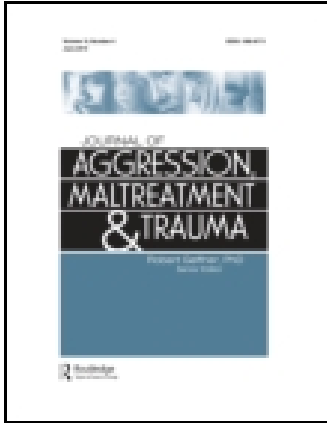


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### Missed Opportunities: Newspaper Reports of Domestic Violence

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## Missed Opportunities: Newspaper Reports of Domestic Violence

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*News coverage can influence public views of important health problems, including domestic violence (DV). To understand how newspaper reports frame DV, this study examined 187 articles published across a single state over a one-year period. Coded variables included characteristics of the newspapers and articles; incident details; common DV themes (e.g., victim blame; DV as isolated or rare); and education, resources, and community context. Approximately one-third of articles framed DV using themes that might misinform the public about DV (e.g., victim blame). The majority of articles missed opportunities to provide educational information or resources about DV and failed to situate DV in a community context. These findings point to missed opportunities for newspapers to provide comprehensive information and resources to the public.*

**KEYWORDS** *domestic violence, media, newspaper*

Domestic violence (DV) is a serious public health problem, costing an estimated \$5.8 billion annually (National Center for Injury Prevention and Control, 2003) and draining resources from communities in myriad ways. Individual community members (most often women) can suffer from serious physical (e.g., Campbell, 2002; Coker, Smith, Bethea, King, & McKeown, 2000; Ford-Gilboe et al., 2009) and psychological (e.g., Coker et al., 2002; Ford-Gilboe et al., 2009) consequences of DV, leading to higher than average health care costs for women reporting abuse (Jones et al., 2006). In addition,

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child witnesses can suffer psychological and cognitive consequences (e.g., DePrince, Weinzierl, & Combs, 2009) that have implications for their performance and behavior in classrooms. In turn, witnessing DV affects student learning more generally in classrooms (e.g., Carrell & Hoekstra, 2010), thus influencing educational systems broadly. In addition, DV leads to an estimated 8 million days of missed work (Max, Rice, Finklestein, Bardwell, & Leadbetter, 2004; National Center for Injury Prevention and Control, 2003), causing a significant loss in productivity that affects the economic health of a community. Further, DV poses significant costs to communities in terms of developing effective criminal justice and public safety response (DePrince, Belknap, Labus, Buckingham, & Gover, 2012). Thus, local communities have a stake in understanding the prevalence and consequences of DV to advocate for policies that prevent it and minimize associated harm to communities.

Unfortunately, communities might have relatively limited access to information about DV. For many people, the media provide the primary source of information about DV. Thus, media coverage can be a powerful force in framing issues (Scheufele, 1999), either facilitating or inhibiting public understanding of DV. Indeed, research indicates that news coverage of public health issues can influence how audiences view the issue as well as possible solutions (Bullock & Cubert, 2002). For example, cancer patients use the media as an information source, indicating that media information influences treatment decisions (Chen & Siu, 2001). In terms of DV specifically, descriptions of shared responsibility between DV victim and offender in newspaper articles influence readers' ratings of offender punishment severity (Lamb & Keon, 1995). Consequently, newspaper articles present a unique opportunity to educate the public about DV. Smaller, local newspapers could play a particularly important role in informing residents in rural regions about DV in their communities, given that television news coverage is usually produced in and focused on larger urban centers.

Although newspaper reports can play an important role in educating communities about DV, past research points to content in newspaper reports that might misinform the public about the empirical realities of DV (Bullock & Cubert, 2002; Taylor, 2009). For example, news reports that frame DV as single or isolated incidents can misinform the public about the reality that DV is often a chronic crime for female victims (DePrince, Labus, Belknap, Buckingham, & Gover, 2012). Because media frames provide readers with a way of organizing or understanding issues (Scheufele, 1999), it is important for victim advocates, mental health professionals, and others concerned with public education around DV to understand the themes that most commonly emerge in the framing of DV news reports. For example, news articles that frame DV as caused by alcohol or anger control problems might inadvertently provide excuses for perpetrators' behavior,

thus decreasing public concern regarding holding perpetrators accountable. Although a broad literature on crime and media coverage generally exists (e.g., Carrabine, 2008; Jewkes, 2010; Silverman, 2011), only a handful of empirical studies have examined themes in DV coverage. For example, do DV newspaper reports emphasize some case attributes while leaving out others, or take advantage of opportunities to educate readers about the realities of DV, including its prevalence as well as resources for prevention and intervention in communities?

The research that does exist on newspaper coverage of DV stories has focused nearly exclusively on reporting in response to DV fatalities or attempted homicides (e.g., Bullock, 2007; Bullock & Cubert, 2002; Taylor, 2009). Unfortunately, such a narrow focus disregards reporting on nonfatal DV cases, which make up the majority of DV incidents in the United States (Catalano, Smith, Snyder, & Rand, 2009). Within this narrow focus, studies have evaluated several themes in newspaper articles, including presence of victim blame (Bullock & Cubert, 2002; Taylor, 2009), sources for articles (Bullock, 2008), references to patriarchal structures (Bullock, 2007), depictions of victims' experiences (Bullock & Cubert, 2002), and DV as a larger social issue or a series of isolated occurrences (Bullock & Cubert, 2002). The available research consistently demonstrates that newspaper articles describing DV fatalities or attempted homicides continue to perpetuate common misconceptions about DV (e.g., victim blame), present incidents as isolated rather than part of a larger social problem (Bullock & Cubert, 2002), and portray the incident in ways that supported patriarchal institutions (Bullock, 2007).

This study makes three important contributions to this burgeoning literature. First, we broadened sampling of DV-related newspaper stories beyond coverage of fatalities to assess whether the themes identified in previous research (e.g., victim blame) were present when coverage of all types of DV stories was included. In addition to coding the presence or absence of themes, we tracked details about incidents covered, including information about offenders and victim-offender relationships. Second, we documented how frequently newspapers reported reactively (e.g., specific details associated with the incident) versus proactively on the topic (e.g., articles on prevention of DV, resources for DV). Although any article on DV offers an opportunity to provide resources or accurate information, we anticipated that proactive articles (e.g., announcing the opening of a new DV shelter) would be particularly important to providing education and community resources about DV for the public. Third, where previous research has at times focused on major state newspapers (e.g., Taylor, 2009), we were concerned with analyzing articles from smaller, local newspapers as well as major newspapers. Thus, this study provides a broad view of how newspapers in small and large communities report on DV generally, not solely in response to fatalities.

## METHOD

### Procedure

All DV articles used in this study were published in Colorado in 2008. An initial sample of 213 articles was collected in two ways. First, as part of efforts to track media representations of DV, three victim advocates from a DV coordinating council collected articles related to DV from statewide sources (the three victim advocates reviewed statewide newspapers as well as collected articles identified by victim advocates living statewide). These statewide efforts resulted in identifying 80 articles, including newspaper stories from small, local papers that were not otherwise available electronically. Second, Internet searches of the Web sites of the major Colorado newspapers (*Denver Post*, *Rocky Mountain News*, *Colorado Springs Gazette*, and *Pueblo Chieftain*) resulted in an additional 133 articles for the sample. Thus, the sample reported here includes articles from a broad range of newspapers statewide, avoiding potential sampling problems, for example, of sampling only a single newspaper that might have a particular framing bias. In total, the initial sample of 213 articles came from 19 different newspapers in 14 cities across Colorado.

Inclusion and exclusion criteria were evaluated in the initial 213 articles. According to inclusion criteria, articles had to (a) be published in 2008 (although articles could describe events occurring prior to 2008), (b) be published in newspapers in Colorado, and (c) include information to indicate the topic of DV. To evaluate the latter criterion, the article had to include reference to the topic directly or a description of the relationship between victim and defendant as intimate (e.g., girlfriend or wife status, references to dating or online dating, heterosexual or same-sex relationship, etc.). If articles described interpersonal violence but did not specify the victim–defendant relationship, the article was included if the newspaper described the crime as DV or reported that the offender was charged with DV. Articles were excluded if only the suspect or offender and the specific charge was mentioned with no further information about the victim or situation (as in the case of brief crime notices posted in some smaller newspapers), or if articles were incomplete (e.g., missing pages that could not be located).

### Materials

We developed a coding system that addressed four major sections: characteristics of newspaper and articles; incident details; DV themes; and education, resources, and community context (details on each section are provided later). The codebook was developed based on input from two sources. First, victim advocates from the Social Change Committee of the Denver Domestic Violence Coordinating Council consulted with us to identify variables (including incident details, DV themes, and education, resources, and

community context) that reflected their public education efforts (e.g., efforts to counter victim blame and excusing perpetrator behavior; efforts to highlight community responses to DV). Second, to identify potentially relevant incident details and DV themes, we drew on the empirical literature on trauma generally (e.g., importance of victim–offender relationship; DePrince & Freyd, 2002) as well as previous media studies of DV specifically (e.g., myths; Bullock, 2007; Bullock & Cubert, 2002). Coding was completed by a lead coder, with an independent rater double coding 11% of randomly selected articles. Interrater reliability was .81, indicating a high level of agreement according to Landis and Koch (1977). Agreement across all categories was 88%, with only two categories having below 85% agreement.<sup>1</sup>

#### CHARACTERISTICS OF NEWSPAPERS AND ARTICLES

To characterize the range of newspapers from which the articles in the sample came, we collected the following information.

*Newspapers.* We tracked the name of the newspapers in which articles were published. In addition, we tracked the publication cities as well as their size and the number of times per week the newspaper was published.

*Article length and timing.* The word length of each article was noted. In addition, where reactive articles reported on the date of the particular incident, we calculated the number of days until the story was published.

*Reactive versus proactive articles.* Each article was categorized as either reactive or proactive. Reactive articles were written in reaction to a specific DV incident, with a focus on reporting details associated with a particular case. Proactive articles were written with the intention of educating the public about DV more generally (e.g., DV prevalence or consequences; community organizations that address DV) or showcasing a DV-related event (e.g., the opening of a DV-related nonprofit organization).

#### INCIDENT DETAILS

For stories that reported on a particular DV incident, the following details about the incident were coded.

*Incidents.* The type of incident described in the article was coded as either a DV homicide or a nonfatal DV incident.

*Nature of intimate relationships.* We coded several characteristics of the victim–defendant relationships described in the reactive articles, including relationship status (married, separated, or divorced; boyfriend/girlfriend; or ex-boyfriend/ex-girlfriend), cohabitation status (living together or not), and sexual orientation (heterosexual or same-sex couple).

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<sup>1</sup> Agreement for “response of the larger community to the event” was 70%, and 80% for “did the couple live together at the time of the incident.”

*Defendant characteristics.* Several characteristics related to how the defendant was described were noted. First, we tracked defendant gender. Second, we coded whether or not the article described the defendant as working in law enforcement or the military, in a position of authority (e.g., a teacher or community leader), or famous in his or her community (e.g., an athlete or musician). Third, if previous instances of violence were reported, we assessed whether the defendant in the current incident was the defendant in the previous incident as well. Finally, we coded whether or not the article suggested that this was the defendant's first DV incident (e.g., an incident was described as "out of the blue").

#### THEMES ABOUT DV

Drawing on multiple sources (e.g., Bullock, 2007; Bullock & Cubert, 2002; National Coalition Against Domestic Violence, 2007), including input from victim advocates, we coded 11 common DV themes that are important to public education and understanding of DV. Themes included beliefs that DV (a) is rare; (b) occurs more frequently in economically disadvantaged groups; (c) occurs more frequently in certain minority cultural groups (i.e., ethnic minority, religious minority); (d) is usually a single, isolated incident; (e) is the responsibility of or caused by the victim; (f) is maintained because the victim stays; (g) is an appropriate way to discipline an intimate partner; (h) is caused or excused by the offender's uncontrollable anger; (i) is caused or excused by alcohol or drugs; (j) is acceptable under any circumstance; and (k) can be labeled as something else, such as a lover's quarrel.

A primary coder and a secondary coder discussed the inclusion and exclusion criteria for each of the preceding content areas and agreed on set category definitions. For example, an article was coded as containing Theme A (*DV is rare*), if the article mentioned lack of crime or DV incidents in the area or surrounding neighborhoods. For Theme B (*DV occurs more frequently in economically disadvantaged groups*), mention of the perpetrator or victim as poor or as having limited education was part of the inclusion criteria. Any mention of the victim having done something to provoke the incident (e.g., threatening to leave him; seeing someone else) was coded as Theme E (*DV is the responsibility of or is caused by the victim*). If the article mentioned that the victim chose not to leave or chose to stay, this was coded as Theme F (*DV is maintained because she stays*). When an article referred to the incident as a "crime of passion," mentioned the perpetrator's anger, or appeared to indicate that the perpetrator's temper contributed to the incident, this was coded as Theme H (*DV is excused by offender's uncontrollable anger*). If the article highlighted the involvement of alcohol or drugs, this was considered to be Theme I (*alcohol or drugs causes or excuses DV*). Based on established category definitions, all articles were coded for the presence or absence of these 11 themes.

## EDUCATION, RESOURCES, AND COMMUNITY CONTEXT

Finally, we determined whether articles provided readers with education about and resources for DV, as well as set DV in a community context.

*Education about DV.* If stories provided education about DV, the type of education provided was coded in terms of the presence or absence of the following categories: (a) DV prevention, (b) physical consequences of DV, (c) mental health consequences of DV, (d) causes of DV, and (e) effects of DV on children. General educational information about DV that did not fit into any of the previous categories was coded in an “other” category.

*Resources.* We coded whether or not stories directed readers to DV-related resources; these could include resources for children, victims, abusers, and family or friends of victims or abusers.

*Community context.* Attributes that helped to set the DV article in a community context were coded. First, we coded whether or not stories included information about the community’s response to the incident, including if the larger community responded to the incident or showed concern for the victims; if friends or neighbors showed concern for the victims; if the community responded with anger, shock, or outrage; or if the community responded by defending the alleged perpetrator. Second, we coded whether the article mentioned other DV incidents in the community or otherwise put the specific incident in the context of a larger social issue. Third, the specific sources cited in the article were documented, including the police, a witness, the victim, the perpetrator, an expert (e.g., mental health professional, victim advocate, district attorney), or friends or neighbors of the victim or perpetrator.

## RESULTS

Of the 213 articles that were initially reviewed, 187 met the inclusion and exclusion criteria.

## Characteristics of Newspapers and Articles

## NEWSPAPERS

The sample included 187 unique articles from the following newspapers: the *Pueblo Chieftain* (28%), the *Denver Post* (26%), *Rocky Mountain News* (18%), the *Colorado Springs Gazette* (16%), the *Grand Junction Daily Sentinel* (3%), the *Longmont Times-Call* (2%), the *Fort Collins Coloradoan* (1%), the *Arvada Press* (0.5%), the *Daily Record* (0.5%), *Denver Daily News* (0.5%), *Douglas County News-Press* (0.5%), the *Golden Transcript* (0.5%), *Greely Tribune* (0.5%), the *Julesburg Advocate* (0.5%), *Mile High News* (0.5%), the *Northglenn-Thornton Sentinel* (0.5%), the *Post Independent* (0.5%), and the *Villager* (0.5%). These newspapers are located in 13 different cities in



Colorado. According to 2008 census information (U.S. Census Bureau, 2008), 60% of the articles came from newspapers published in cities with a population greater than 200,000 people (i.e., Denver and Colorado Springs), 29% of the articles came from newspapers published in cities with a population between 100,000 and 200,000 people (e.g., Pueblo, Fort Collins), and 11% of the articles came from cities with a population below 100,000 (e.g., Grand Junction, Longmont, Golden). Of the 187 articles, 96% came from newspapers that are published daily and the other 4% came from newspapers published weekly.

#### ARTICLE LENGTH AND TIMING

Articles were an average of 358.1 words long ( $SD = 246.6$ ). Articles were generally published within a week of the incident: 28% were published within two days of the incident, and 47% were published within one week of the incident. Approximately one fifth (18%) of articles did not specify the date of the incident. Although published in 2008, 6% of the articles reported on incidents that occurred before 2008.

#### REACTIVE VERSUS PROACTIVE

Out of the 187 articles in the sample, the vast majority was reactive (90%,  $n = 169$ ), focusing on the details of a particular incident. Only 10% fit the criteria for proactive articles, emphasizing educational content and resources.

#### Incident Details

Incident details were coded in the 169 articles that reacted to a specific DV incident.

#### INCIDENTS

Among the 169 reactive articles analyzed, 48% reported a DV homicide, and 58% reported a DV incident that was not fatal (one article reported both a DV homicide and a nonfatal incident).

#### NATURE OF INTIMATE RELATIONSHIPS

Of the couples described in the 169 reactive articles, 100% were in heterosexual relationships. On average, the relationship was mentioned relatively early in the article: 39.3 words into the article ( $SD = 59.59$ ). Specifically, 32% of the couples were reported to have been married, 12% were separated or divorced, 31% were in a dating relationship, 18% had previously dated but were no longer together at the time of the incident (ex-boyfriend/girlfriend),

and 7% of articles did not specify the relationship. In terms of cohabitation, 34% of the articles indicated the couple lived together, 36% that the couple did not live together, and 30% did not specify cohabitation status.

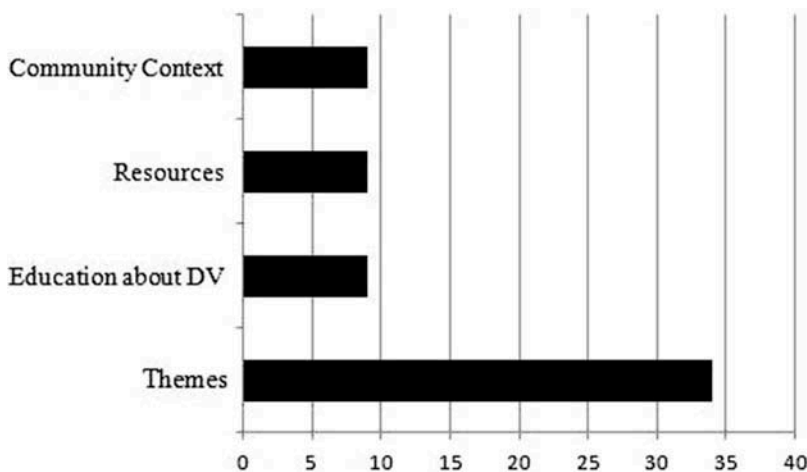
#### DEFENDANT CHARACTERISTICS

The vast majority of articles (82%) described incidents with male offenders. In addition, 13% of articles described female defendants, 3% described DV incidents that resulted in cross-arrest or situations in which both members of the couple were implicated, and 5% of articles did not describe the defendant's gender. Only a minority of articles reported on defendants who worked in law enforcement or the military (9%); had an authority role, such as a teacher or community leader (3%); or were famous in their community, such as a sports player, actor, or musician (10%).

Nearly one third (31%) of the articles mentioned a history of violence, and in 93% of these cases the defendant in the current case was also the reported offender in the past violence (in 2% of articles, the defendant was the other member of the couple; in 6% of articles, the offender in past incidents was not specified). Only a small minority (7%) of the articles described first-time occurrences of DV.

#### Themes about DV

Regardless of whether articles were categorized as reactive or proactive, thematic content consistent with common forms of bias about DV was documented in approximately one third (34%) of articles (see [Figure 1](#)). [Table 1](#)



**FIGURE 1** Percentage of articles that provided community context, resources, or education about domestic violence (DV) relative to the percentage containing themes that might promote misinformation.

**TABLE 1** Percentage of Articles Containing Specific Themes with Examples

Theme	% of Articles	Example (Source)
Victim responsible for incident	13	"The March 6 fight . . . was triggered by a text-message she received on her cellphone from an ex-boyfriend" (Police report: Broncos' Marshall was bleeding after fight. <i>Colorado Springs Gazette</i> , June 26, 2008)
Alcohol or drug use excuses DV	9	"Porter and his 21-year-old common-law spouse were drunk and argumentative with each other" (Man sentenced to probation for choking wife. <i>Pueblo Chieftain</i> , October 1, 2008)
Offender's uncontrollable anger excuses DV	6	"Rizzo told police Cowling went over the edge when they argued" (Man to stand trial in brutal stabbing. <i>Pueblo Chieftain</i> , September 13, 2008)
DV occurs infrequently	3	"It's a hard time. It's a quiet neighborhood. We very seldom have trouble or need for the police to come up here," said a close neighbor." (Man killed by deputies faced foreclosure. <i>Colorado Springs Gazette</i> , June 24, 2008)
DV is a single, isolated incident	3	"This case is about one man's obsession," said Deputy District Attorney . . . 'One man's rage and one man's decision that if he couldn't have Keshia Tann, no one would.'" (Trial under way in 2007 stabbing death. <i>Colorado Springs Gazette</i> , October 23, 2008)
Labeled DV as something else (e.g., lover's quarrel)	3	"The encounter led to a squabble between Guerrero and Mascarenas" (Jury must decide if shooting was intentional. <i>Pueblo Chieftain</i> , May 11, 2008)
DV occurs more frequently in economically disadvantaged groups	2	"Ryan [perpetrator] . . . had moved into her [victim] basement in June to help her pay rent" (Suspect in tot's slaying hears charges; love triangle emerges. <i>Rocky Mountain News</i> , October 13, 2008)
DV occurs more frequently in certain minority cultural groups	2	"Both [perpetrator and victim] hail from a Navajo reservation in Arizona" (DA: Killing of boyfriend self-defense. <i>Pueblo Chieftain</i> , January 12, 2008)
DV is appropriate way for a husband to discipline wife	<1	"In his belief, he was the man of the house, and if she did something wrong, he punished her," Thain [witness] said. 'Anything that Cora did always got him riled up.'" (Neighbors say woman's death not a surprise. <i>Denver Post</i> , January 22, 2008)
DV is acceptable	0	
DV is maintained because the victim stays in the relationship	0	

Note. DV = domestic violence.

provides the percentage of articles that included each theme coded as well as examples of each. To address possible differences between urban and rural newspapers, articles from larger cities (>200,000) were compared to those from smaller cities (<200,000) to determine if there was a difference in thematic content (associated with biased or incomplete reporting; e.g., victim blame). Chi-square analysis indicated there were no significant differences by size of the city associated with the paper.

### Education, Resources, and Community Context

Regardless of whether articles were categorized as reactive or proactive, we coded whether articles provided information about education, resources, or community context. Because we anticipated that proactive articles would be more likely to provide this information, we break out reactive versus proactive articles where useful. In addition to details about coding provided next, [Figure 1](#) provides an overview of the major findings reported in this section relative to the presence of themes.

#### EDUCATION ABOUT DV

Overall, only 9% of articles contained any kind of education about DV. None of the articles provided information about how to prevent DV, and the causes of DV were discussed in only 2% of articles. Education about the physical consequences of DV was found in 2%, mental health problems that can result from DV were discussed in 3%, and education about the impact of DV on children was provided in 3%. Because we predicted that proactive articles would be more likely to provide the public with information about education or community resources related to DV, we coded proactive and reactive articles separately. Within the proactive articles, 28% contained no educational information about DV, and the remaining 72% contained at least one type of educational information. The vast majority of this education information came from proactive articles. In fact, when we look at the reactive articles alone, only 2% included at least one type of educational information.

#### RESOURCES

Overall, only 9% of articles provided information about DV community resources for any population. In particular, 8% provided information on resources for victims to find help, 2% provided resources for the family and friends of victims and resources for children who are being abused or affected by DV, and only 1% offered resources for abusers. Within the proactive articles specifically, 22% did not include any resources, 56% included one type of resource, 11% included resources for two of the

populations just mentioned, and 11% included resources for three of the populations. Within the reactive articles, only 2% described at least one DV-related resource.

#### COMMUNITY CONTEXT

Only 9% of articles mentioned other instances of DV in the community or put this incident in the context of the larger social issue. Only 12% of articles reported that the larger community (beyond friends and neighbors) responded to the DV incident, and 11% of the articles reported that friends or neighbors showed concern for the victim. In 8% of articles, journalists documented that the community responded with anger, shock, or outrage that the event had occurred, compared to defending the offender's actions or blaming the victim in 4% of articles.

Ninety-one percent of the articles contained information from police, 11% contained information from a witness, 33% from the victim, 28% from the perpetrator, 21% from an expert (i.e., a mental health professional, victim's advocate, or district attorney), and 17% from friends or neighbors of the victim or perpetrator.

#### DISCUSSION

Extending previous research, this study evaluated the content of DV articles appearing statewide in Colorado during a single year. Overall, we found no differences between newspapers based in large cities and those in more rural regions (population <200,000), suggesting that journalists approach DV reporting similarly across the state. Across all articles coded, approximately one third contained themes that could misinform the public about the realities of DV. In addition, the type of misinformation across articles was diverse, suggesting that better education broadly about DV might be necessary for both the media and the public. Several themes appeared more often than others; namely, beliefs that DV is rare, is the responsibility of or is caused by the victim, is caused or excused by alcohol or drugs, and is excused by the offender's uncontrollable anger. Although we examined DV articles broadly (in terms of whether they involved fatalities or were reactive), the thematic content identified in this study is quite similar to that identified in content analyses of newspaper coverage of DV fatalities (e.g., Bullock, 2007; Bullock & Cubert, 2002). The consistent findings across studies suggest a need to educate journalists about DV. In addition, the findings suggest that DV awareness campaigns might want to target messages to minimize victim blame, and educate the public about offender responsibility despite substance abuse or difficulties with anger management.

Media frames structure information for readers, emphasizing certain values (Scheufele, 1999). Entman (1993) commented that framing content in a

particular way promotes a specific causal interpretation. Given the potential importance of media in framing and highlighting issues for readers, we find it striking that more articles included DV themes that could misinform the public about DV (e.g., victim blame) than content aimed at educating or connecting the public with DV resources. In fact, less than 15% of articles provided readers with any educational information about DV, and none of the articles offered information about prevention. If articles were reactive to a particular incident, they were even less likely to provide any information on education or resources. Thus, articles nearly uniformly missed opportunities to direct readers to community resources for dealing with the mental and physical health consequences of DV. Even taking into account the very real constraints facing reporters and newspapers in terms of article length, a nine-word sentence at the end of article that states “For help or questions about domestic violence, call \_\_\_\_\_” represents less than 3% of the average length of articles (358 words). Thus, providing readers with a single resource seems feasible given the average article length.

When sources were cited, newspaper articles reported information mostly gathered from the police, suggesting that law enforcement voices are disproportionately represented in this public discourse, whereas others are virtually absent. For example, information solicited from witnesses, victims, and perpetrators was reported in less than half of articles, compared to law enforcement information in nearly all cases. This has important implications for how the public views DV, potentially making readers less sympathetic to the victims if their voices (or voices of their advocates, friends, and loved ones) are not heard, and there is disproportionate emphasis on law enforcement perspectives.

In a related vein, newspapers rarely took advantage of mental health experts and trained victim advocates in Colorado who could provide important education, local resources, and background on the issue. Newspapers reporting on DV also appeared to miss opportunities to educate readers about the complexities of DV as well as the extensive costs of DV to entire communities in terms of public health (Sisley, Jacobs, Poole, Campbell, & Esposito, 1999), criminal justice resources (National Center for Injury Prevention and Control, 2003), lost employment productivity (Max et al., 2004), children’s cognitive development (DePrince et al., 2009), and so forth. Better education through news media about the problems that DV poses to the entire community might facilitate policies and practice that lead to better DV prevention and intervention efforts in communities.

In addition to the clear lack of education or resources, we noted that articles rarely reported the reaction of the larger community to the incident. Much could be gained, particularly in terms of raising awareness about DV, if articles reported community responses to local incidents (e.g., the work of nonprofit organizations that support DV victims, or simply the concern of friends and neighbors of victims). Knowing that other people geographically

or emotionally close to an incident are affected by DV and are responding to it can be a very effective motivator for community members to become involved in prevention initiatives. For that motivation to manifest, however, the events must be reported in a way that connects the incident to the wider community.

Across the sample, we have reason to be concerned that newspaper articles leave the public with skewed pictures of the reality of DV for many people and communities. For example, no articles reported on violence in same-sex couples, although violence in female and male same-sex relationships appears to occur at rates similar to that of heterosexual couples (see Balsam & Szymanski, 2005 for a review; Greenwood et al., 2002). In addition, few articles focused on DV experienced by women in dating relationships. Further, almost half of the articles reported DV homicides when the vast majority of DV incidents are nonfatal, and leave survivors to contend with significant medical, psychological, and social consequences (see Vigdor & Mercy, 2006 for a review). If the public is not educated about the costly consequences of nonfatal DV, there could be less support for community policies and resources to address these problems.

The articles also appeared largely homogeneous in their purpose. Ten percent of all articles were written proactively; that is, with the goal to educate readers about DV, highlighting organizations providing support to victims, or a DV-related community event. The remaining 90% of articles reactively reported on DV incidents that had already occurred, often in very brief stories. Ideally, all articles (proactive and reactive) would incorporate more resources and educational information in the future. An increase in well-informed, educational, proactive articles could improve the general public's knowledge of DV as well as understanding of the broader community's stake in policies that decrease DV and support victims. Perhaps most important, newspaper articles that mention resources (e.g., a DV shelter phone number) could save lives if used by victims and their loved ones.

Limitations should be considered when interpreting these data. First, homogeneity of articles on critical factors (e.g., presence of specific themes, provision of educational information or community resources) prevented us from examining relationships between variables. Second, this coding focused on newspaper articles and might not reflect the manner in which other news media (e.g., radio, TV) report on DV. Further, this project did not code for article themes associated with counteracting bias. Future research could consider the prevalence of articles that work to dispel common forms of misinformation. Finally, it is not clear how reactive and proactive content for DV articles compares to other public health issues. It might be the case that missed opportunities for educating the public and providing resources are equally prevalent in other areas. In sum, newspapers reported on DV cases, nearly half of which involved fatalities. Most articles reported in response to a particular DV incident. Even when we considered proactive articles that

addressed the issue of DV more generally than a specific case, articles rarely offered readers educational information or resources and hardly set DV in a community context. Consistent with complementary research using different methods in different states, we found that newspaper reports continue to publish misinformation about DV, framing content in an incomplete manner that privileges some case details at the expense of others. The way journalists frame news coverage could prevent the public from understanding the complexities of DV, and limit the ability of community members to make informed decisions about community policies, resources, and interventions.

Given the role that newspapers can play in public discourse, these data point to missed opportunities to provide accurate and educational information about the nature of DV and associated resources. Critics might question, though, whether newspapers have a responsibility to educate readers or where any such responsibility falls relative to the need to engage and entertain readers to sell newspapers. Arguably, though, education and selling papers need not be mutually exclusive. The media should be seen by those working on public health issues as an important partner for accurate dissemination of information (American Public Health Association, n.d.; Chan, Quereshey, Melnick, & Siu, 2004; Sharma, 2012). Victims' advocates, DV service providers, and researchers should consider the potential benefit of a proactive approach to media relations. To enhance coordination between public health stakeholders and the media, scholars have recommended that public health advocates cultivate relationships with local media representatives, take the time to explain current research, and provide press releases for public events. Given the disproportionate voice of police in articles about DV, it is also essential to provide continued outreach and education to law enforcement officials. We hope that such advocacy efforts can increase both the availability and accuracy of media information on DV to take advantage of missed opportunities in current DV newspaper reporting.

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