

## 5 METHODOLOGY

### 5.1 Introduction

*“Writing is hard: it involves confrontations with critique (from others, and often more harsh, from oneself), it involves co-operation with conventions, it requires engagement with public accountability, it demands a self” (Bennett, 2000: 10).*

The act of writing is demanding. Research, generating knowledge(s) for wider consumption, also requires the kind of personal and public accountability to which Bennett (ibid) refers. In particular, critical writers (including feminists) have drawn attention to the ways in which knowledge production and the documentation of knowledges has reflected, and continues to reflect, particular situated perspectives and power relations. When combined (situated perspective and power), knowledge generation tends to represent another incarnation of the views and interests of the powerful. As such critical perspectives, including feminist perspectives, ask for greater reflection on the research and writing processes, for a much greater willingness to confront the self and wider audiences regarding the process of knowledge generation, and for more explicit explorations of one’s situated position towards greater accountability, both “publicly” and “privately”.

Here, writing about the methodology design and decision-making processes that have shaped this study and thesis is also important as part of this critical and feminist perspective on knowledge production. Like any other, this research and the writing up and (eventually) dissemination of it involves situated knowledge and power relations. It is, as are all forms of knowledge, oriented and contextual. Critical reflection and open discussion of the decisions and theories that informed the processes of my research are, therefore, maintained here as part of a broader feminist epistemological project, as well as the personal project of my own development as a researcher through thinking and writing. The research methodology is therefore presented with care and relative detail in the spirit of generating, as an outcome of the research, not only findings central to the research question itself, but also the development of deeper thinking around the act of research, especially research into gender representations and the media.

As already alluded to, methodology, here, is taken to refer not only to the *methods* applied in the proposed research, but to the *theory* informing the manner in which research is conducted and the ways in which theory will be applied in research processes (Jayaratne & Stewart, 1991). It is often difficult to pinpoint each and every theoretical influence on one's thinking and approach, but I will aim in this Chapter to make explicit the most vital influences and theoretical frameworks that have guided and crafted my research.

## 5.2 Feminist Epistemology and Ethics

Epistemological and ethical approaches to research are shaped both directly and indirectly by theoretical and political positions. These positions are ever-present (although dynamic and shifting) whether explicitly expressed by researchers or not. Furthermore, questions of epistemology and ethics are central to critical and feminist concerns over the research process (as mentioned above), underlying and constituting the foundation for many of the decisions that are eventually taken in relation to research. They are, therefore, a good point of departure for a discussion on methodology. Epistemology and ethics are presented *together* due to the especially close relationship between feminist ethics and feminist epistemological concerns. This section highlights, by way of introduction, some of the broader theoretical and political reflections that I have engaged with in this regard while designing and undertaking the research.

Critical feminist epistemology (and especially, among others, critical postcolonial and African feminist epistemology) demands of the feminist writer and researcher a profound engagement with both her (or his) social location and relationships of power connected to research and writing. The foundation for this requisite dimension to feminist research is the notion that all knowledge is situated (for example, Mbilinyi, 1992; Stanley & Wise, 1993, Stanley & Wise, 1990), and that patterns of knowledge production are an expression of power (Bennett, 2000; Mohanty, 1991; Zeleza, 1997; Zeleza, 1996). With regard to situated knowledge, Mbilinyi (1992: 53) asserts the following:

“Critical feminist epistemologies deny the possibility of neutral, value-free science and knowledge. The researchers are part of the world under study. Our conception of the problem under study, our construction of research instruments, our interpretation of data, are all effected by our multiple identities and discourses.”

Zeleza (1996) adds that knowledge production (emerging out of *situated* knowledge) is political and expresses unequal power relations and struggles over power, manifest both in the material and in the ideological. In this way, again, common positivistic notions of knowledge as neutral in terms of interests are challenged and knowledge production (feminist or otherwise) is viewed as a privilege, as power and as political.

“Knowledge, as creed and commodity, as a proprietary privilege, reflects and reproduces the spatial and social divisions of power, old and new, material and ideological, between and within societies” (Zeleza, 1996).

This leads to a complex dilemma for feminists, of being in the political, privileged and powerful position to (re)produce knowledge (Smith, 1987), even if intended in the service of social and gender justice or to undermine the status quo of power. Part of critical feminism’s response to this dilemma is an insistence, firstly, on **reflexivity** to throw these power dynamics and the social locations of feminists into light. Fonow and Cook (1991) assert that reflexivity constitutes reflection upon, and critical examination of, the very nature and processes of research. This kind of feminist commitment to reflexive research - keenly aware of and in conversation with issues of power and politics in the research process - has shaped many decisions around the methodology selected for this research.

As Luff (1999) has noted, feminist research can therefore involve an almost “autobiographical” account of the researcher’s location, background, experiences and decisions in the research process. While I do not give an exhaustive autobiographical account in this thesis, I do reflect on key aspects of my own position and research process, respecting and aiming to effect a feminist stance that is always wary of notions of “objectivity” in research, and one that therefore aims to be transparent towards highlighting the constructionist and political dimensions in research processes and outcomes (ibid).

The research approach undertaken was, in the first instance, dominated by **qualitative** methods, located within a feminist sociological debate that has illuminated the benefits of qualitative methods and their triangulation with quantitative methods. Jayaratne and Stewart (1991) explore some of the debates pertaining to the roles of qualitative and quantitative research, pointing to the ability of qualitative research to delve into gendered experiences by moving, in certain ways, away from methods that predefine categories, responses and

potential research findings. Since engendered research probes concepts and issues largely marginalised from mainstream research, they note that qualitative approaches create the space for marginalised voices to emerge (ibid). Furthermore, taken-for-granted knowledge constituting predefined categories can be better challenged and unpacked through qualitative research (Jayaratne & Stewart, 1991). This, then, is not just a question of method but of epistemology, firstly in the political concerns that shape method selection and, secondly, since the decision to choose primarily qualitative methods derives from certain understandings of what (engendered) knowledge is and how best to seek it. The research undertaken here was informed by this understanding of open-ended, qualitative research as offering great potential to unearth unanticipated findings.

Mbilinyi (1992) furthers these issues around qualitative research by maintaining that gendered identities and discourses, as an achieved (rather than inherent) state involving continuous struggle, may be best unearthed through methods that embrace contradictions, inconsistencies, conflict and ambivalence. Mbilinyi (ibid) as well as Mama (1995) further theorise a subjectivity that is multiply constituted, where various gendered discourses drawn upon in subjective instantiations involve continuous shifts and negotiations. Mama (1995: 164), for example, described the conceptualisation of subjectivity employed in her research into black women's identities in the following way.

“I have developed the idea of subjectivity as being the sum of all positions available to an individual: positions which are both psychodynamic and discursive.”

This understanding, as well as the explorative nature of the research, led to the choice of principal research methods of data collection and analysis considered adept to unpacking and acknowledging *multiple* gendered discourses and perspectives, namely primarily qualitative methods.

While highlighting the value of qualitative methods within the historical context of gendered (and unequal) knowledge production legacies has been an important part of feminist projects, the role and position of quantitative research within feminist studies remains a contentious issue. Oakley (1998) understands this contention as part of a historical struggle between traditional, patriarchal ways of knowing (associated with positivism, in turn

associated with quantitative methods and enumeration) and feminist challenges to these. While debates around the value of qualitative and quantitative research have stemmed from and contributed to important challenges to patriarchal ways of knowing, Oakley (ibid) argues, however, that there is also a need to assess the role and value of all methods and to consider carefully how each are understood and applied rather than merely rejecting certain ways of knowing.

For example, while Jayaratne and Stewart (1991) point to common critiques of largely qualitative approaches that hold them to be at risk of greater researcher bias in the interpretation of data, various feminist researchers have often responded to this critique by invoking arguments denying the possibility of true objectivity, and opting instead for increased rigour and transparency of research decisions (see, for example, Mbilinyi, 1992). As such, as a broad approach to research qualitative methods have great value in what they can offer while also requiring rigour and care in approach. Similarly, while there has been a history of quantitative methods being appropriated within a positivistic, patriarchal discourse, various feminist researchers have been and continue to work on developing ways of applying quantitative approaches that reflect and integrate feminist arguments and values. Oakley (1998: 715) stipulates in this respect that “many of the supposed differences between qualitative and quantitative ways of knowing are not a matter of a hard-and-fast distinction, but of a continuum”. As such, both approaches share the empiricism associated with quantitative research and the application of themes and interpretation associated with qualitative research, both of which need to be carefully assessed in relation to whatever research is being undertaken (ibid).

For this research, then, when piloting and applying a methodology I aimed to contribute to highlighting the value of qualitative research and to be aware of the potential problems associated with research approaches (including, historically, with quantitative approaches) while also looking to the research purpose and aims in determining what was appropriate for this study.

In terms of the **personal engagements between researcher and research participants**, a balance was attempted between, on the one end of the spectrum, considerable interaction between the researcher and the researched and, on the other, a more positivistic approach that attempts to keep the researcher from unduly directing or influencing the information

given by respondents. In essence, my approach was to focus on hearing journalists' perspectives rather than engaging in discussion and debate with participants about the issues. However, a certain level of engagement was viewed as inevitable in the research process and I chose rather to acknowledge these engagements than to attempt to sidestep them completely or obscure their existence. As Stanley and Wise (1993) point out, feminist research recognises the role of the researcher within the research process itself, rejecting the notion that researchers can make themselves invisible in the research process or that an impact on the research situation is completely avoidable. This epistemological rejection of a positivistic notion of complete objectivity is indeed threaded throughout this research thesis, in the detailing of the theory, assumptions, politics and decision-making processes that have informed my approaches. The methodology was designed with the understanding that researchers invariably frame the research experience and outcomes to some extent.

**Power relations** between the researcher and the researched are another common point of feminist epistemological and ethical concerns (see, for example, Mama, 1995; Mbilinyi, 1992; Stanley & Wise, 1990). This includes the recognition of, and attempts to mitigate, the unequal power relations generally inherent between researchers and researched in "traditional" research approaches. Cognisant of the feminist ethical and political concerns around such "traditional" models of research interactions, I attempted in my methodology design to build in appropriate spaces for research participants themselves to feed back into and influence the research process, particularly in the form of a post-interview questionnaire as discussed below. I also engaged with critical considerations around research in preparation for the empirical research.

I should also note, however, that in the case of this research the power dynamics were slightly different to those commonly associated with feminist research. Firstly, much work on feminist ethics concerns the power relations between researcher and women and/or other marginalised research participants. In this case, I was interviewing both men and women, and I was interviewing men and women in relative positions of power and privilege. The precise details of each participant's background and socio-economic status were not probed during the interviews, and there would undoubtedly have been huge variation among research participants in terms of past and current experiences of race, class, gendered identities and other bases for social inequality. However, as knowledge producers through the media and professionals at well-known and successful newspapers, it was relatively

safe to assume that they did not constitute a group of participants easily defined as particularly “marginalised”. Of course, as I have mentioned, this is a broad view and variations would have existed between participants (some of which are raised later in the research findings), but suffice it to say here that at least in the socio-economic sense I was interviewing people in relative positions of power, and interviewing them in relation to their roles *within* this relative position of power (namely, their professional roles). As such, I needed to ask myself in what ways I would apply and be able to understand feminist ethics in relation to my own research situation.

Donna Luff (1999) writes on similar issues in her reflection of feminist ethical questions encountered in her own research with women of relative power and privilege, and women with anti-feminist perspectives. Writing on her research with women in the British Moral Lobby, Luff (*ibid*) engages in an apparently embattled dialogue with feminist ethics theories surrounding research. Her broad conclusion (although laced through with a sense of continued struggle with the issues) is that power is not simple, and that identities are not unitary, and as such that there is great variation and contradiction between and among women, as well as in different feminist research situations. She observes the “fractured and often contradictory subjectivities of researcher and researched”, as well as the “fluctuating nature of power” (Luff, 1999: 687). As such, her research showed that “feminist research” and even “research with women” more specifically cannot be painted solidly with one colour, and that complexities and variations need to be accounted for in addressing feminist ethics in research, as they were in hers.

Luff (1999) also raises the fact that, while feminist research does and should aim to challenge hierarchies in research processes especially through avoiding the objectification of subjects (who are mostly women and therefore already subject to extensive objectification), objectification of research participants is perhaps not *entirely* avoidable. At the very least, this is because in the end the researcher (whether with the inputs of research participants or not) imposes a particular lens and analysis on the data, and frames the research outcomes through her or his approach (*ibid*). This is not a situation unique to feminist research, but one that does particularly challenge the aims and values of feminist research (*ibid*). Therefore, she argues that while the aims of feminist research ethics should be pursued, they can perhaps never be completely accomplished. They are, in this sense, therefore more a political process than a complete or sterile outcome. In my research, this

argument was significant because in trying to measure inequalities and power relations between myself and the research participants, and in trying to address them where possible, I kept coming up against limitations in my ability to mitigate against all unequal power relations and even to *identify* all potential power dynamics, especially among such a diverse group of participants. I needed to come to terms with a certain level of unavoidable, or even just at this point unidentified or unsolved, issues that would relate to power relations in my research. My attempt to apply feminist ethics is, as are others, imperfect and further complicated by the fact that the power relations between the research participants and myself were not easily pinpointed from a feminist ethical perspective.

Luff (1999) also notes that feminist research ethics can tend to be sceptical of the value and political imperatives of researching more powerful people. In the context of a dearth of attention in research to issues related to and impacting on women and their lives (and in particular research that enables equal participation of women in knowledge production), it is often argued that there is a need to research women, the “powerless”, to redress this imbalance (ibid). In the first instance, however, it is quite important to avoid the assumption that can be inherent in such arguments, namely that there is a relatively homogenous group “women”, conceptualised as (quite equally) powerless. Indeed, social inequality is far more complex than this, and many factors can impact on power and powerless, and even differently in different situations. As such, researching the less powerful and their experiences in patriarchal conditions will involve more than just research with “women”. In addition, while the general point surrounding the need to study the “powerless” is significant, as Luff (1999) points out there is also a need to “study up”, that is to research the “powerful”. However, rather than *recreating* unequal power relationships by placing the “powerful” at the centre of social inquiry, feminist research can do this in a way that contributes to the feminist project through the application of a *critical* research paradigm in researching people in power. Critique, critical paradigms and an attempt to understand and conceptualise identities and applications of power can therefore be combined.

My own research was inspired in part by my curiosity as to why those in a powerful position, at least when it comes to the *media production* process, continue to reproduce gender constructs that appear to be limiting or even harmful, despite policy imperatives and, often, good intentions. I therefore needed to “study up”, not just in terms of studying research *participants* identified as more powerful, but in terms of studying powerful *norms, practices,*



*paradigms and discourses*, within a powerful *industry*. As this research thesis will show, I aimed not to uncover individual subjectivities as much as I aimed to delve into dominant, subversive and marginalised discourses employed by participants in relation to their work in the media industry. In addition, the sample in my research and time constraints for interviews (on the part of participants) meant that I *couldn't* dwell too long on establishing nuances around the location of individual research participants within matrices of power in the industry or beyond it. Therefore, I have shied away from drawing comparisons between a relatively small pool of qualitative research *participants* in terms of power, and instead tried to draw focus back to look more at wider *discourses*.

Broadly, I understood the research participants to be, at least in the area the research was concerned about, in relative positions of power, and the research area more generally (the media industry as an inter-related cluster of cultural, social, political and economic entities) to be in a relative position of power. Thus, while I recognised that I was, indeed, in a privileged position in a number of respects as the researcher (for example, as the person whose decisions frame, direct and guide interpretation of the research), participants were also privileged and in the position to generate knowledge that was widely circulated in the public sphere. Through the interview process I also experienced power relations in this research context as non-linear: I felt less powerful in certain situations, as emerged clearly in my own discourse in certain interview transcriptions, and more powerful in others, such as during the writing up of research findings. Some reflections on these dynamics are included later on in this thesis. Suffice it to say here that, as part of a feminist position, the methodology *was* designed in order to mitigate undue domination of researcher over researched, *while* simultaneously the power dynamics in this research challenged dichotomous notions of researched/researcher power dynamics.

The following practical steps were also taken to ensure that the research was conducted with an awareness of, and commitment to, ethical issues:

- **Information regarding the research study and the ethical undertakings of the research** was sent to the newspaper editors and the journalists approached for participation in the study. Journalists were given time to consider the study (at least a couple of weeks) before any follow up was made with regard to their participation. The

correspondence clearly highlighted the fact that participation in the research was voluntary.

- **Signed consent** from all participants and newspaper editors in a position to grant permission for the research was sought and granted.
- Prior to the interviews, I read and engaged with theory surrounding research ethics, and committed to a **basic ethical code of conduct** I drew up for myself. This primarily involved considerations around working with research participants in a way that was trustworthy, did not unduly place pressure on them, allowed them to as openly as possible communicate their perspectives and was rooted in the spirit of granting respect towards and genuine interest in their views. While the research was steeped in a critical feminist theoretical tradition, I also considered it important to remind myself to remain open to new, unanticipated insights, and to really hear and engage with the perspectives of participants during the interviews, before critically interpreting them at a later stage. In other words, I did not want my theoretical orientation and background literature research to render me completely deaf to new insights and perspectives.
- All journalists involved in the study are referred to in this thesis **anonymously**, and wherever possible clearly identifiable characteristics have been omitted from the thesis. The views of participants have, as far as possible, also been integrated and presented in a way that **avoids responses being connected with specific individuals**. Exceptions to these rules were, however, situations in which critical information about participants needed to be presented in the thesis alongside responses. This was the case with editors, as identification of an editor of a newspaper, along with the time period of the research, would in any case already identify the participant. However, editors of the newspapers were consulted and I was able to name them in this thesis (also out of thanks to them for allowing their newspapers to be part of the study). I felt that anonymity would, in any case, be more of an issue for journalists than editors, due to their position within the newspaper and a probable reluctance to speak on the record on behalf of their publication (something the editor would be more entitled to and accustomed to doing).
- **Transcriptions were kept separate** from signed consent forms.

In summary, key epistemological and ethical issues were considered in terms of selecting a general research method orientation (namely qualitative), in considering modes of interaction between participants (observations around which are presented with the

findings), in attending to questions of power and power relations between myself and the research participants, and in being as reflexive as possible about my research decisions. The latter is explored further in relation to various decisions around the research below.

### **5.3 Selection of Media Institutions for the Study**

The research targeted popular print news media. This denotes paper format newspapers, regarded “popular” due to wide national circulation relative to small local newspapers, with sales of at least 40 000 per issue. Newspapers were targeted for the research due to their potential role in knowledge production, setting agendas for national discussion and debate, and “voicing” the concerns and priorities of nations. I also considered them to be of interest as sites of widely and popularly disseminated knowledge production, particularly impacted upon by discourses of objectivity (de Bruin, 2004; Ross, 2002).

The research did not include a broader selection of print media forms (for example, magazines) in order to limit the sample for purposes of analysis. While it is recognised here that studies have revealed that newspapers as a media form in Southern Africa are not as widely used by women for news information as compared to other media forms such as community radio (Adhiambo, 2006), issues of access to various forms of media were regarded as separate issues from the research undertaken here, and newspapers (in particular weekly newspapers) were considered to be widely enough read to merit their importance as a news media form. My application of the concept of gender also involved the recognition that men’s engagement with gendered media constitutes as important a part of gender transformation processes as women’s, therefore negating the need to focus primarily on media forms targeting women. In addition, readership figures for the selected weekly newspapers (presented as part of the research findings) revealed that women did in fact constitute an important proportion of the newspaper readers.

Due to the in-depth qualitative research methodology undertaken with journalists, the sample of newspapers selected for study was necessarily limited. I therefore decided that the newspapers selected would need to be similar in various respects to restrict the variables that could be compared and contrasted in the analysis, while still including a range of different news reporting styles in the study. I eventually decided on weekly newspapers in

part due to their envisaged potential to engage more profoundly with current social issues, given the more dispersed deadlines and therefore the ability to more broadly select and cover weekly news events and generate analytical or topical news pieces. As one newspaper editor later put it, in contrast to weekly newspapers that more actively seek out stories over a period of time, “on a daily [newspaper]... whatever happens today should be tomorrow’s news”. While this quote only indicates one simplified dimension of the differences between daily and weekly newspapers, it draws attention to the interest I had in the possibilities for weekly newspapers to carve out a space for news agendas to be set and longer-term stories to be investigated and discussed.

I deemed it important not to restrict the sample to newspapers catering only for the most class privileged members of South African society, despite the fact that newspapers largely appeal to higher income earners due to affordability factors. I also considered it important to incorporate newspapers read by a variety of South Africans in terms of background, location and race<sup>20</sup>. Following South Africa’s historical legacies, race and class remain highly linked in South Africa. During sampling I found that newspapers appealing primarily to a black readership, for example, tended to be those with a higher readership base in the lower LSM<sup>21</sup> groupings (denoting a lower income status). However, the nexus between race and class is shifting in South Africa (although narrowly and unevenly) as reflected in one newspaper for the study with both a higher LSM and a relatively high black readership. My sampling approach was aimed as far as possible at including newspapers with a range of readerships in terms of class and race to capture a diverse readership base. Sampling criteria were finally also based upon practical concerns such as geographic and language-related accessibility. Three weekly newspapers were selected in accordance with the following criteria:

- Since my first language is English, as well as the fact that discourse analysis was to be applied in the interpretation of data, only English newspapers were selected. This was

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<sup>20</sup> The contestability of this concept itself is acknowledged here. Race was identified and viewed as a factor in the research from the premise that, as La Veist (1996: 212) asserts, race “denotes a common socio-political history”. While this extract reflects La Veist’s concern with the use of the concept of race in health research specifically, it is worth mentioning that race is not assumed a biological category here, but is incorporated because of its historical relationship with issues of socio-economic and socio-political background.

<sup>21</sup> LSM, or Living Standards Measure, is a South African category created for research that aims to categorise the market into groups within different socio-economic positions. It is calculated broadly on household access to services and amenities (for example, urban or rural location, access to running water and sanitation) as well as household ownership of major technologies and appliances (for example, fridges, cellular phones and televisions).

to ensure that interviews could be conducted in a language with which participants felt comfortable and, importantly, that I could analyse the data effectively.

- The newspapers selected were all owned by different media groups.
- The head offices of each newspaper were based in Gauteng for the purposes of accessibility.
- Weekly newspapers were selected to limit the sample of the study to a particular news production deadline as discussed.
- Selected newspapers were as far as possible varied in terms of readership among low-income, middle-income and high-income groups, identified according to media readership reports.
- The newspapers represented as far as possible a spread of readership characteristics in terms of race, class and gender.

An outline of each newspaper and statistical information about these newspapers (reflecting these selection criteria) is presented in Chapter 6. I acknowledge at the outset that the sample presents certain limitations and that comparisons drawn between the selected newspapers were undertaken in a manner that was cognisant of the limitations of the sample.

## **5.4 Research Component One: Analysing Newspaper Content**

### *5.4.1 Selecting an appropriate methodology*

To support the principle research (based on semi-structured, open-ended, one-on-one interviews) a “scoping” of the content of the three selected newspapers was also undertaken in order to broadly achieve the following:

- Generate a brief description of the newspapers in terms of their general style, focus and market offering to provide general introductory information and profiles for newspapers; and
- Broadly identify some gendered discourses in newspaper texts in order to provide a background to, and data for triangulation with, the principle interview research. This includes the ways in which gender is constructed and through which voices, perspectives and spaces these constructions emerge.

As the research continued, the “scoping” phase of the research needed to be re-conceptualised as component one of the research, as it became less a small background information exercise and more analysis in its own right. Component two of the research (namely the interviews) still constitutes the “principle” research as it was undertaken in greater depth and detail in some respects, and attends more directly to the aims of the research (to examine the perspectives of journalists). However, the analysis of newspaper content has yielded important data, contextualising, triangulating and, indeed, giving more meaning and significance to the interview data than would have been possible without analysis of the newspaper content as well.

In designing a methodology appropriate to the objectives and scope of component one of the research, some difficult considerations emerged surrounding the merits of qualitative and quantitative research approaches within this particular research context. Initially, given that I wished to generate some broad, background information about the sample newspaper content in preparation for the interviews, I attempted to introduce content analysis for this “scoping” component of the research. However, after an unsuccessful pilot of this methodology, I decided on a more qualitative approach for this research. The theory, practical experiences and decision-making processes behind the changes in method for this research component are included in relative detail here, since the methodology selection process is viewed as a relevant and interesting case study of some of the dynamics of quantitative and qualitative methods for social research, particularly feminist research.

Initially, I planned to include a relatively large volume of newspaper issues for component one of the research (about 36 newspapers in total, including 12 issues of each of the three newspapers for the study). This was initially planned in the hope that the analysis of the newspapers’ content could yield quite a sound *overview* of the newspapers’ general discursive orientations. As such, I felt that a quantitative approach would be practical towards generating a relatively quick but broad picture of newspaper content within the confines of time available for this component of the research (and in preparation for the interviews). I therefore initially decided on content analysis, a method widely used in analysing media texts.

I designed a framework for the content analysis guided by as close as possible an alignment to the definition of “gender transformation” I have given earlier (Chapter 2). In particular, I

wanted to move beyond the counting of certain broad, traditional gender “stereotypes” (as exemplified in a number of studies already undertaken in South Africa) and instead to explore the feminist approaches or paradigms I had identified (in Chapter 2). Certain principle elements constituting the concept of gender transformation were extracted from the description generated in Chapter 2 (based on the progressive feminist paradigm) and categorised. Then, principle elements constituting broad approaches to gender issues critiqued in the literature review (namely those emanating from a liberal-inclusionary paradigm) were also extracted and categorised. These principle elements were then developed into a set of key questions to determine the general discursive orientation of the textual unit in relation to the approaches to gender issues. At one end of the spectrum, a very progressive approach to gender was conceptualised under “gender transformation” while at the other a highly liberal-inclusionary approach was conceptualised under “women’s issues”. In the middle, an approach conceptualised as looking at “gender relations” was defined, reflecting a move in certain respects towards a progressive feminist approach. Textual units (such as news articles) within the newspaper sample were then considered against the key questions underneath these categories (“gender transformation”, “gender relations” and “women’s issues”) to determine their overall orientation in terms of approach to gender issue, and would be counted

Through the pilot, I attempted to discover whether certain sections in the newspapers, such as décor, cooking and television guides, could be omitted. However, my intention was to be as inclusive as possible to begin with, wanting to avoid assuming certain areas in the newspaper to be more or less gendered or important in terms of discursive content. Table 1 below presents the content analysis framework that was initially developed through the processes described above. The content categories are placed in captions to underscore the constructed nature of these categories.

<b>TABLE 1: PILOTY QUANTITATIVE METHODOLOGY (COMPONENT ONE)</b>		
<b>“Women’s issues”</b>	<b>“Gender relations”</b>	<b>“Gender transformation”</b>
<b>Conditions for categorization</b>		
a) Articles fall into this category if they meet the	a) Articles fall into this category if they meet the	a) Somewhat different to the other two categories, articles



<p>criteria set out below, all of which are linked by a common concern with women as a societal category by sex.</p> <p>b) Articles categorised here may also fall into the other two categories, since a focus on women in one section may precede engagement with the issues stipulated in the criteria for other categories.</p>	<p>criteria set out below, which are linked by a common move towards the identification of gender as a social construct.</p> <p>b) Articles in this category may also fall into other categories. In particular, it may be closely associated with the category of “gender transformation”, which takes the criteria below to a deeper level.</p>	<p>will be counted according to their compatibility with each of the criteria set out below. Therefore, rather than counting articles in accordance with their total compatibility with the key criteria for gender transformation, they will be counted in terms of each individual component making up “gender transformation”.</p> <p>b) This category isn’t mutually exclusive from others.</p>
<b>Criteria for categorization</b>		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Relates <i>primarily to women</i> (i.e. as a societal group by sex).</li> <li>▪ Relates to concerns over the position of women in society, especially in terms of <i>equity, numerical representation</i> and/or the <i>prevalence</i> of problems faced by women.</li> <li>▪ Especially, but not limited to, popular current issues such as:             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Women in business;</li> <li>○ Women in politics;</li> <li>○ Gender based violence;</li> <li>○ Women’s health status; and</li> <li>○ Women’s economic status.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Places “women’s issues”, or the position of women in society, <i>in relation to</i> men (and <i>visa versa</i>).</li> <li>▪ Displays consciousness of the <i>social embeddedness</i> of gender and gendering (beyond a concern with women as a societal category by sex).</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Displays an awareness of gendered <i>power relations</i>.</li> <li>▪ Displays an awareness of gender as a <i>social identity</i> that is <i>multiply constituted</i> (intersects with other social variables).</li> <li>▪ Displays an awareness of gender as a <i>social identity</i> that is <i>not stable</i> or static, but shifting over space and time.</li> <li>▪ Displays an awareness of the gendered nature of <i>institutions, processes, approaches and/or ideologies</i>.</li> </ul>



Early work on the subject of content analysis, such as that by Berelson (1952), describes content analysis as a research technique aimed at systematically, quantitatively and “objectively” describing communication content. Deacon et al. (1999: 17) expand upon this by asserting the following in respect of content analysis:

“[Content analysis produces] systematic descriptions of what documentary sources contain. By counting how often particular topics, themes or actors are mentioned, how much space and prominence they command, and in what contexts they are presented, content analysis provides an overview of patterns of attention. It tells us what is highlighted and what is ignored.”

Indeed, identifying issues or perspectives in the newspapers that were prominent, as well as those that were silent, was deemed very useful for this research. However, while not all content analysis rests on the assumption of “objectivity”, the focus on the systematic, “replicable” nature of content analysis (Bauer, 2000) did not always function well within the context of my own research, and raised some issues for me with regard to the feminist approach I was taking. The scientific ambitions involved in the method’s emergence (Deacon et al, 1999), in terms of bringing the “rigour and authority of ‘natural’ scientific inquiry to the study of human and social phenomena” (Deacon at al., 1999: 15), were a concern to me.

Deacon et al. (1999) and Bauer (2000) probe the notion of “objectivity” in relation to content analysis, noting that the researcher’s inputs into defining the questions asked, the criteria used for counting and the conclusions drawn from the information unearthed, are significant. Therefore, the building blocks constructing any content analysis framework are, essentially, based on researcher decisions emanating from the reviewed theory, research objectives and hypotheses of that research project. In this way, they are actually highly situated and even qualitative to an extent, constituted within the parameters of the conceptual frameworks developed by the researcher.

I found that, within a relatively small sample and given the kinds of data I was looking for (related to discourses, fluid and overlapping), the building blocks of a content analysis framework for my research did indeed require qualitative input, and in this case to such an extent that a more qualitative approach would, in the end, be more effective to take. In

addition, while I had certain themes and issues that I was specifically trying to look at through the research (such as the concept of gender transformation), the parameters of these themes and issues were still relatively fluid and needed further exploring. In terms of content analysis, I felt that within the context of my research an effective content analysis would require a far more developed and quite complex categorisation framework (drawn up in accordance with a fair amount of initial qualitative research), a framework that was more established than the explorative nature of my research questions could allow.

“Content analysis is an extremely directive method: *it gives answers to the questions you pose*. In this regard the method does not offer much opportunity to explore texts in order to develop ideas and insights. It can only support, qualify or refute your initial questions” (Deacon et al., 1999: 117, emphasis my own).

Therefore, while a quantitative method may be useful in cases in which more fixed categories can be identified for analysis, my theoretical basis for the issue of gender transformation was perhaps too relational and integrated, and requiring of greater flexibility, to allow for such fixed categories to be successfully applied. The pilot of this method revealed that, in practice, content analysis of this kind would not be effective for my research. The piloting of the methodology was halted when I encountered the following main limitations:

- **Textual “units” for counting could not always be identified:** For example, some articles had relatively free-standing “boxes” with additional stories or information linked to another article, and I could at time not determine difficult where one textual unit began and another ended, instead finding that in the kind of research I was doing, seeing textual content in a more overlapping way was important.
- A similar issue was encountered in terms of determining **which sections to leave out**. Some sections (such as television guides) appeared to be appropriate for inclusion in a study on gender and others did not, depending on the type of newspaper. For example, while one newspaper demonstrated a fair amount of critical engagement with social aspects of representation through film and other media in their film and television reviews and guides, in other newspapers the film and television sections included very brief descriptions or blurbs of films that did not appear to have as much

gender relevance. Because the one newspaper had demonstrated that even film and television sections have the potential to engage with gender transformation issues, incorporating a fair amount of gender-conscious commentary, I did not want to exclude this section; it clearly “counted” as a section with relevance to the study. However, when moving to the other newspapers, including this section would lead to the content being counted being far more superficial and the textual “units” being very small. This would unfairly impact on the kinds of counts I would get from the different newspapers, and therefore skew the comparison of counts (which would not be equal). Again, the need for greater fluidity in what I was looking at created limitations in terms of coding and counting.

- Overall, as the numbers began to emerge, the ***data did not add significant insights in terms of what I was aiming to understand***. Little was being added to my understanding of the newspaper texts due to the relative rigidity of counting. Using the previous example of film and television sections to illustrate this point, I found that if I included the television and news sections, I would be “counting” a huge number of relatively empty textual units in some newspapers compared to fewer, richer units in terms of analysis of gender transformation discourses in another newspaper, which could be better unpacked qualitatively.
- The framework ***did not make enough room for alternative or problematic discourses***. I discovered that the presence or absence of different levels of gender awareness according to the framework was not the only issue, but that problematic discourses and silences also needed to be explored and highlighted. While in some respects silences can be enumerated, in this instance there was more complexity in discourse than a relatively simple framework could capture. For example, one newspaper repeatedly represented the act of a man hitting a woman as a “klap”<sup>22</sup>, raising a problematic discourse that, although relevant to my study, did not fit into the framework I had developed. While I looked at improving the framework, I soon realised that short of converting my study into the development of a highly complex framework that could cover all the relevant issues emerging (a thesis in and of itself), applying a quantitative framework for this exercise unduly restricted the kinds of information that I could pick up on and reflect in this research component.

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<sup>22</sup> Afrikaans slang for “hit”, which from my perspective and experience is laden with connotations of punishment by an authority figure over another. It therefore potentially has gendered significance.

- ***The number of textual units overall that fell within the three categories of framework I had designed was small.*** This is, indeed, an interesting and relevant finding, indicating that few articles within the newspapers could, according to the framework I had set out, be considered as engaging with gender issues at all. However, I felt that to continue counting these rare units, side-stepping other potentially interesting issues along the way that would be better explored qualitatively, would result in a method that would not yield data suitable for my research purposes.

While in some respects the potential limitations of quantitative methodologies were raised in this pilot, I do not completely reject the idea that quantitative research can be designed and appropriated in a way that can yield insightful and useful information. Indeed, with larger samples in which categories have been very well-developed over time (generally requiring an initial qualitative assessment in order to do so), patterns of attention and approach can reveal important information surrounding the orientation of larger volumes of texts, as well as potentially highlight power dynamics through the dominance of certain patterns. In addition, quantitative data can have strategic value in terms of having greater discursive currency towards motivating for policy change among many decision-makers. However, the pilot did reiterate the significance of qualitative inputs in constructing quantitative frameworks, and the importance of looking at the unique interests of a particular research study when deciding on a method. In this case, the limitations of content analysis placed too many restrictions on the depth and capability of analysis required to address my research interests.

Therefore, I moved towards a more qualitative approach, applying critical discourse analysis to a smaller sample to enable me to access more diverse, rich and meaningful information related to gender transformation. The shift to a more qualitative approach also led to a much deeper engagement with the newspaper texts, so that the initial “scoping” component of the research became more central to the research than initially envisaged. In addition to the qualitative analysis, however, I *also* incorporated very basic quantitative “counts” based on the framework I had developed, using enumeration to add a dimension to this phase of research while not centralising content analysis as a method. For these, I tried to incorporate many of the lessons learned in the pilot methodology.

#### 5.4.2 Method applied

Twelve newspaper issues - four issues of each of the three newspapers selected for the study - were reviewed for component one of the research instead of the initial anticipated number of 36 issues. The sample is shown in Table 2 below. Consecutive newspapers were looked at, with the exception of the last edition for each newspaper, which was taken from a later date due to the disruption of the Christmas and New Year period on the newspapers<sup>23</sup>.

<b>TABLE 2: NEWSPAPER ISSUE SAMPLE FOR COMPONENT ONE OF THE RESEARCH</b>		
<b>Sunday Sun (SS)<sup>24</sup></b>	<b>Sunday Times (ST)<sup>25</sup></b>	<b>Mail &amp; Guardian (MG)<sup>26</sup></b>
2 December 2007	2 December 2007	30 November 2007
9 December 2007	9 December 2007	7 December 2007
16 December 2007	16 December 2007	14 December 2007
13 January 2008	13 January 2008	18 January 2008

Parts of two additional SS newspapers were looked at qualitatively but not included in the counts of textual units with gender relevance undertaken (to be described below). These additional issues (12 August 2007 and 19 August 2007) were included qualitatively due to particularly interesting content in terms of gender, brought to my attention by the editor of the newspaper during my interview with him.

It is important to note that the first two issues of each newspaper were published at the time of the 16 Days of Activism campaign in South Africa. This campaign takes place annually from 25 November to 10 December and involves various activities towards awareness-raising around the issues of gender based violence and child abuse so prevalent in South Africa. It should also be noted that the sample was drawn from a time in which the “succession race” between Thabo Mbeki and Jacob Zuma for the position as new party president of the ANC was taking place, as well as at the time of the Polokwane Conference, where much of this battle emerged. This period also included the nomination of Jacob Zuma

<sup>23</sup> During this period, the newspapers were generally considerably smaller and some were based primarily on special holiday entertainment features.

<sup>24</sup> From here on, the Sunday Sun will be referred to as SS.

<sup>25</sup> From here on, the Sunday Times will be referred to as ST.

<sup>26</sup> From here on, the Mail & Guardian will be referred to as MG.

for ANC president by the ANC Women's League, sparking a furore of debate and comment by political players, leaders, civil society and gender activists, particularly in light of the ANC Women's League's earlier promise to nominate a woman for the post of ANC president. I raise this since these events had an impact on the amount and kinds of coverage of gender issues in the newspapers at the time of the research.

After an initial assessment of the newspapers, I decided that certain sections would be omitted from component one of the research. SS is a short newspaper generally without separate supplements. The business and careers sections are integrated into the main newspaper and were considered relevant to the study. No sections were therefore omitted in the case of the SS. The ST, however, is a very long newspaper with numerous separate supplements. Given some of the issues encountered in the initial quantitative pilot, as discussed above, some of these supplements were considered to be of less relevance than others, or in some cases not comparable with sections from the other newspapers. I therefore decided that the lifestyle magazine, entertainment guide magazine and travel sections would be omitted. The comment and analysis, and the business supplements, were included. With regards to the MG, while the film and entertainment section was potentially of interest as discussed earlier on, given the omission of such sections in the other newspapers and the large volume of very small textual units in addition to larger ones in this section, it was also omitted from the counting exercise (although I look at it briefly qualitatively). The rest of the MG was included, as it did not involve any distinguishable or separate lifestyle or travel supplements either.

Component one of the research was, as discussed, eventually a primarily qualitative exercise (discussed further down). However, rudimentary "counts" were also made to supplement the qualitative analysis and alert me to any potential inconsistencies in my overall impressions. Given the problems encountered with counting gendered features in textual units discussed above, these counts were intended to be used with caution and with cognisance of the limits of their contribution to the study.

Again, while undertaking these counts, the ultimately qualitative foundation for the counts was highlighted. The vast majority of counts required of me, the researcher, to make some sort of qualitative assessment as to whether or not a particular textual unit fitted in with a particular category, since the boundaries were seldom clearly defined. Furthermore, the

counts only indicated whether certain issues or features were raised in the newspapers, not whether these were “positive” or “negative” instances of gendered representation. The boundaries between “positive”, “gender transformative” and “negative” gendered representations were also seldom clear, and various (often contradictory) discourses often existed side by side in single textual units. In addition, my observations of various other South African media studies in which gender representation is described as “positive” or “negative” had already been of methodological concern to me, in their assumption that this dichotomy was clear, based on consensus, and can be assessed quantitatively. Determining the actual relevance of gendered features, therefore, required the qualitative reflection and discussion undertaken.

In terms of the counts, the delineation of “textual units” was in many ways made easier through the omission of particular sections of the newspapers, and was taken to denote any bordered text. Therefore, for example, a small editorial block containing comment embedded within a larger news article would be taken to be a separate textual unit. Basic categories for counting were devised after an initial review of the gender-related content in the sample newspapers. As new features arose, I decided whether they could fit into the categories provided for, and if not the categories were either refined or new categories created. While my research interests guided this process, these categories were drawn more from impressions of the texts than imposed from the outset onto the texts.

This process led to the identification of a number of categories that indicated the coverage of either particular gender issues or particular gendered phenomena (such as gender based violence). It also led to the formation of the broadly defined category of “gender constructions”. The latter was created to cover instances of *gender discourses* that were not necessarily found in textual units dealing with any particular coverage of a “gender issue” or gendered phenomenon. For example, a gendered joke on the jokes page, a sexualised image of a woman or a gendered stereotype arising in a sports column could be considered a gender construct rather than the intentional coverage of what would broadly be considered as a gender issue or phenomenon<sup>27</sup>. Almost all textual units that involved gender issues also simultaneously involved gender constructs, therefore falling under two categories. In some

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<sup>27</sup> I realise that this implies that gender constructs are completely separate from gender issues - this is not my intention. However, for the sake of making difficult distinctions among textual units, certain issues and events tend to be more widely associated with gender, and are here therefore defined as such, while others involve more subtle gender constructions related to a much wider range of topics.

cases, one textual unit could fall under three categories. Therefore, the counts indicating the number of textual units of “gender relevance” are lower than the sum of the counts for all other categories. The categories and their meanings are shown in Table 3 below.

<b>TABLE 3: CATEGORIES FOR COMPONENT ONE COUNTS OF GENDERED TEXTUAL UNITS</b>		
<b>Category</b>	<b>Meaning</b>	<b>Comments</b>
Gender relevance	All textual units identified as having gendered features, discourses or subjects.	These counts can indicate textual units falling under one or more other categories.
Women in leadership	Textual units in which the issue of women in leadership, particularly in the public sphere, is either raised directly as an issue or promoted through the emphasis of women leaders in the news. This includes, for example, women as community, political and business leaders.	While having this category was regarded as important, it was particularly difficult to count and my own qualitative assessment of each textual unit played a significant role. For example, it was very difficult to distinguish between cases in which women leaders were incidentally in the news and spaces created to emphasise the leadership capabilities of women. The counts should therefore be regarded with their highly qualitative, evaluative nature in mind.
Homosexuality	Textual units in which either issues around homosexuality are raised or protagonists of news stories are named as gay.	Textual units in this category can vary greatly in terms of the kinds of discourses conveyed around homosexuality. The very need for this category already points to the relative heteronormativity of the newspapers.
Gender based violence	Textual units in which either the issue of gender based violence is directly raised or in which instances or events of gender based violence are raised.	Textual units in this category can vary greatly in terms of the kinds of discourses conveyed around gender based violence.
Socio-economic “women’s issues”	Textual units in which socio-economic issues with particular relevance to women are raised. This includes jobs most likely to be undertaken by women and	This category was particularly difficult to count, given the potential problematic elements of isolating “women’s issues” as discreet. It was for this reason that the category was variously introduced and retracted during the analysis phase. Eventually,





	<p>issues primarily or solely affecting women. Examples include female sex work, domestic work and mother-to-child transmission of HIV.</p>	<p>however, I found that there was a need to capture textual units that shared an emphasis on issues with particular relevance to women, especially in the context of the need address gendered inequalities in attention to certain spaces and issues associated with the social-economic. Therefore, I counted textual units in this category cognisant of the fact that, while the focus on women's issues is important towards addressing historical imbalances, none of these "women's issues" are ultimately isolated to a homogenous group of "women".</p>
<p>Gender constructions</p>	<p>Textual units in which the discourse used (whether visual or written) constructs men and women in particular ways. The exercise used to decide whether something counted as a gender construction was to ask: if an alien from a planet without different genders saw or read this, what particular social ideas would they get about men and women, and their positions/roles/values on earth? This could involve more overt or subtler assertions about women and men, boys and girls. Gender constructions are understood here to discursively assign both traits and values to masculinity and femininity, as well as to construct the relationship between men and masculinity, women and femininity, and masculinity and femininity.</p>	<p>Initially, two categories were made: constructions of masculinity and constructions of femininity. This was changed to gender constructions when my observations during component one of the research re-emphasised the importance of viewing gender in a relational way. Constructions of masculinity and femininity are seen as deeply entwined and dependent upon one another, and therefore need to be viewed in relation to one another.</p> <p>I also steered away from categorising gender "stereotypes", since I view gendered constructions not necessarily falling under "stereotypes" to be important as well. I also felt that the notion of "stereotypes" implies a negative value judgement on the representation, therefore excluding other important discourses that may be positive or ambivalent. "Gendered constructs" as a concept therefore offered more room for the inclusion of representations with relevance to gender transformation. This category was extremely useful towards counting representations of gender not directly linked to "gender issues", such as those in jokes pages or columns directly addressing issues.</p> <p>These counts also included certain visual images</p>

		<p>considered to be expressing strong messages about gender. For example, a headshot of a person would not be counted but a sexualised image of a woman would be. Again, it was difficult to know which images to count, as almost all images could arguably convey some sort of gendered meaning or construction, and their inclusion was based on a qualitative assessment of their importance in this regard.</p>
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These counts were also divided into those that appeared in the “main news” section of the newspapers and those appearing in the latter parts of the newspapers. As already mentioned, these categories are intended as rudimentary guidelines for counts, which I have used cautiously given that textual units seldom fall clearly into one or another category. Similarly, the division between the more prominent news section of each newspaper and the rest of the newspaper for counting was intended to indicate broad divisions in the newspaper but made cognisant of the bleeding between sections of the newspapers and the varied ways in which the notion of “main news section” can be understood. The division I made for the research in this regard was based broadly on the size of the newspaper against which the number of pages regarded as dealing with the most “prominent” news could be assessed, as well as the rough division between the earlier sections of the newspaper that were dominated by news and reporting, and the latter containing more conversational spaces such as jokes, columns and letters.

Beyond the counts undertaken, I also chose to address issues related to the gender transformative potential of textual units through qualitative methods more adept to the kinds of complexities and nuances needed for the analysis. I felt that even the issues raised by the counts involved a great deal of value assignment in accordance with one’s ideological and political point of departure, and should be tackled in a manner that allows for a more open exploration of this than a quantitative approach can afford.

The qualitative analysis of component one was framed by theoretical approaches to critical discourse analysis combined with thematic analysis (discussed in Section 5.6, as this method pertained broadly to both component one and component two of the research). It was focused on identifying and describing conceptions of gender transformation,

constructions of gender and the implied readership. Component one also aimed at linking various discourses to different spaces within the newspaper, and at identifying any inconsistencies or contrasts in discourses. The analysis for the newspaper content was undertaken - and is presented - prior to the detailed analysis of the interviews. In this way, the qualitative findings of component one could be more strikingly compared and contrasted with the interview data.

## **5.5 Research Component Two: Principle Research with Print News Journalists and Editors**

The second component of primary data collection involved semi-structured, open-ended, individual interviews with journalists from the three selected newspapers. Initially, I aimed to triangulate interview data with focus group discussions. However, this was not feasible for editors who felt that they could not spare more of the journalists' time over and above interviews. Approximately seven journalists were approached for individual interviews from each newspaper. This was done after gaining the consent of the relevant editors, who also participated as key informants. Participants were selected through a process of going through newspapers to identify journalists, liaising with various members of the editorial staff regarding the prospective participants identified (for example, to verify which journalists were in full-time and in-house positions) and finally gaining consent to participate from those who were approached.

Some newspaper editorial staff gave me free range to identify journalists for participation in the study while others were more directive. In one case, only senior journalistic staff members were initially recommended to me despite my wish to hear from journalists in a range of different positions. The newspaper editorial staff were concerned that junior journalists would not represent the newspaper as well as senior staff, and although I explained that my intention was not so much to assess the *newspaper's* official position as emerging discourses through the voices of some of its journalists, I got the sense that the editorial staff wanted to select journalists for the study who would best reflect upon the newspaper and its approach. This was also understandable considering the recent controversies related to this particular newspaper, its investigative modus operandi and its relationship with the state at the time.

Another newspaper recommended mostly journalists with a particular interest in gender issues, and while I was still able to generate my own list of prospective participants, there was a sense that I should be talking mainly to those considered to have a particular interest and skill in the area of gender. I, on the other hand, wanted a range of perspectives not limited to those with a particular interest in gender issues. However, this response did indicate a subtle discourse conceptualising gendered perspectives as somewhat separate rather than integrated and omnipresent, and especially as held by those with an interest in gender. In other words, from this perspective primarily explicit views on gender are gendered, whereas I would regard a much wider range of perspectives gendered. My feminist understanding that all subjectivities, and therefore perspectives, are gendered (and as such that the discourses of all journalists would be of interest) therefore clashed somewhat with this discourse when it came to setting up interviews. The following criteria were used as far as possible in identifying participants:

- Only full-time, in-house journalists were approached to participate in the study. Therefore, columnists were excluded, as were free-lance journalists (with one exception being a free-lance journalist who had worked many years with the same publication and was interviewed due to a lack of in-house staff responding to the call for interview dates).
- A roughly equal spread of women and men was sought.
- A rough spread of different journalists in terms of age and, where possible, race was aimed at (the SS, for example, had no white full-time journalistic staff at the time).
- From reading the relevant newspapers, some journalists were identified if their work was seen to be reflecting discourses of interest in terms of gender, while others were randomly selected.

Individual interviews were guided by a broad set of prepared research questions but I was relatively flexible in terms of following interesting lines of question and discussion. The questions I designed were formulated with the explorative nature of the research in mind, aiming as far as possible to probe participants' own perceptions of gender and media issues rather than limit questions to rigid or pre-defined issues that I was interested in as far as gendered media issues were concerned. For example, one question revolved around the infamous Zuma rape trial (raised in Chapter 4), which was incorporated as a well-known

case study of the media's treatment of gender issues towards generating open-ended discussion with participants.

Much of the research on gender and news production processes to date has focused on organisational and professional practices impacting on the processes of media production (see, for example, Opoku-Mensah, 2004; de Bruin, 2004; de Bruin & Ross, 2004; Gallego et al., 2004), rather than analysing journalists' perceptions of their roles in engendered news media production. The key aims of this research were thus to answer the research question via a range of sub-questions pertaining to journalists' perceptions of:

- "Gender transformation";
- "News";
- "Gender issues";
- The role of the media in "gender transformation"; and
- The role of journalists in "gender transformation" through news production.

In addition, issues influencing or related to how the above perspectives would be shaped (such as organisational culture and professional practice) were also raised in the interviews to contextualise and further discuss what the participants had offered in terms of the above main areas of enquiry. These included, broadly, the following:

- The relationship between market factors and the shape of journalistic products;
- The criteria through which journalistic products and practices are judged as good or bad;
- The influence of newsroom characteristics and structures in mediating journalists' ability to shape their own journalistic approaches; and
- The relationship between journalistic notions of responsibility towards the "public good" or transformation and the value of "objectivity"<sup>28</sup>.

Once the interviews had been completed, I distributed an open-ended questionnaire to research participants to allow for reflections and comments on the research process and the issues discussed. The post-interview questionnaire was designed, in part, to balance

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<sup>28</sup> Questions related to this were added after the first couple of interviews indicated the significance of these different ideologies regarding the role of the media to the research question.

relations of power in the research process, creating a space for feedback into the process for those who may not have raised concerns during the interviews. It also enabled me to better understand perceptions, thoughts and feelings around the research process towards reflection and refinement, and allowed participants to make retrospective comments pertaining to the issues discussed to draw my attention to any potential gaps in the interview.

I have noted earlier on (in Chapter 4) that a political economy approach has the capacity to unearth various issues related to journalistic practices, through unpacking certain characteristics constituting the news production milieu. Cognisance of these factors was integrated into the research, and did emerge in the interviews and findings. However, data collection was not directed in particular at unearthing and unravelling complex issues pertaining to political economy and print news production, focussing more on perceptions of gender transformation. Furthermore, while the research question focused primarily on the issue of “gender”, this concept is intersected by numerous variables such as race and class, as indicated earlier. While it was not my intention to comprehensively assess the nature of these intersections, they are inherent to gendered discourses and manifestations, and as such have also emerged to a degree during the research process. I concede, however, the limitations of the extent to which these intersections have been interrogated in this research (this is further discussed in Section 5.7).

Given the permission to do so, the interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim in order to enable deeper engagement with the content and discourse of interviews, and allow for themes and discourses not previously anticipated, or overlooked during the interview, to be captured for analysis. I also considered full transcriptions to be important towards capturing evidence of the kinds of interactions between myself - the researcher - and participants. For example, the transcriptions allowed me to identify moments in which certain participants or I were battling to express ideas or were confused about something. They also put participant responses into context, for example, allowing me to compare participants’ responses in relation to the ways in which I had framed or worded the questions (especially since the questionnaire was semi-structured, and therefore not always applied in exactly the same way).

As part of a commitment towards ensuring that participants' voices came forward during the findings, and were therefore not discursively obliterated by the critical academic analysis I applied to them, numerous extracts from the transcriptions have been incorporated in the findings. In addition to the political reasons related to voicing, I decided to do so to better open the data up for scrutiny, rather than obscuring the data unduly via an over-dominance of interpretation.

## **5.6 Data Analysis Framework: Critical Thematic Discourse Analysis**

### *5.6.1 Selecting a data analysis approach*

In terms of data analysis, the research methodology incorporated both a thematic approach and salient aspects of a critical discourse analysis approach. These approaches overlap, and pertain to both the processes and theoretical approaches guiding the analysis. The presupposition underpinning my approach to data analysis is that the act of analysis is an interpretation of data that, while done through a framework of theory, is ultimately *one of several possible interpretations*. For me, a feminist agenda, a framework for the conception of “gender transformation” (including the notion of progressive and liberal-inclusionary feminist paradigms) and various other theoretical inputs have worked towards constituting the final analysis. Therefore, salient theoretical conceptions informing the themes I identified as well as the ways in which I applied a critical discourse analysis approach are outlined below. I will not repeat the discussions in relation to the way I have conceptualised progressive and liberal-inclusionary feminism (also partly an outcome of the analysis as well as in input into the analysis) as I have in Chapter 2, but will focus instead here on wider theoretical bases for thematic and discourse analysis.

### *5.6.2 Incorporating thematic analysis*

Thematic analysis constitutes a “poorly demarcated and rarely acknowledged, yet widely used qualitative analytic method” (Braun & Clarke, 2006, citing the ideas of Boyatzis, 1998 and Roulston, 2001). As such, a brief delineation of its conception and application for this research is important. In this respect, I draw heavily on Braun and Clarke (2006), who broadly introduce the method and pose key questions to researchers towards identifying the type of thematic analysis most appropriate for their research. As will become apparent here,

the type of thematic analysis I have undertaken both compliments the use of critical discourse analysis and is shaped by critical discourse theory.

According to Braun and Clarke (2006), thematic analysis can be viewed as a foundational qualitative research method that is flexible and variously manifest. It broadly involves a method of identifying, analysing and reporting on patterns in a body of research data (ibid). Some researchers do not actually regard it as a method in and of itself, but rather as subsumed within other methods such as discourse analysis (ibid). Braun and Clarke (ibid), however, argue that this means that the processes and underlying assumptions involved in a thematic approach to analysis often go un-interrogated, and that expressly describing these processes and assumptions is important towards fostering a critical research community in which the work of fellow researchers can be evaluated.

As an example, Braun and Clarke (ibid) note that researchers frequently point to certain themes “emerging” from the research data, without describing the processes undertaken to identify such an “emergence”. As such, they note that a “passive account of the process of analysis” is often undertaken and that this “denies the *active* role the researcher always plays in identifying patterns/themes” (Braun & Clarke, 2006: 80, emphasis original). Themes are not inherent to texts but rather reflect researchers’ thinking and choices (ibid). This is not always made explicit by researchers, and as such Braun and Clarke outline key questions researchers can ask towards making their particular thematic approach to analysis clearer to themselves and to those who read their work. As will become evident, the answers to these questions are strongly linked to one another as they rest upon key theoretical orientations.

The first question involves what the researcher will take to count as a “theme” (Braun & Clarke, 2006). A theme broadly denotes a patterned response or meaning, but the way in which it will be identified depends on the researcher’s approach (ibid). For example, prevalence of a theme may be more important in one study than in another (ibid). In the case of my research, prevalence of responses or meanings is important, but not solely. Because of the largely qualitative nature of the research I have undertaken, combined with a critical discourse analysis approach, inconsistencies in responses (that may not be that *prevalent*) can also be considered *important*, with particular relevance to certain feminist theory with which the study is concerned.



Therefore, the “themes” identified in this research have been largely informed by the theoretical basis for the research and the research question at hand, which is sometimes strongly anchored in the prevalence of certain responses and sometimes not. For example, I have focused more (but not exclusively) on patterned responses related to gender issues in the media than to certain others that are peripheral to the research question. This is necessarily, therefore, a selective approach to identifying themes, which I consider to be inevitable given the many possible interpretations of “themes” that can be made for any set of qualitative interviews or newspapers. In this sense, then, when I refer to themes that “emerge” from the data, this emergence is considered against the backdrop of theoretical approaches and research objectives I have applied.

The second question pertains to whether the thematic analysis is aimed at generating a thick description of the information gathered during the research or a detailed account of certain, particular aspects of the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This, according to Braun and Clarke (*ibid*), is important towards setting the parameters for the different claims the researcher can make. As has already been raised, my approach was to focus on particular aspects of the information gathered during the research, evaluated as most significant to the research question at hand. Therefore, instead of a thick description of all the data, particular aspects were highlighted and described in a more detailed and nuanced manner. As such, the findings of my research are framed as primarily concerned with gendered aspects of discourse rather than as a description of all aspects of the interviews.

The third question relates to whether the thematic analysis approach is largely inductive or deductive (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The former denotes an approach to theme identification that is strongly embedded in the data itself (or at least, aims to be so as much as possible), in a sense endeavouring to be led by the data (*ibid*). This precludes any pre-existing coding framework (*ibid*). The latter approach is more theoretically based and involves a deeper analysis of data framed by the research question. As can be deduced at this point, my approach has been largely deductive, although this has not precluded unanticipated themes presented by the data, where related in some way to the research question. I worked broadly from the framework surrounding my research question and the theory I engaged with, which guided the coding process, but a number of themes I had not yet codified prior to the analysis were also identified through immersing myself in the transcriptions.

The fourth question involves choosing between semantic or latent themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Looking at semantic themes involves describing the data and then considering the implications thereof (ibid). Looking at latent themes involves a greater amount of interpretation at the level of theme identification, going beyond semantic content towards identifying the underlying assumptions, conceptions and ideologies theorised as having an impact on the semantic content itself (ibid). My approach involved identifying latent themes, an approach strongly associated with critical discourse analysis in its embeddedness in a social constructionist paradigm (ibid).

This leads into the fifth and final question pertaining to whether an essentialist/realist or constructionist epistemological approach is used (Braun & Clarke, 2006). My approach is constructionist, lending itself to the identification of latent themes as well as a critical discourse analysis approach.

In terms of practical method, I have roughly applied the following key steps in identifying the themes for my research (based on Braun & Clarke, 2006):

- Becoming familiar with the data, or immersing myself in the data;
- Generating initial ideas about themes and coding these;
- Searching for themes in the text and coding them according to initial ideas;
- Reviewing the themes and refining them where necessary; and
- Defining and naming the themes.

All of this has been done in a way that relies on critical discourse theory (as well as initial and developing conceptions of gender transformation, progressive feminism and liberal-inclusionary feminism) in identifying themes. Various aspects of this theory are discussed below.

### *5.6.3 Incorporating critical discourse analysis*

#### **5.6.3.1 Choosing critical discourse analysis**

The choice of a discourse analysis approach reflects an understanding of language as “an irreducible part of social life” (Fairclough, 2003: 2) and therefore of discourse analysis as a tool through which to explore social phenomena. Furthermore, the research question

involved issues around the production of written texts in the form of newspaper articles, and the perceptions of journalists in relation to these. It was therefore my understanding that discourse analysis, delving into ways of thinking through language, was an appropriate tool. I have drawn heavily (although not exclusively) on Foucault (1972; 1973) in conceptualising what is meant by discourse. I furthermore considered “critical” discourse analysis an appropriate research tool for application in a feminist investigation of discourse in relation to both social relations of power and the role of discourse in enabling or impeding social transformation.

As discussed above, I incorporated aspects of a thematic approach to the analysis. I therefore did not undertake a technical analysis of the linguistic structures of the discourse aimed at assessing the structural ways in which meaning was conveyed, nor did I undertake any detailed analysis of the discursive interaction between the participants and I (although some reflection is made on this). Instead, my analysis was concerned primarily with identifying the broader themes and social ideas to emerge in the interviews through discourse.

#### **5.6.3.2 Defining discourse**

A notion that has emerged progressively through the “linguistic turn” in twentieth century thought is that language, and the ways in which it is used, is not merely significant in conveying meaning, but also in creating it (Locke, 2004). This turn in thought transformed conceptions of language as “a medium for expressing meanings that pre-exist linguistic formulation” towards a conception of language as “a system that constitutes meaningfulness in its own terms” (Locke, 2004: 11). Meaning and reality are therefore not merely reflected through language, but shaped by it.

“Language ceased to be the province of formal linguistics alone. It was reconceived as a social and political entity, the means by which what we know of the world can be created (rather than simply represented)” (McHoul & Grace, 1997: 13-14).

The view of language as both constituted by and continually constituting social life is the foundation of the concept of discourse. As Potter and Wetherell (2001: 200) put it, discourse

analysts would view discourse as both “constructive and constructed”. Discourse, then, is a language practice regarded not only as a reflection of social life, but as a site through which social meanings are created, perpetuated and challenged, making it particularly important to the question of social and gender transformation. Discourse is not limited, however, to linguistic utterances, but can extend to ideologies, values and norms, and to ways of thinking, acting and believing (Locke, 2004). This draws attention to the various manifestations of discourse, broadly encapsulated by the idea of “language” but expressed through different forms of internal and external communication. It further denotes that discourse embodies ways of being and doing that are accepted or subscribed to, and that these include perceptions of roles in society.

Discourse, according to Foucault, not only shapes the world around us but also our social location within that world. As Lazar (2005: 143) puts it, “[d]iscourse, following Foucault (1972), refers to a set of related statements - manifested multimodally through the interplay, for example, of language and visual structures... that produce and organise a particular order of reality, and specific subject positions therein”. This statement further highlights that the discourses that shape subjects are not random, but interconnected. Foucault often described discourse “in terms of bodies of knowledge” (McHoul & Grace, 1997: 26), recognising the interconnected nature of various statements as part of “well-bounded areas of social knowledge” (McHoul & Grace, 1997: 31).

Discourses are not created within a vacuum. Instead, the shapes these discourses take are largely determined by social structures and power relations, and even by the force of other existing discourses. Discourses reflect and represent conventions serving particular social institutions and power relations (Fairclough, 2003), and can therefore be understood as bodies of knowledge connected by the conventions, social agreements and power relations that constitute them. A number of utterances, therefore, can be identified as belonging to a particular discourse - a particular body of knowledge with its limitations in terms of the parameters of acceptable speech. This highlights one of the fundamental reasons for the growing popularity of discourse analysis as a social research tool: such an understanding of discourse implies that it can tell us about the social dynamics that shape our society. It can go beyond description to look at the latent themes, the social, political and cultural origins and implications of discourses (Remlinger, 2005).

Discourse can also be conceived of in this context as a *performance* through which meaning is negotiated. As Remlinger (2005: 116) points out, a performance view of discourse holds language to be “a socially constituted practice that shapes, challenges and changes cultural ideologies”. As a performance, it is shifting and changing all the time in accordance with the context and objectives of the communication. The notion of performativity in terms of discourse has been integrated into the analysis of the data, drawing further on a conception of individual subjectivity as constituted by multiple social factors and influences (Mama, 1995) and as experienced and expressed variably in accordance with the dynamics of a given context. Finally, drawing on the work of Foucault, discourse is presupposed here as being discontinuous; discourses are viewed as constantly shifting, overlapping and intersecting (McHoul & Grace, 1997).

#### **5.6.3.3 Discourse, power and social change**

If language both reflects *and* constitutes meaning and reality through discourse, and if discursive processes are historically situated and ongoing, language can be viewed as a powerful tool through which to address issues of social and gender transformation. Furthermore, if discourses function to legitimate particular ways of being and doing, they can be regarded as highly significant to the feminist project of gender transformation. It is therefore regarded as appropriate to the research question to critically probe discourses towards an understanding of which ways of being and doing are negotiated and prized among print news professionals, and which ways of being and doing are perpetuated or contested in the textual products they produce.

However, the Foucauldian concept of the discontinuity of discourse and of discourse as a site of struggle over meaning, while implying a certain level of human agency, is not necessarily compatible with an agenda of gender emancipation (reliant on human agency to resist and change dominant discourses). The “theoretical coherence and practical viability of feminist emancipation” possible within a Foucauldian paradigm is a question that has long occupied feminists (Sopor, 1993:29). Given the heavy reliance on Foucault for the theoretical basis of this research, coupled with the transformation agenda upon which the research question was established, some of the tensions between feminism and Foucault are explored here.

Foucault has been widely appropriated in feminist work. However, numerous feminist writers have also launched from scathing attacks to theoretical struggles and negotiations with Foucault's work in the context of establishing its relevance, and desirability, within feminist thought. The possibility of the effective resistance to gender oppression, keenly linked to the question of agency, is one particular point of contention and ambivalence. Moi (1985: 95) has gone as far as to say that "the price for giving in to [Foucault's] powerful discourse is nothing less than the depoliticisation of feminism".

Why do feminists, such as Moi (1985) battle with the question of the amenability of Foucault's theories on discourse and power with feminist resistance? Sopor (1993) notes that in one sense Foucault's work theoretically frames power and domination as ubiquitous and inescapable. In this sense, she describes Foucault's as work that "desists 'progressive' talk" (Sopor, 1993: 36). MacCannell and Flower MacCannell (1993: 204) further assert that, for Foucault, "power is granted a neutral if not benign character... open to all even when it appears to be held by a few". This raises serious concerns among many feminists as to whether such a theory can, firstly, challenge power and domination if it is viewed as so inevitable and, secondly, identify certain groups of people as oppressed. If either one of these is not considered possible within a Foucauldian framework, can feminist work hope to appropriate it towards the goals of gender transformation?

Sopor (1993: 37), however, notes that the way in which Foucault's own discourse around power is articulated (with its derogative tone towards power), operates to "surreptitiously... invoke a desire which aspires to be free of this subjectifying machinery and its panoptical gaze". Foucault's own discourse, then, is implicitly critical of power. Foucault's work is also rich in conceptual tools towards understanding power and the socially constructed character of discourse and subjectivity. In essence, while Foucault appeals to feminists in the way that he foregrounds the issues of social constructivism and power in relation to discourse, his work raises concerns over whether, within this paradigm, there can ever be a discourse beyond that of the wielding of power, and therefore whether the notion of "emancipation" is in fact viable. Foucault's own scepticism over emancipatory theories (pointing to their own role in the wielding of knowledge and power) can perhaps be viewed not so much as a threat to feminism but rather as useful towards challenging feminists to critically reflect on their own institutional and discursive positions in the matrix of power (Grimshaw, 1993).

Consequently, the view among some feminists is that critical aspects of Foucault's work can be appropriated towards progressing feminist theory.

Feminists, therefore, have ranged in their interpretation of Foucault's work on discourse and power from irreducibly depoliticising in nature to fundamental towards identifying and challenging oppressive power. Many, myself included, have chosen not to try to definitively determine which ultimate position Foucault's work takes in this regard, but rather to appropriate valuable tools provided by his work towards analysing discourse and power, while maintaining as a goal the possibility of transformation. The tensions between Foucault and feminism on the issue of feminism's political agenda is discussed briefly here because of the intensity and persistence of the debate, which is seen as relevant to my appropriation of Foucauldian theory in a research study whose objectives are located soundly in a feminist project of gender transformation. It is also perhaps useful to note that Foucault himself, when confronted with the question of whether his work precludes a progressive politics, was also ambivalent (Ramazanoğlu, 1993).

For the purposes of this research, the issues of power, discourse and social change are approached from the theoretical perspective that, like Foucault, holds discourses to be strongly shaped by current discursive contexts, institutions and relations of power. As discourses, institutional forces and power overlap and interact, discourses are seen to be reinforced or challenged in a continuous negotiation over meaning and power. Similarly to Foucault, as well, I do not consider power in the shaping of discourse to be singular, homogenous or purely dominant. Power can emanate and express itself variably, drawing on a number of different discourses in different situations.

For example, a person experiencing and wielding power in one space or in an interaction with a particular person or institution may not experience the same power in another context. In my own research, I have felt both powerful and powerless as a researcher, a woman, a white person, a student, a young person and a middle class person in different settings. In some cases, in a single context power can be present in one respect but impacted upon by a sense of vulnerability or powerlessness in another. And even oppressed groups can assert agency, however limited, in accordance with their context. Therefore, I draw on Foucault to problematise black-and-white conceptions of power and oppression

*within* a feminist approach that acknowledges that oppression does exist and should be challenged.

Unlike certain readings of Foucault, however, I do not see domination as completely inevitable or the fact that power is fluid and variable as a denial of the fact that some groups of people suffer unduly under oppression and wield far less power than their oppressors. Furthermore, I view discourses as being subject to change through the application of agency. While an opening needs to exist for this to happen (for example, the availability of an existing discourse that can in some way be appropriated to form a new, more liberating discourse), and that without such openings transformation may not be possible, this research is premised on the notion that discourse can be transformed through an active and critical engagement with current dominant discourses. Therefore, the study of discourses of transformation has theoretically been premised on certain Foucauldian concepts of discourse as well as a feminist agenda.

#### ***5.6.3.4 Making discourse analysis critical***

A feminist framework as a basis for research necessarily implies or entails a critical approach. Embedded in a political agenda to pursue social change and to challenge and transform power relations, feminist theory has both drawn upon, and contributed to, critical social theory in general. However, some of the key characteristics of a critical reading of discourse, in particular, will be briefly delineated here, and will be seen to overlap with feminism's critical approach. This is important because a "critical" theoretical foundation for discourse analysis, together with the feminist theory applied in the analysis, has inevitably impacted significantly on the research findings.

Locke (2004) points out that the word "critical" is a commonly applied epithet used to distinguish a particular approach in various fields. It is, however, used to signify different things for different people (*ibid*), making a brief description useful here. Drawing on Kincheloe and McLaren (1994, cited by Locke, 2004), Locke proposes that the following key theoretical presuppositions can be said to underscore a "critical" approach and have been theoretically influential in the critical discourse analysis I have applied:



- All thought (and therefore discourse) is ultimately arbitrated by historically situated relations of power;
- There is no such thing as fact transcending the impact of values or the “ideological inscription” of the context in which a discourse is constructed;
- Language is pivotal in the constitution of individual subjectivity, whether this is always consciously occurring or not;
- Society is characterised by oppressive power relations, most powerfully reinforced when these relations of power become internalised, naturalised and therefore “invisible”;
- Power relations shaping discourse are constituted by many factors (gender, for example, would be intersected with class among other variables); and
- Processes of knowledge generation, including research itself, are also processes through which power relations are reinforced, reproduced or challenged, and self-reflexivity in the research process is therefore an important facet of critical research.

The points above raise the presupposition of an intimate connection between power and discourse, as well as of the socially constructed nature of discourse, within a critical discourse analysis approach. They furthermore highlight the way in which people are shaped by and expressed through language, which reveals both conscious and unconscious socially contextualised values and beliefs. As such, a critical approach to discourse analysis seeks to *uncover* these values and beliefs. Finally, the above points underscore the assumption within a critical paradigm that power relations shape society fundamentally and that these often go “unseen” due to the ways in which they are naturalised by discourse. A critical discourse analysis approach would therefore aim to challenge power relations by “visibilising” the assumptions and implications behind discourses. These critical conceptions of discourse have underpinned the analysis.

## **5.7 A Note on Studying Race and the Limitations of the Research**

Some of the limitations of the research have been mentioned already in terms of sampling and the fact that I concede to applying a particular lens to the data in order to focus the research. However, perhaps one of the most important limitations of this research thesis that needs highlighting early on, in my view, is the fact that I have not attempted to undertake an analysis of the role of race or racial identity in constructing or impacting on gender, nor have

I done much analysis on issues *closely related* to the impacts of race relations and identities on gender, or gender identities on race relations. The racialised history of South Africa, of brutal and oppressive colonial and apartheid forces stretching over many years, has left an indelible and sustaining mark on both class and gender relations. These impacts continue to be significant, even as current-day South Africa continues to face significant social and political changes.

For example, in relation to race and masculinities, Ratele (1998) observes that the meanings of black manhood in post-apartheid South Africa are imbedded in history, shifting and inescapably contextualised and constructed through historical processes (economic, social, political). He also argues that analyses of blackness and black manhood tend to object black men, to the extent that he questions whether most theories on black masculinity are in fact “a spawn of white racism” (Ratele, 1998: 64) (a point to which I will return). Salo (2003) has also indicated in her research on youth and gender in Manenberg (a Cape Town township) that gender identities and values shift and change in accordance with various historical processes (both local and global), and in particular that local social and economic histories in South Africa have had a significant bearing on the construction of masculinities and femininities in South Africa. Issues of African and black “culture(s)”, and the need to reclaim them after centuries of colonial domination, for example, continue to be heavily debated in terms of their gender implications. Some have accused certain African Renaissance discourses as being the guises of patriarchy and paternalism, and many have questioned whether any one “authentic” African “culture” can be seen to exist. These debates raise points of contention in terms of “culture” and gender that are fuelled and shaped by historical processes of racial oppression (discussed more in Chapter 2), and therefore highlight the need to consider gender and gender transformation in South Africa in relation to racialised history.

Constructions of gender among white South Africans, as Epstein (1998) has pointed out, have also been historically forged and are still strongly linked to various social, political and economic processes of apartheid. Violent nationalisms, the use of violence by the white patriarchal state and the shape of current day white masculinities have, for example, been linked (ibid). Focusing on white masculinities in South Africa (and emphasising their heterogeneity), Epstein (1998: 49) argues that “South African masculinities have been forged in the heat of apartheid and the struggle against the apartheid state, particularly (but

not only) the obviously coercive arms of the state”. Epstein’s (ibid) emphasis is both on the historical roots of gender constructs and on their ongoing propensity for discontinuity, for change with changing contexts. Others such as Morrell (1998) have also looked extensively into these kinds of issues, especially in relation to masculinities in South Africa, exploring the construction of gender identities and “profiles” as complexly intersected by a multiplicity of contextual factors including (constructions of) race. In this way, both past and present race and class relations and identities (to name a few) are key constituting forces in the construction of masculinities and femininities in South Africa.

Ifi Amadiume (1987) has also strongly argued not only that colonialism has had a significant impact on gender relations in Africa (a challenge to often-implied western assumptions of African societies as innately patriarchal) but that knowledge generation around people and societies in Africa homogenise gender relations and sidestep crucial historical shaping forces, thereby naming, labelling and producing knowledge around gender relations in various African locations through the (particular type of patriarchal) ideology of the west. As such, not only is historical context important in understanding gender relations, but it also impacts on the ability (and in most cases also the political will) of most researchers to see gender relations through anything other than dominant modes. This makes a range of perspectives in unpacking certain issues of representation in the media in South Africa very important, some of which I am not capable of.

The historical legacies that continue to shape race and gender relations will always demand important gender analysis as events and changes unfold. As some of this thesis does indeed show in relation to current political events, gender politics are today being powerfully, and critically, played out in the political, social and economic spheres - too many to count or include. Many of these carry with them echoes (or in many cases *shouts*) of the colonial and apartheid past, of race and class and notions of culture, whether African or Afrikaaner or any other.

So, given the significance of these issues, why have I chosen to largely sidestep them in my analysis? The reasons are two-fold: political and academic. Politically, as a white person I did not feel entitled to add my voice to the fray of white voices discussing, or more importantly interpreting and critiquing, what blackness means in terms of gender (or visa versa). The majority of images and texts I analysed for this study were of and about black

people in South Africa, and therefore while my analysis of South African newspapers representing a diversity of people necessarily included an analysis of texts including people of different races, from a political perspective I just did not wish to impose a (relatively ill-informed and experientially-impooverished) *analysis* of race and gender in South Africa's media. I did not want to, if at all possible, add to the objectification of blackness to which Ratele (1998) and Amadiume (1987) refer.

One may say that whether I try to or not, my analysis will carry whispers (or, again, shouts) of my white, middle-class background and perspective, situating my findings within this. I would not argue this point. However, short of leaving out all newspapers with readerships of different races and income statuses (to name a few areas of difference and inequality), research into the media in South Africa will cross paths with issues of representation and race. However, I chose not to focus on this in my analysis. In a sense, I opted out of attempting to undertake a deliberate analysis of race in the hopes that these issues will continue to be looked at by black South African scholars who are already addressing the dearth of black voices on these issues in processes and products of knowledge production. The second reason, briefly, is also related somewhat to the first. I do not believe that I have the expertise or knowledge, academic or experiential, to add anything of much value to analyses and understandings of the intersections between gender and race.

As such, I decided that I would not want to offer up a poor or half-baked analysis of these issues, leading me to largely limit my analysis to the trope of gender. Therefore, while this was a difficult decision (given that gender is constituted by many social and political forces, including race), I felt that my best offering would be to study constructs of gender in their myriad forms, acknowledging the diverse ways in which gender is constructed and manifested, while not seeking to identify *causally* what the impacts of various (and shifting) race relations, identities and legacies may be. I wish to acknowledge, however, that further such analysis of media texts by South African scholars, well-informed by and contextualised in South Africa's colonial and apartheid history, would yield some very interesting and important insights.

## 5.8 Conclusions

In this Chapter I have aimed to express and explicate some of the main theories, concerns and decision-making processes that have shaped the research. Broadly, a critical, feminist

and discourse-focused approach has been used, and described here. Although not repeated under methodology, however, much of the feminist theory, media theory and historical detail raised in earlier Chapters also had a bearing on the way in which data was interpreted and presented, on the methodology. Feminist theory and, in particular, the frameworks for understanding feminist paradigms that I described have shaped the ways in which I have understood the data, and visa versa (the data that I analysed also helping me to refine and re-define the rudimentary frameworks I had conceptualised prior to the analysis). Media theory, such as that related to political economy and the different levels (micro-, meso- and macro-levels) impacting on text production also, in a sense, forms part of the methodology as these theories combined with critical thematic feminist-oriented discourse analysis in the analysis of data, adding a lens and lending greater attention to certain issues.

This Chapter, and those preceding it, has therefore been aimed at gradually building a strong sense of where the knowledge I present in the following Chapters comes from - how it was interpreted (“constructed” even) and presented, and why. Starting at the premise for or attraction to the research question - a feminist standpoint - how do we understand feminism, and in what way do I apply it? I then asked specifically, why is feminist research interested in the *media*? How do we understand the media - its impacts on social life and how media products are created - and why are these understandings important to this research, especially from a feminist perspective?

Having looked at this, if feminists should indeed be interested in the media - if it has an impact on gender transformation - what have feminists already been saying about it and what have they been focusing on? I have explored the questions: how could I add to this and, in South Africa, are there any *particular* contextual and historical issues shaping the media, how its role and impact is perceived, how gender is portrayed and understood and what kinds of contributions I can make?

And finally, having established that the research is relevant and that there is room for growth in this area of enquiry, I have charted in this Chapter how the research was applied methodologically towards meeting the political and empirical objectives I have set. With this epistemological, theoretical and historical backdrop, the following Chapters will present the findings made for this research, findings that will variously reach back and touch on the

issues raised in the Chapters so far, and seek to add to them empirically and theoretically towards enhancing feminist media studies in South Africa.