

# 'THE GIRL IN CELL 4': SECURING SOCIAL INCLUSION THROUGH A JOURNALIST-SOURCE COLLABORATION

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## Abstract

*Aboriginal people who die in custody face two forms of exclusion: one evident in their disproportionately high imprisonment rates; the other in their traditional lack of voice in the media. This latter exclusion comes about through journalistic practices that privilege authoritative sources and emphasise distance. Janet Beetson was one of fourteen Aboriginal people to die in custody in 1994, a record year for Aboriginal prison deaths. At the time, her death went largely unremarked in the mainstream media. 'The Girl in Cell 4' was published in 1997 about these 1994 events. It was not breaking news: its aim was to tell in detail the story of the last week of Janet Beetson's life through an investigation of what led to her avoidable death. This article charts the critical importance of Janet Beetson's family members in bringing the story to public attention in a way that honoured their loved one and called to account the systems that allowed her to die. This journalist-source collaboration challenges orthodox ideas about arm's length reporting, and indicates that such collaboration can provide for social inclusion.*

## Prologue

Janet Beetson died of treatable heart disease in the Mulawa Correctional Centre in Sydney's western suburbs. She was 30 years old when she was admitted with a well-documented heart condition, symptoms that were put down to drug withdrawal, a 20-centimetre chest scar from open-heart surgery that was noted on her prison admittance form and a long prison record. Everything that anyone needed to know about her poor health was in her prison files (Delaney, 1994; Hand, 1995; Mullen, 1994), but nobody looked.

Her death in 1994, three years after the Royal Commission released its final report into deaths in custody, was the direct result of neglect, indifference and incompetence within the prison (Mason, 1997). It was also the direct result of the failure of governments to ensure the recommendations of the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody were properly implemented – that is, in such a way that they actually met their objective of lowering the number of deaths. In Janet Beetson's case, sixteen Royal Commission recommendations were breached (Dodson, 1996: 357–58). In the year she died, according to the Australian Institute of Criminology, Aboriginal prison and police custody deaths were at substantially higher levels than at any time in the previous fifteen years (cited in Mason, 1997: 61).

There were three deaths in Mulawa that year. The overcrowding and tension inside the prison were such that prisoners were holding mass 'slash-up' sessions – cutting themselves with whatever they could find – as a form of protest against their conditions.<sup>1</sup> For three months, prisoners wrote to a journalist at the *Sydney Morning Herald* describing prison conditions and complaining of poor – in some cases fatal – treatment.

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Allegations contained in the letters included the inadequacy of Janet Beetson's medical treatment, irregularities in the treatment of another young woman who had attempted suicide, the theft of a 1 litre bottle of Methadone from the prison clinic, and the fear that at least one prisoner had taken an overdose. The letters described a sub-standard medical service and gave an example of an incident where, after undue delays, a prisoner removed 40 stitches (a result of self-mutilation) from her own arms with nail clippers. Allegations of widespread sexual harassment of prisoners by male prison staff and a sex-for-favours network were also made (Moss, 1997).

After taking the prisoners' allegations to the New South Wales Ombudsman (who decided to formally inquire into them), the journalist reported them in the *Sydney Morning Herald*. This story was neither followed up nor reported in any other New South Wales print media at the time. Nor was it followed up three years later when the Ombudsman reported evidence in support of many of the prisoners' sexual harassment, misconduct and increasing self-harm claims (Moss, 1997). Apart from one story in the *Parramatta Advertiser*, the media ignored the Ombudsman's report.

The story of Janet Beetson's death, 'The Girl in Cell 4', was published nearly three years later in *HQ* magazine (Mason, 1997). I began working on it as a journalism student at the University of Technology, Sydney and completed it as a freelance journalist. It traced the last week of her life, and described the institutional failures that led to her death. It was the only story to report in any detail from the point of view of a person and her family affected by the failures in the prison system, and was the only story to report these events as facts rather than allegations.

## Introduction and context

Aboriginal people who die in custody face two forms of social exclusion. One form – disadvantage and domination<sup>2</sup> – is evident in their disproportionately high imprisonment rates relative to the rest of the population, a situation that is worsening (Australian Institute of Criminology, 2009). In 2008, Indigenous people in Australia were 17.2 times more likely to be incarcerated than non-Indigenous people, up from 13.5 times more likely in 2000 (Australian Institute of Criminology, 2009).

A related form of exclusion results from Indigenous people's traditional lack of voice in the media (Meadows and Oldham, 1991; Ewart, 2002). Journalist and journalism academic Jacqui Ewart examined a newspaper experiment in 'public journalism' to see how successfully it had included non-routine sources. She found that, even though the experiment was designed to include non-elite sources, the coverage did not equal that of elite sources (2002: 72). Only one in four sources was non-elite (2002: 72), and 'Indigenous Australians amounted to less than one quarter of all sources used' (2002: 74), confirming an earlier finding that, even in coverage of Aboriginal issues, non-Indigenous voices drown out Indigenous voices by a factor of four to one (Meadows and Ewart, 2001: 125).

This lack of Indigenous voices in the media is important because of the connection between media and societal exclusion. As journalists report newsworthy and significant events, people and circumstances in a circular, self-reinforcing process, journalists make these events, people and circumstances significant and newsworthy. They come to matter – or not – to the community of interests to which Hall et al. (1978) have referred as a societal 'consensus'. The media help construct this consensus as they construct societal identity, delineating who is in and who is out (Jakubowicz et al., 1994), and represent the norms and interests of the larger community (Johnston, 1991: 12.6.2; Bourdieu, 2005: 29). But not everyone shares these interests, and not everyone can speak – or wants to speak – in their terms (Hall et al., 1978), and they therefore remain marginal.

Indigenous people's exclusion from the media is therefore the result of a combination of their dominated and disadvantaged position in society (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992) and journalistic norms and practices that favour elite (Hall et al., 1978; Ewart, 2002),

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institutional (Tuchman, 1978; Ericson et al., 1989) and credible (Reich, 2010) sources. And as they are not considered as sources, nor are they necessarily considered as news organisation ‘readerships’ (Hartley, 1996: 234).

As societal norms influence societal behaviour, the norm of objectivity influences journalism practices (Schudson, 2001). Despite ongoing debate about the limitations of objectivity in both journalism (2001: 164) and journalism studies (Zelizer, 2004: 60), the acknowledged norms and values of Western, mainstream newsroom journalism continue to be represented by the ideal of objectivity (Schudson, 2001; Poerksen, 2008). Objectivity – and the associated values of balance, independence, impartiality and freedom from bias – shape and/or defend mainstream journalism practice in several ways. Examples include the routine over-accessing of official sources and experts (Hall et al., 1978; Ericson et al., 1989; Ewart, 2002), who lend factual credibility to a story (Reich, 2010); and fact-checking – associated with ‘objective’ journalism as a ‘strategic ritual’ against newsroom and public criticism and defamation threats (Tuchman, 1972). Tuchman notes that information from official and prominent sources requires less fact-checking than the unofficial and unknown (1978: 86), and the value of balance produces the ‘he said, she said’ form of journalism, where an issue is assumed to have two sides, each represented by one source (Rosen, 2009).

These factors – exacerbated by growing newsroom time and resource pressures (Davies, 2009; Lee-Wright, Phillips and Witschge, 2012) – combine to produce arm’s length reporting, and limit who and what makes news. They produce uniformity in both practice and stories among journalists (Schudson, 2005: 218), and structure against both complexity and reflective practice (Schön, 1991).

As the presence or absence of marginal sources is determined by societal power relations and the norms and routines of newsroom news production, so is the character of their representation. When they are reported as story sources, Indigenous people usually appear not as representatives or spokespersons speaking on their own terms, but as symbols to illustrate a story on a newsworthy event or theme (Tuchman, 1978). These symbols often conform, individually and/or collectively, to a presupposed stereotype – victim, deviant, a law and order problem, criminal (Meadows and Oldham, 1991; Cunneen, 1992; Goodall, 1993), and more recently dysfunctional. Indigenous people have insufficient media access to gain either adequate coverage (Ericson et al., 1989) in the mainstream media for the things that matter to them, or to significantly shape how they are reported (Plater, 1992: 32).

This is also true of the stories and voices of people like Janet Beetson and her family, although there are notable exceptions, such as the death of Mulrunji Doomadgee, who died in a Queensland (Palm Island) watch-house in 2004. However, as journalism academic Janine Little – who has written on Chloe Hooper’s (2008: 47) ‘way of working’ when writing her book on Doomadgee’s death, *The Tall Man* – has argued, riots that followed the release of the autopsy report into Doomadgee’s death ‘ensured that this Aboriginal death in custody made international news where others barely rated a mention, if they were mentioned at all’ (2010: 48). In a 2005 article, investigative journalist and journalism academic Wendy Bacon described the previous 20 years of Aboriginal deaths in custody media coverage as a case of ‘ethical failure’, where ‘Australian journalists have not sustained a “vigilant scrutiny” of government, let alone protected more disadvantaged groups’ (2005: 36). The effect of this media exclusion is that people who die in custody, and those affected by those deaths, are excluded from the realm of people and things in society that matter – those who are significant enough to be reported on.

This article presents a case study that is part of practice-led journalism research, which applies critical reflexivity (see Kemmis and McTaggart, 2000) through the conceptual tools in Pierre Bourdieu’s theory of practices (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992). It uses the analytical and narrative techniques provided by Donald Schön (1991) – reflection-on-action – and autoethnography to analyse my unorthodox freelance practice as I researched and wrote the story. It is concerned with finding out how unorthodox practices might

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contribute to orthodox journalism practice to extend the range of stories told, and the range of voices heard in those stories.

While the literature on journalists and sources cited above confirms the routine over-use of official sources and the routine under-use of non-official sources, and research is growing into changes in sourcing practices brought by the internet (see Lee-Wright, Phillips and Witschge, 2012), there is little research into non-institutional and individual journalism practices – including those of freelance journalists (Schlesinger, 1990; Machin and Niblock, 2006; Wahl-Jorgensen and Hanitzsch, 2009). This article seeks to contribute to closing the gap between theory and practice in journalism research, and to offer an example of research into an unorthodox practice with particular non-official sources.

The following case study looks at the relationship of collaboration that developed between Janet Beetson's family as important sources for the story and myself as the journalist, as a way of exploring the link between this aspect of journalism practice and social inclusion.

## Case study and discussion

I will look at the journalism practice and its effects, as these relate to the journalist–source relationship, in three phases: before making contact with Janet Beetson's family; during the research and story development process; and after the story was published.

### Before

The story came out of research, with Wendy Bacon at the Australian Centre for Independent Journalism, into deaths in custody print media reporting. Our research, published in the ACIJ's media magazine, *Reportage*, found that media coverage in response to the release of annual Australian Institute of Criminology deaths in custody monitoring reports was scant, reactive, passive, partial and therefore inaccurate (Bacon and Mason, 1995).

While governments routinely reported their implementation of the Royal Commission's recommendations, and journalists routinely reported the implementation claims in the media, Indigenous prison deaths were at record levels.<sup>3</sup> No coverage in the mainstream media at that time explored the disparity between the implementation claims of governments and the fact of increasing deaths, and none included voices from those who were affected by a death in custody (Bacon and Mason, 1995). The overall impression was that the effort to reduce deaths in custody was progressing. This erroneous impression, in Bourdieu's terms, amounts to a misrecognition of the political and other interests embedded in the situation (Swartz, 1997: 89–90). It also illustrates the ideological and structural exclusion from the media of those who might have countered government accounts.

One of the sources for the *Reportage* research, and a potential alternative source for journalists, was a two-page newsletter published by Jennifer Searcy (1994), whose son had died in custody in Western Australia. Her newsletter contained deaths in custody statistics, information about relevant community events and a brief article on Janet Beetson's death. Through her newsletter, Searcy became a voice and a source on Aboriginal deaths in custody, and countered the general silence or misrepresentation surrounding deaths in custody. She performed the essential media function of watchdog – even though she was not a journalist. Without Jennifer Searcy's newsletter, produced with few resources from her home in Perth, Janet Beetson's story – and its human and policy significance – may never have come to light.

### During: Researching and writing the story

Following the inquest into Janet Beetson's death, held in August 1995, I visited the New South Wales Coroner's Court to look at the file. I was hoping for material that would answer questions about what had happened to Janet Beetson, and would demonstrate how the system was failing and therefore how it could be improved. I hoped to write a piece of investigative journalism that might contribute to improving the situation of

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those in prisons, and to lessening the likelihood that someone else would die in similar circumstances. I wanted to confront the system and to participate in an act of correction. This, according to US journalism academics James Ettema and Theodore Glasser (1998), is the point of investigative journalism:

What should attract all of us, as readers and as citizens, to investigative journalism is its willingness to confront a certain sort of social reality: the reality of outrageous civic vice and, by implication, the possibility of enhanced virtue in the conduct of public affairs. (1998: 7)

From the documents in the file, it was evident that I had found an exemplar of such a story. The Coroner's file revealed a terrible, avoidable death, and provided a vivid example of both systemic failure and the missing link between thought and action that seems to characterise many of these cases.

The witness statement from Janet Beetson's next-of-kin and mother-in-law, Dawn Delaney, set out Janet Beetson's medical history and what the prison authorities knew about it from her previous stays in prison. Other witness statements described her ill-health, growing concern among other prisoners and some prison officers, efforts to get medical treatment for her, and her ill-treatment by the medical staff. In this situation, those alert to Beetson's ill-health, showing concern and trying to get her some treatment, were the convicted criminals, rather than the law-abiding public officials. Here was another chance to perhaps counter myths about people in prison, to humanise perceptions of them, to draw connections – to show that these people care and act on that care, just like anyone else.

Because Janet Beetson's life-threatening illness was assumed to be drug withdrawal, she was inadequately examined and not taken to hospital, where she needed to be. The statements revealed a breakdown in the processes designed to give the prison enough information about a prisoner's health to protect them from dying an unnecessary death, if not to maintain and/or restore their health.

From this information contained in the Coroner's file, it appeared that Janet Beetson's story provided an opportunity to interrogate what was happening inside our institutions, and to look into the gap between what governments say and what they do.

From the Coroner's file, I had the names and contact details of the family, and their legal representatives. I decided to take an indirect approach to the family through an intermediary – their legal representatives. There were three reasons to take this approach: one was that I did not want to add unnecessarily to the family's trauma and distress. Another was that I felt an indirect approach through someone they already knew was likely to be more acceptable. If I could convince the family's lawyers, get their support for my approach, they might advise the family to talk to me. I would also need access to documents from the inquest, particularly the findings and transcript of evidence, and knew the family would receive copies.

I rang the family's legal representatives and made an appointment with a paralegal officer working on the case. I later learned from Dawn that the family members were anxious about the prospect of talking to a journalist. They had been under a great deal of stress. Along with Janet's death, and other family members' ill-health, Janet's fifteen-year-old son was having problems as a result of his mother's death. There were other risks for the family. As Ericson et al. (1989: 378–79) note, in order to participate in news discourses, any source 'must come to terms with the fact that the news formula ... offer[s] moral assessments of her as an authorized knower'.

Dawn Delaney faced the real risk that telling the story in 'The Girl in Cell 4' would invite moral judgement of her family, and especially of Janet Beetson as a criminal and possibly as a poor mother. The person who could be most damaged by this was Janet's teenage son and Dawn's grandson, Shawn.

Having decided to talk to a journalist, Dawn Delaney was ready for me. We sat at her dining table surrounded by her files on the case. There were also photographs, letters

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she'd written to find out what had happened to Janet, notes and a list of unanswered questions on the medical logs. Dawn's police statement, setting out the history of Janet's ill-health and contact with the criminal justice system, suggested that the prison system was well informed about her medical history. She showed me evidence she had gathered, gave me copies of the documents I did not have and apprised me of her questions to the authorities. She also made sure I understood the consequences for her family, especially Shawn, who was thirteen years old when his mother died.

Over the next three hours, she told her story of Janet in her own way. She began speaking once the tape recorder was turned on and my questions followed her lead. If I had other questions that were not covered in Dawn's story, I could come back to them later. She was organised, effective and eloquent. The quote that opens the story – 'They just let her die' – was the first thing she said once the tape recorder was turned on. But it wasn't easy: by the third paragraph (of the interview transcript), she was crying.

Because of the nature of the story's subject-matter and its consequences for Dawn Delaney and her family, I was anxious to take a particularly careful approach. By careful, I mean watchful and gradual, doing my best to read nuances in mood and body language. I sought 'layers of permissions' (Shapiro, 2004), sometimes checking that it was okay to ask questions on certain topics before asking them, or not if permission was denied or reluctance detected.

This approach comes naturally to me. It reflects what Bourdieu calls my 'habitus' (Benson and Neveu, 2005), a set of dispositions, assumptions and judgements laid down by primary and secondary socialisations that influence behaviour and set the boundaries of what is possible (Neveu, 2007: 339; Benson and Neveu, 2005: 3; Swartz, 1997: 103). Habitus therefore structures practice within a field (Benson and Neveu, 2005: 3). Dispositions in my habitus affected my concerns and practice in the following ways. As a journalism student and inexperienced freelancer, I had not developed the identity and practice of a newsroom journalist (secondary socialisation). I was therefore freer than I might have been to follow my dispositions in favour of social justice, and watchfulness and gradual care, arising from growing up with a socially aware and mentally ill mother (primary socialisations).

This initial three-hour interview with Dawn Delaney included time for cups of tea and recovery breaks. It felt important to allow enough time to gather the information and quotes, and for the emotions to rise, be acknowledged and subside if they were going to. While journalists are taught to keep control of the interview and the story, it was important in this instance to negotiate control, an approach since advocated by Bruce Shapiro (2004). In the case of sources who have been through traumatic events, he says we need to understand that they:

have very often had their capacity to trust permanently undermined, and we, as reporters, need to go the extra mile ... [W]e have to find ways to earn that trust back by handing over a little of the power for the story ... It works.

Rather than keeping control of the interview and not revealing the story's content, I entered into a relationship of collaboration with Janet Beetson's family, and gave the relationship and the story the time it needed. I was writing the story in my spare time, and needed to wait for the release of necessary documents, such as the transcript of evidence. The story took eighteen months, on and off, to complete.

An important part of our collaboration was that, as the story was written, I showed the family the drafts. They knew how I was writing the story and how they were being represented. I was able to explain why I was following up particular lines of research, why I had written parts of the story in certain ways, or included some material in the story and left other material out. As our relationship and collaboration developed, we swapped documents with each other. Working on the story began to feel like an enterprise with a shared purpose – about Janet Beetson's humanity and about justice – but with different roles.

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I am not suggesting I am on my own in taking this approach. It is the approach of much humanitarian journalism (Machin and Niblock, 2006), and is evident in Chloe Hooper's (2008) book on the Palm Island death in custody of Mulrunji Doomadgee. Hooper wrote about the arrest and death, the inquest, the dead man and his family, Palm Island, the police officer charged with Mulrunji's death – Chris Hurley – and the police, all from within the context of a relationship with the dead man's family. She and I both employed what journalist and writer Daniel Mendelsohn refers to as 'proximity' and 'distance', where:

*proximity* brings you closer to *what happened*, is responsible for the facts we glean, the artifacts we possess, the verbatim quotations of what people said; but *distance* is what makes possible the story of what happened, is precisely what gives someone the freedom to organize and shape those bits into a pleasing and coherent whole (2006: 473, original emphasis).

Hooper also made the observation that, of the 'fifteen or so' journalists at the inquest, only *The Australian's* Tony Koch did not stay with the police but rather 'with a local family and went out on the street reporting' (2008: 92), making his access to police less routine and certain.

Although I was with the family in seeking redress for a wrong committed against one of their own, and in validating Janet Beetson's humanity, I knew that I was no use to them or the story without maintaining credibility as a journalist. I needed both proximity and distance.

As a freelancer, I was free of the routines and structures of mainstream news production, including deadlines, and of what Michael Schudson (2001: 162) calls the 'industrial discipline' of 'objectivity as ideology'. I was free to allow the time for a collaborative relationship to develop with Janet Beetson's family, and to express human values, such as solidarity (see Ettema and Glasser, 1998), through my journalism practice. I could also explore the possibilities of ethical journalism that comes from its role in a democratic political system, its commitment to get as close as possible to the truth of a situation, and to do that with accuracy, honesty, fairness and respect for the rights of others (as outlined in the Journalists' Code of Ethics).

Although at the time of the interview with Dawn Delaney I did not think in terms of handing over some of the power over the story (Shapiro, 2004), it was clear that I was in a relationship with her and other family members that required trust, care and respect. I was acutely aware that it was hard on them to relive what had happened to Janet Beetson, but they trusted me with Janet's story and their vulnerabilities. We cried together, and we shared the same objective – something akin to honouring Janet Beetson's humanity, her dignity and giving voice to her and the family's experience, not leaving her as a voiceless, forgotten number in the deaths-in-custody tally for the year she died.

### **After: Publication and its effects**

Dawn Delaney seemed happy with the story's publication, and the recognition it brought to her daughter-in-law, her family and other women in prison, as well as how it highlighted the issues surrounding continuing deaths in custody. We remained in contact, and when the story won the George Munster Award for Freelance Journalism in Sydney, Dawn was there to celebrate.

A few months after the story's publication in 1997, the family invited me to accompany them to the prison, where a smoking ceremony would be held to help settle Janet Beetson's spirit. I attended the ceremony and wrote the story, this time with less involvement from the family – it was largely a piece of reportage – but with their blessing.

An unexpected bonus was that the story's publication led to Mulawa prisoners' voices being heard more directly than through the story. Someone took the magazine into the prison and women inside wrote a letter to the editor, which was published in the next edition. It complimented *HQ* for an 'honest account of the unnecessary death of Janet Beetson' (Names withheld, 1997). This sentence confirmed that the story had met at least

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one of its aims: it had represented the experience of women inside, and of Janet Beetson, accurately. In this sense, it had told a truth.

The letter's authors used the opportunity to say that many of the conditions inside prison that had contributed to Janet's death had not improved. They also referred directly to their voicelessness. They noted the lack of media coverage and public interest, and expressed their understanding of the consequences of their social exclusion:

The fact that a female prisoner's death is not reported or recorded anywhere of note (until your article) signals toward the far wider and more threatening questions about the status of prisoners in general and women as prisoners in particular. (Names withheld, 1997)

The letter concludes that it is important for women in prison to:

unite against the common enemy – not the prison officers or medical staff, nor men *per se*, but the ignorance of our culture which places too little value on the well-being of those people who have been branded criminals. Janet Beetson's death was caused not by individuals but by these attitudes which are endorsed by every institution we hold dear. (Names withheld, 1997)

Just as these women understood that Janet Beetson was ill and needed urgent medical attention when medical staff apparently did not, they understood something of the complex range of factors, including the kind of cultural-political attitudes, that their treatment revealed.

## Conclusion

Allowing us to hear the voices of the usually unheard – in this case, the family of a woman who died in prison and her fellow prisoners – is an important motivation for journalism that aims to include the generally excluded (Ettema and Glasser, 1998).

The relation between societal and media power relations, combined with the effects of the norms, structures and routines of news reporting – including how journalists find and represent sources – plays a significant role in the structured exclusion of the usually unheard, such as Indigenous people and the families of those who die in custody. Therefore, different norms and practices, such as collaborating with sources rather than keeping them at arm's length, may achieve results where orthodox ways of working may not (Hartley, 1999).

Consistent with our relationship, I counted Janet Beetson's family, the women in prison and those who care about them as part of the audience for 'The Girl in Cell 4'. They formed 'readerships' for the story, and spoke of it, and their exclusion from the media, from their own points of view. Recognising the generally unheard as part of the audience for our reporting is one way to counter their exclusion.

Because norms and values are integral to practice, this article seeks a reconsideration of the acknowledged values guiding journalism. Solidarity and collaboration are not usually spoken of as journalistic values, but understanding the human values that underpin our work can contribute to journalism that counters exclusion. In their study of successful US investigative journalists (that is, award-winning, mainstream journalists), Ettema and Glasser (1998) examined how fact and value are interconnected in investigative journalism as a way of identifying 'the sorts of news values that might transcend objectivity as a basic norm of journalism's professional culture' (1998: 14).

For Ettema and Glasser, the overriding responsibility for journalism is for 'sustained public interaction' (1998: 189) that expresses the following values: 'publicity' – bringing to public attention system failures, corruption and injustices, and the effects of destructive, indifferent and incompetent public and corporate administration; 'accountability' – asking those responsible to account for the situation and/or their actions/inaction, and providing an opportunity for those affected to be heard, lending voice to the voiceless; and 'solidarity' – connecting those who have suffered to the rest of us through telling their story

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(1998: 7, 189). They see these values as producing journalism that contributes to ‘the possibility of enhanced virtue in the conduct of public affairs’ (1989: 7), something that Dawn Delaney and I sought in telling Janet Beetson’s story.

The collaboration with Janet Beetson’s family was critical in bringing the story to public attention in a way that honoured their loved one and called to account the systems that had allowed her to die. This example of one journalist–source relationship suggests an alternative to mainstream, arm’s length reporting, and indicates that such collaboration can provide a basis for social inclusion. As well as acknowledging values such as publicity, accountability and solidarity in our reporting, I believe it can extend the range of stories told and the range of voices heard.

## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> This information, from a personal communication with a representative of prisoners’ advocacy group Justice Action (November 1995), is supported by the discussion and findings of the New South Wales Ombudsman’s report into the ‘care and protection’ of women prisoners in Mulawa, and ‘the response to, and prevention of, self mutilation by women at that gaol’ (Moss, 1997: i). The Ombudsman also identified other contributing factors in her report – such as, but not confined to, poor food, arbitrary and harsh punishments, problems with staff resulting in women being locked in their cells for long periods, poorly managed mental health problems and drug use among prisoners (Moss, 1997).
- <sup>2</sup> This is reflected and described in the range of ‘social, legal and cultural factors’ discussed in the underlying issues sections (Volumes 2 and 4) of the Report of the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody, which the Commission said explained the disproportionately high imprisonment rates (Johnston, 1991).
- <sup>3</sup> The numbers of Indigenous people dying in prison peaked in 1995 (eighteen deaths), stayed relatively high until 2001, with between nine and fourteen deaths each year, then steadily decreased until 2006, when there were four deaths. Four Indigenous people died in prison in 2007, and nine in 2008 (Lyneham et al., 2010: 12).

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