifted from the perpetrator, and his violent history, onto the victim. Lisa becomes the victim of a tragedy her fiancé was unable to save her from. This is emphasized by the omission of her resistance to his violence. Her voice is lost and she becomes passive in the relationship, when in reality she was actively resisting his unilateral actions against her. Again the case is disconnected from IPV as a social problem. If Mr Gittany's history of violence from court discussions was included in an article the frame would shift completely, to one in the context of IPV generally. This may also reduce focus on the victim blaming tactics of the defence's case to the underlying issue of an escalating abusive relationship that Lisa Harnum was trying to leave. The case continues and a committal hearing is expected to be set in May.

Jessica's Case

On the seventh of September 2007 Cameron Neil Cook drugged his son. He then bound, gagged and beat his wife Jessica, before chaining her to the backseat of his car and driving off Mordialloc pier with the intention of killing them both. Jessica broke free and escaped the car that was filling with water. She managed to find a police van and was taken to hospital. She survived the ordeal. Mr Cook was arrested in the car. He pleaded guilty to attempted murder, intentionally causing serious injury and reckless conduct endangering life and was sentenced to 15 years jail, with a minimum of twelve.

Eight newspaper articles, from different publications (a mix of metropolitan and national newspapers, both tabloid and broadsheet from News Limited and Fairfax publications) covering these events were analysed.

Articles

Court told of shackled wife's ordeal¹⁶

The Age. 11 September 2007

Julia Medew

Woman tells how husband tried to drown her¹⁷

The Age. 31 July 2008 12:00 am

Kate Hagan

Court hears pier plunge murder attempt followed divorce request¹⁸

Herald Sun. 06 February 2009

Paul Anderson

Chained wife Cheated Death¹⁹

Herald Sun. 07 February 2009

Paul Anderson

Ex-cop jailed for trying to murder wife²⁰

The Age. 25 February 2010

Author Unknown

Cop gets 15 years' jail after wife chained to car, driven off pier²¹

Herald Sun. 25 February 2010

Unknown Author

Beaten and chained inside a car, desperate mother "Jessica" escaped her jealous husband's bid to drown them both at Port Phillip Bay²²

Herald Sun. 25 February 2010

Paul Anderson and Elissa Hunt

Chained wife fears for day when husband released²³

The Age. 26 February 2010

Kate Hagan

What do we know about Jessica, Cameron and their son?

We are given the following information about Mr Cook:

- 41 years old at time of incident
- Ex-policeman
- Adopted son of Port Moresby hospital midwife

- Father in military, moved around a lot as a child
- “Dabbled” in University degrees
- Taught English in Japan
- Ex-girlfriend fatally stabbed in robbery gone wrong
- Joined Victoria Police in 1996
- Became a legal aid solicitor following his time in the police force
- Suburb he lived in

We are given the following information about Jessica:

- Her given name and surname
- 34 years old
- Worked as film editor
- Mother of a young son
- Suburb she lived in

We are given the following information about their son:

- 7 years old
- His first name

We are given a lot of extraneous information about Mr Cook, mainly through one article *Chained Wife Cheated Death*, this may cause the reader to empathise with him as we learn about his “difficult past”. This could allow the reader to excuse his behaviour because of assumptions made about his upbringing.

The first article published contains information that makes the victim easily identifiable. "..., who worked on Australian film *December Boys*, which premiered at the weekend and stars the Harry Potter series' Daniel Radcliffe, was taken to The Alfred hospital with facial injuries and remains in a stable condition." Not only is the information about the film irrelevant, it removes the privacy of the victim which could cause fears over her safety. Similarly their son is named in *Woman tells how husband tried to drown her*, which could be extremely damaging to a young child as he is so easily identifiable and could become a target for bullying or harassment. Jessica's name was suppressed by the judge later on in the case, and the two final articles do not include her name, although the earlier articles can easily be found on newspapers web pages, causing her identity to still be accessible.

Framing

As with the first case study each of the eight articles use an episodic framework. None of the articles reported the incident within the broader context of IPV. There was no further information provided on resources for people who may be suffering, or know someone suffering, from abuse by an intimate partner. In accordance with court reporting rules seven of the eight articles use only the court hearings as sources. The remaining article uses an exclusive interview with the victim, after the perpetrator was found guilty, as well as evidence from the court hearings. None of the articles use the terms Intimate Partner Violence, domestic violence, family violence, or violence against women. Again this distances the incident from IPV, causing it to be seen as an isolated incident perpetrated by a violent individual.

Portrayal of the Victims

Three of the articles' headlines refer to Jessica as "shackled wife" or "chained wife". (*Court told of shackled wife's ordeal*, *Chained wife Cheated Death* and *Chained wife fears for day when husband released*.) Referring to her this way not only removes her identity as a woman, mother and person but also removes Mr Cook from focus, absolving him of the responsibility for his actions. Attention is shifted to Jessica, what did she do to become the chained wife? Similarly *Cop gets 15 years' jail after wife chained to car, driven off pier* uses passive language, although Mr Cook is present in the sentence, it is still passive, removing the action of his violence toward her. From this headline it is not clear that he was the one who chained her to the car and drove off the pier. Although Mr Cook was no longer working as a policeman he is still identified through his former profession, while she is only identified as a "wife".

Mr Cook drugged their son before he began the attack on his wife. None of the articles refer to this as abuse or an act of violence. Four of the articles refer to this as a "drugging". One article describes him as "tricking" his son into taking the sleeping tablet and one as him "giving" him a sleeping tablet. The remaining two articles do not mention the drugging, one stating that "He called his father and told him to go and get their son [name] 7, who was asleep in his bed." (*Woman tells how husband tried to drown her*) The seriousness of this violent act is dismissed through the lack of inclusion, or clarification as abuse, causing it to appear acceptable to the reader. The psychological affects of the incident on their son are only reported in one article, the rest dismiss the impact of Mr Cook's violence on the young child.

The Victim's Voice

The fact that Jessica survived her husband's murder attempt allows her voice to be present in the reporting of the case. This is a stark contrast to cases of murder, where the victim's voice is completely lost. All the articles mention Jessica's resistance to some extent. Three articles merely mention that she was able to escape the sinking car, while others go into further detail. Including the victim's resistance to violence shows the audience the lack of consent from the victim. It also emphasizes the unilateral behaviour, as opposed to mutual behaviour, of Mr Cook.²⁴ *Woman tells how husband tried to drown her* includes a detailed account of Jessica's resistance to her husband's violent actions. The article includes direct quotes from Jessica's witness statement such as: ""He did a loop around the car park at full speed, and I was mumbling through the gaffer tape, 'Don't do this'," [name] told police. "He took off as fast as (he could) heading towards the pier. I was trying to scream but my mouth was taped over."" It is through such details we no longer see Jessica not as a passive object being acted upon.

Beaten and chained inside a car, desperate mother "Jessica" escaped her jealous husband's bid to drown them both at Port Phillip Bay includes an exclusive interview with Jessica. The article describes how Jessica believed a guardian angel was looking over her and how she didn't want to give her husband the satisfaction of seeing her die.

Portrayal of the Perpetrator

In 2007 Jessica asked her husband for a divorce. Mr Cook threatened to kill her and they saw a marriage counsellor; two months later at the time of the attack she believed the marriage was over. The threat is only mentioned in one article *Court hears pier plunge murder attempt followed divorce request*. The article does not identify death threats as a form of men's violence against women. This is a critical part of the story that should be highlighted.

The fact that Jessica was pursuing a new relationship is reported in all the articles, although extremely inconsistently. Jessica had asked for a divorce and according to her the marriage was over. Despite this four of the articles refer to her relationship with another man as an affair. Three articles describe the marriage breakdown in varying detail, one refers to footage of her and another man. *Chained wife Cheated Death* goes into the most amount of detail on the strain on the relationship caused by Mr Cook's work as a police officer and then legal aid solicitor. By reporting such details the media is excusing the behaviour of the perpetrator by focusing on that of the victim. Justice Hollingsworth stated that Mr Cook's "conduct was completely inappropriate" to the breakdown of his marriage. *Chained wife fears for day when husband released* and *Ex-cop jailed for trying to murder wife* both include this detail, no other articles include this. Jessica was trying to leave a dysfunctional and abusive marriage, by referring to her "affair", reporters are excusing his behaviour and scrutinising hers.

Mr Cook's vengeful attitude is widely reported. "Cook, who has shown no remorse, was overheard at one of his court appearances saying, "When I get out of here I'll do the job properly"." (*Beaten and chained inside a car, desperate mother "Jessica" escaped her jealous husband's bid to drown them both at Port Phillip Bay*) Three of the articles refer specifically to threats Mr Cook made against Jessica following his arrest. None of these articles define this as psychological abuse, despite the inclusion of the sense of fear Jessica felt about the eventual release of Mr Cook from jail. Again the seriousness of psychological abuse is absent, so much so that Mr Cook is able to continue to inflict his violence on Jessica from jail. This perpetuates the idea that psychological abuse is not as serious as physical abuse. This may influence society's idea of what constitutes men's violence against women, as well as prevent women who are experiencing psychological abuse to take action to seek help. The *Family Law Legislation Amendment (Family Violence and Other Measures) Bill 2011* redefined family violence as "threatening or other behaviour by a person that coerces or controls a member of the person's family, or causes the family member to be fearful."²⁵ Now that legislation recognises the serious nature of all forms of family violence, public perceptions also need to shift to reflect this change.

Conclusions

Media reporting of cases such as this one need to focus on the behaviour of the perpetrator and not scrutinise that of the victim. This prevents excuses being made for the behaviour of the perpetrator. The protection of victims' identities also needs to be considered. Including details such as first names and suburbs puts the safety of

the victim at risk, and may cause undue psychological stress. The seriousness of psychological abuse also needs to be highlighted. The use of expert witnesses in court testifying about the significance of psychological abuse would allow journalists to report it as abuse. This may help break down the misconceptions surrounding psychological abuse in society and help efforts to prevent psychological abuse in Australia.

The media has a strong influence on public opinion, which in turn can put pressure on the state to create policies to address societal problems. Although court reporting rules are in place to protect a trial from prejudice, what protections are there for the victims and survivors of violence?

Things to Remember when Reporting IPV

The reporting of both cases shows the issues faced by the Australian media when trying to report IPV in a responsible manner.

It is important to frame incidents of IPV within the broader context of men's violence against women. This can be done by including information about the affect Men's violence Against Women has on, and its prevalence within, our society. Although this may only be possible once a person is found guilty and the strict court reporting rules have been loosened, it is still crucial in presenting family violence as a community issue. The use of expert witnesses by the prosecution may also enable journalists to do this. Articles should also include resources for those who may be, or know someone who is, experiencing violence in their own life when possible such as help lines and websites. Such information could save the life of a woman experiencing violence.

Journalists should give equal weight to the prosecution and defence's cases, which prevents the defence's case been taken as truth. If the perpetrator has a history of violence this should also be included, preventing the audience from seeing the incident as an isolated episode. Using this information may allow journalists to frame the case in the context of IPV without prejudicing the trial. Steps should be taken to protect the victim's identity. Extraneous facts should not be included in articles, especially those that make the victim easily identifiable.

All forms of abuse need to be recognised and labelled as such in order to make the public understand that non-physical forms of violence are just as serious as physical ones. These violent behaviours include: verbal abuse, emotional abuse, social abuse, spiritual abuse, economic abuse as well as sexual and physical assault. Men's violence against women should be reported as what it is, using language that enables the public to fully understand what they are reading about, rather than using suggestive terms that skirt around the issue. This can again be achieved through expert witness testimony, allowing journalists to use the language used in the courtroom.

Excusing the behaviour of the perpetrator, or blaming the victim is completely unacceptable. There is no excuse for violent behaviour and the media should reflect this. Focussing on the behaviour of the victim or excusing violence only perpetuates the idea that men's violence against women is an acceptable part of our society. Although most men are not violent, this is a serious issue affecting all sectors of our community. When appropriate, the victim's resistance to violence should be included, emphasizing their lack of consent to violence rather than portraying them as a passive entity being acted upon.

All these things need to be considered in order to write responsibly about IPV. A change in the media can affect change within public opinion. Therefore journalists should consider how their audience may respond to their piece and whether they are perpetuating victim-blaming attitudes. Care needs to be taken to ensure media

publications make it clear that men's violence against women is a problem affecting all sectors of Australian society that needs to be addressed as a community issue. For further information on how to report Intimate Partner Violence please see the EVA's *Responsible Reporting Guidelines for Journalists and Family Violence in the News: A Media Toolkit*.²⁶

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