

Lesson two

Finding things out

Lecture notes

The second lecture includes 36 PowerPoint slides. This can be edited down to suit. The lecture should also be supported by the use of examples in the reading pack, as detailed below. These can be provided to the students as pre-reading, or during the lecture. Other examples from local media can be substituted.

The notes below suggest how the material should be presented. It is of course understood that lecturers will adapt the content to their curriculum and inject their personal style.

ACTIVITIES AND TRAINER NOTES	SLIDE NO. & MATERIALS
<p>Welcome and introduction</p> <p>Make some clear statements about the confronting nature of the material, and how students can take care of themselves, similar to lecture one. Depending on the context, you may be able to trim these slides and simply remind students of the material presented in Lesson One on these points. Alert them to the resources section at the end of the PowerPoint presentation and mention whatever student counselling resources are available at your institution. Emphasise the need for respectful debate and argument.</p> <p>Briefly mention that in tutorials/seminars students will be asked to apply some of the lessons learned to scenarios from real life.</p>	1-4
<p>Finding things out</p> <p>The job of journalism has two sides: finding things out and communicating the results. Both jobs are more complicated than they sound. When it comes to violence against women there are important things to keep in mind both in how information is gathered, and in how we communicate the results of that. In this lesson, we are concentrating on finding things out - sources of information, interviews with traumatised victims and survivors and related matters.</p>	5
<p>Understanding what you are seeing</p> <p>Most reporting of VAW in the media is at the “worst end” of the spectrum – the material that comes before the courts often involves the police. This adheres closely to traditional news values. The sources of information are clear, and the reporting is largely reactive.</p> <p>But we know that this kind of reporting does not reflect all, or most, of the issue. We need to be alert to the other ways in which VAW impacts on news and social issues stories.</p> <p>Consider using stories in the news at the time this lecture is delivered to point out and discuss potential “hidden” VAW issues. For example, stories on unemployment, homelessness, mental health, workplace performance and so forth.</p> <p>Identify the sources used in these stories. Encourage students to think about other possible sources. Refer students to other examples in the reading pack.</p>	6-8

ACTIVITIES AND TRAINER NOTES	SLIDE NO. & MATERIALS
<p>Crime stories and court reporting</p> <p>Refer to example 01 in the examples pack, and/or more contemporary examples from the period in which this lecture is delivered.</p> <p>Who were the sources? What other sources might have been relevant? Depending on time, either identify the sources or ask the students to call them out and write on the whiteboard.</p> <p>There are legal issues that impact crime and court reporting. These will be dealt with in lesson three but can be talked through here too.</p> <p>How might this story have become “visible” to the media before the police and courts were involved? For example, what services were involved? What were the visible impacts on the women and children involved?</p>	<p>9-10 Example 01</p>
<p>Event and response stories</p> <p>By events and response stories, we mean here not incidents of violence, but rather other events, such as statements by politicians, releases of statistics or inquiry findings, announcements of new initiatives and so forth.</p> <p>Refer to examples 02, 03 and 04 in the examples pack, and/or more contemporary examples from the period in which this lecture is delivered.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What were the sources in these stories? • What other sources might have been used? <p>Encourage students to imagine themselves at the event/statement.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What questions would it have been relevant to ask? • Did the journalists present ask these questions? • What opportunities did the event create for better reporting of VAW, and were these opportunities taken? 	<p>11 Examples 02, 03 and 04</p>
<p>Issue based stories and personal stories</p> <p>Refer to examples 05, 06, 07, and 08 in the examples pack, and/or more contemporary examples from the period in which this lecture is delivered.</p> <p>Encourage students to think about what was involved in identifying the story, gathering the information and obtaining the interviews.</p>	<p>12 Examples 05, 06, 07 and 08</p>

The **conventions of sourcing are relevant to the reporting of VAW (and other social issues)** in numerous ways.

- Often those with direct knowledge - **victims and survivors - cannot be named or do not wish to be named** for very good reasons.
- VAW is about the exercise of power. **Victims and survivors have less power than the perpetrators and are therefore less likely to be able to speak publicly, and less likely to be regarded as credible.**
- **VAW takes place in private.** It can be hard to find the sources, because they are not in public. Usually there is **no easy source of verification of their stories.**
- **The nature of their position – especially the fact that women who experience multiple forms of discrimination and disadvantage are more likely to be targeted for violence – means that victims and survivors are often ‘easy’ to attack on credibility grounds. They may have mental health issues. They may have a disability. They may have resorted to drugs and alcohol as a way to cope with the violence.**
- For years the scale of VAW has been hidden, even if hidden in plain sight. Nobody wanted to believe it. Few people had seen it, and those who had seen it were not believed or credited.
- Unfortunately, this story is real.

Who speaks through the news, and which voices get heard? If we reflect on this, we realise that sourcing involves social power. To be a news source is to have the power to speak publicly. To be a news source is to have the power to shape the way that events are understood.

Thinking about sourcing makes family violence a powerful case study for thinking about journalism more generally, and how it deals with power, and the extent to which it does or does not challenge the powerful and defend the vulnerable.

Thinking this through from a practical viewpoint, we can see **that broadening your sources and taking the time to build your contact book is very important to doing a better job of reporting VAW and FV.** A conscientious approach to source selection is a valuable skill for a reporter on any beat.

Police will continue to be an obvious and important source, but not the only source. For example, police statistics are not the best source on prevalence of FV. See the other possible sources listed.

When it comes to politicians and other community leaders, you should use your judgment. You can use media conferences and doorstops to ask questions about VAW issues if appropriate. As with any other story, use your judgement in reporting and responding in interviews to what people say. **Stress that journalists do not have to print something just because someone said it.** It is important to think about **how the language of sources (quotes from sources) might contribute to the negative representations we went through in the earlier activity** (do their comments blame victims, justify or excuse perpetrator or neutralise the violence?). **Responsible journalism pushes back against this and seeks other ways to tell the story.** You might wish to refer students to recent examples of statements by public figures.

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When interviewing neighbours and colleagues of victims of FV, use your judgement. Remember that the nature of the issue means that the violence is hidden. The fact that neighbours or employers saw the perpetrator as a good person isn't necessarily relevant or useful. Think carefully about how to use this material, if you use it at all. It is **one thing to say that nobody knew there was an issue, because the violence was hidden. It is another to quote a neighbour saying the perpetrator must have "just snapped" because he was a nice person.** Self-evidently, a man who murders his wife and children is **not a "good bloke"**. At the same time, **suggesting that he is or was a "monster" can help perpetuate the myth that only monsters abuse their families.** The prevalence of family violence shows this to be untrue.

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If you choose to report that a source said someone was a 'nice person' or that there were 'no signs' that he was abusive, put this quote to a VAW expert as well to allow them to provide a quote about the context of how perpetration of violence is often hidden and is used by 'ordinary men,' many of whom are respected by their community.

VAW experts and advocates are important sources, particularly for **providing context about the broader social problem.** Victims/survivors can also offer a personal and human understanding of the issue.

Victims and survivors often are the most powerful source in terms of impact on readers/viewers of media content but note the guidelines for interviewing them below.

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The unreliable source. Journalism is all about judgment. **Nobody will ever suggest that a journalist should not access all available sources of information, news and views. However, it is part of the job of journalists to use judgment in how to report this material.** We will talk about this more in the next lesson. For now, just **be aware that sometimes sources will purvey myths, say sexist things** or say things that they may regret later.

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Social media is an important source for journalists and is part of any modern journalists toolkit for newsgathering, The #MeToo movement began in response to New York Times and New Yorker reporting of allegations of abuse by Hollywood producer Harvey Weinstein. The phrase was coined by activist Tarana Burke in 2006 and attained its current significance in a tweet by actress Alyssa Milano.

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In Australia, journalist Tracy Spicer used social media to source allegations against media figures, notably against presenter Don Burke and late Nine News director John Sorell.

Social media enables people to tell stories that may not usually be heard in the media.

It also facilitates abuse: 41% of female Australian journalists told Women in Media that they had experienced online harassment in 2016. This was a self-selecting survey.

The important lesson and the conclusion to this section thinking about sources is that part of reporting VAW well means challenging some of our traditional ideas about who gets to speak, and what we regard as credible evidence. We need to challenge the way that news is framed.

ACTIVITIES AND TRAINER NOTES	SLIDE NO. & MATERIALS
<p>A list of expert organisations is available on Our Watch’s website supporting the media to prevent violence against women: media.ourwatch.org.au.</p> <p>No source should be regarded uncritically, but we know that the true “experts” on family violence – people who work in the sector, in law reform or who have conducted research on the drivers, prevalence and effects – are under-represented in the media. Think more broadly about who would add depth and perspective to your story. Just because they haven’t been quoted before doesn’t mean they don’t have a point of view.</p> <p>Use this opportunity to encourage students to develop good contact books for the reporting of complex social issues. Often the best sources do not have media units or PR professionals proactively promoting them. A good contact book can be the difference between superficial and quality reporting.</p>	
<p>Interviewing the survivors, the victimised and traumatised</p> <p>It follows from the previous discussion about sourcing that when we report VAW we are often going to be interviewing sources who are not always polished, professional or experienced with media organisations, and who are in a position of powerlessness. Sometimes their credibility will be under attack.</p> <p>Often, the victims and survivors of VAW will still be at risk. They are the victims of trauma, and that means that special ethical considerations arise. We must not exploit their vulnerability. We must not further rob them of power.</p> <p>It is very understandable and appropriate for journalists to be wary of interviewing vulnerable and traumatised people. However, we need to properly understand our ethical duties.</p> <p>It is important that journalists not shy away from their core duty of telling stories. The failure to credit and seek out the stories of victims and survivors is one of the reasons that VAW has been under-reported in the past.</p> <p>Research (Muller, 2011) involving the experience of other trauma survivors, such as from the Black Saturday bushfires, confirms that responsible reporting can be of great benefit to them. It is a powerful form of acknowledging their experience and giving them the power to shape the story. This too is part of a journalists’ task – giving voice to people who have important stories to tell.</p> <p>Failing to interview victims and survivors because of our own discomfort is not desirable. So too, of course, is interviewing them in ways which adds to their trauma, puts them at risk or fails to tell their story and give them voice. The notion of informed consent remains vital. Consider whether the person is in a position to give you that informed consent. Do they understand what they are doing?</p>	<p>24</p> <p>25</p> <p>26</p>

ACTIVITIES AND TRAINER NOTES	SLIDE NO. & MATERIALS
<p>The ethical code gives us some guidance in what to do and what not to do. A touchstone of all professional ethics is the idea of informed consent. If we are interviewing someone, we must be sure that we have their informed consent, just like a doctor must have informed consent from the patient before proceeding with treatment</p>	27
<p>This means the journalist has a duty to take care to inform the source about the impact of the story. <i>(If time permits or in seminars, discuss some ways in which this might be done. For example, reporters could take along a copy of the publication they are writing for and show the interview subject how similar stories have been treated in the past.)</i></p>	
<p><i>Refer to the reading for this week, in particular, the MEAA ethical code, the other codes, and under further reading, Denis Muller's (2011) work on dealing with the victims of trauma.</i></p>	28
<p>Journalists should ask themselves whether people have been fully informed of the consequences of what they are doing. If they have, and they understand what they are doing, then they are able to consent to the interview.</p>	29
<p>The four abilities model of consent is a test that journalists can use when deciding whether a potential subject can provide informed consent. It requires an assessment of the capacity of the subject, while also holding the journalist accountable for the truthfulness and thoroughness of the background information provided.</p>	
<p>If the trauma is fresh, it may be difficult for the journalist to judge whether the person is able to give consent. Some extra precautions may be necessary, such as making sure support people are present, or giving the subject extra opportunities to comment on the way their material will be used.</p>	
<p>Some things journalists should consider in interviewing traumatised and vulnerable people include:</p>	30
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • involving experts, advocates and support organisations that have the interview subjects' best interests at heart 	31
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • taking extra care to make sure the interview subject feels comfortable, for example having a woman present • taking extra care to explain your purpose in seeking the interview • you might consider checking back with them before publication or broadcast, particularly if the person is still traumatised at the time of the interview. 	32
<p>The safety of the source is important. This has implications for when and how you do the interview, and how and whether you identify your source. Think about whether they are at risk of being seen by the perpetrator, for example.</p>	33
<p>If you are interviewing someone who is a victim/survivor of VAW, they have already been robbed of power. An interview style that recognises this is important. If you give the subject some power over the direction of the interview, you are more likely to get a good result.</p>	

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<p>Consider the kinds of questions that you can ask - open, closed and “no question”. Each has advantages and disadvantages, but open questions leave most power in the hands of the interview subject.</p> <p>Best Practice: The best practice is to place power in the hands of the victim/survivor while retaining the ability to conduct the interview productively. Open questions should predominate. Language that is likely to offend or traumatise should be avoided.</p> <p>Run through the examples on the slides with the students. Can they add to either good or bad things to do in these interviews?</p>	34
<p>Conclusions</p> <p>This is the place to remind students of the core trade skill and responsibility of the journalist – to tell stories. To help society to “know itself” to use the words of the MEAA Code of Ethics (included in the reading). Telling stories about family violence and VAW is clearly an important thing for journalists to do. Doing it properly involves broadening our range of sources, and dealing with them ethically, and using judgment in communicating the results to the public.</p> <p>It is important to do these difficult interviews, but we need to keep these points in mind</p> <p>This may also be a good place to watch the video ‘Behind Closed Doors’ which provides a good summary of the learnings from lesson 2. It features journalists and survivors speaking about best practice reporting, considerations for sources, and interview techniques with survivors.</p> <p><u>In the next lecture, we talk about how to do the other side of the journalistic job – communicating the results.</u></p>	35
<p>Resources</p>	36

Reading

Undergraduate Reading

Essential Reading

- Cooper, L. (2016). 'Survivors of violence: The dos and don'ts of reporting their stories', *Uncovered*, 6 July. <https://uncovered.org.au/survivors-violence-dos-and-donts-reporting-their-stories>.
- DART Center for Journalism, (2012). 'Ethics and Practice: Interviewing Victims'. <http://dartcenter.org/content/interviewing-victims-ethics-and-practice>
- Our Watch, (2014). 'Reporting on domestic violence'. <http://www.ourwatch.org.au/News-media/Reporting-Guidelines>

Further Reading

- ANROWS and Our Watch, (2015) 'Media representations of violence against women and their children: State of knowledge paper', *Landscapes*, 15, <http://anrows.org.au/publications/landscapes/media-representations-violence-against-women-and-their-children-state>.
- Franklin, B. and Carlson, M. (eds.) (2011). 'Introduction', *Journalists, Sources, and Credibility: New Perspectives*. Routledge.
- Muller, D. (2011). *Media Ethics and Disasters: Lessons from the Black Saturday Bushfires*, Melbourne: Melbourne University Publishing.
- Muller, D. (2014). 'Chapter 13: Trauma, disasters and suicide' *Journalism ethics for the digital age*. Melbourne: Scribe publications.
- Sheridan-Burns, L. and McKee, A. (1999). 'Reporting on Indigenous Issues: some practical suggestions for improving journalistic practice in the coverage of indigenous affairs' *Australian Journalism Review*, 21(2), pp.103-116

Graduate Reading

Essential Reading

- Cooper, L. (2016). 'Survivors of violence: The dos and don'ts of reporting their stories', *Uncovered*, 6 July. <https://uncovered.org.au/survivors-violence-dos-and-donts-reporting-their-stories>.
- DART Center for Journalism, (2012). 'Ethics and Practice: Interviewing Victims'. <http://dartcenter.org/content/interviewing-victims-ethics-and-practice>
- Our Watch, (2014). 'Reporting on domestic violence'. <http://www.ourwatch.org.au/News-media/Reporting-Guidelines>
- Franklin, B. and Carlson, M. (eds.) (2011). 'Introduction' in *Journalists, Sources, and Credibility: New Perspectives*, Routledge.
- Simons, M. & Morgan, J. (2017). 'Changing Media Coverage of Violence Against Women: Changing sourcing practices?' *Journalism Studies* <http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/1461670X.2016.1266279>

Further Reading

- Morgan, J. and Politoff, V. (2012). 'Victorian print media coverage of violence against women', VicHealth and The University of Melbourne: Melbourne, <https://www.vichealth.vic.gov.au/media-and-resources/publications/victorian-print-media-coverage-of-violence-against-women>,
- Muller, D. (2011). *Media Ethics and Disasters: Lessons from the Black Saturday Bushfires*, Melbourne: Melbourne University Publishing.
- Muller, D. (2014). 'Chapter 13: Trauma, disasters and suicide' *Journalism ethics for the digital age*. Melbourne: Scribe publications.
- Chapter five 'Contempt of court' and chapter six 'Covering court' in Pearson, M. and Polden, M. (2015). *The journalist's guide to media law: a handbook for communicators in a digital world*. Sydney: Allen & Unwin.
- Sheridan-Burns, L. and McKee, A. (1999). 'Reporting on Indigenous Issues: some practical suggestions for improving journalistic practice in the coverage of indigenous affairs' *Australian Journalism Review*, 21(2), pp.103-116.