



Representing the Dead: Media Reports of Domestic Homicide

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Introduction

- Analysis of SA media reporting of SA domestic violence deaths 2005-April 2010
 - Part 1: overview - content analysis of reporting
 - Part 2: feminist and critical media analysis of the SA reporting of the killing of Glenys Heyward

Domestic Violence Related Deaths in Australia

- A domestic violence related death involves an intimate partner or ex-partner and/or the children of at least one of the parties
- DV related homicide is the primary context of women victims of homicide and a common context for filicide (Easteal 1993; Mouzas & Rushforth 2003; Johnson 2005)
- 58% of intimate partner homicides in Australia in 2004-05 featured an existing record of DV (Mouzas & Houliaras 2006)

Critical Discourse Analysis of Print Media

- How the media reports domestic violence can have a profound effect on how society responds.
- Media views both reflect and shape public attitudes and these can either stimulate or stymie policies that might remedy domestic violence.
- Feminist discourse analysis: examines devices that reproduce patriarchal beliefs (Fairbain & Dawson, 2008)
- Focuses on the *abuse of such power, and especially on dominance*

SA Media Analysis: methods

Analysis of Domestic Violence death reporting in SA daily newspapers *The Advertiser* and the *Sunday Mail*: Jan 1st 2005 - April 11th 2010

- Factiva search using search terms:
 - **Free text:** (mum or dad or wife or husband or de facto or defacto or son or daughter or girlfriend or boyfriend or mother or father) and (murder or kill or dead or manslaughter or homicide)
 - **Date range:** 01-01-2005 to 11-4-1010
 - **Source:** The Advertiser, Sunday Mail
 - **Subject filter:** crime/courts: domestic violence or murder/manlaughter
 - **Followed by** searches for individual cases using names, suburbs and MO
- NB Search using free text terms (domestic violence) and (murder or kill or dead or manslaughter or homicide) returned very few results

SA Media Analysis: methods

Article inclusion criteria:

- 1) reporting where: a person is accused of killing their intimate partner or ex-partner and/or family member and/or the child/ren of at least one of the parties in the context of domestic violence – “a domestic dispute”
- 2) New cases from 2005-April 2010, plus reporting on hearings/trials/sentencing etc.

SA Media Analysis: methods

- **Part 1: content analysis**
- **Part 2: analysis of Heyward case**

Articles reporting DV deaths

	Total	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010 1-1-10 to 11-4- 10
Articles	219	6	9	65	36	64	37
Articles reporting new homicides: finding body/ies, gathering evidence, charging accused	116	6	2	59	18	26	5
New homicide cases reported	21	2	1	2	7	7	2
Adult Victims nF, nM	25	1F, 1M	1F	2F	3F, 5M	5F, 5M	2F
Child victims (at same time as adult victims) nF, nM	2					2M	
Perpetrator, nF, nM	25	1F, 2M	1M	5M	2F, 4M	8M	2M
Articles reporting previous years' homicides: hearings, trials, stories re victims, others affected, perpetrators, commentary	103	n/a	9	6	18	38	32

Summary part 1

- Reporting of DV deaths has increased over the time period analysed.
- Reporting of hearings, trials and appeals has increased (more stories per case).
- Murder-suicides receive little media attention.
- The DV death case that grabbed the greatest amount of media attention in the selected time period was the Glenys Heyward case.

Part 2: Newspaper reporting of the Heyward case

- Ms Glenys Heyward reported missing on 27th July 2007. Had not been seen since 10pm 23rd July
- Had been in defacto relationship with Neil Heyward since early 1980's. Had left him in Nov. 2006 and moved in June 2008 to another dairy farm saying that she feared for her safety
- Was due to go on holiday with her new partner 2 days after she disappeared
- Embroiled in a dispute over a 2m dollar property claim
- Was reported by friend and brother to be the happiest she had been for a long time

- Mr Heyward said Ms Heyward had "tried to take her life a few times" while they were together.

"Yeah, it was pretty bad," he said.

He said his sons, Matthew, 20, and Thomas, 24, were taking her disappearance hard.

She's gone missing before," he said. "She was a runaway child. She ran away as a youth. She went to Western Australia."

- 25th Nov. 26yo associate (farmhand) of Heyward's arrested and charged with murder
- 27th Nov. The accused implies 3 others involved
- 29th Nov police take evidence from the claimed murder site
- 30th Nov remains of a body found on a property owned by friend of Neil
- 2 sons arrested
- Neil missing – police launch a search for him

- After 6 hour siege in which Neil inflicts stab wounds to his throat and chest he is arrested and charged
- 14th Dec funeral
- Matthew and Thomas released on home detention bail
- Delay in case from March to October due to backlog at Forensic Science Centre

- March 31 2009 charges against Thomas dropped due to lack of evidence
- Neil and Matthew Heyward and Minter committed to trial for murder
- 27th April all plead not guilty
- 6th June Neil found dead in prison cell – suicide
- 32 yo old son from previous marriage emerges after 24 years
- Trial date set for Feb 8th 2010
- April 2010 guilty verdicts for both accused

Newspaper reporting of the Heyward case

- 96 articles between 30th July 2007- 11th April 2010
- Reporting lacks a gendered analysis of murder of women in the context of domestic violence
- Successful dairy farmers with numerous properties worth about 7 million dollars in total

Neil Heyward as mad, bad or sad

- Serial wife basher
- Bragged to neighbours about beating her
- A DISTURBING portrait of a violent control freak who reacted with murderous rage when the subject of his control fought back has emerged
- Evil and manipulative man
- Got weirder and weirder in lead up to murder
- Furious at loss of control – was unravelling
- He was insane - suicide

Glenys Heyward: Mum

- By-lines frequently used this
- 3 sons: one she saved, one she trusted and one alienated
- Stayed til they were adults
- Wanted children's inheritance

Glenys Heyward: the woman

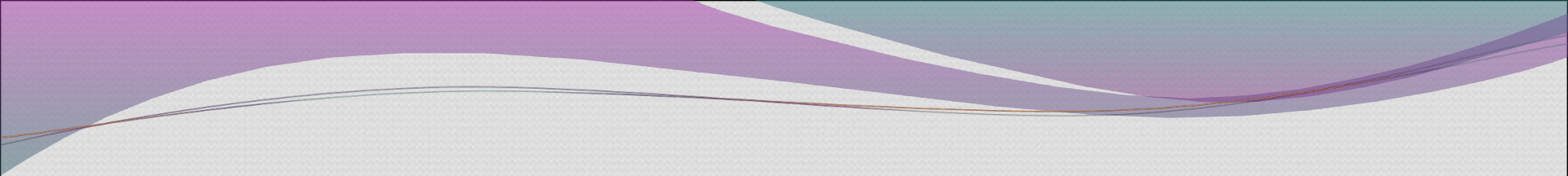
- Estranged defacto partner
- Had formed new relationship
- Caring toward her mother
- Was the happiest she had been
- Was seeking 2m dollars in property settlement

Glenys Heyward: the victim

- Bleeding terrified
- Didn't leave or go to police – feared she would be killed – stayed for 24 years
- Was isolated
- Tried to commit suicide in early 80's after severe beating
- Remained in hiding after leaving
- Fearful for her life up til day before the murder
- Had appt. With DV social worker for the day after she was murdered
- Took anti-depressants
- Asked to have him killed

What can the media do?

1. Reporting leaves big silences – widespread occurrence of DV, perpetrators are not ‘monsters’
2. Reporting fails to educate – long term impact of DV on women’s health, why women stay
3. Promote domestic violence and other support and crisis services to the public
4. Media can improve safety of victims by acknowledging warning signs:
 - Use of weapons – Neil had fired a gun close to her
 - Killing of animals
 - Separation
 - Threats of homicide/suicide
 - Stalking
 - Jealousy
 - Isolation



5. Not a relationship problem – language used can mask the reality that one person is being abusive to the other

- Marital dispute
- Unlucky in love

6. Avoid victim blaming – keep focus on behaviour of perpetrator

- Ms Heyward was in the relationship for 20years

7. When systems don't work

- Mitigate against unsafe messages only
- Important to give women hope that they can live free from violence
- effectiveness of service systems, government policies and legislation as well as identified gaps and trends.

Concluding Comments

- Domestic homicides transgress our dominant cultural ideals of families as loving, homes as safe havens, and relationship bonds between parents and with their children.
- The identification of victims as somehow deserving their fate and/or killers as unpredictable, deranged aberrations, allow us all to continue our daily lives in families and relationships in confidence that WE cannot be touched by such deaths.
- It is this need for an illusion of safety and beliefs about family life that too often obscures recognition of danger, inhibits help-seeking and pre-emptive protective action from services. The challenge is to learn from this common and often predictable crime, to reduce and prevent future deaths.