8   FINAL REFLECTIONS

8.1   Introduction

"The work of an intellectual is not to mould the political will of others; it is, through the analyses that he [sic] does in his own field, to re-examine evidence and assumptions, to shake up habitual ways of working and thinking, to dissipate conventional familiarities, to re-evaluate rules and institutions and to participate in the formation of a political will (where he has his role as citizen to play)" (Foucault, 1989: 305-306).

Through this research, I hope to stimulate debate and challenge approaches both in my own field(s) (the work of an "intellectual") and in wider spaces and fields such as journalism and the media industry in South Africa (the work of a feminist committed to change). I have not come to this study as a journalist or even as someone with a focus on feminist media studies, but as a feminist researcher I hope that this work can raise some useful questions in both of these areas in addition to those they may raise within my "home" field of gender studies.

As I put forward in the beginning of this thesis, South Africa in many senses represents a case of "unfinished revolution". This is not really to suggest that any revolution is truly finished, but just that while the transition in South Africa to democracy and to the kind of constitutionally enshrined rights for women represents a laud-worthy and, in some senses, quite revolutionary change, there are still significant and persistent problems that need to be addressed in terms of gender transformation. The media is one area that needs to be looked at in this regard, as a powerful epistemological tool constituting and contributing to processes of change. It tells us about, is an instance of, and impacts upon feminist trajectories in South Africa.

This thesis was premised on the hypothesis that understandings of gender and gender transformation among print news professionals may in some way have an impression upon the shape of gender and gender transformation discourses within media representations. It seems that there is much talk about gender and gender transformation in South Africa today, with many different organisations and institutions declaring their support (including

many media institutions). However, what would happen if we were to step back and consider critically the premise of the assumption that there is consensus on what this means? This study has aimed in part to contribute to this endeavour, unpacking assumptions and meanings behind the ideas of "gender" and "gender transformation" in the hopes of gaining a deeper understanding of why the contemporary advancements of gender transformation in South Africa and its media are still so apparently uneven. By re-examining evidence and assumptions, this research has raised questions about the nature of gender transformation discourses in South Africa, the role of the press (particularly the tabloid press) in processes of change, and the contemporary methodologies being used to look at gender and the media in South Africa.

In this Chapter, I will briefly draw together the key findings of this research, including its limitations, reflect on the contributions the research makes to the field and briefly discuss its implications for further research and wider contexts in South Africa.

8.2   Glancing Back: A Synopsis of the Research Approach and Findings

8.2.1   *Approach*

Throughout this thesis I have reflected upon the guiding principles, theories and politics that have constituted the research approach and, ultimately, the findings made. A social constructionist perspective includes reflexivity surrounding the research itself, and findings within a social constructionist paradigm, such as those presented here, are thus also considered as shaped by and oriented towards a particular discursive context. As such, I recognise what has been presented here as one interpretation of a collection of research data made through a particular theoretical lens, namely what I have conceptualised as a "progressive" feminist approach. This is, as I have pointed out, not only a theoretical foundation for the research but also a political one, reflected in the ways in which the findings have been harnessed towards speculating discursive gaps and linkages with potentialities for processes of gender transformation.

In addition to a politicised, social constructionist feminist paradigm, I approached the research data and the analysis through the vector of two key frameworks, set out at the beginning of the research but further evolving throughout. "Progressive" feminism and "liberal-inclusionary" feminism were used as basic frameworks from which to conceptually, theoretically and, to some extent, also historically contextualise and identify broad discourses around gender transformation. These frameworks were extremely useful in this sense, not only allowing me to, through brief descriptive terms, evoke a set of related characteristics and issues already discussed, but also because having these frameworks as a basis and then continuing on the journey of the research, I was able to reflect upon the question of feminist paradigms and trajectories in South Africa and to continually refine them. It therefore helped to define and identify issues in the findings, and to define and identify areas in need of further theoretical work. This process could, perhaps, be extended through further research.

Besides their descriptive and identification functions, these frameworks were also used as part of promoting a central message and approach through this thesis, namely that gender transformation is a complex process requiring more nuanced approaches than a focus on women's public participation, numerical representation and rights can afford. While this is indeed being more widely recognised, there is evidence that feminist trajectories in South Africa, it's media and its feminist media research and activism environment still reflect a prevailing dominance of liberal-inclusionary approaches at the expense of progressive ones, and applying these frameworks throughout has therefore been part of a kind of theoretical advocacy to further promote the latter.

I found that applying progressive feminist theory was very constructive in exploring the fluidity and dynamism of gender discourses. In the first component of the research, for example, a progressive feminist lens led to the consideration of gender constructs, which I felt would be more receptive to heterogeneity and internal inconsistency than a consideration of gender "stereotypes". Probing gender constructs in a relational way also flagged the significance of the ways in which masculinities and femininities were discursively constructed as actualising one another. As such, applying a progressive feminist lens strengthened the data and underscored the limitations of looking at media representations of women (or of men) in dichotomised or isolated terms.

Methodologically, too, I used critical thematic discourse analysis, which was applied towards an analysis of the latent themes in the data. As such, the findings have been presented in a way that not only details the content of the research data, but also theorises underlying causes. Furthermore, the data has been put in a form of dialogue with issues of power and the political imperative of interrogating the potential discursive sites for change within the media. I considered participants' discourses from the perspective that they reflect various circulating discourses and broader evolutions of meaning taking place, whether these discourses were assimilated or challenged by participants. This advanced my concentration on latent themes regarding, for example, how participants' discourses may link to negotiations of gendered meaning happening beyond the walls of the newsroom, such as wider discourses of gender transformation in South Africa.

I also approached discourse as constituted of various assumptions and presuppositions, which I have aimed through this research to begin to unpack. This theoretical approach was valuable in drawing out assumptions and values potentially masked by, for example, discourses of objectivity, such as the significance of political economy and related understandings of readers' values in determining the parameters of objectivity. Attention to power relations is also a significant aspect of critical discourse analysis. The conceptualisation of power for this research was, however, non-linear, challenging notions of absolute power or powerlessness. For example, while some discourses to emerge through the research were flagged as particularly powerful, variable discourses with less social and political currency were also considered to have an impact on the discursive milieu and, therefore, on struggles over meaning. More powerful discourses (such as those related to journalistic objectivity and factuality) were regarded as functioning to discursively anchor, stabilise or mediate the more variable discourses (such as those related to journalists' desires to apply didactic strategies in their work). The critical discourse analysis approach also involved attention to how power relations are often most reinforced when they are internalised and naturalised. I have therefore aimed to visibilise naturalised discourses, by interrogating many of the taken-for-granted constructs that constitute discourses of journalistic professionalism, gender and certain feminist approaches.

Reflecting back on the two key aims of the study, these were often met more indirectly than anticipated. For example, understandings of gender and gender transformation, and journalists' understandings of their role in transformation processes, were often quite difficult

to evoke in the research process through direct questions. This in itself showed some limitations and boundaries with respect to how these concepts and terms were perceived, a finding in itself. However, to further discover the issues these understandings were therefore explored multi-modally, through other but related themes that journalists were more comfortable or able to talk about (such as broader issues of social transformation through the news), through examples (such as the Zuma rape trial and the media coverage thereof) and through triangulation with the findings of component one of the research. That these aims could not always be tackled directly with participants is not, I believe, an uncommon situation in gender research. Gender as a fluid, subjective and complex experience is not generally experienced through the analytical or identified vector of "gender". Therefore, as previous research experience has also taught me, as a researcher one sometimes needs to cast the net of inquiry wider to see how gender and gendering manifests spontaneously or unconsciously in a looser range of related topics and discussions. This was certainly the case here.

To meet the first two aims of the research through discourse analysis was the final aim of the research. This was effected by choosing the type of analysis applied (to be discussed below), and by triangulating newspaper representation discourses with those emerging from the interviews. Therefore, discourses were explored through static texts (the texts being static of course, not the discourses) and through "live", unfolding communication via the interviews. Triangulating these discourses was very useful in attending to the aims of the study, not only offering thematic findings in terms of discourses, but also findings related to how different discourses are actively negotiated.

The analysis I applied employed elements of a Foucauldian conception of discourse as discontinuous and overlapping. The findings therefore reflect a particular interest in, and attention to, not only consistent patterns but also contradictions and inconsistencies. I considered these contradictions in the context of ongoing negotiations over meaning, and of discursive locations (including gendered locations) being achieved rather than inherent states. I also gave significant attention to discursive *strategies* in the negotiation of meaning. The findings arising out of this research in turn supported the value of a broadly Foucauldian approach to discourse. Without assessing the significance and meaning of discursive contradictions, for example, important aspects of the data could have been sidestepped as instances of "unreliability" in their inconsistency. Instead, by looking at these apparent

contradictions, I was able to identify discursive *strategies* employed by participants, further strengthening data on the perceived roles and agency of journalists.

8.2.2   Limitations of the study

The sample for this qualitative research was limited, and the findings therefore represent only a part of the story of print news production as it relates to gender transformation. For example, that race did not emerge strongly in the research findings does not necessarily suggest that issues of race are not importantly interwoven in engendered print news production processes; while it may indicate in part a discursive tendency among participants to conceptualise gender in terms of a male/female dichotomy rather than as multiply-constituted, it does not necessarily signify that discourses at the interface of gender and race do not exist among participants. Furthermore, I have also not, as discussed in the methodology, aimed to specifically pursue issues of and related to race in this research, especially in terms of the newspaper content, for both political and practical reasons. Therefore, this is a recognised limitation of the research, and it would be very interesting and encouraging to see this taken forward by researchers with greater ability in cross-analysing, and greater knowledge for contextualising, issues of race and gender in South Africa.

Another possible limitation of the study, emanating I think from the limited sample, was that there were very few noticeable differences (especially no qualify-able differences) in terms of the discourses of male and female participants. The fact that differences along gender lines among participants did not emerge very strongly in this research does not necessarily indicate that there are no differences, and with a somewhat extended sample I might have felt more comfortable with making connections. In one sense, that differences among male and female participants for the most part were not that distinct even in a limited sample could indicate a lack of significant distinction in the discourses around gender and gender transformation employed by men and women journalists in terms of the media. However, this would be an interesting area to explore further with a larger sample that could allow for better comparison, and an important one in terms of looking at how gendered identity and location impacts on interpretations and understandings of gender and its place in media texts.

Finally, another limitation of the study was that, while journalists' and editors' views on issues of political economy were very interesting, unlike other issues discussed in the interviews I was not able in this particular study to go back and explore this issue more directly through other means. In other words, while I was able for example to triangulate the interviews with newspaper content to explore the statements of participants about gendered media texts in comparison to the gendered media texts themselves, in this study I did not interview readers to further explore statements by participants about readers. Political economy emerged as an important aspect of the gender and media debate, and it would therefore be useful to explore readers' perceptions of the issues discussed with journalists and editors, to gauge their own interpretations of engendered media texts and what they expect from newspapers in terms of gender transformation issues.

8.2.3   Key themes arising from the study

8.2.3.1 Discursive devices and diverse spaces

One of the first and most important findings made was that gendered meaning in news texts is conveyed and effected through different *discursive devices*, and that various *spaces* within newspapers have different discursive boundaries and norms, allowing for the use of certain discursive devices over others in terms of forwarding gendered messages. I also found that spaces in the newspapers not always considered in engendered analyses of media texts, specifically more "informal" spaces such as columns, jokes pages and letters pages, played a very important role in shaping, negotiating and manifesting gendered meanings and debates, and that these spaces therefore merit greater attention.

Through the first component of the research, three key discursive devices were identified as conveying gendered meaning. Advocate discourses, openly stating particular positions on gender issues, were clustered primarily in spaces in which overt opinion was acceptable, such as editorials and columns. Complicit discourses were present in various spaces, but particularly in news stories. These were discourses that, through language and fact selection, discursively complied with the discourses expressed by subjects being quoted in the news text and/or the assumed readership. Due to a journalistic reliance on the notion of "fact" in the news as separated from opinion, complicit discourses were a powerful tool through which to (consciously or unconsciously) convey particular meanings within the news without overtly expressing an opinion or deserting factuality. Spatial discourses were those

that conveyed meaning through the prominence, location and formatting of different views and voices within newspaper texts. These emerged as particularly important in determining the overall discursive orientations of newspapers in light of the frequent contradiction between, for example, complicit and advocate discourses. By giving certain voices more room over others, the value of freedom of speech could be upheld, while at the same time giving dominant or preferred voices greater representational power.

Identifying these discursive devises not only helped me to visibilise and assess different discourses in the newspaper texts themselves, but also linked with the interview findings. For example, manifestations of complicit discourses in the news echoed journalists' discursive strategies around objectivity in news reporting, where wording and fact selection functioned to imbibe texts with a particular angle (often reflecting the journalist's social perspective). Identifying these discursive devises also helped to elucidate some of the apparent inconsistencies between interview assertions and my analysis of the newspaper texts. For example, advocate discourses in the newspapers generally reflected editorial discourses in the interviews, while spatial or complicit discourses in the newspapers highlighted greater lags in gender transformation discourses.

8.2.3.2 *Lags in "private sphere" gender discourses*
One of the most distinctive and early findings I identified in the study was the level of apparent *contradiction* in terms of gender discourses and discourses of transformation. As I looked more closely at this discontinuity of discourse, however, I identified a broad pattern, one resonating with the feminist frameworks I was developing. This was that "public sphere" gender representations were relatively well advanced and widely represented (echoing liberal-inclusionary approaches) while "private sphere" representations (which would also fall under the auspices of a progressive feminist approach) lagged significantly behind. In addition, the greatest lags in gender transformative discourses were located in the more "informal" sections of the newspapers, which had different parameters on content and style than traditional news reporting, as well as in the more tabloidised newspapers or tabloidised newspaper features.

This pattern in discontinuous discourse seems to resonate with the uneven trajectories of feminist discourse in South Africa and its media. These uneven trajectories were represented in both newspaper content and interviews in different ways. In the case of the

former, the question of women's public participation was the most prominent connection made with "gender transformation" and an anchoring feature in the face of variation and contradiction among participants with regard to questions of "private sphere" gender issues. In the newspaper texts, apart from in the MG (which had a very politicised perspective on gender issues) liberal-inclusionary values were quite consistently advanced while, simultaneously, progressive feminist values were not (or even actively resisted at times).

In terms of newspaper content, complicit discourses that naturalised gender differences and obscured the distinctions between sex and gender were quite prevalent within the SS and the ST. The visual culture and spatial discourses I observed in the tabloidised newspapers also contributed towards projecting women, in particular, as defined by their sexuality (represented through the male gaze), and entertainment features reproduced patriarchal dichotomies of men and women as active/passive and consumers/consumables respectively. Anti-feminist backlash emerged especially in columns within the SS. I discussed some examples in which feminist discourses were re-appropriated to undermine feminist advancements. In other cases, although anti-feminist backlash was not obvious, representations of gender issues were often depoliticised, or the gendered nature of certain problems (such as rape) deflected and framed as broader, un-gendered social problems.

Social constructions of hegemonic masculinity expressed through complicit and spatial discourses were a further important component of gendered discourses in the tabloidised newspapers, as was the significance of constructions of femininity as functioning discursively in the actualisation and maintenance of hegemonic masculinity. Discourses resisting gender transformation in the tabloidised newspapers were, however, often located side by side with discourses promoting gender transformation, highlighting the unevenness of feminist trajectories. Overall, I got a sense that anti-feminist and gender transformation-resistant discourses were better able to play themselves out in informal spaces, and around "private" or intimate relationship issues, the last frontiers of engendered change.

In contrast to the significant contradictions in the gender discourses of the tabloidised newspapers, the MG offered a more cohesive package in terms of gendered discursive orientation. Like the SS, the advancement of representations of women in leadership appeared to be an endeavour undertaken within the MG, both textually and visually. However, the discourses surrounding the private sphere in the MG contrasted with many in

the SS in terms of moving away from naturalised gender constructs towards socially and economically contextualising, as well as politicising, intimate gender relations. The MG represents a niche and elite market, however, and the study therefore raised difficult questions related to the link between the political economy of tabloid, related issues of class, and opportunities for progressive gender transformation discourses to be advanced in the news media.

8.2.3.3 Journalists and editors in discursive negotiation

The interviews showed that journalists and editors did battle with issues of gender representation, political economy and social transformation, all of which were sometimes difficult issues to tackle and to weigh against journalistic values. Overall, and especially when beginning to analyse the interview data, I felt that there was much tension between stated gender transformation commitments and what I saw in the newspapers. The theme of discursive negotiation, which became more apparent as I revisited the interview transcripts, went a long way to exploring this tension. Through the interviews, it was clear that competing pressures are brought to bear on journalists and editors when making decisions around the shaping of news texts for printing.

The professional values and norms of journalism (forged in a particular South African historical context), the economic imperatives of the brand, wider discourses of gender transformation in South Africa and personal social locations and understandings of gender issues were all actively negotiated. This resonated not only with a Foucauldian conception of discourse as discontinuous and a negotiation over meaning, but also Gans' (1980) theorisation of the media production process as involving the weighing of various "considerations" towards the production of an "acceptable" media product. Through reviewing the interview transcripts I also saw some of the ways in which participants attempted to discursively harmonise competing discourses, usually by making various discourses somehow compatible with the central journalistic tenets of objectivity and free speech through the media (the anchoring discourses in most cases).

The research findings around discursive negotiations also reflected the various levels at which considerations in media production - or, as understood in this research, discourses - originate. Micro-level considerations involving individual identity and agency were signified in the impact of participants' own views on how news content was discursively negotiated.

Some participants' discursive strategies shifted, for example, in accordance with the extent to which they felt that addressing certain issues was important, and some gender issues were framed as "obvious" in a way that reflected participants' own discursive locations in terms of gender. Meso-level considerations centred largely on ideological and practical concerns within the newsroom and those related to journalistic values and practices, such as discourses of objectivity and balance. At the macro-level, considerations derived from broader social and political contexts. These levels were shown, in many respects, to be very much interlinked and often inseparable. For example, micro-level considerations of personal perspective are shaped by macro-level discourses, and macro-level discourses were in turn impacted upon by meso-level ideologies. In a sense, all of these "considerations" or discourses were linked and negotiated in a dynamic way.

8.2.3.4 *Reader primacy, political economy and the democratisation of the media*
One of the most striking features of discourses related to the role of the media was the rejection of a transmission view of the media's impact. Far greater agency was sketched for readers, and a pluralist paradigm of the media's impact dominated. This was especially the case in the tabloidised newspapers, which also focused more on reader-centred news. This was expressed through a discourse that held tabloid or "popular" news to be a form of democratisation of the media, through accessible and colloquial language, stories with which readers ("the people") can personally identify, and localised, conversationalised news. Linked to this was a discourse that held readers to be weary from the "serious" traditional news that was seen as focusing on morbid and/or complex social issues. As such, tabloid was framed as respite for the weary post-apartheid reader through "light" and accessible features. Discourses of democratisation of the media appeared to be linked to both historical ideology and political economy: ideologically valued in a post-apartheid context in which many readers (or potential readers) may still feel marginalised from the mainstream (read: elite) press, and economically in terms of the imperatives of the brand, appealing to an emerging and potentially lucrative new readership market.

However, these discourses also offer up interesting and important questions about the accelerating tabloid media in South Africa: in this context, what does democratisation of the media through tabloid really mean? What voices are coming through and what are the implications? To use an example, some discourses in tabloidised news pieces upheld hegemonic masculinities that, from a critical feminist perspective, implicitly contribute to rape

culture. Are these truly supported by readers, which readers really support them, in what sense are they supported, and what does this mean for the values of gender transformation within South Africa and its media?

The value and potential of tabloid as a role player in democratising the media (one lauded in various academic writings and by participants) needs to be looked at more closely. It also needs to be weighed against the ways in which it is apparently, in my view, being appropriated towards propagating and legitimating pervasive gender constructs inhibiting transformation processes. Discourses of democratisation and reader primacy can enable the perpetuation of the status quo in many respects, due to their reliance on widespread existing social values (for example, patriarchal ones) to legitimate the existence of certain discourses in the media. These are very difficult issues that the media industry needs to engage with as tabloid establishes a firm (and financially powerful) foothold in the media industry in South Africa.

8.2.3.5 Indirect didacticism through the news

As I have mentioned above, most participants were quite emphatic about reader agency, and were not comfortable with "transmissions views" of the media (as discussed in Chapter 3). Discourses of objectivity were also quite prominent and some participants expressed in various ways that they were not comfortable or in agreement with the idea that the media must play a role in social transformation processes, as this would contradict the value of objectivity. While a number of participants did concede in various ways that they are able to (and often do) imbue news pieces with a particular discursive slant, these mostly emerged as *concessions* in the sense that there was an apparent reluctance to admit the limitations of the concept of objectivity or to render journalists or the media as too powerful in shaping the views and actions of readers (except for MG participants, who were more comfortable with notions of social constructionism and therefore sceptical of the notion of objectivity). Furthermore, reader agency was highlighted with respect to their ability to select and appropriate information in media texts, as well as influence content themselves through economic pressure, letters to the newspaper and as news sources. As such, news media texts were largely described as polysemic, while at the same time allowing for what van Zoonen (1994) described as limits to decoding possibilities, or "preferred" meanings.

Discourses of didacticism did, however, still emerge in all newspapers in some form, even those (like the SS) with the firmest rooting in discourses of objectivity. Through discursive negotiation this tension was mediated. Discursive strategies that were best able to function didactically while still meeting the demands of dominant discourses around the media's role (to be balanced and/or objective and/or a watchdog) were variously raised, especially where the motivation existed to apply them (as I have mentioned, for example, when the issue was considered important or "obvious" to the journalist). So, for example, participants mentioned "sneaking" social transformation issues and perspectives into news pieces via quotes by experts at the end of the news story (and the selection of who to quote and on what aspect of the story), or by populating different informal spaces within the newspaper (such as letters pages) with texts that may support or challenge a particular position. It appeared that the desire to teach through news media was experienced as a tenuous position for participants, but that where the motivation existed to do so, creative strategies could be used while satisfying broader journalistic values.

8.2.3.6 *Discursive strategies and negotiations in creating news texts*

Ideology, or the socially constructed dynamics of news texts, was often associated with extreme ends of the spectrum of partiality (for example, having very close personal, political or monetary ties to the news subject), resonating with Gans' (1980) assertions regarding journalistic notions of bias. To avoid crossing the boundaries of objectivity while also being able to highlight social issues participants felt were important, the import of sidestepping overt didacticism in favour of some subtler strategies was raised. These included, as I have mentioned, using or creating different spaces within the newspapers, crafting stories skilfully in a way that conveys a certain message, selecting facts for inclusion and selecting staff with particular broad perspectives to work at the publication. In many cases, journalists also spoke about stories or facts as having the agency to naturally or inherently convey certain values, so that "facts" and "stories" were ascribed with agency (rather than the journalist) in shaping meaning within the news text. Ascribing agency to, for example, "stories" or "facts" in shaping didactic meanings within news texts was therefore one of the strategies employed towards engaging in meaning making processes while at the same time remaining within the discursive margins imposed by journalistic professionalism.

A positivistic slant to discourses surrounding the media's role and function within society dominated among most participants. In these discourses, objectivity and bias were

dichotomised and applications of the notion of objectivity were negotiated through the vectors of factuality, balance and a lack of direct personal involvement with news subjects (a discourse which allows for the above strategies to be used). Interestingly, the more tabloidised the newspaper in the study, the more emphatic and rigid discourses of journalistic objectivity were. This reiterates Deuze's (2005) observations that tabloid media should not be simply discarded as a debasement or antithesis of traditional news, since many of the journalistic values (or discourses) driving the two approaches overlap. The greatest challenges against positivistic notions of objectivity were launched by participants employed within the "critical"[74] brand of newspaper, namely the MG, with some journalists from the ST as well. Among these participants, objectivity was either overtly rejected as a construct that obscures the inevitable positionality of journalists, or critically negotiated and reformulated in alliance with notions of "balance" and "fairness".

Wider discourses, and the relative social currency they maintained, also appeared to impact on how texts were mediated and how strategies around didacticism were employed. Again, fact was sometimes naturalised as inherently conveying a particular social value - especially where that social value was assumed to have social currency. This social currency comes through in what is considered acceptable or unacceptable for publication. Thus, for example, women's positions in the public sphere can be quite consistently promoted while their positions in relation to men within the "private" sphere can be consistently undermined. Discourses of objectivity, therefore, can be dangerous in my view because they can limit self-reflexivity and sidestep these issues of social currency, of *values*, even those impacting on "objective" endeavours like the seeking of "fact" for a news article. In essence, what this study has shown in terms of discursive strategies is that the politics, perspectives and understandings of journalists and editors - as well as wider society (in which news professionals are located) - play a major role in shaping the kinds of strategies used within the bounds of journalistic values and norms, and for what purposes they are used. Journalists' and editors' politics, perspectives and understandings around gender transformation therefore need to be further explored and more openly discussed, locating them as social, relational and dynamic.

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[74] Through this research, I came to define a critical newspaper approach as one which views a variety of social and economic issues in a politicised way, contextualising these issues within processes and relations of power.

8.2.3.7 Dominant liberal-inclusionary paradigms in understanding "gender transformation"

This key theme has already been raised at various points, because it overlaps with so many of the other major themes arising from this study. In terms of the interviews, a liberal-inclusionary feminist conception of gender transformation dominated, particularly when questions to participants were introduced with the terminology "gender transformation". When asked about "gender relations" or "gender issues", the parameters of conceptions of engendered change were generally widened somewhat into the realm of symbolic representation and power relations, but primarily through the discussion of certain organisational culture dynamics and social politics that undermine women's advancement in the public sphere. Broader conceptions of gender issues signified the movement of a gender lens into the private sphere, seeing the linkages between public and private, and between gender relations and broader social, economic and political configurations. This included the issue of HIV/AIDS and related welfare concerns, poverty and gender based violence. Particularly participants from the MG, and some from the ST, saw gender as infused into and contextualised by diverse social phenomena. Overall, however, a liberal-inclusionary paradigm was most powerful and consistent among the newspapers and participants. I have argued throughout that this approach, while offering a valuable contribution, also leads to the sidestepping of many crucial gender issues facing South Africa today, and to severe limitations in engendered change.

Whereas liberal-inclusionary approaches tend to focus primarily on equal participation with men in so-called public spaces, progressive approaches would go beyond this to interrogate gendered culture within these spaces (which did emerge to some extent in the discourses of some participants) and also to challenge the roles and statuses of women and men in the so-called private sphere (something which needs much greater attention). Rather than relying on women's voices through representation in the media (as writers or news sources), there also needs to be more questioning of the social construction of these women's voices. Rather than focusing primarily on quantifiable inclusion, the media also needs more awareness around the "invisible" values and ideas that underpin inequality in our society, including those relegated to the "private" sphere. And instead of using a relative male/female dichotomy in terms of conceptualising gender, variations in gender constructions need to be looked at.

It is my contention that approaches too dependent on liberal-inclusionary feminist paradigms - at the expense of attention to subtler symbolic, identity-related, discursive and epistemological gender dynamics - will only lead to limited changes in the gender status quo. In my view, this point is supported by the research findings presented here, which indicate lags and blind spots in the trajectories of gender transformation, especially in relation to what I have defined as a progressive feminist perspective of gender. As a result, radical improvements in media representations of women's public participation, for example, run parallel to persistent gender constructs that tolerate and perpetuate patriarchal sexual politics that undermine women. In essence, feminist theory conceptualised as progressive challenges a primary focus on women's public participation and the related "gender" and "women" synonym, and this study highlights the progressions, lags and values of such an approach within the news media.

8.3 Looking forward: Contributions and Implications of the Research

8.3.1 So what does it mean? Implications of the research

8.3.1.1 Bringing gender activism and the media industry together
The rejection of a transmission view of the media's impact is important in the context of endeavours to gender transform the media. The implicit reliance on a transmission view of the media in many discourses of activism around gender and the media could lead to a discursive schism between gender activists and media professionals. This could undermine the credibility and effectiveness of feminist interventions. There is a need for feminist media researchers and activists in South Africa to consider more closely the complexities of media impacts over the assumption of a one-way flow of power. This could also deepen understandings towards generating more effective strategies to deal with the media's gendered implications.

8.3.1.2 Harnessing the dynamism of media roles in South Africa
In terms of the project of gender transformation, the historical role of the news media as watchdog offers some openings for strategic media interventions into gender injustice. The relative interventionist approach of the media in South Africa and the associated discourses of didacticism and activism emerging in the research, while paradoxically buttressed by

powerful discourses of "objectivity", alludes to the fact that the media industry is not entirely opposed to playing an active role in shaping the trajectories of South African transition and transformation - if these trajectories are seen as informed by inherently worthy, universal human values. Historically situated discourses on the role of the media have, to date, been forged largely around issues of racial transformation and state politics in the narrower sense, potentially keeping the focus in terms of the media's role centred on these issues. However, a progressive understanding of gender would certainly contribute towards gender transformation issues being regarded in a similar way, and therefore prioritised as part of the media's role.

8.3.1.3 Interrogating dominant gender transformation discourses

The discursive limitations surrounding conceptions of gender transformation have an impact on the scope and trajectories of current and envisioned strategies for transformation. Clearly, a critical mass of women in the media is not sufficient to address transformation issues, especially where a liberal-inclusionary paradigm and limited conception of gender is shared by men and women journalists. What it comes down to, in the end, is what is discursively supported and challenged. It would be interesting, for example, to ask why Bullard of the ST was fired for his racist discourse while the SS columnist Sibiya's overtly sexist stance, legitimating gender based violence, can be published. Of course, there are great variations between publications in this regard, differences I do not wish to sidestep. However, in essence what this research showed (and what the Sibiya and Bullard example illustrates) is that there is unevenness in the media both between and within publications in terms of what it supported or challenged with regards to transformation projects, and this unevenness deserves attention.

The interview findings, in my view, resonated with Gouws' (2004) remarks on the shortcomings of national feminist projects in South Africa as too dependent on what she calls state feminism. By centralising the state as the primary agent in gender transformation processes, Gouws (ibid) argues that interventions remain limited to achieving narrow gains through mainstream policies focused on getting more women into the state and other public structures, while most women do not see real gains on the ground. State feminism can also lead to a lull in the women's movement due to a false sense of security in the progression of feminist achievements in the hands of the state.

The Zuma rape trial, for example, drew attention to the limitations of South Africa's contemporary feminist movements and advancements. The trial threw into the spotlight the powerful social constructs perpetuating patriarchy that continue to exist side by side with liberal-inclusionary feminist achievements, a national gender machinery and declarations of women's equality. The gender transformation discourses raised in this research reflect some of these issues through a heavy reliance on liberal-inclusionary feminist paradigms and large public structures to implement mainstream policies of affirmative action, with limited engagement with what the real changes to gender relations and quality of life (especially but not only for women and girls) in a broader sense will be.

Liberal-inclusionary feminist approaches serve in a way to stabilise gender debates, due to their more advanced historical trajectory and their appeal in terms of circumventing more challenging and controversial changes to the status quo. However, while these discourses provide a focal point at which some aspects of the gender transformation agenda can be more widely agreed upon, the status quo needs to be adequately challenged if gender transformation and widespread related social problems in South Africa are to be challenged in the longer-term. As Motsei (2007) noted in relation to the Zuma rape trial, the incredible ambiguity and contradiction to emerge in the trial between larger public and structural achievements, on the one hand, and intimate gender relations and identities, on the other hand, signal significant divisions within South Africa and lags in progress that need to be addressed.

Many of the media representations discussed as part of this study showed this divide. While a number of the more counter-transformative representations were communicated through humour, colloquialism and "light" features, these representations of intimate gender relations and identities are, in my view, significant instances of problematic meaning-making. From a progressive feminist perspective, these representations cannot be separated from wider issues of women's empowerment, often paradoxically promoted alongside these discourses. For example, complicit discourses that centralise and construct hegemonic masculinity as aggressively sexual, and feminine sexuality as a passive conduit for the expression of dominant masculinity, undermine advocate discourses (such as those in editorials) against gender based violence. The gendered values, identities and constructions being entrenched in these discourses are, in certain ways, implicated in the prevalence of gender based violence.

Research undertaken in South Africa by Vogelman (1990), for example, supports the assertion of linkages between gender identities, ideologies, discourse and very tangible forms of gender oppression such as rape. Through interviews conducted with a group of men, including rapists, Vogelman (ibid) found that rape was linked, among other things, to the reinforcement of masculine pride and power. This was attributed to powerful social ideals of masculinity and other gendered socialisation features including the objectification of women. As such, Vogelman (ibid) argues that transformation cannot take place without attending to these social relationships and ideologies, manifested in gendered discourse.

Earlier writers such as Smith (1987) have also pointed to the linkages between gender discourses and material realities. These works highlight the significance of constructions of masculinities and femininities in shaping manifestations of gender oppression; social constructs cannot merely be discarded as benign or entertaining stereotypes. Yet many of the gender constructs underlined in this research appear to be popular as part of the commercial appeal of the newspapers, signalling difficult questions related to the role of political economy. These questions in turn demand that we look at the gender transformation project *both within and beyond* the mass media - within the media through its role as knowledge producer and disseminator, and beyond the media in terms of the wider social values that lead to a demand for such texts from media producers.

8.3.1.4 Re-examining tabloidisation, political economy and gender in South Africa

As I have mentioned, the private sphere as the final frontier of gender transformation represents a particularly strong area of resistance to change. This appears to have been picked up on in tabloidised news styles, which have different discursive boundaries in terms of content, and generally more "informal" spaces through which private sphere discourses can be accommodated. Interestingly, in the MG the private sphere was also raised but contextualised and politicised in a way that enabled counter-transformative gender constructs to be deconstructed rather than reproduced through naturalisation. The MG has also picked up a feature of tabloidisation through the extent to which human-interest pieces are covered, and used these spaces to unpack social, political and economic dimensions.

Features of tabloidisation such as the greater visibility of, and a conversational approach to, the private sphere can thus potentially offer great opportunities for gender transformation through the media. However, as this research indicates, dismantling the master's house is

not only dependent upon the wielding of new tools, but on the ways in which these tools are wielded. While traditional news approaches have been variously critiqued as, in essence, being constituted of ideological and practical tools that function to perpetuate the status quo, newer approaches to news production (such as tabloid) have also been re-appropriated to perpetuate patriarchal constructs. This speaks to the extent and shape of progressive gender awareness among editors and journalists working within a variety of journalistic approaches, a factor that will impact on the ways in which the *tools* of journalistic ideology and practice will be wielded. It also speaks to the need for broader social change; if counter-transformative gendered constructs surrounding the private sphere are such a powerful source of resistance to change within broader society, how can editors and journalists create competitive products without appropriating these discourses through these informal spaces? In this way, macro-level gender discourses and gender transformation trajectories are linked to salient issues of political economy in the news media, whether it be tabloid or traditional.

The MG caters for a niche market to which progressive, intellectualised approaches to social issues appeals. In many ways, while it reflects some important discursive shifts in terms of perceptions of gender issues in South Africa, it is also quite removed from the far-reaching actualities of continued struggles over gendered meaning and power characterising South Africa's social landscape. As such, while the strategies at the MG in promoting a gender transformation agenda should be examined for the potentialities they represent, they cannot merely be transferred onto other newspaper brands with very divergent markets and, indeed, offerings to the public. While the strong entertainment and tabloid aspects of the SS and the ST place limits on certain discursive strategies for transformation, for example on the detailed contextualising and politicising of intimate gender relations, they already do and may also further present openings for engendered change.

8.3.1.5 The need to promote a progressive "gender lens"

If limited understandings of gender and gender transformation can be linked to limited approaches and strategies to transform gender relations, then the development of a gender lens that is able to more comprehensively see and challenge patriarchal status quos is central. Re-examining and developing gender lenses that are able to respond to the dynamic and complex nature of gender inequalities in South Africa is especially important given that what is dominantly valued is generally naturalised and subsequently made

invisible (as this study has highlighted). Therefore, there is a need to identify, make visible and challenge naturalised assumptions about gender transformation, and to promote politicised awareness around it.

Through this research, I have identified two broad potential strategies for gender transformation of media products. The first key strategy is the development and promotion of more progressive gender lens. I argue that liberal-inclusionary feminist approaches such as the promotion of more women in the media industry are not enough to truly challenge the status quo. Instead, more media producers (including women *and* men) with progressive and politicised understandings of gender relations are needed to change the media. The development of a **progressive gender lens within the media** should therefore be the central strategy if the shifting and changing tools of the media are not merely to continue to be re-appropriated towards rebuilding the master's house. By "progressive feminist lens" I mean an enhanced understanding, conceptualisation and appreciation of gender issues from a progressive, feminist perspective as I have defined it.

Through the expansion and strengthening of a gender lens among media professionals that lends itself to perceiving gender in a more integrated, relational way (seeing, for example, the links between complicit discourses of hegemonic masculinity and the issue of gender based violence in South Africa), the discursive limitations of liberal-inclusionary feminist discourses within newspapers could be slowly and strategically transformed. If journalists, for example, "see" through a gender lens that constitutes transformation issues primarily in terms of women's public participation, then the significance of representations related to the private sphere are unlikely to be palpable to them.

As Made's (2000) anecdotal observation about journalists in Zimbabwe showed, journalists can have very particular, and very narrow, understandings of what "gender" means, understandings that are in fact propagated by the media and in various other discursive spaces. Made (ibid) observed that, in a workshop with Zimbabwean journalists, when asked what "gender" was most participants gave answers such as "women's rights". Many participants, she says, were very surprised to hear the definition of gender as the social expectations and conventions associated with sex, which are varied and changeable over space and time, and one participant went further to say that "women's rights" must be the correct definition as he had read this in the media.

This study has taken these anecdotal observations forward more extensively in the South African context and shown that the features of the gender lens applied by many print news professionals in many respects run parallel to the kinds of advancements and lags in gender transformation trajectories in media representations. Furthermore, as many of the examples in the findings showed, whatever type of lens is applied, discursive strategies are adapted to support its social conceptions. The more entrenched the social lens, the more "obvious" certain issues (and the ways in which "facts" and "stories" were seen to support them). It is my belief that the steady integration of a progressive feminist lens in the media is therefore one of the foundations for engendered transformation in the media.

However, as much of the discussion in this thesis has pointed out, journalists and editors do not produce texts for dissemination into a social vacuum, but operate within various considerations. These include the imperatives of political economy, and the value of relating to a diverse public imbued with agency. In addition, "personal" and journalistic values (micro- and meso-level considerations) are also not constructed in a vacuum, but dynamically responsive to and constituted of wider social milieus (macro-level considerations), from discourses in media representations and government policies to local communities. Therefore, in addition to a progressive gender lens within the media industry, the cultivation of a **progressive awareness of gender transformation in broader society** is needed.

As the level of awareness of more than the promotion of women's careers and economic locations is gradually expanded, the transformation of gendered discourses pertaining to the private sphere, for example, could be stimulated and accelerated in broader society. Current macro-level lags in feminist trajectories impact to a degree on the scope of gender transformation in the media. This is by no means to suggest that media professionals can or should deny agency and responsibility in terms of engendered news production. However, the discourses emerging in this research signal wider gender transformation discourses in need of attention. In my view, an important part of this will be encouraging researchers and activists to generate knowledge around this. In addition, the representatives of state and civil servants should also be encouraged to learn about and understand gender from a more progressive lens, and to integrate this understanding into policies and public dialogues, as in my view state policy and discourse has been very instrumental (and successful) in advancing the dominance of a liberal-inclusionary paradigm in South Africa to date.

As I have already discussed, state feminism in South Africa is posited as one constituting force in the perpetuation of largely liberal-inclusionary feminist paradigms that resist the flow of change into all corners of social life. Discourses dominating in the political arena also tend to focus heavily on gender affirmative action in the public sphere. Some shifts towards progressive awareness of gender have taken place, however. In many cases, these have been contributed towards not only by increased dissemination and assimilation of progressive feminist theory and research, but also by the increasing *necessity* for more integrated approaches presented by persistent major social problems such as the HIV/AIDS pandemic. However, discourses at various levels including, for example, government, civil society organisations and the media could be further transformed towards making a greater discursive impact in this regard. This would also require greater involvement in gender issues at all levels, rather than the perpetuation of a dependence on state feminism to take care of the goals of feminism.

8.3.1.6 *Exploring and harnessing discursive openings for change*

The second main strategy I would recommend to address the implications of this research relates to the central discourses I have flagged around journalistic agency (for example, assigning greater agency to readers), values (for example, of objectivity) and roles (such as the democratisation of the media through tabloid). While I do not support the appropriation of a positivistic discourse towards attempting to gender transform the media (as has been done in some cases of gender and media activism), I have also highlighted the fact that discursive schisms exist between the discourses of media professionals and most gender and media activists and researchers. Therefore, another strategy would be to use **existing discursive openings as a point of engagement** to promote change.

A Foucauldian conception of discourse recognises the power of various *existing* discourses in processes of developing *"new"* discourses (or rather, the continual *evolvement* of existing discourses). Therefore, carefully considering and engaging with contemporary journalistic discourses can reveal opportunities to strategically challenge prevailing gender constructs counter to transformation. As I have already said, it is not only the master's tools that need to be reworked but also often the ways in which they are wielded, to avoid mere patriarchal re-appropriation.

Many sites of discursive connection between the interests of gender activists and the professional values of journalists could be used as the platform for greater engagement. Within the news, for example, the use of complicit discourses can be more effectively interrogated and journalists' awareness surrounding the positionality of their writing can be further developed through interaction and discussion. Discourses placing stories and facts at the centre of the news can also, for example, be engaged with among journalists and gender activists towards unpacking the concept of "objectivity", and in so doing draw greater attention to the subtler (gendered) discursive mechanisms operating within the paradigm of objectivity. In addition, issues related to the power of spatial discourses in balancing and assigning greater power to different voices could provide a source of greater discussion between activists and media professionals. Strategic interventions aimed at highlighting subtler applications of positionality and agency could therefore help to raise awareness among media professionals and dilute the power and masking functions of many current discourses of objectivity. At the same time, gender activists can learn more about the complexities of engendered media production, journalistic approaches and journalistic imperatives towards revised strategies.

Most participants expressed significant scepticism at the idea of the media promoting one particular "line" in terms of gender issues, which was largely regarded as counter to the media's roles of reflecting the public's interests, maintaining objectivity and indeed reflecting a diversity of voices representative of South Africa within the media (democratisation of the media). However, as the research also shows, editorial and journalistic decisions were made in accordance with particular social values, and spatial discourses played a significant role in orienting newspapers in a particular way while maintaining values such as freedom of speech. There are, therefore, opportunities inherent in the political will of media professionals that can both reflect journalistic values and build on gender transformation discourses. Thus, as part of the second main strategy I would argue that endeavours to gender transform the media should include **creating/opening/capitalising on existing spaces amenable to gender transformation**.

Feature writing, for example, provides particular opportunities for the deconstruction and unpacking of gender relations. The importance of "informal" spaces highlighted through this research could also be looked at more closely in terms of the weight given to different discourses through spatial discursive devises. In so doing, the existing shape of newspapers

can be appropriated in ways that can stimulate more engagement with gender transformation issues. The constitution of a progressive gender lens, again, would provide a foundation in shaping the forms and functions of didacticism already existing within the media, away from the appropriation of didacticism to support the status quo. Here again, the issue of political economy re-emphasises the need for broader discursive shifts towards widening the scope and opportunities for this approach within a highly competitive market.

8.3.2 Contributing to the fields of gender studies and feminist media studies in South Africa

As I have discussed elsewhere in this thesis, the lines between fields of study of relevance to this research are fluid. Feminist media studies, in particular, is a transdisciplinary field, lending itself to affiliation with a variety of fields out of which it can operate simultaneously. My own location, and the location of this work, is therefore in some respects difficult to determine. I have aimed to contribute to feminist media studies in South Africa in particular, as well as more broadly to gender studies (especially those with a focus on media and representation).

I have aimed to make both theoretical and empirical contributions to the field of engendered media studies, with the purpose of stimulating debate and deepening understandings of engendered news production. In terms of theory, what I have "contributed" cannot be described as "new" in that it is built solidly on the back of previous work by a multitude of different writers and researchers. The contribution itself lies mainly in the way in which I have adapted the theories of others for more direct application to the media in South Africa and under more distinct frameworks that can help in identifying, denoting and understanding feminist trajectories in both media analysis and the media industry. By integrating key aspects of what I have conceptualised as progressive feminist theory into the analysis of both the newspaper texts and the interviews, I hope to contribute to the evolvement and strengthening of engendered media studies in South Africa beyond some of the perceived and described limitations of liberal-inclusionary feminist approaches, as well as those that focus on gender "stereotypes". In addition, I hope that the frameworks I have used offer a useful platform from which to begin to identify, name and therefore also discuss the lags and progress of feminist trajectories in South Africa and its media.

Empirically, I have endeavoured to explore an area thinly addressed in South Africa to date, namely the understandings and discourses of gender and gender transformation among print news professionals themselves, and in particular how they view their role within the production of engendered texts. By triangulating the analysis of news texts and the interviews with print news participants about their role in engendered media production, empirically this research has also been able to contribute in quite a unique way to feminist media studies in South Africa. I have finally also used the linkages between the theoretical frameworks I have developed, the newspaper content findings and the interview findings towards highlighting discursive consistencies and inconsistencies that may signal potential areas for strategic intervention in the future, making this in part a political project stemming from an empirical and theoretical one.

This academic work, in the form of a thesis, will probably make more of a contribution in terms of a political project within the field of feminist media studies in South Africa than, for example, in the media industry or the gender and media activism environment in South Africa. However, I have attempted to draw out and distil key strategies in a way that makes this work malleable to potential future applications with regards to the latter. Ultimately, this research will, I hope, challenge researchers, activists and the newspapers under study (and possibly beyond) to look anew - and in a more nuanced, detailed and self-reflexive way - at how gender and media issues are being tackled in South Africa.

8.3.3   And where to from here? Vistas for further research

Further research can strengthen the value and potential implications of these findings and suggested strategies. As I have mentioned, the nexus between gender and race (including associated issues of class and "culture" in South Africa) did not emerge strongly in this research, in part because I did not pursue these issues through the research design for both political reasons and reasons related to ability. However, this is an important area that could be further explored from a progressive, critical feminist approach. What may be particularly interesting and important are critical African feminist perspectives on the ways in which race and (racialised) class inequalities, and both material and cultural imperialism, have shaped and are shaping current day media representations of femininities and masculinities, especially in tabloids.

While I have highlighted the significance of diverse trajectories in gendered media representations of the "public" and "private" spheres, I have also briefly pointed to the limitations of this dichotomised conception of spheres. For the purposes of this research, this distinction has been useful in highlighting important issues. However, the linkages and the relationship between these spheres in feminist trajectories in the media could be interesting to unpack in greater detail, attending more closely to the ways in which they flow into and relate to one another.

Finally, the impact of political economy dimensions on the shape of the rise of tabloid media in South Africa (in my view representing both great opportunities and very problematic gendered appropriations of this emerging news form), merits further exploration from the perspective of the emerging market to which it is targeted. Many readers of the SS, for example, are first time newspaper readers. Clearly, the SS is offering something of value to a readership previously marginalised by mainstream media. As the triangulation of the analysis of interviews and newspaper content showed, looking at the question of gender transformation in the media from diverse angles is important towards unpacking the issues, especially since discourses are discontinuous and in processes of often tense negotiation with one another. Many interesting statements were made by participants about the value proposition of tabloid, alongside my own (quite scathing) analysis of certain aspects of tabloidised news in terms of gender. The value proposition for readers, then, is an important angle to further explore in relation to gender transformation.

Grabe, Lang and Zhao (2003) have also shown in their research that audiences respond differently to news content according its formal features, so that "form has been shown to transform content" (Grabe, Lang & Zhao, 2003: 409). In particular, they have observed in relation to tabloid news that the meanings derived from it by audiences are shaped by the tabloid form so that, for example, audiences tend to evaluate tabloid features as less believable. In addition, Grabe and Kamhawi (2006) have shown that gender can impact on the ways in which audiences receive the same news form and content. Given the impact of form on meanings derived by audiences or readers, in the case of print news media exploring the relationship between readers and emerging tabloid newspapers in South Africa could be very relevant to assessing tabloid newspapers' social significance. As such, I think it would be very useful and interesting to pursue the nexus between gender transformation, news media democratisation (in a context of great inequalities and divisions

reflected in newspaper readership statistics) and tabloidisation in South Africa, from the perspective of the readers and by exploring the ways in which they derive and interact with meanings from tabloid news features.

8.4 Conclusions

As I have said, South Africa represents a case of unfinished revolution with both opportunities for and constraints against comprehensive gender transformation. Great strides have been made in terms of inequality but these have not been enough to stamp out or, in some cases even to make a dent in, pervasive and highly gendered social injustices and inequalities. The media has its role to play and, in the context of ongoing change, opportunities need to be seized and limitations challenged. I believe that re-examining the foundational discourses and goals around gender transformation is central to this process, both within and beyond the media.

Nuanced issues need nuanced approaches, and a progressive gender lens within South Africa's media industry and wider society is, I believe, vital to making this broader shift in approach. Revolutions are not won on inclusion alone, but on the wave of collective shifts in thinking.