

7 NEGOTIATING DISCOURSES OF VALUE: INTERVIEWS WITH JOURNALISTS AND EDITORS

7.1 Introduction

“There are more ideas on earth than intellectuals imagine. And these ideas are more active, stronger, more resistant, more passionate than ‘politicians’ think. We have to be there at the birth of ideas, the bursting outward of their force: not in books expressing them, but in events manifesting this force, in struggles carried on around ideas, for or against them” (Foucault, 1978: 707).

Discourses are not static bodies of knowledge but are evolving, negotiated, contested. Even dominant ideas are resisted, and different discourses can compete and negotiate with one another towards charting a way forward in thinking or practice. In part, I would read Foucault’s reflection above as suggesting that ideas (strong social forces) are not just manifest in books, in formalised and written text, but also in live events, and that they are also not just manifest in final textual products, but in the struggles for meaning that precede and continue to be represented within these.

So, too, looking at newspaper texts as has been done in the previous Chapter, while also able to tease out certain struggles over meaning and offering examples of more distilled outcomes (compromises?) of the struggles over meaning, can offer only part of the story of meaning making. Interviews - live interactions and in themselves “events” characterised by meaning making - have been the primary source of information for this research, not only because through them I felt I would be able to more directly ask journalists about their perceptions and decision-making around gender and media texts, but also because, in the act of interviewing, contestations over meaning and processes of representation-creation are actively taking place. Interview participants are responding to both perceived and actual expectations around the research, to anticipated and unanticipated questions, to various considerations and conveying a slice of their position and location in relation to these. Interviews offer an opportunity to observe these processes.

Subsequent to transcribing and re-reading the interviews, I found this characteristic of interviews to be even more pronounced than expected. While the interview data (like any

other data) cannot - even in conjunction with the newspaper analysis - give a complete picture or construct a comprehensive causal theory surrounding how gendered media texts in the newspapers are produced, it does highlight very interesting and contextually relevant aspects of meaning making processes in the media. This is so especially when viewed against the backdrop of other, prolific research around the media industry, textual production, discourse and power, as well as the findings for component one of the research. In many respects, the processes of meaning making within the interviews offered some important insights into the struggles over meaning that may be taking place in the constitution of newspaper texts. The interviews cast light on particular areas of rich and vibrant discursive negotiation over value and meaning related to the media industry, journalistic professionalism, gender and the politics of social transformation in South Africa, and questions of agency (both journalistic and consumer). These meanings and values act as considerations for the constitution of the texts discussed in Chapter 6, underscoring the ways in which ideas around gender and news are both understood and negotiated.

First, this Chapter will provide a brief outline of the interview participants and any relevant methodological or contextual issues surrounding the interview participant sample. Second, it will highlight key observations regarding my interaction with the participants, touching mainly on those with significance to the way in which participants' responses may have been constituted, namely questions around how the interviews (and therefore the interview findings) were framed. The findings for the interviews are then presented separately for each newspaper, as was done in Chapter 6, under sub-headings created as part of the outcome of the research, representing broad themes emerging from the interviews. These include the newspapers' market and market appeal, narratives related to how news stories are identified and written, the role of the media, notions or understandings of gender transformation and gender issues, and discursive strategies employed by participants to negotiate the media's role, especially in a transforming society, in amidst these various considerations.

These themes are broad and representative more of areas of concern or relevance to the question than of the original research findings themselves. This is in part because the findings were so highly interlinked that I struggled to present the detailed interview data for all of the relevant newspapers via themes based on original findings. Therefore, I instead present the findings via these broad thematic areas, and build a discussion around the

original findings progressively as I address each area for each newspaper. This Chapter then concludes very briefly with an overview of the findings, before the final reflections are made in concluding Chapter 8.

7.2 Interview Participants' Profile

As discussed in the methodology, participants were approached on the basis of key criteria (such as their current status as in-house staff) and attempts to garner a spread of different participants. The participation of the newspaper editors was also sought. However, the process of acquiring permissions to conduct research at the different newspapers, as well as to formalise interview appointments, was in some ways a difficult one and impacted on the final participant profile. A summarised participant profile is tabulated below (Table 8).

TABLE 8: INTERVIEW PARTICIPANT PROFILE					
Feature		SS	ST	MG	Total
Sex	Female	5	3	3	11
	Male	2	2	1	5
Race ⁵⁰	Black	7	3	1	11
	White	0	2	3	5
Journalistic experience	5 years or less	4	1	1	6
	More than 5 years	3	3	3	9
	Unknown	0	1	0	1
Position	Journalist	5	3	3 ⁵¹	11
	Sub-editor	0	2	0	2
	Deputy-editor	1	0	0	1
	Editor	1	0	1	2
Training in	Yes	5	2	4	11

⁵⁰ I use these racial categories with a good deal of scepticism and caution given their tendency to bypass complexities in identity and force individuals into broad, poorly conceptualised boxes. Furthermore, it could be argued that I have further simplified these issues by using only two racial categories: "black" and "white". However, I felt it would make participants uncomfortable to ask them to name their self-identified race (as may be done in a quantitative study), and I also felt it would be ethically and practically problematic for me to apply more specific categorisations (such as "coloured" or "Asian") myself, according to what would be assumptions regarding appearance and identity. Therefore, I decided to use a more politicised conception of race here, with broader attendant associations of historical advantage and disadvantage, economically and politically. This is not intended to obscure diversity or the complexities of "race".

⁵¹ One of these participants did not identify as a journalist or reporter as such, but more specifically as a "critic".

journalism ⁵²	No	1	1	0	2
	Unknown	1	2 ⁵³	0	3
In-house staff	Yes	7	5	3	15
	No	0	0	1	1
Number of participants		7	5	4	16

In total, sixteen individual interviews were conducted, including seven at the SS, five at the ST and four at the MG. The number of interviews for the MG, in particular, was lower than I had hoped. I found it difficult to set up appointments for these interviews since I was not initially granted permission to contact journalists directly (having to go through an administrator at the newspaper); where I was able to contact journalists directly, it was easier to pin down dates for interviews. Many journalists were also very busy at work, and the nature of journalism as a profession meant that their schedules were not always easy to predict.

I should note that once contact was made with editors for permission to conduct the research, they happily granted permission to conduct the research. However, encouraging journalists to respond, either positively or negatively, to requests for participation was generally very difficult, as was garnering their commitment to dates for interviews. After nearly nine months of trying, I needed to finalise the principle research component. As such, at certain newspapers fewer interviews were undertaken than initially intended, and the profile of participants was somewhat altered due to issues of accessibility.

- One *contract* member of staff from MG was interviewed by phone. Since I had only managed to secure interviews with two journalists from the MG in nearly 9 months, I forewent the criteria of limiting the sample to in-house staff in this instance.
- The editors of the SS and MG were both extensively interviewed. In the case of the SS, the deputy editor (who was to become acting editor a few months after the interview) was also interviewed. However, perhaps in part due to the controversy and time-consuming legal issues surrounding the editor of the ST at the time of the research, I was not able to make any direct contact with him. I was also not able to

⁵² Note that this refers to training in a field relevant to their current position as journalists or, in the case of one participant working as an art critic writer, training relevant to his work. Those without such training may have training and/or degrees in other areas, having switched from another career without accessing journalistic training.

⁵³ While I did not ask these participants directly, the discussions held with them strongly suggested that they had training in journalism.

garner the participation of the managing editor, who granted permission for the study, in an individual interview. Instead, I was able to conduct interviews with two sub-editors at the ST.

- More women than men were interviewed. One reason was simply that more women journalists, in the end, responded to my request for interviews and committed to an interview date. Another was that, in some cases, staff at the newspapers assumed that I would be more interested in speaking to women journalists or journalists with a special interest in gender issues, who also tended to be women, and therefore put me in direct contact with more women. This is noteworthy in the context of some of my findings, illustrating a discourse that regards gender issues as being primarily women's issues, either through the assumption that gendered identities and experiences primarily impact on women and/or that women can best understand and articulate gender issues. While I did indeed identify and approach as many male journalists as female journalists at all the newspapers, the sample I was able to get in the end was constituted of eleven women and five men.
- Interestingly, one of the newspapers initially only wanted me to speak to senior journalists, feeling that they would represent the newspaper better than junior staff. All of the senior journalists they put me in touch with were, however, male. In the end, when a sub-editor realised this she put me in contact with more women journalists.
- As far as I could tell (from my visits to the newspaper and reading the newspaper), only black in-house staff worked at the SS at the time of the research, and as such only black staff were interviewed.
- Due to time constraints among journalists, leading to their reluctance to commit to long interviews, in some cases I agreed to ensure that the interviews would take no longer than thirty to forty minutes. Therefore, while some interviews were quite lengthy and in-depth, they did vary in length.

All in all, about eleven hours of interview data was gathered, and the average interview time was just over forty minutes. I should note here that some of the data for the interview with the MG editor was lost. This was the first interview conducted, before new digital recording equipment was purchased, and despite the fact that I used two different tape recorders simultaneously portions of the interview data from both was inaudible. I worked to retrieve as much as I could, and while I was not able to transcribe the interview in full, nor in as much detail as with the other interview transcriptions, I have reconstructed the data for this

interview through very careful repeated listening to the tapes and through my notes. In addition, I access an interview with the editor undertaken in 2004, which was available on the internet⁵⁴. In this interview gender and media issues were also discussed. The information I use for this research participant is, therefore, carefully considered against these limitations, and in contrast with other participants in the study very few direct quotes are given for the MG editor in the findings, since I felt that only a few could be presented well within context. In addition, I sent extracts from the draft thesis in which the MG editor was referred to directly, for her to confirm that they represented her views accurately.

Overall, the interviews were transcribed with great attention to detail, for example including indications of different lengths of pauses, of where participants began to say something but stopped mid-word, of body language that was documented in my written notes and so forth. I have indicated all participants in the extracts provided in the findings as “P” and myself as “D”. As I mentioned in the methodology, I wanted to where possible obscure the individual identities of participants, especially the journalists and even more so the more junior journalists, not wanting their comments to be recognisable. My experience at the one newspaper where I was referred primarily to senior journalists raised sensitivities around who should be in a position to represent the voice of the newspapers, and I did not want journalists, and especially junior journalists, to be put in a compromising position in this regard. Editors are referred to as editors, however, and so while they are not indicated in the extracts, their voices are deducible. As I have mentioned in the methodology, however, this was both more difficult to avoid and less of an issue than it was with journalists. The guidelines for transcripts (for example how pauses or words that were not easy to identify are indicated) see Appendix A.

7.3 Participation and Positionality: Interactions Between Researcher and Research Participants

As discussed in the methodology Chapter, feminist research theory commonly highlights the role of the researcher in shaping the outcomes of research (Stanley & Wise, 1993). A social constructionist perspective of knowledge production further indicates that no knowledge is articulated in a social vacuum, and researchers should therefore be as open as possible

⁵⁴ Interview with Ferial Haffajee in 2004 by Ofeiba Quist-Arcton. Available online at <http://portal.unesco.org/>

about the research environment and interactions, in recognition of these as shaping forces. I will not be doing this in great detail, but will highlight some of the most salient observations I made during the course of the research.

The way in which I undertook interviews was neither to attempt to “remove” my social presence from the interview situation nor to engage in a fully two-way discussion with the participants. Instead, I tried to create a balance between these approaches, engaging somewhat with participants but also attempting not to bring my own perspectives on the issues at hand into the interviews to the extent that I would not be able to recognise their own initial interpretations of the questions.

Power relations between researchers and those researched are also a key concern for feminist methodologists (Mbilinyi, 1992; Stanley & Wise, 1990), in the context of historical relations of power in this regard, particularly in research related to groups with less access to social power, such as women. As mentioned in Chapter 5, however, my research did not closely or neatly follow this pattern of power relations. I considered myself to be researching, in some senses, “up” to people in positions of relative power and was mindful that it would be difficult for me to establish all of the differences among participants that may impact varying on power relations in the research process. As a researcher I felt both empowered and disempowered at different stages and in different ways during the research. My experiences in certain respects resonated with a Foucauldian conception of power as multiply-constituted and dynamic, with various factors mediating the flow of power in different spaces and at different times.

The participants in my research did not only have access to socio-economic power as educated, middle-class people, but also in their daily roles as producers of knowledge. The process of garnering the participation of journalists, fraught with delays, led me to feel quite helpless at times, as an outsider who could be granted or refused entry into their spaces. Most of the participants were also older than me, and experienced in their field, while I was a “young person” and a “student”. As such, the power dynamic was sometimes shaped by a sense that the success of my research rested upon their willingness to voluntarily put time aside for me in amongst their own professional and personal priorities. Particularly in the first few interviews, my sense of vulnerability and uncertainty was evident in the transcriptions I reviewed, as I tried to connect with journalists within *their* own spaces and about *their* own

profession, about which I had little first-hand knowledge. The following extracts illustrate my initial sense of nerves and uncertainty in conducting interviews with journalists:

"D: Uhm, you say, then I'm just wondering.. in the media industry is there sort of uh, I don't know if the word is right, hierarchy in terms of... are there certain beats that are considered more prestigious beats than others, or, or not really? Are they kind of equal?"

"D: OK, OK. Uhm, and then, aah, I just wanna, to ask you, what is the, this is the, this is a question that is more geared towards, ja, uh editorial stuff, so I'll be asking the same of Mr. M, it will be interesting to hear different perspectives

...

P: OK...

D: What do you think is the key market for this newspaper, how would you describe your market for Sunday Sun? What niche do you fill or..."

On the other hand, however, moments within the research process were characterised by a greater proportion of power on my part, particularly in defining, guiding and interpreting the interviews. Once interviews were set up, and I became more comfortable in conducting them, my role and ability to guide the parameters of the research process increased. Interview transcriptions correlate with my observation that, as the researcher, I have a significant impact in terms of directing what is discussed and how it is interpreted. This may not be done in a conscious effort to tightly control the research process, which I generally tried to keep quite open and geared towards unearthing unanticipated insights. However, it could simply be done through the act of either conscious or unconscious framing of the research aims and research questions for participants, as well as through the selection of theoretical frameworks through I chose to construct the questions and analyse the data.

In terms of framing the research situation, the way in which I introduced the research aims through emails and on the phone would already have set up expectations for participants, who could have interpreted the gendered theme of my research in various ways prior to entering the interview. Discourses are not isolated, but always oriented to a real or imagined audience, and shift in accordance with this. They are also shaped by the discourses with which they engage. As such, the focus and articulation of my research and the questions in

the interviews would have shaped responses in certain ways, and I have tried to identify these where possible.

For example, I was particularly interested in participants' awareness and treatment of gender issues through their journalistic work. However, many participants' conceptualisation of "gender transformation" was largely confined to the issue of women in the workplace. In other words, the term "gender transformation" tended to be interpreted as focusing on gender equality among those who make the news rather than gender transformative discourses within newspaper texts themselves. As such, I used various different terms, such as "gender issues", "women's issues" or "gender relations" to further probe their understandings of gender transformation. The use of these different terms evoked somewhat different responses, and the wording I used in the questions therefore emerged as important in framing and influencing the answers given by participants. The following extract illustrates the importance of the way in which I framed and articulated questions in shaping different kinds of responses from participants around gender issues:

D: Um... (*Pause*) Alright. And I just wanted to know from you, what, what comes to your mind when you hear the words gender transformation? What does that mean to you?

P: It means [], uh, well.. for me it would mean, um, uplifting women. Um... because that has been the gender that has been, you know, previously disadvantaged. So it would just mean something that will put them in, in high positions, something that would put them in advantageous positions as well, and uh..

D: You mean specifically in terms of.. work? And careers?

P: Yes. In terms of work and careers and uplifting them business-wise as well.

D: And what do you think, um, more generally are the most important gender issues in South Africa at the moment, post-, post-apartheid South Africa?

P: Uh, it would be things like HIV and... how... mostly people who are infected are women. Um, it will be... u- uh... domestic violence and.... you know the other thing would be, you know, as much as we try to, to empower, as much as you know government is also trying to empower women, the other issue is, um, getting women to cope with maintaining the family life as well as their career

and.. you know just how to strike a balance, with, with those two different sectors.”

Here the participant raises different issues in response to the questions on “gender transformation” and “gender issues in South Africa” respectively. At times, when interviewing participants, I also noticed their uncertainty about a question or at times even their possible interpretation of a question as subtly accusatory. Issues of social transformation can be quite sensitive topics, with most participants wanting to convey an equality-minded position. Some questions around gender issues - in the current discursive climate around gender - were sensitive in that asking them could be interpreted as implying that the participant was unaware of or insensitive to gender issues. In these cases, I then tended to rephrase the question to order to mitigate their sense of confusion or of being put “on the spot”. However, while this was done for reasons related to research ethics, upon reading the transcripts I found that in many cases the way in which I rephrased questions towards reducing confusion or taking the pressure off participants often unintentionally framed the question even more narrowly, therefore limiting their responses. The extract below demonstrates this. The participant’s immediate response that journalists don’t think about the social issues being discussed in the interview created a tension in the interview, in the sense that it foreclosed many of my questions or that, should I continue along the lines of my draft questions, the participant may feel grilled about the position he was taking. My quick response was to mitigate this tension by suggesting, through a rhetorical question, that the social issues being discussed come up “naturally” in the stories written about, to which the participant then agreed.

D: Is it something, I’m just trying to understand also, um.. in the journalism profession, this idea of being objective versus pushing forward certain issues, or or... []

P: (*Overlapping*) We don’t really think too much of issues..

D: Does it just come up naturally? You come across it in your human-interest pieces...

P: Ja.

D: ...It’s not something that you pursue specifically, or...

P: No, because then stories are dry and boring and horrible.

My role in framing the research situation and the participants' responses was something I attempted to be cognisant of when reviewing the data, and the transcriptions helped me with this. Some issues in this respect were picked up on early, and I tried to make changes towards my approach where I thought these were problematic. Others were only pinpointed after reading the transcripts later on, after the interviews were complete, and in these cases I tried to incorporate cognisance of this into the analysis I did. In particular, a common issue that came up was that at certain moments in the interviews I tended to dominate more in an attempt to get to the issues at the heart of my research, especially when participants interpreted my questions differently to how I had intended them. This is something that I felt was both interesting to the research findings themselves, reflecting diverse understandings of the questions based on my own and participants' discursive locations, and also important to reflect on as a researcher towards improving my interviewing skills.

I should note, however, that the flow of discursive influence, like that of power, was not one-way. Indeed, in re-reading the transcripts I found that I had often begun to employ the discourses used by journalists in the interviews, both consciously and unconsciously. I interpret this change in my own discourse as being towards achieving greater discursive cohesion with participants, to facilitate understanding between myself and participants, create a sense of rapport and allow participants to feel more comfortable in communicating their answers than if my social science discourse dominated the questions. This is an example of how discourses are continually shaped within interviews, as subjects employ different discursive strategies oriented towards the perceived audience.

One strategy I used to try to mitigate my control over the research and interview data was to distribute post-interview questionnaires to journalist participants to encourage feedback on the research process and give them an opportunity to make retrospective inputs into the interview data. The questionnaires were sent to participants by email, and framed as being an important way for participants to make any additional comments and for me, the researcher, to improve upon my research. The following questions were posed to participants:

- Did you enjoy the interview? What did/didn't you enjoy about it?
- Did you feel at ease and free to express your thoughts and opinions during the interview?

- Were the issues discussed during the interview interesting to you? How so?
- Is there anything we discussed during the interview that you would like to add to or clarify?
- What are your thoughts about the research I am doing?

Unfortunately, very few participants (three) responded to these voluntary questionnaires, which I sense was largely due to their reluctance to spend time on it. Those who did respond reflected satisfaction with and enjoyment of the interviews, and only a few minor additions to the interview data were given. After the interviews, a number of participants expressed directly to me that they had enjoyed the opportunity to be interviewed on their own thoughts and experiences, particularly since they were usually the ones to interview other people as part of their work. The following are extracts from the post-interview questionnaire responses:

“The opportunity to talk about what I do! That was enjoyable.”

“It’s not often the journo’s [sic] do the talking, we are usually questioning other people.”

“I think it is a subject worth researching and with the potential of producing interesting results.”

“South Africa is in the process of changing and gender issues are the ones that need more attention.”

“Any serious research into, and discussion of, issues in the media, is useful. Media freedom is constantly under threat in some way... I may only be a movie critic, but the critical spirit must remain alive in the media or we lose out on a key element of our democracy.”

In summary, my interactions with participants raised the issue of researcher positionality, as well as the discursive strategies used by researchers and participants to orient themselves towards a particular perceived research situation. The interview process is a dynamic one, and what is articulated during an interview is continually being shaped and reshaped by

what went before it. The transcriptions were very useful in reminding me of this, as well as documenting it for incorporation into the data analysis. Therefore, while my research is not focussed on comprehensively identifying the interview dynamics, I have tried to incorporate recognition of these issues when analysing the research data.

7.4 Making News for the People: Journalistic Discourses from the Sunday Sun

7.4.1 Market and market appeal

As mentioned in Chapter 6, the SS originated in part out of the competitive need to carve a niche in the weekly tabloid market. As a relatively young newspaper, its market success has been significant, with rapidly rising sales and readership. Much of this success was ascribed by participants to the appeal, and indeed value, of tabloid style news to certain sectors of the market within a specific socio-economic and political context in South Africa. The value of tabloid, in this regard, was rendered variously as linked to:

- The marginalisation of contemporary and potential readers from mainstream media prior to the boom of tabloid, since mainstream media are seen to be elitist;
- Post-apartheid socio-economic aspirations where tabloids, through celebrity features, offer readers (especially black readers) a window into new and more affluent lifestyle;
- A socially weary readership in the wake of a taxing period of national transition, with tabloid providing lighter entertainment than the traditional press; and
- The need for media identification with readers' pervasive religious beliefs, a form of identification contrary to mainstream social, political and media rhetoric (which is more secular).

The value and role of tabloid was a particularly strong theme among editors interviewed, who endorsed and legitimated tabloid to offset critiques made against it.

The newspaper's key draw card for readers in terms of content was articulated as local celebrity gossip⁵⁵ or celebrity news. As one participant responded to a question pertaining to what SS readers consider the most important, valuable and interesting, "what our readers

⁵⁵ Some participants did not agree with this term, arguing that it implied fabrication rather than fact-based stories, as will be discussed later.

want is scandal, 'cause you know those celebrities..... juicy stuff, juicy news, that's what makes news." As will be further discussed, this tabloid news focus has a particular set of legal, ethical and potentially financial ramifications, impacting on the way in which journalistic values are shaped and articulated by participants. As the SS editor put it:

"P: It's far much more difficult to run a tabloid newspaper, in the sense that, um, it is more personality-driven than issue-driven. So, you you you... can expose yourself to..... defamation action, because..... our stories are based on people's lives."

While the principle draw card of the SS is celebrity scandal news, however, the SS is made up of diverse sections aimed at providing "a little bit of this and a little bit of that" to the readers. In this regard, the deputy editor noted that readers are drawn to different aspects of the newspaper, and that it is important to feature variety and novelty in terms of content, as well as regular sections to attract various readers.

"P: I think that is one of the biggest challenges, ja, having, being fresh every week..... being fresh and interesting..... while also being predictable, because readers are very funny creatures, you may think you know them..... and then out of the blue your reader will surprise you one day and write in and tell you their favourite part of the newspaper is not that story that you investigated for three weeks..... they just write in and tell you 'my favourite part of the newspaper is the jokes page.'"

These different sections provide both more "serious" and more "light-hearted" ("fun", "relaxing") content according to participants, but with the focus being on the latter. The editors, in particular, highlighted the informative and advisory aspects of newspaper content (such as the careers page) in addition to the celebrity scandal based news. However, these informative sections are also shaped by a tabloid style, and even the general news section, according to the deputy editor, is tabloidised through for example a concentration on visual text and human-interest features. Note that the extract below, illustrating this point, also includes a kind of discursive countering of perceptions of tabloid as superficial and "fickle".

“P: So we are basically... um, a sort of paper that is more relaxed, obviously, not necessarily chilled out or fickle, we’re still very much a newspaper, but we’re generally very tabloid-driven, ja, picture-driven, um, personality-driven, that sort of thing. Um, but that makes up plus minus two to three pages of our newspaper and then the rest is essentially news that is happening throughout the week, but handled in a different way and very much people-focused, colour pieces, um, mini features, that sort of thing.”

The discourses employed by participants reflected a very market-driven approach to newspaper content and style, with discourses around tabloid as an emerging news form centring firmly on the notion of giving previously marginalised readers what they want. This is represented in certain instances as necessarily involving a deviation from traditional newspaper approaches. In fact, the SS’s success in the market has included its appeal to first-time newspaper readers, who were described as being excluded from the majority of print news media. As the editor put it:

“P: About 2.1 million readers we are having every Sunday, those are actually new readers. And the role we played is that, um... we we created a new kind of readership.”

The notion of traditional news media forms imposing their approach on certain readership sectors emerged, and the principle of market-driven, reader-oriented news was framed as key in tapping these neglected sections of market. In describing the launch and success of the SS, the editor noted the following:

“P: At the time, prior to 2001, editors were thinking differently. *They had forgotten that the reader is king, give the reader what he or she wants, and you’ll see the reaction* and that’s what happened. When the Sunday Sun came into being, that was our, our, our motto, to give them what they want” (emphasis my own).

While the appeal to new readers was not overtly linked in the interviews to a race/class nexus of marginalisation by the media, this was implied in some of the interviews. Discourses surrounding “ordinary” people, or people “on the ground” were linked through

anecdotes and examples to the notion that mainstream print media forms have tended to marginalise working class, black readers. The role and success of the tabloid was posited as its ability to create a point of identification with, and discursive inclusion of, these readers. In response to a question on the role of the media in social transformation processes, the deputy editor raised these issues as being central to the role of the tabloid press in particular.

“P: There is a strong belief especially among the tabloids that it’s not also only about politics and stuff like that, but it’s getting people, um, I think to some extent to feel a bit *more part or involved about what is happening in the country*, and and and people, *and for people especially ordinary people in the street to be able to express more, what they feel about what is happening in the country*, and stuff like that and they usually weren’t able to do that with papers like Weekly Mail or Sunday Times for instance. I’m not saying that they never used to write through there, but um... they feel with these kind of papers, they have a much more, better voice..... because *they feel it’s more closer to them, you know, at their level*” (emphasis my own).

This extract illustrates a discourse describing privilege and exclusion in the print media, and tabloid as a medium through which to include and create a sense of identification with “ordinary” people. The “ordinary” person is discursively portrayed as self-evident, in that what constitutes “ordinary” was not directly articulated. However, as the following extract shows, issues of class and race, including attendant issues around education, socio-economic position and geographic location, are strongly linked to this.

“P: And the type of stories that are dealt with are very much with people that they [readers] deal with on a day to day basis, you know, ordinary type sort of people, it’s not only about politicians or top business men, or the Tokyo Sexuale’s⁵⁶ or whatever, but it is about Mama Mnisi or something like that, around the street corner, who’s house was burned or petrol bombed.”

One key aspect of inclusion was the use of accessible, simple and colloquial language. As the editor described it, the newspaper uses what he calls “spoken English”, and

⁵⁶ A well-known businessman and politician.

colloquialisms such as “Jozi” instead of “Johannesburg” are incorporated. One of the participants linked this to the LSM characteristics of the SS.

“P: Because you know our LSM is... is, we’re catering for, for any other lay...man..... It shouldn’t be too heavy and it should also have an entertaining element to it. Because, um... I don’t think that our, our readers don’t want to be.. loaded with, with, you know, the whole technicalities as well.”

The editor further described the move to colloquialism and simplicity in tabloid as a new development to counter urbane mainstream journalistic approaches that are increasingly irrelevant to many people. In the following extract, he discusses this by comparing tabloid’s contemporary success to the success of the new brands of affordable cars on the market.

“P: It’s, it it even happens with cars today. We expected cars to go.. more sophisticated for, and and, you know mo-, mo-, more complicated and all that. But look, you have the Tatas, you have the Chinese cars coming in cause they start to realise that let’s give people what they want and not put all these gadgets in that we think they want. And I think it’s similar... policies working here.”

In this way, tabloidisation is also discursively framed as a form of **democratisation of the print news media**, in its use of accessible language. The notion of democratisation of print media through tabloid is also linked to its appeal to what is described as universal human-interest (the personalisation of tabloid), as well as the socially relativistic approach taken by the newspaper. In the following extract, for example, the editor discursively renders human-interest stories, at the heart of tabloid, as democratising the news:

“P: I’ve got a dream of of, my my dream newspaper would be a newspaper which knows no race... um.. no creed.. no religion. That would be, um... the the *ideal* one. But it’s not possible. But, but what I’ve observed is that a human-interest story knows no colour. Uh, because it it touches the heart..... And... anytime it will touch anybody who reads it, because it it it’s about, it’s about human nature” (emphasis original).

In terms of the socially relativist approach referred to, it is argued that the newspaper engages with the beliefs and values of readers not generally embraced, for example, by secular society or the rhetoric of the privileged “mainstream” media. One participant elaborated anecdotally on tabloid’s appeal to readers in its inclusion of these beliefs, values and experiences, often marginalised in traditional print media. In this regard, tabloid was discursively linked to the democratisation of what constitutes “news”, or knowledge production.

“P: For instance with Daily Sun they will report about witchcraft and people will say there’s no witchcraft. Because no-one has come forward, no research has been done. But black people believe in the township that there is witchcraft, and who is the market for Daily Sun? Market for Daily Sun are people in the township. So those are news that are relevant to them. For you as individuals in the suburbs we’ve got nothing to do with witchcraft. But somebody in a village has something to do with witchcraft, it’s a belief.”

It is interesting to note that in the interview with the editor of the MG, this notion of democratised print news through tabloid emerged as well. She observed that tabloids play a certain function in putting newspapers “back in touch with their readers”, and described them as “organically” linked to and growing out of communities. Despite some of the charges laid against tabloidisation, including those noted by the MG editor, a discourse of inclusion of, and identification with, marginalised communities and readers contributed towards framing the value and market appeal of tabloid.

The market appeal of the SS was also related by some participants to **post-apartheid socio-economic aspirations**, particularly among the youth. The significant coverage of black local celebrity stories, in this regard, was rendered as a point of aspirational identification among a relatively young readership interested in climbing the socio-economic ladder. This resonates with my observations of the discursive orientation of the SS during component one of the research, which highlighted what I called an “aspirational” discourse. The term “aspirational”, however, was initially derived from one of the first interviews I conducted with the deputy editor of the SS. In relation to the SS’s focus on celebrity news, she noted the following:

“P: A lot of people these days obviously want to know what their celebrities are doing, because *they always aspire to that sort of life* when people see it they want to actually read it, go out and say ‘I saw so-and-so, the TV star’ or whatever, ‘I wonder what is he up to’, or ‘gosh, who is he seeing, who is he dating’ or whatever, ja. So it’s, *it’s perhaps a bit aspirational to some extent because these, these people are essentially, you know, a lot of people’s role models, particularly for the youth, you know*” (emphasis my own).

The editor further elaborated that these local celebrity stories offer a means by which black working class readers can identify with, and therefore imagine, a wealthier lifestyle. This was especially linked to the working class background of the celebrities covered in the tabloid news, as well as the way in which these celebrities are exposed as fallible towards a greater identification with them.

“P: I think what they [readers] enjoy is that the Sunday Sun gives them, opens a window for them..... *every Sunday you go into the lives of those people that they see as the elite*. The people they s-, the people they see as the achievers in society..... But this is also so that people should also know that *those people are not there because they are born to be there*, how they they, *they worked themselves up to become what they... they are today*. And, and that they also live a normal life..... *they also have personal problems which are similar to theirs*” (emphasis my own).

In addition to the focus on celebrities, the sections relating to careers, role model of the week, consumer guide and so forth were described as close to the hearts of the editors. The editor described how these sections are aimed at encouraging and informing a township youth readership with little educational guidance in relation to careers. Both tabloid features and additional sections were therefore framed as appealing to and serving an aspiring black youth through information and identification. The values and appeals of emerging newspapers, such as the SS, are therefore shaped by South Africa’s historical legacies and changes taking place, including socio-economic changes.

A third key discursive theme related to tabloid market appeal and the SS relates to the notion of what I have called the **weary South African reader**. This describes a readership

that is psychologically run down by the persistent barrage of troubling social, economic and political issues represented in the news in South Africa. There was a sense that the post-apartheid honeymoon is over and that pervasive and controversial societal issues continue to frustrate and tax South African people, who are in need of some respite from this traditional “hard” news coverage. The need for a light read was further highlighted as being important for a Sunday newspaper, which is meant to be a “relaxing” read at the end of a busy week.

“P: I think people on a Sunday, you know, after coming back from church, if they go to church, just want to sit down and relax and have a good laugh... and you laugh. They don’t want serious stuff where it is sad or political stuff.”

The editor elaborated on this in relation to market research undertaken, and a sense of post-apartheid weariness of continuing political debates.

“P: In our first research, people said, we realised that people were tired about, about issues, about blaming apartheid and everything. Life goes on. And uh, um, we like to to to to talk about things which make.. life fun. And, ja. I think that’s what they find [in SS]”.

In this way, tabloid is framed as serving an alternative social function for readers to traditional print news. “Soft” news, in a sense, is refigured as socially functional rather than trivial. This resonates with the literature reviewed in Chapter 4, which pointed to the ways in which tabloid challenges the “hard” news/ “soft” news dichotomy, and has evoked arguments that legitimate tabloid news as a democratised and reader-oriented form of news.

Finally, and linked to the above, the SS’s inclusion of religion, in particular, was linked to the idea of reader-oriented news. While most large newspapers maintain quite a secular discourse, the notion of reshaping newspapers away from traditional “hard” news approaches and towards meeting readers where they are was extended to the Christian orientation in numerous SS spaces. In this respect, the editor noted that while the SS is a tabloid, it is a Sunday tabloid specifically and that “the majority of people are religious people, they go to church.” Therefore, religious sections such as Sun Churches as well as religious columns are included. As discussed in Chapter 6, the discourses emerging in these

spaces of the SS were of particular interest in terms of gender, and I will be expanding on this issue later on. Suffice it to say here, however, that the inclusion of religion in the newspaper was, to an extent, framed as part of the democratisation of knowledge production and the inclusion of discourses commonly separated out of mainstream print news. This included what I described as often quite problematic gendered instantiations of religious discourse, linking the democratisation of the media to the idea of social relativism, where values are valid if seen as shared by groups of people (in this case readers).

7.4.2 *Getting stories, writing stories*

For participants at the SS, getting stories was often articulated as a key challenge as well as a source of excitement and satisfaction. Staying ahead of other tabloids, in particular in terms of the celebrity scandal stories “cracked”, was described as a significant part of the job, as well as one of the greatest areas of competition with other newspapers. Given the rising economic incentives and competition among both weekly and daily tabloids, scooping new local black celebrity stories, or at the least covering them from a novel angle, was very important for participants. Due to the nature of the stories covered, journalists’ contacts were figured as central to the story-gathering process, and maintaining good relationships with contacts as important towards professional success.

The fact that the SS is a weekly newspaper was described as further heightening the challenge and importance of accessing novel, cutting-edge celebrity stories that would not already have been covered by other weekly tabloids. The issue of potential legal (and hence also financial) ramifications of pushing the boundaries of privacy towards getting these news stories was frequently raised by both journalists and editors. Therefore, familiarity with the law as well as maintaining rapport and a relationship of trust with contacts (for example, by ensuring that facts are checked and documented) were regarded as extremely important.

When it came to writing stories, most journalists reported writing between two and four stories per week. The style of writing was described as highly market-driven and brand-oriented. While participants said that personal style was exercised in the writing of stories, this was done within the bounds of both general news reporting protocol (for example, covering the “five w’s” - what, where, who, when and why) and the newspaper’s brand

identity. The latter included, for example, the use of “simple” language, keeping stories short, the use of certain colloquialisms such as “paggeld” and “Jozi”, and general style rules regarding how sources are introduced and quoted, which are also defined towards a more conversational style (for example, not using titles such as “Mr” or “Ms”). As one participant put it:

“P: Normally it’s, it’s, it is good to have your own, you know, personal writing but you need to adjust, you need to check your newspapers. Like for instance, the writing with Daily Sun or Sunday Sun is different with the, the, the broadsheet papers, you know like Star, they write differently..... [We] need to write like a tabloid.”

As such, texts were described as forged through both individual agency and style and the more formal as well as informal parameters of the brand.

7.4.3 Role of the media

Discourses surrounding the role of the media were, in all three newspapers of the study, significant towards unpacking current and potential constraints to (and opportunities for) gender transformation through the media. These discourses communicated various (and often contradictory) journalistic values, both generally and related to the specific newspapers. It is these discourses around journalistic values and roles that inform the scope and trajectory of social transformation through the press, and that reveal points of tension at the nexus of simultaneous but varying notions of journalistic responsibility within a transforming society. Not all of these discourses came through in response to direct questions about the role of the media or the press, but emerged frequently as part of responses to other questions, for example, questions related to what makes a good journalist or a good news story.

Four main themes emerged in the SS interviews in relation to the role of the media. First, discourses legitimating tabloid as a media form emerged, centring on the notion of reaching out and giving voice to readers on the ground. This echoes with discourses surrounding the democratisation of the media through tabloid, and includes journalistic values maintaining

the primacy of readers' own views and beliefs (**reader primacy**), reliant in part on a conception of the media as a reflection and voice of society. It also extended to notions of the news as something relatable to readers, and of journalists as story-tellers.

Second, great credence was given by participants to the notion of **journalistic "objectivity"**, as dichotomised with "bias". Discourses in this regard often conflated objectivity with notions of "fact" and "balance", and bias with notions of extreme ideological leanings or direct personal involvement. However, tensions and contradictions surrounding these conceptions of objectivity and bias revealed important points of negotiation between the dual objectives of social transformation through the media and the media as objective informer.

Third, a discourse of **didacticism** emerged as an interesting contrast to the emphasis placed on "objectivity", whereby the media in general was configured by some as society's political "watchdog", and tabloid in particular as part of what I have called the "moral police".

Finally, the media's function as a business, and attendant notions of news and journalistic values linked to this aspect of newspapers' political economy, was raised. In other words, the fourth theme related to the strong **economic imperatives of the brand**, shaping textual creation.

In terms of the first theme, discourses reflecting the notion of print news media (particularly the SS and other tabloids) as functioning to create identification with and give voice to their readers emerged strongly among the editors. In determining newspaper content and style, questions pertaining to how a story relates to the reader's own context were of great importance. Upon being asked what kinds of stories his readers thirsted for, the editor noted the following:

P: Stories which relate to their... they're tired of hearing about.. uh, politicians and business people and how other people influence their lives..... *But they want to see in the newspaper someone they know.....* They want to see their areas being mentioned..... Like..... how is the 2010 [World Soccer Cup] for example going to affect us? It's one thing to say South Africa and Africa and

the world..... They want to know, in Soweto⁵⁷, *how are we going to benefit? What can we expect? And once you start to involve people around that.. they start to become your marketers*, because they go ‘ei, did you see, uh, what Sunday Sun said today?’” (emphasis my own).

In this way, SS is framed as further democratising the print media and also as linked with political economy; the newspaper creates a sense of identification with “ordinary” people, and this in turn benefits the newspaper economically. In an extract introduced earlier, in which a participant raised the issue of witchcraft as a legitimate base for a story if readers relate to and believe in it, political economy also validated these kinds of stories, for which tabloids are often criticized. As the same participant noted, “in the newspaper, actually it’s a business and also to satisfy your particular market.”

In addition, this approach to the media’s role in relation to society often included a discourse incorporating aspects of social relativism. Readers’ beliefs and values were given primacy even when they are controversial or can be perceived of within broader transformation discourses as marginalising or discriminating against certain social groups. With reference to controversial columns in the SS in which, for example, attacks are borne against legalised abortion and gay rights to marriage, the editor at one point noted: “who are we to judge? Because we are just a reflection of, of society.” This sense of the media’s role as *reflecting* (rather than constructing) the views of readers was, however, often articulated with immense discursive tension, with much negotiation between the values informing enshrined rights and liberal paradigms, on the one hand, and controversial reader views on the other. The editor expressed this tension as shown in the extract below.

“P: It’s not easy because, um.. especially if you say listen to what your readers say. If your readers are against.. for example, uh, gays and they feel that it’s, it’s not a a... I think the majority of our, of our nation, they are Christians. And the other half they are... Muslims, and they are, I also think they are not pro-abortion and all that and, but it’s a matter of one would have to keep the balance and say minimise the harm.”

In this extract, the discourse articulated earlier by the editor, maintaining a reflective role for the media, is in contestation with a discourse that holds the media to be influential on

⁵⁷ A Johannesburg township.

society. By now noting that there is a need for balance views and to “minimise harm” in conveying these views, the editor is engaging in a discursive negotiation between the notion of reader primacy, and the notion of media responsibility and agency. Interestingly, the concept of “balance” (linked also to “minimising harm”) emerges here as a discursive strategy through which to deal with these tensions. This will be discussed further in relation to the section on discursive strategies for transformation.

Another issue raised by one participant under this broad theme related to the role of print news media in expressing the post-apartheid frustrations of readers around issues such as service delivery and crime. In this discourse, the media was rendered a vehicle through which readers can air their views and frustrations, similarly to the airing of views counter to broader transformation discourses as discussed above.

Journalistic values informing what are considered desirable attributes for journalists, as well as what constitutes a good news story, are shaped by broader discourses surrounding the role of the media. In this case, conceptions of news as defined by whether it can relate to and create a point of identification with readers were linked to the discourses discussed above. As a point of identification, journalists described a good news piece not only as something that is “new”, but also as related to something that *impacts* on readers’ lives, interests the readers personally, and in this way also stimulates engagement and discussion among readers. News was therefore conceptualised as relative to, or highly oriented towards, its particular readership rather than statically defined or abstract. The following extracts are examples of this.

“P: What is the news? It’s something that brings change into normal life, if it is different from normal life..... can it change people’s lives? Or can it.. what would it have, what interest would that bring to people’s lives?”

“P: Before you write the story you have to ask yourself that: how will Denise [the reader] want to read my story? If you can answer that..... then she will. But if I don’t answer that question myself as a journalist, how will I expect someone, someone to buy that newspaper?”

Certain desirable journalistic traits were also linked at least in part to this theme, such as the role of journalists as story-tellers, building narratives that reach the readers, or the need for journalists to be good with people, able to listen to and engage with them.

The second key theme was related to the importance of the media as a vehicle for the provision of “objective” information. This was commonly conflated with the notion of “fact”, generally conceptualised in a positivistic sense as both distinct from subjectivity and a clearly defined conduit for “truth”.

“P: We know we have to be objective, unbiased, um, we have to always tell the truth, you know don’t twist and turn.”

“P: They [contacts] give you a story, make sure you, you write it factual. Don’t be biased. Because once they complain about a story, say ‘hey, but there you misquoted me’, they will not inform you anymore, they will not contact you.”

As can be seen in the last extract, it is in the presentation of “facts” that some participants saw the avoidance of bias and the achievement of “objectivity”. As long as the story conveyed verifiable facts, it was considered objective and by implication untarnished by subjective input. This reflects a positivistic paradigm that is in contrast to a social constructionist paradigm upon which much feminist writing and critique is based. From a social constructionist perspective, one could argue that even if there were verifiable facts, seeking, selecting and presenting them is not objective but situated.

Numerous participants did, however, also articulate contradictory or dynamic discourses around the issue of objectivity. Especially when it came to questions around the role of the media in transformation processes, or specific examples of social issues, these points of tension tended to emerge quite strongly. In some discourses, the presentation of objective fact was discursively harmonised with the role of assisting in social transformation processes. Interestingly, where social values were articulated by journalists in relation to the way they covered particular issues in the news, the notion of fact was incorporated as a means through which social values are *legitimately expressed*. In other words, certain *social values* were articulated as being naturally *inherent in fact*, or in a sense factual themselves. In some of the interviews, I posed a question to the participants about the Zuma rape trial

and how they felt the media had handled it. The extract below was part of one participant's response to this question.

"P: The media did their best, they really did their best, but Zuma also felt they were there to damage him, they were there to destroy him. Which he [Zuma] was wrong. They were just, *they were just looking at the facts that why will somebody who is at the forefront of moral stability go and do something like that, without even consideration to the issue of HIV/AIDS?*"

That Zuma's decision to engage in extra-marital, unprotected sex with an HIV-positive woman was socially or morally wrong (a social value) is expressed as a fact, or as self-evident through the presentation of facts. In this way, the notion of objectivity based on verifiable facts is *discursively harmonised* with a social transformation agenda. This response was from the same participant who noted the importance of fact in the avoidance of bias, and who elsewhere in the interview firmly expressed that journalists should not attempt to engage in a social transformation agenda through their work, but simply objectively report facts. This view was expressed below in response to a question around whether he felt social transformation as a media role and objectivity as a media role were compatible.

"P: No, you need to be objective. *Forget about transformation, forget about social responsibility as a person. You need to be objective. Look at the facts*" (emphasis my own).

These seemingly contradictory responses - on the one hand advocating that transformation agendas should be kept separate from journalism and on the other (in another part of the interview) implying that the media can and should be communicating social values - are made discursively compatible through conceptions of fact. As the continuation of the above response shows (see the extract below), the withholding of fact due to *overt personal involvement* is what is conceived of as bias. This was a theme emerging among numerous participants, who expressed notions of "bias" as involving overt monetary incentives or personal/emotional involvement in stories. However, as the extract also shows, where fact is presented to the effect of highlighting social values, a transformation agenda is in some way

legitimated. The relatively long extract below is included to illustrate these tensions and discursive strategies.

“P: Look at the facts. Not because of... it’s Mandela involved then how will that dent his image because you look at him globally as a great leader. That because of.. he has beaten up his child. We should write about that, we should. That’s being objective. You’ve checked. You’ve balanced. You’ve ensured that... for instance, if you look at the issue of Amabokoboko⁵⁸, it has touched me personally. They did well. But look at the attitude towards the people who have supported them throughout their their their... the tournament. When they came back with the trophy everyone wanted to see that. But did they parade in the township? No. South Africa’s big. Why would they choose Soweto only? We’ve got Limpopo. We’ve got Kwa-Zulu Natal. They did not bother to go there. But they go to Cape Town, their own mother home. In Soweto they went as far as six o’ clock early in the morning, so that nobody will see them. The media needs to highlight that.”

The issue of Amabokoboko’s failure to parade in areas in which many of their supporters resided is expressed here as wrong, as well as an example of objective reporting forming part of the media’s responsibility. After insisting that transformation should not be an issue for journalists (“forget about transformation”), this participant highlighted the need to foreground problematic social issues such as those related to Amabokoboko. The inconsistencies and tensions in these discourses, to me, seem to express an attempt to marry the importance of highlighting social issues clearly close to the participants’ heart and the journalistic value of objectivity. In many ways, the notion of “fact” remains the medium through which these can be made compatible.

In another participant’s response to a question around the media’s coverage of Zuma’s rape trial, a distinction between the media’s role in conveying fact and the role of *other* sectors of society in ensuring transformation was made. I asked one participant what she thought about public misconceptions about HIV/AIDS fuelled by the media’s wide coverage of Zuma’s comments that taking a shower prevents HIV transmission. I wanted to know what

⁵⁸ South African rugby team, who had recently won the Rugby World Cup.

she thought of the press' role in these misconceptions, as it was through the media that these comments came to be so widely heard. She had the following to say:

“P: The media was doing the right thing, they had to report that [showering to prevent HIV infection] was said, what he [Zuma] said..... *What people do out there, that's another issue*, it is um... I think the job of the NGO's and the government who is supposed to teach people there about AIDS” (emphasis my own).

I should note that my own scepticism about the compatibility of notions of objectivity and social transformation, which came through in the kinds of questions I asked, seemed to be peculiar to a number of participants at the SS. For many of them, objectivity was not mutually exclusive from social transformation agendas, and this is linked to the ways in which broader journalistic discourses around facts and the concept of bias are configured.

A number of journalists advocating journalistic objectivity conceded that this was often an ideal state which journalists could not always reach, and noted the tensions encountered in balancing “free speech” and their own subjective inputs, on the one hand, and journalistic objectivity on the other. In the extract below, this tension is evident in the participant's discourse, and it is framed as a somewhat irresolvable conundrum as well as something that can be mitigated by including different perspectives and content.

“P: You can not always be objective and sometimes it clashes with the freedom of speech, ja so you you'll think when you are being objective here and you can't tell, like, *you can't distinguish between the two, being objective here or am I exercising my freedom of speech*, you see? Um, which you still need to do, *I have the right of freedom of speech, so I'll write what I think, and at the, at the other hand I am wrong, because I am not being objective*, yes... so it is difficult that one, um ... to be objective always, *but you have to try by all means to be objective and unbiased*. (Pause) So I think, maybe if you are writing about gender issues, don't just stick on women, write about males, just to be on the safe side (*laughing slightly*) or something like that” (emphasis my own).

The following extracts also illustrate some of the ways in which journalists conceded to being able to shape a story in addition to the provision of facts, thereby framing news stories as constructed, not just presented. This included reference to word choice, selection of what information will go into the news piece, and the shaping effect of a chosen angle for the story. These responses followed from a variety of questions, including one related to the agency and responsibility of journalists in changing gender representations in the media.

“P: As a journalist you get to choose the angle of the story that you want. So whenever you pitch an idea, it’s because you’ve already decided on the an-, on the angle that you’re going to take. And how you’re going to, um, approach the story and which langu-, which ty-, what type of language you’re going to be using.”

“P: I think, ja i-, i-, in a way the media does take a role in issues because... as I tell you, as journalist we need different people and even though from time to time we are reminded by the ethics that when you write a story, you have to be very objective, but I tell you that thing of establishing rapport with our sources and stuff like that, at the end of the day you do.. (*laughs slightly*) somehow address it in a certain manner or you write a story because it was influenced by a certain source.”

“P: Out of the whole interview I’ve got my own individual focus, not every thing that the person said is going to be included in the interview, but I’m going to take a certain focus and base my story on that.”

“P: The way you write your story, the way you use your words, you don’t have to lie to make a story to be juicy..... you don’t have to lie and say, oh, she was climbing the mountain and while she wasn’t even climbing the mountain..... it might make the story juicier to other people, but whereas accuracy, the two actually go hand in hand. The writing, the way you write the story, the accuracy, it makes the story juicier.”

As can be seen in the extracts given, some participants were uncomfortable conceding to the unattainability of, or strategies of getting around, objective reporting. Some laughed

uncomfortably, and some were carefully choosing their words. However, in many cases the notion of fact, again, was the centre to which they returned to at least partially resolve these tensions, as the last extract shows.

Responses to questions around the values and traits of a good journalist resonated with notions of objectivity through factuality. This is shown in the selection of extracts below.

“P: To be a good journalist is to stick to the facts. That’s I think number one. Stick to the facts. Accord your facts.”

“P: To be a good journalist, uh, you must actually be a ... and I don’t know how to actually put this, but be an honest journalist. There is this culture in people’s minds, in everybody’s minds that journalists are liars..... that whatever you see on the papers, it’s not true, journalists are good liars. I don’t think that is true. I think being uh, honest, reporting honestly and accurately, is one of the things that a journalist and a good journalist should have.”

For participants at the SS, objectivity was therefore a very central journalistic value, despite tensions surrounding its application in various cases. At times, social values were incorporated into the notion of objectivity through discursive strategies that will be discussed further in the section on discursive strategies for transformation. It is important to note that these inconsistencies and tensions reflect the impact of diverse *broader discourses* relating to the role of the media and the importance of certain transformation issues in South Africa (as will be unpacked as I go on). In other words, there is a discursive welding together and weighing up of traditional journalistic norms, broader historically shaped ideas about the media in South Africa and the broader perceived transformation needs of the new dispensation (such as transformed race relations, for example, or specific understandings of what kinds of gender transformation need to take place).

The third key theme I have mentioned in relation to the media’s role is that of didacticism through the news. Particularly with regard to tabloid news stories, such as celebrity scandal, discourses implying the press as a sort of “moral police” emerged. As can be seen in this extract of an interview with the deputy editor, celebrity scandal stories are seen as functioning to highlight the fallibility and moral shortcomings of celebrities:

“Hopefully eight times out of the ten they [celebrities] will admit it and say .. ‘look I’m sorry’ or.. whatever, or ‘I didn’t mean to’ or something, so it’s, it’s just sort of like to have a lesson at the end of it all, these people that you idealize are not necessarily.. perfect, you know?”

Another participant noted the following:

P: Our role is to show the, well, the readers what their role models are doing, do you understand? Ja... If they don’t behave well, children must know that this person is not a well-mannered person and ... Ja.”

Therefore, some discourses framed celebrity scandal stories as functioning to let readers aspire to the lifestyle and achievements of celebrities, while at the same time a number of participants also framed these stories as functioning to humble celebrities and provide caveats for the consequences of personal behaviour. The discursive implication that these stories serve as part of a moral police also came through in the language some participants used to describe their approach to these stories, such as the somewhat legalised discourse below.

“P: OK, I did the interview with the husband, *I posed those allegations and he could not answer the allegations* because they were quite strong and quite hurting, that a third person is actually intruding into my private life in a way, you know” (emphasis my own).

The creation of certain spaces within the newspaper, particularly columns, was also linked to moral didacticism. The editor noted that these spaces were created to fill a moral void and engage readers with respect to moral issues, posited largely as existing in the private and especially familial spheres.

“Then talk about people’s issues... it could be a..... moral problem thing, *moral degeneration*. Then we got, um, Bishop Sibiya to write a, a column, so that he should, should write about issues, about moral issues and all that. We also have um, um, um, Reverend Jentile who writes about relationships. Um, eh eh, sexuality..... And problems in marriage. Pre-counselling. He tells them what to

look for. *Which we think that can help society.* We also have, uh, uh, Mbuyiselo Botha who is um, uh, a columnist with us, he's actually the secretary general of Man-, Man's Forum. And he's an activist, um, uh, um, against, uh, women and children abuse. And we think that that could help, because he talks to men as to how real men should behave, he highlights.. men who are role models.”

It is interesting, to me, that the strength of discourses surrounding objectivity is contrasted with strong discourses of didacticism. As will be discussed further in relation to discursive strategies for transformation, discourses of didacticism through, for example, columns pages, indicate that the communication of certain social values is supported through various spaces in the newspaper. The moral police discourse that specifically related to celebrity scandal stories, in my opinion, also functions to legitimate these kinds of tabloidised stories, which are so often critiqued as being a sign of the ethical debasement of news journalism.

Related to the discourse of didacticism was the lesser-mentioned role of the media as a political watchdog for society. The deputy editor noted, in particular, that this role was one that was served more by traditional print news media, and that tabloid newspapers tended to focus less on the trials and tribulations of large institutions and political figures than on the personalised, localised issues faced by readers. However, she noted that views of the media's role as watchdog were particularly prevalent at the moment due to the historical context in which the media in South Africa is operating. This issue will be taken up further in relation to other newspapers in the study, among whose participants the media as watchdog discourse was more pronounced. Linked to discourses of didacticism in the SS, however, were also similar journalistic values of persistence, doggedness and a critical perspective in order to expose public figures.

Finally, issues of political economy or the economic imperatives of the brand were threaded through the interviews, including in relation to notions of the media's role in society. There was a fair amount of reference to “rivals” in the newspaper business, and the need to shape content in a way that would enable the SS to compete. This included discourses, as discussed earlier, related to giving readers “what they want”. The editor asserted that, in terms of economic imperatives, he did not allow advertisers to dictate content. However, as he noted in an extract provided earlier, giving readers primacy in terms of content and style serves as a marketing tool, and one that is successful according to the SS's circulation

figures. Linked to discourses framing the media as a business were responses to questions around what constitutes news. Largely prizing the bizarre, unusual and exclusive as news, these responses link the construction of newsworthiness to rarity, competition and therefore political economy. As the deputy editor put it, news stories, particularly in the tabloid business, need to stand out to attract the attention of readers and compete with the plethora of emerging rival publications. The bizarre is therefore valued.

“P: You’ve probably heard this, but it’s true, you know that whole adage of dog bites man? OK, *they say in journalism, if a dog bites a man, OK that’s run of the mill, but when man bites dog ... then that’s a hell of a story.* So it is anything that is out of the ordinary, very unusual, um ... for want of a better word... that has a wow factor, um, that gets people talking. Especially in our line of work, *in tabloid, if it is run of the mill, you’re dead,* you know, it has to get people talking essentially, it has to be, it has to spark some sort of thing in people” (emphasis my own).

I have already pointed out in relation to the literature and the first component of the research that journalistic discourses that prize the bizarre and unusual have been implicated in trivialising social issues and perpetuating problematic stereotypes and constructs, including those with an impact on gender transformation. It is therefore important to note, here, the political economy dynamic to these discourses. They also appear to be linked to the notion of the “weary reader” served by tabloid news style, offering an alternative to the repetition of pervasive social problems in the news.

Finally, discursive constructions around journalistic ethics were also linked to political economy. Some of the key guidelines and codes in terms of the ethical acquisition of stories, particularly those of a tabloid nature, were frequently discussed in terms of the need to avoid legal action, such as lawsuits for defamation. The editors also highlighted the *Constitutionality* and *ideological ethics* around these guidelines and codes of conduct. However, the discourses employed by participants largely indicated a *political economy* dimension to the responsibility of journalists to conduct their work within the bounds of these ethical codes of conduct. In this way, journalistic values are again shaped by political economy.

7.4.4 *Notions of gender transformation and gender issues*

Due to the concept of “gender transformation” being at the centre of my research, questions aimed at eliciting responses from participants that could reveal their understanding of and views towards this term were posed. I realised soon into my research, however, that limiting my questions to “gender transformation” would provide very limited responses in terms of participants’ conceptions of gender. As such, I variously used the terms “gender transformation”, “gender issues” and less often “gender relations” to see what these different terms evoked. Depending on the particular interview, however, these questions were not always asked in a uniform way and responses were shaped in part by whatever discussion had gone before. Nonetheless, I have chosen to group responses from the SS broadly according to whether these were in response to the term “gender transformation” or “gender issues”, to illustrate some of the rudimentary discursive divisions between perceptions of the two. Generally, I asked participants what first came to mind when they heard “gender transformation”, and therefore what they considered to be the most important gender issues in South Africa. I will also briefly discuss some of the key responses to questions around journalists’ roles in transforming gender relations through the media.

Responses to questions around what “**gender transformation**” involves were very much reflective of a **liberal-inclusionary feminist paradigm** focusing on women’s numerical representation and advancement in the workplace. Some participants also immediately responded by focusing on these issues in relation to the newsroom specifically. In fact, that responses to the term gender transformation were so limited to these issues of numerical representation in the newsroom and the workplace generally, not at the heart of my research concerned with symbolic representation in media products, led to the incorporation of other terminology and more examples to explore my research topic further during the interviews. This probably reflects one of the key findings for my research, however: that understandings of “gender transformation” are still very much limited to liberal-inclusionary feminist paradigms, suggesting a lag in the trajectories of progressive feminist thought. The following kinds of responses were common.

“P: OK, in our field and anywhere else... because in South Africa, these days especially I have seen women given great opportunities, both in the government and in the private sectors.”

“P: (*Pause*) Like normally in the newsroom I believe that women have been oppressed in terms of, of positions. Like in still all the newspapers, [] I don’t think I can give you an example of where there’s an editor as a woman, besides you know these magazines.”

An extended theme in line with this included the notion of women’s empowerment, or the need to build capacity for and promote women’s positions in the public workforce and leadership. The editor also articulated the importance of ensuring that once women are in these positions, they are able to employ their skills and power rather than being sidestepped due to perceptions that they have not earned their positions there. After noting that women are increasingly being employed in newsrooms, he elaborated the following.

“P: But what is actually happening is that.... it’s fine to have them [women] in those positions, *but what powers do they have to change...* do they.. do we give them enough power to say, or do we still as, as the male editor sit there and say ‘I don’t think it is necessary, this thing is working all the time like this. Not now’..... Do we bring them in to, to, to... *make up certain quotas set by the government* and.. other people involved, *or do we do we change it, for real change, for example, to say ‘bring your perspective’?*” (emphasis my own).

This response moves beyond purely numerical issues around representation towards questioning the organisational culture into which more and more women are stepping. This extract also leads into another theme expressed by a few participants, namely that introducing more women into the newsroom will bring a different *perspective* to the news. The editor continued his response by saying the following.

“P: I ask everyday, I told [her, the deputy editor], ‘your challenge [] is to see to it that when we publish the newspaper that you must be proud to say.. if a female reader gets hold of this newspaper can she put it down and say I’ve gained something.’”

The deputy editor herself noted the following:

“P: We’re trying desperately to also fill in the fashion content of the newspaper so that it has *more of a woman’s voice*. We have a female columnist, we only have one female columnist and we’re still thinking of ways to actually, you know.”

The discursive implication of these extracts is that, to some extent, women journalists bring a particular perspective that women readers will be able to better identify with, and that there are particular types of content that interest women specifically. I would call this a kind of simplified and/or unquestioned assumption about a “**woman’s perspective**”. To some degree, this discourse dichotomises men and women, homogenises women and therefore associates women with specific interests. Of course, this issue was not discussed in any detail with participants, and these observations are therefore anecdotal. However, it is noteworthy that a discourse linking women with what is in some respects a naturalised notion of a woman’s perspective emerges, a theme that also arose in the interviews with participants from other newspapers.

One participant observed that women are at times responsible for lags in the achievement of gender equity in the workplace. She argued that women do not focus enough on their work, choosing to give more of their time to endeavours on the home front at the expense of their work.

“P: Sometimes women lack confidence, sometimes they concentrate on, on other things that are not important to our work. We don’t take our work really seriously, and if you put..... more effort into our work, and even our seniors, they will treat us as such...”

D: Why do you think it is like that though?

P: OK, I’ll tell you... um with Sunday Sun, I see more male employees more keen to go out on stories, to go out at parties, [] but we see women always saying (*in a damsel-in-distress voice*) ‘aah... I’m going home, oh, my husband, oh my boyfriend, oh my [], oh my space, oh, my time, oh my’ all the time..... Working is about compromising also, you can’t just be paid, without taking effort. But men, for most of ... all the time, I don’t see men complaining much about their work..... about taking pains, going an extra mile.”

Interestingly, the extract above appears to convey a discourse in which gender transformation is framed as **women emulating men**, particularly in the context of their focus on work in the public sphere. That women tend to take on (and be expected or obligated to take on) far greater responsibility in the domestic arena in terms of house work and care work, as well as to be socialised more as care-givers and intimate partners than as breadwinners, is not considered. Gender transformation is therefore discursively focused more on inserting and adjusting women into male dominated public arenas than on redefining masculinities or gendered relationships between public and private spheres. This resonates strongly with early liberal feminist paradigms.

Another participant raised the issue of **women's "voice"** in relation to gender transformation, also an interesting discursive offshoot of the general responses around women in the workplace. The idea of voicing - of being heard rather than silenced or remained deaf to - echoes aspects of a feminist epistemological approach to gender transformation discussed in Chapter 3. An extract follows.

"P: OK, I can say, basically, years back women in South Africa, they didn't have a voice when talking about gender transformation, for women it's like now you've got a chance to voice out whatever that you've been.. having, whatever that you you've been wanting to say, you've got a chance. Gender transformation, I can basically say women have been given a chance in South Africa to actually stand up and have 50/50... a 50/50 chance..."

Finally, while all of the responses to questions around gender transformation concentrated almost primarily on women as a broad social group, two participants directly noted that when they heard the term "gender transformation", they immediately thought that it is something that **principally relates to women, not men**.

"P: Aaah... for me as a woman I think it is about women. (*Laughs slightly*) Ja, it is not much that I think of that it relates to men. I think it all, it all relates on women because woman has always been the one, the ones with problems relating to gender."

“P: Uh, well.. for me it would mean, um, uplifting women. Um... because that has been the gender that has been, you know, previously disadvantaged.”

This resonates with a general conflation of “gender” and “women” in various public discourses around transformation, as discussed in Chapters 2 and 4. In these extracts, it is linked to women’s historical disadvantages (similar to dominant discourses around racial transformation in South Africa) as well as to a notion that it is primarily women who experience their *genderedness* as problematic. From a feminist perspective, these viewpoints have a good deal of salience with regard to ongoing struggles for gender transformation, in a context in which women have and continue to bear the brunt of patriarchal constructs and institutions. However, progressive feminist theory, as I have described it, calls for a move away from isolating women as a homogenous disadvantaged group, and towards identifying not only differences among women at the nexus of race, class, sexuality and more, but also the relational nature of gender and the location of masculinities within patriarchy and gender transformation. The parameters of discourses around gender transformation, such as the ones discussed above, have a bearing on the kinds of changes (and approaches to change) envisaged and pursued. In other words, if women are seen as the locus of “gender” then gender transformation strategies (within and beyond the media) will only address women, which in my view will significantly curtail the reach and impact of gender transformation.

Questions pertaining to the key “**gender issues**” in current South Africa evoked a slightly broader range of responses than those related to “gender transformation”, although mostly (all with the exception of one participant) **elaborating or expanding on the issue of women’s representation in public spheres**. Most responses included more detail on the underlying issues and sources of resistance to gender equality in the workplace. For example, the extract below conveys a concern that when women reach positions of power, there is a backlash against them.

“P: If president Mbe-, Thabo Mbeki takes a woman to be hi- his deputy [president], what happens, what do you do? We boo her, we we don’t listen to her, we are a suicidal, not a suicidal, but we have the pull-down syndrome, that’s what is leading us.”

Notably, in many of the interview responses around issues of gender and gender transformation, women were located discursively as **(passive) recipients of gender transformation**, which was framed as if conceded, allowed or promoted by male gatekeepers. In the extract above this comes through (“takes a woman to be his deputy”). There was a sense of gates being opened by men, and of women being inserted into a largely unchanged public sphere. This discourse came through in phrases such as “give/allow women a chance” and “bring women in”. This perhaps reflects broader gendered discourses around transformation, and while subtle is potentially important in terms of refiguring gendered power relations.

There were quite strong concerns regarding the **legitimacy of women’s gains** in the workplace, or perceptions of the merit of women in positions of power and leadership. Two key issues arose here. Firstly, gender affirmative action was considered potentially problematic in that it sometimes promoted transformation tokenism rather than real transformation in the workplace. In the extract below this issue is likened to tokenistic approaches to racial transformation.

“P: Generally speaking, there are still whites that are.. leading in..... they put blacks in the front, but at the end they are still the ones pushing and pushing at the back and they are the ones benefiting... so it goes the same way with women... at the end of the day, who is in the front? It is still men.”

Related to the issue of transformation tokenism in the workplace, two participants (one male and one female) expressed concerns that reverse sexism was resulting from gender affirmative action in the workplace, whereby men were being unfairly discriminated against when it came to taking certain positions. These concerns cast a shadow on the legitimacy of gender affirmative action policies, at least in their current state.

“P: Now since the women must also get senior positions..... I think we’re happy as women that it is actually happening and women are being given a chance to, to.. and respected equally like males, and on the other hand, sometimes we feel, let me say a position is being advertised, a male candidate is actually qualified, more than the female candidate and he also has got some

experience, but the gender of taking females, sometimes it gets very unfair to males... ja...”

“P: Magazines yes have been transformed, but still they are not transformed because you don’t find a certain man as editor in a women’s magazines. So that’s a problem. We need to be, you know, transparent, be able to accommodate men. Men can do well in women’s magazine. And then women can as well do well in the newspapers. So I think there need to be given chance, and that need to be reviewed.”

Secondly, pervasive sexual politics and the patriarchal economy of sex being exploited in the workplace were raised as considerable obstacles to any meaningful gendered changes in the workplace, including perceptions of women’s legitimacy in the workplace. I was personally taken quite by surprise by the number of participants at the SS to raise this (three out of the seven participants interviewed, or three out of the five journalists interviewed). All three participants were young women, and one participant in particular discussed these issues with great passion. One concern raised by a participant was the undermining impact of sexual harassment on women’s advancement in the workplace, and another concern raised by three participants was what one participant called the “casting couch”. This refers to requests or expectations for women to have sex with men in power to be hired or promoted at work. This was not seen as limited to the media industry, but broad-based. The casting couch was implicated in undermining the credibility of women’s advancements.

“P: [An important gender issue is] how you are treated, how people view you as a woman, ja, especially when you are in that position ... I think what should go away is what *people think that you got that position ...like, you got a position because you’ve slept with someone* or ... which happens a lot and still happens.

D: Those perceptions, or...

P: Ja, *the perceptions about women in power, because they say that they are using their.. they are using their bodies to get there, ja*” (emphasis my own).

The extract below was taken from one interview in which the participant spoke lengthily and passionately about this issue. In fact, this participant redirected almost all the questions

posed subsequently back to the issue of the casting couch, and it was therefore clearly a point of serious concern for her. I have included quite a long extract here, combining various parts of a lengthy discussion about the issue.

“P: OK, I am not saying this is like, um, happening, but I hear people say it is happening. *Most of the time like females there is this thing of sleeping your way to the top.* I don’t know if you’ve heard about it.

D: Ja, it’s come up with a few of the interviews, ja.

P: Aah, nowadays women in in every industry, I’m sure you have been reading papers where some government manager slept with the secretary or was sexually harassing the PA⁵⁹, or stuff like that. Suddenly, there is this thing..... to get this kind of a position. Yes, you’ve got the qualifications, yes, we see from your CV⁶⁰ that you can actually do this, *but you’ve got to go to the casting couch..... Some people end up doing that because they are desperate, they actually need.. a job, they actually have to make ends meet..... People are convinced, they’ve got the wrong mentality and they, it it now becomes a culture, a culture in a way that women in our country they sleep with anybody who is in charge for them to get a job..... Sad part is, if you refuse doing that, if the manager is interested in doing it, in giving you the job and you don’t want to go down that road, you don’t get a job.....* I’m not saying all the successful women they slept their way to the top, but 50% (*slaps the table with her hand*) of those women, in the top, they actually slept their way there, the other 50%, they’re the normal, uh, actual citizens and women that... they just went their way in. OK, let me say that they were fortunate that their, (*laughs*) their bosses did not ask to shag them” (emphasis my own).

A culture of sexual economics in the workplace, with women as the sexualised objects and men as the gate-keepers exploiting these sexual economics, is described here. Women are discursively portrayed as both co-conspirators and as victims within this patriarchal system, and the effect is conveyed as men in power profiting from it and women’s credibility being undermined even as they rise to higher positions. The participant herself emphatically insisted that half of all successful women have reached their positions of success in

⁵⁹ Personal assistant.

⁶⁰ Curriculum vitae.

exchange for sex, a suggestion that would hold women's advancement in the workplace to be a farce and perpetrate the notion that women's primary value is located in their bodies.

Discourses surrounding the casting couch and other issues in the workplace are not directly linked to my research question, which relates to how gender is portrayed in the media rather than playing out in the newspaper. However, these exchanges exemplify some of the circulating discourses around gender transformation with a potential impact on how gender issues are represented in the media. Furthermore, if sexual politics define and significantly impact upon the newsroom context, this could have negative implications for opportunities to change gendered thematic and discursive content in newspapers.

One participant raised gender issues unrelated to women's position in the workplace, namely the issues of **HIV infection among women** and **domestic violence**. This was the only direct response to questions about gender transformation or gender issues that related to gender beyond issues of economic and workplace empowerment. Overall, discourses related to "gender transformation" and "gender issues" signalled a focus firmly located within liberal-inclusionary feminist paradigms, with instances of progressive gendered discourses also relating primarily to workplace issues. It is important to note that discourses around "gender issues", in particular, linked gender transformation to more qualitative issues of gender representation and construction, or how women are viewed. However, little was said directly about masculinities or the impact and significance of gendered identities and shifts for men beyond the notions of reverse sexism and the benefits accruing from the casting couch. The discursive focus was still very much on women, how their position in the public sphere is changing and how they may become greater role players in the public sphere.

When asked about their encounters with gender issues in the field of journalism, particularly in how stories are covered or what they thought journalists' roles were in transforming gender relations, some participants did not see a link, returning to discussing issues around gender and the newsroom. Another common response was to refer to legal rules on how to report on certain events and phenomena (for example, not naming a rape victim). However, a few participants raised issues around the representation of gender in newspaper texts. One participant raised the **sexualisation of women in the media**, and also criticised the tendency to **portray women as victims**. When asked what role she felt journalists played in transforming gender relations, she articulated the following:

“P: I would say they [journalists] do [play a role], because um... I mean you... you you you read newspapers such as... Sowetan where you find that, um... *whenever you read a story about a woman it's either she's experienced tragedy or she has been raped and such things. So now you you get to question, you know: what are we trying to say about women?* If in, what are we saying that, um, they still remain the weaker sex regardless of, um, whatever..... accomplishments we're trying to get after 1994. And sometimes, um, when you get an article that... that uplifts a woman is when a woman has won best farmer of the year award, you know? Only, only when there is sort of a momentous thing or..... *In a way they are still perpetuating stigma that women, irregardless of everything else, they still remain, uh, victims.* And... you also get newspapers such as the Sunday Sun and City Press where *women are also... still projected as sex symbols* with a very big picture of a woman who is almost naked there. You know?” (emphasis my own).

Two other participants raised the issue of women's sexualisation in the media, but did so indirectly in talking about the need to “balance” newspaper content. The inclusion of spaces in which, according to one participant, women's empowerment could be addressed and, according to the other participant, “moral” issues could be discussed, were described in the context of the need to “balance” content against the “page three girls” in the SS. Therefore, the sexualisation of women was tacitly acknowledged as part of the SS's content, and as something that is potentially damaging or limiting. However, that this is “balanced” with other content was viewed as part of a commitment to women's empowerment and moral reform. One of these participants noted the following in relation to her specialist beat of covering “women's empowerment” stories in the SS:

“P: You know, the normal page three girls where people will be naked and such things. But then, *we also want to portray a different and a serious side of women* and, ja. So *women empowerment is a very big deal in our newspaper.* Ja. (*Quietly*) In terms of [] and such things” (emphasis my own).

Another participant understood journalists' roles in terms of gender transformation through the media as challenging the tendency for newspapers to depict women in a negative light.

It also shows how decisions regarding the perceived appeal of a news piece have (perhaps unconscious) gendered implications

“P: As a journalist you can come up with an idea saying I want to do this, um... put women in this way, but then the gate-keepers will say, ‘no it will look better if it is written in that way ... if it is written this way, if the story is written this way’, always bringing the woman down, always saying the women are the wrong ones.”

One participant appeared to interpret a question regarding his encounters with gender issues when investigating and writing news pieces in a personalised way, whereby he discursively implied the potential gender issue as being his own ability as a man to objectively write stories with gendered topics.

“P: I’m flexible, I’m not biased in any gender issues. If I write about women abuse I will criticize men. If he is wrong, I feel he is wrong, I will do it. If a male, like a woman is abusing her husband, I must do it to my best ability without being involved. But I don’t have a problem with gender issues.. whatever stories.. gay or lesbian. I can still write about that.”

Particularly when viewed in the context of the full interview with this participant, this extract illustrates what appears to be the discursive implication that a **journalist’s gendered subjectivity** can impact on how stories relating to various gendered subjects are written, but that through journalistic objectivity this (biased) gendered subjectivity can be overcome. This links with discourses holding women to have a particular (and what some perceive as more legitimate) perspective on gender issues. This participant is challenging the assumption that women can do a better job at covering gender issues in the media, and crediting journalistic objectivity as the means through which such gendered personal perspectives can be overcome. This is linked to this particular participant’s discourse of bias as personal or emotional involvement, and to his passionate earlier assertions regarding the unfair assumption that men cannot write on women’s topics, for example, in women’s magazines.

Gendered discourses not related directly to issues around the media or questions related to gender transformation emerged through some of the examples of contemporary events

discussed. In particular, it should be briefly noted that discourses elicited in response to discussions around, for example, Zuma's rape trial or the "casting couch" revealed tensions around **gendered sexual politics**. Discursive tensions related, in particular, to the framing of female and male subjects in sexual situations as either victims or perpetrators within the boundaries of acceptable sexual behaviour, and some interviews showed contradiction and inconsistency in this regard. This perhaps indicates the battle of various discourses converging at the point of intimate and sexual heterosexual relationships.

I should further note that issues of race, "culture" and class were not directly referred to in views expressed around gender issues in South Africa. Gender discourses were constructed primarily around gender differences, without distinctions made in the interviews in terms of race, class or "culture". This is not to suggest that participants do not have views in this regard, however; it is just to indicate that discourses around gender were generally framed in homogenous terms in the interviews. Direct mentions of race, generally, were few, and centred primarily on the market for the SS, intersecting more often with issues of class and geographical location. References to the "black community" emerged, framing race in quite general, homogenous terms with the only real distinction being made in terms of location (linked to class), such as references to townships. However, gender issues were **configured largely around the broad concepts "women" and "men"** (and especially with a focus on women).

7.4.5 Discursive strategies for transformation

Finally, drawing together findings for SS presented thus far, I will outline some of the key discursive strategies through which social and gender transformation in relation to representations in the media were described as being (potentially) promoted or resisted. This theme - of discursive strategies for transformation - began to grow as I observed in the transcripts some of the contradictions, tensions and negotiations in discourse that were taking place, for example around notions of the media as playing a didactic role and yet needing to be objective. Varying discourses appeared to be in the active process of being negotiated towards determining a path of action in relation to a specific event or news story, and in many senses these processes emerged as a key finding of the research: discourses reflected not only values and meanings around gender transformation, but told me

something about how journalists navigate a complex discursive environment, with competing interests and values, and therefore how gendered news is and could be understood and contextualised.

This section on discursive strategies links together perceptions of the SS's market, notions of the media's role in society and understandings of gender issues, in a negotiation of discourses towards the possible parameters of gender transformation through the media. It is important for the purposes of the research question and feminist agenda of the research to explore potential constraints, opportunities, spaces and strategies for gender transformation through the media. Many of the discussions with relevance for this section did not touch directly on gender transformation. However, it is through interrogating broader discourses informing what and how news is put forward, in conjunction with the theoretical foundation on gender and the media laid for this research, that this thesis can suggest discursive openings for change.

In the interviews with SS participants, while discourses of objectivity were very strong, there were various ways in which notions of objectivity could be adapted and negotiated towards the objectives of didacticism and social commentary. In addition, participants described ways in which didacticism could be incorporated even where readers may not agree with the slant given (problematic in terms of the reader-driven approach of the newspaper). The editor, for example, maintained the centrality of market-driven approaches, but pointed to the scope within this for introducing didactic perspectives on certain issues.

“P: When the Sunday Sun came into being, that was our our our motto, to give them what they want. And they, they said it's impossible [] to give the readers what they want. You, you may have an idea what you want to give them, but the thing is that, what do they want first? *Give them what they want. And give what you want to give them as an addition. And try to change their habits from that*” (emphasis my own).

In this extract, there is a sense that not only are there issues and perspectives that could or should be introduced towards influencing readers (and that news therefore is not only a reflection of society), but that spaces can in fact be carved out to do so. As discussed earlier, much of the value and success of SS was credited to its delivery of relatable issues,

characters and views to the reader, even where these could be conceived of as problematic in terms of social transformation. However, participants' responses highlighted numerous tensions with regard to this, as I have mentioned.

One of the key strategies towards dealing with these tensions was through the **creation of various spaces** in which different perspectives, and in particular "free speech" or overt opinion, could be shared. As one participant noted, the precepts of journalism such as objectivity restrict what journalists can write, while spaces such as columns allow for a higher level of engagement with issues through opinion-sharing.

"P: OK... There are journalists, reporters like us we write that... we are ... restricted by guidelines that we, we shouldn't be..... what I was talking about when I was speaking about objectivity. So now, columnists.. writing a column is something that are totally different. You can write any nonsense and... the, the main duty of a columnist (*humorously*) is to create controversial, controversy, something to talk about. Usually they tackle issues that we.. that we wouldn't be given the opportunity to write about."

Therefore, the tenet of journalistic objectivity can be harmonised with didactic objectives and/or the objective of reflecting the views of the readers (and therefore attracting readers) through the creation of more spaces associated with free speech. In tabloid, in particular, these spaces can be maximised, tabloid challenging certain conventional news formats and growing conversationalism in the news.

The deputy editor noted that the editorial is a significant space through which the perspectives of the editor, as well as underlying or foundational values of the newspaper and its direction, can be seen. Columns came up a few times in the interviews, however, as spaces in which more controversial social issues could be addressed, not only because columnists are not limited by the precepts of objective reporting and are instead expected to give opinions, but also because their professional location outside of the publication protects the newspaper from having the views expressed attached to the newspaper itself. When asked what would happen if a journalist wrote something controversial for the newspaper, the editor answered the following.

“P: In mo-, in most cases I don’t even publish that. Then I tell them I say ‘no, you are part of Sunday Sun’..... Now, once you start to have an opinion... it’s..... just going to send the wrong message. (*Pause*)..... And so, I’d rather not have internal opinions, because once you’re full-time staff.. you are Sunday Sun. So that opinion is very difficult, to have a personal opinion whilst you are a full-time staff. So I’d rather.. not have them. Rather have people from outside who cannot be linked to Sunday Sun.”

Columnists are framed as the free agents of free speech, and there is implicitly less accountability in terms of what they write. As such, selecting columnists for a publication (who will tend to have their own particular perspective on issues) can be a strategy through which to create space for particular perspectives without risking the same level of accountability for controversial things that may be written.

Another key strategy I identified was the promotion of a **“balance” of views and content**, which was discursively made compatible with the notion of objectivity. “Balance”, fitting well within the broader journalistic values, could be strategically used to negotiate tensions between, for example, popular reader-oriented discourses and transformative didactic discourses. To illustrate this, I include a small extract from the editor’s interview, which overlaps partially with an extract already introduced earlier. In this extract, the editor notes that a balance is attempted between spaces that sexualise women (and are, implicitly, part of “moral degeneration”) and spaces through which “moral” issues such as healthy relationships, marriage, women and child abuse and so forth can be addressed, namely through columns.

“P: And then we [thought] how about also considering that um, *to put a balance between.. we’ve got a Sun Babe on page three, and then talk about people’s issues...* it could be a..... moral problem thing, moral degeneration. Then we got, um, Bishop Sibiya to write a a column, so that he should, should write about issues, about moral issues and all that. We also have um, um, um Reverend Jentile who writes about relationships” (emphasis my own).

One of the participants argued that it was this kind of negotiation over space and attention given to different perspectives (free speech) that was more important and valuable than

pure regulation or control of content in accordance with particular values. One of the main methods of introducing free speech, she noted, was through different spaces in the newspaper catering for individual perspectives, which also served to give voice to different readers. Regulation and controls restricting the expression of various views, including those linked to “what readers want”, did not blend well with the journalistic value of media independence. When asked about the importance of free speech versus regulation, she had the following to say:

“P: Well, both are very important..... because at the end of the day we cannot say we, we have, um, freedom of speech in the media if every now and then we are going to be regulating what, what these journalists are saying..... Sometimes we don’t normally get that [free speech] *which is why I think we have the open section for people to say that “but I did not agree with this and that”. You know just for people to write in and say that.* And ja. And and and, at the same time it is a good thing because, you know, as a writer *you do have a sense of some feedback on what do people think as well, you know. Not necessarily that I’m just going to feed the reader this thing and this is what they have to consume*” (emphasis my own).

At the level of news reporting, in which normative journalistic values and approaches are required, the sections above have already outlined some of the ways in which journalists conceded to shaping stories in a particular way without breaking the rules of journalistic objectivity. To repeat part of an extract already introduced, one participant said: “the way you write your story, the way you use your words, you don’t have to lie to make a story to be juicy.” The **selection of “facts”, words and an “angle”** for a particular story are other strategies through which meaning is shaped within the parameters of journalistic values and approaches.

In addition, a discourse assigning a kind of **agency to “facts” or “stories”**, which are framed as conveying issues, meanings and values in and of themselves, appeared to be a discursive strategy through which to harmonise social transformation agendas and journalistic objectivity. In this discourse, agency was given not only to the facts or stories themselves (facts and stories being perceived of as engaging with the reader rather than the journalist), but readers were also given agency to “decide for themselves” as one participant

put it. While no overt opinion can be given, “facts” or “stories” were framed as inclined to convey a particular meaning. A good example of this is provided below, where didacticism is appropriated for the newspaper through a discourse that holds the *story* to be the agent through which social issues are raised.

“P: A personality may be involved in an AIDS campaign..... that personality goes out to different schools and speaks to school kids on a weekly basis and tells them to abstain [from sex] and if they can’t abstain to use condoms, and that very same personality then goes and sleeps around with three or four women and impregnates all of them. Hello! You understand what I mean? So in that way we try to raise awareness in that way, and *it is not a case of having to preach to readers and say look at this person, he did this and this and that, but it comes out in the story and the person [reader] can see it*” (emphasis my own).

Two of the participants also ascribed **agency more directly to the broader public**, both as readers and as potential sources for news stories. In the following extract, while the participant discursively indicates some level of agency for the journalist in shaping (“judging”) the news story, she highlights the agency of news sources to create possibilities for social transformation issues to be tackled in the news. In this way, responsibility and agency is shared with the public.

“P: I’m going back to the legal implications, if you’re talking to me on record, like this is on record, then you are giving us as a journalist a chance to write and analyze and judge the situation, and let the readers judge everything that is happening regarding the gender transformation, but some *of the things, we are unable to do that because they [sources] don’t want to talk on record*”.

With regard to the handling of gender issues in the media, in particular, no specific related guidelines or policies were identified by participants. The editor mentioned having undergone training, and some participants noted the legal rules around reporting on issues such as rape. With no policies or guidelines addressing the coverage of gender issues specifically, it is important to look at broader discourses relating to social transformation and

news coverage, as well as gendered aspects of discourse, which will to some extent shape how gender issues will be viewed and covered.

Other strategies raised in relation to covering gender issues were again **equity for women in the media** and a **women's perspective approach**. This included especially the recruitment and promotion of women journalists and editors towards bringing in a woman's perspective. Furthermore, creating specific sections with content considered of particular interest to women, as well as using women as sources and experts informing news content, was suggested by the deputy editor. A discourse holding women to have a particular perspective, particular interests and a particular sense of identification with other women's views emerged.

As I have already discussed, this is potentially problematic if not interrogated or supplemented with other strategies, given the heterogeneity of women's experiences and interests, the need to challenge rather than merely reproduce the status quo of contemporary femininities, and the importance of considering men and masculinities (not just women and femininities) as impacted upon by patriarchy and significant in gender transformation.

The notion of letting facts or stories speak for themselves towards highlighting social issues was also raised specifically in relation to examples around gender. As already discussed above, one participant noted that the "objective" reporting of facts around the Zuma rape case highlighted Zuma's moral or social shortcomings. The editor also noted the following with regard to attempts to be sensitive to social issues, such as gay rights, without becoming "biased" towards one particular perspective on gay issues.

"P: The other thing is that sometime when you want to, to, to, to accommodate too much people like for example.. uh.. the the the gay community and all that. And *then you start to be bias again*. Is that what what is the story. *I prefer to say 'what is the story?' 'What is the issue?'* And report on that. And then if people really want to to to have opinions and bring sides we have the letters page to do that" (emphasis my own).

In this extract, returning to the "story" or the "issue" is discursively framed as a means through which to remove oneself from opinion and bias. As such, the story or the issue is

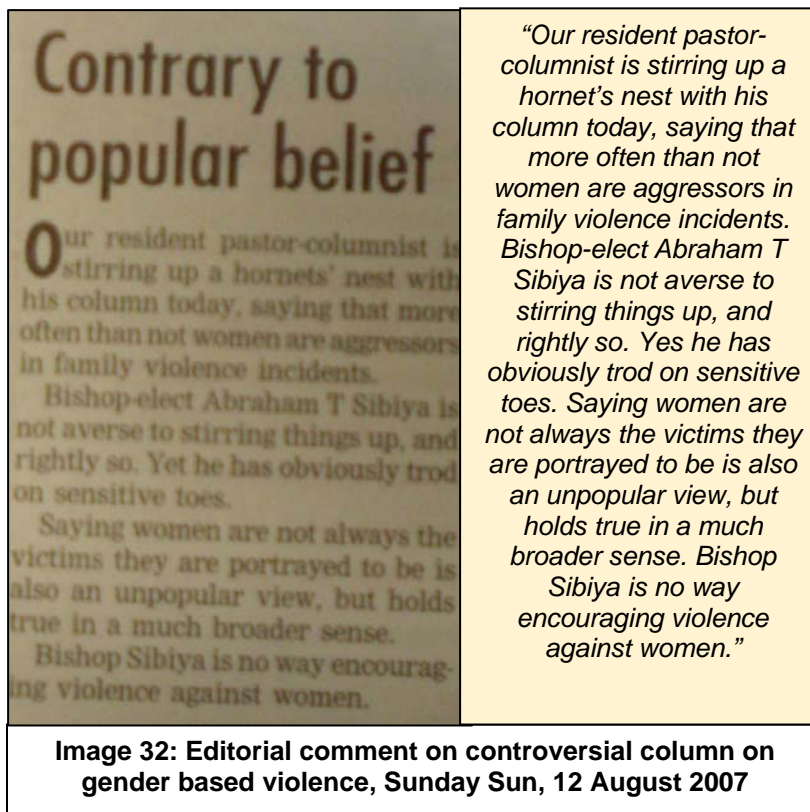
portrayed as being removed from subjectivity, self-sufficient and un-reliant on human opinion. This enables objectivity to be discursively maintained while social transformation issues are raised. The notion of “balance” works in a similar way to discursively satisfy the value of objectivity and be able to give different views through the media in terms of gender issues.

In conclusion to the interview findings for the SS, I will raise one particular example of a controversial gendered column published in the Sunday Sun, a column mentioned by the editor during his interview. This example highlights many of the most salient and challenging findings for the research, particularly regarding tabloid newspapers. In this case, the editor published a controversial and what he recognised as potentially problematic column by a regular but independent columnist, Bishop Sibiya, about the issue of gender based violence. While aware of some of its potential gendered implications, in the interview the editor contextualised this decision within certain discourses of journalistic value, and discursively legitimated and mitigated the decision to include the column through some of the strategies already discussed. The discourse raised in the interview suggests a significant tension and process of negotiation between different discursive values and approaches. The column in question has already been covered in more detail from a feminist perspective in Chapter 6 (see my critique of the column “Women must not be bent on pushing men too far” in Section 6.3.2.3). The following is a relatively lengthy extract from the interview with the editor regarding this column, which he raised on his own accord during the interview to illustrate issues around gender transformation and the print media.

“P: Just a week ago, um, um, don’t forget this is Women’s Month, and Bishop Sibiya wrote that uh, um, it seems some women, if not most women, who are victims of.. a domestic violence, are sometimes not the victims they claim to be. In most cases, some are... actually.. pushing guys into this kind of situation. And you can imagine the reaction. And I knew that.... and he did say that ‘I’m not promoting violence. I don’t say wo-, men... are right, but women should know that not all men are equally matured. Some are less matured, some are less achievers. So obviously when you push him into.... To, to to a corner, he.... You you must be careful to, to who am I dealing with, that kind of thing’. And I realised what the reaction was going to be, then I go to the, um, uh, uh editorial comment, then I do a comment for example to put things in

perspective, to distance Sunday Sun from from what he's saying, and also to try to explain that people should not in-, misinterpret him and, and give our interpretation of what he's saying. (Pause) Because that's where the problem is, especially if people, you have people like Bishop Sibiya, who who started to be... face of the public in the Sunday Sun. People start to see him as part of the Sunday Sun. And so we try to to really make a difference there" (emphasis my own).

In this extract, the potential impacts of this problematic column are described as mitigated through the creation of alternative spaces through which dissenting views can be expressed. The editor later went on to say that the letters page to which readers can submit their views is important in this respect, creating a space in which views can be contested and balanced out. The editorial section also serves an important function in this respect. He further underlines the way in which the newspaper distances itself from the views of columnists.



My own observations of the editorial he mentioned, however, was that it did not actually refute or re-interpret the columnist's views, but rather reaffirmed the role of a columnist as being to present controversial views, stating that while the column was controversial it was not without grounds, and affirming the columnist's own assertion that the intention of the column was not to promote gender based violence (see Image 32 on the left). In addition,

Bishop Sibiya's column in the following week's newspaper continued to perpetuate constructs of women as devious abusers within their relationships with men. The letters

page furthermore did not include any rebuttals in the week following the column discussed in the interview. It seems, from my perspective, that these strategies were not duly employed in this particular case.

The extract of the interview provided above, as well as the editorial to which the editor refers, raises some interesting discursive strategies and tensions regarding what is or is not fore-grounded as knowledge (even if in the form of opinion), and the thorny ongoing dialogue between market interests (or reader primacy), possible broader social transformation projects and journalistic norms and values around free speech. From the sample I looked at there were many columns with similar messages about the gender order in the SS, and these kinds of columns appear to be part of the market appeal of the SS if its concurrent content and growing success are any indication. If this is the case, then, is there perhaps not *enough* of an incentive (or perhaps is there a *disincentive*) to block these kinds of gender representations from the newspaper or to apply the strategies to which the editor refers with greater force and commitment?

In my view, this example shows that editorial and journalistic values and views on social issues are significant in perpetuating or challenging certain gendered voices (and silences) in the media. Whether they be values informing what good journalism or a good newspaper or tabloid is, values informing which voices published in the media are or are not problematic from a social transformation perspective (and to what extent), or the negotiation and struggle between these values, undoubtedly values drive the selection of particular news pieces - even columns by independent columnists, more distanced from the publication. Values also inform whether and what kinds of strategies will be employed to negotiate different views and how they are presented in the media. In this case, the editor identified the column as potentially problematic and both decided to include the column and implement strategies to offset it in some way, within the discursive boundaries imposed by journalistic norms and values, and wider discourses of gender transformation. In a sense, then, it is a case of **mediated agency** - agency employed but also informed and influenced by (sometimes conflicting) discourses.

Notions of balance and the creation of spaces through which to present and challenge views are important strategies through which social content is legitimated within the parameters of journalistic discourses of objectivity and reader-oriented content. As such, especially in the

context of values of free speech, it is not just content that is negotiated but the use and creation of *spaces*. As shown in Chapter 6, the balance and pattern of voices created through space granted (or denied) constitutes gendered representation. The use of space is a strategy beyond the use of content, therefore, through which social values are communicated. As such, editorial decisions on this level are very important and telling in terms of how gender transformation projects are valued and perceived, and because these decisions interface complexly with the readers and therefore gender transformation projects and values at a broader societal level.

I should highlight here that the editor, deputy editor and journalists at the SS, overall, expressed a commitment to gender transformation in South Africa and its media, and were very open, forthcoming and supportive when it came to my research on these issues, which were regarded as important. In many ways, it was from the analysis of the content of the newspaper that the interview findings were put into greater context, since the level of commitment articulated in the interviews seemed at odds to me with what I saw in the newspaper in some respects⁶¹. This re-iterated the need for the research I have done, not only because through triangulating interviews with analysis of gender representations I could explore these and other schisms, but because what I found supported the hypothesis that how gender transformation is *understood* will impact on how it is interpreted in terms of media representations and therefore what kinds of gender representations in the media will be challenged through a gender lens. In other words, the shape of the lens will shape the perceived status quo and the strategies used to address it.

How the issue of the column was addressed would also be shaped in part by how gender is perceived as a social problem. For example, from the interviews and the newspaper content there appears to be a lag in motivation to change or in any way revolutionise interpersonal relationships viewed as “private” (such as marital relationships) compared to the motivation to support public emancipation for women. So GBV, for example, as an abstract concept can be condemned (in line with its unconstitutionality and wider feminist discursive advancements) but Bishop Sibiyi’s column, speaking more to what is perceived as the “private” and “moral” interpersonal sphere of heterosexual marriage - while still recognised

⁶¹ Not in all respects, as I have mentioned, as there were efforts made to promote women’s empowerment within the content of the newspaper, as discussed in Chapter 7.

as presenting a controversial gender issue - may not be so firmly located as a problem through the existing gender lens.

Finally, the example of the Bishop Sibiya column on gender based violence illustrates some of the ways in which the application of free speech, for example in columns, highlights **hierarchies of social values**. As the case of the firing of Bullard showed (discussed in Chapter 4), limits apply to “free speech”. As such, which controversial or offensive views are included or excluded reveals value hierarchies in terms of what constitutes free (published, even if disapproved of) speech and unacceptable (barred from publication) speech. These hierarchies of social value are closely knitted, I would argue, with the shape of gender transformation lenses or how the gender transformation project is perceived. In fact, I would argue that they are mutually reinforcing: hierarchies of value shape wider gender transformation projects and the discourses surrounding (or constituting) existing gender transformation projects reinforce hierarchies of value (for example through the valuing of “public” over “private” transformation).

In conclusion, the **positions and political will of staff** on various issues, their **understandings of gender and gender transformation**, and the possibilities inscribed into the discursive strategies described above through **discourses of journalistic value** (from free speech to the political economy of reader primacy), are therefore important in carving the limits and possibilities for transformation through the media or mediated agency by media professionals. In essence, the findings for the SS begin to highlight the import of political will around gender transformation, the role of understandings of what gender transformation is in determining how this project is conceived of and applied, and the tensions surrounding the ways in which political economy intersects with these.

7.5 Straddling traditional and popular news polarities: Journalistic discourses from the Sunday Times

7.5.1 Market and market appeal

Unfortunately, key input from the editor of the ST with regards to market and market appeal was not available. However, most participants noted the diversity of content appealing to ST

readers, as well as the mix in broadsheet (or “serious”) content and popular, tabloid style (or “light”) content. One participant referred to a phrase coined by a previous editor to describe this approach, namely “**quali-pop**”. This indicates a duality in newspaper identity with regards to tabloid and broadsheet approaches, in so doing appealing to a diversity of readers rather than one niche market.

“P: Look, the Sunday Times straddles a very weird.. it kind of tries to fence, it tries to be all things to all people. Which seems to work for it, it doesn’t work for too many other things. So you know, page one is invariably kind of, um, sort of big investigations politics, but told in a kind of, um, *the term they used to used in the sort of late ‘80’s early 90’s was kind of quail-pop.*

D: Pardon?

P: Quali-pop, is the term. (*D laughs*). The, there’s a previous editor who coined it and it is kind of quality reporting, but sort of popular kind of ...

D: Oh, oh, I see. (*Laughs*)

P: ..feel to it, so unlike you know, *unlike the Mail & Guardian, which is a niche market publication*, which does these great investigations and actually... will give you the blow by blow almost forensic analysis of a story, *our readership is so diverse.....* we’ve got to tell them the tale, but they must, they’re not going to go for the minutia of a bank transfers and whatever. You’ve got to tell them as simply and to the point as possible and that’s the quail-pop sort of thing” (emphasis my own).

The same participant noted that ST readers often tend to buy the ST for particular sections that appeal to them.

“P: You’ve got a very mixed readership..... Your average kind of Sunday Times reader seems to like a specific section in the paper, so it is kind of hard to pin them down..... you know, if you park off, you see people reading the paper, you’ll see those who immediately grab Metro [section], those who immediately turn to the sports pages and the TV guide or whatever, um, I think, I think the TV guide is sort of up at the top, and news is further down, ja... (*D laughs*)”

In a sense, then, the ST has a series of markets, and readers have a range of different interests in the newspaper as a brand. However, one of the appeals of the ST, according to participants, is the inclusion of “light” tabloid style features and approaches within the broadsheet format and style. As the participant above noted, the “hard” news sections also tend to incorporate simpler and briefer narrative than, for example, the MG. Interestingly, while the ST market was located by participants partly in its tabloidised approach, unlike the SS the identity of the newspaper was not figured as a “tabloid”.

“P: I mean it’s [the ST] more populist, *it’s more tabloid than.. pretty much any paper in this country except the the, you know, tabloids themselves*. Um, you know, so there’s a, there’s an element of of... pop, of tabloid writing..... It’s not the Mail & Guardian style, it’s not worthy, it’s not academic, it’s not treatise. Any story has to be made pretty simple to be accessible to people. And that’s really the style” (emphasis my own).

As the above extract shows, the discursive location of the ST is one that **straddles traditional broadsheet and tabloid** newspaper approaches, while maintaining an identity outside of the label “tabloid” itself. Again, a contrast with MG is articulated, and in this way ST’ identity appears to be constructed in its relation to, and in the middle ground between, tabloid newspapers on the one hand and highly in-depth newspapers such as the MG on the other. Another participant described the of the newspaper section she sub-edited as more decisively tabloid, incorporating the label for this section more openly and contrasting it with other sections of the newspaper.

“P: Ja, it’s [my newspaper section] tabloid. So it’s more, *it’s a tabloid format*. So it’s more pop, it’s younger, and we can use words like ‘Joburg’ and ‘cop’, *which the main body section, or Insight [section] or anybody else never would*. So it’s much more colloquial, and it’s much more local, it’s much more pop. We have an extensive art section in the back, and um, so, so we aim at... it’s much more fun, it’s more quirky, it’s more... ja, we’re less doom and gloom and... we have doom and gloom, believe me, we do. (*Laughs*) But we try and lighten it up considerably as well” (emphasis my own).

In this sense, the style of the ST is diversely oriented, with the overall product assuming a more fragmented identity than the other newspapers in the study. As with the SS, tabloidised features such as written accessibility and colloquialism, an orientation to the notion of “people on the ground” (for example, through localised and popular culture stories), and a purposeful withdrawal from a traditional news emphasis on problematic political and social issues (“doom and gloom”) were raised. In many senses, this resonates with the discourses used to describe the SS, especially what I called the **weary reader discourse** and the **tabloid as democratised (localised, more accessible) media discourse**.

In addition to the more tabloidised features, participants indicated that the ST maintains an identity as an influential newspaper through its **investigative political reporting** pieces, generally presented on the front page. These investigative stories generate a lot of controversy and public debate, and it is most likely these stories that locate the ST as the most influential media source in South Africa (Media Tenor South Africa, 2007). One participant noted that a dedicated investigative unit had existed to work on these longer-term stories. While this unit had dissolved to a large extent, he noted at the time of the research that it was being revived.

While the approach, style and content of the newspaper were described as highly diverse, some participants noted that news content is oriented broadly to a particular market, with news stories selected in part in relation to how they will affect the lives of the readers themselves. One participant explicitly linked this broader market to a “**middle class**”, noting that this impacts significantly on what kinds of stories are selected and how they are approached.

“P: So what makes news for the Sunday Times? Things that, um, affect the middle class. Ja. Things that affect wealthier people. Um... so.... A flood in a township? No. A flood in a township that’s caused millions of people to stage a march in Sandton? (*Said humorously*) Yes. You know, I.. that’s that’s the reality.”

Therefore, while the ST market and content was described as diverse, the impact of tabloidisation on the market profile and content emerged quite strongly, as did the broader market orientation in terms of class.

7.5.2 *Getting stories, writing stories*

While the same discursive emphasis on the “chase” of collecting stories expressed by SS participants was not present among participants at the ST, there were a number of references to story acquisition as an ongoing process and a way of life. Participants referred to the need to have a “nose for a story” or to always have one’s “nose to the ground” in order to be a good journalist. As two participants noted, this involves approaching all daily experiences and encounters through the lens of journalistic “curiosity”. One participant explained it in the following way:

“P: You got to have..... a nose for a a a story. You got to be a person who’s inquisitive, want to know what’s happening. When you walk down the street and there’s a hole on the side of the street, and then you walk.. down the same street the next day, the, the hole is still there, you just need to find out what’s happening there.”

Participants indicated that stories are accessed via a variety of methods, including regular contacts, anonymous tip-offs, people phoning in to the newspaper with stories and journalists’ own observations (such as the one expressed in the extract above). As mentioned earlier, the ST’ research-backed reputation as a highly influential media source, quoted regularly by other media sources, encourages those with potential stories to contact the ST over other publications (Media Tenor South Africa, 2007).

Participants noted that between two and three stories per journalist are generated each week, and that most of these stories are done within the week. However, as with the SS, the time between when the story is conceptualised and gets preliminary approval, and when the final version needs to be approved, is generally about two days. Therefore, time limits imposed on these weeklies are still quite tight. There are, however, some longer-term projects undertaken, especially those done by the investigative unit, and brainstorming sessions are held periodically to do longer-term news agenda planning.

In terms of writing style, most participants observed that this is very brand-oriented and that journalists pick up the newspaper’s specific style over time. Two participants commented that the level of editorial intervention into written stories is largely dependent on journalistic

seniority, since more senior members of staff have, over time, learnt the newspaper's particular approach, editorial stance and "culture". Therefore, certain discourses within the newspaper function as connected bodies of knowledge defining the limits of acceptable speech or communication through the newspaper. That this is largely learnt through experience at the newspaper further indicates aspects of organisational culture and brand-oriented journalistic values as shaping the discursive parameters of news outputs. This has implications for journalistic agency located at the nexus of numerous "considerations" (Gans, 1980) in the process of news-making.

The ST is over 100 years old, and one participant in particular (a sub-editor) noted on various occasions the connections between journalistic approaches or values, and the historical trajectories of the newspaper and the South African media in general. This participant also mentioned the "culture" and "tradition" of the newspaper as informing style.

7.5.3 *Role of the media*

While the interviews at the ST produced less of a discursive focus on the democratisation of the media than the SS, especially for socio-economically marginalised sectors of South African society, a discursive emphasis on the need to **reflect the diversity of South African society** in the newspaper resonated in certain ways with discourses of democratisation from the SS. In addition, less of a focus on the particular merits of the newspaper's specific brand orientation was discerned in these interviews than in those with participants at the SS (where tabloid was directly and indirectly almost defended as a news form). However, discourses valuing aspects of tabloidisation emerged, such as mention of the need to ensure that news is **relatable and accessible** to the readership in terms of content and language (the "pop" in "quail-pop").

While highly positivistic notions of "objectivity" and "bias" were also not given *as much* discursive credence as in the SS interviews, similar tensions between journalistic values were also communicated including tensions between didacticism and objectivity. In this respect, discursive strategies were also articulated towards addressing transformation issues through the media while maintaining certain journalistic values. In particular, the notion of "stories" communicating issues without alienating or imposing on the reader (again,

the **story as agent**), the discursive acceptability of particular views among the perceived readership as functioning to assist as a gate-keeper for content (resonating with **reader primacy and social relativism discourses** from the SS), and **the provision of different kinds of spaces** within the newspaper through which to convey diverse views were introduced as ways in which these tensions could be mitigated.

However, as with many of the interviews at the SS, responses related to the relationship between the media's role as social transformation agent and as "objective" presenter of facts often produced contradictory, vague and vacillating discourses, making it difficult at times to discern what position the participants were actually taking. One participant, for example, began with one assertion about the media's role but, as she discussed and unpacked the issues at hand, she began to move through and consider various different positions, finally recognising with a sense of irony in her voice that her argument had come full circle. **Tensions and discursive negotiations around the media's role** therefore emerged as a strong theme for the ST as with the SS.

Some perspectives on the role of the media, as I have mentioned, were sometimes more clearly defined than others. One of the participants directly articulated a perspective of the media as informing the public towards strengthening public agency. Through information, she noted, members of the public are better able to make constructive decisions for themselves. In this discourse, final agency is located with the reader, and the media functions to provide the informational tools with which this agency can be exacted.

"P: I think people need, should be informed, that information and, um, knowledge is power, and that it's better to be informed, you know, and know your rights and know what.. and *you can therefore act and be in control of your life* rather than to be uninformed and, you know, ignorant..... like I said our job is to inform" (emphasis my own).

The theme of **shared agency between readers and the media** was a recurrent one. In this discourse of shared agency, participants generally conceded the role of the media in highlighting certain issues and even in orienting stories towards a particular "angle". However, the transmission view of the impact of the media was strongly questioned on the basis that readers ultimately interpret and select information in accordance with their own

views and locations. Therefore, the media was seen as potentially strengthening, but not significantly shaping, readers' views.

"P: I would like to say the media plays a role. People also have a mind of their own. People can think. Um, they don't, they don't really have to listen to what [I say] all the time to actually make a decision. So I can't actually blame the media, but I can only say we do, uh, infuse in the thinking. We do, uh, enhance it in a way. Because we push to an extent that we cannot push anymore. But, at the end of the day it's that person's choice to make up their mind..... At the end of the day you'll read it and take it with a pinch of salt" (emphasis my own).

One sub-editor participant insisted that her staff ensure that all relevant information is included in the news, but that readers are often selective in what they read into a news piece. As such, the media's agency in transforming society is only partial.

P: I think that we are.... there is a responsibility. But I don't think that we can be responsible for anything dumb people do. (D laughs).... I think that people blame the media very easily for stu-, for stuff that people, p-, politicians' mistakes. Like for instance, a mistake is a euphemism, when Thabo Mbeki stood up and said HIV doesn't cause AIDS, there was a woman at the HIV neo-natal clinic at Baragwanath⁶², who the.. who was HIV positive, then began breastfeeding her child who was HIV negative at the time and the child became HIV positive, because this woman listened to what the president said.

D: Then do you think it's... I mean in a situation like that would... would it be within a, within a newspaper's jurisdiction to say 'OK, he said this incredibly stupid thing, let's make sure we get, um, the other side'?

P: But they do! They do! The people don't read that far. It's up, it's not up to us to choose what people will remember, or do not remember because people... the very nature of people is that they choose to absorb what they want to hear" (emphasis my own).

Another participant invoked a discourse holding the media to be a reflection of society. This links up with ideas around reader primacy and social relativism, where readers' (and

⁶² Hospital.

therefore society's) values and experiences are seen as necessarily determining what is produced in the media. However, as the extract below shows, this reflection is not always seen in direct and unmitigated correlation with "reality", but relates to *assumed, perceived* and in some cases even *ideal* set of societal values.

"P: We, we reflect the cou-, the society we live in. So... we, we want a society where women are respected. So as the newspaper we (*mumbles*).. Like for example, the Sunday Times represents.. mo-, mo-, mo- more than, I I don't know the exact figures but millions of readers, probably three or four million, or five million. So we [] like represent those values."

The selection and presentation of discursive content for the newspaper was also stressed as necessarily reflecting a variety of different views shared by diverse members of society, and as a process in which perceived sensitivities around certain issues are weighed against the need to voice differing opinions. In terms of didacticism, there was a discursive implication that certain social issues are highlighted through the media, but that **an openly didactic approach alienates** and patronises readers. As such, a discourse holding "stories" rather than overt discussions of or opinions on issues to be the best strategy towards transformation through the media emerged in some interviews. In this way, (perceived) agency is discursively shifted from individual journalist or particular newspaper brand to story, and the "story" is presented as interfacing with and therefore impacting on the views of readers.

One participant commented that openly didactic articles are "dry and boring and horrible", and that journalists instead need to introduce issues through a focus on the details of the stories themselves, or as a brief addition to the end of news articles (for example, getting an activist to comment on an event). This participant framed readers of the newspaper as perceiving overtly issue-driven content to be uninteresting and unduly imposing (something that is seen as forced on readers), and this kind of content therefore as economically unviable. As such, any strategies for the communication or highlighting of social transformation issues would need to be sculpted in accordance with the **economic imperatives of the brand**.

“P: You know, we are, we have to be an entertaining read, so *it’s to sneak up the issues on the reader (laughing a little), sneak the issues up on the reader as opposed to shoving it down their throat*, cause then they’re going to voluntarily consume this stuff, aren’t they? Or choose not to” (emphasis my own).

Similar to the SS, a discourse holding facts and stories to communicate social issues and even certain social values emerged, and “objectivity” in terms of collecting and presenting accurate information therefore legitimated didacticism or activism around social issues. In this respect, some of the participants’ responses reflected a sense that some values are self-evident in facts or stories, and a shared consensus with readers was therefore implied in relation to certain issues. This is illustrated in the extract below, in which the example of domestic violence as being “wrong” is considered evident through the presentation of accurate information or fact.

“P: *I don’t think campaigning for an issue like that has anything to do with objectivity*, I mean there is nothing, you know, *a guy that beats up his wife, there is no objectivity necessary there, I mean if he did it, he did it, you know it’s.. you can’t be objective in a situation like that*, I mean it’s.. *you can objectively interview them, you can objectively look at the story, but the bottom line is what he did is illegal and wrong and you know, should be appalled*. So, ja, I mean campaigning is, campaigning and objectivity are two sort of very different sorts of things, you know, *that’s like saying that you’ve got to be objective on HIV/AIDS, um... the facts are there*, you know, it’s not a question of having to say, you know, um, let’s give the [AIDS] denialists equal space as the people in the mainstream, because unfortunately the scientific stuff is out there and if you do that it becomes a self-defeating nightmare” (emphasis my own).

In my view, some of the interview data for the ST, similarly to the SS, indicated that the journalists’ own views on various issues shaped what was articulated as a case of self-evident “fact”. The strength of discourses through and within which people operate and perceive social reality can, in a sense, function to naturalise and legitimate certain issues as inherent in fact. This is one reason why broader circulating discourses are also emerging as

so important in the shaping of news outputs; if these broader discourses shape peoples' understandings and perceptions of social issues, they will indirectly impact on what is naturalised as fact or story in the media. In the interviews, the selection of "facts" for the news was at times rendered in a way that **discursively naturalised fact** for journalists, and as such certain viewpoints were regarded as obviously credible while others were not. As a result, some "facts" are included over others.

The perceived relevance of information to a story was also linked, in my view, to **social currency and the power of various circulating social discourses**. For example, one participant discussed the example of the media's coverage of the Zuma rape trial, arguing that one strong view is that the media's duty is not to be selective in terms of the facts presented, since all relevant facts need to be communicated to the public in order for people to make informed decisions. In my view, however, the example she used illustrated the link between the social currency of certain discourses and the notion of relevant fact. That the "behaviour" of the woman who accused Zuma of rape on the night in question should be communicated by the media suggests, at least in part, that certain actions on the part of this woman were *relevant* to the story, which was about the issue of rape. This, in turn, is laden with gendered values and assumptions forming part of broader discourses around gender and sexuality, and as such the perceived relevance of this information is linked to those discourses.

Of course, Zuma's rape trial also involved an interrogation of the woman's "behaviour", and the relevance is therefore not determined solely by the media but also importantly by the gendered court proceedings on which the media reported. However, it is interesting to note that the hypothetical exclusion of certain information by the media in this regard was perceived of by the participant as a potential form of propaganda. She observed that the need for the media to "educate" or assist in social transformation is a contentious and complex issue in the context of the media's role to present fact, and there was significant tension between competing perspectives on the media's role in her discourse. However, the relevance of the information around the accuser's "behaviour" was raised in a way that appeared to suggest that readers would or should consider this information in making a "decision", and as such that it is linked to broader gendered discourses. I have included a relatively long extract here to illustrate this.

“P: I think the reality is that a lot of, a lot of us might say, ‘well... yes our responsibility is to educate’, *but educate as in... trying to slant it a certain way or educate as in just providing you with the information that allows you to make a decision?* Um, and I think that that differs, you see, and I think different people, some people would say educate where you actually present only certain information and, and leave it out. And you make, and y- and you.... You assess the information you give, you decide what people are going to, to see, you leave out things you don’t want. So, so you’re educating you’re also.... *It’s almost propaganda in a way.* Other people might say, ‘well, you know what, just give it all to people’ and then.. ja, in a healthy democracy they might not like the fact that..... some of us might think ‘well, Jacob Zuma’s acc-, [rape] accuser acted very strangely [on the night of the alleged rape] and could you call it rape?’ And, you know. Some of us might question that from the outset. I mean, the whole situation is strange. Do you-, is that rape? And some people might think, ‘well, you know, why are you questioning the woman?’ But... I, I think, I do-, I just, I don’t think that just because they’re women they should be allowed to get away with behaviour, ‘cause that’s another gender bias, that they.. we wouldn’t expect of men. So.. *(sighs) Yeah I mean that is a hard one.* Everybody you speak to... they-, *there are differences within the Sunday Times as to how far you go on that.* Um... and of course, you know, like I said it’s a power we have so... the temptation is probably to tell people what to think *(laughs quietly)*” (emphasis my own).

The **journalistic value of informing the public on all relevant facts** is shown here not only as linked to broader discourses imbued with social values and assumptions, but also as a difficult position for journalists and editors to negotiate. On the one hand, as another participant pointed out, journalists should avoid providing too powerful a “platform” for certain problematic perspectives (such as AIDS denialists, for example) but, on the other hand, journalists are expected to present all “sides” of a news story. As with participants at the SS, some participants at the ST conceded to the powerful draw, or even inevitability, of imbuing news articles with a particular discursive slant. However, again agency was framed as shared with readers and limits on the parameters of journalistic responsibility in this sense were therefore set. The participant quoted above also had the following to say in this regard.

“P: And, you know, we do analyse information. And no information is just... completely there as an object. I mean *even a word is loaded*. So... (sighs) Look I I I *I have no doubt that we have an effect* but (sigh-laugh), you know, *we’re journalists so we don’t want to take responsibility* (ironic sigh-laugh) for what you’re reading into a word, you know?” (emphasis my own).

In the extract below, a discourse of relativism as expressed by some participants at the SS emerges. The participant, in discussing her views on the press coverage of the Zuma rape trial, pointed to the fact that journalists will take particular “angles” when constructing a news piece, but that readers’ individual viewpoints “at home” (their private or personal viewpoints) will ultimately prevail.

“P: I write a story in a certain angle, what I feel might suit that story. But it does not necessarily, generally.. I must go and generalise and say ‘ooh, Zuma’ or whatever, or ‘the woman [who accused Zuma of rape] deserved it’.. or... what they [Zuma’s supporters] were doing outside the court⁶³, as a human being I say that was just intolerable. I honestly felt insulted as a woman. Because I mean, which woman actually does deserve to be raped?..... They [Zuma’s supporters] shouldn’t have treated her in that sense. Somehow we.. well, some papers actually played a role in, in, fusing that, and publicizing the whole thing.... But I mean above everything else, it would be... an individual thinking about it at home. When I thought about it at home I thought ‘that was so wrong’, you know..... but... to tell you the honest truth we are all individuals and we think about things differently. I mean those women what they were doing.. honestly there was a point when I was thinking.. ‘they are out of order’. But there was a point where I was thinking ‘they are adults, they know what they’re doing’. That’s, that’s fair in that way.”

One participant commented frankly that habitually critically examining social issues is not something that is part of what journalists, particularly within tabloidised sections of the newspaper, do or should do.

⁶³ As mentioned in the literature review, some supporters of Zuma, including a number of women, burnt placards reading “burn the bitch” and made various public statements against the woman who accused Zuma of rape.

“P: You know, we don’t work for Insight [section] (*laughs*). We work for pop, tabloid, we don’t think a lot about what we write, we just think, ‘oh, that’s a story’ and we go for it (*laughs*). You know.”

When asked about balancing the values of objectivity and transformation, this participant also noted: “we don’t really think too much of issues.” It is perhaps salient that this frank perspective on issues of objectivity and transformation was given by a participant without formal training in journalism, training that covers theory regarding the role of the media, in a sense allowing for this frank reflection on an aspect of organisational culture within the newsroom. However, the view that was not limited to this participant was that parameters are set on journalists’ responsibility and ability (for example, under pressured time constraints) to critically think through the issues discussed in the interview in the day-to-day work environment. Interesting, through, when some examples were raised certain key guidelines were said to be followed to sensitively cover issues. Furthermore, social causes were also implied as being taken up by journalists who aimed to expose social injustices. As such, the limits on journalistic responsibilities or desires to critically think through and address social issues were not framed as absolute. The same participant quoted above, for example, raised the following examples.

“P: Obviously we are not going to.. mention somebody’s race unless it’s germane to the story, the Press Code stuff, it’s basic. You know in the Press Code they have the ... you know, you don’t identify..... Like for instance Charles⁶⁴ has done a lot of gender stories, there’s.. this lesbian couple that have been hounded out by their neighbours in Orlando, he [Charles] did it, we lead with it, you know. So... ja, quite a... strong sense of outrage for [our section of the newspaper] (*laughing*). So, you know, so injustice will, will be [run big].”

Another factor in determining the slant of a story was the acceptability of certain discourses to the assumed readers. This was framed as an ideological *and* political economy dimension to decisions around how news stories and various perspectives within them are represented. When asked whether the disapproval she expressed of the treatment of the

⁶⁴ Pseudonym I have used to replace the name she used in the interview.

woman who accused Zuma of rape would come through in the way she would write the news story, one participant responded as follows.

“P: But the, the question is would that have made news?”

D: Ja...

P: People don’t generally like hearing good stuff. You know we don’t want to hear... (*sucks air past teeth expressively*) Mr [Nelson] Mandela did this nice thing or... you don’t want to hear nice stuff. People love controversy at the same time. Which is why you put a balance in your story. You s-, *you can’t really speak what you’re saying, you speak what people want to hear*. You know. *If I was to write what I wanted to hear, that’s why I’d have a column, and speak out what I wanted to say*” (emphasis my own).

As such, the parameters of acceptable discourse are shaped by the perceived readership. “Balance” in a story was again also put forward as a mechanism through which to mitigate against what could be perceived of as an overt ideological slant, while at the same time the assumed values and interests of the readers were framed as contributing to the orientation of a news story. The theme of different spaces within the newspaper serving different discursive functions also came through. In the extract below, another participant responds to an example I gave her of a news article in which a case of gender violence was referred to as a woman being given a “klap” by a man. I asked the participant if a story with this kind of wording would be published in the ST, and if there are filters regarding newspaper content in this regard.

“P: I mean, look, you should always get lots of different views and perspectives about gender issues and anything else. Um.. and is there a filter system? Yes there is, there is for every story. Um.. if it was a question of...a... something like a man just giving a woman a “klap”, I would argue that for most people in the Sunday Times we wouldn’t, you know, we wouldn’t allow that to.. hit, I mean.... In fact, the bias would probably be towards.. the woman, you know. Cause I mean gender violence, I think like we said we’re, uh, we’re, we’re talking to a.. um, a more educated, m-m-, wealthier part of the the population. And as a result, you know, there is an.... Well, I mean, I wouldn’t say that because wealthy men beat their wives too (*with humour*)! But generally, you

know, there is not this understanding that my, my wife or my partner's my slave and, you know, we're not going to write it.....I mean I think it's pretty.. you get very simplistic stories like [] domestic violence cases, women went to thing and her husband had beaten, you know, had beaten..... nobody here is going to say 'well, she deserved it'.

This participant notes that certain content would not be published if it were deemed unacceptable to readers as well as newspaper staff. A set of assumptions and deductions as to the values of the readers, therefore, in part determines discursive content, echoing political economy aspects raised in interviews with some participants from the SS. In fact, the above extract suggests that these perceived values could impact on content to the point of a certain degree of "bias" to a particular viewpoint. Journalistic values around objectivity are therefore also in negotiation with perceptions of the market.

This participant also raised the **link between South Africa's journalistic history and approaches to the issue of objectivity**. She asserted that the trajectory of journalism in South Africa has been shaped by its apartheid history. "Professional" journalistic approaches to news production, based on the presentation of fact, have not fully taken shape in South Africa, she argues, because of South Africa's relative newness to democracy. Instead, news journalism in South Africa is constituted of greater levels of advocacy and involvement in transformation processes, a characteristic she framed as counter to more "sophisticated" forms of journalism in developed countries.

"P: In South Africa almost the journ-, newspapers have become part of the story. So they are almost advocacy groups..... I mean it's a new democracy, I think people still think they're fighting for something. And I think they, journalists see themselves as, you know, the role of the Church, or something like that, then almost in opposition to government, depending on the government, or in support of government, you know, depending where you come from in this debate. And... so journalists play a lot more active role I think in... that, um... process than they would in other countries with longer histories of, you know, where they're not set up as the opposition and more as, like, these are the facts. But, it's much more sophisticated, it's a much more well-established, you know, you've got.. democracies there, (*ironically*) well democracies, well... but

England's been a a a around maybe..... ten centuries and for the last three or four centuries it's been the way you see now. So there is this established political sys-, this established society. Ours is not and I think journalists play, I mean we've got to be honest, South African journalists play a very...active role in the defining of the society."

South Africa's press is, therefore, framed as more didactic, active in transformation processes and prone to advocacy due to its historical location. While the participant discursively evaluated this in linear relation to a first world blueprint of journalistic "sophistication", she also intimated later in the interview the legitimacy of this approach within South Africa's current historical location, in which the trajectory of transformation processes and the shaping of democracy are unfolding, and therefore could use the active scrutiny of the press.

In terms of participants' inputs regarding desirable traits for journalists and the news, attention to the notion of factuality, as observed with participants from the SS, did not arise at all. The most desirable journalistic trait among participants at the ST was "curiosity", or the ability and inclination to ask questions about various phenomena and in so doing uncover the stories behind them. This came up with all of the participants. I asked one participant, a sub-editor, why this was so key to ST participants.

D: The word cur-, curiosity's come up with everybody that I've interviewed here so far. Is that something that .. gets, that is very much.. is that a word that is really part of the.. newspaper's culture?

P: No...

D: I'm interested that it came up for every person so far.....

P: Ja, but, um, I mean, any.. if, if anybody in any other publication doesn't say that then they're mad (*D laughs*). Because the idea is that... *journalists have to be curious enough about something to want to find out more*. Um, so.. if something happens somebody might say that's interesting. A journalist, uh the very good journalists are curious and *as a result are constantly saying 'oh, maybe that's a story'*. Even though its part of your everyday life doesn't mean, you know, it shouldn't be written about" (emphasis my own)

As such, journalism was framed as an uncovering or probing exercise into the underlying causes behind phenomena. Linked to this idea was the quality of having, as one participant put it, “a bullshit detector”, and “doggedness”, “scepticism” and “cynicism” as another did. This resonates with discourses emerging in some of the interviews with participants at the SS, linking journalistic practice to the persistent interrogation and underlying mistrust of authority figures towards uncovering dishonesty and iniquity.

Desirable characteristics of news stories were also linked to political economy dimensions, similarly to those raised by participants at the SS. These included the need for news to be relatable to, and in some way affect, readers’ lives, as well as to be novel and extraordinary. Two participants referred to the latter as the “oh fuck factor”. When asked how she selected stories to undertake, one participant said the following.

P: Can I swear? (*both D and P laugh*) *It’s got to have what I call the ‘Oh fuck factor’, a regrettable term, but...*

D: As opposed to the wow factor (*laughs*)?

P: It’s like a ‘Oh my... What? Did that really happen?!’ You know, it’s got to have, it’s got to have that... either incredible irony or it’s got to be big. A *very big impact, or an incredible irony* or it’s, um... ja... it’s got to have that X-factor” (emphasis my own).

This factor was seen as a motivator for readers to buy the newspaper. After describing the “oh fuck factor” one participant said the following:

P: It has to have that thing that tips you. If you loo-, *look at the headline and you say ‘I really want to read that’* and you can’t wait to get home, then that is what I think constitutes a news story, ja” (emphasis my own).

As mentioned earlier, the different sections of the newspaper were also pointed out as having somewhat diverse criteria for what constitutes a good news piece. However, an impact on and relevance to the reader was generally quite important. One participant expressed the constitution of news as having both an “objective” dimension and a “subjective” dimension. As can be seen from the extract below, the former was discursively framed as the broader, theoretical parameters of news, and the latter as the more localised,

market-oriented parameters within this. This extract forms part of the participant's response to the question: "what makes something news?"

"P: (*Laughs, sighs*) Well... that is uh... (*laughs*) Now that is... that's a hard question. Because *there's an objective definition and there's a purely subjective definition*. What makes news? Something that's *new..* Um, something that's *happening..* Um.. something that's *relevant..* Something that's *of interest to people*. Something that affects you, impacts on you. *That's objective*. What makes news? Um, *subjectively... what's the paper, you know, every paper's set up and it has a defined readership*. Now, what makes news for the Sowetan might not necessarily be news for the Sunday Times. So what makes news for the Sunday Times? Things that, um, affect the middle class...."
(emphasis my own).

This participant then continued to give an example introduced earlier of a flood in a township resulting in a protest in Sandton as relating to these middleclass readers. This extract illustrates the negotiation and relationship between broader journalistic precepts and values, and the impact of political economy dimensions. Both the business aspects and ideological aspects of news production shaped how the role and location of the media were perceived by participants.

7.5.4 *Notions of gender transformation and gender issues*

Responses to questions related directly to "gender transformation" and "gender issues" were less confined to a liberal-inclusionary feminist paradigm than was the case with participants from the SS. There was also generally a greater engagement with issues related to the discursive and symbolic representations of gender through news media. However, while a more varied range of responses was given to questions related directly to "gender transformation" and "gender issues", the overall themes to emerge in response to these questions were still similar to the themes to emerge in the SS interviews and reflective of the dominance of liberal-inclusionary paradigms. These included the issue of **women's workplace and economic empowerment**, expanded to issues such as gendered resistance to this empowerment and the notion of reverse sexism as a consequence of

gender affirmative action. The notion of a **woman's perspective** and particular **women's interests** (with women-targeted sections of the newspaper, for example) also came through quite strongly.

Sexual politics in the workplace was not mentioned, although sexuality was raised in relation to **gender diversity in terms of sexual orientation**. As with the SS interviews, however, some interesting gendered discourses not specifically linked to the media emerged in relation to examples and events discussed in the interview, such as the Zuma rape trial. As with the SS findings, I will roughly present participants' responses to questions around "gender transformation" and "gender issues" respectively, before discussing additional gendered discourses to emerge. However, the overlaps between these responses is presented where needed.

One participant responded to both questions around gender transformation and gender issues with a concentration on the issue of women's numerical representation and empowerment in the public sphere, specifically the workplace and economy. In fact, questions aimed at broadening the scope of the interview discussion around gender were received with apparent confusion, with gender transformation and issues being framed entirely within the parameters of women's greater representation in the public sphere. I therefore found it difficult to sustain the interview, not wanting to make the participant feel uncomfortable by further pushing the gender theme through different questions. I have included below a relatively long extract to show the interview exchange around these questions.

D: And what comes into your mind when you hear the words gender transformation?

P: Gender transformation and equity, what comes to my mind? Oh, number one is to... how can I put this? Eh... to... correct.. imbalances basically..... We know, I know for a fact that women didn't have the opportunities that they have now. Whe-, so when you speak about gender equity then I know that it's mainly about women getting a fair share of the economy, if I can put it that way. And as... getting the representation in the workplace.. right.

D: What do you think are the most... pressing gender issues facing South Africa at this.. at this point in post-apartheid South Africa?

P: (*Long pause*) Repeat the question again.

D: Eh, what do you think are the most... um.. important or serious gender issues that we face in this country?

P: Most important...

D: In post-apartheid South Africa...

P: OK, I I I I just say like, um, when looking at big companies like the senior management, that's where you don't find many women. So that's where basically the big challenge lies..... most of them [big companies] a- a- a- a- are run by men..... Like getting.. forty to fifty percent of women. That ea-, that's easy to deal with. But like the senior management that's where the biggest challenge lies..... Getting, like, women to get those... big pa-, big positions.....

D: Ja.. And when you you're busy working on your news pieces, do you ever come across gender issues or women's issues in.. in the stories that you cover?

P: (*Long pause*) Not really.. Because, there... The the most of the stories we do are.. based on issues. Issues like service delivery. Issues like, eh.. unemployment. Issues like... like your normal day to day issues. Crime. Not really gender related issues. For me I wo-, I wo-, I wo-, I won't say that I do come across those kind of issues.”

This does not necessarily indicate that these are the only gendered issues and discourses with which this participant is familiar and engaged with. The participants' expectations regarding the interview and research, and both the terms “gender” and “transformation” may have functioned to elicit particular responses. While I did try to broaden the scope of the discussion via the example of the Zuma rape trial, with limited success, the discursive scope of responses appeared to illustrate a conception of gender largely within the confines of a liberal-inclusionary feminist paradigm. In many senses, a liberal-inclusionary paradigm appeared to be the most widely accepted and widely associated feminist trajectory when it came to “gender transformation”. Another participant also conceptualised gender transformation as including these issues, relating them specifically to the newsroom.

“P: I mean, with the gender as well I also think about how women are actually being so empowered now, as opposed to before, and... I think of our newsroom, I mean we don't ha-, we don't really have that many women but..

most of them are subs [sub-editors] and such, but we have sufficient number of women, and that are actually in lead as well.”

Another response to the question of gender transformation engaged more widely with gendered resistance to women’s empowerment, especially perceptions about women. This echoed a theme emerging at the SS. However, this participant’s discourse also raised interesting perspectives on the nexus between gender, race, “culture” and class in the post-apartheid South African context, the only *direct* reference to these intersections in all of the interviews for the study. Her initial reaction to the question of gender transformation was the following:

“P: Oh well... (*humorously*) It [gender transformation] would be a lovely idea (*D laughs*). What did Mahatma Gandhi say about.. about European civilization? Ja, when asked about what he thought of European civilization, he said it would be a nice idea.

D: OK (*laughs*).

P: I had the same thought on gender transformation.”

She then raised some experiences of lags in gender transformation in relation to how women are viewed and the impact this has on their workplace empowerment. For example, she argued that women journalists are less likely to be assigned to stories requiring travel to what are perceived of as dangerous destinations, such as other parts of Africa or the Middle East, despite women journalists’ willingness to travel there. She also asserted that women in the workplace are still expected to work more to achieve the same level of success as their male counterparts, and that men assume that women will take on many of the more mundane tasks around the office. Interestingly, while these imbalances were critiqued and linked to limited gendered *perceptions*, they were also discursively framed in somewhat *naturalised* terms.

“P: Women do all the work. The men flit in and out... and do very little work. And it sounds like a, like an extraordinary generalization..... And it’s a proven fact that women have a higher sense of organization commitment than men do, and I think that is definitely the case here (*pause*). The men here, like for instance a a senior staffer here, did not pitch up for night shift Saturday night,

cause he he thought the women would sort it out, you know? The woman whose job it is to see, to see to the the duty roster and the re-jigging thereof, he thought no, she'll just sort it out."

Furthermore, the question of gender transformation elicited from this participant examples of how **race, "culture" and class were perceived of as shaping gender relations** and the trajectories of gender transformation in the workplace. As the following extracts show, this participant (a white woman) viewed lags in gender transformation as generally greater among black people in South Africa due to cultural legacies as well as post-apartheid sensitivities and politics around African "culture". Heterogeneity in terms of gender relations is discursively linked to "race" and "culture", terms used interchangeably and therefore concepts implied as closely linked in the South African context. Interestingly, while she conceded that gender transformation among white people in South Africa has not been achieved, she argued that it is a particularly thorny issue among black South Africans, and that racial transformation and the sensitivities related to it (for example, around issues of "culture") have been prioritised in South Africa over gender transformation. In addition, class hierarchies (discursively portrayed in not only social but also in spatial terms) were tentatively linked to lags in gender transformation in the third extract, through the vector of education.

"P: The []⁶⁵ department [of the ST], for instance, is run by a bunch of older black men. My young black women who go there seeking [resources] to be assigned to them, get the [resources] that [don't work]. Why? Because they do better, they have better career prospects, and they are, um... and they are seen to be BEE⁶⁶ upstarts by these old.. and not knowing their place, by these older black men."

"P: I mean cause you think that (*sighs*) *as white people, you think that the gender issues you have to deal with are big. Try it in other cultures.* I mean my black, young black women staff have got far more... in the way of... I mean you have to, *you have to remove sexism from society in order for there to be... you know, a transformed media, because obviously media is a reflection the society*

⁶⁵ The department and the specific resources they provide are omitted here to protect the anonymity of those working within it.

⁶⁶ Black Economic Empowerment (affirmative action programme).

from which it comes. Like for instance there are certain questions that my staff can ask or not ask of people because they are women. I would never countenance that. I would never, I would never even.. consider those restrictions, but as young black women they have to do it. I mean *the whole race and gender merger also needs to be looked at.* I mean, the fact that *post '94, white people on en mass had to transform, and a lot of people did and a lot of people didn't, but the same, the same transformation was not required of other cultures.* Which is why you end up with a situation in which Zuma is existing, because he... being a struggle icon, is able to behave in the most sexist and reprehensible manner as he deems fit to behave in, and nobody says anything about it, because *there are some holy cows that you just don't touch.* So.. *transformation.. racial transformation has.. come... a lot further than gender transformation* and I think that we have concentrated on racial transformation at the expense very often of gender transformation” (emphasis my own).

“P: You have two different strata, you have the people that, *not the people here for whom gender is less of an issue, then the people down here for whom, who have to struggle with those kind of stereotypes every day, because people are less educated,* people have less experience, it's, it's quite tough” (emphasis my own).

Discursively, a good deal of tension is portrayed within and between issues of gender and racial transformation in South Africa, as well as the role of “culture” (discursively linked to “race”) in the complexities of trajectories of transformation in post-apartheid South Africa. This discourse resonates with some of the arguments around anti-feminist backlash in post-colonial contexts raised in the literature review, in which resistance to gender transformation is understood in the context of issues surrounding the identities forged and strengthened as part of the anti-colonial project. The majority of, or greatest prevailing, gender issues are also perceived of in this discourses as afflicting the “other”. Another participant, a coloured woman, also made a similar link in terms of the role of class and education in shaping gender discourses, although this participant did concede that these links cannot be generalised.

“P: Cause I mean gender violence, I think like we said we’re, uh, we’re, we’re talking to a.. um, a more educated, m-m-, wealthier part of the the population. And as a result, you know, there is an.... Well, I mean, I wouldn’t say that because wealthy men beat their wives too! (*With humour*) But generally, you know, there is not this understanding that my, my wife or my partner’s my slave and, you know, we’re not going to write it.

Therefore, while there was some recognition of the diversity of gendered experiences among two woman participants at the ST, there was a tendency (even if uncomfortably so) to see gender issues as primarily affecting the “other” (in terms of class and/or race).

Another theme to emerge in relation to gender transformation resonated with one raised by SS participants, namely the notion that women may have a different perspective on gender issues than men. However, as the extracts below show, participants at the ST also challenged this paradigm. One participant, in particular, responded immediately to the question around gender transformation by challenging the notion of a woman’s perspective or specific women’s interests, which she appeared to regard as a key (and simplistic) discourse around gender transformation. Interestingly, what the following extract also shows is the idea, again, that black South Africans (and especially black men) are assumed the least likely champions of gender transformation, in the way that the scenario is met with a sense of mild surprise.

“P: The story that appeals to a woman reporter is not necessarily going to appeal to a man. (*Pause*) I don’t have... huge problems with my staff in that regard, because, basically I think the biggest champion, unconscious albeit, champion of women’s rights in this office is John⁶⁷, he’s a 48 year old black man.”

Another participant drew on ideas around gendered subjectivity to describe what kinds of news stories are of greater interest to men and women, but again pointed out at the end that one cannot generalise. In a sense, naturalised dichotomies existed in many senses in terms of how men and women’s perspectives were described, but these interviews reflected a growing discomfort with these dichotomies.

⁶⁷ Pseudonym.

“P: It [Zuma rape trial], it showed just how much hatred we had, I mean as women towards our own women.... It’s something that hurts a woman generally. I mean you hear that a child is raped.. it’s not your child, it’s no-one you know, but emotionally you cry, you think about it, and you can’t get it out your mind, and you sympathise with those people. Maybe men are not like that, you know. Maybe men are f- f- f- are built of steel, but... to tell you the honest truth we are all individuals and we think about things differently.”

“P: Well, you know, I think... *(Pause)* I don’t think often that there is such a difference between what is interesting to women and what is interesting to men. Um... *(Pause)* ja, and I and *I think people harp on about... you know, you need to write for women, it’s like what are women... what are women interested in? Women aren’t homogenous. Any more than men are homogenous. So just because I’m interested in something, doesn’t mean the next woman is*”
(emphasis my own).

The participant quoted in the last extract, in her emphasis on the heterogeneity among women and men (which she elaborated on with reference to her own interests as being different from other women’s), appears to be challenging what she perceives of as a strong discourse around gender and the media. In fact, the perceived prevalence or strength of this discourse shaped her subsequent response to the question of the representation of gender issues through the media. The notion of an inherent gender difference in perspective as impacting on the ways in which media stories are covered came through as an important discourse around gender and media issues.

“D: Are there any, any circumstances where, uh, where people...covering a news story and, and, some sensitive gender issue comes up and...is it an issue of how to deal with it? Or.. what angle to take on the story? I mean something like the Zuma trial would be... an example. Uh, do you think that comes up for your journalists? Or it came up for you when you were writing?

P: Yeah *(tone suggesting ‘well obviously’)* I mean I think, look, undoubtedly it does, you know, um you come at something from your... your point of view, your... reality. And if you’re a woman and someone’s talking to you about... rape or domestic violence, you probably believe it more than a man who

probably thinks ‘well..’ you know? Not all men, granted, but yeah you are coming, I mean, it’s not to say that there is no thing as a gender difference.”

Interestingly, this participant had a generally sceptical response to the question of gender transformation and the media, to which her first response was “political correctness.” Her discourse suggested a sense of **weariness and wariness of circulating discourses about gender and transformation in the media**, such as the notion of a specific woman’s perspective or particular women’s interests. As she later noted, to her many of these discourses were not relatable to her experiences at work, but rather discourses emerging from an ivory tower.

“P: I mean I, I understand why people talk about it [gender transformation in the media], but I sometimes think it’s, it’s, it’s, *the debate is happening at a very lofty intellectual level*. Has no.. *that has no kind of meaning for people on the ground, you know*” (emphasis my own).

While this was the only participant in the study to suggest so directly that discourses around gender transformation are inaccessible or removed from journalists’ experiences, this response highlights an issue to emerge in other interviews: namely that what I have called “progressive” approaches to gender transformation are still primarily dominant in academia and among gender activists and specialists, and that the trajectories of feminist thought within broader social discourses differ from these. Broader, more widely circulating discourses of gender transformation centre mostly on the notion of women - their inclusion and their perspectives. This will be important to consider in attempts to engage media professionals on issues of gender transformation.

The interview with this participant also illustrated a high level of negotiation and mediation of various gendered discourses, particularly around women, sexuality and the concept of “morality”. As with many other instances of discursive tension around gender issues to emerge in the interviews for the study, this tension was raised in a discussion of the Zuma rape trial, as shown in the extract below. Here, the participant discursively separated the sociology of gender issues from the notion of morality. She discussed what she considered “difficult” cases of, or “grey areas” around, gender relations and the tensions emerging when notions of “morality” as well as social background function to shape gendered values. To

me, her discourse shows an attempt to **separate morality from sociology and power relations**, and later social background from gender, which serves to legitimate and negotiate particular gendered discourses, for example, around women's sexuality. However, to me it appears that she also considers patriarchal social values as problematic and to some extent politicised, by raising the notions of "misogyny" and "discrimination".

"P: Now, I mean, the more difficult cases are date rape, uh, some particular rape cases, you know. That's.. that's more difficult, even Jacob Zuma's rape.. accuser. That's more difficult because.... *It's not just a gender issue, it comes into.. a moral issue and where you stand on the moral... um, divide.* You know, same like prostitutes..... Some people want to call them street walkers and think 'shame', some people go 'well they're prostitutes and what do you expect'? You know, and I think that's obviously that's where it's more difficult, because those are grey areas in life. Um. You know. Some woman goes out, gets drunk, wears skimpy clothing.. now, obviously your brain says 'Ok, well it doesn't mean any-, it doesn't mean she..' But then, you know, all of us are thinking 'well, the, the behaviour is... questionable'..... we're called on to make a judgement. *And to be honest with you I don't know if that judgement is... gender as much as.. our up-, our upbringing, all of us, you know.* So somebody who's more religious may be less tolerant and go 'well, I'm sorry'. If a man went out like.. y-, you know, anybody, not that you deserve to be raped but, you know..... it's a grey area and I wouldn't be too quick to condemn or call, or or c-, call it rape or whatever. By the same token somebody else, man or woman, might say it's absolutely unacceptable, you know. So I think that's also.. where you come from. But then that is influenced by.. ja, misogynistic (*laughs*).. ja and I mean gender discrimination, gender bias, so... (*Pause, sigh*)" (emphasis my own).

This extract shows a discursive attempt to separate the social from the "moral", the "religious" and "upbringing", as well as discursive tensions around gendered values. This also highlights a more general dichotomy implicit in gender transformation discourses among participants and in the newspaper content overall - of the personalised (sexual, intimate, moral, religious) from the political, which is more associated with issues such as public representation and the public sphere.

Two participants raised the issue of sexual orientation, one in relation to the question of “gender transformation” and another to the question of “gender issues”. These participants linked the issue of sexual orientation, and in particular the rights of gays and lesbians, to the notions of equality and diversity in South Africa, and the need for this to be reflected in the media. The following extract is from one of these participants.

“P: OK. One when you think of, when I think of gender, I think of gender equality, I think of... um... gender diversity. I mean we’ve got, we’ve got a whole lot [running] on us now in our country. Before sexuality wasn’t such a big deal. But now in gender terms, now we are starting to accommodate the.... homosexual side of life, you know. We try, we’re living up to it. We’re not blocking them in any way. *I think that’s what comes into my mind when I think about that, I think about all the different, the diversity we have in our country*” (emphasis my own).

When asked about encounters with gender issues in the news and stories they covered, discourses characterising these gender issues in broader terms than numerical representation or subjective gendered perspectives also emerged. Two participants raised issues around **gender violence** and the **nexus of socio-economic marginalisation and gender**, for example. These participants (one male and one female) also noted quite emphatically that gender issues in the stories they covered emerged regularly, and framed these as integrated into many broader issues.

“P: Well, it’s something that you come across with all the t-, time, um, you know various stories. I mean, I’m trying to think of, for example, a while back, not a South African story, but famine in Niger, I went up there and the particular thing was that... you’d have, and we didn’t quite know that situation, but you’d have women and children, sort of essentially starving and coming there trying to get food, um... but they’d leave and they’d take food away and come back again and they were still starving. And the thing is that the men were essentially taking the food. And that was actually, that became the story, was that along with a long host of other issues, but you know, I mean *you get confronted with it at all levels*. Um, service delivery protest, you know you, particularly small rural communities, um.. if you look at the hierarchies and the sort of, I mean

South Africa, for all intents and purposes is still a very patriarchal society. Um, you know just politically one has to look at it, you know, um, take the Zuma case, prime example. So I mean, you know, *those issues are out there all the time, it's it's in relationships, it's in, it's in, you know, pretty much any kind of sort of conceivable story you do, there are going to be elements of all those sorts of things*" (emphasis my own).

Notably, this participant's discourse appears to reflect what I have called progressive feminist thought in terms of both the apparent awareness of gender dynamics and the terminology incorporated, which link gender to issues of power (hierarchies, patriarchy). Furthermore, gender issues are not discursively limited to liberal-inclusionary feminist concerns over the inclusion and development of women in the public domain, but are extended to relationships and access to resources, for example. The second participant, a woman, asserted that gender issues emerged frequently in the stories investigated for the news, although she also emphasised later that she thought these issues are not actually directly considered by journalists who "don't think too much about issues."

D: OK. And then in terms of your, um... the actual, the work that is done and the the stories you cover, how often do gender issues come up there? When you cover different stories, or language issues and those kinds of things...

P: (*Overlapping*) Oh, every day.

D: And what kind of issues come or what kind of issues stand out as... challenging in that sense?

P: Well, obviously I mean, OK..... A lot of it like the... I hate to say grass roots... like working class issues. Stories like a woman gets booted out of her home by her in-laws because she bust her nephew for raping her daughter, so she gets kicked out because she interfered with the family tradition. You know that sort of crap that goes on in South Africa all the time, it has to touch us because we write about it. Um, what else? I mean stories like that *all* the time... (*Sigh*)" (emphasis original).

Again, this participant has tentatively linked the gender issues encountered in her work to "culture", and more directly to class, in South Africa. While many of the themes around gender raised by participants at the ST resonate with those raised by participants of the SS,

discourses extending beyond liberal-inclusionary feminist paradigms were more common, and discourses linking gender to various other social dimensions (even though at times with a problematic tendency to “other” gender transformation issues in South Africa) emerged more strongly. Considerations around diversity in sexual orientation, gendered power and class/race/”culture” intersections with gender, for example, were stressed by participants and in some cases linked not only to gender transformation in the newsroom but to the way in which gender relations are represented in the media.

7.5.5 Discursive strategies for transformation

Many of the discursive strategies employed to negotiate journalistic values and social transformation issues have already been raised in relation to the role of the media as expressed by participants, and I will therefore not elaborate much more here. As with the SS, the centrality of facts and stories in the newspaper is a discourse through which to address transformation issues without abandoning journalistic values such as objectivity and factuality. As one participant noted, through the **centrality of stories rather than overt engagement with social issues** in the news, journalists can “sneak up issues” on the reader. Readers were framed as having an aversion to what is perceived as the forcing onto them of social issues, and as such the “facts” and the “story” were portrayed as better strategies for engagement. This illustrates how tabloidised news forms (more personalised and story-based than analytical or “forensic” as is the coverage in the MG) can and are engaging in social issues. As with the SS, separate spaces such as editorials and columns pages were pointed to as spaces in which transformation issues could be addressed more directly. Even so, limits around what could be presented in these spaces were expressed, as shown in the extract below.

“P: Ja, because like the editorial pages are mainly about... the views.. like views expressed in editorial pages are seen as views of the newspaper. But, like say.. politically, even editorially the newspaper cannot really be seen to be taking sides. But if the newspaper feels that like women.... they can really take that stance and say ‘you know what, as the Sunday Times we feel that this [treatment of Zuma’s rape accuser] could have been prevented because of women’s rights or whatever’. And then that’s what they can do in editorial

pages. But, in the news pages, that's where you report on what's happening and you report on what you see. You basically... your view is not part of the article and shouldn't, and should never be part of the article."

As another participant (quoted earlier) pointed out, the limits of acceptable speech within any part of the newspaper are also shaped by the **perceived social values of the majority of the newspaper's market**. In fact, **shared agency with readers** in terms of the shape of newspaper content was raised in response to numerous questions. The role of readers' values in shaping news content through political economy, as well as their agency in interpreting and selecting information in the news, was variously raised. Some journalists were quite direct in saying that considering the complexities of issues in the news is not always considered part of a journalist's work. Some of the discursive strategies raised are illustrated in the extract below.

D: So is there space to do that, to sort of really push certain issues or highlight certain issues? Or...

P: Ja, but *we don't really think too much about the issues, we obviously, or when the stories that illustrate these issues come out, then...we don't try to fit the...(Overlapping)*

D: So it's story-driven as oppo-, opposed to issue-driven?

P: Oh, ja *it's not issue-driven at all.*

D: The issues that come with the stories.

P: Ja.

D: OK.

P: When you've got a good illustration of an issue, go with it. *In the issue stuff you will find with [my section of the newspaper] that it's always at the back, always at the bottom of the story... We'll phone the Human Rights Commission to comment or this kind of thing. Gender groups this and that. (Pause) It's a story, it's a hu-, it's the stuff that grips people, because if you say 'Er, the issue of so and so and this and this has come up', I mean, I don't expect the reader to go beyond the first paragraph or something like that. You know, we are not the Sunday Independent, thank God (humorously imitating disgust). Because it's so boring. You know we are, we have to be an entertaining read, so it's to sneak up the issues on the reader (Laughing a little), sneak the issues up on*

the reader as opposed to shoving it down their throat, cause then they're going to voluntarily consume this stuff, aren't they? Or choose not to" (emphasis my own).

As this extract shows, a sense of scepticism and **aversion to overt didacticism** is present, but does not entirely exclude the role or application of didactic content in the newspaper. Instead, discursive strategies are used to negotiate these tensions, such as **positing the story as an agent** in illustrating issues or **including activists' comments** at the end of the article. Strategies are therefore developed within the parameters of readers' perceived expectations.

7.6 Balancing critical perspectives: Journalistic discourses from the Mail & Guardian

7.6.1 Market and market appeal

All participants at the MG sketched a portrait of a niche market of more **formally educated and influential** people than most mainstream newspapers. In particular, leadership and broader "decision-makers" in the country were highlighted as an important market segment, impacting on the kinds of news produced by and expected of the MG. The editor described the readership as "thinking South Africa", and pointed out that the readership is importantly constituted of leadership located across the private, public and civil society sectors. Another participant noted that the MG is "regarded as the newspaper that politicians and decision-makers...read." As such, the editor pointed out that the MG is not a "family read" in the way that other weekly newspapers such as the ST tend to be, nor a daily informational read such as the Pretoria News, but a more in-depth, political read. One participant had the following to say about the readership.

"P: We've got a very small readership. Intensely.. intelligent and vocal readership. Um.. They aren't fools. So they can spot rubbish. So do your work (*laughs*), you know, do your job. Um... and so you always, you know with that understanding I think the journalists really push themselves to... really write, the best that they can. So, um... ja, *our readers are intelligent, articulate.*

They're a higher LSM so they usually are very well educated. Um.... So, you really have to know your subject matter and, um... and and people come to expect a certain amount of, um... very... intelligent debate in the newspaper" (emphasis my own).

As this extract shows, the readership was distinguished along the lines of class and related educational and lifestyle (LSM) characteristics, as well as being distinguished as somewhat **politicised** and **vocal readership** interested in debate. That the readership is formally educated and well informed in various areas was also cited by participants as significant in determining the shape and style of the journalism practiced. As the extract above illustrates, a high standard of critical journalism is required to meet the expectations of the readership. As other participants pointed out a good deal of contextual knowledge in the journalist's field of specialisation as well as a broader general knowledge are thus critical characteristics for a journalist at the MG, in order to meet an informed and vocal readership where it is at.

In addition, an important aspect of the market appeal of the MG raised was **journalistic and editorial opinion**. In other words, participants at the MG highlighted the importance of space given and expertise in providing informed debate and opinion over straightforward news reporting in which overt expressions of opinion are proscribed. This emphasis on space and depth provided for opinion, comment and analysis has significant implications for the kinds of discursive strategies available to and employed by the MG towards social and gender transformation.

While other newspapers also include spaces in which comment and opinion are given, the MG market was framed not only as creating far more space in this regard, but also as expecting more educationally informed and in-depth scrutiny of issues in its opinion sections. Furthermore, these opinions were discursively framed as coming more directly from writers at the MG in addition to out-of-house staff such as freelance columnists and readers. As shown in the extract below, opinions were linked more closely to the newspaper itself than was the case, for example, with the SS which distanced itself as a brand or entity from the opinions expressed in the spaces it provided.

"P: We are a very thinky newspaper, people take us seriously, our readership tends to be very highly educated, tend to be in positions of power, and to be

very influential, so we're involved, I think, in the business of... of apart from the news that we generate and the investigations that we do and so forth, that are part of the package, *I think we're a paper that is very highly considered for the value of it's opinions*. And I think that goes for the political opinions stuff as much as it does for he arts stuff" (emphasis my own).

The editor noted that, at the time of research, all journalists were fully trained through universities in the journalism profession. This is unlike the other newspapers in the study, whose journalistic staff members were drawn from a greater variety of educational backgrounds, including those with tertiary education in fields other than journalism and those with diplomas or basic training programmes in journalism. A **privileged niche market** was therefore sketched, and staffing decisions as well as decisions around style and content are shaped around this.

Another key element of the MG's market appeal as described by participants is its **investigative and in-depth political coverage**. In contrast to more tabloidised newspapers - valued for the simplicity and broader accessibility of their language and content, as well as their "entertainment" and "light" features - the MG was described as providing more detailed analysis of state politics. Similarly to the ST, however, one of the MG's flagship features includes prominently displayed political investigations into issues such as corruption among government officials and others in power.

"P: They [readers] expect things like our investigative team, who've got quite a reputation for the work they do, to pull out these stories and um... highlight corruption I suppose."

The editor herself placed the investigative news pieces high on the list of features that are most valuable and interesting to readers. As such, she noted that the MG as a publication identifies with a "**watchdog**" **role** within South African society. As mentioned earlier, the MG was recently ranked the second most influential media source in South Africa, after the ST, and this is linked to the investigative news covered in the MG. However, the MG's investigative news pieces tend to be more detailed in their approach than, for example, the ST. One participant from the ST noted the following:

“P: [Mail & Guardian is a] niche market publication, which does these great investigations and actually... will give you the *blow by blow, almost forensic analysis of a story.*”

Related to this, journalists at the MG were generally described by all three journalist participants as having a good deal of knowledge in their field, or as specialised in a particular area towards developing in-depth coverage in the newspaper. As such, participants’ discourses reflected less of an emphasis on the normative journalistic values that were highlighted by participants at the other newspapers, for example, related to skills required in chasing stories, reporting simply and factually, and integrating entertainment into news content and style (although this is not to say that these elements are not included at all by MG participants). Instead, journalistic values around detailed and specialised coverage, and as such also knowledge on various subjects, were more notably emphasised.

“P: I think also that a lot of the writers [at the MG] are specialists in fields. And um... so.... You know, *they perhaps more than other newspapers they do tend to... uh be more in-depth on their particular subjects.* Um, you know, a a a daily newspaper basically wants to just get to the latest developments. Whereas... a newspaper such as the Mail & Guardian wants to look behind those developments and perhaps explain them” (emphasis my own).

“P: They [senior journalists at the MG] know the groundwork, they’ve done their homework. So they have, you know, excellent background knowledge on.. the big issues informing their section or their industry. And very often they have a lot of background knowledge on all the other stuff.”

Highlighting all these market appeal features, as well as the broader content of the MG, one participant responded the following when asked what readers of the MG find most valuable and interesting.

“P: *(Pause)* Look I mean it seems, you know, just just... uh... based on the mix that the newspaper runs. I mean *it’s a political newspaper, it’s always been a political newspaper.* Um... it’s... regarded as the newspaper that politicians and decision-makers, um, read. So... um...it will often get approached to write

those kinds of stories and feature them..... That's in the news..... It has a lot of other sections [] and so it's a *it's a broad ranging newspaper but upfront in the, in the news side it's about.. cutting-edge issues of the day and political issues. Decision-making.* Things that, that affect the way, the state of the nation" (emphasis my own).

That the MG is a "political newspaper" was highlighted by participants on two levels. Firstly, the editor and journalist participants pointed to the in-depth coverage of national or party politics through investigations as well as comment and analysis features. Secondly, as directly articulated by the editor and implicit in the discourse of the three journalist participants, the MG is a *politicised* newspaper in the way that it covers various news and features. By this I mean that issues beyond national party politics are **politicised**, with the social and economic politics shaping various contemporary phenomena unpacked and highlighted, and issues tackled in some spaces of the newspaper through what one participant called "**advocacy journalism**". The editor also highlighted one of her goals as an editor as being to broaden awareness around the parameters of "politics".

"P: We need to inculcate in people that political coverage is not just coverage of... um, party politics. It's classically, *classically*, Frere Hospital" (emphasis original).

She then continued to discuss the example of Frere Hospital⁶⁸ as an instance of politics within the sectors of health and welfare. I will discuss more with regard to the issue of MG's politicised approach in the section dealing with the role of the media. However, it is important to note that a political stance (conceptualised in a broader sense than state party politics) is more overtly adopted in the editorial orientation of the newspaper.

The editor noted that the newspaper's content and style reflects quite clearly a **particular editorial orientation in terms of socio-political principles**. In particular, she highlighted the MG's stance as "green", gender conscious (including "cutting edge" coverage of gender issues), pro-poor ("stand on the side of those who do not have"), anti-racist and pro-diversity. She also emphasised the editorial commitment to expanding coverage towards

⁶⁸ An East London hospital that faced serious financial, managerial and health provision problems and incapacities, which were given attention in the media.

repositioning the MG from a South African newspaper to an African newspaper, also an undertaking I think could be laced through with a post-colonial, political perspective. Another participant observed that the MG is also secular in orientation and “progressive” in its underlying principles and values. While numerous participants from all the newspapers in the study included elements of moral, political or social didacticism and advocacy in their discussions of the role of the media, the discourses emerging from the MG suggested a more overtly embraced, or proud, editorial stance in this regard. One participant linked this in part to the MG’s history as a “crusading” newspaper.

The editor pointed out, however, that the MG’s approach was made possible in part by what she called an “**inverted**” **commercial model**. She noted that, unlike most other newspapers, the MG is premised on a commercial model that is editorial-led. In other words, the journalism is not so much shaped by readers’ or advertisers’ interests, but rather readers are attracted to the publication by the kind of journalism done and editorial stance taken by the MG. She stressed the role the publication’s ownership plays in sustaining this model, even though the kinds of journalism undertaken by the MG (often controversial) have at times impacted on its commercial viability. She observed that the “quality” of the journalism in the MG is critical to the credibility upon which the brand rests, and that as such maintaining it is of utmost importance. Due to the resulting economic pressures experienced, alternative commercial endeavours are pursued towards the commercial viability of the publication, such as the publication of the *Women’s Book* (a resource for journalists in which women experts in diverse fields are listed for easy contact by journalists). Therefore, many of the very distinctive features of the MG are also linked to quite a distinctive political economy dynamic, less common among weekly newspapers.

7.6.2 *Getting stories, writing stories*

Only one journalist participant directly discussed news collection processes, since one of the other two participants was a film critic and the other was only able to give a short telephonic interview. However, the participant discussing news collection sketched a similar picture, in some respects, to participants from other publications. This depended, however, very much on the section of the newspaper. For example, for feature writing about social development, contact with sources is initiated either by the sources themselves or by the journalist

following up with an existing contact. Sources could include institutions such as NGO's, or any person or body that wishes to have a particular problem highlighted in the press. As mentioned earlier, that the MG is a highly influential publication, as well as the fact that its market has a strong leadership component, means that it would be a desirable publication to contact with regards to highlighting issues.

Other sections, she noted, are more driven by events themselves, such as the fashion section in which the catalyst for stories would be current fashion events. Some sections of the newspaper that are less driven by events, human-interest components or "tip-offs", such as the business section, may be more planned out by the section editor in terms of content. The editor herself noted that when it comes to the identification of news stories, there is a mix of news that is event-driven and editorial-driven; sometimes the newspaper follows, and sometimes it sets, the news agenda.

As with the other publications in the study, stories are mostly written within a week, except for some longer-term stories that may require investigation. While participants mentioned that areas of specialisation existed among journalists, the editor also noted the flexibility in terms of beats or "turfs", with journalists writing for different sections. Related to this, two journalist participants stressed a sense of journalistic agency supported at the MG in terms of being able to take their own news direction and style. I raised an example with one participant of an article from another publication containing what I viewed as highly sexist content, and asked her whether or not this would be published at the MG, and why. After responding that she agreed it to be sexist in content, she observed that *one* of the reasons it would probably not be published in the MG was the probable reaction from staff.

"P: Also... I think it would.. it [the article] would meet with a lot of resistance from staff but I've also got to say that *in this newsroom our staff are allowed to air their opinions quite, quite strongly*. Um, and so if they put up enough of fight or, or argued well enough to say 'I don't think this is right, we should not publish it for x y z reasons'... they wouldn't.. if if not be listened to be heard. You know, the, the decision might be taken [to go ahead with it]..... but they would be heard, definitely" (emphasis my own).

Another participant, primarily a film critic, also reflected the following with respect to agency and freedom at the MG.

“P: In terms of content, I pretty much write what I like, and that is one of the reasons why I’m still at the Mail & Guardian 18 years later, is that *it is pretty much the only newspaper, and I know a lot of people on other newspapers, it is pretty much the only newspaper in South Africa that will let you write what you like.* And I’ve never been censored and I’ve never been restricted, and *that is very valuable to me*” (emphasis my own).

In an interview with the editor shortly after her appointment, she noted that this freedom among journalists was one of the draw cards for young journalists to the publication.

“They [young staff] come to the Mail and Guardian [sic] not because they earn the best salaries, really they don’t. They come because they get space and because their views are heard. Our editorials are very democratically decided, which is quite different” (Haffajee, 2004).

The editor also commented that journalists at the MG should ideally have a sense of political consciousness, and that while she does not like to dictate to journalists in terms of content and opinions expressed, she can choose journalists with social and political consciousness around aspects of the chosen editorial ethos (mentioned in the previous section). Therefore, the agency of journalists within the process of news production was also linked to the culture and editorial stance of the newspaper, and therefore the types of journalists attracted to and employed at the newspaper.

When asked about the style of the newspaper, participants noted that this was again dependent upon newspaper sections. Similarly to the other newspapers in the study, one participant observed that news coverage, in particular, is subject to more specific parameters and norms in terms of journalistic practice than feature writing, which is more flexible in terms of style. In the extract below she discusses this.

“P: It [style] depends on what section I’m writing for actually. Um, of course news it’s quite.. you know, it’s the news style, you would be writing with your...

as much information at the top of the story as possible kind of thing. Anything to grab the reader. In standard news [format]..... It's... varsity stuff. You learn, you know, your five w's and an h. (*Laughs*) Um... although when we do things, like being out on our internship programme, that you get to practice it a lot and... you have a news writing course for a week and, you know, all of those ideas are reinforced and you, you know you get to practice them. Um, when it comes to things like social development and arts, there's a little bit more leeway, um, in terms of the style of writing that I use. I find, um... ja, when.... I'm writing for social development, for example, the stories have to be even better written than normal. Because.. the issues aren't always, you see they're the marginalized issues, they're the marginalized people. So you really have to draw the reader in. So you really have to use story-telling techniques. A lot of voices, a lot of colour. And at the same time not lose the newsworthiness or the issues or the punch. So I find those stories often take a lot more work (*laughs a bit*)."

As the extract above shows, style and flexibility is directed in part by the section being covered and readers' expectations around this. Feature writing is also highlighted as requiring more creativity than news reporting. Participants further stressed the importance of - and the ample space given to - comment and opinion within the newspaper, observing this to be a significant part of its style and approach. Therefore, while some of the standard conventions around news reporting, as mentioned above, come into play, wider styles of writing were also said to receive significant space.

7.6.3 *Role of the media*

The discourses of participants at the MG were **more overtly oriented in terms of values around social transformation** and the location of journalism within transformation processes than the SS or the ST. However, some similar themes and strategies also arose in terms of weighing these values and principles against traditional journalistic norms and values, such as the balancing of different views. Unique to the interviews for the MG, however, was the consistency of **scepticism regarding the notion of "objectivity"**, which all participants expressed in one way or another.

The editor stressed the particular importance of the press as a media form in setting the news agenda. Furthermore, the role of the press as a “**watchdog**” for society was stressed, and desirable journalistic traits reflected this. For example, the editor considered a critical, political perspective to be a key journalistic trait. Another participant had the following to say about ideal journalistic traits.

“P: Um... they [good journalists] have...*very critical and inquiring minds*. Um... and an *uncompromising ability to get to the issue, the heart of the issue*. They just... get in there, *they ask the tough questions*, they see exactly where the problems are and they’re not afraid to put people on the spot and ask them. You know. So ‘how much did your trip to America cost, Mr President?’ kind of thing (*laughs*)” (emphasis my own).

The importance of a critical press performing a watchdog role, particularly in light of recent debates and interventions regarding press freedom and criticisms against the current government, was also highlighted in one of the post-interview questionnaires received back from a participant.

“P: Any serious research into, and discussion of, issues in the media, is useful. Media freedom is constantly under threat in some way, whether it’s proposed restrictions by the ruling party, or through attempts by various high-powered people such as Jacob Zuma to sue members of the media such as cartoonist Zapiro⁶⁹..... The critical spirit must remain alive in the media or we lose out on a key element of our democracy.”

A discursive tension between those with greater power and those without was variously expressed in the interviews, albeit in the context of engaging with a privileged market unlike the SS. Whereas the SS’s participants’ discursive orientation was more focused on voicing the concerns and interests of the “ordinary” people making up much of their readership, here the discursive orientation was more focused on engaging an educated elite in decision-making positions regarding **development concerns**.

⁶⁹ As discussed in the literature review.

As already discussed, the editorial stance of the newspaper with respect to social and political issues was discussed quite openly by participants in comparison to other newspapers in the study, and the approach to **news-making processes discursively framed as politicised** in a broad sense. Within this, the need for journalists at the MG to be well informed in various fields as well as socially and politically “conscious”, as the editor put it, was highlighted.

When asked if journalists were able or encouraged to pursue particular social issues of interest to them within their work, one participant commented that journalists at the MG are comparatively free to pursue particular issues, as long as these issues are relevant to the particular story at hand. Again, as noted in the findings related to other publications in the study, the perceived relevance of particular issues to a story speaks to the journalists’ perception of or consciousness around social issues, such as gender, within broader events and debates. A discourse in which the story itself is seen to conspicuously raise certain issues was employed here similarly to the way it was with participants from the other newspapers in the study. However, the MG’s focus on more in-depth and opinion-driven coverage, as well as editorial stance, presents the opportunity to explore and highlight these issues in more detail.

“P: No there’s, there’s plenty of freedom to do that [pursue certain issues]. It depends on the story obviously. Like, um, if the story is... about.... *(Sigh, pause)* I mean if it’s just a general news story and I feel I have to put in gender *(humorous tone, as if to imply that would obviously be silly)*.. issues somewhere there, um, unless it’s relevant to the story I can’t do that. I must stick to the story. But when it’s a, when it’s, it clearly.. raises questions along gender inequality and stuff like that we are free to highlight that kind of th-, thing. In fact encouraged I would say..... No-one has ever said ‘ag no, that’s a tired topic’ or ‘don’t talk about it’ or ‘don’t bring it into things’. It’s always, you’re allowed to explore it.”

As mentioned earlier, all four participants expressed scepticism regarding purist notions of objectivity in the media. The editor observed that she was more “comfortable” with the values and notions of “fairness” and “balance” than with “objectivity”. For example, she noted that while the newspaper’s editorial stance was premised on certain principles, this

should not translate into the shape of a social movement newsletter. Instead, she noted that “that’s where fairness and balance come in”, namely by giving both sides of a story (different views) and while highlighting social issues, avoiding siding with any particular political *parties* or *individuals*. With reference to the ANC succession race, for example, she commented that while the MG took a clear position on the characteristics a leader of the government and the ANC should have, it would not choose a specific candidate. In this way, the notion of objectivity is rejected in favour of an approach that unapologetically stems from particular social and political values, while the notions of fairness and balance function discursively to maintain broader journalistic values and norms, including the avoidance of overt partiality in terms of supporting particular individual or party interests.

Another participant expressed a similar discursive stance, in this case explicitly rejecting a positivistic notion of objectivity in favour of fairness and factuality. He offered an example, which I have included in the extract below, to illustrate his point that all voices are oriented in some way, a case for positionality.

“P: I’ve never been a believer in the... you know, objective journalism thing because I don’t think there is such a thing. I think that in terms of news there are, um... rules and structures and guidelines by which you can be fair or unfair. But I don’t believe there is such a thing as truly objective journalism, no. And I’ve never been interested in a particularly objective type of journalism, I mean either you present the fact accurately or you don’t. I mean, if you are a journalist and you are lying about information that you’ve got, then obviously that is wrong. What I think a lot of people see as objectivity is ... uh, being fair to the people being covered in a story, so that if you have information that is condemning someone, you give them a chance to rebut it. Um, and you know, when people talk about objective journalism, I mean I think most of it is bullshit, quite frankly, because you have someone like Carol Quin⁷⁰.....who’s on the board of [a company].... writing in [another newspaper] saying ‘I don’t speak as the [board person of the company]’..... saying we have a lot of the.. that the media is not objective enough, the media doesn’t allow enough voices. What is she really talking about? She is talking about the fact that in her view media..... does not reflect the government view point of ‘everything [in the country] is

⁷⁰ Pseudonym.

going fine, there is nothing wrong with Mmanto Tshabalala Msimang⁷¹. Whatever it is, um, she's concerned about the fact that too much of the news in her view point is revealing.. problems in government and problems with individuals in government, she doesn't like that. Now is she making a case for objective journalism or is she not?..... I mean, *whichever way you look at it, it is not objective*" (emphasis my own).

This participant also emphasised the role of opinion pieces in the newspaper in facilitating an ongoing process of public debate - an important function in addition to the provision merely of information. In a way, I would argue that this emphasis on spaces created for opinion, analysis and debate, while in style and perhaps focus is quite different to the tabloidised newspapers, does resonate tabloidisation to the extent that it goes beyond more straightforward "reporting" of "news" and into the domain of more conversational engagement with readers (and other writers). Another participant noted the following with respect to the notion of objectivity.

"P: Perhaps *there's an old-fashioned view in a, in a, in a respect that you know journalists are always objective. I think...um... you know that that.. possibly applies more to dai-, daily journalists than the kind of... uh.. more feature writing that gets done. Or weekly publications. Um..I don't know. I'm not saying that you should... uh...put a spin on things. Um, when I'm, when I'm talking about advocacy journalism it's more.... um... try bring issues to... the attention and the awareness of the readers.... So.. um... advocacy in the sense of trying to get the issues to the forefront and to make them news. And to get people interested in them. Um...whether, you know, that then doesn't mean that one has to be, punt a certain point of view in those stories. I mean you still in the, in the, the tenets of objectivity still applies. So in other words you still need to speak to... you know, somebody who holds one view and then the per... the other person who holds another view so that you get a balanced report on the issue*" (emphasis my own).

In this extract, the participant does not explicitly reject the notion of journalistic objectivity but rather aligns it with the notion of balancing perspectives within a news piece. In this way,

⁷¹ The controversy around this minister is discussed in Chapter 4.

advocacy within journalism is made discursively compatible with traditional journalistic values (and the notion of objectivity is still included as one) through **a focus on the notion of balance** and an avoidance of overt or extreme ideological orientation within an article. Advocacy through journalism is also framed as a function of highlighting, or creating space for, particular issues and perspectives without overtly supporting them. This also echoes some of the discursive strategies employed by participants at other newspapers in the study. In addition, this participant regards weekly newspapers and feature writing as more open to advocacy journalism, again emphasising the differential functions of different spaces within newspapers.

One participant also raised the issue of balancing perspectives, as well as **the role of different spaces** (such as columns and letters) in doing so. However, she also highlighted the problematic aspects of balance, which is tacitly also linked to differing social values and their relation to the notion of fact. The following extract is part of her response to the example of the media's coverage of the Zuma rape trial, an example I introduced into the interview.

"P: I think in.... in the drive, in the media, *I think the drive by the media to sort of create a balanced view like this.. like we're always being told like 'you must create a balanced version of events'...* (Pause) *So in doing that so many of the media I think... (Pause) allowed... garbage to be put out there like.... like reinforced myths about women's sexuality and, um... and... and perceptions of women in particular the woman involved that I think should not have been allowed. Yes, you have to portray a balanced view but then.. you gotta realize that... you, in doing so you... might possibly just be... letting... stupid people have a platform to spout their garbage.* And I really think then the media needed to be more critical of... of the people who were supporting him [Zuma] and.... (Laughs) Just like... if I had had my way I would not have let the Friends of Jacob Zuma⁷² have a voice at all or.. because... it's just given, given them credence or... and and not just them credence but, ja. Bu-, it's just, it's just somehow reinforced or let people who have these.. dumb-ass ideas about women and.. what they deserve and don't deserve..... They shouldn't have...

⁷² An organised trust group set up in support of Jacob Zuma. Activities include fundraising for Zuma's legal costs and public announcements in support of Zuma, especially regarding his criminal trials.

been allowed to reinforce those beliefs. (*Laugh-sighs*) I just.. ja” (emphasis my own).

As with participants from other publications in the study, the introduction of an example with which the participant strongly identified acted as a catalyst for the expression of some of the discursive tensions surrounding journalistic values. Here, the notion of balance embraced above a positivistic notion of objectivity is also negotiated in terms of its relationship to the social transformation and the positionality also implied in the notion of balance. In other words, whereas some journalists struggled with what content constitutes objectivity, this participant struggles with which perspectives constitute balance. I then asked this participant if there are tensions between the journalistic values of promoting national good and presenting balanced, factual news. The following extract formed part of her response.

“P: All the time! I think that, that.. *I think that the issue of objectivity and reporting in the public interest aren't necessarily mutually exclusive.* Very often just reporting the facts.... is in the public interest and reveals.. a lot of bad stuff..... But in the case where, you know, in the case.. like this [the Zuma rape trial] it is very problematic because yes you are reporting the, the facts and this is what... Jacob Zuma said..... And to a certain extent, do you have to do that? ‘Cause it is said. But... I think that there are ways then to, to counterbalance that. Like open up your comment and analysis pages to clearly criticize that kind of thinking. So invite a gender activist to write for you and say... ‘clearly this is a load of bollocks because x y and z’” (emphasis my own).

She then continued to give the example of climate change, in which the notion of balance can be misused to represent equally what are largely scientifically discredited ideas, the same example raised by a participant at the ST. What this extract and these examples indicate, again, are negotiations between notions of objectivity, balance and public interest, negotiations this participant agrees are ongoing in journalistic work. Some strategies raised to deal with this include the **valuing of particular perspectives** and therefore giving them more room (for example, determining certain perspectives on gender issues related to the Zuma rape trial to be counter to transformation), **employing the notion of fact to determine balance** (for example, in the case of global climate change, presenting the “fact” of dissidents to climate change), and where perspectives presented in the news are

considered problematic, **carving out spaces within the newspaper** in which opinions against them can be made explicit without interfering with the notion of journalistic objectivity or balance.

This participant also observed earlier in the interview that while certain norms and values pertaining to journalistic practice and ethics are explicitly provided, for example through ethical guidelines similar to those raised by participants from the other newspapers in the study, that journalistic norms are largely approached in a more flexible way and on a story by story basis. **Prescriptions regarding journalistic content and approach were framed as potentially problematic** and avoided at the MG. However, she was also careful to stress that this did not preclude any forms of gate-keeping with respect to content and approach.

“P: I don’t want to make it sound like it’s just loose, unthought-out stuff. Like it’s like a ‘play it by hip’ (*Laughs*). [It’s] practice in the newsroom I suppose. But not because it’s um..... because we just think up what we want to think up whenever we like. It’s more a case of, um, we try and apply ethics as flexibly as possible so that they apply to that story.”

The editor also noted that she did not like to be too prescriptive with journalists, although a **broader ethos for the newspaper**, particularly with respect to certain issues, is cultivated.

While market factors were raised in relation to what content is negotiated for the newspaper, this theme did not emerge as strongly as in the other newspapers. One participant noted that certain social discourses would be subject to gate-keeping not only due to editorial stance but also due to the market to which the MG caters. However, as mentioned earlier, the commercial model for the MG was considered **more editorial-led than market-led**, and as such discourses reflecting a concentration on giving the readers what they want were not as prominent in terms of negotiating content as with the other newspapers in the study. However, another participant at the MG mentioned that reader response did, to some extent, determine the space given to particular issues. When asked what constitutes news, she had the following to say.

“P: What actually constitutes news? Well... I guess, you know, you get to know the kind of people that are reading the publication, and, um... you know what,

what they would be interested in reading and and....wh-, what, what most newspapers including the Mail & Guardian try to do in their upfront news section is to... sort of shock people a bit and make them think..... That they get a reaction from them. And after a while you start getting a feeling for the kinds of stories that will.. um... get people writing letters to the newspaper in outrage or in response. So, you know, it's, it's sort of give and take I think.

D: Do you think the, the media itself sets, sets sets most of the agenda or is, I mean is it...

P: As I say I think it's a bit of give and take. I mean [] if you just carry on writing stories forever that, um, that nobody sort of writes letters about then you... it's a pretty good indication that people aren't all that interested in that topic."

On the whole, the role of the media, in particular of this publication, was framed in more critical terms than the other newspapers in the study. Objectivity within the media was less of a focus, and participants expressed a concentration of journalistic values around critical and informed opinion, balancing of perspectives and, particularly for the editor, the creation of spaces through which to address issues in a politicised way.

7.6.4 Notions of gender transformation and gender issues

Participants from the MG noted the editorial commitment to and encouragement of the highlighting of gender issues. Furthermore, gender issues were generally quite broadly conceptualised, **including but moving distinctly beyond liberal-inclusionary paradigms** and therefore questions of numerical representation within the workforce and newsroom, and related issues of empowerment of women in the public sector. For some journalists, the **importance of gender issues for diverse social problems**, from **HIV/AIDS** to **violence**, was discursively framed as **inherent or obvious**. However, some discourses oriented towards **mitigating overt feminist discourses** in the newspaper also emerged, in some cases reflecting aspects of the findings from the other newspapers. Again, it should be noted that there were fewer participants from the MG than from the other publications in the study, and that as such it is even more difficult to quantify, or in some cases qualify, the significance of these discourses in relation to the overall publication. However, the editorial stance on these issues is regarded as particularly important, given not only the emphasis

placed on gender issues by the editor but also the editorial-driven orientation of the newspaper.

Responses to the question of gender transformation included both reference to the issue of representation in the workplace, particularly the newsroom, as well as wider social issues. The extract below illustrates one response to the question of gender transformation directly linked to the former. Interestingly, however, this participant described gender transformation in terms of the *processes* taking place towards the advancement of women in the public sphere.

“P: OK. When I, when I hear gender transformation that’s what I’m, that’s what I’m hearing, sort of what processes are, I don’t know, are taking place to achieve that. So are there more women managers? Are.. more women being employed? Um, do you have a balance of men and women in the newsroom? Are women allowed to take leadership positions?”

Another participant’s response echoed this focus, and included the power of women to execute their decisions once within these positions. However, less of a concentration on gendered workplace dynamics, particularly problematic workplace dynamics, was observed.

The editor’s response to the question of gender transformation in South Africa was that gender issues are manifested in a variety of ways, from the question of HIV/AIDS to unemployment. In addition, she articulated these issues as being “obvious” in various spaces, as something that therefore cannot be sidestepped. As mentioned earlier, one of the principles shaping the **editorial stance** was a **commitment to addressing gender issues** through the newspaper. In an interview with the editor shortly after her appointment as the first female editor of a South African newspaper, she had this to say:

“As a female editor, in South Africa, I will bring a different touch to the M&G [sic]. I will want to use our investigative resources to look at some pretty serious gender problems we have - like the rate of rape and the rate of sexual violence. And I hope that we will be able to profile the many young, black or coloured women who are coming up through the ranks, be able to show a different form of leadership in the way that I represent, I think, a different shape of leadership.

The Mail and Guardian [sic] has a history of women's leadership and its ethos, its gender, its principles are very non-sexist" (ref.).

This quote mirrors some of the gender issues raised during my interview with the editor, particularly in terms of the MG's editorial stance on gender issues. The question of women's representation in leadership - including the way in which this emerging phenomenon is showcased within newsrooms and through the newspaper itself - as well as the impact of gender on various other social problems such as gender based violence were raised in the interview as part of the editorial stance of the MG. This also reflects some of the key findings for component one of the research, in which the MG was seen to carve spaces out for the voices of emerging women leaders and unpack some of the multiplicity of issues around gender based violence in South Africa. In the interview with the editor, gender transformation was discursively portrayed in terms of **transforming the newsroom and workplace**, as well as being **integrated or mainstreamed into the coverage of various issues**. In addition, a discursive focus on the location of women within contemporary trajectories of gender transformation was common. The particular vulnerability of women, also when intersected with issues of class, was highlighted by some participants.

Another participant to raise the question of gender based violence and the location of women in relation to various transformation processes was quite emphatic about the importance of gender issues in South Africa. While her response to the question of "gender transformation" was limited primarily to issues of representation in the public sphere, her response to the question of "gender issues" in South Africa was broader and quite passionate. She regarded these issues as integral to the stories covered in the news, discursively communicating what some would call a **gender lens** - a social perspective that "sees" manifestations of gender relations and power in various spaces. Again, this lens is shaped by a **focus on the location of women**, particularly, within gender dynamics.

"D: What do you think are some of the most important gender issues in South Africa today?

P: *(With certainty) Gender violence, absolutely. Um... it is prevalent, it is continuous, it is catastrophic. (Pause) Um... it's so important and... it's such a hard thing to address. Like how do you stop a guy from beating his girlfriend? Um...*

D: Do you cover a lot of news stories or, like, pieces like that?

P: Um.... It's funny, uh, a lot of the social development stories..... will always have that in them..... and it's not necessarily gender violence but it's always, you know, women... along with the, the issues of gender violence, the gender violence being a big problem, there's also just that *in South Africa.. women are still not equal. No matter what anyone says. We are on paper, but we are still paid less. You know? Women are more likely to be poor, more likely to be unemployed. Um.... you know, (Sighs) they have less protection whether it's physical protection, whether it's legal protection, they are just more vulnerable, end of story.* Um, and so a lot of the social development stories that I cover you always come across vulnerable women. Whether it's..... an old pensioner who can't access her grant or... it's.... a young girl who's a child..... a child-headed household run by a... 17 year old girl. *It's..... consistently prevalent. It's always there*" (emphasis my own).

Another participant, specialising in environmental reporting, was not as emphatic regarding the importance of gender issues in issues encountered through her work, but did observe that the particular location of women within environmental issues was a factor.

"P: Um, well, uh.... I think particularly with respect to the environment it's often the women that have...um, a) have to deal with the consequences of environmental degradation. Um...and b) in many instances actually lead.. um... the cause if I may call it that. But often they are leaders in the field."

When asked about gender issues more broadly, she pointed to the issue of numerical representation within the public sphere, as well as perceptions of women. The latter was largely discursively conceptualised in terms of a kind of linear progression of thought regarding women in society, with pockets in which a lag in this progression can still be seen. In the extract below, the perceived role of government in setting precedents in terms of gender is also highlighted as a strategy for transformation.

"P: I think they [women]..... have definitely taken a high profile, and..... the fact that the ANC is talking about a 50/50 mix, and that they're pushing it strongly, makes people think a lot more about it. Uh... on the ground....I think that there's still, um... a lot of conservatism, particularly in the area where I live

which is Nelspruit which is in many respects still..... the kind of gender...um... mix and attitudes towards women sometimes appear to be pretty much stuck in the... in the past. So although I think it's on the political agenda which is great.. if leaders are seen to be pushing this as something that needs to be done then hopefully society over, over a period of time will fall in line and, um.. but I still feel that in reality it's still... quite a long way from.. being transformed.”

When asked about his encounters with gender issues in the undertaking of his work, one of the participants at first appeared to be a slightly irritable in his response to the question, reflecting an initial interpretation of the question based around gendered workplace dynamics. In this regard, he said that gender issues in terms of work were of little relevance within the MG, which he framed as progressive in terms of the gendered work environment for many years, with implications for him as a gay man. He also then moved on to highlight the inclusiveness and progressiveness of the MG in terms of tackling “broader” gender issues around sexual orientation through its platform in the media, and the rights and politics around this, which he described as having been given a voice in contrast to other publications at the time. In other words, like participants at other newspapers he understood the question primarily in terms of newsroom dynamics and organisational culture, but he also expanded the parameters of this discussion in raising issues of voice and sexual orientation within the media industry.

“D: Do you think of gender issues as part of your work or the kind of pieces that you put together?

P: *(Sigh) Not especially. Um... I mean .. you know I think a lot of newspapers might have this problem in terms of gender injustice in terms of race and so forth, in a sense that there is some kind of.. affirmative action taking place in one form or another. But I think that.. my experience in the Mail & Guardian has always been of a very, um.. a very, what you might call a gender neutral space in the sense..... (discusses the impact and number of women in the newspaper over the years). And I don't think there was ever a distinction really made, on those terms. If you look at gender in the broader, broader sense and include the fact that um.. I as a gay man felt comfortable to go and work at the Mail & Guardian, in a way that I might not have felt comfortable at other newspapers, because I didn't have to remain in the closet, I didn't have to hide anything, and*

I could quite happily go into news meetings and news conferences and say 'listen, I want to write about this aspect of gay politics or gay issues and so forth, and I want to write about it from the perspective of a gay man'. And.. I think that brought something valuable to the newspaper, I think that we are the first newspaper in South Africa to be saying, to be taking on the issue of gay rights in the early '90's and tackling them and writing..... saying 'these are the rights we want, this is what the movement is doing and what we want to achieve'. So there wasn't any pussy footing around and we can't say this and we can't say that, we just put it out there and the space was made for that. And I think that was a very valuable thing as well, in terms of the history of the paper" (emphasis my own).

Some of the power dynamics of gender relations were raised and discursively **politicised** by some participants, and role of the media within this was generally considered quite important. The editor herself noted that the issue of gender transformation, as with racial transformation, is often treated poorly in the media due to fears regarding its implications for the future. She therefore highlighted aspects of the anti-feminist backlash, and the role of the media in fuelling this, also raised in Chapter 2. The role of the media in **creating spaces** through which to stress, unpack and showcase gender transformation issues was, for the editor, important.

The discursive strategies through which the processes of gender transformation, particularly through the media, were conceptualised mirrored aspects of the strategies raised by participants in the other newspapers. This included, for example, **discursive negotiations** towards harmonising gender transformation agendas and the journalistic values of objectivity and balance. However, three factors that appeared to distinguish the MG from the other newspapers were, firstly, the **open discussion of a broadly-defined gender agenda**; secondly, the **strength of the notion of mainstreaming gender** (made possible through a "gender lens"); and thirdly the **extent to which spaces are carved out** or made available for these issues. Some participants at the ST, to some extent, raised the latter as well. However, the editorial stance in this regard at the MG was quite distinctive.

The editor emphasised the importance of, and efforts around, **showcasing emerging local and international women leaders**, as news sources particularly. For example, the

Women's Book containing the names and contact details of women experts and leaders in a diversity of fields was compiled by the MG to counter what she called the “informal discrimination” against women occurring at the level of news gathering and presentation. This discrimination, she said, springs from ingrained social habits such as the automatic contacting of men when an expert is needed for a news piece.

In addition to the carving out of spaces within the newspaper itself to “showcase new leadership” among women and address a variety of gender issues (including, for example, the *Body Language* column), the editor framed gender transformation as *woven* into various other issues and, as such, as something that should not only be highlighted as a separate issue but mainstreamed. She stressed the importance of gender in all key challenges facing South Africa, and argued that this should be shown through the media. **Gender consciousness**, she said, should be “**normalised**” within the media.

However, in discursive mitigation of some of the perceived impacts of overt feminist endeavours through the media, she stressed that this should not be done in a “self-conscious way”, nor exaggerated in terms of relevance to all issues; this approach, she said, would deter readers. Discursively, this strategy resonates with findings for the SS and ST, in which **overt ideological orientations were framed as alienating** and patronising to readers, and in which subtler strategies towards raising issues, such as centralising “stories” and orienting language, were therefore considered more effective. However, where this discourse differs is in its conception of gender as inherently embedded within diverse social challenges rather than a separate social issue. The editor also raised advocacy programmes interfacing with the media, such as the Media Monitoring Project (MMP) and Gender and Media Southern Africa (GEMSA) as contributing to awareness around, and therefore greater mainstreaming of, gender issues in the media.

Other participants articulated a sense of consciousness and freedom in terms of addressing gender transformation issues through the media, noting the editorial contribution to this position. As raised in an extract introduced earlier, one participant stressed that gender was never seen as a “tired” issue, avoided or discouraged at the MG. However, as with another participant she observed that the centrality of gender to the story or issue needed to be evident if a journalist was to highlight it, and its relevance should not be exaggerated. Furthermore, similarly to the editor, she discursively framed the importance of certain gender

issues as inherent or “obvious” within stories. This speaks to the significance of a gender lens, discursively suggested in the interviews with both this participant and the editor, since the naturalised perceptibility of gender relations within diverse social phenomena rests on this aspect of their positionality.

This participant discursively contrasted addressing these obvious and appreciated manifestations of gender to perceived impractical or excessive attention to gender, for example through language.

“P: Um... well like I said, I mean..... if it does have to do with gender dynamics in the story somehow... .. [but] *I think we don't go overboard*. I would say that very often, with a news story in particular, the language remains quite neutral⁷³ I would say. It's chairperson, or chair... or people..... Where it's relating to a woman we will talk about a woman. If it's, you know, it's a man it's a man..... It doesn't try and like.... (*Sighs*) blank out gender issues. Um, *but neither will we go to the extremes of talking about a waitron and a waitress....., you know what I'm saying? Like, like, that kind of... that kind of like really... nitty-gritty nit-picky stuff*. In my experience we haven't.. done that. It acknowledges gender issues but does not make it... absolutely cumbersome to write the article” (emphasis my own).

This participant's discourse interestingly conveys an embracing of feminist thought while at the same time drawing a line between what is considered reasonable and unreasonable (petty) feminist strategies. Some **feminist ideas**, therefore, are portrayed as having more **social currency**, including approaches to transforming language or discourse. That these valuations are uneven is also likely to be linked to historical processes and feminist trajectories. Similar uneven trajectories, reflecting hierarchies or varying degrees of social currency around different feminist ideas (for example, attitudes regarding women in the workplace versus women and sexuality), were also echoed in the findings in Chapter 6, as well as in the interviews with participants from other newspapers. This is important, as it tells us about the nuances and complexities of feminist advancements rather than sketching a simple path to gender transformation.

⁷³ This term was raised first by me in one of the questions, and is therefore not a term that may not have spontaneously arisen for the participant during the interview. As such, I have not given it more attention in terms of discursive meanings.

In the interviews with MG participants, the notion that **women journalists and editors** inherently have an impact on the kinds of news produced was also raised. As quoted earlier, in an interview with the editor after her appointment, she linked the editorial stance on gender issues to her location as a woman editor. Another participant also suggested that women journalists might be less likely to allow or sanction sexist content within the newspaper. Another participant raised the issue of women in management in the media as a critical aspect of transforming the media.

However, as suggested in some of the interviews with participants at other publications, gender transformation in the media was linked by one participant to **the need for broader social changes**. Therefore, strategies towards transforming the media in terms of gender are stretched to include change *beyond* the newsroom.

“P: But again, (*Sigh*) for the newsmakers to become more women we need to see a bigger shift in society. We really need to make, like, to bring real change to women’s lives. Give women.. access to stuff that.. education..... It’s the basic stuff. Raising little girls to believe they can be astronauts as opposed to... teachers or, or.. And even if they want to be teachers, let them be teachers but let them be teachers because that’s what they want..... to be..... Letting girls (*Sigh*) go to school as opposed to... running households, you know? Its... it’s really... making it safe for them to go to schools so they don’t get raped on the way. All of that kind of stuff.”

Therefore, gender transformation strategies were conceived of as originating within the media as well as in broader society; the flow of power and influence was described as two-way.

7.6.5 *Discursive strategies for transformation*

Some of the discursive strategies towards enhancing the potential for transformation have already been mentioned. This includes the **editorial stance** taken by the newspaper, and the associated **culture inculcated** and **staff selections made**. In addition, the **spaces provided for in-depth comment, analysis and opinion** allow for more significant room in

which to engage readers with respect to the principles informing the editorial stance, while also allowing for dissidents to maintain the journalistic value of “balance”. **Gender mainstreaming** into the broader content of the newspaper is another strategy facilitated by (although I would argue not entirely reliant on) the space and room within the newspaper to unpack and contextualise issues. As has been raised, however, the power of these strategies is possibly quite unique in some respects to the MG, given the **unique commercial model** described by the editor. In terms of broader application in the media, considerations of political economy and their relationship to ideological positions would need to be considered. The editor noted, for example, that under-investment is one of the greatest challenges facing newsrooms in terms of maintaining and developing quality journalism. That the MG has a niche market reliant upon a particular form of journalism that unpacks and politicises social issues, and provides ample space for these, facilitates these particular strategies.

However, as can be seen in reviewing the findings for the SS and ST, the majority of readers are attracted to shorter, “lighter”, simpler content, and the various discourses maintaining power and privilege in various social spaces, including instances of anti-feminist backlash, play a significant role in shaping media content for most newspapers through (at least in part) the force of political economy. However, this is not to obliterate the role that editorial stance and commitment plays, given the impact this has on the spaces carved within the newspaper and topics addressed (not only for the MG but also shown in the interviews for the SS, for example).

Two participants also raised the skill of **writing and story-telling** as a strategy through which to **bend the rules and norms of conventional journalism** towards addressing issues in a way that appeals to readers. As with the SS, story-telling through news pieces with a human-interest focus was suggested as one way in which to do this. For the MG market, specifically, the artfulness of the writing was also suggested as a rhetorical device through which to engage readers. Greater flexibility to do so was also highlighted as being inherent in features or opinion pieces rather than pieces characterised purely as “news”.

Another strategy mirroring findings from the other newspapers in the study was the use of **diverse spaces in the newspaper** to present different perspectives. As the extract below suggests, opinion pages and other spaces carved out for more overtly ideologically

positioned text function to maintain a sense of freedom of speech and balancing of perspective, while at the same time being a significant platform through which to take an editorial stance through the space and value allotted to various perspectives. In other words, these spaces could be regarded as potentially serving to harmonise broader journalistic ideals and specific editorial ideals. This was also observed in the findings for component one, in which the power and force of certain discourses within the newspapers was shaped in part by the space given to them through columns, letters pages and so forth. The extract below is part of a participant's response to an example I introduced to the interview. I used the example of Bishop Sibiya's column on domestic violence in the SS (reviewed in Chapter 6), summarising the article and the SS editor's comments on it during his interview. This is a condensation of the exchange that took place in response.

P: Oh, my God! Ja. Well... I think, I think our publication would probably not print that. Based solely on the fact that (*Long pause, then sigh*)... Ooh.. (*Sighing*) because we're quite a progressive paper and we're.. I don't think we identify with a religion for instance..... We're a secular paper.... we try to be very progressive. So the issue of women's rights is very important to us.....

D: So there are limits to what would, what would be filtered through the, the newspaper..... and putting forward different perspectives...

P: There are limits..... I just doubt something like that would get in. And also I think.. it would meet with a lot of resistance from the actual staff *If it were published it would be.. packaged so carefully*, and it would be..... a point count for debate, maybe, or something like that..... I doubt that it would get in..... [but] like I said if it was published (*humorously*) *there would be so much room for people to bash it*, for instance..... Or undermine, that kind of thing..... *I think the kind of unsaid rule is 'don't hush the columnist, let them say anything inflammatory, and let them say as much as they want'. And lots of room is given to people who object.* [So] it's not too prescriptive, in terms of gender, but if something really does clearly push the lines people do have the room to... say no" (emphasis my own).

As this extract illustrates, various factors are taken into account towards filtering and mitigating content at odds with the editorial stance, including the agency of the journalistic staff, the perceived market and market offering of the newspaper and *spatial* discursive

strategies within the newspaper. It highlights that the perspectives and voices alone do not shape the discursive orientation or constitute potential transformation strategies, but that the way in which these are “**packaged**” is very significant too. The ways in which various newspaper texts are packaged involves, as has emerged in the findings, discursive negotiations engaging a variety of considerations from political economy dynamics to ideologies of journalistic professionalism and the role of the media.

7.7 Conclusions

The aim of the interviews was to explore the perspectives held and discourses employed by journalists in their work as knowledge producers for the press media in South Africa, particularly in relation to gender and gender transformation issues. As this Chapter has shown, key themes to arise from the interviews related, in the end, to debates around notions of objectivity and situated knowledge. This was the case because, after the initial interviews were undertaken, I began to realise that these issues greatly affected how the potential nexus between “gender transformation” (a more overtly political and ideological agenda) and “the media” (coloured with journalistic discourses that experience tension in relation to political or ideological projects) could be explored. Furthermore, from my particular feminist stance based heavily on social constructionism, I experienced disconnects and tensions in conducting the interviews where discourses of objectivity in a way precluded or blocked any further explorations of gender issues in media representations.

This in itself is an important finding, I believe, as it highlights the schism between most feminist and journalistic discourses surrounding the media. It also resonates with the findings presented in Chapter 6, which show how discursive strategies are used to communicate social messages even within the spaces and conventions associated with “objective” journalism (for example complicit or spatial discourses). Therefore, this second component of the research also helped me to explore these identified strategies from the perspective of journalists and editors themselves.

Overall, the findings presented in this Chapter reiterate a key theme to emerge in Chapter 6, namely the relative advancement of liberal-inclusionary feminist paradigms in relation to progressive feminist paradigms in the media. There were, of course, variations in this

regard. Participants from the MG, especially, articulated gender relations through a relatively progressive gender lens, and in all newspapers liberal-inclusionary paradigms were extended in some ways beyond the limits of concerns with numerical representation. In particular, the failures experienced around liberal-inclusionary approaches, over a decade after the introduction of many gender transformation strategies, to bring women the respect and equality they expected in the public domain seem to have forged discourses that extend beyond women's numerical representation to symbolic concerns around it. An example of this is the persistence of sexual politics in the workplace numerous raised as (still) to the detriment of women. In addition, escalating and persistent social and material problems that are increasingly demanding attention in South Africa - such as HIV/AIDS, gender based violence and poverty - also represented key areas of expansion into progressive feminist paradigms, concerning symbolic and discursive gender issues.

However a liberal-inclusionary paradigm, when it comes to gender, still appeared to be the dominant feminist trajectory, and a central point of agreement, cohesion or consensus among a wide range of participants and newspapers. The term "gender transformation", especially (as opposed to "gender issues" or "gender relations") was associated with liberal-inclusionary paradigms, which in my view is linked to the discourses and approaches encapsulated in key policies, government bodies and laws pertaining to transforming South Africa in terms of race and gender ("transformation" in many ways becoming synonymous with, and therefore limited to, quotas). This represents a site of discursive (and therefore also material and strategic) limitation when it comes to gender transformation.

The interviews also showed how discourses around media production are active, contended and in processes of negotiation. I have explored these discursive negotiations, which occurred actively during the interview process, in order to understand some of the tensions and considerations that journalists and editors needed to mediate in making decisions on textual production. This provided, in my view, rich data pertaining to some of the discursive strategies employed by media professionals in navigating the terrain, and resonated with findings from Chapter 6, in which I identified complicit, advocate and spatial discursive strategies. The findings in this Chapter probed these further and fortified ideas around how the discursive strategies identified in Chapter 6 reflected and connected with theories on the media and gendered media representations, discussed in Chapters 3 and 4.

Standing back, what this Chapter presented in terms of discursive strategies was that editorial ethos and the culture cultivated within a newspaper play a key role in determining how conflicting demands and considerations are mediated. In addition, understandings of gender and gender transformation create a lens through which any considerations, contextual issues and ideological commitments will be seen. This lens therefore shapes how gender transformation issues are noticed, understood and subsequently where and how they are addressed. Political economy also provides significant input into the discursive negotiations that journalists and editors need to make. Tabloidised newspapers, and in the case of this study especially the newspapers marketing to lower LSM groups of readers, reflected discourses of reader primacy, linked to political economy, which in my view legitimated or allowed discourses counter to equality and gender transformation to be more prevalent in these newspapers. This left me wondering whether this was what readers actually wanted (for example representations of gender relations as fraught and highly sexualised, and inequality as naturalised) and, *if so*, what challenges this presents to the media industry in terms of its role in promoting or inhibiting gender transformation processes while remaining competitive and viable. While political economy dimensions were powerful, they were not omnipotent but negotiated through various strategies. So, the findings revealed a number of dimensions to the consideration and carving of texts for the media, some from within the trajectories of journalist ethos and professional discourse, some emanating from the complex location of individuals in terms of social issues, and some from the wider social context media consumers.

These findings have therefore raised not only questions about the media industry, but also about wider discursive milieus in South Africa, especially in terms of how different feminist trajectories are impacting on, and being impacted upon by, various post-apartheid contextual issues. I attempt to address this in the following concluding Chapter, reflecting on the significance of the findings and on the limitations and possibilities that I see as manifesting in the research findings. These are not neat conclusions and suggestions but, I hope, will add to (some nascent, some expanding) dialogue around gender transformation and media representation in South Africa.