Victorian print media coverage of violence against women

A longitudinal study

Professor Jenny Morgan & Violeta Politoff

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Violence against women and girls continues unabated in every continent, country and culture. It takes a devastating toll on women's lives, on their families, and on society as a whole. Most societies prohibit such violence – yet the reality is that too often, it is covered up or tacitly condoned.
UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon, 8 March 2008 (quoted in VicHealth 2010)

During the height of the media interest in this case [the Ormond College sexual harassment case], I watched the stories and misrepresentations unfold with a type of horrified fascination which springs from watching a picture of yourself taken, distorted beyond recognition, and thrown back at you. ... I had somehow contrived to become simultaneously a frigid, slutty, lesbian, sexually irresistible, terrifying, puritanical, man-hating, vengeful victim. No small achievement to embody such a potent and inherently contradictory cocktail of character flaws.
XX, 'Sticks and Stones'; in Mead (1997). XX was one of the complainants in the Ormond College case made infamous in Helen Garner's *The First Stone.*

The media have the resources and reach to highlight the problem that is so often hidden from view. Good quality reporting challenges misinformation and damaging stereotypes that tolerate or excuse violence against women. The more awareness there is of this issue, the greater chance we have of reducing the terrible human toll.
Eliminating Violence Against Women Media Awards (2011)

1   Introduction

Violence against women is a human rights violation that affects innumerable women all over the world; it is prevalent, endemic and debilitating. The United Nations *Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women* (1993) defines violence against women as:

> any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life.

The consequences of gender-based violence are immense and long-lasting. While it is difficult to identify precisely how many women experience, or have experienced, gender-based violence, clearly this issue affects a significant number of women in Australia. Estimates drawn from the Personal Safety survey conducted in 2005 (ABS 2006) 'suggest that one in three women (33%) have experienced physical violence since the age of 15 and around one in six adult women (16%) have experienced actual or threatened physical violence by a partner since the age of 15' (VicHealth 2010: 11). The Australian component of the International Violence Against Women Survey (Mouzos & Makkai 2004) found that more than one-third of women (34%) who have ever had a boyfriend or husband have experienced violence from an intimate male partner. Approximately half of these women have experienced physical violence and one-third have experienced sexual violence. As described by VicHealth, 'intimate partner violence is responsible for more ill-health and premature

death in Victorian women under the age of 45 than any of the other risk factors, including high blood pressure, obesity and smoking' (2004: 8).

In relation to sexual assault, the 2002 Crime and Safety survey showed that 33,000 victims reported they had been sexually assaulted in the 12 months prior to 2002, with 28,300 female and 4800 male victims (ABS 2003).[1] The proportion of women reporting sexual assault is somewhat higher in a dedicated survey undertaken in 1996 by face-to-face interviews (ABS 1996). As these disappointing statistics reveal, violence against women is a prevalent and ongoing problem for women and girls in Australia.

1.1 Community attitudes towards violence against women

> Violence against women has unmistakeable social and cultural foundations. Physical and sexual violence against women in relationships, families, and elsewhere is shaped by social norms, gender roles and relations, inequalities of power, and a host of other factors.

> Attitudes and beliefs are central to the contexts in which violence against women occurs. While they are not the only influence on violence against women, their role is critical. … [A]ttitudes inform the perpetration of this violence, shape victims' responses to victimization, and influence community responses to violence against women

> (VicHealth 2010: 15)

We have good longitudinal data on attitudes held by the Australian community about violence against women. The first national survey was undertaken in 1987, commissioned by the Office of the Status of Women (Office of the Status of Women 1988), and repeated and expanded in 1995 (Office of the Status of Women 1995). And in 2009, VicHealth again replicated and expanded this study (VicHealth 2010) following a smaller Victorian only study in 2006 (VicHealth 2006).

In 1987, one in five of those interviewed (22% of men and 17% of women) considered that there were circumstances in which the use of force by a man against his wife was justifiable. In 1987, 11% believed physical force was justified if the woman slept with another man; this had fallen to 6% in 1995 and 4% in 2009 (Graycar & Morgan 2002: 306–7; VicHealth 2010: 39). While these data show progressive changes in attitudes, there are still some very concerning findings. For instance, in 2009, 20% of men and 17% of women felt that domestic violence could be *excused* 'if it results from people getting so angry they temporarily lose control'. (This question was not asked in earlier surveys.) Similarly, 9% of men felt that domestic violence could be excused if the *victim* was 'heavily affected by alcohol', and 8% of men stated that domestic violence could be excused if the *offender* was 'heavily affected by alcohol'. A significantly lower percentage of women agreed with these two propositions – 6% and 5% respectively (VicHealth 2010: 41).

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[1] The survey for 2002 rather than for 2005 is relied on here. The 2005 results are less reliable due to changes in the way the survey was administered, and much detailed information is unavailable. See ABS (2006), paragraphs 23 and 44, explanatory notes. Overall figures are available for 2005, and the overall number of victims in 2005 is estimated to be 44,100 (2005: 7).

When it came to understandings of sexual assault, the data contain some very worrying statistics. For instance, 38% of men (and the significantly lower 30% of women) agreed that 'rape results from men being unable to control their need for sex' (VicHealth 2010: 41). As VicHealth pointed out, this belief flies in the face of evidence that sexual violence is 'social in origin': rates of rape vary substantially across cultures. If rape was the result of sexual 'need', rates of rape across cultures would be relatively uniform. Secondly, when men convicted of sexual offence are interviewed, their responses indicate that such violence 'is motivated often by the desire to control, dominate, hurt and humiliate'. Finally, 'rather than being caused by lack of control, many incidents of sexual assault are premeditated and planned' (VicHealth 2010: 40–1).

Some responses on sexual assault matters did show an improvement. In 1995, 18% agreed that 'women often say "no" when they mean "yes"'; this had fallen in 2009 to 13%, a statistically significant change. Similarly, 15% in 1995 agreed that 'women who are raped often ask for it', which had changed to 5%, a statistically significant fall, by 2009 (VicHealth 2010: 42). Some other findings were mixed. While the proportion of people who disagreed with the statement 'women rarely make false complaints of rape' fell from 34% in 1995 to 26% in 2009, there was a commensurate increase in those who were unsure whether this statement was true or not (VicHealth 2010: 44). In even more disheartening figures, '[h]alf of all respondents believed that "women going through custody battles often make up or exaggerate claims of domestic violence in order to improve their case", and only one quarter disagreed' (VicHealth 2010: 44).

In other findings:

- 'Community perceptions of what constitutes domestic violence have broadened significantly since 1995'

- '[S]ince 1995 there has been a positive shift in the proportion people who rate the spectrum of violent behaviours as "very serious"'

- 'There has been "a significant increase in those who believe that domestic violence is a crime"' (VicHealth 2010: 7)

At the same time, there has been a statistically significant increase (from 9% to 22%) in people who believe that men and women are equally violent (VicHealth 2010: 34).

In short, generally there has been an increase in understanding of violence against women in the 20 or so years for which we have reliable data. And yet some attitudes remain remarkably resistant, particularly beliefs in some rape myths.[2]

1.2 Why media?

Media coverage of violence against women is important to public understandings of this social issue. Newspapers are far-reaching and often authoritative sources of information, and are one of the key

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[2] Franiuk et al. (2008a: 288) describe rape myths as 'generalized and widely held beliefs about sexual assault that serve to trivialize the sexual assault or suggest that a sexual assault did not actually occur'. These myths primarily function to undermine the seriousness of rape, narrow its definition, lessen the guilt of perpetrators, and subject victims to suspicion and blame for the sexual assault.

sites for disseminating information to the public. The relationship between media, knowledge, public opinion and policy is complex, but there is little doubt that media coverage *matters*. Issues around media effects, based upon research in this area, are considered more closely in section 1.3.

While violence against women is certainly familiar to most people, individual instances of gendered violence are not necessarily linked in people's minds to the broader conception of violence against women as a social problem. Although violence against women is in the news every day, the tendency to report these crimes without identifying them as incidents of gendered violence means that people are unlikely to make this link. Within our study we found that three or four articles which discuss or mention violence against women are published by the *Herald Sun*/*Sun* and/or *The Age* every day. While this finding shows that violence against women does receive considerable levels of coverage, VicHealth's 2010 study of public perceptions of violence against women found that only '[j]ust over half of the general community reported seeing or hearing some form of recent advertising or media reporting about violence against women' (2010: 9). This suggests that people are able to encounter media coverage of incidents of violence against women without necessarily relating the incident to the broader concept of gendered violence.

This study has a specific remit. Our focus is on how violence against women has been represented by parts of the Australian print media. It is not the intention of this report to blame journalists or journalism. We are aware that journalists operate under numerous constraints (see section 2.1), and that audiences come to news from different perspectives and with varied interpretive frameworks. While these elements are important, our focus is solely on the printed word—what people read when violence against women is in the news. Our aim is to describe, as accurately as possible, how gendered violence is framed in the context of press reporting, where the strengths and weaknesses of media coverage lie, and how these might be addressed.

The underlying causes of violence against women are now well understood. These include belief in rigid gender roles, and weak support for gender equality. Research has shown that it is possible to prevent violence against women before it occurs through strategies that address these underlying causes. Public health strategies, such as organisational development, community capacity-building and cross-sector collaboration, have been effective in reducing other health problems and can be usefully applied to the prevention of violence against women (VicHealth 2007). What effect might the media have on preventing violence against women?

1.3   The question of effects

> To a great extent the press sets the frame for both the quality and the quantity of public discourse on specific issues in Australian public life, including crime and social welfare. (Evans 2001: 147)

There has been much debate in academia, within popular culture and among policy makers regarding the extent to which media representation shapes our world. In the realm of violence against women, the question of whether violent pornography makes men more likely to commit sexual assault has been among the most controversial questions to come out of these debates (for more on this issue see chapter 12 of Graycar & Morgan 2002). Despite an incredible number of studies which seek to understand the precise effect of media on audiences and culture, no simple causal relationships have

been ascertained. Nevertheless, there is some consensus that representations are important and influential in people's understanding of the world around them.

Prior research suggests that news coverage of public health issues (including violence) has an influence on public policy (Yanovitzky 2002) as well as public opinion (Palazzolo, Kelly & Anthony 2011; Sotirovic 2003). For example, an empirical study in the US found that exposure to news articles endorsing rape myths made participants far more likely to side with the defendant and dismiss the victim's claims of sexual assault (Franiuk et al. 2008a: 299–300). Their related study (2008b) shows that men, after reading rape myth endorsing headlines, were less sympathetic to victims of sexual assault. Furthermore, such problematic coverage has been found to affect levels of conviction (Marhia 2008) as well as policy making (Yanovitzky 2002).

The interrelationship between mass media, public opinion and policy makers means that the way an issue is covered can have legal and political ramifications (see Marhia 2008; Yanovitzky 2002). Yanovitzky's study shows that news coverage impacts the timing, intensity and nature of solutions pursued by policy makers. He finds that the amount of media attention given to a particular issue affects the approach taken by policy makers. In his case study, which looks into the issue of drunk-driving, heightened media coverage attracted increased policy attention, primarily in the form of immediate short-term approaches. When the extent of the coverage lessened, policy makers turned to long-term solutions as the preferred policy approach (ibid.: 422). Certainly, policy responses will vary depending on, for example, the issue, amount of coverage and the cultural context. Nonetheless, Yanovitzky's study shows that media does play an important role in the policy-making process. Such findings reveal the critical importance of representing violence against women both sensitively and accurately, with a close eye on mitigating those shortcomings that lead to misunderstandings about the nature of gendered violence.

We take the position that news media participates in the articulation of discourses and knowledge around particular issues. Therefore, while news media may not be the only site for information about particular topics, it does remain a key institution in the production of public knowledge, and will, therefore, play an important role in the way people understand social issues such as violence against women.

1.3.1 Considering the individual

It is important to remember that victims who find themselves the subject of news reporting have suffered real violence and subsequently witness mediated accounts of their trauma. The effects of media coverage apply to not only those 'watching from a distance', but also those who experienced the violence firsthand. Blaming victims or sensationalising violence are likely to have a particularly painful effect for those victims represented in these news reports.

Concern over the possibly traumatic effects of sensationalistic reporting on victims has certainly informed Kothari's argument that journalists who include graphic and intimate details in their descriptions of rape are participating in a form of public humiliation (2008: 25). For Soothill and Walby, 'the nature of the press reports, which are supposed to be sympathetic to the plight of such "victims" is such as to render them still further distressed' (1991: 146). These concerns are also likely

to have an effect on a woman's decision to come forward, which will mean willingly putting herself and those around her on public display. The gravity of these concerns has in some places led to laws against the publication of rape victims' names. In Victoria, the *Judicial Proceedings Reports Act 1958* prohibits the publication of victims' names, unless they (or a court) give permission (discussed in Graycar & Morgan 2002: 21).

Extensive publicity can deeply affect both the friends and family of the victim, as well as those close (or who were at some time close) to the perpetrator of violence. Those with connections to the perpetrator are often probed extensively by journalists (Soothill & Walby 1991). This can be particularly painful for those who may also have experienced violence but did not speak out about it publicly. As Soothill and Walby point out, '[t]he lives of everyone even remotely connected with the case which is made the focus of massive newspaper coverage are "at risk"' (1991: 147). Certainly, this aspect of reporting is among the most ethically troubling and directly harmful effects of media coverage.

2 News reporting of violence against women

Our research was informed by a literature review which examined national and international studies in the field (Politoff & Morgan 2010). The following are some of the key research findings showing the predominant patterns in news coverage of violence against women around the world (primarily in the US and the UK). These findings will be expanded in the pages that follow.

- The press generally misrepresent the realities of violence against women (Benedict 1992; Marhia 2008; McManus & Dorfman 2005; Soothill & Walby 1991).

- There is an over-reliance on criminal justice system personnel as spokespeople in reports of violence against women (Bullock 2007; Chermak 1995; Meyers 1997; Mooney 2007; Naylor 2001; Ryan, Anastario & DaCunha 2006; Wozniak & McCloskey 2010). This contributes to a tendency to represent a law-and-order response as the best way to engage with the problem of violence against women (Meyers 2004; Mooney 2007; Moorti 2001; Soothill & Walby 1991; Steeves 1997).

- Reporters covering instances of gendered violence rarely turn to victim advocates as sources for stories (Benedict 1992; Los & Chamard 1997; Meyers 1997; Taylor 2009).

- Coverage is likely to address violence against women as an individual (family or couple) problem, rather than as a broader social problem (Berns 2004; Bullock & Cubert 2002; Gallagher 2001; Greer 2003; Marhia 2008; Media Watch 1993, Meyers 1997; Michelle & Weaver 2003; Moorti 2001; Taylor 2009).

- Due to the tendency to cover incidents of violence against women as discrete 'events' (events-based reporting), coverage includes little contextual, statistical, preventative or practical information about the problem (Carlyle, Slater & Chakroff 2008; Maxwell et al. 2000; McManus & Dorfman 2005; Wozniak & McCloskey 2010).

- Press reports often reinforce rape myths (Benedict 1992; Franiuk et al. 2008a; Mooney 2007; Steeves 1997).

- Coverage tends to over-report stranger rape and under-report acquaintance rape when compared to statistical measures of actual incidence (Gallagher 2001; Greer 2003; Marhia 2008; Soothill & Walby 1991).

- News reports of violence against women, particularly sexual violence, are often titillating and sensationalistic (Carter 1998; Gill 2007; Kothari 2008; Moorti 2001; Soothill & Walby 1991; Sunindyo 2004).

- Female victims are often blamed for the violence perpetrated against them (Alat 2006; Benedict 1992; Berns 2004; Bullock & Cubert 2002; Consalvo 1998; Cuklanz 1996; Meyers 1997, 2004; Soothill & Walby 1991; Taylor 2009).

- The responsibility of the male perpetrator tends to be minimised (Cuklanz 1996; Benedict 1992; Steeves 1997), unless he is deemed a 'likely' perpetrator due to race, ethnicity or mental illness, in which case he is often demonised (Marhia 2008; Meyers 1997).

- Race and ethnicity play a significant role in how victims and perpetrators are represented in news reporting, which is often informed by racial or cultural stereotypes (Consalvo 1998; Jiwani & Young 2006; Meyers 2004; Reimers 2007; Soothill & Walby 1991).

The list above outlines the tendencies most commonly found by researchers who study news coverage of violence against women. The precise reasons for these findings are difficult to ascertain; however, much media research has shown that aspects of 'news culture' facilitate certain types of coverage. Before looking specifically at our findings, we will briefly discuss the issue of news values. These are important for understanding something of the context within which stories about violence against women are written. We will then turn to our research findings and compare these to the aforementioned literature.

2.1 News values

Like most professionals, journalists work within the parameters of a particular work culture. The job has rules which shape and define it, and those rules which shape journalism can be described as news values. Among those news values most discussed by researchers, and which certainly affect the

way violence against women is reported, is the emphasis placed on 'timeliness' (Allan 1999: 57), the unusual and the unexpected (Allan 1999; Schudson 1978; Taylor 2009), and personalisation (Iyengar 1991). In addition to these elements, those sources traditionally considered authoritative in news reporting can be particularly problematic when covering issues of gender-based violence (more on this in section 11).

The emphasis placed on 'timeliness' means that recent events – usually occurring in the previous 24 hours – are favoured by journalists (Allan 1999: 57). The outcome of this focus is that news tends to be 'event' rather than 'issue' driven. Iyengar (1991), in his book about television news, explains how the prevalence of 'episodic' (events-based) over 'thematic' framing[3] in coverage of violence against women means the issue tends to be discussed in personalised and individualised terms rather than through contextualized accounts. Researchers have found that the journalistic values of 'timeliness' and 'personalisation' mean that coverage of gendered violence tends to focus on individuals, lacks context, and very rarely addresses these 'events' as part of a larger societal problem (Berns 2004; Bullock & Cubert 2002; Carlyle, Slater & Chakroff 2008; Consalvo 1998; Gallagher 2001; Maxwell et al. 2000; Media Watch 1993; Michelle & Weaver 2003; Taylor 2009). Furthermore, the value placed upon 'simplification' in news culture (see Chibnall 1977) renders 'thematic' frames less appealing than simple attributions of individual blame for concrete events. This tendency to frame gendered violence as an individual or family problem naturalises and legitimates an individualised view of violence against women rather than highlighting the systemic and structural elements of this problem.

The centrality of the unusual and the unexpected in journalism means that stories which include these elements are most likely to attract news coverage (Allan 1999; Schudson 1978; Taylor 2009). For the representation of gendered violence this means that the more unusual or 'shocking' the violence is perceived to be, the more likely it will be covered (Benedict 1992; Carter 1998; Meyers 1997). Due to this, sensationalism often becomes a common way to report violence against women as it can increase the article's 'unusualness' (Benedict 1992; Carter 1998). Through this focus on the most unusual and 'shocking' forms of violence against women, news media tends to offer an unrepresentative view of gendered violence (Soothill & Walby 1991). This type of reporting lends heightened visibility to those most unlikely aspects of gendered violence, therefore obscuring the realities of this form of violent crime.

The challenge here is that news values define journalism, and the communication of information about violence against women as a social problem does not always fit easily with expectations around what makes news. Nevertheless, it remains important that news media communicate the problem of violence against women as appropriately and informatively as possible.

In addition, it is important to point out that Australian media faces particular legal constraints arising from the laws on defamation and on sub judice contempt. The latter restricts the ways in which

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[3] Framing is an important concept in media studies and refers to short-cuts for communication, enabling journalists to 'process large amounts of information quickly and routinely' – in effect, packaging the stories for efficiency (Gitlin 1980: 7).
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matters can be reported on once proceedings have commenced, aiming to 'prohibit publication of material which might prejudice a particular civil or criminal proceeding' (Butler & Rodrick 2012: 308). Butler and Rodrick note that 'in cases where the public interest in the administration of justice conflicts with the public interest in freedom of speech, the [Australian] common law has traditionally favoured the former' (ibid: 309). Although a detailed explication of the law of contempt is beyond our scope, it should be noted that it may restrict the scope for critical commentary while proceedings are ongoing (see also Pearson & Polden 2011).

3   Our study

This report draws on a literature review of research on news reporting of violence against women, presented to VicHealth in April 2010 (Politoff & Morgan 2010), and the subsequent empirical study of newspaper coverage in Australia. The findings from the literature review guided our empirical research, and the material below represents some of the major findings of this study.

While the literature review offered a broad picture of how news media covers violence against women internationally (mostly in the US and UK), little research has been conducted on this topic in Australia. This is the first study to quantitatively analyse a substantial number of newspaper articles about violence against women. Our study focuses on Victorian print media representation of violence against women in Australia, specifically focusing on reporting from 1986, 1993–1994 and 2007–2008 in *The Age*, a Victorian-based national broadsheet published by Fairfax, and the *Herald Sun/Sun*, a Victorian tabloid, published by News Limited. These dates were selected because they overlap with large-scale surveys of community attitudes towards violence against women (described in section 1.1).

3.1   Why print media?

There has been some debate circulating, both academically and in popular culture, about the degree to which recent developments in information and communication technologies (ICTs) have led to 'the death of the newspaper' (see for example Alterman 2008; Beecher 2005). The authority of the traditional newspaper is seen to have been undermined by alternative online news sources (e.g. blogs and citizen-journalism), and economically by free online content. While this may be the case, it does not necessarily imply that print media no longer plays a crucial role in shaping public opinion. In fact, many of the reports printed by newspapers are the same reports published online (although online reports are published more quickly and with an increased ability for modification). There is evidence that audiences find newspaper reporting more credible, and more trustworthy than other providers of news content (Berns 2004). Studies suggest that established newspapers remain an authoritative source of news content because audiences generally turn to sources such as blogs for *additional* perspectives, not as a *replacement* news source (see for example Reese et al. 2007). It is also important to note that our survey spanned some 20 years: print media had an even more prominent role in earlier years.

Another important reason for our focus on print media is access to a searchable database of digitally archived printed news. The ability to use complex search terms (see section 3.2) to access articles

means that our search returned more than just stories under the banner of 'violence against women', therefore enabling us to access the more mundane and everyday types of reporting. By accessing this wide range of articles on the topic we were able to analyse how instances of violence against women are reported on a daily basis, rather than focusing on one case or one type of easily 'searchable' violence. Certainly, newspaper coverage differs somewhat from television and radio news, and these would also be fruitful areas of study. However, due to the already large scale of this study, based solely on a limited number of newspapers, analysis of these media was beyond the scope of the current project.

3.2   Data collection

To collect data over the periods identified above, three different sources were used: Factiva[4], Newstext[5] and microfilm archives. Those articles accessed by Factiva and Newstext were found using a complex set of search terms (see Appendix 1 for details). The results were then reviewed and any irrelevant articles removed. There is no available online searchable database for *The Age* from the 1980s. Microfilm searches were conducted by reviewing the relevant newspapers and scanning for relevant articles. Articles sourced this way were fewer, due to the difficulties in finding every relevant article. Thus, some caution should be used in comparing coverage from *The Age* in the 1980s with later years.

3.2.1   What is included in the sample

Broadly, our sample includes articles describing both local and overseas incidents of either violence against women or violence by women which involve:
  * sexual violence
  * intimate partner homicide (IPH)[6] (or attempted)[7]
  * other murder (or attempted)
  * 'violence against women' (when this term, or related phrase, is used)

For an article to have been included in the sample it must have mentioned at least one of these types of violence. Therefore, the sample ranges from articles solely about these topics to those which only briefly mention violence against/by women. Each article was coded in a way that identifies how central the violence was to the story's main topic.

In terms of the gender of the perpetrator and victim, we included:
  * violence perpetrated by men against women

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[4] Factiva is a database that provides full-text coverage of most Australian newspapers. This resource is particularly comprehensive for coverage from the mid-1990s to the present. Factiva is quite limited in its access to digitised versions of articles from the 1980s to early 1990s.

[5] Newstext is an Australian newspaper database which gives access to most articles published in News Limited's papers from 1984 onwards. There is a charge to access this database.

[6] We have also collected and coded a smaller sample of articles which discuss domestic violence more broadly. The sample which includes domestic violence is limited to *The Age* 1986, 1993 and 2007 and is not reported on here.

[7] 'Attempted murder' was not strictly defined according to a narrow legal test; any article discussing the infliction of really serious injury in the relevant context was included.

- violence perpetrated by a male against another male if explicitly committed to hurt a woman (intimate partner context)
- all violence perpetrated by women.[8]

3.2.2 Accessing material

As noted earlier, due to the difficulty in acquiring the required articles from a single platform, we used three sources for data collection. Table 3.1 shows the databases/archives used for data collection across the study period for the different newspapers.

Table 3.1 Data source types for newspaper articles, by year(s)		
Year(s)	*The Age*	*Herald Sun/Sun*
1986	Microfilm	Newstext
1993–1994	Factiva	Newstext
2007–2008	Factiva	Factiva

Due to the time-consuming nature of finding articles using microfilm, we were only able to collect a single year in the 1980s. Because the two digital databases have different search structures, we had to modify our search terms and method to accommodate the parameters of the database. The search terms broadly included rape, sexual assault, indecent assault, homicide, murder, domestic homicide, women's refuge, domestic violence or violence against women (see Appendix 1 for exact search terms used for each database). Downloaded articles were reviewed and all irrelevant articles removed from the sample (see Appendix 1 for details on the editing process). Given the large number of articles generated by the electronic searches, one in four articles were selected for coding.

3.2.3 Coding sheet details

In developing the coding sheet, we carefully considered the findings of our literature review to ensure that we could interrogate those elements identified as problematic by researchers. We ultimately employed four different coding sheets (all are variations on the female perpetrator coding sheet in Appendix 2):

- *Male perpetrator(s) (full)* – used when the article was 10–100% about violence against women perpetrated by men.

- *Female perpetrator(s) (full)* – used when the article was 10–100% about violence perpetrated by women. The male perpetrator and female perpetrator coding sheets were identical except the female perpetrator coding sheet had 10 additional questions specific to issues around the representation of violence perpetrated by women.

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[8] We included violence perpetrated by women in order to compare the representation of the perpetrator in relation to gender. This is particularly interesting when comparing the representation of intimate partner homicide perpetrated by women with that perpetrated by men.

- *Male perpetrator(s) (mentions)* – used when the article only briefly mentioned violence against women perpetrated by men (less than 10%). These 'mentions' coding sheets are very short (1.5 pages) and only ask cursory questions regarding the content of the story.

- *Female perpetrator(s) (mentions)* – used when the article only briefly mentioned violence perpetrated by women (less than 10% of the total article). This coding sheet was exactly the same as the 'male perpetrator(s) (mentions)' sheet.

When an article primarily about gendered violence was very short (less than three lines), coders used the full coding sheet but only filled out the first third. These stories were too short to provide any of the other information sought by the coding sheet, so this approach expedited the coding process without losing valuable information.

3.2.3.1 Content of coding sheets

This study used an extensive coding sheet: 10 pages for articles about male-perpetrated violence and 11 pages for articles about female-perpetrated violence. The coding sheet contained 11 types of content:

1. *Basic information* – these included headline, date, gender/age/number of victim(s), type of violence (more than one could be selected), and relationship (two could be selected).

2. *Events-based or thematic* – if the article was deemed thematic, the coder could choose a theme from a list of commonly used themes. These themes were identified from the literature review and from the coding of a small number of articles during pilots of this study.

3. *Sources* – coders were asked to identify who was paraphrased or quoted in each article, and how many times they were quoted/paraphrased.

4. *Nationality, race and religion* – these questions aimed to identify the national context of the incident(s), the nationalities of those involved, and how race, nationality and religion are represented.

5. *Drugs/alcohol* – to what degree were drugs/alcohol mentioned or discussed in the story? Were they described as an explanation or seen to be fuelling the violence?

6. *Framing the victim and the perpetrator* – these questions were based upon arguments researchers have made about how victims and perpetrators are often represented (e.g. victim blaming, gendered descriptions of victims and perpetrators).

7. *Levels of explanation for the violence perpetrated* – researchers have expressed concern over the inclusion of certain types of explanations for violence against women (Benedict 1992; Cuklanz 1996; Steeves 1997). It is argued that the inclusion of explanations can suggest excuses for the perpetrator(s). We thus examined the degree to which such explanations for violence were used.

8. *Questions specific to intimate partner homicide* – much research has looked specifically at the representation of intimate partner homicide and attempted homicide. These questions are specific to this type of violence and therefore are in a separate section of the coding sheet. Questions in this section include whether a prior history of violence was discussed, whether the idea that the violence was motivated by love was mentioned, and whether an argument was cited as having 'sparked' the violence.

9. *Questions specific to sexual violence* – research which specifically considers the representation of sexual violence has been substantial. This section investigates issues raised by sexual violence researchers (in particular, questions around the inclusion of rape myths in press reporting).

10. *Counterframes* – these questions aim to identify the degree to which press reports challenge problematic ways of understanding violence against women. Articles that fit into this category might challenge rape myths, call for action against gendered violence, or discuss the need for law reform in relation to violence against women.

11. *Victim/perpetrator services* – a number of researchers have found that news media rarely offers information about victims' services (Carlyle, Slater & Chakroff 2008). We wanted to establish the degree to which this is the case in Australia. To do this we identified whether the story offered information about victim or perpetrator services (organisation details, phone numbers, websites, etc.)

3.2.3.2   Coding the articles

The articles coded in this study were coded by five individuals, including the two authors of this report. Each coder was carefully trained and was given a detailed instruction manual which explained each question in the coding sheet, and offered examples for more difficult/ambiguous questions. In the training period, coders were asked to code a minimum of 15 articles of different types and were checked for accuracy. Coders met regularly to check for consistency, answer questions and discuss coding-related difficulties. The design of the coding sheet aimed to minimise ambiguous, subjective or difficult-to-answer questions. Considering the challenge of coding articles which can vary dramatically from each other, we are confident that the coding is consistent and accurate within the usual limits of this type of study.

3.3 Outline of this report

To assess the strengths and weaknesses of Australian print media coverage of the issue, we will now turn to our findings. Our findings both overlapped and diverged from the issues highlighted by the literature review. This report focuses on the areas of:

- individualising violence against women
- (mis)representation of risk
- violent context of intimate partner homicide
- role of gender in representing victims and perpetrators
- whether men and women are represented as equally violent
- sensationalism
- sources of authority
- blame, responsibility and exoneration
- existing initiatives in the area

The report concludes with recommendations based on the study findings.

4 Sample overview

This section describes our entire sample by newspaper and date, by perpetrator, and it shows results by newspaper and perpetrator. Tables 4.1–4.4 give a general overview of the sample. The nomenclature used in the study is detailed below. It explains each of the categories referred to in the tables.

The tables describe four elements of this research:

- articles by newspaper and year(s) (Table 4.1)
- 'full', 'short' and 'mentions' in this sample (Table 4.2)
- articles by description of perpetrator: female, male, not specified or unknown (Table 4.2)
- elements above by newspaper (tables 4.3 and 4.4).

When looking at these tables, it is important to remember that the sample from the 1980s only investigates one year, while the samples from the 1990s and the 2000s each include two years. In addition, *The Age* articles from the 1980s were not collected using a database of digitally stored articles, relying instead on manual identification of the articles from microfilm (see section 3.2). Therefore, this sample is relatively small.

In the majority of this report we analyse and discuss our results primarily using the 'full' and 'short' articles; that is, the 'mentions' are excluded. Any variation to this will be clearly identified.

4.1 Glossary of study nomenclature

full articles where more than 10% of the article is about violence against/by women, therefore the entire coding sheet was completed.

mentions articles where less than 10% of the article is about violence against/by women. In this case coders completed a 'mentions' sheet. A 'mentions' sheet is an abridged version of the coding sheet which asks only a few key questions.

non-mentions the combination of 'full' articles and 'short' articles

non-primary violence violence which is discussed/mentioned but is not necessarily the primary violence described in the story. Due to the fact that there is often more than one type of violence discussed (or committed), coders were allowed to choose *more than one* type of non-primary violence (using tick-boxes).

primary violence the main type of violence discussed in the article. If two types are given equal prominence, usually the gravest violence is selected as primary. Although there is often more than one type of violence discussed (or committed), coders had to choose *one* primary type of violence to facilitate this analysis.

short	articles where the topic of violence against/by women is a substantial focus of the article but the articles are very short (usually only a few lines). The first one-third of the coding sheet was completed in the case of 'short' articles.
unknown	gender of perpetrator is not known. The perpetrator is unknown and is still being sought by police or the case is unsolved.

Table 4.1 Newspaper articles, by source, across study period												
Source	**1986**			**1993–1994**			**2007–2008**			**All years**		
	n	*N*	*%*	*n*	*N*	*%*	*n*	*N*	*%*	*n*	*N*	*%*
The Age	99	924	11%	516	924	56%	327	924	35%	924	2452	38%
Herald Sun/Sun	212	1510	14%	821	1510	54%	477	1510	32%	1510	2452	62%
ALL	311	2452	13%	1337	2452	55%	804	2452	33%	2452	2452	100%

Reference to violence by/against women	#	% of total sample	Gender of perpetrator	#	% by category	#	% excluding not specified/unknown
Table 4.2 Overview of sample, by article references to violence by/against women							
Full*	1508	62%	Male	1222	81%	1222	86%
			Female	193	13%	193	14%
			Not specified	44	3%	–	–
			Unknown*	49	3%	–	–
			All	1508	100%	1415	100%
Short*	231	9%	Male	177	77%	177	88%
			Female	24	10%	24	12%
			Not specified	12	5%	–	–
			Unknown	18	8%	–	–
			All	231	100%	201	100%
Full and short	1739	71%	Male	1399	80%	1399	87%
			Female	217	13%	217	13%
			Not specified	56	3%	–	–
			Unknown	67	4%	–	–
			All	1739	100%	1616	100%
Mentions*	713	29%	Male	427	60%	427	95%
			Female	22	3%	22	5%
			Not specified	255	36%	–	–
			Unknown	9	1%	–	–
			All	713	100%	449	100%
ALL (total sample)	2452	100%	Male	1826	74%	1826	88%
			Female	239	10%	239	12%
			Not specified	311	13%	–	–
			Unknown	76	3%	–	–
			All	2452	100%	2065	100%

* Refer to section 4 for a glossary of study nomenclature.

Reference to violence by/against women	#	% of *The Age* sample	Gender of perpetrator	#	% by category	#	% excluding not specified/unknown
Full*	495	53%	Male	406	82%	406	89%
			Female	49	10%	49	11%
			Not specified	21	4%	–	–
			Unknown*	19	4%	–	–
			All perpetrators	496	100%	456	100%
Short*	59	6%	Male	46	78%	46	96%
			Female	2	3%	2	4%
			Not specified	6	10%	–	–
			Unknown	5	9%	–	–
			All perpetrators	59	100%	48	100%
Full and short	554	59%	Male	452	81%	452	90%
			Female	51	9%	51	10%
			Not specified	27	5%	–	–
			Unknown	24	4%	–	–
			All perpetrators	554	100%	503	100%
Mentions*	388	41%	Male	186	48%	186	93%
			Female	15	4%	15	7%
			Not specified	183	47%	–	–
			Unknown	4	1%	–	–
			All perpetrators	388	100%	201	100%
ALL (total sample)	942	100%	Male	638	68%	638	90%
			Female	66	7%	66	10%
			Not specified	210	22%	–	–
			Unknown	28	3%	–	–
			All perpetrators	942	100%	704	100%

Table 4.3 Overview of sample from *The Age*, by article references to violence by/against women

* Refer to section 4 for a glossary of study nomenclature.

Article type	#	% of *Herald Sun/Sun* sample	Gender of perpetrator	#	% by category	#	% excluding not specified/unknown
			Table 4.4 Overview of sample from the *Herald Sun/Sun*, by article references to violence by/against women				
Full*	1013	67%	Male	816	81%	816	85%
			Female	144	14%	144	15%
			Not specified	23	2%	–	–
			Unknown*	30	3%	–	–
			All perpetrators	1013	100%	960	100%
Short*	172	12%	Male	131	76%	131	86%
			Female	22	13%	22	14%
			Not specified	6	4%	–	–
			Unknown	13	8%	–	–
			All perpetrators	172	100%	153	100%
Full and short	1185	79%	Male	947	80%	947	85%
			Female	166	14%	166	15%
			Not specified	29	2%	–	–
			Unknown	43	4%	–	–
			All perpetrators	1185	100%	1113	100%
Mentions*	323	21%	Male	241	74%	241	97%
			Female	7	2%	7	3%
			Not specified	72	22%	–	–
			Unknown	5	2%	–	–
			All perpetrators	325	100%	248	100%
ALL (total sample)	1510	100%	Male	1188	79%	1188	87%
			Female	173	12%	173	13%
			Not specified	101	7%	–	–
			Unknown	48	3%	–	–
			All perpetrators	1510	100%	1361	100%

* Refer to section 4 for a glossary of study nomenclature.

5   One woman after another: individualising violence against women

Media researchers often criticise the tendency for reportage of violence against women to focus primarily on incidents of violence (individual 'events'), with little contextual information about the social problem. This tendency fails to represent violence against women as a systemic social problem and/or ignores the tendency for violence against victims to occur over an extended period of time, not just as one-off incidents. The argument made by these researchers is that by describing gendered violence in an individualised way, readers will tend to view incidents of violence against women as isolated, and fail to understand the prevalence of violence against women both as a social problem and as an ongoing problem for many victims (see Berns 2004; Carlyle, Slater & Chakroff 2008; Marhia 2008; Taylor 2009). Maxwell et al. (2000) argue that this tendency to cover individual incidents of gendered violence (rather than the social factors of the crime) is problematic because it shifts the responsibility for solving the problem from society to the individual victim and abuser.

5.1   Thematic versus events-based coverage

Carlyle, Slater and Chakroff look at the question of episodic (i.e. events-based) versus thematic framing (2008). Their two-year study of newspapers and violence against women in the United States found that 88.3% of stories in their substantial sample used episodic framing (2008: 177). These stories tended to be individualised and they ignored the 'social factors that help perpetuate violence' (2008: 181).

To investigate this aspect of coverage, we asked coders to describe articles as either events-based or thematic (terms discussed in section 2.1). Events-based articles tend to discuss gendered violence in relation to incidents of violence (particular criminal events) and are often framed in relation to law and order. Thematic articles were defined as stories which describe more than who, what, when and where. These articles are more in-depth, often explaining violence against women as a structural problem, offering statistics or including analytical information about the problem.

Table 5.1 Thematic articles, by source, across study period											
Source	1986			1993–1994			2007–2008			All years		
	n	*N*	*%*	*n*	*N*	*%*	*n*	*N*	*%*	*n*	*N*	*%*
The Age	16	86	19%	71	311	23%	42	157	27%	129	554	23%
Herald Sun/Sun	8	176	5%	92	631	15%	34	378	10%	134	1185	11%
ALL	24	262	9%	163	942	17%	76	535	14%	263	1739	15%

Table 5.1 offers a longitudinal view of the occurrence of thematic articles by newspaper across the study period. Generally, it is clear that the *Herald Sun*/*Sun* is much less likely to report thematically than *The Age*. The change over the study period is variable, with a peak of thematic coverage in the 1990s, although *The Age* shows some slight continuing improvement over time.

Table 5.2 Events-based articles, by source, across study period												
Source	1986			1993–1994			2007–2008			All years		
	n	*N*	%	*n*	*N*	%	*n*	*N*	%	*n*	*N*	%
The Age	70	86	81%	238	311	77%	110	157	70%	418	554	76%
Herald Sun/Sun	168	176	96%	536	631	85%	328	378	87%	1032	1185	87%
ALL	238	262	91%	774	942	82%	438	535	82%	1450	1739	83%

Table 5.3 Events-based and thematic articles, by source[9]						
Source	Events-based			Thematic		
	n	*N*	%	*n*	*N*	%
The Age	418	554	76%	129	554	23%
Herald Sun/Sun	1032	1185	87%	134	1185	11%
ALL	1450	1739	83%	263	1739	15%

Consistent with prior research, we found that most articles in our sample (83%) were events-based. Looking at tables 5.2 and 5.3, it is clear that events-based coverage dominates the reporting style for stories about violence against women. We found that articles tended to be either wholly events-based or wholly thematic (though there were to a lesser extent some thematic articles which used an 'event' as a starting point for the thematic discussion). These findings reveal that the majority of articles discussing gendered violence are doing so in relation to individual incidents of violence. This means stories in this category are likely to focus solely on the circumstances of the events and are unlikely to delve further into the wider social elements of the crime. One typical example of such a story would be this 1986 example from *The Age (*28/01/1986):

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[9] In 2% of cases the article was too ambiguous to be coded as either events-based or thematic.

Man faces murder charge

HOBART. — A man is due to appear in Hobart Magistrates Court today charged with the murder of a woman who disappeared more than 16 years ago.

Maxwell Keith Leaman, 46, of Mornington, near Hobart, has been charged with the murder of Pauline Dagmar Leaman, 40, whose remains were discovered on Saturday near Cremorne, a popular Tasmanian beach resort.

Mr Leaman did not plead to the charge when he appeared at a special court sitting on Sunday and was remanded in custody until today.

Mrs Leaman was reported missing from her home in suburban Hobart in May 1969.

Senior police said yesterday that they had received new information last Monday about the woman's disappearance and had begun an intensive search of an area of land near Cremorne.

The story tells of a male suspect who is due to appear in court over the murder of a woman. The details included are basic and police are the sole source. After closely reading the article one could argue that it appears to be discussing a case of violence against women; however, would readers quickly skimming the article notice that the victim and perpetrator have the same surname? While the surnames suggest a relationship between the victim and the perpetrator, no mention of this is made. In fact, if reading this article quickly, one might even come away with the sense that there was no relationship between the victim and the perpetrator. The article's tone is purely factual, and certainly does not situate the violence within a context of gendered violence.

A comprehensive study by McManus and Dorfman (2005) in the United States found that intimate partner violence was covered less thematically than other types of violence. The authors say that when they 'counted all violence articles in the papers, including wire service stories, only one in eight intimate-violence stories rated treatment as an issue, trend or theme rather than as a simple description of a particular violent episode. In contrast, a third of all stories about other violence was thematic' (2005: 53). While we did find thematic coverage to be low, we did not gather data on all violent incidents, focusing only on violence by or against women, and therefore cannot comment upon the tendency identified by McManus and Dorman within our sample. Nevertheless, their findings and ours both suggest that there is room for more contextualised and informative coverage in cases of gendered violence.

It should be noted that the limitations imposed by Australian laws on contempt of court may in some circumstances restrict the ability of journalists to fully report the social context of violence against women. Nevertheless, this does not affect all stories. One way of incorporating context is to consider including more thematic elements into events-based reports (when possible). Incorporating thematic elements (even if minor) within an events-based story would add more contextual information and could bring about substantial improvements in more accurately representing violence against women.

5.2 Thematic coverage and counterframes

When considering thematic versus events-based reporting, one might question the degree to which thematic articles offer a more informed perspective on the issue of gendered violence. To interrogate this question, we identified a number of common counterframes and had coders record the presence of these. Articles which offer counterframes tend to question, discuss or address issues around violence against women/by women in a critical or informative way.

The primary types of counterframe we identified are included in Table 5.4. We permitted coders to select more than one counterframe per article, therefore the percentages do not add to 100. When looking at it is evident that the thematic articles had a substantially higher percentage of counterframes (66% of the thematic articles included counterframes, while only 11% of the events-based included a counterframe).

Table 5.4 Counterframes in events-based and thematic articles						
Counterframe	**Events-based**			**Thematic**		
	n	*N*	*%*	*n*	*N*	*%*
Is there any discussion of problems with the way violence against women is handled by institutions like police, the criminal justice system, politicians, social services, health care practitioners?	106	1450	7%	117	263	44%
Does the article call for action against violence against	24	1450	2%	88	263	33%
Does the article challenge victim blaming or rape myths?	82	1450	6%	83	263	32%
Is there any discussion/mention of a need for law reform in relation to violence against women?	30	1450	2%	76	263	29%
Does the article mention the *difficulty of reporting* the crime/crimes for victims? Or does it mention the difficulty/trauma of court processes for victims?	28	1450	2%	49	263	19%
Does the article mention the prevalence of violence against women? (e.g. includes statistics)	4	1450	0%	50	263	19%
ANY OF THE ABOVE	154	1450	11%	173	263	66%

When looking at those themes identified here as counterframes, one could argue that such themes suggest an editorial style of writing, and therefore are unlikely to be included in events-based reports. Nevertheless, purely informative themes like mentioning the prevalence of violence against women remain surprisingly low (0.003% of events-based articles include such information). This would be one simple way that events-based coverage could easily link the incident to the broader issue of violence against women. In many cases this could be achieved by including an advocate or expert in the field of violence against women as a source.

Table 5.5 Intimate partner homicide and risks of leaving abusive partners, by article type			
Article type	*n*	*N*	*%*
Events-based	5	321	2%
Thematic	10	25	40%

Table 5.5 shows the number of articles related to intimate partner homicide which mention the risks faced by those who leave their abusive partners. In our sample we found that only 2% of events-based stories related to intimate partner homicide mention the risks faced by those who leave their partners, while 40% of thematic articles do so. These findings again show that information about the realities of violence against women is more likely to be included in thematic articles.

The tables suggest the following:

- Thematic information is unlikely to be included for the vast majority of articles about violence against women.

- Articles that could be labelled 'thematic' tend to incorporate more informative perspectives on the issue of gendered violence as a social problem.

- While uncommon, a number of events-based articles incorporate counterframes (11%). This suggests that, although not common practice, the inclusion of thematic elements in events-based reporting is possible.

- The inclusion of thematic elements (even in events-based articles) could be an effective way to report individual incidents of violence against women in a way that links the violence to the broader social problem.

5.3 (De)contextualising violence against women: lack of information about victims' services

One troubling and recurring challenge for those working to help victims and their families is the fact that many people do not know who to turn to when faced with gender-based violence. According to VicHealth, '[o]ne-third of women and over one-third of men in the general community did not know where to go for outside help to support someone about domestic violence' (2010: 53). This issue means many women in contexts of violence may not readily seek help, and may feel they have nowhere to turn.

News media has been criticised for their tendency not to include information about victims' services. For example, Carlyle, Slater and Chakroff found only 5.3% of the articles in their sample offered *any* information about victim services such as shelters and hotlines (2008: 181). In our study, only 2% of articles (37 out of 1739) included information about victims' services. Of these 37 articles, 23 (62%) were thematic. This finding reinforces the argument that thematic articles are substantially more likely to incorporate more in-depth information about gendered violence.

In this key aspect of violence against women, news media could be particularly helpful. For example, *The Age* now includes contact numbers for suicide prevention or assistance with depression in articles discussing suicide. By offering telephone numbers, websites and other information when covering issues of gendered violence, newsmakers would help make the public aware of the services available to those experiencing gendered violence. This would be one important step in bringing victims and support services closer. It would also help to link incidents of gendered violence to the broader societal issue of violence against women.

5.4   Importance of context

The finding that episodic framing is far more common than thematic framing suggest that news constructs gender-based violence as an individual/personal problem rather than a broader social issue. This tendency to individualise gendered violence has consequences for the public's understanding of social issues. Dorfman et al. (1997), in their American study of youth violence, argue that if 'news continues to report on violence primarily through crime stories isolated from their social context, the chance for widespread support for public health solutions will be diminished' (1997: 1311).

Coleman and Thorson (2002) examine whether the inclusion of contextual information about crime and violence can shift readers' perceptions. They found that the incorporation of 'information on context, risk factors, and prevention strategies will help readers learn more about the context in which crime and violence occurs, endorse prevention strategies in addition to punishment, and become more attuned to societal risk factors and causes of crime and violence' (2002: 401). These studies reinforce the importance of contextual information for people's understanding of social problems, and suggest that media can make a significant contribution to increasing public knowledge around violence against women.

6   (Mis)representation of risk

Among the most common criticisms of how the press report stories of violence against women is the tendency to misrepresent the realities of gendered violence, in particular around representations of risk (Benedict 1992; Marhia 2008; McManus & Dorfman 2005; Soothill & Walby 1991). We tested this in our sample by examining the extent to which 'stranger danger' was prevalent when reporting sexual violence. We also looked at the incidence of articles which discuss (or mention) sexual violence in the context of an intimate relationship.

6.1 Sexual violence and 'stranger danger': overview

International studies have found that press reports often present a picture of violence against women which indicates that women's greatest risk comes from strangers, rather than from someone known to the victim. Using police records as a source of comparison, the studies conducted by Marhia (2008) and Soothill and Walby (1991) both show the extent to which news constructions of violence against women fail to represent a realistic image of gendered violence. For example, Marhia's study shows that while 83–92% of rapes reported to police[10] in the UK were committed by someone known to the victim, only 36.8% of rapes reported by the press were perpetrated by known men (2008: 27).

In this study, we too were interested in identifying tendencies in the representation of the relationship between victims and perpetrators. To do this, we had coders read articles which discuss sexual violence, identify the types of violence (primary and non-primary – for definitions see section 4) and identify the relationship(s) between the victim and the perpetrator. Sometimes there was more than one victim/perpetrator and therefore there could be more than one relationship (we allowed the coder to select a maximum of two relationships). It is for this reason that, when looking at the data below, the percentages do not necessarily add to 100%.

When we look at the representation of relationships between victims and perpetrators in articles discussing sexual violence perpetrated by men, our findings were very similar to those of Marhia's 2008 UK study. In Australia, some 75% of sexual assault cases reported to the police (where the victim is female) are perpetrated by someone known to the victim (ABS 2010). reveals that only 41% of articles discussing sexual violence cite a relationship between the victim and the perpetrator (this relationship could be anything from that of acquaintances to co-workers or friends). Based on these statistics, one can assert that sexual violence perpetrated against a known victim is under-reported in Australian print media when compared to actual incidents.

Table 6.1 Male-perpetrated sexual violence and relationship between victim and perpetrator, by source			
Source	*n*	*N*	%
The Age	133	280	48%
Herald Sun/Sun	199	537	37%
ALL	332	817	41%

In Table 6.1 you can also see that there is a difference between *The Age* and the *Herald Sun/Sun* in relation to this issue. *The Age*, when reporting on male-perpetrated sexual violence, includes a greater proportion of stories where the perpetrator is known (or described as known) to the victim than the *Herald Sun/Sun*.

Table 6.2 shows the number of articles discussing sexual violence perpetrated by a male in which the relationship is either not specified or the perpetrator is a stranger. The far-right columns show the

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[10] Marhia cites the British Crime Survey (BCS) as the source of these statistics.

total number of articles where the relationship was *either* stranger or not specified. (Because an article could have more than one relationship, this total is less than the sum of the other two columns.)

Table 6.2 shows that for over 20% of sexual violence related articles in which the perpetrator(s) is male, the perpetrator(s) is specifically described as being a 'stranger'. When considering this statistic, it does appear that concern about the over-representation of 'stranger danger' is valid.

Table 6.2 Sexual violence and relationship is 'stranger'/'not specified' (male perpetrator), by source								
Source	Not specified			Stranger			Stranger/not specified		
	n	*N*	%	*n*	*N*	%	*n*	*N*	%
The Age	71	280	25%	41	280	15%	112	280	40%
Herald Sun/Sun	170	537	32%	138	537	26%	298	537	55%
ALL	241	817	30%	179	817	22%	410	817	50%

The set of columns on the left in Table 6.2 shows the proportion of sexual violence articles in which at least one of the relationships is not specified. This means that the crime is discussed but the article does not mention the relationship between the victim(s) and the perpetrator(s). While it is possible that the relationship is not known, this category does *not* include articles where the journalist writes explicitly that the relationship(s) between the victim(s) and perpetrator(s) is unknown – this context had a specific category on the coding sheet ('unknown'). The absence of information about the relationship between the victim and the perpetrator in the category of 'not specified' makes the violence appear random and out of context. We believe that because the relationship is not mentioned, readers may be inclined to conclude that the victim(s) and perpetrator(s) are strangers (see Appendix 3 for a detailed explanation).

The right set of columns in Table 6.2 combines 'stranger' and 'not specified' articles; by doing so the proportion of sexual violence articles which suggest the violence occurred between strangers becomes very high.[11] When comparing newspapers in relation to this, it is evident that the *Herald Sun/Sun* performed particularly poorly in terms of both including information about the relationship between the victim(s) and perpetrator(s), as well as over-representing stranger-perpetrated violence. While *The Age* performs better in this regard, it is evident that both newspapers could improve in this area.

The high proportion of articles which discuss sexual violence perpetrated by a stranger, or which do not mention any relationship, only reinforce the commonly held but comparatively rare 'stranger

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[11] Because coders were permitted to include more than one type of violence and two relationships, there is some overlap between the statistics from tables 6.1 and 6.2. For example, one article may have discussed two perpetrators of violence – one known to the victim and the other a stranger. In this sense, each article is not treated as an example of a single incident with one perpetrator and one victim. For this reason, the numbers do not add to 100%.

danger' narrative. The over-representation of sexual violence perpetrated by strangers reinforces the belief that women are *more* likely to be raped by a stranger, and does not help readers understand the fact that sexual violence is usually perpetrated by someone known to the victim. This belief is likely to leave women feeling increased (and unwarranted) levels of fear around strange men, a false sense of security around familiar men, and a sense of doubt if reporting a rape that does not conform to the stereotype of 'real rape'. The concern is that this type of misrepresentation will limit the public's ability to understand the realities of violence against women as a social issue (the risks, its prevalence, ways of managing trauma, etc.). The following headlines are examples of headlines that reinforce the idea of 'stranger danger' by emphasising fear around the evil stranger/predator.

- 'Rapist gets 34 years for reign of terror' (*The Age*, 13/05/1994)
- '1200 sex fiends left free to roam' (*Herald Sun*, 16/09/2007)
- 'Sex fiend still on the loose' (*Herald Sun,* 20/02/2008)
- 'Mr Cruel hunt continues – police' (*The Age*, 20/06/1993)
- 'Killer sex sadist gets 27 years' (*Herald Sun*, 1/03/2007)
- 'Bible basher turned sex predator cleared to touch more victims' (*The Age,* 2/03/2008)

Again, there may be times when laws restrict journalists' ability to report the relationship context. In particular, a conflict occurs when the desire to name the perpetrator *and* identify the relationship means inadvertently revealing the victim's identity (which is often prohibited by legislation). However, we believe that in terms of the representation of violence against women, when faced with this choice it is preferable to identify the relationship context and leave the perpetrator unnamed.

When looking for avenues for possible reform in this area, if one considers the difference between the newspapers in the 'stranger' column in Table 6.2, it is clear that the *Herald Sun/Sun* is more likely to report sexual violence between strangers as well as not include information on the relationship between the victim(s) and perpetrator(s). The fact that *The Age* treats this aspect of gendered violence in a way that is less problematic does suggest that overall improvements in this area of coverage are not unrealistic. By encouraging journalists to include information about the relationship between the victim(s) and perpetrator(s), including explicitly mentioning when the relationship is unknown, coverage could improve substantially by challenging misconceptions around 'stranger danger'.

6.2   Sexual violence and 'stranger danger': change over time

There has been over the past few decades a concerted effort on the part of feminists and violence against women advocates to raise awareness about those most likely to perpetrate acts of violence against women, and about the fact that strangers are not necessarily the most likely perpetrators. Due to this, one might consider whether the representation of 'stranger danger' has changed over time. This question is addressed in Table 6.3.

Table 6.3 Sexual violence and relationship is 'stranger' and/or 'not specified' (male perpetrator), by year(s)			
Year(s)	*n*	*N*	%
1986	68	121	56%
1993–1994	207	427	49%
2007–2008	135	269	50%
ALL	410	817	50%

Table 6.3 suggests that there has been little change over the past 25 years in regards to newspaper coverage of sexual violence by strangers or where the perpetrator is not specified. (Tests of statistical significance would be misleading given the different ways the source data were collected.) It is possible that within the daily routine of a court reporter, when faced with a horrific case of stranger-perpetrated sexual violence, statistical considerations around the nature of gendered violence being represented accurately take a back seat. As discussed previously in relation to news values (section 2.1), most events-based journalism aims to inform the public of the facts around individual events, not necessarily to link these incidents to broader structural issues (though, in the case of thematic articles, they sometimes do). Ultimately it seems as though work to dispel the widespread belief that strangers are the most likely to perpetrate sexual violence against women has little impact on the way in which journalists cover this issue (at least in events-based coverage).

6.3   Sexual violence in the context of intimate relationships

Based on the current research, it certainly appears that stranger sexual violence receives disproportionate media attention. This finding raises the question, 'What kind of press coverage does sexual violence in intimate contexts receive?' Table 6.4 shows the proportion of articles from the sample that report sexual violence perpetrated by intimates.

Table 6.4 Sexual violence (primary*) and relationship is intimate (male perpetrator), by year(s)			
Year(s)	*n*	*N*	%
1986	3	90	3%
1993–1994	11	329	3%
2007–2008	9	230	4%
ALL	23	649	4%

* Refer to section 4 for a glossary of study nomenclature.

When considering Table 6.4, it is evident that sexual violence between intimates does not receive significant levels of media coverage. One might suggest that this is due to low numbers of such cases being reported to police. Certainly, sexual violence between intimates is less likely to be reported to police than stranger-perpetrated sexual assault (Gartner & Macmillan 1995; Lievore 2003). Nevertheless, in Victoria, some 13–19% of recorded rapes are perpetrated by intimates or ex-intimates (ABS 2010). This is considerably higher than levels of press coverage would lead one to believe.

Therefore, while sexual violence in the context of intimate relationships is a relatively common problem, Table 6.4 shows that the reporting of sexual violence in this context is significantly under-represented.[12] This finding suggests that intimate partner sexual violence is a social problem which lacks visibility. This lack of coverage reinforces the myth that strangers, not partners or loved ones, predominantly commit acts of sexual violence. One troubling element of this invisibility is that women in such contexts may not feel their experience constitutes 'real rape'. In our sample of 817 sexual assault related articles, we found that *only three* articles discussed the issue of sexual assault by intimates in any depth (thematically or otherwise).

6.4 Sexual violence: effects of misrepresenting the realities

As we mentioned previously, among the most common criticisms of press reporting of violence against women is the tendency to misrepresent the realities of gendered violence. This concern is particularly important in relation to news representation because journalism is culturally understood as a site for the communication of truth/reality. The concern is that misrepresentation will limit the public's ability to understand violence against women as a social issue (the risks, its prevalence, ways of managing trauma, etc.). For Marhia, the disproportionate amount of coverage received by cases that fit the description of 'real rape':[13]

> reinforces the package of myths in the public imagination and feeds them back into the criminal justice system, meaning that the majority of rapes which do not conform to the stereotype may not be identified as rape, whether by the victims themselves, who may experience confusion and feelings of self-blame, or by the police, members of the jury in a rape trial or the public at large. (2008: 27)

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[12] It should be noted that reported cases of sexual violence committed by intimates are the most likely to be withdrawn by the victim. To some degree this may contribute to the low level of coverage that this crime receives (Lievore 2005).

[13] The term 'real rape' was coined by Susan Estrich (1986, 1987) to encompass a stereotypical notion of rape — meaning a rape perpetrated by a stranger, in which excessive violence is visibly evident, possibly involving a number of perpetrators, and where the victim and the perpetrator are socially distant.

Marhia continues describing these effects, later pointing out that when news perpetuates rape myths, a:

> vicious cycle is created, whereby cases which don't conform to the mythology around rape are not progressed because the chances of conviction are so slim, thus helping to perpetuate low conviction rates and the perception that many rape claims are not really accounts of rape at all. (2008: 45)

Therefore, such media representations reinforce particular ways of understanding rape – as well as violence against women in general – and these discourses may contribute to shaping the way that gendered violence is treated in all areas (from the court room to the mind of the victim). This type of effect on readers' perceptions has been shown through audience studies as well. Franiuk et al. (2008a) combined a media analysis with an audience study and found that:

> exposure to articles endorsing rape myths leads participants to be more likely to side with the defendant in a sexual assault case than prior to exposure. Furthermore, exposure to articles challenging rape myths leads participants to be more likely to believe an alleged victim's claim of sexual assault than prior to exposure. (*2008a*: 298–299)

This study shows how exposure to such myths in one context (news media) can influence judgement within a different context (when considering a court case). It also suggests that discourses move and inform outside the site in which they are originally communicated. Such findings can be troubling. Nevertheless, this research offers some hope. It suggests that reporting could have a positive impact on public knowledge. While improved reporting practices are unlikely to immediately transform predominant ways of understanding gendered violence, they could contribute to reshaping public perceptions of this social issue.

7   Violent context of intimate partner homicide

Women who kill their intimate partner and women who are killed by their intimate partner often share a similar history, a history of violence perpetrated against them. Alison Wallace found, in her study of such killings in NSW, that in at least 40% of cases where a man killed his female intimate partner (or former partner) there had been prior violence. In cases where a woman killed her male intimate partner, 'as many as 70% of the … killings occurred in the context of violence by the husband on the wife' (Wallace 1986: 97). Others have reported that prior violence was present in some 50% of intimate partner homicides (Hore & Bordow 1996) up to 80% (Easteal 1993).

Researchers have discussed the importance of including the violent context of many domestic homicides. For Evans (2001), the omission of the history of violence means readers are unlikely to understand the crime as an incident of gendered violence, and will instead perceive it as a random act of violence. 'This practice reinforces panic over stranger danger, rather than pointing to the statistically more significant danger from associates, intimates and family' (ibid.: 152). Similarly, Bullock and Cubert argue that 'by presenting a domestic violence fatality as just another homicide

and ignoring the victim and perpetrator's history and the social context, the coverage sidesteps the issues of male control, manipulation, and the abuse of women' (2002: 493–494).

We gathered information on the frequency with which prior violence was recognised in intimate partner homicide reporting in our selected sample. A story considered to be discussing the history of violence mentioned the prior violence explicitly, noted that cases of intimate partner homicide are not isolated incidents but usually occur in the context of ongoing domestic violence, or mentioned prior intervention orders. We found that prior violence was noted in under 20% of reports of men killing their intimate partners (or former partners) and in under 40% of cases where women did so (see Table 7.1). This substantially under-represents the incidence of prior violence in intimate partner homicide.

For some cases, particularly those early on in legal processing, it is possible this information had not yet been revealed. Nevertheless, even considering such explanations, the presentation of these homicides without the common context of prior violence is problematic. Studies have found that violence presented as a first offence is perceived as less severe, less likely to be repeated, and affects levels of blame ascribed to the perpetrator (Palazzolo & Roberto 2011). The exclusion of prior violence not only misrepresents the broader social reality, but may also lead a reader to find a man's killing of his partner excusable – he 'just snapped' and thus (at least until recently) would have been entitled to argue the defence of provocation; or he is 'mad' not 'bad' and thus can be forgiven. In the case of women who kill their violent partners, if prior violence is invisible, their actions appear incomprehensible.

Looking at Table 7.1, there appears to be an increase over the study period in the proportion of intimate partner homicide articles discussing (or at least mentioning) prior violence. Nevertheless, the media still under-represent the level of prior violence. With the exception of 1993–1994, there is a remarkably low level of prior violence reported in cases where women killed their spouses. Overwhelmingly, when women kill their partners they are doing so in response to violence from them (Morgan 2002), so to see little or no sign of this for the data in 1986 and, especially, 2007–2008 is particularly concerning.

Table 7.1 Intimate partner homicide and 'history of violence', by gender of perpetrator(s), across study period											
Gender of perpetrator(s)	1986			1993–1994			2007–2008			All years		
	n	*N*	%	*n*	*N*	%	*n*	*N*	%	*n*	*N*	%
Male	2	37	5%	20	132	15%	24	109	22%	46	278	17%
Female	3	17	18%	21	34	62%	0	15	0%	24	66	36%
ALL*	5	54	9%	41	166	25%	24	124	19%	70	344	20%

Prior violence can be noted by mentioning it explicitly, or, as was quite common, by referring to intervention orders that had been sought in the past. Violence against women is also made visible as a social or systemic issue – as a social injury (Graycar & Morgan 2002) – if the language used explicitly identifies it as such. While the terminology of domestic violence may be problematic (ibid.: 321–324), it does at least identify the violence as more than something merely individual. Only 9 of the 70 articles involving prior violence (13%) used the words 'domestic violence' or 'violence against women'. In fact, out of all the articles in our sample which discuss male-perpetrated violence against women (including 'mentions'), only 4% (74 of 1826) included the phrase 'violence against women'.

8   Role of gender in representation of victims and perpetrators

Media researchers have argued that there are substantial differences in the representation of men and women. Certain perceived gender roles or characteristics remain relevant ways of narrating events. For example, Evans' Australian study found that, in headlines, female victims tended to be portrayed in terms of their familial relationships (i.e. 'wife' or 'mother'), while male assailants were most often described in terms of their occupations and never as 'husbands' (2001: 152). If such gendered characterisations remain relevant descriptors for journalists, then how will this affect reporting when the assailant is female and the victim is male?

Naylor's comprehensive study of gendered violence reporting in the British press found significant differences in the explanatory narratives used to describe violence committed by men and women. These differences are in line with gender traits that are stereotypically ascribed to men and women. Naylor found that 'women's violence was more likely to be reported as irrational or emotional … whilst men's violence was more likely to be reported as 'normal' or rational' (2001: 180). Therefore, these stereotypical gender traits become part of the *explanations* for women's and men's violence.

We also found some distinct differences between the way in which men and women are described. For example, we found that when the perpetrator is female, her appearance is more likely to be mentioned in the article. In our sample, we found that 24% (53 of 217) of instances where the perpetrator is female include mention of her appearance, whereas for male perpetrators, only 6% (89 of 1399) of instances mention appearance. While it is difficult to know precisely why this is the case, it is possible that the fact that female perpetrators have transgressed gender norms by committing acts of violence means they receive more attention and detail when being described. Perhaps it is a reflection of an embedded cultural tendency, studied frequently in relation to women politicians, to describe the appearance of women more than their male equivalents. In her study of nine US presidential campaigns, Falk concluded:

> Physical descriptions of all kinds are more common in press accounts of women candidates than in the accounts of equivalent men candidates. Furthermore, the types of physical descriptions differ between men and women. Women are most likely to have their attire and gender mentioned and men are most likely to have their age and appearance (other than clothing) noted; women are still more likely to have their age and appearance mentioned than men. (2010: 96)

In terms of explanations for the violence committed, we found that the gender of the perpetrator was relevant. We had coders identify whether or not the story included explanations for the violence. Such explanations included 'reasons' like infidelity, insanity, unrequited love, childhood trauma and financial gain. Table 8.1 shows that stories about violence perpetrated by women were substantially more likely to include explanations than those about violence perpetrated by men. Again, the precise reasons for this are difficult to ascertain; however, because stories with female perpetrators tend to be more sensationalistic (see Table 8.2, as well as section 10, for more details), they are also more likely to include explanations and details when telling the story. Also, as we discussed in relation to the inclusion of female perpetrators' appearance, it is likely that the 'strangeness' of violence committed by women means that they, their crimes, and possible reasons for these crimes receive more attention.

Table 8.1 Explanations for violence in cases of intimate partner homicide, by gender of perpetrator, across study period											
Gender of perpetrator(s)	1986			1993–1994			2007–2008			All years		
	n	*N*	%	*n*	*N*	%	*n*	*N*	%	*n*	*N*	%
Male	22	37	60%	76	132	58%	44	110	40%	142	279	51%
Female	9	17	53%	31	34	91%	12	15	80%	52	66	79%

Table 8.2 Sensationalism and explanation for violence, by gender of perpetrator						
Gender of perpetrator(s)	Sensationalism			Sensationalism and explanation included		
	n	*N*	%	*n*	*N*	%
Male	467	1222	38%	177	467	38%
Female	105	193	54%	83	105	79%

8.1 Female perpetrators of intimate partner homicide

To further investigate how female perpetrators are represented, we conducted a qualitative analysis of all the articles where women had perpetrated intimate partner homicide and where the violent context in which it occurred was mentioned. We identified three interrelated themes: the use of 'battered woman syndrome', the representation of women who killed as vulnerable, and a small counterframing trend that represents these women as possessing much more agency.

8.1.1 'Battered woman syndrome'

Women who kill violent partners have often had difficulty availing themselves of the traditional legal defences to murder of self-defence and provocation. This is in part because the violent context of the relationship, and its implications, are often invisible. In response to these difficulties, some feminists wanted to introduce evidence to explain the behaviour of women who had been living in situations

of domestic violence, especially of those who responded with lethal violence. The strategy became one of introducing evidence from experts, usually psychologists or psychiatrists, who explained that women who killed in such circumstances suffered from 'battered woman syndrome' (see Walker 1984). This was described by King CJ, in the first Australian case to accept evidence of battered woman syndrome, in the following way:

> Repeated acts of violence, alternating very often with phases of kindness and loving behaviour, commonly leave the battered woman in a psychological condition described as 'learned helplessness'. She cannot predict or control the occurrence of acute outbreaks of violence and often clings to the hope that the kind and loving phases will become the norm. ... The battered woman rarely seeks outside help because of fear of further violence. ... There is a sense of constant fear with a perceived inability to escape the situation. (*R v. Runjanjic and Kontinnen* (1991) 53 A Crim R 362 at 366)

The use of battered woman syndrome has been strongly criticised by many feminists. For example, Sheehy, Stubbs and Tolmie (1992) argue that relying on psychiatrists or psychologists to give evidence, not only suggests that the woman herself is not a reliable witness, but also 'reinforces notions of irrationality or disorder on the part of the woman. Rather than suggest that her conduct is rational, reasonable and comprehensible, the introduction of psychiatric or psychological evidence implies the opposite' (1992: 384; see also Leader-Elliott 1993; Stubbs & Tolmie 1999).

In our sample, 6 of the 24 articles concerning intimate partner homicide perpetrated by women (where prior violence featured) explicitly mentioned battered wife syndrome, all in the 1990s. Six articles involved the Margaret Raby case (see below), although battered wife syndrome was only explicitly mentioned in one of these. Thus, one can conclude that battered wife syndrome was either directly or indirectly implicated in 11 of the 24 cases involving intimate partner homicide committed by a woman in the context of prior violence.

The Raby case was the first Victorian case in which the 'defence' of battered woman syndrome was used (see McCarthy 1995). In the six articles about her, Keith Raby's violence is inclined to disappear in the description of Margaret Raby's distressed, and in part still loving, state of mind. Hence, one article is headlined 'Wife: I didn't mean to kill him' (*Herald Sun*, 21/10/94). It commences: 'A woman accused of murdering her husband said she cradled him in her arms and tried to revive him after she stabbed him nine times'. The article includes excerpts from her police statement including a description of the killing: '[s]he described wrapping her arms around Keith Raby, who was very drunk, and tipping his chair slowly to the ground … With one eye open and one eye closed she then stabbed him slowly. She did not believe he knew what was happening because he was so drunk'.

Although Keith Raby's violence appears, it is described in somewhat less vivid terms: 'The defence has alleged Mrs Raby killed her alcoholic husband after suffering domestic violence and humiliating sexual abuse during their short marriage'. The article does go on to say 'she had been subjected to cruel and sadistic treatment including rape, bashings, being kept naked in the house and locked in cupboards'. Although detailed, it is narrated in less dramatic terms.

In another of the articles about the Raby case, in a description of the arguments on sentencing, his violence is almost completely absent in a cascade of calls for a sentence based on general

deterrence: 'battered women might be encouraged to kill their partners as a form of "self-help" if Margaret Raby walked free'; she 'had no justification for stabbing her husband Keith nine times, no matter how he treated her' and she 'killed him slowly and deliberately'. The only mention of his behaviour in this article is in one sentence: 'Raby told the court her alcoholic husband raped, starved and assaulted her' (see 'Call to put battered wife in jail', *Herald Sun*, 15/11/94).

In a report of another case of a woman killing her violent husband, his violence disappears in a discussion of the general characteristics of battered woman syndrome, at least until the very end when some glimpse of the fear she lived with is apparent; she is quoted as saying, 'I wanted to leave him but I couldn't because he said he'd kill all of us' ('Battered wife free on killing', *Herald Sun*, 20/8/93).

Although the prior violence is mentioned in these examples of female-perpetrated violence, it tends to move into the background, de-emphasising the context of gendered violence within which these women killed.

8.1.2   The vulnerable woman who chooses to stay

As already noted, one of the difficulties with battered wife syndrome is that it rests on a notion of 'learned helplessness' and psychologises women's behaviour. This encourages a representation of women as extremely vulnerable. We can see elements of this in the media representation of intimate partner homicide in our sample of cases involving prior violence.

Another of the articles about Margaret Raby is entitled 'Marriage of hell and happiness' (*Herald Sun*, 1/11/94). In fact, this headline is quite subtle and complex: many women who are the targets of severe violence from their partners state that they still love them (Mahoney 1992). However, the article goes on to characterise Margaret Raby as both highly vulnerable and a helpless dupe. Hence the opening paragraph states, 'she was in a very vulnerable state after four of the most miserable years of her life'. And later, '[w]hen she met fellow nurse Keith it was like a dream come true for the lonely woman. He was clean, quietly spoken and kind to patients'. The article goes on to state how she neglected to act on 'warning signs' about his violence: she ignored statements from one of Keith Raby's former girlfriends, 'put[ting] that down to jealousy'. There was a 'violent outburst' by Keith in her home before the wedding yet 'despite the warning signs she went and married Keith'. And '[s]he constantly expressed her love for Keith, despite his behaviour and would have done anything for him'. In a remarkable denial of the agency of both Keith and Margaret Raby, the journalist states his killing was the 'almost inevitable conclusion'.

Indeed, in five of the six articles on the Raby case, the perpetrator, Margaret Raby, is described as weak in some way. In addition to the article noted immediately above, another – 'Call to put battered wife in jail' (*Herald Sun*, 15/11/94) – quotes the expert evidence given by a psychologist: 'she was a classic battered woman, reacting in a dependent and defenceless way'; and in another she 'craved his constant love and approval' (*Herald Sun*, 19/10/94). In a fourth, her defence counsel is quoted as saying 'she had a pathetic dependency' and was 'emotionally dependent' on her husband, although she was also afraid of him (*Herald Sun*, 18/10/94).

Perhaps the most interesting article in this group was one reporting some of Margaret Raby's family urging other battered women 'to expose their attackers "for the villains they are" rather than take the law into their own hands'; or 'call your family in, talk to people, doctors, do anything you possibly can' ('Go for help, family urges', *Herald Sun*, 23/11/94). While it still describes Margaret Raby as vulnerable, it is careful not to blame Ms Raby for her apparent failure to call for help, noting, via one of her daughters, some of the cultural pressures on women to be obedient to male partners. This article is an example which offers an alternative perspective on the case and the issue of gendered violence. It is interesting that it does this by letting the voices of Margaret Raby's family be heard. This again reinforces the importance of sources beyond those of criminal justice personnel as a means to present alternative perspectives.

Representing women as especially vulnerable in fact makes their use of fatal violence against their violent partner less, rather than more, understandable. It reinforces the notion that women are psychologically vulnerable rather than rational actors.

8.1.3 A different view of the female perpetrator

Unlike the articles just discussed, which either minimise the history of violence or fatalistically depict the female perpetrator of intimate partner homicide as vulnerable and unable to leave her abuser because of her psychological inadequacies, the report of a Northern Territory case places the violence of the accused woman's husband front and centre ('Murder charge dropped against battered wife', *The Age*, 14/9/1993). This was a report of the first time prosecuting authorities had dropped murder charges when it was believed the accused (Sherrie Seakins) was going to raise 'battered woman syndrome'. The article quotes the accused, saying, apparently in out-of-court statements, that her husband 'had bashed her three or four times a week during their marriage and had repeatedly raped her'. Despite the apparent use of battered wife syndrome by defence counsel, a move which requires presenting the battered woman as a victim of 'learned helplessness' and as 'irrational', considerable agency was accorded to Sherrie Seakins. For example, her lawyer is reported as saying 'her client was a courageous woman who was "not prepared to accept or offer a plea of manslaughter. She wanted to stand up in court and defend the murder charge"'. This courage can be contrasted with the 'vulnerability' of the female perpetrator in reports of the Raby case.

A further two articles concerned the killing by Cheryl Bradley of her husband. Here his violence is much more visible, as is her frustration with the police. The first article describes her being asked why she never told police about her husband having killed their baby; she said 'she was "terrified there would be repercussions for me"'. When asked why she had not gone to the police when her husband had bashed her, she replied; 'I did all that before over a period of 25 years and it never got me real far' ('Kill cover-up claim on baby', *Herald Sun*, 6/12/1994). In the second report on the sentence hearing, the violence is very vivid: 'Mr Bradley once bashed her so badly with a chain she appeared close to death. He had also allegedly bashed her with car fan belts and fire irons and whipped her' ('Judge urged not to jail battered woman', *Herald Sun*, 10/12/1994).

These articles indicate that, notwithstanding the use of battered wife syndrome evidence, it is still possible to discuss the prior violence which most women who kill their violent partners face, and to represent women as active agents.

8.2   News values revisited

It is worthwhile reiterating here that our aim is not to criticise journalists. Much of what journalists do when reporting on violence against women relies on victims' and perpetrators' interactions with the legal system. This may mean that at a particular point the information from the trial which is being reported is, say, focusing on a female perpetrator's state of mind, with little attention to the behaviour of the deceased. Or defence counsel may have chosen, for forensic reasons not necessarily obvious to an observer, including a journalist, to emphasise a female perpetrator's vulnerability, or psychological distress. It may also mean that, advertently or inadvertently, a journalist is reporting on inadequacies in those legal processes. However, our point remains that these descriptions are what is read by the public. If the circumstances of prior violence disappear or are trivialised in the media, women do appear as likely to be as violent as men, a circumstance not borne out by the statistics. And while our focus is not the criticism of journalism, the skill in representing violence against women without presenting a picture of an inadequate woman, as is demonstrated in the Northern Territory case already discussed (section 8.1.3), should not be downplayed.

We noted above that many feminists have been critical of the use of 'battered woman syndrome' in court cases and its tendency to psychologise women, and move the focus away from male violence and its social causes and consequences. However, when reflecting on the newspaper coverage of prior violence in incidents of women killing men, it may be that battered wife syndrome allowed, even encouraged, the reporting of a context of violence when women kill their partners. As shown in Table 7.1, for female perpetrators, the 1990s saw 62% of reports of intimate partner homicide situated as a response to (or at least in the context of) prior violence, whereas in 2007–2008, no killings were reported in such a context. The 1990s was when battered wife syndrome was first used in legal cases, and thus in the media context this new 'defence' was 'news'. This in turn may also have made violence against in the context of female-perpetrated homicide 'news'. So while the violence perpetrated against these women is often underemphasised in these stories, at least stories which represent the common situation in which women kill do appear.

Where the prior violence experienced by women who kill their violent partners is absent from the reporting of these cases, it looks as if men and women are equally violent. The following section explicitly addresses this issue.

9   Men and women as equally violent?

It is possible for both men and women to be violent. However, patterns of offending and victimisation vary substantially by gender. In relation to public violence, women and men are both most likely to be attacked by men, and men are more likely to be attacked than women (VicHealth 2010). In relation to intimate partner violence in heterosexual relationships, women are much more likely to be the victims than men. The Australian Bureau of Statistics Personal Safety survey (2006) shows that, of women who had experienced violence in the 12 months prior to the survey, 31% had been the targets of a former or current male partner, 28% of a male family member, and 15% of male strangers. These were the three most common categories of perpetrators for female targets of violence. In relation to men who had experienced violence in the previous 12 months, the three most common categories of perpetrators were male strangers (65%), other known men (19%), and 10% had been targeted by male family members or friends. Only 4% had been the victims of their female former or current partners (ABS 2006: Table 16). Access Economics estimated that 1.6% of Australian men and 21.5% of women have experienced domestic violence since the age of 15 (2004: Part 11, tables 3, 8).

However, in the late 1990s and early 2000s, a growing academic discourse suggested that men and women were equally violent, at least in an intimate context. So, for example Headey, Scott and de Vaus (1999) conducted a survey of women and men and concluded that:

1) Men were just as likely to report being physically assaulted by their partners as women. Further, women and men were approximately equally likely to admit to being violent themselves.
2) Men and women report experiencing approximately the same levels of pain and need for medical attention resulting from domestic violence.
3) Violence runs in couples. In over 50% of partnerships in which violence occurred both partners struck each other. (1999: 61)

The authors concede that their findings are unusual, but state that they were 'reasonably confident' that the first and third findings were correct, though less so about the second (ibid.)

This analysis was subject to a compelling critique by Bagshaw and Chung (2000). They point to some of the flaws in the design of the study Headey, Scott and de Vaus rely on, the International Social Science Survey Australia. This used a measure of the incidence of violence which is limited; for example, it counts incidents ranging from 'minor violence', which includes 'discussing calmly', to 'severe violence', including beating and throwing something. It does not distinguish defensive and offensive violence and looks only at violence in the past one-year period, not over a lifetime (Bagshaw & Chung 2000: 6).

It is also the case that national surveys of attitudes to violence against women show that over the past 10 to 15 years there has been a large and statistically significant increase in the proportion of people who believe that men and women are equally likely to commit domestic violence: in the 1995 survey, 9% of people surveyed believed that men and women were equally likely to commit domestic violence, and by 2009 that had risen to 22% (VicHealth 2010). How has the media represented this issue?

Our study does not allow us to definitively answer the question of print media representation of who is most likely to be violent. We did not, for example, collect data on all reports of male-perpetrated violence, but only of male violence against women. So, as the Australian Bureau of Statistic data noted above indicates, we will thus not get a picture of the most common form of violence perpetrated against men by men: violence by a stranger. However, we did collect data on all instances of intimate partner homicide (or attempted), whether committed by a man or a woman.

Of the 348 articles which were classified as intimate partner homicide or attempts,[14] 66 or 19% concerned a female perpetrator, and 80% were committed by men. This mirrors the general Australian homicide rates: the Australian Institute of Criminology's National Homicide Monitoring Project reports 'males have comprised more than 80% of all known homicide offenders since data collection first began in 1989–90 – the highest being 88% in 1994–95 and the lowest being 82% in 2006–7' (Virueda & Payne 2010). Unfortunately, this most recent report from the project does not give us details on gender of offenders in intimate partner homicides. However, other sources of data, including earlier reports from the project, indicate that some 73–77% of intimate partner homicide cases involve men killing women, and the proportion of women killing men ranges from 13% to 21% (see Mouzos 2000; Polk 1994; summarised in Morgan 2002). So the representation of women as killers in the intimate context is probably broadly representative of actual patterns, in terms of article count.

Coders were also asked to code if the article portrayed women and men as equally violent. There were only 48 articles where this code was used, indicating that this was not a major trend in our data. A large proportion (54%) of these concerned intimate partner homicide, especially intimate partner committed by women (77% of the intimate partner homicide cases coded as 'equal violence').

Six of the articles indicating that men and women are equally violent are what we have classified as thematic (see section 5.1). These very explicitly make the claim that women and men are equally violent, although this claim is not necessarily unchallenged in the articles. For instance, one article reports at length the comments of, and challenges to, the then Governor-General Bill Hayden ('Women's rap for Hayden', *Herald Sun*, 16/6/1993). Mr Hayden had spoken at the launch of an Australian Institute of Criminology conference on violence, criticising women's anti-violence rallies like Reclaim the Night and said that 'women should be recognised as perpetrators of violence along with men'. He went on to criticise the media, saying, 'the issue of violence in the community had at times been "misrepresented by the media in an epidemic of journalistic hysteria"'. The article does include extensive quotes from a member of the Coalition Against Sexual Violence 'denying the Governor-General's claims and arguing that 98% of violent crimes are committed by men'.

Another two articles, which are much more opinionated, concerned reviews or commentaries on two documentaries. The first, 'Only half the story' (*Herald Sun*, 27/9/1994), is a review of a Canadian documentary, *Why Women Kill*. It discussed the cases of three women who killed their partners:

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[14] Some cases classified as murder/attempted murder may well have been intimate partner homicides but were not specified this way in the article. Therefore, the coder (and potential readers) would be unable to identify them as such.

It is forceful and thought-provoking television and takes a pretty hefty swipe at men. All men, in fact. And therein lies the rub. Jones is inclined to generalisations – 'Men have always bashed their wives' – and presents one side of the evidence in the three cases cited.

The second, 'Battered by cliches' (*Herald Sun*, 26/11/1994), is a review of an SBS documentary, with a strong attack on feminism. This film, called *Deadly Hurt*, was about a man who killed his wife, and himself, in front of his three children. The killing of intimate partners by men, and their subsequent suicide, is by no means unusual (Carcach & Grabosky 1998; Australian Institute of Criminology 2008). In the article it was argued that the filmmaker 'challenged orthodox feminist wisdom' and its 'black and white' approach: 'the social and psychological causes of such violence are highly complex and simply blaming men for everything was not good enough'. The article goes on to describe how '[h]igh profile feminists were outraged' that SBS showed the film. It quotes the film-maker as saying that the 'feminist agenda' was 'not so much wrong as limited', and was 'blinkered [and] ideological'. The example the film-maker gave in his interview with the journalist was the Office of Status of Women, citing its 'commonly touted' statistic 'that one in three wives is likely to be subjected to domestic violence'. 'In fact', he says 'recent crime figures from the Bureau of Statistics reveal that in the year to April last year, only 0.7 per cent of adult women were victims of assault in the home ...'. This manages to represent the Office of Status of Women figures as partisan, with that from the Bureau as independent and neutral. It concludes with a comment on the observation of feminist academic Patricia Easteal: Easteal argued that Margaret Raby (see sections 8.1.1 and 8.1.2) should have been acquitted of murder under the self-defence doctrine, and that '[i]nstead they are left with the manslaughter label and I just don't think that's good enough'. The article concludes with the rhetorical flourish, 'Not good enough? How dead does a man have to be?'

Both of these articles present an image of feminist 'special pleading'. However, it should be noted that articles which were classified as showing men and women as equally violent were only a small proportion of our sample.

One article – 'Americans examine a dirty secret' (*The Age*, 25/6/1994) – seems to have taken the journalistic tenet of balance to an extreme degree. The first half of the article, while trying to explain Simpson's honoured celebrity status to an international audience, states '[b]ut nobody can now deny that O.J. Simpson was a wife batterer', and goes on to detail the violence committed by Simpson against his wife. This part of the article also contains a great deal of data and informed opinion on violence against women, as these examples illustrate:

- It quotes the US Health Secretary as saying: 'It's our dirty secret, [that domestic violence is] the leading cause of injury amongst women'.

- It points out that women are most vulnerable on leaving a violent spouse.

- It states that in America women are four times as likely to be killed by their male partners than men were by their female partners.

However, the article goes on to say that women are *as likely* to commit domestic violence as men, 'often using weapons to compensate for their inferior strength'. It quotes a 'husband and wife team

of psychologists' commenting on the Simpson case: 'Once again, the myth of the evil, brutal male perpetrator and the perfect, innocent female victim is being broadcast and written about as gospel'.

A further thematic article is much more factual, commenting on a British report showing the high rate of homicide committed by psychiatric patients ('Patients killed 2 a month – study', *Herald Sun*, 18/08/1994). Indeed, it explicitly acknowledges that the figures, showing that 15 killings were carried out by men, and seven by women, indicate 'a much higher proportion than is responsible for violent deaths in general'.

The final thematic article is one of the longest in our sample, a feature on women and violent crime in *The Sunday Age* ('Girls gone wild?', *The Sunday Age*, 18/5/2008). This is a model of thoughtful research and careful use of a variety of sources and statistics.

Our data did not allow us to fully test the question of whether our surveyed print media was representing women and men as equally violent because we only looked at stories about homicide and sexual assault, not all instances of violence. However, in relation to intimate partner homicide, the number of male and female perpetrators covered by the media surveyed broadly follows the pattern of the gender of perpetrators in such homicides. There were only a small number of articles identified by coders as representing women and men as equally violent, more than half of which concerned intimate partner homicide.

10 The daily scandal: sensationalism and the mundane

Much of the research reviewed shows that sensationalistic coverage of gendered violence is worryingly commonplace (Carter 1998; Evans 2001; Greer 2003; Kothari 2008; Soothill & Walby 1991; Sunindyo 2004; Wykes 2001). Carter (1998) and Benedict (1992) argue that sensationalism is a common way to report violence against women because it is seen to increase the article's 'unusualness'. According to Greer (2003), sensationalistic details are included as a way to make reports more appealing to audiences — who are drawn to such coverage due to 'titillation, moral outrage, shock, fascination or a combination of these and others' (2003: 99). The degree to which sensationalism is used by a news source depends upon the genre. For example, tabloid newspapers are far more explicit in their use of sensationalistic language than broadsheets (Marhia 2008). However, Marhia (after analysing both broadsheet and tabloid papers in the UK) argues that while there may be varying degrees of sensationalism in reporting, the tendency is present in most news genres. She finds that 'broadsheets tend to deploy more subtle strategies' which ultimately produce the same effect (2008: 34).

Kothari's (2008) study of *The New York Times* reporting of 'rape as a weapon of war' in Darfur between July 2003 and July 2006 found that the coverage was voyeuristic, sensationalistic and, therefore, humiliating to the victims. For Kothari, the inclusion of graphic details is unnecessary and functions only to publicly humiliate victims by subjecting them (and their experience of violence) to the readers' gaze.

Evans (2001) found that the tendency to sensationalise abuse is common within the Australian context. She cites a particularly gruesome example from the *Herald Sun* in September 1998 in which

a story with the headline 'Pair tell of body barbecue' describes how '[t]he smell of burning flesh filled the neighbourhood … Ms Milbourne said Mr McKee made her clean up the blood and put the body parts into plastic shopping bags' (*Herald Sun* article cited in Evans 2001: 151). For Evans, such sensationalistic coverage blurs 'the line between news and drama' (ibid.). By constructing stories through the lens of entertainment, and sometimes humour, the serious realities of gendered violence are undermined.

10.1 Identifying sensationalism

To identify sensationalism in our study, we had coders answer three questions (see Table 10.1). We gave coders examples and training in identifying sensationalism in order to ensure results converged as much as possible. Nevertheless, assessing levels of sensationalism is a subjective task, and therefore these numbers should be viewed with due caution.

Table 10.1 Sensationalism (full* articles only)[15]		
Question	***n***	**%**
1. Does the story offer excessive amounts of detail about the crime? (How it was/tends to be committed, weapons used, forensic detail, etc. – enough to give the reader a vivid mental picture of the violence) OR does it use nicknames in a sensationalistic way (e.g. 'hot chocolate rapist')?	331	22%
2. Are the details offered unnecessarily titillating? (e.g. suggestive terminology, excessive detail regarding the sexual aspects of the crime)	41	3%
3. Is the headline sensationalistic? (e.g. 'Charade hid grisly secret')	437	29%
ANY OF THE ABOVE	607	40%

* Refer to section 4 for a glossary of study nomenclature.

Question 1 in Table 10.1 seeks to identify articles in which sensationalism appears in the body of the story. We describe sensationalism in this category as excessive amounts of detail which give the reader a vivid mental image of the crime. The following excerpt illustrates this.

> **Cannibal lover**
> TEXAS -- A man killed his girlfriend, then filleted and cooked parts of her body before calling police to tell them what he was doing … When authorities arrived at the home, they found Ms Shearer's mutilated body, one ear boiling in a pot of water on the stove and a fork sticking out of some human flesh sitting on a plate on the kitchen table. (*Herald Sun*, 8/01/2008)

Part of question 1 was also about the sensationalistic use of nicknames to describe perpetrators. Examples of such nicknames include the 'hot chocolate rapist' ('Rape network fear – charged men

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[15] In looking at sensationalism, we are only looking at 'full', not 'short' or 'mentions' (see the glossary in section 4 for definitions). This is because coders did not answer questions regarding sensationalism for 'short' articles (even though 'short' articles could incorporate certain elements of sensationalism).

revealed as close friends', *Herald Sun*, 26/08/2007), 'Mr Stinky' ('Mr Stinky's life term confirmed', *Herald Sun*, 25/11/1994), and 'Mr Cruel' ('Mr Cruel last hope', *Herald Sun*, 28/01/1993). We believe that the use of such nicknames reinforces the belief that men who perpetrate violence against women are 'evil psychopaths', not someone familiar (such as a friend or family member) or of 'normal' psychological profile.

Question 2 sought to assess the degree to which articles include sexual elements in sensationalistic ways. This element is particularly difficult to assess, and we found few examples in our sample. One of the few examples is reproduced below.

> **Mrs X: doctor stimulated me**
>
> Mrs X said the doctor had inquired about the frequency of sexual intercourse with her husband and she told him she believed her low libido was caused by cyproterone … The doctor said he would examine her thyroid area. She had undressed to a body stocking pulled down around her waist 'as pants'. He had felt around her neck and around her breasts. He then pulled the body stocking down and said 'let's have a look here', she said. '(The doctor) asked me if I knew about the G-spot and I said I'd read about it,' she said. He said 'I'll show you where the G-spot is and you can show your husband'. Mrs X said the doctor stimulated her and asked several times 'if it was nice'. He asked her if she wanted him to stop and she said 'no'. She said she climaxed 'in a clinical way – not like with my husband' and then began to cry. (*Herald Sun*, 8/9/1986)

Question 3 focuses only on the story's headline – we have included a number of examples of sensationalistic headlines in the following section.

10.2 Levels of sensationalism identified by this study

Table 10.1 shows that 40% of our sample included one of the three elements of sensationalism we identify in section 10.1. Like much of the prior research in this area, we found sensationalism to be regularly incorporated in the coverage of gendered violence. In contrast to much of the previous research, we found few examples of 'titillating' or 'salacious' coverage (making up only 3% of the sample).

When looking at levels of sensationalism by newspaper (Table 10.2) it is evident that the *Herald Sun/Sun* includes more sensationalistic elements than *The Age*. Nearly half of the *Herald Sun/Sun* articles in our sample included sensationalistic elements. Looking at these statistics, one can say with confidence that *The Age* covers the issue of violence against women in a less sensational way than the *Herald Sun/Sun*. However, both figures are high.

Table 10.2 Levels of sensationalism, by source, across study period (full* articles only)												
Source	1986			1993–1994			2007–2008			All years		
	n	*N*	%	*n*	*N*	%	*n*	*N*	%	*n*	*N*	%
The Age	36	68	53%	70	275	25%	37	152	25%	143	495	29%
Herald Sun/Sun	85	141	60%	222	524	42%	157	348	45%	464	1013	46%
ALL	121	209	58%	292	799	37%	194	500	39%	607	1508	40%

* Refer to section 4 for a glossary of study nomenclature.

Looking at Table 10.2, inclusion of sensationalistic elements appears to have reduced over time. This finding seems to run counter to research elsewhere which argues that journalism is becoming more entertainment oriented (see for example Thussu 2007). It seems from the current findings that there has been a general trend towards *less* sensationalism in press reporting of violence against women over the past 25 years. It should be noted that this improvement in coverage occurred largely between 1986 and the 1993–1994, with little further improvement recorded from the 1990s to 2007–2008. It should also be noted that this improvement is most notable in cases of male-perpetrated violence.

Table 10.3 Levels of sensationalism, by gender of perpetrator(s), across study period (full* articles only)												
Gender of perpetrator(s)	1986			1993–1994			2007–2008			All years		
	n	*N*	%	*n*	*N*	%	*n*	*N*	%	*n*	*N*	%
Male	85	151	56%	230	652	35%	152	419	36%	467	1222	38%
Female	25	38	66%	48	101	48%	32	54	59%	105	193	54%
Not specified	2	6	33%	5	21	24%	5	17	29%	12	44	27%
Unknown*	9	14	64%	0	25	0%	5	10	50%	23	49	47%
ALL	121	209	58%	292	799	37%	194	500	39%	607	1508	40%

* Refer to section 4 for a glossary of study nomenclature.

Looking at Table 10.3, stories with female perpetrators seem more likely to include sensationalistic elements. Female-perpetrated crime (particularly murder) is relatively unusual, and therefore tends to be covered using sensationalistic frames.

When sensationalistic elements appear, they seem most likely to occur in the headline of the story (Table 10.1). Some examples from our sample are:

- 'Cannibal lover' (*Herald Sun*, 8/01/2008)
- 'Woman raped for free sex – police' (*Herald Sun*, 2/06/1994)
- 'Wife welcomes home her 'kill-plot' man' (*Herald Sun*, 11/06/1986)
- 'Husband "carved up on kitchen table"' (*Herald Sun*, 17/06/1986)
- 'Girl slept as undies burned, judge told' (*Herald Sun*, 20/06/1986)

- 'Peg-leg rapist was hired as teacher' (*Herald Sun*, 23/08/1986)
- 'Tomahawk attacker left woman suffering for life' (*Herald Sun*, 19/08/1986)
- 'Nun rape slur fury' (*Herald Sun*, 21/04/1994)
- '"Lolita" raped, jury told' (*Herald Sun*, 1/04/1993)
- 'Murdered woman had "fatal attraction"' (*Herald Sun*, 16/04/1993)
- 'Rape blitz' (*Herald Sun*, 20/11/1993)
- 'Black widow spins evil web' (*Herald Sun*, 21/12/1993)
- 'Jail for man who killed secret wife' (*Herald Sun*, 14/02/2008)
- 'A shocking end to a savage crime' (*Herald Sun*, 11/02/2008)
- 'Paedophile's family fantasy' (*Herald Sun*, 24/04/2008)
- 'Rapist used his dying dad' (*Herald Sun*, 26/07/2008)
- 'Weedkiller death "callous"' (*The Age,* 8/03/1994)
- 'How could she?' (*Herald Sun*, 23/05/2008)
- 'Why is mummy doing this to me?' (*Herald Sun*, 12/01/1994)
- '"Butcher" doctor's victims relive their horror' (*The Age*, 29/02/2008)
- 'I'll take my pound of flesh – chilling vow to shoot it out' (*Herald Sun*, 31/03/1993)
- 'Life for "sexually perverse murder lesbian lovers" thrill kill' (*Herald Sun*, 8/03/2008)

The headline is the most important element of the news story. As van Dijk writes, headlines 'define the overall coherence or semantic unity of discourse, and also what information readers memorise best from a news report' (1993: 248). The headline frames the entire story, and even if the article itself treats the topic with respect, the headline will affect the overall tone of the story. Many of the sensationalistic headlines found in our sample do not show respect for victims, their families or the serious social problem that is gender-based violence. Such is the case in the victim-blaming headline, 'Murdered woman had "fatal attraction"' (*Herald Sun*, 16/04/1993).

In cases of intimate partner homicide, while the discussion of a prior history of violence is frequently absent, it seems that when the prior violence is particularly extreme or perverse it is more likely to be reported. For example, an article about a woman in South Australia who killed her partner ('Tears as killer wife is freed') has a strong focus on the extraordinary sexual abuse committed by the woman's husband on their daughter (*Herald Sun*, 01/2/1986). It is reported that she killed her husband 'because he wanted their 11-year-old daughter to perform a sexual act with the family dog', and this had been preceded by 'sexual interference' of the daughter in the previous four years. The article also notes that the wife's evidence was accepted by both the prosecution and the judge, thus indicating the credibility of this woman's story.

Often sensationalism incorporates elements of humour, frivolity or ridiculousness. This can come in the form of puns, rhymes, the inclusion of odd details, quotes, or 'humorous' nicknames for perpetrators. The following list offers examples of how humour and frivolity were incorporated in the headlines in this study:

- 'Kill call on "womb raider"' (*Herald Sun*, 28/10/2007)
- 'How a flabby fiend stole a girl's innocence' (*Herald Sun*, 21/10/2007)
- 'Killer geek gets 14 years' (*Herald Sun*, 11/12/2007)

- 'Sex abuse man slimy – Judge' (*Herald Sun*, 26/02/1986)
- 'Mr Stinky's life term confirmed' (*Herald Sun*, 25/11/1994)
- 'Scrabble then death, court told' (*Herald Sun*, 9/07/1986)
- 'The lady "killers"' (*Herald Sun*, 29/11/1986)
- 'Woman raped by man in pink nightie – crown' (*The Age*, 21/01/1986)

In terms of sensationalism, the inclusion of humorous or ridiculous elements in the reporting of gendered violence is particularly troubling, and only works against the idea that gendered violence is a serious social issue.

The following excerpt, about a woman who killed her abusive husband, illustrates how articles can problematically combine sensationalism and frivolity/humour in descriptions of gendered violence:

> Lobster Boy TAMPA -- A woman has been convicted of manslaughter over the slaying of her sideshow performer husband Lobster Boy. Mary Stiles, 56, said she was acting in self-defence when she paid a teenage neighbor $2025 to shoot Grady Stiles Jr in the back of the head as he watched television in his underwear. Stiles, 55, won his nickname for a genetic deformity of two-fingered hands and footless legs. During the two-week trial Mary Stiles portrayed her husband as a drunken brute who swatted her with his pincers, headbutted her, sexually abused her and threatened to kill her. (*Herald Sun,* 29/07/1994)

While this case appears to follow common trends in terms of the contexts within which women kill their partners, this story appears anything but common. In fact, its strangeness is the focus. The article uses details (e.g. a sideshow performer named Lobster Boy 'swatted her with his pincers') in a way that makes the situation appear ridiculous. This particular story ultimately trivialises the violence by framing it as strange and ridiculous.

It could be argued that in some ways gendered violence is easily suited to sensationalistic coverage: often there is a sexual element; in cases of 'stranger danger' there is a simple innocent victim/evil perpetrator story arc; and in cases of intimate partner homicide, 'love', can easily be used as a frame (there are many examples of this in the headlines previously listed). However, the realities of violence against women cannot be easily framed in this way. As Clark and Quadara found in their research into women's experience of sexual assault, '[c]ontrary to the popular perception that sexual offences are the outcome of "risky" situations or the acts of risky individuals, offending for these participants often took place in very mundane, ordinary settings, such as opening the door to a family member, attending work functions, and catching up with friends' (2010: 54).

Sensationalistic news coverage of gendered violence is problematic for a number of reasons. First, this kind of reporting represents violence against women in a way that is unrepresentative of the realities of the social problem, particularly because it tends to highlight the most unusual examples of (and details around) such violence (Marhia 2008; Soothill & Walby 1991). Second, coverage that uses entertainment, humour or titillation ultimately trivialises this important human rights issue. Both Benedict (1992) and Meyers (2004) have argued that such trivialisation is deeply problematic because it limits the degree of genuine concern that can be socially afforded to the problem.

Furthermore, as we have mentioned previously, the interrelationship between mass media, public opinion and policy makers means such reporting can have legal and political ramifications (see Marhia 2008; Yanovitzky 2002). Lastly, sensationalistic reporting also raises the question of ethics (see Kothari 2008; Soothill & Walby 1991). At what point does such coverage move from necessary information to the exploitation of the victim's experience? Here there is an obvious conflict between the perceived appeal of sensationalistic reporting and the ethical duty to show respect to victims.

10.3 The mundane

Although levels of sensationalism are high, violence against women tends to be represented as mundane. Naylor (following Schlesinger, Tumber & Murdock 1991) argues that while sensationalistic articles receive extensive coverage, 'mundane' stories are short and 'tucked away on the inside pages' (Schlesinger, Tumber & Murdock 1991 cited in Naylor 2001: 183). We investigated this question of placement, and found that gendered violence is rarely on the front page (Table 10.4).

Table 10.4 Gendered violence articles on front page			
Perpetrator(s)	*n*	*N*	%
Male	77	1399	6%
Female	7	217	3%
General (including unknown*/not specified)	87	1739	5%

* Refer to section 4 for a glossary of study nomenclature.

Our research found validity in the argument that gendered violence is often described either in terms which could be seen as sensationalistic or mundane. While these are not the only two ways this issue is framed (for instance, as we have described previously, a thematic frame may be used), we did find both a high proportion of sensationalism and a large number of articles which only briefly mention gendered violence. Similar to Naylor's (2001) findings, we found that articles about female perpetrators are more likely to include sensationalistic elements than articles about male perpetrators. When not sensational, articles about male perpetrators are often very short or only briefly mention gendered violence.

Further evidence that male-perpetrated violence against women is often treated in a cursory manner can be found in figures 10.1–10.3. The figures show the proportion of articles which are either 'full', 'short' or 'mentions' by gender of perpetrator.[16] Figure 10.1 shows that the majority of our sample (74%) involves male perpetrators. Figure 10.1 compares the articles by length ('full', 'short' or 'mentions') for male perpetrators and female perpetrators. From this breakdown it is evident that although articles about female perpetrators are *less common* (reflecting the fact that women are much less likely than men to commit violent crime), when such stories are covered, female perpetrators are *more likely* to receive 'full' coverage (81% receive this type of coverage). In contrast, when stories focus on male perpetrators, 33% are 'short' or 'mentions'. This proportion increases to

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[16] Refer to section 4 for a glossary of study nomenclature.

over 40% when one incorporates the 'not specified' articles to this group of male-perpetrator articles.

Figure 10.3 compares articles about 'not specified' and 'unknown' perpetrators by length)'full', 'short' or 'mentions'). These are articles where the gender of the perpetrator is either not mentioned (13% of the sample) or the perpetrator is unknown (3% of the sample). While this 13% are labelled 'not specified', the majority (82%) of the 'not specified' perpetrator articles (Figure 10.3a) discuss sexual violence, a crime overwhelmingly perpetrated by men. In this 'not specified' category, 86% of the articles are either 'mentions' or 'short'. If one combines this finding with the large proportion of 'short' and 'mentions' which clearly identify the perpetrator as male (Figure 10.2a), we find that over 40% of the articles which discuss male-perpetrated violence against women do so in a cursory manner (see Figure 10.4).

Therefore, it does seem, as Naylor argues, that gendered violence tends to fall into either the category of 'sensational' or that of 'mundane'. Unusual examples of these types of crimes are more likely to receive coverage (or more than a few lines of coverage). This is evidenced by the fact that when females perpetrate violence, their crimes are more likely to be the central topic. The concern here is twofold: by sensationalising stories of violence against women (particularly when focusing on the unusual or strange), the representation of gendered violence will be unrepresentative of women's lived experience; on the other hand, by treating common forms of gendered violence in a cursory manner they can be perceived as mundane, and risk becoming naturalised (see Naylor 2001).
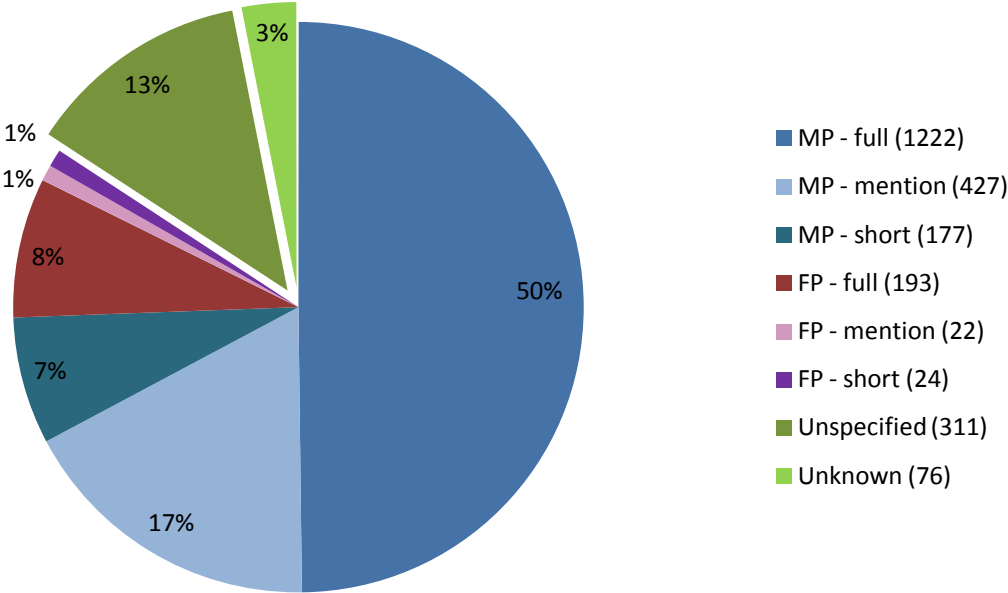
Figure 10.1 Overview of sample by gender of perpetrator and story length. MP, male perpetrator; FP, female perpetrator. (Refer to section 4 for a glossary of study nomenclature.)

56

(a)

10%
23%
67%

MP - full (1222)
MP - mention (427)
MP - short (177)

(b)

10%
9%
81%

FP - full (193)
FP - mention (22)
FP - short (24)
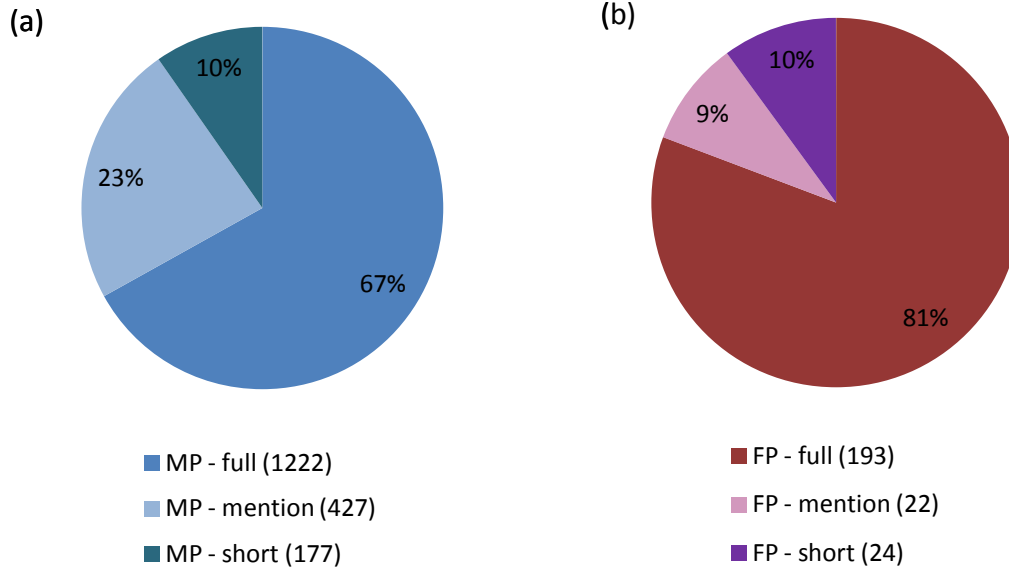
Figure 10.2 Male (a) and female (b) perpetrator articles by length. MP, male perpetrator; FP, female perpetrator. (Refer to section 4 for a glossary of study nomenclature.)

(a)

14%
4%
82%

NS - full (44)
NS - mention (255)
NS - short (12)

(b)

24%
12%
64%

NK - full (49)
NK - mention (9)
NK - short (18)

Figure 10.3 Not specified (a) and unknown (b) perpetrator articles by length. NS, not specified; NK, unknown. (Refer to section 4 for a glossary of study nomenclature.)
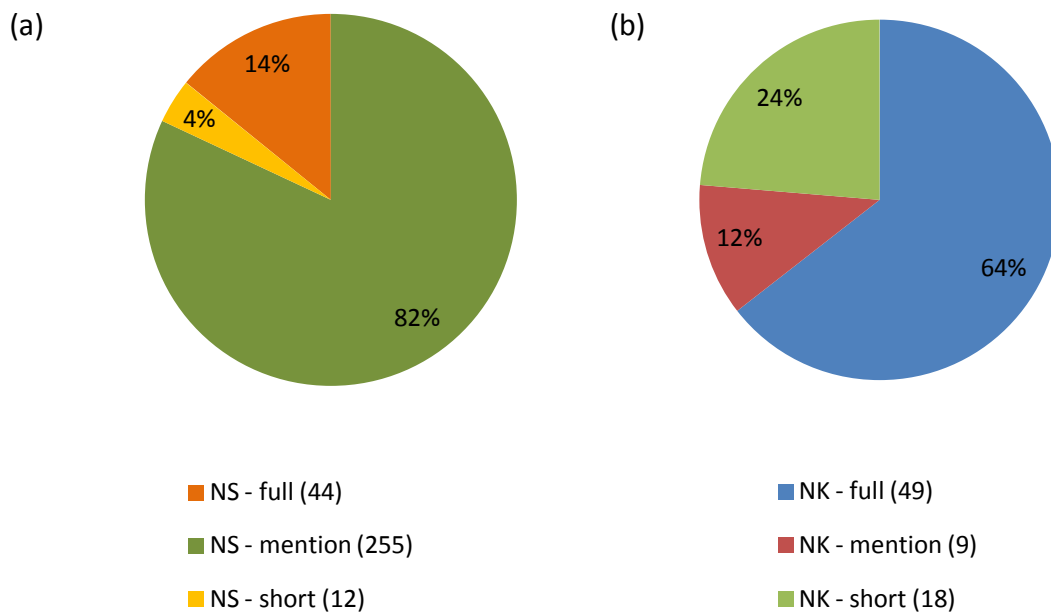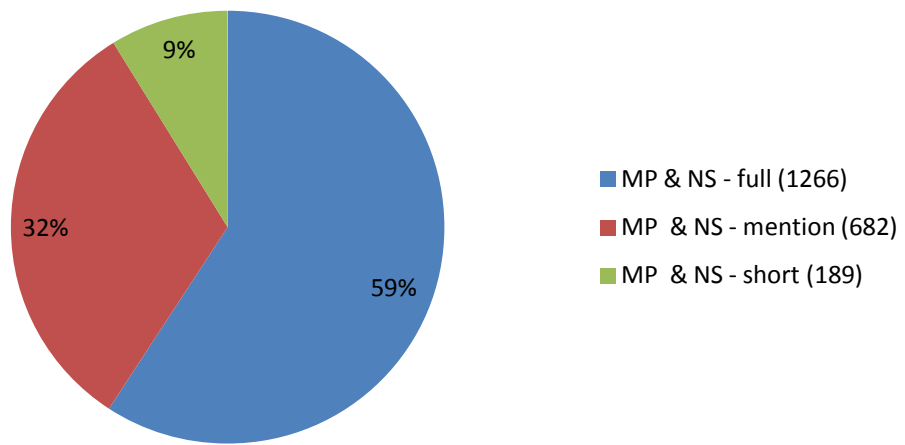
Figure 10.4 Not specified and male perpetrator articles by length. MP, male perpetrator; NS, not specified. (Refer to section 4 for a glossary of study nomenclature.)

11 Who speaks about violence against women: sources of authority

Much work has been done in terms of the media's use of sources (see Hall 1978; Hallin 1986; Schlesinger & Tumber 1994; Schlesinger 1990). Research findings vary from arguing that elite sources function as the 'primary definers' of certain issues (Hall 1978) to seeing journalists and sources as engaged in a range of shifting relationships with varying degrees of antagonism which can change over time (Schlesinger 1990; Schlesinger & Tumber 1994). While certainly the relationships between journalists and their sources are fluid and complex, we can nevertheless assume that there is a 'hierarchy of credibility' (Becker 1967) used by journalists in terms of sources (even if this hierarchy can shift or change over time). '[T]he higher up in this hierarchy the news source is situated, the more *authoritative* his or her words will be for the newsworker' (Allan 1999: 63). Therefore, particular individuals' voices are considered more credible (and thus more authoritative) than others, due to their occupation, expertise, social standing, for example. Researchers have found that the 'hierarchy of credibility' when reporting gendered violence has meant that journalists rely heavily upon police and legal professionals (Bullock 2007; Chermak 1995; Meyers 1997; Mooney 2007; Naylor 2001; Ryan, Anastario & DaCunha 2006). In her study of domestic violence, Taylor points out that '[p]olice and other criminal justice personnel are the primary sources used by the media for crime news in general as well as coverage of domestic violence' (2009: 27).

One outcome of this reliance upon criminal justice personnel is that news reports tend to echo courtroom discourse (Kitzinger 2004). For example, Los and Chamard (1997) point out that shrewd lawyers will often exploit racial and sexual stereotypes in the courtroom in order to win cases. When these lawyers become authoritative sources for journalists, these stereotypes are reproduced by newsmakers (1997: 305). For Kitzinger, this echoing of 'court-based discourse' has primarily resulted in the silencing of victims and putting their behaviour/character up for public scrutiny (Kitzinger 2004: 26). Therefore, by using trials as an authoritative basis for reporting violence against women, journalists can end up reproducing the injustices that occur within that context (e.g. the use of prior sexual history as evidence, the victim-blaming arguments of the defence, and so on) (Kitzinger 2004; Taylor 2009; Soothill & Walby 1991; Wykes 2001).

In addition to primarily citing criminal justice personnel, reporters covering instances of gendered violence rarely turn to victim advocates as sources for stories (Benedict 1992; Los & Chamard 1997; Taylor 2009; Meyers 1997). This tendency to avoid such groups as authoritative sources means that those more contextualised concerns that could be highlighted by advocates rarely appear in coverage of violence against women. Meanwhile, the nature of police work and that of practising lawyers means these sources are likely to focus upon the individuals involved in the violence rather than commenting upon the problem as a wider social issue. In this way, the use of these particular 'authoritative' sources by journalists furthers the tendency to individualise the reporting of gendered violence, leading to coverage which often lacks 'substantive, contextualised insight into deeper underlying issues' (Ryan, Anastario & DaCunha 2006: 212). Furthermore, as Byerly and Ross (2006) point out, by relying upon criminal justice personnel as the predominant authorities on violence against women, news coverage reinforces the idea that gendered violence is best dealt with through law and order, rather than understanding it as a wider social issue which may necessitate alternative or multiple approaches.

Like those researchers already cited, we found that police and other criminal justice personnel tend to be the primary sources used by journalists when reporting violence against women (see Table 11.1).

Table 11.1 Quoting or paraphrasing (highest to lowest percentage), by source			
Source	***n***	***N***	**%**
Legal professionals	617	1349	46%
Police	455	1349	34%
Perpetrator(s)	269	1349	20%
Family of victim(s) or perpetrator(s)	246	1349	18%
Victim(s)	226	1349	17%
Neighbours of victim(s) or perpetrator(s)	127	1349	9%
Political figures	91	1349	7%
Violence against women advocate/expert/social worker	82	1349	6%
Friends of victim(s) or perpetrator(s)	73	1349	5%
Psychologist/psychiatrist	69	1349	5%
Other non-government organisation spokesperson	43	1349	3%

Within our study, legal professionals and police were the sources most often quoted or paraphrased: 46% of articles cite legal professionals, while 34% cite police. This finding suggests that the majority of stories in our sample were reports of trials or recently reported crimes – therefore it is unsurprising that their sources were police and court reports. However, these need not be the only sources. As noted, this reliance upon criminal justice personnel means that the injustices that occur in the courtroom are often reproduced in the reporting of the crime (Byerly & Ross 2006; Kitzinger 2004; Los & Chamard 1997).

We found a number of reports in which judges' victim-blaming comments drove the story with very little counter argument.[17] One story uses such a comment *as the headline*: 'Sex victim "no angel"' (*Herald Sun*, 09/06/1993). Considering the likelihood that only the headline will be read, this example is particularly troubling. Another example can be found in a story from *The Age* headlined, 'Judge doubts rape trauma' (19/05/1993). The article opens:

> A NSW judge has said that one of the reasons why he could not accept that a woman raped by a stranger had suffered 'any substantial psychological effects' was 'the fact that she continued to live with her boyfriend for more than two years after the accident and obviously continued to have intercourse with him'. The

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[17] The number of *explicit* victim-blaming articles within our sample was quite low. Therefore, most articles were not as problematic as this particular example. Nevertheless, it offers a useful case of how the both reliance upon courtroom discourse, and the lack of advocates' voices, can lead to problematic reporting of violence against women.

judge also said that the woman had contributed to her rape by accepting a lift home from three strangers. (*The Age* 19/05/1993)

While the judge's comments explicitly blame the victim, this article does not offer any substantive counter arguments to his claims. The only indication that the judge's comments and ruling could be construed as problematic appears in a line that states that the ruling came 'after remarks by judges in three recent rape cases in other states which have caused outrage in the community' (ibid.). Overall, the tone of the article is neutral, simply reporting the judge's comments in a straightforward manner. This neutrality may comply with some journalistic ideals, and on some occasions could be driven by a desire to comply with the law on contempt. However, in this case, the report concerned a decided case on civil compensation for a rape, and thus there was clear room for commentary. The rape myths espoused by this judge are so pernicious that the article calls for a strong voice of critique – as would an article in which an authoritative voice made explicitly racist or homophobic claims. Often it seems that events-based reporting does not easily incorporate thematic elements, but in this case it would have been logical to do so. Central to this story were the judge's comments, which would have made a perfect platform for discussing how victim blaming might affect the sentences meted out to perpetrators. By reproducing the judge's claims without adequate critique (from the prosecutor or victims' advocates, for example) this article fails to address the issue at the very centre of the story itself – the victim-blaming comments made by this (and other) judges.

In addition to the reliance upon criminal justice personnel, our research shows that reporters rarely turn to victim advocates as sources. In our study only 6% of articles (which used sources) quote or paraphrase a violence against women advocate/expert/social worker. This number is disturbingly low, particularly when one considers the level of expertise which these workers could offer when commenting upon issues in this area. Violence against women advocates are as qualified to discuss incidents and issues around gendered violence as those working directly as criminal justice personnel. When looking more closely at articles which quoted violence against women experts we found that 77% (63 of 82) of these articles included counterframes (see section 5.2).

Some researchers believe that advocates are rarely used as sources because they are considered by journalists to be biased (Taylor 2009: 27; see also Benedict 1992; Los & Chamard 1997; Meyers 1997). Another possible reason why advocates/crisis workers are rarely used as sources is because individual incidents of violence against women are not immediately perceived by reporters (usually court reporters) as being part of the wider problem of violence against women, and therefore they do not see advocates as relevant to the story. It is also likely that connections between journalists and advocates are weak and therefore neither party has an easy channel of communication with the other. Whatever the reason, finding ways to encourage, entice or facilitate journalists to call advocates in relation to stories about violence against women is an important step in improving current print media coverage of violence against women. Our research suggests that one particularly effective way of framing the incident in relation to the broader social problem of violence against women is to have these experts speak. The article discussed above would have been greatly improved with the inclusion of such voices. These types of sources are likely to go beyond detailing the individual incident, and actively link the individual violence to this ongoing and systemic social problem.

Dorfman et al.'s (1997) study of youth violence on television news in California found that law enforcement professionals were used as primary sources in the reporting of youth violence. The authors point out that while prevention is a key element of public health, the tendency to use law enforcement professionals as predominant sources has the effect of representing prevention primarily in terms of guns, self-defence, and 'common sense' (ibid.: 1314). This finding has troubling implications for public perceptions of violence against women as a public health issue – an issue which also tends to be reported using police and legal professionals as primary sources. By relying extensively upon criminal justice personnel, news reports contribute to a construction of gender violence prevention that is understood primarily in terms of law and order, personal safety measures and the use of 'common sense' among women (Meyers 2004; Mooney 2007; Moorti 2001; Soothill & Walby 1991; Steeves 1997). The latter two forms of 'prevention' function primarily to make women feel responsible for their own safety and, if victimised, guilty for 'enabling' their victimisation (see Carlyle, Slater & Chakroff 2008).

We think that the use of sources is particularly important for the reporting of violence against women because it is one of the key areas which can be actively addressed. Greater avenues need to be developed to encourage journalists to seek out these alternative voices. One way to do this is to build and strengthen relationships between those who report violence against women on a daily basis and those who work in the field. Advocates need to be aware of how to effectively respond to incidents of violence against women in ways that are media friendly (such as effective and timely use of press releases and spokespeople). It is evident from this analysis that the use of sources is a key area which should be further developed.

12 Blame, responsibility and exoneration

The two most recurring findings that came out of the literature review were that press coverage of violence against women tends to blame the victim and exculpate the perpetrator (see Alat 2006; Benedict 1992; Berns 2004; Bullock & Cubert 2002; Consalvo 1998; Cuklanz 1996; Meyers 1997, 2004; Soothill & Walby 1991; Taylor 2009). Studies found these two interrelated elements using different measures; however, there is some consensus around what types of things constitute or suggest victim blaming/perpetrator exculpating. Taylor (2009), for example, looks at what she labels 'direct' and 'indirect victim blaming tactics' in her analysis of news coverage of intimate partner homicide. These 'tactics' are reproduced below.

Victim Blame Tactics

Direct victim blame tactics
Negative language used to describe the victim.
Highlighting the victim's choice not to report past incidences as contributing to her murder.
Highlighting the victim's decision not to prosecute previous incidences as contributing to her murder.
Highlighting her actions with other men, such as actual and suspected infidelity while married, being seen with another man, being found with another man when killed, and being the mistress of the killer.

Indirect victim blame tactics
Positive, sympathetic language used to describe the perpetrator.
Highlighting the perpetrator's mental, physical, and emotional problems.
Discussing the couple's financial despair.
Highlighting the victim's mental or physical problems.
Describing domestic violence in terms which assign equal blame to both the victim and perpetrator.

Though Taylor's use of the term 'tactics' is problematic because it implies intentionality on the part of journalists (we believe that journalists are unlikely to blame victims intentionally), the issues identified by Taylor are useful nevertheless. Those features identified in the excerpt can be understood as elements of victim blaming and perpetrator exculpation. Some of the themes (or 'tactics') Taylor identifies were incorporated into our interrogation of press reporting in Australia.

12.1 Findings: explicit blame

To investigate levels of victim blaming in our sample, we had coders answer four questions (Table 12.1).

Table 12.1 Victim blaming (male perpetrators)		
Question	***n***	**%**
1. Was the language used to describe the victim negative? (this must be explicit)	41	3%
2. Are the victims' actions described (by any part/person of the story) as provoking the violence? (e.g. infidelity)	109	8%
3. Could the victims' actions be taken as enabling the violence/abuse? (e.g. hitchhiking, being a prostitute, drunk)	223	16%
4. Does the tone of the article as a whole seem to blame the victim? (explicit blaming)	27	2%

First, and most encouragingly, we found very little *explicit* victim blaming (see question 4 in Table 12.1). We did not find any discernible difference between *The Age* and the *Herald Sun* in relation to victim blaming. We also did not find any discernible difference in levels of victim blaming when comparing intimate partner homicide and sexual violence.

Table 12.2 Explicit blaming for violence (male perpetrators), by year(s)			
Year(s)	*n*	*N*	%
1986	2	193	1%
1993–1994	14	763	2%
2007–2008	11	443	3%
ALL	27	1399	2%

The question of whether the reporting tended to describe victims negatively returned encouraging results. In our sample, only 3% (41 of 1399) of articles about male-perpetrated violence described the victim negatively. This finding runs counter to studies which find news coverage to often describe victims of violence against women negatively.

12.2 Findings: enabling and provoking

As noted earlier, we also looked at more subtle forms of victim blaming – cases where the victim is described as provoking or enabling the violence. Some researchers have argued that explicit victim blaming is less prevalent than it was in the past; instead, the sense that victims can be guilty of *enabling* the violence remains commonplace (Berns 2004). This form of victim blaming is reinforced by the belief that it is a woman's responsibility to protect herself; therefore, if she behaves in ways that are seen as dangerous or risky, she may be perceived as being (at least partially) responsible for her own victimhood. This type of victim blaming is particularly common in cases where the victim was intoxicated or works in the sex industry, for example.

It is along these lines that Berns (2004) argues that by focusing primarily upon the victim (and her actions) popular media coverage of domestic violence normalises the notion that women are *responsible* for preventing, as well as solving, their own victimisation. Berns' study (which looks at magazines and television news) found that 67% of articles about domestic violence used the frame of individual responsibility (instead of institutional, cultural/structural, or a mix of these); and 97% of these articles described the victim as directly responsible. She also cites examples from women's magazines featuring narratives of empowerment and drama with 'uplifting endings', which tell stories of women who have successfully ended their abuse (2004: 101). For Berns, these types of stories are illustrative of a victim-focused approach which suggests it is up to the victim to stop the abuse. While these stories may offer some inspiration to readers, placing the responsibility for solving domestic violence on the victim ignores the enormous barriers women face when attempting to leave their abusive partners (see Mahoney 1992). Focusing on the victims' actions in preventing violence obscures perpetrators' responsibility, which may in turn mean that both immediate responses to such violence and violence-prevention efforts could be misdirected. As Berns points out, this victim-focused approach 'does not work very well if our goal is to effectively work toward

intervention and prevention', and 'diverts attention and resources from effective crime control and prevention programs' (ibid.: 160).

shows the results when we combined articles which *explicitly* blamed the victim with those more *subtle* forms of victim blaming — those which described the victim as provoking or enabling the violence perpetrated against them.[18] In relation to our research on this more subtle form of victim blaming, it is difficult to determine with *absolute certainty* when an article will be read as blaming the victim, as opposed to uncritically including (particular types of) facts around the case. Audience studies would be useful in determining to what degree such representations cause readers to see the victim as responsible (in part or in whole) for the violence she has experienced. Research by Palazzolo and Roberto (2011) does suggest that the inclusion of details such as the victim being drunk or having an affair increases readers' attributions of the victim as responsible.

We trained the coders to identify particular types of details which are perceived to suggest a certain level of blame (e.g. she was drunk, went home with him, took a ride from a stranger, sought male attention, etc.), and therefore we feel confident that these statistics do represent levels of 'blaming' in our sample.

Table 12.3 Victim is 'explicitly blamed' or described as 'provoking' or 'enabling' the violence (male perpetrators), by year(s)			
Year(s)	*n*	*N*	%
1986	43	193	22%
1993–1994	184	763	24%
2007–2008	76	443	17%
ALL	303	1399	22%

Looking at Table 12.3, it is evident that when we expand the analysis to include these more subtle forms of victim blaming (provoking/enabling) the proportion of articles increases substantially (17–24%). While the proportion of such articles is significantly lower than previous research in this area suggests, there is still room for improvement.

The news values of personalisation, sensationalism and the common sources used in covering this issue (e.g. lawyers and police) may also inadvertently contribute to such forms of victim blaming. These tendencies often lead journalists to include a great number of details regarding the victim's conduct, including dress, sexual history and mental stability. Such details are often perceived as

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[18] One could argue that the expression 'victim blaming' is overly strong terminology to describe claims which locate a degree of responsibility for the violence onto the victim (i.e. enabling or provoking the violence). Possibly an expression like 'describing the victim as (partially) responsible for the violence' could be more accurate. While there may be some validity to this claim, for the sake of simplicity (and in keeping with prior literature in this area) we will continue to use the expression 'victim blame'.

markers of 'appropriate' and 'inappropriate' behaviour. According to Meyers (1997), the more female victims transgress lines of 'appropriate' behaviour, the more likely they are to be blamed. Meyers uses the famous US case of Jennifer Levin as an example. Meyers found that Jennifer Levin, who was murdered by a male friend in 1986, was consistently described by news media as 'a sexually hungry, aggressive young women who had driven Chambers [the murderer] to violence' (Benedict 1992: 173). It was within this context that headlines such as 'How Jennifer courted death' (*News*, 29/8/1986, cited in Benedict 1992: 149) were published.

We found these types of characterisations continue into the 2000s. One article from the *Herald Sun* from 2008, entitled 'Cold case DNA coup' (*Herald Sun*, 22/07/2008), provides an example. The article discusses the details around an unsolved murder case from 1984 which had been reopened because previously unavailable DNA testing could lead to a breakthrough in the case. There were two homicide victims in this case: Margaret Tapp and her nine-year-old daughter (who was also sexually assaulted before being murdered). From the article one learns that Margaret Tapp 'was a single mother who was attractive to men and made the most of it after separating from her husband'. The journalist mentions that this was a problem for police, who in looking for suspects (likely to be an intimate), found that there were 'too many'. The article goes onto to describe the suspects: a slew of lovers, boyfriends and male acquaintances of the late Ms Tapp:

> One of them was a teenager who Ms Tapp regularly allowed to cut her lawn,
> despite neighbours warning her of sexually suggestive remarks he'd made to other
> women. (*Herald Sun*, 22/07/2008)

According to the article, police were confident that the murder had been perpetrated by a 'spurned or current lover' because of evidence provided by a one of Margaret Tapp's work colleagues (later described as a 'friend'):

> The friend described Ms Tapp as a real bitch to the men she had relationships
> with. She told police Ms Tapp had a habit of ridiculing her lovers and goading them
> about their lack of sexual expertise. 'Margaret could chop men up in to little
> pieces,' the friend said in a statement to police. (*Herald Sun*, 22/07/2008)

This is an example of an article which, though not *explicitly* blaming the victim, does suggest that the victim is in some way responsible for the crime perpetrated against her. Her various relationships with men (sexual and non-sexual) are listed in a way that emphasises their abundance (e.g. 'then there was the 19-year-old man …'). The statement that she may have been killed by the teenager whom she 'allowed to cut her lawn, despite neighbours warning her of sexually suggestive remarks he'd made to other women' quite explicitly suggests that she maintained relationships with dangerous men when she should have known better. The quote that 'Margaret could chop men up in to little pieces' and ridiculed her lovers' sexual expertise implies that she may have provoked the perpetrator with her actions. Here, Margaret Trapp's behaviour is under scrutiny – arguably because she transgressed culturally drawn boundaries of 'appropriate' female conduct.

As we mentioned previously, the majority of articles in our sample did not explicitly blame the victim nor suggest that she was responsible for the violence perpetrated against her. Nevertheless, it

remains important to turn a critical eye to the 17–24% of articles which did include some degree of victim blaming, identify trends within these, and seek ways to mitigate these types of themes in future reporting of gendered violence.

12.3 Effects of representing women as responsible and blaming the victim

While we did not find exceptionally high levels of explicit victim blaming, we did find evidence that representations of women as responsible for avoiding violence (e.g. not walking home alone) or enabling it (e.g. not leaving an abusive partner) are not uncommon. In addition to affecting readers' attributions of the victim's responsibility (Palazzolo & Roberto 2011), another possible effect of such media coverage is that women will internalise this sense of responsibility. Weaver (1998) studied this possible effect by interviewing 91 women (half of whom had experienced gendered violence) about their responses to a *Crimewatch UK* reconstruction of a sexual assault in which a young female hitchhiker was murdered (1998: 249). The intention of this study was to examine the extent to which the interviewees would adopt the 'preferred reading' of this show (i.e. blaming the victim due to her 'incorrect'/'risky' behaviour), and 'how the reconstruction might contribute to their understandings of how and why women are subjected to male violence' (ibid.: 255). All of the respondents in her study found the program to be both a warning and a way to raise public awareness about how to avoid violent sex crime. For example, one respondent stated:

> People have got to be made aware. Some seventeen year old lassie could have watched it and said 'Well if I'm in that same situation I'd better not do that' (interviewee cited in Weaver 1998: 255).

Weaver's findings suggest that such media representations teach women to 'restrict and censure their activities so as to avoid becoming the victim' (ibid.: 262), therefore making it women's responsibility to adjust their actions, instead of focusing on the actions of the perpetrator of violence. However, Weaver's study also found that women who had experienced gendered violence in the past were more likely to question the message that it is up to women 'to ensure that crimes do not occur' (ibid.). This finding is an important (though in this case troubling) reminder that media representations are not the only place where individuals learn how to understand the nature of gendered violence. Nevertheless, while a handful of women in Weaver's study did question the tendency to represent women as responsible for their own safety, the show left the majority feeling fearful and with a sense that they were at risk of attack from a stranger.

Such findings suggest that media over-representation of certain types of gendered violence – which are newsworthy but statistically unlikely – can foster misplaced fear, and can make women feel that it is up to them to avoid such crimes. By making women responsible, their actions become categorised as 'good'/'appropriate'/'safe' or 'bad'/'inappropriate'/'unsafe', therefore enabling victim blame, as well as producing a form of management and control of women's behaviour. Furthermore, as Carlyle, Slater and Chakroff (2008) aptly remind us, the more responsible the victim feels, the *less* likely he or she will reach out for help (see also Garcia 2004). Therefore, making women responsible may have an effect upon notions of intervention and prevention which are currently expressed by the media 'in terms of women avoiding potentially dangerous situations rather than providing an

environment in which women can move about without fear' (Soothill & Walby 1991: 149). By conceiving prevention in such terms, the risks of gendered violence for women are unlikely to be attenuated.

12.4 Perpetrator exoneration

Researchers have found that coverage of violence against women can often minimise the blame of the male perpetrator (see Soothill & Walby 1991; Taylor 2009; Wykes 1998). To assess the degree to which this is the case in our sample, we had coders answer the 16 questions in Table 12.4.[19] The majority of these questions are based upon what researchers have identified as elements which minimise perpetrator blame (see for example Benedict 1992; Cuklanz 1996; Steeves 1997).

Table 12.4 Elements of perpetrator exoneration (male perpetrators)		
Question	***n***	**%**
1. Are alcohol/drugs framed as fuelling the violence? Or are alcohol/drugs explicitly blamed for the violence?	78	6%
2. Was the language used to describe the victim negative? (must be explicit)	41	3%
3. Are the actions of the victim described as having provoked or enabled the violence in any way?	303	22%
4. Is/are the perpetrator(s) described as having 'snapped'/lost control?	50	4%
5. Is the 'unfortunate' background of the perpetrator (s) mentioned (e.g. difficult childhood)	50	4%
6. Is the perpetrator also described as a victim of violence?	25	2%
7. Is/are the perpetrator(s) described by anyone as a 'nice'/'kind' etc. person?	65	5%
8. Does the tone of the article as a whole seem to exonerate the perpetrator?	47	3%
9. If intimate partner homicide, is the victim's/victims' 'choice' to stay in the relationship/not report/prosecute prior incidents mentioned?	39	3%
10. If intimate partner homicide, is the idea that the perpetrator was motivated by love to kill/abuse invoked in any way? (*explicit*)	26	2%
11. If intimate partner homicide, is an argument described as having 'sparked' the violence mentioned/described?	25	2%
12. If intimate partner homicide, are financial problems, infidelity or divorce/separation/unrequited love mentioned as potential reasons why violence took/takes place?	75	5%
13. If intimate partner homicide, does it mention that the victim/perpetrator still loves the victim/perpetrator?	18	1%
14. If rape/sexual assault, is there any suggestion that the victim/victims may have consented at the time and later changed their mind (or do this in general)?	66	5%
15. If rape/sexual assault, is it described as motivated by lust? (e.g. 'he couldn't help himself because she was so attractive')	43	3%

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[19] Some of these questions overlap with victim-blaming themes.

16. If rape/sexual assault, does the article challenge the idea that rape victims often lie?	26	2%
ANY OF THE ABOVE	547	39%

When we analysed the results based on these questions we found that elements of perpetrator exoneration were high (39%). However, many of these elements are quite subtle and may not necessarily lead readers to interpret the perpetrator as *less* guilty. An audience study by Palazzolo and Roberto (2011) does suggest that the inclusion of particular details (such as those identified above) affects readers' attributions of the perpetrator's responsibility.

While the proportion shown in Table 12.4 appears high, only 3% of articles exhibited an overall tone which exonerates the perpetrator (see question 8). Often, details which describe the crime (and are therefore likely to be reported) include elements which could be seen to exonerate the perpetrator. Nevertheless, perpetrator-exonerating elements such as the inclusion of comments from the defence are often 'balanced' by comments from the prosecution. In our sample we found that nearly every time the defence was used as a source, the prosecution was as well.

Table 12.5 Elements which may exonerate the male perpetrator, by source			
Source	***n***	***N***	**%**
The Age	191	452	42%
Herald Sun/Sun	356	947	38%

Among those elements described by researchers as minimising the perpetrators' blame (in the context of intimate partner homicide) is the inclusion of information about arguments which preceded the violence. Evans (2001) believes that by mentioning the argument which preceded the abuse, the 'she asked for it' stereotype is perpetuated. The description of the argument, for Evans, 'foregrounds *his* state of mind and mitigates the abuse by conjuring up images of the stereotypical "nagging wife"' who therefore triggered the abuse (2001: 154). Taylor believes that mentioning the details of the argument ultimately 'frame[s] domestic violence as the couple's problem' (2009: 25). By framing violence in this way, the responsibility for the abuse is constructed as *shared* when in fact the victim is not to blame (ibid.).

One particularly illustrative example of this type of reporting was published by the *Herald Sun* in February 2008. The story, 'De facto's murder charge', reports that a man was charged with murdering his wife of 20 years — her body was found in a shallow grave in the couple's back yard. The second line of the article reads, 'Anthony Sherna, 41, described as a shy man, is alleged to have killed partner Susanne Wild, 53, more than a week ago when he snapped during an argument'. The story goes on to describe 'the pair' as having lived together for seven years in a 'loveless relationship' (*Herald Sun*, 11/02/2008).

In this opening paragraph, both parties are described as responsible for enduring a 'loveless relationship'. It is in this paragraph that the story begins to cast the accused positively. Both the

victim and the perpetrator are described by neighbours' comments (not the most appropriate sources for a story about an intimate partner homicide). This characterisation of Mr Sherna as a 'nice guy' and Ms Wild as cruel continues throughout the article. 'Ms Wild was a self-diagnosed agoraphobic … and neighbours said she often rebuked her husband and yelled at children from a window'. A few lines later, 'He [a neighbour] said Ms Wild had been a difficult neighbour, particularly for the children in the street':

> Another resident … said Ms Wild would have outbursts, and he described her partner as quiet and unassuming. 'Butter wouldn't melt in his mouth,' he said. 'I felt he was such a quiet individual but I felt she was really overbearing on him. Really, really overbearing. You could see it when he was out gardening. She was over the top, 'do this, do that'.

One of the neighbourhood children is paraphrased, saying that 'Ms Wild had yelled at her for little reason'. She is then quoted:

> 'The lady who lived there, every time we were out she would look at us and one time she came out and took photos of us,' she said. 'I haven't seen her for a while. She's usually out there in her garden. I only know her from hating kids'.

This story incorporates a number of victim-blaming and perpetrator-exculpating elements, primarily by including quotes and comments from the couple's neighbours. In particular, sympathy for the perpetrator is suggested by his characterisation as a 'nice guy' who had to endure a woman who was described as hateful and mentally unstable. The comments from the neighbours add validity to the claim that he 'snapped' because he could no longer tolerate his 'overbearing' wife. One could argue that, to some degree, the article leaves the reader with the sense that she deserved to be punished for her cruelty.

While this article is certainly among the most problematic in our sample, it is relatively easy to see how this article could be improved. Simply by not incorporating neighbourhood gossip, the article would have been much improved. Again, the use of sources appears as a key element in the quality of the coverage.

Another common way in which reports blame victims of domestic violence and intimate partner homicide is by mentioning a couple's off-again, on-again relationship, or by questioning the reasons why the woman remained in the relationship (see Evans 2001; Taylor 2009). In citing such details, reporting can often seem to suggest that the violence is the woman's fault because she did not leave the abusive relationship (Evans 2001). One article in Evans' study goes so far as to ask the question: 'Is there a moral obligation to rescue people who don't want to be rescued?' (ibid.: 157). This manner of understanding domestic violence is problematic considering the fact that '[w]hen battered women leave, they are at a 75% greater risk of being killed by their batterer' (Hart 1989, cited in Meyers 1997: 6) (for Australian data see Wallace 1986).

An example which includes a number of elements of perpetrator exculpation, and perhaps the most extreme example, is an article which involved a man who killed his former partner 'after she had

rejected him' ('I killed love of my life: volatile relationship ended in murder', *Herald Sun*, 6/12/08). The relationship is described as 'extremely volatile and turbulent', presenting the image of a relationship that was one of mutual violence. His mental and emotional state is variously attributed to his parents – he was 'emotionally, mentally and physically abused throughout his childhood by his family, and had been sexually abused by his step siblings' – or to the victim: she 'had taken out a restraining order against Piper [the perpetrator] just four days before her death but invited him back to sleep on the couch at their unit the day after the order was made'. The article goes on to 'explain' that 'he was pleading to sort out their relationship when he snapped. "She told me to f– myself again", he told police'. And finally, his previous partner was also responsible: he had 'been traumatised and left with a deep-seated fear of rejection and abandonment after finding his wife of four months in bed with another woman'.

Other issues found to exonerate the perpetrator include financial stress. In an article headlined 'Lover's pleas sets violent man free' (*Herald Sun*, 26/3/1993), it was stated that the perpetrator's 'problems in his relationship began after [his] florist shop in the Northern Suburbs failed'. Mental illness was also presented as explaining or excusing the behaviour. In relation to a man who killed his wife, three children and himself it was said: 'For the past 18 months Mr M, an unemployed concreting contractor and diagnosed schizophrenic, had been sending signals that such a tragedy was inevitable' ('Calls for help unheeded', *The Sunday Age,* 17/7/1994). In another article about the OJ Simpson case, 'The ghost of Shakespeare stalks America's tragic hero', a deprived social background is invoked as an excuse.

We have identified some of the ways in which perpetrator exoneration was communicated in our sample. While explicit perpetrator exoneration was rare, we hope that, by offering examples, work can be done to mitigate the likelihood that such themes will be included in future.

12.5 Role of alcohol/drugs

A number of journalism researchers have argued that, in press coverage of violence against women, alcohol and drugs are often blamed, or described as fuelling/enabling gendered violence. Evans' Australian study finds that 'the press adds fuel to the myth that alcohol *causes* domestic violence' (2001: 156). The use of phrases like 'spurred by a cocktail' (ibid.: 155) absolve the perpetrator of responsibility, making it seem as though alcohol is to blame for the violence. Paradoxically, Mooney found that in the context of rape coverage, the rapist's inebriation exonerates him, while alcohol consumption by the victim increases the likelihood that she will be blamed (2007: 207). We investigated the role of alcohol and drugs in the representation of gendered violence by asking whether drugs or alcohol were mentioned in the context of the crime, and, if so, who is described as having taken the drugs/alcohol. We then asked whether drugs/alcohol were presented as fuelling or enabling the violence.

Table 12.6 shows the proportion of articles which discuss alcohol and drugs. Interestingly, in analysing these questions we found that all mentions of drugs and alcohol are more likely when the female is the perpetrator. Considering our findings on sensationalism, one could argue that this could

be because female-perpetrated violence requires additional detail and explanation, as it is considered more unusual than male-perpetrated violence.

Table 12.6 Descriptions of alcohol/drugs in relation to violence						
Description	Male perpetrator			Female perpetrator		
	n	*N*	*%*	*N*	*N*	*%*
Alcohol/drugs described as fuelling the violence	51	1399	4%	15	217	7%
Alcohol/drugs explicitly blamed for the violence	27	1399	2%	10	217	5%
Alcohol/drugs mentioned ('just the facts')	84	1399	6%	26	217	12%
ANY OF THE ABOVE	162	1399	12%	51	217	24%

Unlike the findings of other researchers, it does not appear from our study that alcohol and drugs are commonly framed as enabling, fuelling or to blame for gendered violence. At the same time, when alcohol is present, elements of victim blaming seem to be more likely. Table 12.7 shows the number of victim-blaming articles in which alcohol is involved and the total number of articles in which alcohol is involved. When making this comparison it becomes clear that the presence of alcohol/drugs increases the likelihood that elements of victim blaming will be present.[20] This appears to be true for both male and female perpetrators.

Table 12.7 Discussion of relationship between alcohol and victim blaming ('all blaming')						
Article content	Male perpetrator			Female perpetrator		
	n	*N*	*%*	*n*	*N*	*%*
Alcohol is involved *and* victim blaming	61	303	20%	23	64	36%
All articles with alcohol involved	164	1399	12%	52	217	24%

12.6 Role of race, ethnicity and religion

When considering how news media represents issues of gendered violence, it is important not to ignore the ways in which notions of race, ethnicity and religion shape reporting. There is considerable research in this area, and many have found race and ethnicity to have a significant impact on how issues are reported. For example, an Australian study of how Sudanese Australians were represented by *The Age*, *Herald Sun* and *The Australian* in the months around the 2007 federal election found a tendency for reports to focus on violence, issues of citizenship and other problematic frames (Nolan et al. 2011). In terms of violence against women, international research

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[20] The mention of drugs and alcohol consumption on the part of the victim is something that can be perceived by the reader (including the coders in this study) as suggesting the victim enabled the violence. Therefore, particularly in the case of alcohol/drugs and victim blaming, it can be difficult to separate assumptions made by the coder and those communicated by the story.

has found that female victims who are seen as 'other' (e.g. 'women of colour', 'foreign women') are *more* likely to be blamed for their victimhood (Consalvo 1998; Jiwani & Young 2006; Meyers 2004), and violence against them is *less* likely to receive coverage (Meyers 1997, 2004).

Findings from a Canadian study by Wortley (2002) show that while crime perpetrated by black men tends to make headlines, stories about female victims of colour are largely ignored by the press. Furthermore, Wortley found that race was often part of the explanation as to why the violence took place. A number of other international studies have had similar findings, in particular that victim blaming rhetoric is more common in stories about women of colour and that the reporting of violence against women of colour tends to be shaped by cultural and racial stereotypes (Consalvo 1998; Jiwani & Young 2006; Meyers 1997, 2004; Reimers 2007).

Unfortunately, we were not able to make defensible generalisations about these issues in our study on the basis of the quantitative data gathered. Further qualitative and quantitative work is required.

13 Summary of study findings

Our study identified the following primary areas of strength in coverage of violence against women:

- Overall, the Australian print media studied here was much less problematic in its reporting of violence against women than previous, largely international, studies have found.

- The proportion of male- and female-perpetrated intimate partner homicide reported is broadly reflective of the actual patterns of such homicides.

- Very few articles showed men and women as equally violent.

- Explicit victim-blaming (only 2%) was uncommon and the description of victims in a negative light was rare. In our sample, only 3% of articles about male-perpetrated violence described the victim negatively.

- Although a high proportion of stories included elements which could be perceived to exonerate the perpetrator, very few did so explicitly and many included countervailing tendencies.

- In contrast to much of the previous research, examples of 'titillating' or 'salacious' coverage (such coverage made up only 3% of the sample) were few.

Our study identified the following primary areas of weakness in coverage of violence against women:

- Coverage of violence against women tends to primarily report individual incidents of violence with little information about the social context of the problem.

- Events-based (rather than thematic) coverage overwhelmingly dominates the reporting style for stories about violence against women.

- Only 2% of articles included information about victims' services.

- The relationship between the victim(s) and perpetrator(s) is often not specified. This may reinforce existing misconceptions around who tends to perpetrate gendered violence, in particular, fears around 'stranger danger'.

- Sexual violence in the context of intimate relationships appears to receive particularly low level of coverage.

- Histories of prior violence are under-represented in stories of intimate partner homicide.

- Sensationalism was regularly incorporated in reporting of violence against women.

- Though levels of sensationalism are high, violence against women tends to be represented as mundane (or covered in a cursory fashion).

- Police and other criminal justice personnel are over-relied upon as sources, while only 6% of articles included a violence against women advocate or expert as a source.

- While explicit victim-blaming is rare, it is relatively common to describe the victim as enabling or provoking the violence.

The following section will consider some existing initiatives and outline some recommendations, or possible avenues of development, which could be adopted with the aim of improving coverage of violence against women. This is by no means an exhaustive list of recommendations. It is a starting point, and some of these measures are likely to be currently in place.

14 Existing initiatives

While there is much media research which reveals troubling tendencies in the representation of violence against women, some studies have found positive changes in reporting practices and offer avenues for improving current weaknesses in news coverage. When looking at the issues raised by this review, it is important to remember that coverage tendencies can change. The dramatic changes in the representation of stalking which have taken place over time offer a useful reminder that media representations are not static. Lowney and Best's (1995) extensive quantitative and qualitative study found that the representation of stalking in the US changed significantly from 1980 to 1994. The construction of 'stalking' in their wide sample (including magazines, newspapers and television broadcasts) moved from a focus upon the 'psychopathic' stalker between 1980 and 1988, to celebrity stalking between 1989 and 1991, to a notion of stalking as a common problem that should be understood as a form of domestic violence between 1992 and 1994. The argument raised by Lowney and Best is that these shifts occur through a complex, and often prolonged, claims-making process, or the process by which claims-makers struggle to shift particular understandings of an issue. Their study attempts to show how claims-making campaigns, whether appearing successful or not, contribute to ongoing understandings of social problems.

The following initiatives are examples of some efforts to drive change in the area of violence against women news coverage.

14.1 A handbook for journalists: Rhode Island Coalition Against Domestic Violence

One example stands out among overseas examples of interventions which aimed to change the way violence against women is covered. In Rhode Island in 2006, Ryan, Anastario and DaCunha combined quantitative content analysis of news coverage with a public intervention, resulting in significant changes in the reporting of domestic violence murders. The statewide initiative was organised by the Rhode Island Coalition Against Domestic Violence and was run collaboratively, working with journalists, domestic violence survivors and media researchers.

The project began by reviewing previous research into news coverage of violence against women (similar to that undertaken here). A quantitative content analysis of intimate partner homicide reporting in Rhode Island from 1996 to 1999 was then undertaken. The authors' findings are similar to those found in this study (e.g. lack of context around the violence and sensationalism). In addition to assessing areas of weaknesses in the reporting of domestic violence, these researchers identified a number of examples of 'journalistic best practices which broke with these patterns' (2006: 214). This content analysis was supplemented by the use of focus groups with domestic violence survivors and interviews with journalists. By combining media research with the insight gained through these conversations, the coalition wrote a handbook which was distributed to their extensive press list. By their consultation and collaboration with journalists throughout the writing of *Domestic Violence: A Handbook for Journalists*, the final handbook was able to successfully fulfil the specific needs of practising journalists while minimising the antagonistic feelings such a project could easily engender. After the handbook was distributed, the coalition commissioned another quantitative content analysis. These are their key findings:

- The use of the term 'domestic violence' to describe instances of intimate partner homicide jumped from 51.1% to 87.2% after the introduction of the handbook (2006: 218).

- After the introduction of the handbook, the presence of advocates as sources in news coverage of domestic violence doubled, and became 'reporters' most common lead source' (ibid.: 219).

After testing the possible shifts in coverage of domestic violence post-handbook, researchers concluded that 'reporters adopted the newsgathering practices suggested by the RICADV' (ibid.: 222). While it may seem as though the handbook produced this effect, the researchers of this study are careful to point out that it is not simply the creation of the handbook that produced this positive outcome. Rather, the handbook served as 'a catalyst, a tool for facilitating ongoing dialogue with reporters, editors, and their news outlets' (ibid.: 223). The intervention offers a promising example of how research into reporting practices can be used to improve news coverage. The knowledge that journalistic practice and news representations can be improved should function to further motivate researchers and claims-makers towards such interventions. As the study by Lowney and Best (1995)

reminds us, all attempts to change the public construction of a social problem participate in some way in its reshaping and redefinition.

14.2 Eliminating Violence Against Women Media Awards

Australian initiatives are also working towards change in the reporting of violence against women. The Eliminating Violence Against Women Media Awards (EVAs) are one such initiative. The EVAs honour and celebrate the work of journalists working in a wide range of platforms (from documentary film to radio) who have created pieces which further public understanding and awareness of the issue of gendered violence. The EVAs website offers links to past winners (thereby offering useful examples of coverage), information about violence against women and resources for journalists. According to the EVAs website:

> Good quality reporting challenges misinformation and damaging stereotypes that tolerate or excuse violence against women. The more awareness there is of this issue, the greater chance we have of reducing the terrible human toll. The EVAs present a forum to recognise, reward and encourage media that accurately report on this issue. www.evas.org.au

The EVAs are an example of an initiative that takes a positive approach to this issue – encouraging journalists to report violence against women as accurately as possible, as well as highlighting the importance of representing gendered violence in a constructive manner.

14.3 Multi-Media Stop Violence Against Women Project

This project, started with a VicHealth seeding grant in 2007, seeks to have the voices of women who have experienced gendered violence heard through the media. This project offers training for survivors of violence against women in order for them to become media advocates. These advocates are in a position to speak about issues of gendered violence knowledgably and from a place of experience. According to the Women's Domestic Violence Crisis Service, which runs this project, these advocates are able to 'counter many of the commonly held beliefs around family violence; can correct misconceptions and stereotypes about victims; and can support the Victorian Government and Victorian Police in ensuring that perpetrators be held accountable' www.wdvcs.org.au/Survivors-as-Media-Advocates

This initiative marks a powerful and positive step towards improving coverage of violence against women. Journalists are often keen to talk to 'victims', who may not be keen to talk to them. This project facilitates and encourages those who have experienced gendered violence and who want to engage with the media to speak out in a way that they are comfortable with and which is newsworthy. The relationships between advocates and journalists fostered through this project offer an important avenue through which the issue of violence against women can be addressed.

15 Recommendations

The following recommendations provide a framework for a 'violence against women in the media' strategy. They have been grouped into four key areas:

- reporting context
- multi-stakeholder collaboration
- building capacity
- research, development and innovation

These four areas are mutually reinforcing and should be considered to function together.

The focus of our research was the content of news, so the first key area focuses specifically on reporting, and those areas which could be strengthened. The three subsequent areas focus on strategies for achieving the recommended changes in coverage and, ultimately, improving the representation of gender-based violence.

15.1 Reporting context

- *Incorporating context: more thematic coverage*
  - Thematic articles tended to offer views on the issue of gendered violence more insightful than those of events-based coverage. We encourage more articles of this type to be commissioned and published.
  - More thematic elements should be incorporated in events-based reporting (subject to legal restrictions arising from the rules of contempt of court). Thematic elements include information about victims' services (see below), the inclusion of statistics around the issue, comments from violence against women experts/advocates, or any information that communicates that violence against women is a serious and systemic social problem that is preventable.
  - Including terms such as 'violence against women', 'domestic violence' and 'gender-based violence' would help to contextualise reporting.
  - The ability for web-based news to link stories and information means that journalists should be encouraged to incorporate information about violence against women and victims' services using hyperlinks and sidebars.

- *Incorporating information on victims' services*
  - Including information on victims' services when reporting cases of domestic violence and sexual assault should be considered. By including this information the story can offer information for women living in a context of violence who do not know how to seek help. This information can also empower friends or family members of the victim to seek support information on her behalf.
  - The most basic information about victims' services could follow the model now routinely used in stories which cover suicide (i.e. the inclusion of basic information on anti-depression or suicide-prevention services).

- *Mentioning the relationship between the victim(s) and the perpetrator(s)*
  - Although 78% of women 15 years and older have been victimised by someone known to them, this reality is often misrepresented. Newsmakers should mention the relationship between the victim(s) and perpetrator(s) when legally able to do so.
  - In cases of sexual assault, where stories can *either* name the relationship *or* the perpetrator, we think it is preferable to name the relationship.
  - When this relationship is not known, it would be useful to say this explicitly.

- *Mentioning incidents of prior violence*
  - Violence in the context of intimate relationships is rarely a singular incident. By including information about the history of violence, stories will more accurately reflect the realities of gender-based violence.

15.2 Multi-stakeholder collaboration

Awareness and education campaigns must be complemented by actions that address the structural conditions that perpetuate violence. Hence, collective, multi-level action is likely to be the most effective way of stopping violence against women. (VicHealth 2010: 19)

Violence against women is a shared problem which affects the health of the entire community. It cannot be effectively addressed by one group or stakeholder. Rather, it needs to be actively addressed by multiple sectors in a collaborative way. This will be a challenge, but it is the most effective way to address the issue. Strategies and ways forward should be developed collaboratively to coordinate effort, maximise reach and allow resources to be more effectively utilised.

- *Developing key stakeholders collaboration*
  - Consideration should be given to developing mechanisms to harness collaboration towards the ongoing support and development of activity in this area.
  - A collaborative strategy for improving the representation of violence against women should be developed, drawing on the specific recommendations outlined here, as well as those discussed in the *Family Violence in the News: Strategic framework*.
  - The strategy should engage the perspectives of a broad range of stakeholders inclusive of organisations in the violence against women sector, journalists, media outlets, media training providers, state government, VicHealth and others who have expertise on violence against women and the media.

- *Ensuring coordination*
  - Those involved in development of the strategy should be aware of relevant work being done across sectors to ensure coordination of existing efforts, effective use of resources and minimal duplication.

- *Devising and adopting a unified message*
  - Stakeholders, in consultation with public relations experts, should work together to devise a number of clear and concise messages about preventing violence against women.
  - These messages should be adopted by all stakeholders. The promotion of these messages by the full range of stakeholders will enable consistency, thereby facilitating the ability of spokespeople to be 'on message'.
  - The repetition of these messages from various sectors and individuals will add prominence and legitimacy to the messages.

15.3 Building capacity

Among the most troubling, but also solvable, issues found in our research was the lack of violence against women advocates and experts used as sources. Development in this area holds much potential. Based on our research, it is evident that building the capacity of experts and leaders to undertake media activity increases the likelihood that the reporting will include useful information about violence against women as a significant community problem that can be prevented. Specific recommendations include:

- *Skilling the violence against women sector by training and resourcing experts and leaders*
  - Media capacity building in the form of training, resource provision and ongoing support should be provided to experts and leaders most likely to speak to the media.
  - It is important that media spokespeople understand:
    - the aetiology of violence against women, including its causes, prevalence, impact and methods to prevent it
    - the mechanics of journalism and are skilled in effective media management
    - the importance of rapid media response which is on message
    - the laws of contempt and defamation that restrict journalists during particular stages of the legal process.

- *Developing a group of dedicated violence against women media spokespeople*
  - VicHealth should continue to progress development of a small group of cross-sector, media-savvy individuals to respond to media reports and queries.
  - This group of individuals should also have input into development of insightful pieces about the prevention of violence against women to be published by various media outlets. This will help to drive the conversation rather than only responding to issues related to violence against women.
  - In addition to having a background in issues of gendered violence, it would be beneficial if this group of individuals include people who have a public profile in the community and have substantial public relations experience.

- *Continuing to support survivors' voices*
  - The Multi-Media Stop Violence Against Women Project run by the Women's Domestic Violence Crisis Service should continue to be funded and further developed. Such initiatives engage women who have experienced violence in telling their own stories and participating in activities designed to prevent violence against women.

- *Consulting with the journalism industry*
  - To most appropriately develop strategies for the journalism industry, consultation and collaboration is necessary. Initiating consultations with members of the journalism industry around violence against women reporting will provide insights into the issue from the journalists' perspective. This will facilitate more informed strategies in the area and will encourage a collaborative approach to the issue.

- *Targeting education and training for journalists*
  - Educational strategies should be explored. These include targeting university curriculums, developing short courses, as well as on-the-job training. (For an example of a university education based intervention see Stewart et al. (2010).)
  - For the on-the-job training, consultations with the training managers at various media outlets will be useful in developing an appropriate framework.
  - Journalists working with survivors (and their friends and family) may require specific training about engaging with those who have suffered trauma. This training would mitigate the potential ethical issues that can arise when journalists engage with those who have been affected by gendered violence.

- *Developing and distributing resources for journalists*
  - Resources for journalists are important. Existing material should be consolidated and further developed, including specific resources focusing on the prevention of gendered violence.
  - Consultation and collaboration with journalists in strengthening and developing resources will ensure that they are appropriate and will increase the likelihood that they will be used by journalists.
  - A strategy for distribution of these resources should be developed. The aim is that journalists (and the industry) are aware that these resources exist, that they see them as valuable to their practice and are able to access them with ease.

- *Publicising examples of strong reporting on violence against women*
  - The Office of Women's Policy should continue to fund the EVAs, an event designed to acknowledge strong reporting of violence against women in the media.

- *Exploring strategies incorporating law enforcement*
  - Given that police are often an important source for journalists covering violence against women, it would be worthwhile undertaking an examination of the ways in which law enforcement officials speak to the media about gendered violence.
  - These findings would help to develop strategies for encouraging law enforcement officers to incorporate messages about the nature of gendered violence in their conversations with media.

15.4 Research, development and innovation

- *Conducting journalism-related research*
  - Research into the strengths and weakness of media coverage should be conducted every five years. This would provide insight into strategies which have been successful and those which have not. Thus a monitoring capacity is developed which could also inform future strategies to be adopted.
  - Opportunities should be sought to incorporate questions about public perceptions of media reporting on violence against women into other research projects such as the National Survey on Community Attitudes to Violence Against Women.

- *Exploring alternative media strategies (non-news based)*
  - *Exploring new media and alternative media*
    - New media offer additional space for and new ways to present information. This context also offers those working to prevent gendered violence innovative ways to deliver messages to the wider public, as well as respond to problematic or insufficient reporting. Innovative uses of new media could be explored and developed as part of a strategy to effect change in public knowledge of violence against women.

  - *Exploring the utility of a one-stop website*
    - While there is much information online about the issue of violence against women, most of the information is diffuse, with each organisation offering its own information. A scoping study should be undertaken to explore the utility of a one-stop social media site for information about violence against women.
    - It is important that a social media website be an *active* site which includes information, recent research, a calendar of events, as well as stories written by survivors, commentary, relevant videos and opinion pieces. This will ensure that the website has a 'buzz'.
    - This website should be visually appealing and easy to understand, making it quick and simple for journalists to navigate and use the information included.

  - *Organising high-profile media events*
    - As was recommended in the *Family Violence in the News: Strategic Framework*, organising high-profile media events is a way to attract media

attention. These events should present information and research about the realities of gendered violence and strategies to prevent it. The aim is to have journalists cover the events, thereby offering in-depth contextualised information about the issue.

- It is important that these events be appropriately managed for media distribution. For example, that organisers should take into account the visual requirements of television broadcasters, consider the 'newsworthiness' of the topic, and make sure high-profile spokespeople are available for comment.

- o *Developing social marketing campaigns*
  - Consideration should be given to development of a national-, state- and local-level social marketing campaign focused on the prevention of violence against women. This would involve collaborative funding across government agencies, peak bodies and the corporate and philanthropic sectors.

16 Conclusions

This study has found Australian press coverage to be relatively good, and substantially less problematic than the prior research suggests. In particular, the issues of victim blaming and perpetrator exculpation appear to be far less prevalent than suggested by prior research. While there are certainly areas where the coverage could be strengthened, we are nevertheless encouraged by the findings. Although one could say that Australian press reporting of violence against women could engage more often with informed perspectives on the issue of gendered violence (particularly when reporting individual incidents of violence against women), most coverage does not actively reproduce problematic notions of violence against women. Furthermore, we found that explicitly problematic themes around gendered violence were often countered with an opposing voice.

While this research found a number of positives, when considering an issue as serious and systemic as violence against women, we should always seek improvement. Many people are working towards improved coverage, among them more than a few exceptional journalists. One need only look at the entries reviewed by the EVAs to see examples of journalists working to provide insightful perspectives on this serious social problem.

As a cornerstone of information, journalism plays a fundamentally important role in public understandings of social problems. While the question of media effects is complex and multifaceted, it is clear that journalism participates in people's knowledge of the world. News can, and often does, offer in-depth and informative coverage of issues. It is for this reason that strategies need to be developed to encourage journalists to incorporate more context and analysis when reporting violence against women. Given the importance of working together to find ways of preventing violence against women, we believe the recommendations made here should be considered by media, government and those working to prevent gender-based violence.

Appendix 1 Search terms, editing process and search examples

Articles were accessed using three different search methods (Factiva, Newstext and Microfilm). Each of these methods had slightly different search term capabilities. Therefore, we had to design the search terms to suit the parameters of the search engine. We made these as comparable as possible. These are outlined below.

Factiva search

Those articles collected using the Factiva database used the combination of search terms shown below (see the Factiva and Newstext search examples below for an explanation of the connectors and symbols used).

> rape* or raping or rapist* or ((sex* or domestic or indecent) adj (assault* or abus* or violence)) or domestic homicide or stalking or stalker or (intimate partner adj (homicide or abus*)) or (violence against adj (women or females)) or (sex* near3 coerc*) or ((beat or beaten or beating or bash* or attack* or victimised or strangl* or stab or stabbed or stabbing or murder* or kill* or abus* or assault* or violence or homicide or manslaughter or molest* or batter*) near5 (partner or wife or spouse or lover or girl* or boyfriend or woman or women or mother or female or husband or her or she or daughter or sister)) or sexual offence* or (domestic adj dispute) or (sexual* adj (penetrat* or molest*)) or Women's refuge

This particular combination of search terms was selected after testing a number of different combinations. Since articles about violence against women (especially when not about sexual violence) do not necessarily use easily searchable terminology, the search terms for this study had to be broad enough to return the majority of relevant articles while at the same time minimising the return of false positives. We found that this particular configuration most successfully balanced these two issues.

Newstext search

The Newstext archive search parameters slightly different to Factiva's. In particular, Newstext's search window has a word limit which means the search terms used for the Factiva searches had to be modified and broken up into four separate searches in order to fit the character restrictions. While terms were modified in this way for the Newstext searches, these modifications were minor and had little to no effect on the types of articles returned. The majority of issues which arose due to the different search method were related to the tendency to return repeat articles. This issue was resolved in the post-download phase of the study using MatLab software programmed to identify repeat headlines. The four Newstext searches are outlined in detail below.

> **Search 1**: rape, raping, rapist, domestic homicide, sexual offence*, sexual* penetrat*, sexual* molest*, sex* assault, sex* abus*, sex* violence, indecent assault, indecent abus*, indecent violence, sex* <sentence> coerc*, violence against women

Search 2: beat <sentence> mother, beat <sentence> partner, beat <sentence> wife, beat <sentence> girl*, beat <sentence> boyfriend, beat <sentence> woman, beat <sentence> female, beat <sentence> husband, beat <sentence> daughter, beat <sentence> sister

Search 3: (stalking, stalker, Women's refuge, domestic dispute, domestic assault, domestic abus*, domestic violence, intimate partner abuse, intimate partner violence, intimate partner homicide, violence against females) not rape

Search 4: ((kill or murder or abuse or attack or manslaughter or homicide or stabbed or assault) <sentence> (partner or wife or spouse or lover or girl or boyfriend or woman or mother or female or husband or her or she or daughter or sister or women)) not rape

Microfilm search

The microfilm search was conducted at the Baillieu Library at the University of Melbourne, reading through microfilm versions of *The Age* from 1986 in search of articles which fit our criteria. Due to the difference between searching with the human eye (which tends to rely upon headlines) and digital searches (which can pick up the smallest mention), this search method returned significantly fewer results. For this reason, the sample collected using microfilm has fewer 'mentions' than the other sample dates.

Editing process for returned results

After the articles were downloaded, they were reviewed and all irrelevant articles removed from the sample. Once we had our edited sample, we chose to make the number of articles in the sample more manageable by coding every fourth article. This enabled the sample to remain both random and large enough to be statistically relevant. Because of its smaller size we did not use this 'one in four' method for the microfilm sample (the 1986 articles from *The Age*). Instead, we chose to code *every* microfilm-collected article (rather than one in four) as a way to make this sample more comparable to the other date ranges in terms of quantity of coverage. Table A1 shows the number of results from the initial search, the edited results, and the total number of coded articles.

Table A1 Summary of search results and editing process						
Year(s)	***The Age***			***Herald Sun/Sun***		
	Original results	**Edited results**	**1 in 4**[21]	**Original results**	**Edited results**[22]	**1 in 4**

[21] The number of 'one in four' articles is not equivalent to those listed in the sample overview because these figures include articles which discuss domestic violence – which were ultimately not included in the overall sample discussed in this report.

[22] Newstext articles can only be downloaded as PDFs and, therefore, could only be edited on hardcopy. Due to this, it was time consuming to electronically document the edited results. Instead, using hard copies, we had

1986[23]	N/A	113	113	2299	N/A	223
1993–1994	4024	2477	596	8054	N/A	828
2007–2008	4442	1652	381	5406	2511	542
TOTAL	N/A	4248	1090	15759	N/A	1593

Factiva and Newstext search examples

For articles containing	Enter
Either *Michelin* or *Firestone*.	**Michelin or Firestone**
World Cup within 5 words of *rugby*, where *rugby* is the fifth word (there can be 0-4 words between). The terms must appear in that exact order. Search results would contain, for example, mentions of *World Cup rugby* or *World Cup match in rugby*. Use with numbers 1–10. *adj1* is assumed if numbers are omitted.	**World Cup adj5 rugby**
Carrefour within 5 words of the word *sales*, where there can be 0–4 words between *Carrefour* and *sales*. For example, retail *sales* posted by *Carrefour*. The terms can appear in any order. Use with numbers 1–500. *near1* is assumed if numbers are omitted. For more information on proximity connectors (such as w/*n*, near, /N*n*/ or adj) and to learn how range is calculated, refer to article id # 4035.	**Carrefour near5 sales**
Any words that begin with *telecom*. You must use at least 3 characters before the truncation (*) sign and it must be used at the end of a word only. Do not enter numbers after the sign. The more characters you enter before the sign, e.g. telecom* rather than tel*, the better your results. To learn more about truncation, refer to article id # 4295.	**telecom***

coders decide the article's relevance whilst maintaining the 'one in four' pattern. Thus, for articles sourced through Newstext, the number of coded (rather than the edited) articles was recorded digitally.

[23] Because microfilm searching returns far fewer articles that digital searches, we decided to code all of the articles collected using the microfilm search methodology. We believe this was the best way to make the 1986 sample from *The Age* statistically comparable.

This table is borrowed from a Factiva table explaining how to use the different search commands (http://customer.factiva.com.ezp.lib.unimelb.edu.au/en/custSvc/CSMain.aspx?id=3463&sa_from=GL).

not	A search for *duck not cricket* will find stories about the bird variety of ducks but not the cricketing kind. A search for *duck and pond not cricket* also will find stories about the bird variety of duck. A search for *duck and cricket not pond* will find stories about the cricket variety of duck. • If the word and/or/not is part of the search term, enclose it in double quotes. So **bacon "and" eggs** will search for the phrase ***bacon and eggs*** rather than the terms ***bacon*** and ***eggs***. • When mixing ands and ors, as in ***schwarten or borbidge and minister***, the **OR** is not exclusive. So you might find stories with just **schwarten; or with all three words**. The **AND takes precedence over the OR**. • Try using brackets, as in **(schwarten or borbidge) and minister**.
Proximity	A search for *international finance* finds stories containing that phrase. The same search for *international **<near>** finance* finds stories with the words as far apart as nine paragraphs. *international **<sentence>** finance* finds those terms in the same sentences.

This table is borrowed from a Newstext webpage explaining how to use the different search commands (www.newstext.com.au/pages/help.asp?Po=2).

Appendix 2 Example coding sheet

The example coding sheet included here was used for articles about female-perpetrated violence. The male-perpetrator coding sheet does not include questions 90–100.

REPRESENTATION OF VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN: FEMALE PERPETRATORS

1. MEDIA TEXT ID NUMBER: ☐☐☐☐☐

2. DATE: ☐☐☐☐☐☐

3. PAGE #: ☐☐

4. HEADLINE:

_____

_____

_____

5. Gender of author:
1) Female(s)
2) Male(s)
3) Mixed
4) Unknown

☐

6. NEWSPAPER:
1) The Age/Sunday Age
2) The Herald Sun/The Sun/Sunday Herald
3) The Australian

☐

7. WORDLENGTH (# of words, X if N/A):
(if too short to code, stop at #30)

☐☐☐☐☐

8. **WORDLENGTH**:
1) Very short (1-2 paragraphs)
2) Short (3-6 paragraphs)
3) Medium (7-12 paragraphs)
4) Medium-long (13-35 paragraphs)
5) Long (more than ½ a page)
6) Very long (1 page +)
X) N/A

☐

9. STORY TYPE:
1) News
2) Feature
3) Accent
4) Letter to the editor
5) Editorial
6) Business
7) Sport
8) Readers' Poll
9) Comment/Opinion
10) Other

☐☐

10. GENDER OF VICTIM(S):
1) Female
2) Male
3) Transgender
4) Unspecified/not mentioned
5) Mixed but the primary target was a woman/primarily female targets
6) Mixed

☐

11. GENDER OF PERPETRATOR(S):

1) Female
2) Male
3) Transgender

4) Unspecified
5) Unknown
6) Mixed – primarily woman

[ ]

12. What percentage of the story is about female violence? (how central to topic is discussion of female violence?)

1) 80-100%
2) 50-79%
3) 10-49%
4) Less than 10%*

* *Use "mentions" sheet (unless reason to code in more depth)*

[ ]

13. Apart from female violence, the primary topic or the *context* of use is:

1) Abortion
2) hyperbole/saying (e.g. "being surrounded by paparazzi is like being gang-raped"/"raping and pillaging of the countryside")
3) Indigenous issues
4) Refugees/immigration/asylum seekers/migration issues
5) War/conflict
6) Difficult international contexts
7) A way to give personal context (she had been abused by her father as a girl…)
8) Risks of drugs or alcohol
9) Crime statistics (up/down this year…)
10) Within a discussion of other crimes/social problems
11) Pornography*
12) Prostitution
13) Suicide
14) Mental health issues
15) Politics (e.g. election issues, etc.)
16) Other_____
X) N/A (VAW/Violence by women is 100% of topic)
If about pornography, stop at #30 (inclusive)

[ ][ ]

AGE   (X if N/A – general stories, SKIP to #18)

14. Number of victims?

0) None   2) More than one victim
1) One   X) Not mentioned

[ ]

15. What is the AGE OF VICTIM (in years):
(if 1 month old, enter 1/12)
If more than one victim, enter the youngest.

[ ][ ][ ]

16. Number of perpetrators?

0) None   2) More than one perpetrator
1) One   X) Not mentioned

[ ]

17. If YES to #16, then what is the AGE OF PERPETRATOR (in years):
If more than one perpetrator, enter the oldest.

[ ][ ][ ]

18. PRIMARY TYPE OF VIOLENCE:

1) Rape/sexual assault	16) Infanticide
2) Indecent assault (non-penetrative *adult*)	17) Family violence
3) Sex with an underage girl/boy	18) Unlawful imprisonment/abduction
4) Indecent assault (non-penetrative *underage*)	19) Euthanasia
5) IPV	20) Sexual harassment
6) IPH	21) Sex slavery
9) Murder/manslaughter	22) Pornography
10) Stalking	23) Sexual abuse (general)
11) Beating/bashing/assault	24) Violence against child of partner
12) Attempted murder	25) Violence against women
13) Emotional/psychological/verbal abuse	26) Other_____
14) Incest	27) Threat of violence
15) Child abuse	

19. OTHER VIOLENCE – tick those mentioned/discussed:

- ☐ Rape/sexual assault
- ☐ Indecent assault (non-penetrative adult)
- ☐ Sex with an underage girl/boy
- ☐ Indecent assault (non-penetrative underage)
- ☐ IPV
- ☐ IPH
- ☐ Murder/manslaughter
- ☐ Stalking
- ☐ Beating/bashing/assault
- ☐ Attempted murder
- ☐ Emotional/psychological/verbal abuse
- ☐ Incest
- ☐ Child abuse
- ☐ Infanticide
- ☐ Family violence
- ☐ Unlawful imprisonment/abduction
- ☐ Euthanasia
- ☐ Sexual harassment
- ☐ Sex slavery
- ☐ Pornography
- ☐ Sexual abuse (general)
- ☐ Violence against child of partner
- ☐ Violence against women
- ☐ Threat of violence
- ☐ Other_____
- ☐ NONE

20. PRIMARY RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN VICTIM AND PERPETRATOR:

1) Partners (never lived together)
2) Partners (living together)
3) Partners (used to live together)
4) Partners (living situation unknown)
5) *Former* partners (never lived together)
6) *Former* partners (living together)
7) *Former* partners (used to live together)
8) *Former* partners (living situation unknown)
9) The "other" man/woman (love triangle)
10) (Step)Parent/child
11) Niece-nephew/aunt-uncle/cousin
12) Siblings
13) Friends/acquaintances
14) Grandparent/granddaughter(son)
15) Co-workers
16) Strangers
17) Not identified but know to be partners (from other stories etc.)
18) Other relationship with unequal power dynamic (e.g. student/teacher, doctor/patient, soldier/civilian, older man and schoolgirl)
19) In-laws
20) Other _____   21) Unknown
22) Not mentioned/identified   X) N/A (general)

21. If more than one relationship, what is the secondary relationship?

1) Partners (never lived together)
2) Partners (living together)
3) Partners (used to live together)
4) Partners (living situation unknown)
5) *Former* partners (never lived together)
6) *Former* partners (living together)
7) *Former* partners (used to live together)
8) *Former* partners (living situation unknown)
9) The "other" man/woman (love triangle)
10) (Step)Parent/child
11) Niece-nephew/aunt-uncle/cousin
12) Siblings
13) Friends/acquaintances
14) Grandparent/granddaughter(son)
15) Co-workers
16) Strangers
17) Not identified but know to be partners (from context, other stories, etc.)
18) Other relationship with unequal power dynamic (e.g. student/teacher, doctor/patient, soldier/civilian)
19) In-laws
20) Other _____
21) Not known
22) Not mentioned
X) N/A (general)

22. Is the scenario:
1) Heterosexual
2) Homosexual
3) Not mentioned/identified
4) Bisexual
X) Not relevant

FRAMING OF THE STORY

23. Is the story framed:
1) Thematically (including stories based upon research, reports, etc.)
2) Event-based (episodic) *** if event-based go to #25**
3) Thematic coverage resulting from an 'event'
4) Ambiguous/too difficult to answer

24. If thematic <u>AND primarily about female violence or gendered violence</u>, does the story include any of these elements?

☐ Human interest
☐ Statistics
☐ Law and regulation
☐ General educational
☐ Social/societal/institutional factors mentioned/discussed as influencing the continuing problem of female violence or gendered violence? (E.g. is this issue discussed as a social problem that is linked to discourses around gender roles?)
☐ OTHER_____
X) Not relevant

SOURCES* (if no sources skip to #28)   ***ONLY ANSWER IF MORE THAN 50% ABOUT VAW***

25. SOURCE(S) USED in reference to VAW	# TIMES QUOTED/ PARAPHRASED	Author is expert
Victim		
Perpetrator		
Police		
Lawyer – Defence		
Lawyer – Prosecution		
Lawyer – General/Other		
Judges		
Other criminal justice personnel		
Psychologist/psychiatrist		
Academics		
Family – Perpetrator		
Family – Victim		
Family – Victim AND perpetrator		
Friends – Perpetrator		
Friends – Victim		
Friends – Victim AND perpetrator		
Neighbours/bystander/witness		
DV/rape crisis workers/advocate/expert		
Previous partners		
Magistrate		
Political figure		
Other NGO spokesperson		
media		
Documents, reports, etc.		
Other		

26. If more than one source, do the sources offer opposing viewpoints (challenging)?
0 = NO   1 = YES   X = N/A

27. If appropriate, select a **key term** for this article:

28. If appropriate, select a **key term** for this article:

29. If appropriate, select a **key term** for this article:

_____

LOCAL VS INTERNATIONAL

30. Identify the national context(s) of the violence discussed, where the perpetrator is from, and where the victim is from.

COUNTRIES mentioned	CONTEXT (where the violence occurs)	PERPETRATOR	VICTIM
1.			
2.			
3.			
General stories			
NOT IDENTIFIED/MENTIONED			

31. Does the story mention/discuss any of these (those in **""** must be explicit):

- ☐ Refugees/migrants
- ☐ Tourists/travellers
- ☐ "Torture"
- ☐ "Human rights"
- ☐ Rape as a "war crime"
- ☐ War
- ☐ The oppressive regimes of other nations (past or present)
- ☐ Difficult situations for women in international contexts
- ☐ NONE

- ☐ Race (not aboriginality)
- ☐ Aboriginality
- ☐ Ethnicity (more than nationality - entails cultural signifiers)
- ☐ Nationality
- ☐ Islam
- ☐ Other religions – not Islam (e.g. Pope/clergy counts)
- ☐ LGBIT

FAME (X if N/A – general stories)

32. Is someone involved with the crime famous?
0) NO
1) Perpetrator
2) Victim
3) Family/friends
4) Other _____
5) BOTH

33. If famous, what kind of famous are they?
0) NOT famous
1) Celebrity (actor, entertainer, etc.)
2) Politician
3) Sports star
4) Other famous

GENDER AND LEVELS OF VIOLENCE   **0 = NO   1 = YES**

34. Are men described as tending towards violence, or having a gendered culture of violence (is this a topic/theme mentioned in the article)?	
35. Is the idea that men and women are equally violent communicated in any way throughout the article?	
36. Is the crime explicitly identified as *particularly violent* by journalists/others? (adjectives used to describe, e.g. "gruesome", "shocking", etc.)	

37. Are alcohol or drugs mentioned in the context of the crime? (include when victim drugged)
  0) NO   3) Yes – general   6) BOTH (victim & perp)
  1) Yes – the victim (voluntary)   4) Yes – other
  2) Yes – the victim (involuntary) 5) Yes – perpetrator	

38. If alcohol/drugs mentioned, is it framed as:
  X) Not mentioned
  1) possibly fuelling the violence
  2) explicitly blames alcohol/drugs for the violence
  3) basic mentions ("just the facts")	

39. Is the violence represented as abnormal/strange/irrational? (explicit)	
40. Are the victim and the perpetrator portrayed as equally responsible for the violence?	

41. Does anyone in the story commit/attempt suicide OR is suicide discussed?

  0) NO

  1) Yes – the victim

  2) Yes – the perpetrator

  3) Yes – speaks in general about victim/perpetrator suicides

DESCRIPTIONS OF *CENTRAL* FE/MALE(S) IN THE STORY

Skip to #42 if there are no central fe/male (general stories)   **0 = NO 1 = YES**

42. Which of the following are mentioned:	**Victim(s)**	**Perpetrator(s)**
Family position (daughter/son, mother/father, etc)		
Occupation (lawyer, prostitute, etc.)?		
Mental health (bi-polar, traumatised, etc.)		
Emotional state (angry, mild depression, jealous, etc.) NOTE: "Scared" does NOT count		
Appearance (lovely, handsome, dressed in red, etc.)		
Attractiveness		
Physique		
Clothing		
Disability (mental or physical)		

FRAMING THE VICTIM(S) *(Skip to # 48 if victims NOT mentioned)*   **0 = NO 1 = YES**

43. Is the language used to describe the victim/(s)? (this must be very *explicitly* negative) (e.g. argumentative, inadequate, promiscuous, etc.) 0) Neutral 1) Negative 2) Positive 3) Both	
44. Is/are the 'unfortunate' background(s) of the victim/(s) mentioned? (e.g. difficult childhood, etc.)	
45. Is/are the victim/(s) in the story described as vulnerable? (*Explicit*)	
46. Are victims' actions described (by any part/person of the story) as *provoking* violence in any way? (infidelity, he raped her, etc.)	
47. Could the victims' actions be taken as *enabling* violence/abuse? (hitchhiking, being a prostitute, drunk, etc.) 0) NO 1) Dressing provocatively 5) Profession – sex worker 2) Drinking/drug use 6) Hitchhiking 3) Going with/inviting the perpetrator home 7) A combination of these 4) Being out alone 8) Other _____	
48. Does the tone of the article as a whole seem to blame the victim?	

FRAMING THE PERPETRATOR(S) *(Skip to # 56 if perpetrators NOT mentioned)*   **0 = NO 1 = YES**

49. Is/are the perpetrator/(s) described as having "snapped"/lost control?	
50. Is the 'unfortunate' background of the perpetrator/(s) mentioned? (e.g. difficult childhood, etc.)	
51. Is the perpetrator also described as a victim of violence?	
52. Is/are the perpetrator(s) described as evil/monstrous/deranged/brutal/etc.? (including *nicknames* like "hot chocolate rapist")	
53. Is/are the perpetrator(s) described by anyone as a "nice"/"kind"/etc. person?	
54. Is/are the perpetrator(s) described as jealous, or as having become jealous? (This can be suggested – does not need to *explicitly* say "jealous")	
55. Is/are the perpetrator(s) described as seeking/achieving revenge? (This can be suggested – does not need to *explicitly* say "revenge")	
56. Is there any suggestion (by any source, journalist, etc.) that there could be an economic motivation behind the violence? (e.g. to get life insurance money, etc.)	
57. Does the tone of the article as a whole seem to exonerate the perpetrator?	

IPV/IPH (Skip to #64 if not about IPV/IPH)   **0 = NO 1 = YES**

58. Is the victim's/victims' "choice" to stay in the relationship/not report/prosecute prior incidents mentioned? **(The victim here is *not* the female perpetrator)**	
59. Does it mention the risks faced by those who leave their abusive partners? (e.g. percentage of women who are killed when leaving?)	
60. Is the idea that she was motivated by love to kill/abuse invoked in any way? (*explicit*)	
61. Is the long-term/ongoing nature of the violence mentioned OR is the couple's history of abuse mentioned?	
62. Is an argument described as having "sparked" the violence mentioned/described? **X = general stories**	
63. Are any of these mentioned as potential reasons why violence took/takes place? ☐ financial problems ☐ infidelity ☐divorce/separation/unrequited love ☐OTHER	
64. Are any of these terms used? ☐ domestic violence ☐ family violence ☐ IPV ☐IPH	
65. If DV, does the story go beyond describing DV as physical violence? (e.g. economic, emotional, spiritual abuse, etc.) **If so, how?**	
66. Does it mention that the victim/perpetrator still loves the victim/perpetrator?	

RAPE/SEXUAL ASSAULT/INDECENT ASSAULT (skip to #70 if not rape)   **0 = NO 1 = YES**

67. If rape/sexual assault, did it occur in (including attempted rape): 1) Private place 5) Multiple places 2) Public place 6) Not mentioned 7) Other_____ 4) Car X) general stories	
68. Is there any mention of the possibility that the victim lied (or that victims lie about rape/sexual assault)? **If yes, how?**	
69. If rape, is there any suggestion that the victim/victims may have consented at the time and later changed their mind (or do this in general)?	
70. If rape/sexual assault, is it described as motivated by lust? (e.g. he couldn't help himself because she was so attractive, etc.)	
70a. Does the article challenge the idea that rape victims often lie?	

SENSATIONALISM   **0 = NO 1 = YES**

71. Does the story offer _excessive amounts of detail_ about the crime? (How it was/tends to be committed, weapons used, forensic detail, etc. – enough to give the reader a vivid mental picture of the violence) OR does it use _nicknames_ in a sensationalistic way?	
72. Are the details offered unnecessarily titillating? (suggestive terminology; excessive detail regarding the sexual parts of the crime)	
73. Is the headline sensationalistic? Including graphic headlines. (e.g. "Charade hid grisly secret")	

NATIONHOOD/CULTURE/RELIGION/STATUS

74. Does any part of the article imply that VAW is linked to economic status?
0 = NO   1 = YES

75. Is the violence _explicitly_ described in relation to culture/religion? (e.g. how culture – 'ours' or 'theirs' – facilitates/enables violence against women)
0) No – the story does not link VAW to culture
1) Yes – Australian culture generally (does _not_ include Aboriginal culture)
2) Yes – 'other' cultures/religions (non-Australian, including Aboriginal, or religions deemed 'different')
3) Yes – in terms of both Australian and non-Australian culture

                                        0 = NO 1 = YES

76. Is VAW described as facilitated by the cultural differences of 'other' cultures/religions?	
77. Is a direct comparison made between the 'other' culture/religion and Australian culture in relation to some form of VAW?	

FRAMES   **0 = NO 1 = YES**

78. Does the article actively/explicitly challenge the idea that victims are to blame? If so, which?	
79. Does the article call for action against female violence?	
80. Does the article mention the prevalence of female violence? (e.g. percentages)	
81. Does the article mention the *difficulty of reporting* the crime/crimes for victims? Or does it mention the difficulty/trauma of court processes for victims?	
82. Is there any discussion of problems with the way female violence is handled by institutions like police, the criminal justice system, politicians, social services, health care practitioners, etc.?	
83. Is there any discussion/mention of a need for law reform in relation to female violence?	

VICTIM/PERPETRATOR SERVICES   **0 = NO 1 = YES**

84. Does the story offer information about victim services? (e.g. DV and rape crisis centres) **If so, what are they?**	
85. Does the article suggest ways women can/should take control of their particular situation (context of violence)? Usually stories that use the notion of "empowerment" as a way to get out of an abusive context. E.g. self-defence classes, etc.	
86. Does the story offer information about perpetrator services? (e.g. counselling, men's groups, etc). **If so, what are they?**	
87. Does the story mention services for depression/suicide prevention? **(if no discussion of depression/suicide then X = N/A)**	

88. COMMENTS:

89. Were reasons/explanations given as to why the violence took/takes place:
0) No
1) Yes

EXTRA QUESTIONS WHERE FEMALE PERPETRATOR:

90. Were any of these offered as explanations for the violence?
☐ Revenge
☐ Response to violence
☐ Self-defence
☐ Post-natal depression
☐ Battered wife syndrome
☐ Other mental/psychological issues/illnesses
☐ Emotional issues
☐ Jealousy
☐ Childhood trauma
☐ Poverty
☐ Drugs/alcohol
☐ Evil/bad OR cold/calculating person
☐ Under pressure
☐ Financial gain
☐ Low self esteem
☐ Low education level
☐ Mentions that there is no motive
☐ Other _____
☐ NONE

91. Is it mentioned that she was abused by the person she was violent towards?
0) No
1) Yes

92. In the case where the female perpetrator is also a victim of IPV/H, was the woman's "choice" to stay in the relationship/not report/prosecute mentioned?
0) No
1) Yes
X) N/A

93. Is the female perpetrator described as vulnerable?
0) No
1) Yes

94. If rape was discussed/mentioned, what gender was the rapist?
0) male
1) female
2) transgender
3) BOTH male & female
X) N/A

IF THE ARTICLE DISCUSSES VAW, THEN: 0 = NO 1 = YES X = N/A

95. Does the article challenge victim blaming myths? If so, which?	
96. Does the article call for action against VAW?	
97. Does the article mention the prevalence of VAW? (e.g. percentages)	
98. Does the article mention the *difficulty of reporting* the crime/crimes for victims? Or does it mention the difficulty/trauma of court processes for victims?	
99. Is there any discussion of problems with the way VAW is handled by institutions like police, the criminal justice system, politicians, social services, health care practitioners, etc?	
100. Is there any discussion/mention of a need for law reform in relation to VAW?	

Appendix 3 'Not specified' relationships and stranger danger

We believe it is likely that articles which do not specify the relationship between the victim and the perpetrator imply they are strangers. We conducted an analysis of a subset of articles in which the relationship was 'not specified'. After analysing 30 randomly selected articles of this type, we found that the articles could be divided into three categories.

The first category (60%: 18 out of 30 articles) was about stranger violence but the relationship was not explicitly described as such. These were all stories about serial rapists and serial killers which made no mention of the relationship between the victim and perpetrator.

The second most common category in this subsample were articles which describe the details of the crime with absolutely no mention of a relationship. Since these articles do not offer any information about the link between the victim(s) and the perpetrator(s), one could argue that they tend to leave the reader with a sense that this was a random, isolated incident, in which the relationship between the victim(s)/perpetrator(s) was not of great significance. An example of such an article is reproduced below:

> **SHOOTING: Man charged with murder**
> Homicide detectives charged a man with the murder of a woman at Footscray on Tuesday night. Mr Housam Zayat, 22, of Alphington was charged with shooting Anne Williams, 50, at her house. Mr Zayat was also charged with the attempted murder of Mrs Williams' 16-year-old son, said police. He was remanded in custody to appear at the Melbourne Magistrate's Court tomorrow. (*The Age*, 15/8/1993)

The final and far less numerous type of article found in this subsample comprised stories which described/discussed the crime in general (e.g. 'rape statistics have gone up this year') without mention of relationships.

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