

Why this focus on the news? Because it is the major source of information, facts, ideas and opinion for people throughout the world. In today's 24-hour news coverage, it matters profoundly who and what is selected to appear in news coverage, and how individuals and events are portrayed.

Global Media Monitoring Project¹

The titillating portrayal of sexual violence, the regularity with which it is committed, and the way in which we leap to blame and discredit victims is the real scandal.

Laura Bates, Everyday Sexism²

SUMMARY

We welcome the opportunity to respond to the latest consultation on the Editors' Code of Practice.

We do not wish to provide exact wording amendments in our submission. We believe that the committee members themselves, using their expertise, are able to take our recommendations and make them viable for a free and responsible press and to enhance the code in the interests of the public.

Our recommendations:

- Expand on clause 11 to include all forms of violence against women, to discourage reporting that reinforces 'myths and stereotypes' about sexual violence and reporting that blames the victims for the violence enacted upon them.
- Expand on clause 12 to discourage the use of harmful social stereotypes.

ABOUT US

No More Page Three are a campaign group concerned with the representation of women, namely objectification and violence and sexual violence against women and girls (VAWG)³, in the UK press. In 2015 we were successful in achieving one of our aims; to see an end to the famous 'page 3 feature' of the Sun newspaper, which at the time was the largest selling newspaper in the UK. Page 3 featured heavily in the Leveson Inquiry, and had become symbolic of the UK press' treatment of women. After witnessing submissions and testimonies from charities and women's groups, which collectively outlined the endemic sexism in the British Press, Lord Leveson concluded that:

¹ <http://whomakesthenews.org/gmmp-2015>

² <http://www.ibtimes.co.uk/rape-not-romp-it-time-end-titillating-portrayal-sexual-violence-1548176>

³ VAWG is a collective term for a set of human rights abuses relating to women *because* they are women (e.g female genital mutilation) or which disproportionately affect women and girls (e.g rape). As such it is a description of crime *types*, rather than victims. It includes, but is not limited to: rape, sexual assault, 'honour' based violence, forced marriage, domestic violence, sex trafficking, forced prostitution, sexual harassment, and female genital mutilation.

"The evidence as a whole suggested that there is force in the trenchant views expressed by the groups and organisations who testified to the Inquiry that the Page 3 tabloid press often failed to show consistent respect for the dignity and equality of women generally, and that there was a tendency to sexualise and demean women.⁴

"Importantly, these criticisms of the Page 3 tabloids do not derive from the fact those newspapers contain an image of a topless woman on Page 3 (or not only from that fact). They are criticisms for which evidence can be found on a reading of all the pages in those newspapers as a whole.⁵

With regards to the system of press regulation which existed at the time, the following recommendation was made:

"Consideration should also be given to Code amendments which, while protecting freedom of speech and the freedom of the press, would equip that body [now IPSO] with the power to intervene in cases of allegedly discriminatory reporting and in so doing reflect the spirit of equalities legislation."⁶

We agree with this recommendation and we do not believe that the current Editors' Code of Practice is robust enough to discourage discriminatory reporting practices.

THE NATIONAL UNION OF JOURNALISTS GUIDELINES

The *NUJ guidelines for journalists on violence against women* published, September 2013⁷, cites the key actions that journalists should take when reporting on VAWG:

- Frame violence against women and girls (VAWG) as a gender equality and human-rights abuses rather than as a "mishap", a "bad relationship" or as the consequence of women undertaking activities that would be unremarkable for men (walking alone, being out after dark, drinking in a bar, etc.).
- Have regard for women as individuals and avoid media reporting which reinforces negative gender stereotypes.
- Take care not to contribute to the sexualisation of women and girls in the media.

This guidance was created in partnership with other organisations such as [The End Violence Against Women Coalition](#) and [Women's aid UK](#) which campaign to end all forms of violence against women in the UK. The experts in this field are very clear

⁴ The Leveson Inquiry Report, page 664, para 8.18

⁵ Ibid, page 665, para 8.19

⁶ Ibid, page 665, para 8.22

⁷ <https://www.nuj.org.uk/site-search/?keywords=guidelines+vawg>

about the role the press can play in ending violence against women, given that 2 women a week are murdered by their current or former partner⁸ we would argue that this is a public health issue and on those grounds the press has a duty to the public to ensure it does not report the news in ways which exacerbate this crisis.

THE POWER OF THE PRESS

We are particularly concerned with the prevalence of myths and social stereotypes in the reporting of rape and violence and the objectification of women and girls. There is credible research demonstrating the vital role of the media in forming our attitudes towards particular social groups. We believe the press has a duty to the public, in this respect, to refrain from reporting which can be harmful.



1 in 5

women aged 16 - 59 have experienced some form of sexual violence since the age of 16



15%

Only around 15% of those who experience sexual violence choose to report to the police



5.7%

of reported rapes end in a conviction.

Rape Crisis England & Wales headline statistics 2015-16

In her 2008 report into press reporting and the reality of rape Natasha Marhia identified a “Press construction of rape” which is contrary to all research and crime statistics and which, crucially, “has a damaging effect on public perceptions of sexual offences and in turn the reporting of, and conviction rates for, sexual offences.”⁹ In other words; press constructions of rape, which are not based in reality, contribute to a climate in which only 5.7% of reported rapes end with a conviction, and where it is estimated more than 85% of rapes and sexual assaults go unreported.

In response to low reporting and conviction rates in 2015, and following a National Scrutiny Panel, the Crown Prosecution Service handed new guidelines to the Police regarding rape cases, with the express purpose of dispelling societal myths which can constitute a barrier to justice for victims of rape and sexual abuse.¹⁰ The joint Police and CPS action plan states that:

“Police and prosecutors must focus their cases on the behaviour of the accused, not the complainant and, significantly, the Panel uncovered some

⁸ <http://www.refuge.org.uk/get-help-now/what-is-domestic-violence/domestic-violence-the-facts/>

⁹ http://www.childtrafficking.com/Docs/lilith_representation_0109.pdf

¹⁰ http://www.cps.gov.uk/legal/p_to_r/rape_and_sexual_offences/societal_myths/

Submission to the Editor's Code of Practice Consultation March 2017

pervasive myths that remain to this day among not only some police and prosecutors but perhaps society as a whole, and which may be a barrier to justice for some vulnerable victims.¹¹

RAPE AND DOMESTIC VIOLENCE MYTHS

The Crown Prosecution Service describes "Myths" as a 'commonly held belief, idea or explanation that is not true¹² and gives the following examples of Myths on its' website:

- Rape Occurs Between Strangers in Dark Alleys
- Women Provoke Rape By The Way They Dress or Act
- Women Who Drink Alcohol or Use Drugs Are Asking to Be Raped
- Rape is a Crime of Passion

Refuge are the country's largest single provider of specialist domestic violence services, they state on their website that: 'There are many myths surrounding domestic violence. By believing them we allow the problem to continue.¹³ And give the following examples:

- Women ask for it. They deserve what they get.
- He only hit her because he was under stress.
- More women would leave if the abuse was that bad.

Crucially, when it comes to "Myths" the CPS concede that:

"It is an unfortunate fact that myths about rape and sexual violence are brought into the jury room, and form an obstacle to obtaining convictions. It is therefore imperative that we recognise these myths and challenge them at every opportunity.¹⁴

We believe the press should be obliged to report the facts in a way that does not cause harm; as such the Editors' Code of Practice Committee has an ethical duty to take these recommendations into consideration. We would urge you to expand clauses: 11 Victims of sexual assault and 12 Discrimination in a way that will reflect the spirit of equalities legislation, as recommended by Lord Leveson, and in line with the current NUJ guidelines for journalists on violence against women, in the interests of the public.

We have ended this submission with a set of examples.

¹¹ https://www.cps.gov.uk/publications/equality/vaw/rape_action_plan_april_2015.pdf

¹² http://www.cps.gov.uk/legal/p_to_r/rape_and_sexual_offences/societal_myths/

¹³ <http://www.refuge.org.uk/get-help-now/what-is-domestic-violence/myths-of-domestic-violence/>

¹⁴ http://www.cps.gov.uk/legal/p_to_r/rape_and_sexual_offences/societal_myths/

EXAMPLES**(This list is not exhaustive.)****Metro - February, 2017**

By speculating that the author "might still be alive if she followed her instincts" this article is evoking the myths that '*women would leave if the abuse were that bad*' and that '*women ask for it*'. This is in contravention to the NUJ guidelines which state that journalists should:

"Take care not to imply that a survivor of gender-based violence might be somehow, even partially, to blame for the violence she has experienced, nor assume or imply that any of her behaviour might have triggered the abuse or that "she asked for it".



The Sun Online – February 2017

By describing the perpetrator as a 'Gentle giant' 'the nicest guy' and 'sweetest guy you'd meet' the Sun are leaving open the possibility that the victim is to blame for a sudden and inexplicable change in the behaviour of her murderer. This is a tacit blaming of the victim for any violence enacted upon her, when the precise details of the murder are unknown. The use of the term "'obsessive" knife killer" frames the issue as one of mental health rather than of VAWG, the NUJ guidelines state that journalists should:

"... not refer to abusers as "monsters", "fiends", "maniacs" or "beasts" as this creates the myth that abusers are noticeably and substantially different from "normal" men.

And as in the above example:

"Take care not to imply that a survivor of gender-based violence might be somehow, even partially, to blame for the violence she has experienced, nor assume or imply that any of her behaviour might have triggered the abuse or that "she asked for it".



Andrew Saunders, 20, described by friends as "the nicest guy", brutally murdered 21-year-old window dresser Zoe Morgan and her new lover Lee Simmons

A "GENTLE giant" hotel worker turned into an "obsessive" knife killer after being snubbed by a Matalan worker who fell for a colleague.

One rugby teammate said: "God knows what really happened. I played rugby with him and we all know he was a quiet one, sweetest guy you'd meet."

The Metro, March 2016

By placing exclusive focus on the sexual history of the victim this article is evoking the Myth that women who are promiscuous cannot be victims of rape.



[Start transcript]

*Deepcut trainee Cheryl James 'bragged about sex' Army recruit Cheryl James bragged to a friend about a string of men she had sex with during her training. The 18-year-old soldier was discovered with a fatal bullet wound in 1995 at the Deepcut barracks in Surrey. In a letter she wrote while posted at Leconfield in East Yorkshire, Pte James listed 11 men she allegedly had sex with, including a sergeant and a corporal. In extracts read at Woking coroner's court, she admitted she 'got into s***' about her sexual partners, adding: 'Now I feel like a slag but it was good so who's complaining'. Former Deepcut major Richard Simonds told the inquest how he saw Pte James's body 'lying in the woods' near her guard post. The hearing continues.*

[End transcript]

The Scottish Daily Mail, March 2016

As above, this article focuses to a salacious degree on the details of the victim's sexual history, suggesting that her previous behaviours are relevant to the question of whether or not she was raped and sexually harassed prior to her death.



[Start transcript]

Deepcut tragedy girl loved sex, says boyfriend

Scottish Daily Mail 19 Mar 2016 By Inderdeep Bains

A TEENAGE soldier who died at Deepcut Barracks loved sex and could not stay faithful, her boyfriend told an inquest yesterday.

Cheryl James, 18, died from a shot to the head after being posted on guard duty with an SA80 rifle alone at the Surrey base.

Her boyfriend Simeon Carr-Minns told Woking Coroner's Court that the pair had been in love and planned to marry – but days before her death in November 1995, he found Private James was in a relationship with another recruit.

When Mr Carr-Minns – then a soldier stationed near Deepcut – confronted her, she confessed that she wanted to sleep with other men and 'couldn't help herself'.

In a statement, Mr Carr-Minns told the inquest: 'Everybody liked her. Everybody seemed to like her. She was really sexy as well... and loved sex.

'She couldn't help herself. If she wanted to have sex with somebody else she just would. She wouldn't have been able to stay faithful.'

The 39-year-old said he had pleaded with her to stay with him despite finding her looking 'dishevelled' in bed with Pte Wilkinson.

He said the couple had a 'long discussion' about her 'polyamorous' behaviour that night before going to town the next day for a shopping

'She couldn't help herself'

trip and a drink with a group of friends, including Pte Wilkinson.

Mr Carr-Minns said they returned to have a party at the base before having sex behind a curtain in a room in the Naafi bar the day before she died.

He said he had grown concerned as her mood was up and down, and suspected that she had been drinking to 'anaesthetise' the guilt and hurt she felt inside.

The inquest earlier heard a reference to a 2002 police review of the original investigation into Pte James's death, in which it was suggested that Mr Carr-Minns 'should be considered a suspect'. But coroner Brian Barker QC told the court yesterday that the boyfriend was no longer under any suspicion.

Pte James was one of four recruits to die in unexplained shootings at Deepcut over seven years amid rumours of bullying, abuse and a cover-up. Her death was initially dismissed as suicide and no forensic investigation was carried out.

The new inquest was ordered last July after the open verdict from a 1995 inquest was quashed.

The court also heard yesterday that Pte James had been told by a fortune teller days before her death that 'something terrible was going to happen'.

The inquest continues.

[End transcript]

The Sun, February 2016

By referring to the suspected attempted rape or sexual assault as a 'romp' the Sun are failing to provide an accurate description of the events and minimising the seriousness of the report. The NUJ guidelines state that journalists should not:

"...use the word sex when you mean rape.

This distinction should be made explicitly clear in any reports into sexual violence and rape.

