



Minnesota News Council
Mock Hearing Project

Teacher's Handbook

Incest Survivor v. Small Town Newspaper

[also includes student actor materials]

Teacher's Handbook

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Teacher's Handbook

Introduction

The mock hearing project was begun to try to introduce the idea of alternative forms of advocacy and adjudication to journalism students and students interested in media ethics. The First Amendment compels us to have most of the discussions about media ethics in public. The courtroom isn't where most newsroom decisions get made. But the News Council's hearing process allows interested parties and their community to have that public discussion dealing with specific cases where media standards are questioned.

The mock hearings help students understand the nature of the News Council, and it let's them become participants in the process. The hearings here are based on actual Minnesota News Council cases. We chose cases that were intriguing, sometimes controversial, and demonstrated key ethical principles in journalism. These are the kinds of cases that generate the most lively discussions and debates at a hearing.

The Hearing

The hearing itself should last an hour at the least.

Introduction of student actors and explanation of the hearing process	10 min
Complaint reads statement, then respondent reads statement	15 min
Question and answer period	20 min
Deliberation period	15 min
Vote	5 min

If you have more time to work with, it might be helpful to read from the News Council's determination of the case and compare the votes.

Please see *Discussion Points* in this handbook for issues you might want to discuss with students before and after a mock hearing.

The Materials

Hearing preparation materials

This includes the complaint, the newspaper's response, articles, questions for voting and issues to consider. This is similar to the packet of materials news council members would receive.

Teacher's Manual

The front section includes the teacher's preparation notes, discussion points, the Minnesota News Council's determination of this case, a worksheet, and a feedback form.

The back section contains prep notes for the student actors, their background information, a sample Q&A, and the script to be read at the beginning of the hearing.

If you have any questions about the facilitating a mock hearing, contact the Minnesota News Council at 612/341-9357 or info@news-council.org.

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Introduction to the Minnesota News Council

The mission of the Minnesota News Council is to promote fair, vigorous and trusted journalism and to help the public hold news outlets accountable. The Council does this through various activities, all designed to engage the media and the public in public to discuss standards of fairness. We do this because we are convinced that journalism is the most important institution in a democracy, because it holds all other institutions accountable, or it should. The question is, how do you hold a news outlet accountable, other than by canceling a subscription or switching stations?

The News Council was founded in 1970 by the Minnesota Newspaper Association, which represents the interests of about 370 newspapers. The association's leaders recognized that public trust in the news media was declining, and they felt they could reverse that trend by making news outlets accountable to the public. They followed the model of the British Press Council, which entertained complaints against news outlets, and they held their first public hearing on a complaint in January of 1971, against a labor newspaper that reported a certain legislator was taking bribes from liquor lobbyists. At the hearing the editor admitted that he did not check the facts because he did not want to lose the story. The Council, made up of 12 journalists and 12 lay persons, upheld the complaint, and the decision was widely publicized.

The newspaper association wisely cut the News Council loose after a couple of years, so that it would be independent. The Council's success stems from its total lack of authority. If it had authority, it could come from one of only two places. If it came from the government, the news business would not make itself available for public discussions. If it came from the news business, the public would not trust it.

Over the years, the Council has upheld about half the complaints it has heard and has denied about half. Even in cases where a news outlet's position earned the Council's support, news outlets have been known to respond to what they heard about themselves in the hearing by changing policies or raising standards.

The journalists who serve on the Council do not represent their organization; they act independently. Anyone can apply for membership. Our youngest member ever was recruited from a class here at the U of M, Zoua Vang, a journalism student who was 20 at the time. We never ask what anyone's politics are; we are interested only in whether a candidate for membership believes in the value of a free press and in high standards of fairness.

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Hearing Preparation

Preparing students and the classroom

We strongly urge you to do a practice session with your actors before the mock hearing so they are prepared for questions that might be asked. Ask the rest of the class to prepare a few questions to pose at the hearing.

A real hearing would take place in a room in which tables are arranged in a horseshoe, and the complainant and respondent are sitting next to each other facing the group from the open ends. You can, if your class is small, use a typical classroom formation with the two parties at the front of the class at a table. They should have name cards in front of them, identifying them by character name and title.

Introducing the hearing process

Remind students that just because a complaint has come to a hearing, that does not mean it has merit. It means that the parties have been unable to resolve their dispute. Generally, in about half the cases, the Council finds the paper has done a good job.

The hearing has five stages: opening statements, question-and-answer period, deliberation by Council members, final statements by actors to correct any errors introduced in the deliberation stage, and the vote.

Opening statements

The complainant goes first in reading the prepared statement. The news organization then responds. The opening statements do not repeat the language of the initial complaint. The parties are there to argue the merits of their positions.

Question-and-answer

The teacher takes the role of the News Council chairperson and recognizes each questioner.

Students may need to be reminded to keep their questions neutral and brief. Ask them to rephrase multi-part or confusing questions.

Students often wish to engage in debate at this stage. Remind them that there will be time for arguments and deliberation in the next phase. The question period is to gather information and to understand the arguments of the complainant and respondent.

If the student-actor doesn't know or can't think of an answer to a question, it's up to you to decide if that is critical information. If not, it's okay for the student to simply pass. If it's important, *you* provide the answer.

Once questioning dies down, ask if anyone needs more information to make a decision on the votable questions. Re-read the votable questions. Ask a question yourself if you think something vital has been left out.

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Hearing Preparation

Deliberation

Now students can engage each other in discussion and debate. They should speak to each other, not to the two parties or the teacher. They should state a position and try to convince each other to support that position.

Final statements: The two parties can make a final statement if they need to correct errors that came up during the deliberation. Otherwise, they should refrain from speaking.

The Vote: Read each question and have the students vote on each one separately. Hand out the actual News Council Determination for discussion afterwards.

PLEASE keep track of any questions that our material does not prepare the student to answer and send them, along with your feedback form, to the Council office. We can upgrade our materials with your help.

Preparation for the case of Incest Survivor v. Small Town Paper

There were five people present at the hearing: the editor and the publisher of the newspaper (both men) and the young girl, her mother and her therapist (three women). You may conduct this mock hearing with two or three persons.

In this case, the gender of the parties is significant. You should assign a male editor and a female victim. If you choose not to include a therapist, you may raise the issues the therapist raised yourself during the discussion or at the end of the mock hearing.

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Discussion Points for the Class

During this hearing, students will often suggest that the paper simply shouldn't report on these kinds of stories, shouldn't name the victim or the perpetrator, or should put false names in the paper. This is an opportunity to talk about the roles and responsibilities of a paper in a community. What would students think about a newspaper that withheld information it considered inappropriate?

Ask students why citizens might need to know about incest and sexual assault cases. Have them consider why newspapers do not generally name rape or incest victims when they name victims of other crimes. This policy is being questioned, in rape cases, because the stigma is changing and because the Internet is making it difficult in high profile cases to keep to the standard.

Talk about privacy rights in your state and civil rights in the post 9-11 era. Students can also identify and discuss other kinds of information that newspapers keep from the public (for example, in times of war).

You might discuss the policies news organizations establish for naming victims. Crime victims are named; rape victims usually are not. Why? It was believed that the crime of rape was particularly shameful, but that attitude is changing. As a society we are less likely to believe that the victim was responsible for the crime against her, that she asked for it or brought it on by her own behavior. Should newspaper policies change with the change in society? This might also be a good time to talk about privacy rights in your state.

The newspaper in this case held off publishing accusations against the father until a conviction. This is not necessarily common practice for newspapers. Inform students about the process of arrest, charge, trial, plea bargaining, conviction and sentencing, so they know the steps involved and the person's innocent or guilty status at each stage.

The newspaper cited the judge's leniency as a reason to explain the circumstance of the crime. Explain the status of judges as elected officials and the responsibility of the public to watch the behavior of these powerful elected officials.

One way to help students understand the tough task the newspaper faced is to ask them to rewrite the article without using identifying information. Help them consider what kind of information is important to include in a crime story.

For more covering victims: Michigan State University runs the Victim and the Media Program (www.victims.jrn.msu.edu/)

For resources about incest: National Violence Against Women Prevention Center (www.vawprevention.org/)

Note to high school teachers:

The issue of incest may be highly charged for some students. It may be necessary to help students pull back from emotional and personal associations. Help them consider the topic in a more public sense. Maya Angelou's autobiography, *I know Why the Caged Bird Sings*, deals with her incest very well. Using this book, or portions of it, may help students understand how a child incest victim processes his or her victimization and survives. Teachers might also consider inviting a school or campus counselor into the classroom to answer questions

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Minnesota News Council Hearing Determination

Anonymous juvenile incest survivor v. small town newspaper

A 17-year-old incest survivor attended the hearing, accompanied by her mother and her therapist, Sandy Garry of Winona. Representing the newspaper were Michael Smith, editor, and Gary Stumpf, publisher.

Complaint

The complainant contended that the July 12, 1995, story about her father's sentencing:

- invaded her privacy when it identified the victim of the sexual assaults as the convicted man's minor daughter (she is his only daughter), and
- was sensational and re-victimized her by publishing graphic details of the abuse she endured.

Response of the news organization

The paper said it could not serve the truth if it left out the details of the crime and the relationship of the offender to the victim. The paper said its responsibility is to the community and that by fully reporting the incest the paper would discourage others from committing the crime for fear of publicity. Editor Mike Smith said that the paper had been very sensitive to the well-being of the girl by choosing not to run a story when the man was charged with the crime a year before his sentencing.

Discussion

The girl said that when she finally told the secret of her abuse, after eight years, she felt a great weight lift off of her, "until a week later when I saw the article on the front page. It totally tore me apart knowing that I had gone so far and for what? To have the whole town know, detail by detail, what my father did to me?

"Because of the article I feel that everybody is looking at me and isn't seeing me... but somebody who had sex with her father.... After the article... everybody [at work] would be staring at me and whispering.... I believe that... people will think that I had some part [in] what my father did to me."

Sandy Garry said the paper could have warned the girl that it was about to publish a story, could have consulted professionals to ask how best to deal with the information, and could have accompanied the article with a story about sex abuse, about the dynamics of the problem and about how to help victims.

Garry said that, from her experience in working with offenders, threat of exposure would not alter their behavior or their decision to offend.

Mike Smith, the Herald's editor, said the paper couldn't both tell the truth and minimize harm. He believed he had to state the relationship between the victim and the offender to communicate the seriousness of the offense, and to give all the details of the crime because the sentence - one year instead of the 13 the sentencing guidelines call for, plus 30 years' probation - was so lenient.

He said "In my opinion, if you didn't do anything wrong, you have no reason for shame." Public member Terry Thompson, vice president of PR at Pillsbury, took exception: "To say that if there is no wrongdoing there is no shame is ignoring the reality that the victim does feel guilt and shame."

As to the complaint of sensationalism, Smith said that he printed exactly what was in court documents to prevent sensationalism and to circumvent gossip in the community about what had happened in the

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Minnesota News Council Hearing Determination

Anonymous juvenile incest survivor v. small town newspaper

family. The serious nature of the crime made it a front-page story in the community of 2,488, he said the headline was not an unusual size and the story was treated like any other felony story.

Council members asked the editor and publisher about other ways they might have written the story. Kate Stanley, Star Tribune editorial writer, asked if they had considered identifying the victim as "a relative." Gary Stumpf, the publisher, said that all relatives would then be suspect. She asked if he really wanted the victim identified and he said yes. Stumpf believed that leaving out the details of the crime or the relationship of the victim to the perpetrator would have been misleading and inaccurate, and that the public had a right to know the seriousness of the crime. (The editor said the Herald does not name rape victims, and if the perpetrator had been a juvenile it would not have reported any names.)

Council members asked who had been consulted before publication, and the editor and publisher said that they had spoken to each other and the prosecutor, who had urged full disclosure. They did not speak to the family, or to a mental health therapist, or seek a woman's perspective. Smith said he had all the information he needed and had only a weekend to write the story. Jones disagreed, "You had a year," he said, referring to the fact that the father had been charged a year earlier.

Public member Dorothy LeGrand, an attorney, asked the editor why, if the punishment did not fit the crime, that part of the story did not receive more prominence. The girl explained that she had asked for a lenient sentence so her father could receive counseling sooner. The newspaper did not report that.

Determination

The Council choose not to vote on invasion of privacy or sensationalism, but after discussion decided that the paper had been insensitive to the girl. Members suggested that the paper should have consulted others in developing the story and could have talked with the family before printing it to prepare them.

Concurring: Barkelew, Hoben, Jones, Kostouros, LeGrand, Pumarlo, Reeder, Sellers, Smith, Stanley, Thompson, Wicks; Dissenting: Handberg, Parry; Abstaining: Pine (acting chair)

The Council also voted unanimously to recommend that the paper create guidelines for covering sexual abuse cases, consulting with outsiders, including counselors and victims.

Notes

- The girl requested anonymity at the end of the hearing. The Council agreed to preserve her anonymity in its news releases. The Council decided not to ask other outlets not to use her name, but to use its own news release as an example.
- * The news coverage of this hearing avoided any mention of the girl's name or of the family name.
- Shortly after this determination, two major news outlets ran a story identifying another 17-year-old victim of incest. She wanted to be identified, saying that her recovery had progressed to the point where she was strong enough to demand accountability from her abusers, who were her parents. This case illustrated a point made by the therapist, Sandy Garry, who said that news organizations should decide each case on its merits and that sometimes publication of a victim's name helps the victim. She advised news organizations to talk with victims, families and therapists to determine the merits.

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Worksheet

Covering Crime

1. What victim's names does the media generally withhold?
2. In what kind of case might it make an exception?
3. When might a newspaper withhold the name of a person charged with a crime?
4. What impact has the Internet had on these standards?
5. Are newspapers legally bound to conceal the names of minors?

Alternatives

6. What was the newspaper's reasoning behind not concealing the names of those involved?
7. Could the newspaper have published a false name? What would the implications be?
8. Did the story present all points of view necessary to fairly inform the community? If not, what points of view were left out?

ESSAY QUESTION

Rewrite this article the way you think it should be written, dismissing any information you think is inappropriate. Then answer the following questions.

- Did you publish the father's name? Why or why not?
- Did you include graphic details of the abuse? Why or why not?
- What information in this article did the public have a right to know?
- What information did they not have a right to know?

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Feedback Form

The Minnesota News Council appreciates your feedback.

Your name: _____

School: _____ Date: _____

1. What kind of course do you teach (and what level)?
2. How many students participated in the mock hearing?
3. Were the materials provided sufficient to performing the mock hearing?
If not, what was needed? what was overwhelming?
4. Are the materials and worksheet content appropriate to your course of study?
5. Did you run into any problems with the materials or making the process work?
6. How can the News Council improve its mock hearing project?

For our curiosity

What issues in media ethics are your classes most interested in?

Do your students have faith in the media?

Where do your students get their news?

Please fax or mail this form to the Minnesota News Council
12 South 6th St., Suite 940
Minneapolis, MN 55402
Fax: 612/341-9357

Student Actor's Handbook

Student Actor Preparation

You might want to do a practice session with your teacher in advance of the mock hearing in class so you are prepared for the range of questions that might be asked. Remember, you are playing a part. Even if you disagree with the position of the party you are playing, you should stake the position of that party.

Some guidelines

1. You only need to answer the question at hand. Don't give more information than you are asked to give.
2. Do not get involved in debates with class members.
3. It's okay to show some emotion. The real people did.
4. If students ask the same question over and over, simply say: "I believe I've answered that already."
5. If you don't know what they are asking, ask them to rephrase it.
6. If you don't know the answer, try to make one up that makes sense. If you can't figure it out, say "I don't know the answer to that." Look to your teacher; he or she may be able to help you out.
7. Don't be afraid to soften your position as the hearing goes on. Parties do learn from each other during this process and they become more flexible (usually). However, don't bend too early. You have strong convictions you need to defend.

Student Actor's Handbook

Complainant Background Material

Background for the Incest Survivor

She is rather quiet, but determined. Her initial belief is that the paper shouldn't have published anything, but during the hearing she changes her mind to acknowledge that the paper had a right to print it but should have done it in a different way. She is not sure what would have been the right way.

She thinks incest is a personal family problem and that there is no benefit to others from making it public. She understands this problem only as it relates to herself, not as it relates to the perpetrator, the family or the community at large. She doesn't have the larger picture. She is not capable of making statements about the efficacy of treatment for offenders, the stages of therapy for victims, etc. She has been, and continues to be, in therapy. She is making progress.

Her mother and therapist came with her to the hearing. Her mother did not speak. Her therapist did.

Sample Q&A

Why did you ask for a more lenient sentence?

I wanted my family to be able to be back together, and I wanted my father to be able to start therapy that he couldn't have gotten in prison.

I don't believe that the paper was as interested in emphasizing the lenient sentence. Why wouldn't they have asked me my opinion about the sentence, since I was the person involved? I would have told them that I asked for the more lenient sentence.

The newspaper spoke to the attorney? Wouldn't he have spoken for you?

He wasn't my attorney. He was the state's prosecutor. He wasn't speaking for me.

Do you think people involved in a crime like this should be named?

They shouldn't name the victim at all. Papers don't name rape victims, why should they name me?

And they didn't have to name my father because he wasn't a threat to the community, just me.

The paper said one reason it named the family was to let the community know you needed help.

No one has come forward to help. I can't wait to move away to get rid of the stigma. Even my brothers have to deal with it at school.

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Complainant's Script for Hearing Opening Statement

I believe that the paper re-victimized me by including the graphic details of my abuse and by identifying me as the offender's minor daughter. Even though the paper did not print my name, it may as well have because I live in a small town and everybody knows that I'm that man's only daughter.

After I told the secret of my abuse, I finally was getting the help I needed and I felt that I was doing extremely well considering the circumstances. I then gave a statement at my dad's hearing and I felt a huge weight lift off of me. I said to myself, "I can finally move on."

Until one week later when I saw the article on the front page of the newspaper. It totally tore me apart knowing that I had gone so far and for what? To have the whole town know detail by detail what my father did to me? Because of the article I feel that everybody is looking at me and isn't seeing me, but somebody who had sex with her father. I have to live with strangers thinking this of me 7 days a week, 365 days a year. Can any of you imagine how this might feel?

After the article was published, whenever I would go to work everybody would stare at me and whisper. I believe that because of the article people will think that I had something to do with what my father did to me. Unless you're a victim, it is hard for people to realize that it isn't the victim's fault. Nobody deserves to go through what I went through and what I'm going through now.

I also believe that the article victimized my family. I have two younger brothers who still have to go to school in this small town. Now that everyone in town knows every detail of my abuse, I'm sure there will be cruel kids who will say mean and disgusting things to my brothers.

The paper's response to my letter of complaint stated that this type of article would discourage another adult from committing such a heinous crime. As a victim, I know that it would instead be used by the offender as a threat to keep the victim from telling.

I'm glad that I came forward about my abuse. However, if an article like this had printed about someone else before I told about my abuse, I would not have opened up because my biggest concern was that all

Student Actor's Handbook

Complainant's Script for Hearing Opening Statement

my friends would think differently of me. As a victim, I truly believe that reading a detailed article like this will discourage other victims from coming forward.

I did not accept the paper's apology because I felt that it was not heartfelt. It was filled with excuses of why the editor and publisher felt they had to print the article. A genuine apology is a statement that one is sorry for doing something wrong. The paper did not apologize because it didn't admit that it did anything wrong nor did it take responsibility for identifying me.

I believe that I deserve a front-page, heartfelt apology with no excuses. The paper should admit that although it had a right to print the news about my dad's sentencing, it was wrong and unfair in the manner in which it did it. I also believe that the paper should set up a policy so that it will not re-victimize other victims in the future by identifying them and exposing graphic details of their abuse.

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Therapist's Script

(If you choose not to have a student actor read this, include it in the council members' reading packets.)

My name is Molly Anderson and I'm a clinical social worker. I have twenty years' experience working in the field of sexual abuse recovery. I've been Jane's therapist for a year, ever since she publicly acknowledged her abuse.

We have made great progress in overcoming the emotional affects and the shame of her abuse. But Jane is still in recovery. She has a lot of work left to do to deal with the pain, anger and shame of what happened to her. The story in the newspaper, appearing as it did, has set her recovery back.

It was very damaging to Jane and I think the paper should have and could have done some things differently in order to minimize the damage.

For one thing, a newspaper story is not necessarily bad news for the victim, but each story needs to be considered on a case by case basis. Survivors of sexual abuse go through a number of stages in their recovery. Jane is in an early stage. She was not yet ready to handle public exposure of her abuse. But some of the women I work with are very ready: they are angry, they know that they did nothing wrong and they want their abuser to have to answer in public for what he did. These young women would welcome a story in the newspaper.

I think the paper needed to do more research before writing this story. I wonder if they talked to any therapists. They didn't talk to me! I wonder if they talked to any victims. In fact, I wonder if they talked to any women at all.

Before the next story comes along, and unfortunately it will, I would recommend to these gentlemen that they talk to people like me and develop guidelines to handle sensitive stories: how to approach families, what kind of information to include, a list of professionals who can advise you. I would be willing to advise you.

It is important that the girls have some preparation before such a story appears and even, perhaps, some input and control over the story. You must realize, these girls have had all control taken away from them. They did not even have control over their own bodies. And now the paper has taken away control again, control of their own stories. Getting the girl's input gives her back some control.

Student Actor's Handbook

Therapist's Script

(If you choose not to have a student actor read this, include it in the council members' reading packets.)

I realize that this is a difficult conversation to have. You may have to work through relatives or attorneys. You may ask the family if they would prefer that you speak with the therapist and then, through the therapist, speak with the girl. However it works, you should give the girl an opportunity to tell her story.

Finally, I don't think the paper went far enough. If their goal is to discourage such criminal behavior, they will start to accomplish that goal when they educate the public about the crime, including signs to look for if you suspect that a child is being sexually abused. The paper needs to run occasional stories about abuse and the resources available to victims. These stories don't necessarily need to be tied in to a story about a conviction.

The local newspaper does have an important role to play in the community and it does need to cover these kinds of stories, but it needs to do so with empathy for the victim and with knowledge about the crime.

Student Actor's Handbook

Respondent Background

Background on the Editor

The editor is a man in his 40s. He has worked in newspapers more than 20 years. He loves his town and his newspaper and thinks that the paper does a good job.

He is a journalist first. For him, truth is the highest value and anything less than the truth is unacceptable. He knows that people get hurt by what is published in the paper, but that's just the way it is. He's not a therapist, he's a newsman.

He feels out of his element when covering a story like this. He has never had to deal with it before. He sincerely wants to hear from the Council and the victim about what he could have done better. He's trying to find a way to be empathetic to the victim while still telling the whole truth. And he's upset that the story hurt the girl.

He did not try to talk with the victim partly because of his discomfort (which he doesn't acknowledge) and partly because he felt it would hurt her.

The editor stands firm throughout questioning that the role of the paper is to tell the truth. He does not bend on the issues of journalistic integrity, but he does show a willingness to consider new information and ways of reporting. He'll say: "I'll consider that."

Sample Q&A

Did you speak to anyone before you wrote this story about the issue of sexual abuse?

No, we didn't speak to a therapist or a sexual abuse expert. This was a crime story, which we wrote in the same way we would write most crime stories. We deal with the attorneys and each other. We wouldn't ask anyone how to write our story.

Did you speak to any women in the office about the story?

There is only one woman who works in the office as a receptionist. She isn't a journalist, so we didn't think it would be helpful.

Did you know that the girl had asked the judge to grant a more lenient sentence?

No, but if I did, it wouldn't have changed the story. The girl did what she thought would be best for her family. But a judge is the one who has to make the decision, considering what's best for the community. We need to hold the judge accountable for imposing such a lenient sentence.

Why didn't the reporter speak with the girl's lawyer about the leniency of the sentence?

The prosecutor was trying the case. He represented her interests in the case, so we spoke with him.

How did you decide to name the father, knowing that the daughter's name would then be known?

I don't know how else we could have done it. I didn't publish her name to be hurtful. I'm sorry that she

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Sample Q&A for the Respondent

was hurt. But, we try to be fair by treating each crime the same. We have a policy of publishing the name of someone convicted for a crime. We held off on naming him until after sentencing, because we realized it was a sensitive issue. We didn't want to name him until it was necessary. But rumors were already circulating in the community, so it was necessary to put the rumors to rest by publishing the truth.

We also believe that now that the community knows this family is in a crisis, the community can do what it needs to try and help.

Why couldn't you withhold the father's name?

It's not the role of the newspaper to cover up information. If we hadn't named him, it would have left every other man in the community suspect.

Why did you include so many details of the abuse?

We wanted to avoid any sensationalism about that. So, we only used the description directly from the court documents. They are public information.

We used the details we did to give the context for our questions about the leniency of the sentence. The public needed to know why the sentence might seem lenient given the level and length of the abuse.

How much did you do to prepare for this story?

There were only three days from the sentencing hearing until we went to press.

Did you know about the case before the sentencing?

Yes, we knew when the father was arrested. That was a few months before he was sentenced.

Did you consider putting the story somewhere other than the front page?

We treat all felony stories the same. They run page one above the fold.

Student Actor's Handbook

Respondent's Script for Hearing Opening Statement

In this case, the public had a right – and a need – to know that a convicted felon was in their midst, that a man who had pled guilty to and had been convicted of a very serious sex crime involving a minor was living in this town. The fact that it was his daughter, his only daughter, only makes the situation more serious and cannot be omitted from the article without completely changing the nature of the crime. This, as unfortunate as it may be, is a fact that could not be overlooked in the article. We firmly believe there was no other way to report this story and still tell the whole story. The plain and simple truth is that father-daughter incest, a felony, had taken place.

Nonetheless, we understood the effect that such published news has on affected parties. We knew that it would not be an easy article for the family to read and to deal with. Thus, we decided to run it after the father pled guilty and was convicted and sentenced. We felt at the time that this was the most compassionate way to publish this story. We could have run the story when he was initially charged, and then again when he was sentenced, but this would have meant putting it on the front page two or three times. We could have legally and ethically done so, but to lessen this burden on the family, we chose to run the story only at its final legal stage: conviction and sentencing.

We want to emphasize that this is not merely a family problem, as has been often suggested. This is a public matter. Incest is a felony dealt with in a court of law. We have to serve our policy of publishing felonious crimes.

We believe there can be positive effects of the publication of this story. Prior to this time, rumors abounded. Guilt was being tossed about. No one knew the truth. We strongly believe that only through publishing the truth, which we responsibly did, can a rumor and accompanying pain and heartache be put to rest.

We hope we may have discouraged another adult from committing such a heinous crime because, quite likely, their tale will be told in the press. This is the purpose of a free and strong press, one that is not to be abused, but simply be used to the public's benefit.

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