



## Example Letter to the Editor

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[Name of Publication / Media Product]

Attn: [Mr./Ms. Name of Editor]

[Address]

[City, State, ZIP code]

[Date]

Dear [Mr./Ms. Last Name of the Editor (or "To Whom It May Concern," but it is always better to try to get a name!)]:

I am writing to you today to discuss an issue that has become an integral part of the national conversation when it comes to the media's treatment of survivors of domestic violence: victim blaming.

October is Domestic Violence Awareness Month and as a part of this important time the National Network to End Domestic Violence (NNEDV) is asking [websites, publications, etc.] like [name of media outlet] to take initiative and stop victim blaming in the media and create a more unbiased platform for discussion of domestic violence.

I am sure you are aware of headlines, language, images, and interview styles that imply a domestic violence victim is at least somewhat responsible for the abuse they have endured. These instances create an environment in which it is more difficult for future victims to come forward and report abuse.

Recently, the media reported on the very public divorce and assertions of abuse by Johnny Depp toward Amber Heard. In covering this celebrity news story, many publications focused on Heard's history of bisexuality, which is irrelevant to the reports of domestic violence, and/or insinuated that she was only reporting the abuse for financial gain. This proved to be untrue, as she donated 100 percent of the money she received from the divorce to charity. This type of journalism is hardly unbiased, as it clearly implied that she had inappropriate motives and that by reporting abuse she had agreed to have every aspect of her life publicly inspected, regardless of relevance.

But what can you do? Nothing will immediately solve the larger societal problem, but there are some steps media outlets can take to help shift the conversation and tone of stories involving domestic abuse.

When reporting on domestic abuse, reporters should think critically about how the story will be read by the public and what message is really coming across – even if it does not directly say it. Avoid using language that objectifies, degrades, or discredits the victim in any way, and focus on placing the focus on the abuser’s actions, rather than the victim’s. Often, victims cannot “just leave,” for many reasons, but this does not mean they are weak. Instead of asking why someone did not just leave the relationship, ask “why did the abuser choose to abuse?”

Make sure to identify domestic violence as such. Homicide, murder, rape, and other crimes can all be domestic abuse if they involve people who are or have been involved as intimate partners. It can also be important to provide resources as part of a story, so other people who may be going through something similar can reach out and get help. For instance, at the end of a story about domestic abuse, you can provide the contact information for a local domestic violence hotline, program, or shelter. Additionally, remain committed to your pledge of getting information from unbiased sources and/or creating a balanced picture; if friends and family of the abuser are interviewed, friends and family of the victim should be as well.

Thank you for your attention to this critical issue during Domestic Violence Awareness Month. Preventing some of these all-too-familiar victim blaming narratives from entering the national conversation through the media, starts with journalists like yourself. I challenge you to make an effort to spread the word about this issue, and give other individuals in your industry the tips mentioned above, in order to help us create an environment in which those who have been victimized feel safe coming forward. They have certainly been through enough already.

Sincerely,

[Name]

[Title]

[Contact Info (usually email address, address and/or phone number)]