

6 GENDERED DISCOURSES IN DISCONTINUITY: ANALYSING NEWSPAPER CONTENT

6.1 Introduction

In trying to establish the kinds of discourses shaping print news professionals' approaches to representing gender in the media, I also needed to get a sense of what kinds of gendered products are being produced in the three newspapers. Asking print news professionals' perspectives on representation was something I considered important, as studying representations themselves do not tell us much in terms of why or how they were created (the discursive sources and sites of negotiation). However, I also realised that the perspectives I would be getting from participants would be oriented within the research situation towards meeting the perceived expectations of my research (contrasted, for example, with the ways in which these perspectives would be oriented towards an editor or fellow journalist), and that beyond this these perspectives could, in any case, translate in a variety of ways into the actual texts produced. Discourses are contested, negotiated and contextually oriented. Therefore, they could emerge and manifest differently in different situations, and the content of newspaper texts themselves can therefore not be predicted by what is derived from interviews. In fact, some of the most interesting insights into the research question, I felt, would be derived from the triangulation of data on newspaper content and interviews.

From previous research experiences, I also knew that gender is seldom articulated, experienced or understood on a day-to-day basis through the trope of "gender". As such, research on gender can often be greatly enriched not by only asking participants about gender, but by seeing how gender is manifested in their lives - indirectly - in different ways, including how they speak about gendered experiences that they may not identify as "gender" moments or issues. This is further entrenched by the fact that discourses surrounding what "gender" means will vary, and may well include only a certain limited set of issues from the subjective position of participants (compared with, for example, a different sense of what "gender" involves from the subjective position of a feminist researcher). Therefore, "gender issues" in media representation that may not come up in the interviews

could well come up in an analysis of newspaper content. Looking at newspaper content from a gender perspective would thus offer rich data for triangulation with interviews.

This Chapter is concerned with establishing key discourses in the content of the newspapers under study. First, I present a brief introduction of each newspaper in the study, including basic information pertaining to the age, ownership and editors of the newspapers at the time of the research, as well as a reflection on circulation and readership. My aim here is *not* to give a statistical analysis of the figures presented, but rather to reflect on some of the overall trends or interesting features as considered from a layperson's perspective. These are aimed at creating a broad sense of the market for each newspaper. Thereafter, an analysis of newspaper content is presented. This analysis has been framed by an attempt to advance what I call progressive feminist analysis of gender and gender transformation through media texts, as outlined in Chapter 2, and (as mentioned in Chapter 5) includes both rudimentary counts and thematic, critical discourse analysis.

6.2 Participating Newspapers: A Profile

6.2.1 Sunday Sun

The SS was launched in 2002 and is owned by Media24. As communicated during the interviews, the SS was launched in part in response to the emerging popularity of a new South African tabloid newspaper, Sunday World, owned by another media group. According to the interviews, Sunday World was having a negative impact on the readership numbers of the Media24 publication City Press. The SS was therefore created to tap into the market gap the Sunday World had brought to the industry's attention, and to compete within this market segment. Following the success of Sunday World and SS, a number of other tabloids were created in South Africa. The identity of SS as a "tabloid" newspaper is one that interview participants claimed as well. The editor at the time of research was Phalane Motale, the founding editor of the newspaper. During the latter part of the research period, however, the deputy-editor, Linda Rulashe, had stepped in as acting editor.

SS's readership figures have risen steeply in its time on the market, and at the time of the research it was the fastest growing newspaper in the country. Even during the empirical

research period, circulation rose rapidly. Between July and September 2007, circulation was at an average of 195,592 per month, and by the period of October to December 2007, this number had jumped to 401,132, a 105.1% increase. In the latest readership²⁹ figures received at the time of the research (for February to November 2007), SS's average monthly readership was just shy of 3 million, standing at 2 846 000. This readership figure should also be seen in the context of the immense growth in circulation for the SS in the latter part of 2007; the *readership* figure only shows a *yearly* average, but in the context of the very steep rise in *circulation* at the end of 2007, the readership at the end of that year would also most likely be significantly higher. Suffice it to say, however, these figures indicate that circulation is increasing swiftly and there is also a relatively high ratio of readers per newspaper bought.

Readership for the SS is very much concentrated on the black South African market, and many readers of the SS are first-time newspaper readers³⁰. 92.59% of the readers of SS are black, with 4.64% coloured, 0.74% Indian and 2% white. 90.23% of readers are first language speakers in black African languages. While newspapers are generally a media form associated with higher LSM groups (in contrast to, for example, radio), the SS has a concentration of readers in the lower LSM groups 1-6 (66.9%), which includes households with very little disposable income and very little access to modern amenities and services. Only 8.82% of readers fall into the highest LSM category 9-10 compared to, for example, ST (29.87%) and the MG (40.04%). Similar trends can be observed related to figures reflecting monthly household expenditure. While SS's readership includes higher income groups, it is largely concentrated on lower-income groups, especially when compared to the other newspapers in the study.

While most readers of the SS reside in urban areas, a greater percentage of SS readers live in small towns and villages (38.4%) than readers of the ST (26.81%) or MG (14.35%). 58.05% of readers have either a matric³¹ (41.71%) or a tertiary education degree (16.34%), with 41.95% of readers having completed some high school. 50.32% of readers are not working, due to unemployment (27.2%), retirement (4.01%), being a "housewife" (4.43%) or being a student (14.69%). The number of student readers is slightly higher than the other

²⁹ Readership differs from circulation. It refers to the number of people who read the newspaper, whereas circulation refers to the number of newspapers sold.

³⁰ This information comes from both interviews and the website <http://www.southafrica.info>.

³¹ Final year of high school in South Africa.

newspapers in the study, but the unemployment level is also significantly higher. These characteristics will be discussed later in reference to the findings of the interviews.

In terms of age, the readership of the SS is quite evenly spread between the three age groups spanning the ages of 16 and 49 years, which constitutes 88.68% of the readership. 11.31% of the readers are 50 years or older. The age group 16 to 24 years (26.91%) is proportionately higher than in the other newspapers (20.92% for the ST and 16.49% for the MG), while the over 50 years age group (11.31%) is proportionately lower than the other newspapers (19.84% for ST and 20.77% for the MG). The age groups in between differ by no more than 4%. The sense emerging from this, as will be reiterated in relation to the interview findings, is that the SS has a larger youth market than the other newspapers in the study.

Finally, in terms of sex, the SS's readership reflects a similar pattern to the other newspapers in the study, all of which have a roughly 60/40 percentage of male and female readers respectively. 41.46% of SS's readers are female and 58.54% are male. A summary of figures for the SS as well as the other participating newspapers is tabulated at the end of this Chapter.

The SS's readership reflects an appeal to market groups generally marginalised from mainstream popular print news, particularly in terms of class and urban/rural location. In addition, it reflects a relatively youthful market. This could perhaps be linked both to its low price relative to other weekly newspapers as well as its tabloid style, which incorporates more colloquial language and human-interest stories reflecting township and rural experiences more than other newspapers.

6.2.2 *Sunday Times*

The Sunday Times is, by a wide margin, the largest weekly and national newspaper in South Africa. The newspaper is over 100 years old, established in 1906 and owned by Johnnic Communications. With a recent circulation (for the period of October to December 2007) of 504 401, it is however being followed closely by the growing SS, which had a recent circulation of 401 132. Readership for the ST is just shy of 4 million at a 3 820 000 monthly average for the period of February to November 2007. This represents about 8% of

the South African national population³². While I could not access figures regarding what percentage of newspaper-reading South Africans read ST, 2005 figures show that 40% of adults in South Africa read newspapers³³. This only pertains to adults, not to the national population, so that considered in this light the readership for the ST among newspaper-reading South Africans would be very high. The editor of ST was Mondli Makhanya during the time of the research. Prior to his appointment as editor of the ST in 2004, Mondli Makhanya was the editor of the MG.

The ST and the editor himself were embroiled in controversy during the time of the research resulting from the publication of provocative information regarding the Minister of Health (as mentioned in Chapter 4). This controversy, and the attendant legal issues for the newspaper and the editor, contributed to the atmosphere in which the interviews took place. I was also not able to get hold of the editor himself for permission to undertake the study, since he was extremely busy, and eventually went through the managing editor, Herbert Mabuza, who was put into contact with me through the deputy editor at the SS. The ST is known for its investigative journalism, and its front-page stories frequently set the news agenda for the week and stir national debate. According to a study by Media Tenor South Africa (2007) for 2006/2007, the ST was the most influential newspaper in South Africa when measured by the extent to which other media sources quoted it. This is an important indicator of agenda setting powers within the media, and can lead to the attraction of talented staff, advertising and news breaking sources who want their stories to be published in a widely influential publication (Media Tenor South Africa, 2007).

Racial demographics for the readership of the ST are quite spread, with 64.63% black, 8.87% coloured, 6.81% Indian and 19.69% white. In terms of the proportions of these figures to national demographics, while the majority of the readership is black, the black readership is still proportionately lower than the roughly 80% of the South African population that is black, while the white and Indian readership for ST is higher than the national average. The majority of ST readers (61.96%) also have a black African language as their home language. This is, however, considerably lower than the SS. 28.35% of readers are English (almost identical to MG's figures) and 9.69% are Afrikaans, both considerably higher than the SS's figures for the same languages.

³² The national population is about 47.9million, which I rounded off to 48 million. This figure was released mid-2007 and was found on the website www.southafrica.info.

³³ AMPS 2005RA, at <http://www.markettree.co.za/south-african-statistics.php?statistics=newspapers>.

The majority of readers come from urban locations (73.19%), a higher figure than the SS and a lower figure than the MG. Figures regarding average household expenditure indicate a correspondence between higher incomes and urban areas, and LSM categories are also based in part on rural/urban localities. The numbers of readers working full-time and those not working are roughly equal, at 44.71% and 44.01% respectively. Of those not working, 17.28% are unemployed, 8.14% are retired (the highest percentage for retired readers of all three newspapers), 12.12% are students and 6.47% are “housewives” (also the highest percentage of the three newspapers). In terms of education, readership was quite spread among the three categories of “some high school”, “matric” and “tertiary” as the highest educational level attained. Figures pertaining to a tertiary level of education (31.83%) were significantly higher than the SS (16.34%), but also significantly lower than the MG (48.61). Figures for household expenditure and LSM groups for the readership were also relatively evenly spread, hovering roughly between 20% and 30% each, except for the lowest LSM group 1-4 at 13.01%. This is perhaps not surprising given the relatively high price of the ST compared to the SS, which would make the ST comparatively inaccessible for people in the LSM group 1-4.

Readership by age shows a cluster of readers (59.24%) between the ages of 25 and 49 years old, and lower readership numbers (40.76%) among readers younger than 25 (20.92%) and older than 50 (19.84%). In terms of sex, as with the other newspapers in the study the approximate ratio of 60/40 percent to men and women respectively is maintained, with 42.54% of readers being female and 57.46% being male. The readership among women is the highest for the ST, but only marginally so.

Overall, the ST appears to appeal to a wide range of readers, in terms of race, class, age and gender. While it is out of reach for most in the lowest LSM group, it is interesting that it appeals to roughly the same number of readers in the highest LSM group (9-10) as the second lowest (5-6) which represent significantly different socio-economic positions and lifestyles. As will be discussed in the findings, the identity of the ST is one that is based on straddling a variety of locations and market segments, with various sections in this comparatively long newspaper appealing to different readers.

6.2.3 *Mail & Guardian*

Formerly the Weekly Mail, the MG was established in 1985 at what was known as the height of resistance to apartheid. It developed an international reputation as an apartheid critic, and was suspended in 1988. As discussed in the literature review, funding for “alternative” newspapers was quelled during the apartheid era and led to various newspapers folding. The Weekly Mail was one such newspaper facing closure, but avoided it by entering into a partnership with the Guardian of London. In 1995, the Guardian became the majority shareholder in the paper which was renamed the Mail & Guardian. In 2002, the Guardian reduced its shareholding to 10% and sold the majority (87.5%) to Zimbabwean entrepreneur, Trevor Ncube’s company, Newtrust Company Botswana Limited. In 2004, Ferial Haffajee was appointed the new editor of MG, becoming South Africa’s first woman newspaper editor. She is on the board of directors for Gender Links, which deals with gender and media issues in South Africa, and has become quite prominent as an expert and topical speaker on South African politics, the media, and various social issues on numerous radio and television shows. In March 2009, while this thesis was being finalised, she announced her decision to leave the MG to become editor of the up-and-coming newspaper City Press. She left MG at the end of June 2009, after helping to achieve the MG’s highest circulation to date.

The MG’s circulation and readership, while having increased, is still much smaller proportionately to the other newspapers in the study due to its niche market status, with recent circulation figures of 51 842. Similar to the other newspapers in the study, however, the ratio of readers to number of copies sold is relatively high, and readership for the MG stood at 467 000 in 2007. This represents roughly just under 1% of the national population, but in view of the roughly 40% of adults who actually read newspapers this would be a higher percentage among newspaper-reading South Africans. While its readership is relatively low compared to the other weeklies, the MG has been ranked as the second most influential newspaper in South Africa, following the ST, when it comes to other media sources quoting it (Media Tenor South Africa, 2007).

In terms of readership demographics, the MG has the highest percentage of white readers (26.77%) and the lowest percentage of black readers (60.39%) of the three newspapers included in the study. However, its readership is still predominantly black, with 9.85%

coloured and 2.78 Indian. The MG also has the highest percentage of readers in the highest LSM group 9-10 (40.04%) and the lowest percentage of readers in the lowest LSM group 1-4 (7.07%) of the three newspapers in the study. In terms of the latter, the purchase price of the MG would be one contributing factor as with the ST (as well as the fact that the MG's writing is known to be in a style that would tend to be most accessible to people with high levels of formal education). Similarly to ST, too, is the fact that there are still relatively high numbers of readers in the LSM groups 5-6 (24.41%) and 7-8 (28.48%). While the readership is clearly concentrated among higher LSM groups, it is indeed interesting to note nearly a quarter of readers are in one of the lower LSM groups (5-6).

Education related figures for readership are also linked to the higher economic privilege of MG readers compared to the other two newspapers in the study, with nearly half (48.61%) of the readers having had tertiary education compared to 16.34% for the SS and 31.83% for the ST. Only 17.99% of readers had not received matric. The MG also had the highest percentage of readers working full-time (62.1%) and the lowest percentage of unemployed readers (6%). In terms of students, the MG lagged slightly behind the other newspapers with 10.06% of readers being students compared to 14.69% for SS and 12.12% for ST. The readership percentage residing in urban centres was also the highest among the three newspapers (85.65%).

In terms of age, the MG readership is quite well spread, although like the ST the readership in the lowest and highest age groups was the lowest, with 16.49% of readers between 16 and 24 years, and 20.77% of readers over 50 years. Readers between the ages of 25 and 49 years constituted 62.74%. In terms of sex, the MG also had a roughly 60/40 ratio, with 59.96% of readers male and 40.04% of readers female.

Overall, the MG readership represents a privileged demographic in terms of class, linked to higher levels of education, urbanisation, household expenditure and employment. While the MG has the highest white readership of all the newspapers in the study, it is also the only newspaper out of all South African newspapers listed by AMPS with such high levels of black readership *correlating* with such high levels of 9-10 LSM and low levels of 1-4 LSM. With the Volksblad as the exception, all newspapers with as high a percentage of 1-4 LSM readership as the SS had levels of black readership at least as high as the MG. The MG is

thus unique in that it has both a high black readership and a majority readership with higher economic status.

6.2.4 *Summary of Newspaper Profiles*

The newspapers in the study represent a diverse range of readership demographics. The SS is associated with demographic characteristics linked more to the lower income groups, MG with a far more economically privileged readership and the ST with a more even spread in terms of class and income. Of course, these are broad summaries of the information provided, and a diversity of readers is linked to each newspaper.

All of the newspapers have a majority of black readers, but with the highest levels of black readership in the SS and the highest levels of white readership in the MG. As already discussed, while high levels of black readership are generally associated with higher levels of readership in the lower LSM categories due to South Africa's apartheid legacy (as is the case with the SS), the MG has both strong linkages to a class elite and to a black readership. While there was no information to indicate more directly the link between class and race readership percentages within the MG, it appears that more than any other newspaper the MG may be marketed to a black elite.

With regard to age, all newspapers had more readers in the 25 to 34 years and 35 to 49 years categories, and lower readership levels in the 16 to 24 years and 50 years and over categories. However, the SS had the highest levels of readership among the youth.

In terms of sex, there is a roughly 60/40 ratio between male and female readers respectively in all newspapers. How sex as a variable relates to other variables such as class, race and age within each newspaper is unknown, and as such there is little more to be gleaned from this figure. The figures for all three newspapers are summarised in Table 4 below. Having established a broad sense of each newspaper's market, Chapter 6 will look at representations of gender within the three newspapers, drawing on the theory and methodology discussed in Previous Chapters



TABLE 4: PARTICIPATING NEWSPAPER READERSHIP AND CIRCULATION FIGURES

| | | Sunday Sun | Sunday Times | Mail & Guardian |
|--|----------------------|-------------------|---------------------|----------------------------|
| <i>Period: October to December 2007</i> | | | | |
| Circulation/sales | | 401 132 | 504 401 | 51 842 |
| <i>Period: February to November 2007</i> | | | | |
| Readers | | 2 846 000 | 3 820 000 | 467 000 |
| Sex | Female | 41.46% | 42.54% | 40.04% |
| | Male | 58.54% | 57.46% | 59.96% |
| Race | Black | 92.59% | 64.63% | 60.39% |
| | Coloured | 4.64% | 8.87% | 9.85% |
| | Indian | 0.74% | 6.81% | 2.78% |
| | White | 2% | 19.69% | 26.77% |
| Age | 16-24 | 26.91% | 20.92% | 16.49% |
| | 25-34 | 30.5% | 26.52% | 29.55% |
| | 35-49 | 31.27% | 32.72% | 33.19% |
| | 50+ | 11.31% | 19.84% | 20.77% |
| First language | Afrikaans | 5.06% | 9.69% | 13.92% |
| | English | 4.71% | 28.35% | 28.69% |
| | Any black language | 90.23% | 61.96% | 57.39% |
| Rural/urban location | Cities | 61.6% | 73.19% | 85.65% |
| | Small towns/villages | 38.4% | 26.81% | 14.35% |
| Working status | Full-time | 36.37% | 44.71% | 62.1% |
| | Part-time | 13.32% | 11.28% | 9.64% |
| | Not working | 50.32% | 44.01% | 28.27% |
| | Housewife | 4.43% | 6.47% | 4.5% |
| | Student | 14.69% | 12.12% | 10.06% |
| | Retired | 4.01% | 8.14% | 7.71% |
| | Unemployed | 27.2% | 17.28% | 6% |
| LSM Group | LSM 1-4 | 22.03% | 13.01% | 7.07% |
| | LSM 5-6 | 44.87% | 29.11% | 24.41% |
| | LSM 7-8 | 24.31% | 28.01% | 28.48% |
| | LSM 9-10 | 8.82% | 29.87% | 40.04% |
| Education | Some high school | 41.95% | 30.39% | 17.99% |
| | Matric | 41.71% | 37.77% | 33.4% |

| | | | | |
|------------------------------|------------------|--------|--------|--------|
| | Tertiary | 16.34% | 31.83% | 48.61% |
| Household expenditure | Less than R4000 | 44.73% | 27.85% | 17.13% |
| | R4000 - R9999 | 32.96% | 29.37% | 28.91% |
| | R10 000 - 15 999 | 13.77% | 20.86% | 19.91% |
| | R16 000 or more | 8.5% | 21.91% | 34.26% |

6.3 Gendered Discourses: Analysis of Newspaper Content

6.3.1 *Broad Themes Emerging*

While numerous other studies have been undertaken to assess newspaper content in terms of gender, this component of the research is distinguished, firstly, by its focus on the three newspapers involved in the study, secondly, the comparison and contrast between them and, thirdly, an attempt to move beyond quantifying broader gender stereotypes towards an assessment of the diverse manifestations of gendered constructs in the texts (a progressive feminist approach). As detailed in the methodology, a high level of interest was paid to variations, discontinuities and contradictions in gendered discourses, taken to be important signifiers of contestation and negotiation around the numerous discourses circulating at various levels of society. In this regard, this component of the research highlighted some powerful ambiguities in terms of the trajectories of gender transformation in South Africa as represented in the media.

It should be noted at the outset that the findings presented in relation to both component one of the research and component two (the interviews) have been grouped according to relatively broad themes. This has been done in part due to the extent to which smaller sub-themes continually overlap and interact with one another, making the separation of these sub-themes by headings likely to obscure these links and stunt the discussion. I have aimed, however, to highlight key sub-themes variously under broader themes as well as in the final and concluding Chapter.

By way of broad introduction, the analysis of newspaper content generated interesting findings regarding the often differential treatment and representation of **private/intimate gender relations** (for example, romantic relationships) on the one hand and **public gender**

relations (for example, women's political representation) on the other³⁴. The former generally lagged significantly behind the latter in terms of gender transformative discourses. The analysis also highlighted the **diversity of spaces** available in newspapers, and the differences between what they can and do achieve in terms of discursive politics around gender. Different **discursive devices** were involved in constructing gender in various spaces of the newspapers, and through the research process I came to identify these discursive devices broadly as "advocate discourses", "complicit discourses" and "spatial discourses".

By "**advocate discourses**" I refer to the more overt forms of gendered discourses that openly support, promote or advocate particular gender relations and identities. "**Complicit discourses**" are those that do not openly advocate a particular position, but discursively comply with certain discourses around gender, whether those of the implied or assumed readership or of the sources quoted in the news article. The foundation of this "complicity" in discourse is an assumption that the views inferred in the language are shared by the readership. In news pieces, a complicit discourse is often presented on the surface as merely conveying the "facts", or the views of others, and is therefore a powerful discursive tool within the parameters of "news". "**Spatial discourses**" refer to the discursive meanings conferred not through language as such, but through the prominence, location and format given to particular topics, images or views. In other words, perspectives and values are inferred via the decisions made around the spatial positioning and prominence of certain voices. These discourses often operate in cooperation with advocate and complicit discourses, and act as powerful conduits for the overall gendered orientation of the newspapers. A single textual unit could involve two or more of these discursive devices, which often overlapped and worked in conjunction (or even contradiction) with one another.

The extent and nature of gender-related news content appeared to be significantly impacted upon by **current events and media campaigns**. For example, gender as a socio-political issue was more prominent during the duration of this research sample, at the end of 2007, due to the 16 Days of Activism campaign in South Africa (25 November to 10 December). There was a sharp decline in gender-related content in the final newspapers assessed at

³⁴ I make the distinction between the "private" sphere and the "public" sphere cognisant of their inter-connectedness and even the gendered implications of reinforcing a dichotomy that many feminists have asserted reinforces the lesser value assigned to those spheres associated with the "feminine". However, while the distinction between the two is neither simple nor unproblematic, the data highlights a significant difference in terms of the treatment of more private and more public realms that consequently necessitates a simplified distinction here for the purposes of the research.

the beginning of 2008 when this campaign ended. While the sample was limited, the anecdotal evidence in this regard (that outside of gender-related media campaigns the media tends to be very silent on many important gender issues) are was supported by another South African media study (Media Tenor South Africa, 2006) as will be discussed later in greater detail.

The **style of the newspapers** had an important impact on the kinds of gender discourses emerging. “**Tabloidisation**”, as a key feature of two of the newspapers under study, was linked more often to discourses that **naturalised gender differences**, sometimes through the vectors of “culture” and religion. A “critical” newspaper style³⁵, on the other hand, was more inclined to employ discourses that politicised gender, focussing on socio-political and structural gender differences rather than essentialising them. Again, the style and associated discourses were not differentiated between newspapers only, but often between different spaces within the newspapers.

Finally, discourses emerging in newspaper representations flagged certain **broader discourses around gender and transformation**, linking the discourses in the newspaper to macro-level shifts (and tensions) in gender discourses. These often apparently contradictory or conflicting discourses appear, firstly, to reflect aspects of the *broader trajectories of feminism* in South Africa and, secondly, to suggest the **multiplicity of normative gendered discourses** being negotiated in contemporary society. The characteristics of the individual newspapers are described and briefly compared, reflecting further on these broad themes, below.

6.3.2 *From the Podium to the Bed: Gendered Discourses in the Sunday Sun*

6.3.2.1 **General style, content and discursive orientation**

A relatively short newspaper, the SS is about 40-50 pages long and in “tabloid” format. The newspaper style can also be described as “tabloid” (a label supported by the editors and journalists interviewed), with a concentration on celebrity and entertainment news. Local celebrity scandal and human-interest pieces are the “heart” of the news in SS (see image below). In particular, local black entertainment and sports celebrities (singers, television

³⁵ What this means will be explicated in more detail in the findings related to individual newspapers below.

actors, soccer players and so on) form the main focus of celebrity news. Human-interest stories, on the other hand, centre largely on working-class, black South Africans, particularly those living in urban centres and townships. This is the discursively implied readership of the newspaper³⁶. The appeal to working class readers is a relative anomaly in press markets, which are generally targeted at higher LSM categories due to the relative cost of newspapers compared to other media forms such as radio.



Image 5: Tabloid news content, Sunday Sun, 19 August 2007

As mentioned in Chapter 3, a tabloid format and a tabloid style of writing and content do not always co-exist. The SS, however, is both in a tabloid format and a tabloid style. In addition, that its nameplate is in red associates it with a group of newspapers termed “red tops” (such as *The Sun* and the *Daily Star*), known to be of a more colloquial writing style, dense with pictures and marketed as more sensational³⁷.

³⁶ This readership is largely reflected in the readership demographics, but the *discursive* orientation is focused on here, therefore the use of the phrase “discursively implied”. The “implied” readership is that which the newspaper’s selection of issues and writers connotes, and is therefore not taken to necessarily mirror the actual readership demographics.

³⁷ Again, this information is drawn broadly from discussions with people and from the popular site Wikipedi.com, which I use cautiously here and have buttressed with academic work.

Considering the size of the newspaper, a variety of spaces have been created beyond those for news, including weekly sections for jokes, letters, the “Sun Babe” (or “page-three” pin-up pictures of young local women who have submitted their pictures for selection), opinion columns, sport, cars, careers/labour, consumer issues, the role model of the week and local churches. The space and tone of the celebrity news and weekly sections for careers, the weekly role model and cars section (most often in a price bracket at odds with the lower LSM readership demographics) convey an “aspirational” discourse; while the readership discursively implied in the newspaper is that of working class black South Africans, the spaces created and discourses employed promote and support the achievement of middle and “upper” class status.



Image 6: “Aspirational” discursive content, Sunday Sun, 19 August 2007

In addition, there is a substantial discursive emphasis on disparities between the “haves” and the “have-nots”. The plights of working class people living in townships are often highlighted in human-interest pieces, and career/labour sections highlight issues around jobs such as domestic work and mining. The extract below is an example of one such discourse.

“Everyone fantasises about telling the boss and the bank manager where to get off. But for the other millions of us unfortunate souls, it is back to the grindstone” (Sunday Sun, 9 December 2007).

The various spaces created in the newspaper, including significant input from columnists and readers (in the forms of letters as well as human-interest stories brought forward by readers) create the sense that interaction with readers is an important element of the newspaper’s identity and appeal. The discourse is colloquial and shaped by the local readership of the newspaper (for example, “*Jozzi*” for Johannesburg”, “*gogo*” for grandmother and “*bucks*” for money), adding to the sense that the newspaper aims to speak to its readership “where they are at”³⁸. Human-interest pieces and those that reflect on the private struggles of both celebrities and “ordinary” readers add to the sense that the newspaper aims to personalise its content. These features mirror those associated with tabloidisation, involving shifts towards narrative, sensational, personalised and conversationalised discourses (Connell, 1998).

Interestingly, in addition to a discourse that stresses secular achievements, a strong religious discourse is present, with often-conservative³⁹ viewpoints being proposed through the vector of Christianity (examples of which will be discussed below). Significant room is given in sections of the newspaper made available for comment and opinion in this regard, from the letters page to a weekly column by Bishop Sibiya and a “Sun Churches” page. The gendered discourses manifested in these spaces were of considerable interest, echoing and reinforcing some strong anti-feminist backlashes advanced through essentialist religious discourses.

Overall, the newspaper reflected a variety of often-contradictory discourses, from those promoting gender equality, on the one hand, to those objectifying women and representing an anti-feminist backlash on the other. In some respects, the SS appeared to aim to promote spaces for women to be visibilised as leaders and career persons. On the other hand, of all the newspapers reviewed for this research the SS was also the most

³⁸ More in this regard will be discussed in relation to the interviews.

³⁹ I am conscious of the variable application of this word, and am using it here to connote values broadly associated with conservatism, such as the valuing of nuclear family structures, heteronormativity, anti-abortion views, conceptions of sexuality as belonging within the confines of marriage and so forth. What these conservative discourses entail, exactly, will be further elaborated through examples and discussion.

heteronormative, and most palpably reproduced “traditional” hegemonic masculine constructs.

6.3.2.2 Counts of textual units with gender relevance

The counts undertaken for the SS are presented in Table 5 below.

| TABLE 5: RESEARCH COMPONENT ONE COUNTS FOR THE SUNDAY SUN | | | |
|--|-------------------------------|--------------|--------------|
| | Main News⁴⁰ | Other | Total |
| Gender relevance | 20 | 34 | 54 |
| Women in leadership | 4 | 4 | 8 |
| Homosexuality | 3 | 1 | 4 |
| Gender based violence | 2 | 10 | 12 |
| Women’s issues | 2 | 0 | 2 |
| Gender constructions | 14 | 21 | 35 |

These counts are presented here quite briefly, as their particular importance from a gender perspective is mainly derived from looking at them qualitatively as well (looking qualitatively at the content and variation within each “count”). Thus, qualitative findings that enrich understandings of the significance of these counts will follow in the next section.

The counts shown above reflect an overall predominance of textual units of gender interest in the latter part of the newspaper given to opinion, comment, columns, letters, careers and so on. In particular, constructions of gender are particularly strong here. Interestingly, small textual units and “light” entertainment in the newspaper (such as jokes in the jokes column and letters from readers) accounted for a fair number of these gender constructions, indicating that they are often conveyed through “informal” spaces and not merely the “news” in newspapers. Gender based violence was also prominent as an issue in the latter part of the newspaper, although this also appeared to be linked to the 16 Days of Activism, since the first week in January (not falling under the auspices of the 16 Days of Activism) accounted for none of the textual units dealing with gender based violence.

⁴⁰ In the case of the SS, the “news section” was identified as up to page 10.

Homosexuality in the sample newspapers was primarily covered in the news sections. Two of these involved male celebrities who denied that they were homosexual and one involved a transvestite who was planning to have a sex change. The one mention of homosexuality in the latter part of the newspaper was made in a religious column decrying laws allowing abortion in South Africa, in which same-sex marriages were briefly drawn into the argument as what the author perceived as another example of poor legislation passed by the new democratic government.

As discussed in the methodology, the category of “women in leadership” was particularly difficult to apply, and particular caution is therefore needed in assessing the significance of these counts. However, at a qualitative level I observed that there appeared to be a concerted effort in the SS to include and promote women as politicians, community leaders and sportspeople through various methods. These included, for example, using images of women regularly in the careers/labour sections of the newspaper and including women’s sports features in every issue reviewed here (something neither of the other newspapers in the sample did). “Women’s issues” counted here involved advice on labour issues with particular relevance to women, such as domestic work.

6.3.2.3 Discussion and examples of discourses in the Sunday Sun

As mentioned above, the increased representation of women in public spaces appeared to be part of the SS’s deliberate endeavours through a variety of mechanisms including spatial discursive devices. While written texts are important, the overall visual messages of newspapers regarding the roles and statuses of women in different spheres can also be very powerful.

As will be discussed in more detail in relation to the ST, any gender transformative discourses at a language level can be symbolically negated to an extent by dominant visual representations that contradict them. In terms of gender equality in public spaces and leadership positions, the SS discursively represented women as operating successfully in these spheres through spatial discourses.

While complete gender parity in this regard did not appear to be in place, there were significant efforts visible in certain aspects of the visual construction of the newspaper and special features presented towards conveying women as active participants in the public

spheres of politics, industry, “the office” and so forth. The images below provide examples of this.



On the other hand, however, gendered discourses surrounding the “private sphere” and the relations between men and women, for example, intimate or romantic relationships, marriage, sex and so forth, were far less progressive. This came through particularly in the more conversational, interactive and “informal” parts of the newspaper (such as columns and jokes) although it was also present in the news pages. Gender differences and conflict, in these discourses, were portrayed as natural and inevitable, and gender relations were represented as fraught, highly sexualised and, above all, framed by normative heterosexuality.

In fact, constructions of hegemonic *masculinity* in SS were asserted with particular regularity and intensity through both activist and complicit discourses in news texts. Overall, I had the sense that when it came to articulations of gender *relations*, specifically, most of this was done with an implied male reader in mind, or at the very least with a readership (male or female) that internalised the power of hegemonic expressions of masculinity. Some of the most prevailing and problematic constructions of masculinity to be represented were the following:

- Men are highly sexed;
- Sex is a priority for men in their relationships with women;
- Men are highly predatory when it comes to sex;
- Men have no control over their sexual desires;
- Men cheat, and this is usually the natural consequence of sexual dissatisfaction caused by their (female) partners;
- Demonstrating (hetero)sexuality and sexual prowess is central to demonstrating masculinity;
- Men are naturally heads of households - to undermine this role is to emasculate them;
- Men are often victims of destabilised gender relations brought about by feminism;
- Men are often victims of women's manipulation and their emasculation of men;
- Men are not as naturally communicative as women;
- Men must be "macho" and not show sensitivity or emotion; and
- Men are the symbolic and practical leaders of the nation.

Some alternative discourses around masculinity did emerge, however:

- It is men who perpetrate gender based violence, and therefore it is men who should take responsibility in preventing it;
- Men should take greater responsibility in the domestic sphere when it comes to family;
- Men resist women's emancipation because of patriarchy, and need to recognise the importance of gender transformation for all.

In contrast, these were some of the problematic constructions of femininity that emerged:

- Women are temptresses;

- Women are manipulative and sometimes even evil;
- Women are discardable objects for sexual gratification;
- Women constantly crave, need and desire male sexuality - their sexuality is realised through (penetrative) sex with men;
- Women use men for monetary gain;
- Women talk too much and nag men too much;
- Beauty in a woman is important (and should be commended, even if she is in a public position based on leadership and intellectual abilities);
- Women are primarily responsible for marital bliss (if a man cheats/hits/hurts it is because she drove him to it); and
- Women are victims of gender based violence.

Again, some alternative discourses around femininity did emerge:

- Women are crucial leaders in their communities;
- Women are an integral part of the workplace;
- Women can be powerful and influential public figures; and
- Women survive and overcome injustices such as gender based violence and sexual harassment.

These statements represent simplified or condensed messages coming through in newspaper texts. Some examples of interesting cases of gender constructions will therefore also be discussed here.



Image 8: Complicit discourses of heteronormativity, Sunday Sun, 12 August 2007

The article shown in Image 8, posted on the fourth page of one newspaper issue in the heart of the celebrity news coverage, is an example of a complicit discourse of heteronormativity and of masculinity as demonstrated (and in need of demonstrating) through heterosexuality. In the opening line, we are told that the male music celebrity has “spoken out about the trauma of being labelled gay, when he says he is in fact straight”. We are then told that the “hunky” celebrity was hospitalised and nearly attempted suicide due to “nagging questions about his sexuality”. The article conveys his assertion that he can “prove” he is straight and quotes him as saying: “I would pull my pants down to show my manhood when people asked if I was a girl or boy or both”.

While the journalist has not overtly stated that heterosexuality is “normal” or “natural”, there are two interesting discursive forces at play here. One is that, editorially, such a story was selected. That the celebrity was not assumed heterosexual is framed as a tragic and unjust incident, and that he feels the need to publicly assert his heterosexual orientation is implicitly framed as newsworthy. Discursively, then, the mere selection of this as “news” is heteronormative and implies a masculine need to “defend” heterosexuality.

Secondly, while the journalist is drawing on the celebrity’s own words, the text that does not directly quote him is complicit with his assertions. For example, to say that he has “spoken out about the trauma of being labelled gay” implies a level of agreement that it would (or should) in fact be traumatic. The heading employs the linguistic imagery of having “balls” to represent heterosexuality, discursively complying with the celebrity’s stated conflation of the male sex with male heterosexuality. The celebrity himself employs the term “manhood” to represent his penis, and articulates sexual orientation as evidenced through physical sex (“when people ask if I was a girl or boy or both”). The heading, not directly quoting the celebrity, is discursively *complicit* in the way it also conflates physical sex with sexual orientation, naturalising and normalising heterosexuality. The images selected for the article - one of which is of the celebrity surrounded by young women - is also complicit in supporting the celebrity’s concern that his sexual orientation be known.



Image 9: More complicit discourses of heteronormativity, Sunday Sun, 2 December 2007

Another example of a complicit heteronormative discourse is in the article shown in Image 9, on the left side of the page, regarding a transvestite's plans for sexual reassignment. Again, language selection in the unquoted text complies with a heteronormative, homophobic discourse. Firstly, it is stated that Bheki is seeking a sex change and "is blatantly open about it", implying that it would be something one should be ashamed of. Secondly, subtle discursive mechanisms are also employed to patronise or undermine Bheki. For example, the journalist repeatedly refers to Bheki as "he", despite Bheki's quoted assertion that she identifies as a woman. This may be a common and even predictable approach given pervasive social and discursive resistance to the distinction between sex and gender (not to mention the serious levels of prejudice against, and misinformation about, transsexual people). However, whether a conscious or unconscious language choice, it discursively rejects Bheki's self-identification. This is a gender-political act. In addition, despite the fact that Bheki is quoted as saying she can no longer be classified as gay, the opening description of her is as "gay". The extract from the article below is also very revealing:

“*Ke mme ha ke ntate* (I am a woman and not a man) and I behave as such’ he emphasised to the Sunday Sun this week, with a voice thick as that of Barry White’s” (Sunday Sun, 2 December 2007).

Again, Bheki’s gender self-identification is condescended upon by following her statement about identifying as a woman with a tongue in cheek reference to a masculine voice. The subtext reads something akin to: “You say you are a woman, but really you are not.” Interestingly, the journalist later expresses a somewhat different discursive orientation in asserting that “in a country where gay and lesbian issues are still largely taboo, especially among blacks, he has broken new ground by speaking openly about his procedure.” This offers a good example of discontinuity in discourse, where the “official” line advocated is a more liberal one of diversity and tolerance, while another discourse, complicit with the implicit views associated with the readers, repeatedly emerges.

Moving to examples from the columns section, one weekly column, in particular, repeatedly drew upon highly hegemonic discourses of masculinity, particularly regarding sexuality. This column portrays (fictional or non-fictional) stories around township and rural life, with a tongue in cheek tone, colloquial language mixing local languages and a style that implies they are stories of men and for men. The story-telling style is suggestive of a fraternal setting, where men exchange entertaining tales of their adventures. There is a strong discursive implication that the reader understands the meanings of these stories, with the implied reader being, among other possible things, mobile, working class black South African men⁴¹.

In terms of gender, specifically, pervasive discourses around masculinity centre on male (and female) sexuality. Masculinity is represented as highly sexualised, almost animalistic in the implied lack of control over or mediation of sex drive. (Hetero)sexual displays are figured as central to masculinity. As in the previous examples discussed, this is again often articulated through physical sex, with regular references to the size and functioning of male genitalia acting as metaphors for hegemonic masculinity (“balls”, “manhood”). Male genitalia are also figured as “tools” through which to perform and prove masculinity. The extracts below provide examples of this.

⁴¹ This is my own impression, and is contestable.

“Pudikabeka started going on about how his wife always complained that his manhood had shrunk over the years..... Themba, the bloody rascal, even went as far as coaxing poor Pudikabeka to lay his tools on the table so that the men could decide if the wife had a fair case or not” (Sunday Sun, 13 January 2007).

“Hahaa, it was Christmas time again, and the miners were heading home to empty their balls after a long year away from wives, girlfriends, concubines, lovers and *heeeiii*, everybody” (Sunday Sun, 2 December 2007).

While women only play side roles in the stories portrayed, the ways in which feminine sexuality is constructed serves to symbolically accentuate and legitimate constructions of masculinity. In particular, of the columns reviewed, women were mostly portrayed as sexual objects. As objects, they were not always represented in an entirely passive way, but sometimes as sexually demanding and in an almost constant state of craving for the male sex. Despite a kind of agency depicted with regard to women’s sexuality, in my opinion it does not emerge as an empowering discourse for women. Instead, the discursive implication is that women exist primarily as sexual objects through which men actualise their masculine identity. Furthermore, women’s sexuality is framed as something that can only be actualised through heterosexual sex.

“Years later he fled to *Jozi* when a neighbour found him helping himself to her donkey. The old lady, a widow, got so jealous that the fit young man was wasting energy on a donkey that she hauled him into her hut and bonked him to a pulp” (Sunday Sun, 9 December 2007).

“And that’s how, they say, he got his Ndebele name, because one lady from the tribe got such a good service from Mahlangu that she bestowed the name on the man” (Sunday Sun, 9 December 2007).

This emphasises the ways in which constructions of gender are shaped and reliant upon contrast with, and actualisation through, one another, making gender analysis that looks at masculinities and femininities in an integrated way important.

Overall, the sexual interactions between men and women are figured as narcissistic performances rather than part of a broader and more intricate set of relations. Even an account of what appears to be coercive sex is depicted with nonchalance.

“Anyway, Mahlangu had this naughty habit of helping himself to the mamas who sell stuff at the train station. You see, the old ladies were not allowed to sleep at the station, so they had to keep Mahlangu warm. Hey, that Mahlangu, they say was popular with the old mamas.” (9 December, 2007)

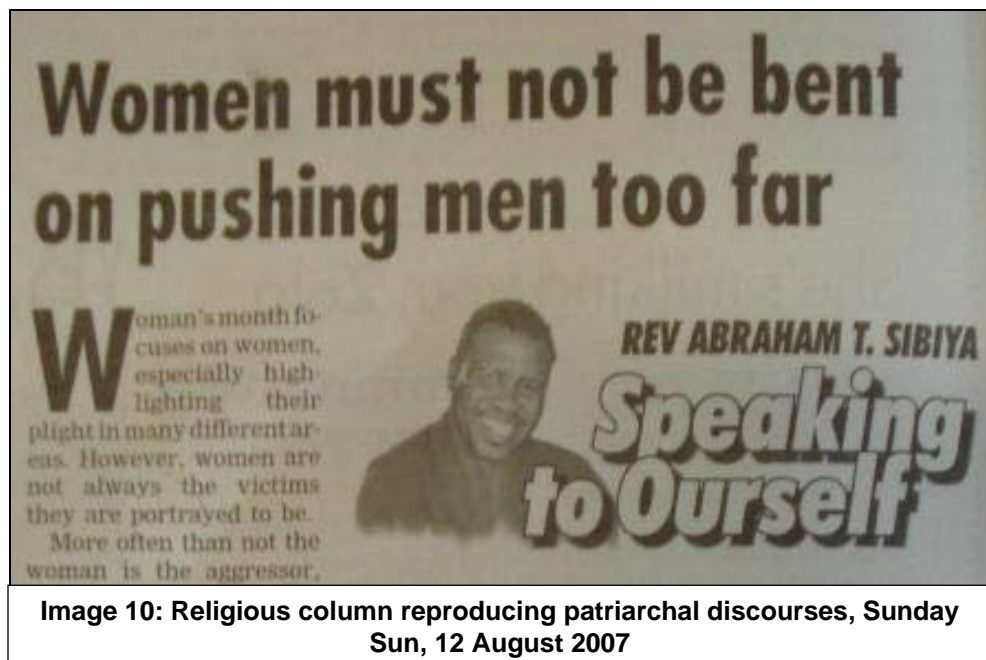
The above extract disturbingly portrays coercive sexual encounters - coercive in the sense that they are implied as a form of blackmail or exchange in a highly unequal set of power dynamics. Yet, the women are framed as being grateful for, or sexually benefiting from, these experiences, with the reference to the man as “popular with the old mamas”. In this way, not only are the women objectified and implicitly urged to accept a patriarchal sexual dynamic, but their own sexuality is rendered not as autonomous, but shaped largely by male displays of heterosexuality. In other words, the meaning, value and function of their sexuality is implied as being to demonstrate and applaud male heterosexuality. The story is told in a way that prides the male’s ability to perform sexually and demonstrate his masculinity with the women. This column is an example of prevailing discursive orientations that centralise masculinity (and the demonstration thereof) as natural, sexual and essential. This is done in part through an appeal to a “memory” of days gone by (“those were the days”), and through a kind of cultural expression laced through with gender.

As I have already stressed in Chapter 5, I do not attempt to explain the intricate intersections of historicized notions and experiences of race, class and gender (critical constituting factors in gender relations in the South African context as elsewhere). However, an analysis of these texts could, I believe, be greatly deepened through the layering of an integrated race, class, “culture” and gender lens, well-informed by and contextualised in South Africa’s colonial and apartheid history. I mention this again here because these columns in particular appear to invoke, imply or appeal to “cultural” foundations for the gender values depicted through the narrative, and the tales themselves are very much woven through with a sense of shared history and identity, located in colonial and apartheid migration and labour among other things. As such, a further analysis of issues of race, class

and “culture” as they interact with gender, of which I do not consider myself capable, would certainly deepen understandings of these discourses.

Moving on to another example, a weekly column by Bishop Sibiya, while ostensibly quite different to the column above, also afforded some powerful examples of gendered discourses being reproduced in opinion sections of the newspaper. There are many examples to draw from, but I will limit the ones presented here to those related to the issue of gender based violence. Around Women’s Day and the 16 Days of Activism, several columns were published regarding the issue of domestic violence. While the SS included various news pieces and statements about the need to stamp out widespread gender based violence in South Africa, these columns re-appropriated anti-gender violence discourses to reframe men as victims and women as aggressors. The extracts below from the column entitled “Women must not be bent on pushing men too far” exemplify this.

“Women’s Month focuses on women, especially highlighting their plight in many different areas. However, women are not always the victims they are portrayed to be. More often than not, the woman is the aggressor, driving the man to resort to violence and abuse” (Sunday Sun, 12 August 2007).



He continues to frame male aggression as natural and unchangeable, shifting the responsibility of gender violence onto the shoulders of women. Through naturalised gender constructs supported via biblical quotes and interpretations, Sibiya reasserts “traditional” gender roles as central to the prevention of gender violence. It is women’s responsibility, he asserts, to play the (God-ordained) gender roles they were assigned towards harnessing masculine traits - such as aggression - to their advantage. In this way, patriarchal relations are represented as inevitable and natural, and women encouraged to work within their parameters to prevent violence perpetrated by men.

“There are violent men out there whose anger can drive them to kill. Wisdom will not push their buttons but will harness their strength to protect women rather than harm them..... So a woman must be careful not to dominate a man through the power of her tongue, especially when the man is not vocally disadvantaged. This is precisely why God commanded the woman to be submissive to her own husband. It was to avoid confrontation between these two formidable forces” (Sunday Sun, 12 August 2007).

To this effect, feminist ideals are fingered as the cause of gender violence, assuming gender violence was not a problem in a pre-feminist past. In this discourse, a natural, rightful gender order exists that, if challenged, debases both men and women. A return to this gender order is framed as being to the benefit of women, whose defiance against it has led to their own contemporary gender relations problems.

“Violence against women flared up when women, through movements like ‘women’s liberation’, chose the aggressive route rather than submission. Our grandmothers were far wiser than the women of today. They knew how to keep a home warm and their men content. They knew how to channel man’s aggression towards protecting them and their family rather than harm them. Today’s women seem to be skilled in bringing out the worst in men. No wonder there is so much violence and abuse against women and girls... Women can make or break a home. God gave them qualities to build homes and make them the envy of many. But if they assert their feminine rights instead of applying wisdom, they will live to regret it” (Sunday Sun, 12 August 2007).

This caveat delivered to women through the vector of religion (appealing to an essentialised, timeless notion of gender relations) obscures the agency of men in perpetuating gender based violence as well as the unequal power relations that characterise patriarchy. This, in a sense, disarms and *re-appropriates* the hard-earned advancement of anti-gender based violence discourses in society, discourses that are interestingly reflected elsewhere in the SS. This intra-textual contradiction in discourse reflects the general lag in gender transformative discourses around the “private” sphere and intimate relations compared to those pertaining to the public domain and official public rhetoric.

In response to this column, the editor issued a disclaimer in his editorial, cautioning readers not to take Sibiyá’s column as a justification for gender based violence. The editorial position taken to gender based violence around the 16 Days of Activism was also that it should be eliminated. More regarding the editorial perspective on this matter will be explored in relation to the interviews, since this column was in fact raised by the editor as an example of some of the gender-related issues arising for the newspaper. Suffice it to say here that the SS has made space for these kinds of discourses, alongside discourses that figure gender based violence as an unacceptable injustice perpetrated against women. It should be noted, too, that while the majority of gender constructions were achieved through complicit discursive mechanisms (distancing them from more official newspaper rhetoric around gender issues) these columns demonstrate instances of advocate discursive mechanisms against feminism and women’s liberation, and their inclusion is therefore of particular interest.

Another column by Sibiyá furthered the construct of women as manipulative and abusive through the wielding of sexual power. As with the previous column, this column again explicitly states that gender based violence is unacceptable, before embarking on a tirade against women in which they are framed, again, as ultimately responsible for men’s behaviour (such as infidelity). In this case, discourses challenging gender based violence were again re-appropriated towards the reframing of women as abusers and men as victims, equating instances in which women “deny” their husbands sex as instances of “diabolical” cruelty and “spousal abuse”. Men’s infidelity is asserted as men’s natural and only reasonable response to this “abuse”.

Interestingly, this column again frames problematic gender relations as the fault of women for turning against a God-ordained gender order, and the patriarchal context in which

women may resist, deny or avoid sex with their husbands is entirely sidestepped. The women's liberation movement is also fingered once again as the catalyst for skewed gender relations. The following extracts exemplify the constructions of femininity that are developed towards re-appropriating discourses against domestic violence.

“Some women can be cruel and evil beyond any description. They can be so abusive that it would make Idi Amin look like a saint..... Somehow, through the ages, it has appeared as if such afflictions by women on men are trivial and of no consequence..... One of the weapons women have used to punish men is denying them sex..... The scars suffered by men because of such afflictions are countless” (Sunday Sun, 19 August 2007).



Image 11: Religious columns with discourses naturalising (patriarchal) gender differences, Sunday Sun, 12 August 2007 (left) and 9 December 2007 (right)

At least two other columns by different authors in the SS in the four-week scoping period engaged in similar discourses that naturalised gender differences, called on women to take responsibility for the afflictions in their relationships and depicted feminine submission and desire to please men as central to maintaining peace in heterosexual relationships. In addition, letters in the letters pages ranged from those decrying gender violence to those framing women in the same narrow, misogynistic terms.

As discussed in relation to the case of Bullard (Chapter 4), columns (and indeed letters pages) can be a space in which certain views not generally acceptable in public spaces (“politically incorrect” or counter to dominant public rhetoric) can be more directly articulated. Columns can therefore serve to highlight certain tensions between public rhetoric and

prevailing privately held views. As the firing of Bullard also showed, however, the discourse of “free speech” in the media, allowing for more flexible discursive boundaries imposed on columnists, is still reigned in or checked by the social currency of certain discourses, and the editorial values and understandings around certain social issues. In other words, greater flexibility is allowed for, but there *are* still limitations to what can be printed under free speech, and these limitations tell us something about both editorial and wider social values and perceptions.

Bullard was fired for “crossing the line” through racist discourse. However, what strikes me as a highly misogynistic discourse in some of the columns reviewed here has not been filtered out but protected under the right to free speech given to columnists. The editorial leadership behind the two cases is not the same. However, it is interesting to note this as an illustration of how the parameters set on free speech seem to reflect the different trajectories of values and understandings around social prejudice and power relations. From my perspective, a “gender lens” would see columns such as these filtered out in a similar way to Bullard’s column, as an instance of the promotion of prejudice.

Highly gendered jokes - again depicting heterosexual gender relations as fraught and sexualised, and naturalising some of the same gender constructs discussed here - were also given significant space. The examples below are of three such published jokes.

“A rape suspect went to a sangoma⁴² to help him win the case. The sangoma made his penis vanish. He went to court and won the case because how can he rape if he doesn’t have a penis to penetrate? He went back to the sangoma happy and full of joy and wanted his penis restored, but when he arrived the sangoma was dead!” (Sunday Sun, 12 August 2007).

“A dying American soldier in a battlefield hospital in Afghanistan had a final wish: ‘How I wish I could kiss the American flag before I die.’ Extremely touched by the soldier’s patriotism, the nurse says: ‘I have a tattoo of the American flag on my butt. You may kiss it if you don’t mind.’ Soldier: ‘Of course, I wouldn’t mind. Thank you for fulfilling my last wish.’ The nurse took off her panty and the dying soldier kissed the flag. Soldier: ‘Thank you nurse. Would

⁴² “Traditional Zulu healer and respected elder” (<http://wordnet.princeton.edu/>).

you be so kind as to turn around so that I can kiss Bush too?” (Sunday Sun, 2 December 2007).

“In the beginning, God created the earth and rested.

Then God created Man and rested.

Then God created Woman.

Since then, neither God nor Man has rested” (Sunday Sun, 2 December 2007).

Integral to the above jokes are many of the same discourses that have threaded through other newspaper texts including, in particular, the message that relations between men and women are largely grounded in (and limited by) sex, and are generally fraught. It is very concerning that in the first example, gender based violence is trivialised to this extent. The joke does not convey an interest in whether the rape “suspect” perpetrated the crime or not, and the victim remains invisible. The perpetrator’s emasculation - as in a number of the texts already discussed, discursively equated with physical sex - becomes of central concern. His loss of ability to perform sexually is a focal point and the punch line of the joke over the possible rape. In addition, given that another article in the SS pointed to the fact that rape need *not* be perpetrated by penetration with a penis, it is concerning that a joke was published that employs a complicit discursive mechanism to suggest that this is beyond common sense.

In the second example, the performance of masculinity (in the laddish insistence of the soldier to sexualise and degrade the interaction with the woman) is once again prioritised as the core of the joke, and the woman rendered as the conduit for this. Finally, the third example echoes many of the discourses already discussed - discourses that naturalise a patriarchal suspicion of women, who are often framed as troublesome, and in this case again through reference to religious doctrine.

Interestingly, as can probably be ascertained from my *own* discourse in the paragraphs above, the jokes column was one of the most concerning and shocking to me. That columnists provoke and argue controversial perspectives was more predictable to me than the highly misogynistic discourses manifested in, and borne through, such a seemingly benign space as the jokes column. This was perhaps the most striking example of suggested complicity as a discursive mechanism, and represents the power of casually

articulated humour as a tool to express deeply-borne perspectives that may not be as utterable in other, more formal, discursive spaces. Furthermore, the jokes pages tended to paint a very dire picture of the relationships between men and women, a far cry from the pro-gender emancipation discourses articulated in editorial spaces and news on women's leadership.

This raises two difficult questions. Firstly, do these jokes in fact convey a trend in the perceptions of gender and gender relations held by readers, given that they are published in orientation to a particular assumed market and if so, what does this indicate about gender transformation trajectories in South Africa? Secondly, are these kinds of spaces that proffer an opportunity to reproduce discourses retrogressive to gender transformation the place in which inquiries into the role of the media should begin to focus? So much feminist critique and activism has been directed at the "news", yet it is in these spaces that many of the most interesting discursive gender politics are being played out.

After reviewing a series of gendered discourses I perceive as being problematic, let me also say that the "conversational" section of the newspaper *also* exhibited some alternative discourses that challenged these kinds of constructs towards gender transformation. The column represented in Image 12 below offered some challenges to constructions of hegemonic masculinity and was one of the most important spaces among the columns, jokes, and so on in which gender transformation was advocated.

In one article, indicated on the left, Botha attacks business entities for not doing more to fight gender based violence. The article indicated on the right, however, offered the most patent challenges to some of the dominant constructions of masculinity reproduced through the other columns reviewed in SS. Botha expresses outrage at an incident in which women were forced by men to wear skirts rather than pants. He accuses these men of being backward, and of representing a form of masculinity with which he will not associate himself. He also indicates that such displays of masculinity are counter to the goals and ideals of democracy.



In the discourses he employs, many of the discourses manifested in other columns of the SS are contested. By asserting that the perception and treatment of women as “perpetual minors” and as “in need of men’s so-called supervision or guardianship” counters certain discourses emerging in other (mostly religious) columns, in particular one that contends that women need father figures, a role their husbands should provide. He also attacks the use of “culture” as a discursive vehicle through which to justify patriarchy, a hot issue in South Africa at present (as discussed to some extent in Chapter 2). Botha quotes women’s views on the matter in the column, one of the only spaces in the columns in the newspapers reviewed where women’s own counters to patriarchal discourses are voiced. He further quotes another man in opposition to the forced ban on pants for women, and frames his perspective as a proud manifestation of a different (more transformed) kind of masculinity.

Finally, Botha encourages anger and action against gender injustice, a significant discursive counter to the submission called for in Bishop Sibiya’s columns. That this column is included in the same edition in which Bishop Sibiya argues that women are the abusers in relationships is a significant instance of discursive diversity and contestation. Where one discourse advocates submission and, at the most, feminine agency employed *within* the parameters of “traditional” gender constructs, the other (expressed by Botha) advocates loud voicing against such constructs. Of great interest, too, is the manner in which Botha employs complicit discursive mechanisms towards redefining masculinity. By referring to the men who tried to control women’s dress as “such idiots pretending to be men”, he too re-appropriates a popular discourse to further a new one; he appropriates the discourse of

naturalised masculinity (what it means to be a “real man”) - so often applied towards masculine constructs of domination - to reframe masculinity in a new way. This column exemplifies the manner in which discursive tactics can be applied towards a variety of gender political positions. It further demonstrates that the columns space can create room for gender transformative discourses and dialogue.

However, while this column (named *Men2Men Talk*) is the only instance of the voicing of women’s concerns over gender relations in the columns reviewed, all columns reviewed were written by men. This is not to suggest that men’s voices in relation to gender transformation are not very relevant and important; they are indeed from a progressive feminist perspective. However, women’s voices also need to be well positioned within the media from an epistemological perspective. As a powerful space for engagement, the columns may be a good area to attend to and cultivate in terms of gender transformation, both in respect to the power and room given to particular discourses and the voices offered up in these spaces.

As I have mentioned, the SS showed an overall high level of discursive contradiction and tension when it came to gender. At times, discontinuities in discourses between textual units were strikingly apparent when such texts were placed adjacent to one another, particularly when it came to discourses constructing ideal femininity. The simultaneous sexualisation of women and the liberal discourses asserting parity and women’s rights, particularly within the public sphere, were of particular interest. This also raised questions surrounding the gender transformative capacity of the tabloid, for which the sexualisation of women, especially in the “page-three” pin-ups, has almost become institutionalised. Image 13 below is an example of this kind of contrast on a single page of the SS. The “role model of the week” on the left is a woman applauded for pressing sexual harassment charges against a high profile politician and seeing them through, despite enormous pressure exerted upon her to drop the charges. By making her the role model of the week, resistance to pervasive patriarchal discourses that hold a young woman to be sexually available to men in positions of power is encouraged. On the right side of the page, on the other hand, is the monthly winner of the Sun Babe, discursively repositioning women under the male gaze, and placing value on their physical and sexual desirability and availability (to men).



Image 13: Discursive contrast in gendered representations of women, Sunday Sun, 2 December 2007

The sexualisation of women was also symbolically and spatially juxtaposed with intensified attention to the issue of gender based violence around the 16 Days of Activism. Reporting on incidents of gender based violence was varied in approach. Some articles represented instances of the kinds of gender based violence coverage that has long been the object of feminist critique. The gendered discourses in these articles were generally achieved through complicit discursive mechanisms. Other articles employed advocate discursive mechanisms towards highlighting and condemning gender based violence. Two contrasting examples are provided in Image 14 below.



Image 14: Contradictory discourses on gender based violence, Sunday Sun, 12 August 2007 (left) and 16 December 2007 (right)

The first example is the small article on the bottom left of the page with the headline “Explosive love”, which describes an attempted murder-suicide (in which the murder was not successful but the suicide was) in a trivialised manner. We are told that a man blew himself up with explosives after he “mistakenly thought he had killed his wife in a domestic tiff”. We are also told that neighbours picked his body parts off the lawn. On one level, one could argue that the man is being mocked for his actions. On the other, however, the attempted femicide is made indistinct and the import of his actions are trivialised.

A common feminist critique of news coverage is that gender based violence is often normalised due to the discursive impact of journalistic norms and ideals that value “bizarre” and “unusual” news over “everyday” events (Meyers, 1997). Femicide, in South Africa, has arguably reached such levels as to be regarded by some media professionals as “everyday”, and “bizarre” incidences in which sensational details (for example, those of flying body parts) and disruptions in common narrative trajectories (for example, that the woman survived and the man died) are therefore often selected for the news. This contributes to a discourse that normalises gender based violence. Linking the attempted femicide to a

“domestic tiff” further plays down the act and normalises it (a “domestic tiff” being part of “everyday” life). Furthermore, the man’s agency in perpetrating attempted murder is subtly obscured, and the framing of his death as the principle event in the news piece deflects from his actions and intentions of control over his partner. In Image 14 above, I have included the full page in which the article was located to show, too, the juxtaposition of coverage of gender based violence and a sexualised image of a woman representing a strong male gaze.

In the second example, on the right of the same page (Image 14), a new law enabling rape victims to compel their attackers to take an HIV test is reported on. To an extent, this article employs an advocate discourse by including information and perspectives that are not directly related to the new law being reported on, but that serve to place the law and the issue of rape in the broader context of advancing the rights of victims of gender based violence. It also employs more subtle, complicit mechanisms that imply consensus with the reader when reporting on the details of the issue. For example, we are told that after a “protracted” process the new law has “finally” been put into place. This opening statement immediately establishes the new law as overdue and progressive, as well as one that many would welcome. In addition, women’s rights groups are quoted regarding the prevalence of rape in South Africa, and the journalist asserts that “the definition of rape was until now narrow and outdated”. As such, discursive strategies of complicity and advocacy are employed to applaud the new law within a news reporting format. Again, I have included the advertisement for a penis enlargement product with the sexualised image of a woman alongside this news article to underscore the incongruity of discourses.

Overall, the discourses emerging in SS were highly contradictory. Intimate gender relations (for example, sexual, romantic and “domestic”) were a particular source of conservative discourses with strong anti-feminist backlash sentiments. “Informal” and religious spaces were especially powerful conduits for these discourses. Many SS readers, according to certain research participants, are Christian. It is interesting to note, however, that the spaces created for religion in the SS subscribe to a gendered discourse with a particularly strong anti-feminist backlash, which is not necessarily inevitable in all religious or Christian discourses. While there are probably numerous readers who may agree with such discourses, these examples raise the question regarding to what extent discourses in newspapers can and should reproduce particular discourses circulating in broader society.

As will become evident with the other newspapers reviewed, these particular discourses are filtered out through the editorial process in other newspapers. While newspaper columns, letters pages and so are in place to stimulate debate, put forward controversial views and engage with readers' concerns, editorial gate-keeping plays a role in limiting certain discourses. The SS appeared, for example, to push forward visual and spatial discourses around women's right and ability to lead in public spaces. Is it just a matter of political economy, creating space for discourses shared by readers, or do ideological and ethical concerns at editorial level limit the extent to which this happens? What does the discursive tension in the SS tell us, firstly, about this particular newspaper, secondly, about tabloid and, thirdly, about broader feminist trajectories in South Africa? Some of these questions will be explored through comparison with the other newspapers in this Chapter and in Chapter 7, where editorial and journalistic perspectives and discourses are unpacked.

6.3.3 *Investigations and Sensexualisations: Gendered Discourses in the Sunday Times*

6.3.3.1 General style, content and discursive orientation

The ST is the most widely circulated national newspaper in South Africa, with a readership of over three million people. It is a large newspaper with a number of sections and inserts, ranging from the Business Times, to Lifestyle, Metro and the ST magazine. The newspaper is formatted as a broadsheet, but with the inserts in tabloid format.

The ST represents an instance of very mixed journalism. On the one hand, it is known for its investigative journalism aimed at uncovering, in particular, fraud and corruption among government officials and various other powerful people and institutions in South Africa. Its front-page stories are well known, and one study named it the most influential newspaper in South Africa as a result of these kinds of stories (Media Tenor South Africa, 2007). This journalistic approach resonates with the view of the media's role as a "watchdog", and as such as a distinct political actor (raised in Chapter 4).



On the other hand, however, much of its content closely resembles tabloid, with sensationalised celebrity stories, human-interest pieces and stories framed by their appeal to the “bizarre” and “unusual”. This tabloid style extends not only to content but also to the highly visual presentation, with many (gendered) images including those which, in addition to a small caption, form an entire textual unit or what I have called a “picture-story” (i.e. a story told through pictures, without prose accompanying it). In addition, the ST includes a range of both “serious” social commentary and education around critical social issues such as HIV/AIDS, and “light”, entertaining features and snippets. This resembles what is sometimes dubbed “edutainment”, incorporating a didactic but informal, conversational and light-hearted approach.

In Image 15, the divergence of content can be seen. This page contains an article regarding HIV/AIDS among children and makes suggestions on how to approach issues such as the treatment of HIV-infected children and how to discuss children’s HIV-status with them. The article highlights thorny and challenging social issues, but also incorporates colloquial language in the headline and a cheerful image. At the bottom of the page, a playful news piece regarding the question of

whether to greet with a kiss on one cheek or both is included. This illustrates the variety of stories contained in the ST, as well as the often-colloquial style.

While the front page investigative and political news pieces resemble a more “traditional” reporting style, the tabloid style of writing and presentation is also very influential in many parts of the newspaper. The way in which ST appears to attempt to straddle the polarities of what is perceived of as “hard” and “soft” (or tabloid) journalism is captured in one of the participants’ descriptions of the ST style as “quali-pop”, namely a mixture of “quality” and

“popular” journalism. While this assertion will be discussed in more detail in the section detailing interview findings, it is perhaps helpful to note here that this description of style resonates with debates around tabloid versus “real” journalism discussed in Chapter 4, and appears to represent an actively sought location at the interface of these styles of journalism, both of which have a particular readership appeal.

The implied readership of the ST is middle-class. This is largely predictable given the pricing of the newspaper and the demographics associated with newspapers on the whole. The discursively implied racial readership is quite spread, but very urban, and the Metro section is directed at a Gauteng readership in particular. An “aspirational” discourse resembling that found in SS is also present in parts, although aimed more at a middle-class readership discursively portrayed as aspiring to the upper echelons of upper-class-ship. Features and images portraying the lives of the extremely wealthy are frequently incorporated to this effect.

In terms of gender, like the SS the content and discursive orientation is relatively mixed, with textual features ranging from more progressive gender discourses to those exhibiting what I perceive as highly problematic gender constructions. Similarly to the SS, the latter often involved gendered constructions linked to the “private sphere”, including inter-personal relationships and sex. In the range in between the two poles of quite progressive and quite problematic gender discourses, were also textual units that captured subtler issues around gender representation in the media. For example, some features raised important gender issues without adequately addressing them in terms of gendered implications, or framed them as (un-gendered) social-economic phenomena (to be discussed in more detail later on).

Sensationalist, tabloid-style pieces were often particularly problematic in terms of gender, employing a vast amount of (highly gendered) focus on sexual relationships. My impression was that while gender relations in the private sphere more broadly were not cast in a problematic way as was often the case in the SS (for example in the columns discussed), sexuality *in particular* was cast as often fraught, and central to the interpersonal relationships between women and men. This was true in particular of tabloid-style celebrity pieces. Romanticism between women and men was also portrayed (and is also a potentially interesting site of gender analysis) but outweighed by the sexualisation of relationships

between them⁴³. Furthermore, while discourses embraced sexual diversity to a greater extent than those in SS - and did not suggest as strong an undertone of homophobia - they were still largely heteronormative.

As with the SS, the political coverage in the ST represents a more “traditional” reporting style and language, and there was no real discursive difference detected in the sample at hand regarding the way in which male and female politicians were represented. While I noticed some features in this regard, the sample size (even at a qualitative level) did not allow for any projections as to significance. For example, I noticed that one news headline mentioned a female politician by her first name (not the case with male politicians), but I was not able to determine in this sample if this was a common feature of coverage of women politicians or linked to the fact that she, like many women politicians in South Africa, had a long double-barrel surname that might not work easily in a headline. However, while I could not detect any particular gendered discursive orientations in the treatment of male and female politicians, political news coverage (as with the SS) was largely male-dominated. As will be discussed later, this could also be attributed to the dominance of male politicians in the political arena itself (despite the fact that South Africa has among the highest number of women in political posts in the world) as well as the particular political issues dominating the news at the time, namely the ANC succession race between male politicians Jacob Zuma and Thabo Mbeki.

The ST, like the SS, represents an instance of diverse and often contradictory discourses, and problematic gender discourses clustered in (but not exclusive to) the more “informal”, colloquial and conversational spaces in the newspaper. However, in contrast it is more secular, and gendered discourses are conveyed less through vectors of religion than through westernised discourses of sexual liberation and sexualisation. Importantly, unlike the SS, in the sample assessed no spaces were created, or allowed, for the use of overt anti-feminist messages. Instead, the lags in gender transformation in the ST were more linked to the visual culture of the newspaper, the gendered colloquial discourses of tabloid and, in some cases, the mere sidestepping or neutralising of gendered issues.

⁴³ That is not to say that romanticism and sexuality are discreet, just that those articles that focused on romantic love were more concerned with the relationship and emotions within it as a whole, while articles about sexuality did not to nearly the same extent.

6.3.3.2 Counts of textual units with gender relevance

The counts undertaken for the SS are presented in Table 6 below.

| TABLE 6: RESEARCH COMPONENT ONE COUNTS FOR THE SUNDAY TIMES | | | |
|--|-------------------------------|------------------|--------------|
| | Main News⁴⁴ | Other | Total |
| Gender relevance | 25 | 35* | 60 |
| Women in leadership | 4 | 4 | 8 |
| Homosexuality | 2 | 1 | 3 |
| Gender based violence | 7 | 0 | 7 |
| Women's issues | 0 | 2 | 2 |
| Gender constructions | 18 | 32 ⁴⁵ | 50 |

Tabloid style stories and images contributed to the predominance of textual units with gender relevance in the latter part of the newspaper. The “back page”, containing celebrity gossip centred almost entirely on sex, was a prolific source of constructions of gender counted in the latter part of the newspaper. Gender constructs also entered here through readers’ letters, particularly around the controversial issue of the Women’s League’s nomination of Jacob Zuma as ANC president.

The gender constructions in the main news section of the paper varied in part due to the varied spaces provided in the news section (which unlike most front pages of newspapers already includes letters, columns and short news snippets, for example). Therefore, these constructions were counted in forms such as a letter addressing sexism, an article on Jacob Zuma’s wives, a gender stereotype of a swooning woman employed in a tongue-in-cheek column, a picture-story of a sex worker who offered to donate some of the proceeds of her work to charity and an article on celebrity marriage. As can be seen at first glance, these examples of gender constructions tend to be centred on the “private” sphere, including sexual and marital relations.

With respect to women in leadership, the counts above reflect a balance between the news section and latter sections of the newspaper. Two of these textual units were of particular

⁴⁴ In the case of the ST, the “news section” was identified as up to page 16.

⁴⁵ In the last issue reviewed, the “back page” was missing. The number of articles with gender relevance and gender constructions was therefore significantly lower for this last issue, also impacting on overall counts.

interest, since they raised the wage and wealth gaps between men and women in South Africa. However, while they raised the fact that very few South African women are among the country's wealthiest, and that women still earn much less than men, they did not address the gendered reasons behind this.

The textual units involving constructions of homosexuality included two stories regarding gay celebrities or prominent people, one of whom was getting married and one who was said to have gone public with his sexual orientation. The last count referred to a gendered stereotype of homosexuality raised as part of another article. As with the SS, gay women were not portrayed in any of the textual units counted. While the discourses employed were rhetorically more embracing of diversity in sexual orientation and not openly homophobic, the very sparseness of the textual units representing gay relationships, as well as the fact that in one news piece "coming out" constituted celebrity gossip, represents a discursive feature in and of itself, and the resultant discourse is a heteronormative one.

6.3.3.3 Discussion and examples of discourses in the Sunday Times

Some of the most patent gender constructions emerged through the overall visual culture created on the pages of the ST. Scanning the images included in the newspaper, an overarching visual discourse is shaped, which largely signifies women as objects for sexual and visual consumption, and men as agents in public spheres such as politics, business and sports. The "back page" phenomenon, involving celebrity gossip, usually concentrated on sex, as well as various other entertainment and celebrity-related images, contributes significantly to this visual portrayal of women. Images as part of political coverage did include women, but images of men continued to dominate these spaces. Images of sports and business protagonists were predominantly male. Even the images of women in the business pages were of women as sexualised consumables, with the "back page" phenomenon incorporated into the Business Times as "The other back page".

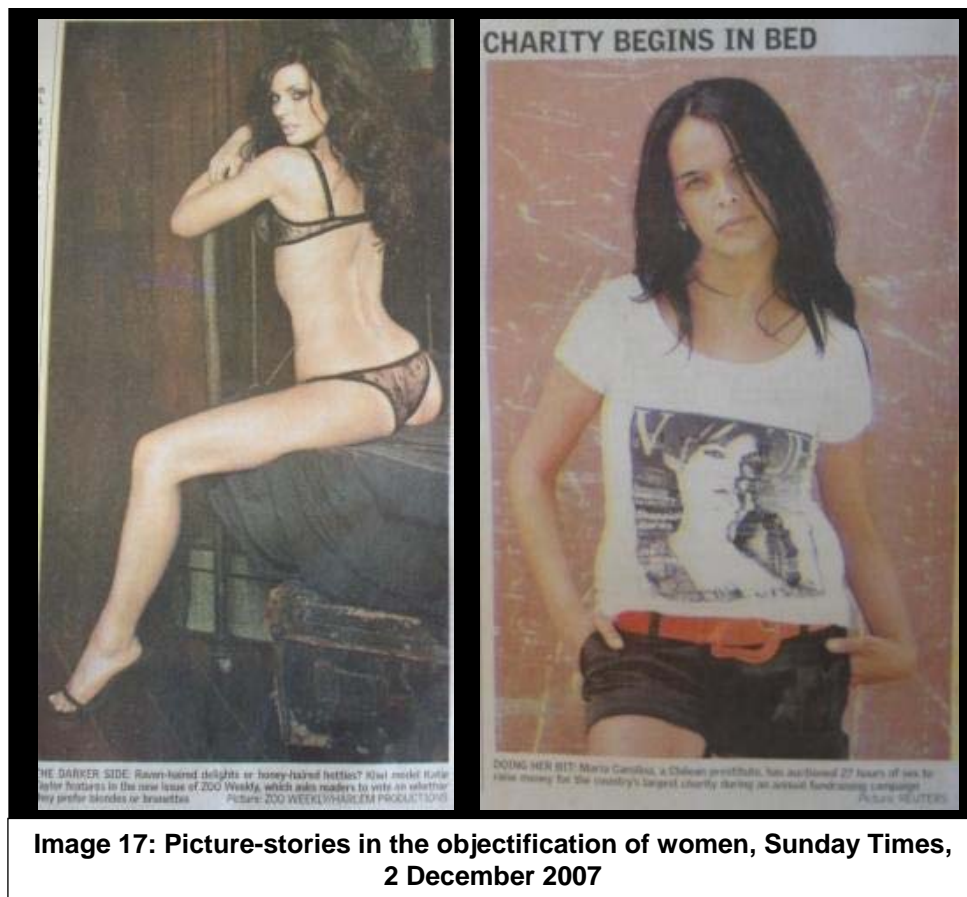


Image 16: Gendered constructs of consumers and consumables in the business section, Sunday Times, 2 December 2007

Image 16 above shows three pages from the same edition of the Business Times, including the front page, back page and another page from the inner content of this supplement. The front page and back pages are dominated by images of young women in the role of implicitly consumable marketing attractions. On the front page it is as Victoria Secret lingerie models flown as part of a “PJ party” to a fashion show by Virgin Atlantic. On the back page it is as waitresses for a new restaurant, specifically employed for their role in (sexually) attracting heterosexual men to the establishment. Given that the context is a supplement on business issues, (young) women in these images are discursively portrayed as consumer items within the business market rather than as business people.

The pattern for the Business Times included sexualised images of young women on *all* back pages and three out of four front pages in the sample, thus rendering the bodies of women as vain and decorative attractions to the supplement itself. This further implies the readership's interests as heterosexual and male, constructing and reinforcing a "male gaze". In the main body of the supplement, images of men in business roles dominate. The powerful spatial discourse created through these visual patterns in one that dichotomises the roles and values of women and men as passive/consumed and active/consumer respectively.

That women are the main focus of picture-stories, and that this often includes stories centred on sex, goes towards reinforcing a discourse that holds women to be passive, silent, sexualised and visually accessible. The images below are of picture-stories, in other words, stories that are principally conveyed with the use of an image accompanied by a short caption.



In the image on the left, the caption reads: “THE DARKER SIDE: Raven-haired delights or honey-haired hotties? Kiwi model Katie Taylor features in the new issue of ZOO weekly, which asks readers to vote on whether they prefer blondes or brunettes”. In the image on the right, the caption reads: “DOING HER BIT: Maria Carolina, a Chilean prostitute, has auctioned 27 hours of sex to raise money for the country’s largest charity during an annual fundraising campaign”. In both cases, the “story” is constituted primarily of an image and limited text, framing these women as primarily for visual consumption. The discourses in the caption texts also affirm the notion of women as consumable. There were very few picture-stories involving men, but a good number involving women. This reinforces the notion that women (especially young women) are objects to be viewed without reference to a deeper context. The construction, performance and consumption of feminine sexuality, here, is also implicitly undertaken through a heterosexual male gaze, implicitly defining and reinforcing notions of masculinity as they do notions of femininity.

Other sources of overt gender constructions constituting women as principally sexual and visually consumable are complicit gendered discourses in tabloid-style articles. The colloquial language of the tabloid pieces is not only highly gendered, but framed in androcentric and heteronormative terms. Some of the words used to describe women and men on the back page of just one of the newspaper issues in the sample were as follows:

Women: “sexy society darlings”, “toy joy”, “playmate”, “girls”, “buxom”;

Men: “playboy”, “geek” (Sunday Times, 13 January, 2008).

In another issues were some of the following descriptions:

Women: “stunning model”, “beauty queen”, “beauty”, “busty Dutch lass”, “model girlfriend”;

Men: “formula one ace”, “track idol”, “speed king”, “randy tennis ace”, “German multi-millionaire” (Sunday Times, 2 December 2007).

When listed like this, the gendered discursive orientation of the colloquial descriptive language used in these celebrity gossip tabloid pieces is quite evident. Masculinity is constructed as active, powerful and linked to material and public achievements. Femininity is constructed as centred on the value of beauty, sexualised and constituted in relation to

the relationship with men (as their girlfriends, playmates etc.). While these descriptions do also, to a certain extent, mirror the patriarchal structures and relationships between the men and women being reported on, the ways in which these relationships are *described* demonstrates a discursive *complicity* with these patriarchal relations, reinforcing the gendered constructs around men and women.

In these tabloid style articles, heterosexual sex is represented as the axis around which the relationships between men and women pivot. The sexuality of men and women are both portrayed through a heteronormative lens, but constructed in different ways. Male sexuality is linked strongly to the notion of sexual “performance”, discursively portrayed as functional, aggressive and a necessary performance of masculinity (echoing with discourses contained in a number of SS articles). Female sexuality is strongly linked to physical beauty, unabated sexual desire and sexual availability. Many of these stories centre on women’s sexual willingness and desire for their (male) partners, and men’s ability to “satisfy” them sexually. In this way, too, femininity and masculinity are discursively portrayed as being actualised and performed *through* one another via heterosexual sex.

Unlike the SS, the sports pages contained very little on sportswomen. There were only three instances in which women were raised in the sports sections of the sample. One was with a yearly calendar supplement detailing the sports events for the year, which included women’s sports events and images of female sportspeople. The second was a story of a man and a woman sportsperson who had entered into a relationship with one another. In this story, the sports prowess of the man is discursively centred over that of the woman, who is portrayed primarily as another acquisition of the sportsman. While the content of the article is largely centred on sport, the headline and images used for the article focus on the romantic relationship, and label the sportswoman as the man’s “big catch”. The image selected for the article shows the woman in a supporting, nurturing role, contributing to a more passive, supportive construction of femininity in relation to a more active, assertive masculinity. As with the SS, a sense emerges that discourses around personal relationships in the media lag behind other gender transformation achievements.



Image 18: The privatisation of women's public participation in the sports section, Sunday Times, 16 December 2007



Image 19: Trivialising gender in a sports column, Sunday Times, 9 December 2007

The third mention of women in the sports sections involves a column on the 2010 Soccer World Cup to take place in South Africa, discussed in relation to the question of how to deal with the matter of sex work at a time of huge tourist influx. Entitled “Evening classes for ladies of the night”, this column was written in response to a suggestion made by a politician (Meshack) to meet with sex workers to discuss the implications of 2010 with them as well as the possibility of seeking other employment in time for 2010. The author then suggests in a tongue-in-cheek tone how sex workers can and should capitalise on the 2010 Soccer World Cup and grow their “skills” to accommodate foreign tourists. While the column is written with a great deal of irony, and a reasonable scepticism at Meshack’s motives, the discourse employed eventually serves to undermine sex workers, to trivialise their work and circumstances in a country in which sex work is illegal, and to construct them as sex-hungry consumables in

the 2010 market. That the writing is ironic does not, in my opinion, adequately dilute the patriarchal discourse that dominates. The excerpts below illustrate this:

“Never mind, Meshack, we know that deep down you think they’re [sex workers] having fun, even when in the next breath you talk about retraining them for a ‘better life’. Far be it from me to suggest that you are barking up the wrong World Cup tree, but this doesn’t seem the time for well-meaning rehabilitative initiatives. The KZN sisters surely know a wad of deutschmarks when they see one. To pretend otherwise is to be condescending” (Sunday Times, 9 December 2007).

“This isn’t the time to start talking about needlepoint classes and poverty relief funds when the prospect of lusty shirt-swapping and a little more with a happy Spaniard is in the offing. If Hadebe really wants to help, he could offer Cantonese lessons or night classes in the etiquette of asking a Bulgarian how he likes his scotch” (Sunday Times, 9 December 2007).

“I say let the sisters do what they do best” (Sunday Times, 9 December 2007).

The columnist continues to describe ways in which sex workers can prepare themselves to better pander to the needs, whims and egos of male sex tourists during the World Cup, in a way that trivialises the issue of sex work and complicity reinforces patriarchal power relations between clients and sex workers. The author mocks “condescending” attempts to encourage sex workers to gain “respectability” and is understandably sceptical of such attempts and their implications. However, he further undermines and condescends upon sex workers discursively rather than framing them as potentially empowered. In saying: “I say let the sisters do what they do best”, an insincere camaraderie and identification is implied (a condescending discursive devise), as is the message that (female) sex workers are principally good for the sexual service of men.

While columnists work within a more flexible framework than other journalists, there are limits regarding what they are allowed to publish, as illustrated in the case of the firing of the ST columnist Bullard (discussed in Chapter 4). This is ultimately controlled by editors but, as

appears to be the case in the recent firing of Bullard, is also motivated by public responses to columns and the political currency of the issue at hand.

Despite the fact that such columns openly represent an individual's view, some very powerful discourses are conveyed in these spaces. The parameters of "critical" and "thought-provoking" are therefore set along some lines or values, and as such which columns are and are not published speaks to the social politics woven into the editorial filtration process. That this was the only article mentioning women in this sports section (together with the previous example mentioned) also constitutes a subtle spatial discourse through which women's "place" in sports is constructed around sexuality.

The above examples represent instances of relatively overt gender constructions. However, subtler and more internally contradictory discourses also emerged. For example, one prominent article covering the rape of a school girl, Jamie Paterson, during a house robbery frames the act of gender based violence in a way that denies or sidesteps its gendered characteristics. Below is an image of a quote from Jamie Paterson posted on the second page as the "editor's choice", with a brief description to contextualise it.

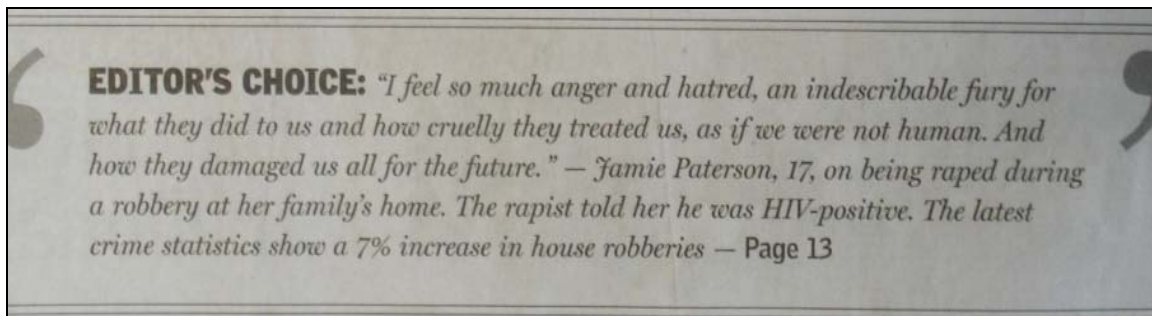


Image 20: Discursive sidestepping of gender dimensions through the framing of a quote, Sunday Times, 9 December 2007

That her voice emerges strongly in the story and is quoted here is encouraging from a gender transformation perspective. The cruelty demonstrated by the attackers, who also severely beat her mother while calling her a "white bitch", is indeed conveyed in the news piece as well. However, by raising house robbery statistics in relation to the rape as in the example above, this young woman's rape is framed as the consequence not of gendered violence, but as an almost logical consequence of increased house robberies. That rape and serious assault of women is part of a house robbery is therefore subtly discursively

accepted, and the gender relations that intersect with class, race and other contextual issues (as in this case) to fuel gender based violence are sidestepped. Framing the events as part of the problem of house robberies naturalises rape in South Africa to a certain extent.

The main article regarding Jamie Paterson’s rape, on another page of the newspaper, also ends with a list of statistics on crime, including high-jacking, robberies, aggravated assault and murder, but again not rape. Once again, while Jamie Paterson’s voice emerges strongly (linked in part to her incredible willingness and bravery to speak publicly about the rape) the event is framed as a violent robbery, not a gendered manifestation of power. The gendered nature of crime and violence in South Africa, indicated in the kinds of crimes committed and the role of gender in determining victims and perpetrators, is discursively circumvented.

In other examples, gender issues are raised but not really addressed. For example, the article below raises the issue of the gender wage gap, but does not in the end address or unpack the reasons behind it. The headline suggests that the gender wage gap is an important element of the article, but the only comments on this gap quoted are that it is “shocking” and that, in the field of architecture, the numbers of women and men are reaching a balance as are wages. This article therefore illustrates an instance of a gender equity discourse, but not a gender transformative one that seeks to understand the underlying gender constructions and relations that lead to inequity.



Image 21: Gender equity discourses sidestepping constructions underlying inequity, Sunday Times, 9 December 2007

Some textual units were discursively inconsistent *internally*. In an article speculating which of the women who are wives of Jacob Zuma would become “first lady” of South Africa should he become country president, Zuma and his polygamous lifestyle is mocked and ridiculed through the language and tone of the article. However, at the same time the issue of polygamy is trivialised and the notion that women’s power is largely located in their personal relationships with men is subtly reinforced. The excerpts below illustrate this:

“Being Mrs Jacob Zuma is no walk in the park” (Sunday Times, 16 December 2007).

“The question on everyone’s lips is: who will he take as first lady should he win the race for the ANC presidency and thereby land the job of president of South Africa?” (Sunday Times, 16 December 2007).

“The Zuma harem - well, part of it anyway” (Sunday Times, 16 December 2007).



Image 22: Tabloid humour and colloquialism as trivialising gendered topics, Sunday Times, 16 December 2007

Again, these excerpts convey an ironic undertone, and the article appears to try to undermine polygamy. However, for the sake of entertainment and humour some of the issues are trivialised and oversimplified. As was the case in some of the SS examples, the “entertainment” orientation of certain news articles can tend to trivialise social issues, especially those relating to gender relations and the “private sphere”.

Another example of apparent internal discontinuity in discourse is a column in which a tongue-in-cheek, sceptical and disapproving view of women taking double-barrel surnames is taken.



Image 23: Internal contradiction and struggles over gender transformation meanings and strategies, Sunday Times, 13 January 2008

The column begins with a message of support towards and alignment with feminist ideas, including those informing the use of double-barrel surnames by women upon marriage to men, before continuing to suggest why their use is embarrassing and unnecessary to the feminist project.

“Look, I have read the likes of Simone de Beauvoir and other feminists. Some of my sisters have actually reminded me that feminism, like everything else, started in Africa..... Feminism should therefore be embraced by African women, I agree. I do understand that women should assert themselves strongly in this phallogentric, patriarchal society that we are all born into. One way of asserting oneself is through the language one uses in engaging other members of society. Another way of asserting oneself is through guarding one’s identity jealously; yet another is by defying societal expectations as to how one celebrates one’s individuality and identity. But there should be limits to that celebration of one’s identity, methinks, especially if through celebrating one’s identity one inadvertently opens oneself to ridicule” (Sunday Times, 13 January 2008).

He continues to explain, in particular, the logistical hassles of adopting a double-barrel approach to post-marriage surnames in the context of the African tradition to already combine surnames with a clan name. What is interesting about this article, in particular, is the interaction between the content and the headline: “Feminists will never have me over a barrel”. While the headline suggests a resistance to feminism and an “othering” of feminists as a potential external threat, in the main content of the column the need for and validity of feminism in South Africa is trumpeted, alongside a discourse that undermines one manifestation of a feminist strategy of resistance. It therefore promotes, while at the same time subtly undermining, feminist strategies and holds them up to inspection as to their reasonableness.

He claims that “double-barrel surnames are not a manifestation of feminism; they are meaningless and pompous.” The feminist motivations behind them and the patriarchal nature of current naming practices, alluded to in the beginning of the article, are thus subsequently trivialised and devalued in relation to, for example, the custom of incorporating a clan name. This discontinuity in discourse signifies some of the discursive struggles around gender transformation that can and are undertaken through the media, particularly through spaces such as columns and letters. Internal contradictions, often between advocate and complicit discourses, are a sign of this struggle over meaning and value in a changing society.

As mentioned in relation to the SS, annual campaigns such as Women’s Day and the 16 Days of Activism campaign lead to an increased number of articles on gender and gender based violence issues around these times (Media Tenor South Africa, 2006). In the case of the ST, while a higher incidence of mention of gender based



Image 24: Personalised voicing in representations of gender based violence, Sunday Times, 2 December 2007

violence was not observed during these three weeks than in the last issue in the sample in January, the campaign did lead to the publication of special articles on gender based violence at this time. A partnership between Gender Links and the ST around the 16 Days of Activism was undertaken towards the publishing of stories on gender based violence told from the perspectives of the women who had experienced it. These articles represented important instances of voicing, for the women whose voices were raised through the articles as well as more broadly in the highly personal voicing of gender based violence issues beyond the reporting of unusual cases.

In the context of political events highlighting gender issues, such as the ANC Women's League's nomination of Jacob Zuma for ANC president, some space was created to capitalise on the debate this generated. One particularly powerful piece on the issue was a column written by a woman (see Image 25 below). Interestingly, most regular columns (in all of the newspapers reviewed⁴⁶) were written by men, and while it is not clear why this is the case or if it fluctuates due to the inclusion of columns by writers who do not write columns each week, this column offered an alternative voice to some of the gendered views being forwarded in other columns. It is also decidedly feminist, raising an interesting point around the potential role of columns in generating (pro- or anti-feminist) advocate discourses that challenge or reinforce complicit gendered discourses. Advocate discourses are less subtle than complicit ones, and can therefore also play a role in stimulating public debate more directly.



Image 25: Rare woman columnist discussing contemporary gender issues, Sunday Times, 2 December 2007

⁴⁶ The MG did, however, bring in various women's voices in column-like form by including pieces from women outside of the newspaper itself.

While the language employed in much of the investigative journalism undertaken in ST tends to steer away from overt reference to gender and gender issues, the presentation of specific facts towards highlighting these can be a strategy towards wielding “the facts” and “the story” to promote awareness of gender issues. In the article below (Image 26), issues surrounding a belief in India that some children are “cursed” and therefore treated with shame, suspicion and often abuse, is investigated and explored. Here, gender issues are raised more critically than in other investigative articles reviewed, in the repeated consideration of the differential treatment of boy and girl children, and the particular vulnerabilities girl children face.



Image 26: Feature writing highlighting social and structural gender dynamics, Sunday Times, 13 January 2008

The article focuses more on religious and “cultural” beliefs as the source of suffering endured by these girl children than the gendered power relations and constructs that may fuel these practices and beliefs. However, unlike many other news articles on child abuse, this article ensures that, while the issue is not framed as solely impacting on girl children, some of the social and structural gender issues that make girls particularly vulnerable are highlighted. Employing a more emotive discourse than traditional news reporting would allow, the author has also used sarcasm to frame patriarchal abuses as unacceptable, and even ridiculous. Interestingly, sarcasm and irony is used similarly to the way it was in the column on sex work and the 2010 Soccer World

Cup, but towards creating a discursive alignment or agreement with the reader on the need to undermine patriarchy.

“They are not permitted to marry and are only able to earn a few rupees as prostitutes. But even the cursed girls that stay in their extended families are sexual prey for all the men. Feelings of guilt? Sense of injustice? Whatever for?”

It is the right of every man to abuse a woman of a lower caste without making himself impure” (Sunday Times, 13 January 2008).

Perhaps the framing of these issues as largely “cultural” and religious is also problematic, and a more direct engagement with the concept of gender as it impacts and is impacted upon by “culture” and religion could be made. However, this article aims to highlight gendered dimensions of child abuse, and is therefore an interesting example of gender transformation issues emerging in the press.

The ST contains a variety of journalistic approaches and spaces, from the controversial expression of viewpoints in columns to formal political reporting and the investigative reports that often lie in between in the continuum of overt and, on the other end, covert manifestations of situated knowledge. Overall, some of the tabloid style features (both visual and textual) are implicated in supporting aspects of a patriarchal culture in the newspaper. Particularly in entertainment and celebrity sections (but also penetrating into, for example, the business section), the male gaze is pervasive. As Mulvey (2003) discusses in relation to cinema, the male gaze reflects and reinforces a gendered sexual imbalance in which women and men are dichotomised as passive and active respectively. Mulvey (ibid) argues that not only does the male gaze place the female body at the centre of the gaze of sexual desire and commodification, avoiding a similar objectification of men, but that it also functions to enlist the reader (whether male or female, heterosexual or homosexual) towards viewing female sexuality through a heterosexual male lens. It is through such pervasive visual culture that gender constructs are widely assimilated, and written gender transformation discourses can be undermined by this kind of visual orientation. Furthermore, through the lens of this male gaze, both ideals of masculinity and femininity are defined as actualised in opposition to one another.

Therefore, while certain visual and textual features may be classified as “light” and “fun” among other things (as will be discussed in relation to the interviews), they shape a visual discursive culture that, although normalised, is an important issue for gender transformation. As such, the role of tabloidisation in gender transformation (or lack thereof) in the media needs to be interrogated. This is not a simple matter, given that tabloid features such as the rise of the human-interest story and conversational style are potentially powerful tools towards transforming the media. As has been evidenced in some of the examples described

above, conversational spaces in which people's views are expressed, emotions more overtly incorporated and colloquial, inter-personal language used, offer opportunities to both lash out at feminist ideas or to promote gender transformation. The values informing the limitations imposed on free speech and the spaces created for it in newspapers are therefore of great interest. As with the SS, some of the most interesting gendered features emerged in relation to these kinds of spaces. However, subtler gendered discourses were also highlighted in news pieces here, underscoring the role, for example, of fact selection and framing in engendering the news.

6.3.4 Carving spaces: Gendered Discourses in the Mail & Guardian

6.3.4.1 General style, content and discursive orientation

The MG is generally between 40 and 60 pages long, depending on whether or not the newspaper is running special issues or supplements. The newspaper includes various sections such as general news, African news and issues, international news, comment and analysis, a financial section, a business section and a "Friday" section covering entertainment features such as books, theatre and film. The layout is tabloid although the style is not. The style of reporting is more "critical" than the other newspapers covered, a term I use here to denote a journalistic style that engages more directly with social, economic and structural issues in framing, analysing and contextualising contemporary events. It also denotes aspects of what is referred to as a "critical" approach in the social sciences (discussed briefly in Section 5.6.3.4), in particular the social constructionist foundation for this approach and a consciousness of power relations.

Some of the stories covered are investigative, aimed at exposing corruption, fraud and other ethical and legal issues within South African politics, and in this sense the MG conforms to an extent to the notion of the press as a political watchdog. The news sections, however, often involve a form of commentary or opinion, rather than aiming only to present snippets of "factual" information in the style of "traditional" news reporting. In this sense, the MG's style often blurs the distinction between news reporting and comment and analysis. The excerpt below, from the "news" section, is an example of the mixing of opinion and news reporting writing styles.

“A casino might seem a perverse setting for a presidential hopeful to address anybody, let alone what purported to be a gathering of the KwaZulu-Natal legal fraternity in Pietermaritzburg on Tuesday evening. The Golden House Casino is a succinct answer to those who wonder what has gone wrong in our society. On that evening rich, poor, Muslim, Hindu, Christian, black, white, Indian, coloured, Pakistani were gambling there by 8pm on a Tuesday” (Mail & Guardian, 14 December 2007).

In addition to the commentary infused into news reporting, early pages of the newspaper (generally reserved for news reporting) incorporate a good deal of dedicated comment and opinion spaces related to current events, often written by various social and political leaders. For example, a number of women leaders were invited to share their views on the issues surrounding the ANC’s presidential race in one of the sample newspaper issues. The kinds of stories covered in the MG also include various human-interest pieces, and while this in some respects represents a tabloidised approach to news, these stories are distinguished by their greater tendency not to be of bizarre or salacious events but rather of common social, economic and political problems experienced by non-celebrities, such as domestic abuse.

The discursively implied readership of the MG is middle-class, educated and largely urban. It is also suggested as largely liberal⁴⁷, secular and humanitarian, interested in issues such as poverty and violence, and the particular struggles of the third world in post-colonial contexts. In this respect, however, the discursively implied readership is not predominantly those who struggle with these issues in their own daily lives; issues such as poverty are framed as being experienced (directly) by a “them” rather than an “us”. This is in contrast to, for example, the SS for which the socio-economic issues portrayed are framed more often as being experienced by a collective “we” of readers.

A good deal of space was carved out in the MG for the discussion of gender issues in the sample reviewed. I use the term “carved out”, because spaces appeared to be consciously created to highlight particular gender issues and to capitalise on gender debates emerging through current events. These spaces were carved out through the addition of supplements,

⁴⁷ I use this term here to denote a “leftist” orientation based broadly on human rights and diversity over state or religious restrictions on personal freedom. This could include, for example, the right to abortion and sexual orientation. I recognise, however, the potential complexity and diverse applications of such a term.

extra columns and the incorporation of special articles written by various politicians and leaders.

For example, the 7 December 2007 issue of the MG included a focus on various women's perspectives on the ANC's presidential race (particularly in terms of gender issues), from politicians to local activists. This was spread throughout the newspaper and featured prominently on the front page (see below). Women's voices, in this regard, were purposely fore-grounded in a political current events context in which male politicians had tended to dominate the news. This represents, in a sense, a liberal-inclusionary approach. However, unlike the SS whose liberal-inclusionary approach was relatively limited to showing working women visually and as new *subjects*, in this case the emphasis is on *voice*, epistemology: on who gets to shape how "news" (knowledge) is presented.



Image 27: Special issue featuring the voices of women leaders on the ANC succession race, Mail & Guardian, 7 December 2007

While the perspectives given through the voices in this and other spaces were diverse, reflecting discursive struggles over the meanings, manifestations and strategies of gendered politics, none of these messages were overtly anti-feminist. Instead, a political leaning towards gender transformation characterised the discourses emerging in the spaces created. Discourses reflecting a high level of (pro-gender transformation) engagement with and contemplation around gender issues were quite prominent. The only obvious exception to this rule was the sports section, which was devoid of sportswomen in the sample reviewed. A discourse highlighting the importance of women in leadership (mirroring liberal-inclusionary feminist paradigms) was also quite prominent, but was buttressed by discourses that interrogated the assumption that having women in leadership necessarily

leads to gender transformation. Various discourses also deconstructed gender relations and identities within broader socio-economic and political contexts, challenging essentialised or naturalised gender constructs. In this way, liberal-inclusionary approaches were fortified or supplemented by critical and progressive approaches to gender transformation.

The nexus between gender and poverty featured quite strongly, with poor women's struggles, in particular, forming a focus in many of the engendered articles featured. Issues related to gender based violence and sex work were also particularly prominent. The focus on gender based violence was linked (at least in part) to the 16 Days of Activism, with special features and supplements around this issue incorporated in a way that supported the women in leadership discourse. For example, numerous articles on gender based violence reported on the perspective of women working in fields related to gender based violence, for example as policewomen, social workers and activists. The concept of patriarchy, with its attendant implications of power relations, was also one that emerged in numerous textual units, reflecting more overt applications of feminist discourse than the other newspapers. Patriarchal resistance was also discursively raised as a key inhibitor to gender transformation. In this way, there was a discursive recognition of the power dynamics and struggles inherent in gender relations.

Understandings of gender relations were also regularly underpinned by discourses that linked them to socio-economic and structural contexts, such as poverty, socialisation and legal frameworks. This is in contrast to some of the discourses emerging in the other newspapers in the study that naturalised gender relations, particularly those located within the "private sphere". Generally, the MG reflected less internal contradiction in gendered discourse than the other newspapers reviewed. The voices promoted, spaces created and images used - while indeed containing discursive struggles, contradictions and variations - tended in my view to be oriented towards a more cohesive gender transformation project.

Interestingly, as a researcher I found that it was initially more difficult to identify "gender constructs" in the MG than in the other two newspapers. I eventually came to understand this difficulty as linked to my own critical understandings of gender and gender transformation, which were more often reflected in the MG than in the other two newspapers reviewed. In addition, the language employed in the MG to describe gender relations was more familiar to me in the context of the theory built around my research. I realised that my

own discursive locations, including my particular academic training as well as the conceptualisations and constructions of gender I have built over the years, impacted on my ability to “see” similar constructions in other texts. In this regard, I observed first hand how the discourses we draw upon and prize in our own understandings of gender are, in a sense, naturalised to us, making alternatives to these easier to identify.

I also reflected that the very notion of a “gender construct” is generally used to refer to those socially constructed discourses around gender that are critiqued by feminists, rather than those that feminists themselves subscribe to. However, even the notion that gender is socially constructed, as opposed to natural or essential, is a discourse and a construct in and of itself, birthed and reinforced in particular social, political and discursive contexts. The notion of gender as socially constructed is the outcome of various discursive influences and struggles. This highlights the need to attempt to be as open and “transparent” as possible regarding the theoretical frameworks used in analysing texts for research. It also highlights the need to consider the discourses articulated by participants in the interviews and through the texts they produce from the perspective that their most fundamental understandings of gender may not be overtly or consciously articulated, since the discourses that frame these understandings are, to a large extent, quite naturalised and therefore self-evident to participants. This will be reflected upon in more detail in the findings related to the interviews.

6.3.4.2 Counts of textual units with gender relevance

The counts undertaken for the SS are presented in Table 7 below.

| TABLE 7: RESEARCH COMPONENT ONE COUNTS FOR THE MAIL & GUARDIAN | | | |
|---|-------------------------------|--------------|--------------|
| | Main News⁴⁸ | Other | Total |
| Gender relevance | 8 | 37 | 45 |
| Women in leadership | 5 | 18 | 23 |
| Homosexuality | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Gender based violence | 0 | 18 | 18 |
| Women’s issues | 2 | 12 | 14 |
| Gender constructions | 5 | 25 | 30 |

⁴⁸ In the case of the MG, the “news section” was identified as up to page 10.

The counts for the MG, as with the other newspapers, both reflect important discursive features and obscure others. As I have observed before, while the counts assisted towards confirming, challenging or highlighting particular qualitative findings, their functionality within this research is limited by the constraints imposed by attempting to “count” discursively diverse features that are often more varied, subtle and internally contradictory than a quantitative assessment can account for. For example, fewer articles with “gender relevance” were counted in the MG than SS or ST, and the last issue of MG reviewed (18 January 2008) contained none.

However, that fewer textual units of *gender relevance* were counted for the MG does not necessarily reflect a lag in gender transformative discourses, since many of the textual units counted in the former newspapers pertained to, for example, images that portrayed counter-transformative constructs (for example, sexualised constructs of women). Thus, while the MG sample contained a greater number of textual units that aimed to critically highlight gender issues, it did not have the greatest number of units with gender relevance. That the last issue of the MG did not contain any articles in which gender constructs or issues could be identified also does not simply denote non-transformative discourses given that gender constructs in the context of these counts could be both those that promote or inhibit gender transformation as I have defined it. Furthermore, as highlighted in the previous section, the way in which gender is portrayed in the MG is far more subtle, particularly to me, and it is often the case that problematic discourses are easier for me to identify than those that meet certain gender transformation expectations (for example, does one consider a *lack* of anti-feminist sentiment in and of itself a gender *discourse*?).

In terms of representations of homosexuality, no textual units were counted for the MG. This signifies a heteronormative discourse in the sample, through which representations of homosexual relationships are marginalised in comparison to representations of heterosexual relationships. This, to an extent, naturalises heterosexuality. However, while the other newspapers in the study contained a greater number of textual units representing homosexual relationships, these counts generally did not reflect positive discourses or those challenging heteronormative discourses, as illustrated in some of the examples given. Homosexuality in the MG was not represented in the context of “entertainment” or gossip, for example. Some may further argue that homosexuality need not (and should not) always be presented separately as an issue, but that acceptance of sexual diversity can be infused

in texts, which will in far subtler ways then demonstrate a *lack* of homophobia. There are thus a number of ways of looking at these features, in this and other newspapers, in more details, and again a larger sample (and more knowledge of queer studies) would go a long way towards better unpacking this issue.

The way in which the MG has carved out spaces through which to advance gender issues at the forefront of the media's attention is evidenced in the counts. The MG sample had the highest number of articles (18) related to gender based violence in the context of the 16 Days of Activism. It should be noted, however, that the SS followed closely behind with 12 articles on gender based violence, and because it is a shorter newspaper than the MG this count is also quite high. There were qualitative differences between the manner in which the MG and the SS represented gender based violence, as will be elaborated upon in the examples that follow.

In terms of the counts it is also interesting to note that, in the MG, none of the counts for gender based violence were provided by the news section. While it is important to remember that the boundaries between "main news" and the kinds of spaces following in the latter parts of the newspapers reviewed were not rigid, this to some extent supports my qualitative observation that, in the sample, gender based violence was treated by the MG as a broader social issue rather than presented in terms of isolated "news" incidents. This is linked to Meyers' (1997) assertions regarding the representation of gender based violence in the news, which she has critiqued as obscuring important features of gender based violence by presenting, as "news", primarily individual cases, often with a more bizarre or unusual element (for example, the case of a notorious serial rapist). In this way, she argues, problems such as rape are framed as isolated incidents rather than a pervasive gendered problem (ibid). The MG tended to engage with gender based violence through discussion, analysis and "common" and relatable human-interest stories rather than through the presentation of isolated and bizarre or unusual cases.

The counts for women in leadership, as a category, were by far the highest out of the newspapers reviewed. As already discussed, counts for women in leadership were particularly difficult to undertake and were ultimately determined on a qualitative level. However, the counts do reflect what appeared to be a concerted effort to include the voices of women in leadership. That it was women in various leadership and professional positions

dealing with gender based violence whose voices were fore-grounded towards highlighting issues of gender based violence is an example of this, as is the additional space carved out for various women leaders to reflect on the ANC presidential race. In this sense, not only does the MG appear to be creating spaces through which to forward a gender transformation project, but this project is constructed around a prominent gendered discourse regarding voicing; this, in my view, is a discourse that holds women's voices to be highly important in reflecting, promoting and changing women's position in patriarchal societies.

While other discourses do emerge in the MG to challenge the notion of women's voices being better able to represent and fight for women's position in society, the ways in which the spaces have been created signifies the strength of this particular discourse. It could be regarded as a strength and/or a weakness from a feminist perspective that primarily women's voices are forwarded in highlighting and challenging issues around gender relations.

Another feature covered with greater regularity in the MG than any of the other newspapers was "women's issues". These included issues such as the state of domestic work, sex work, pregnancy and HIV/AIDS, and the nexus between the prevention of HIV among women and gender based violence. These were generally covered in special feature articles. Constructions of gender were also counted in many of these features, which regularly posited women's issues in the context of socio-economic and structural power dynamics.

6.3.4.3 Discussion and examples of discourses in the Mail & Guardian

Gendered discourses in the MG both engaged with and moved beyond liberal-inclusionary feminist paradigms around women in leadership. A strong concentration on the issue of women represented in leadership was communicated through both spatial and advocate discourses. The space given to women, in particular, to comment on the ANC race is an example of a spatial discourse.

Each week the MG publishes about 10 contributions written by various individuals outside of the MG. In the context of the overall dominance of male voices in politics at the time period from which the sample was drawn, the decision to use these spaces primarily to share the voices of women represents spatial discursive strategies towards gender transformation,

centred on a discourse that prizes the importance of women's voices in gender transformation processes.



Image 28: Spatial discourses of voicing through special written contributions by women leaders, Mail & Guardian, 7 December 2007

These spatial discourses are linked to advocate discourses, in the sense that a very specific selection of contributions to the debate was made, a selection that included voices advocating gender transformation. Contributions by various women in this issue of the newspaper included a strong activist orientation around gender issues. This shapes these spaces within the MG around a strong gender transformation project. While variations exist between the conceptualisations of - and subsequent suggested strategies in answer to - gender relations, the overall message emerging is that women can and should take an active positions in politics, and that there should be concerted efforts work towards restoring political leadership in South Africa that is favour of comprehensive gender transformation. In other words, the strategies articulated were different but the overall political project largely cohesive.

Editorial space was also used to this effect. In an editorial contribution entitled “A pipe of patriarchy” (Mail & Guardian, 30 November 2007), the editor commented on the ANC Women’s League’s nomination of Jacob Zuma for ANC president. She drew attention to the arguments made in favour of the nomination, that the best candidate rather than just a woman candidate should be nominated, and critically assessed these arguments from the perspective of the historical role of the ANC Women’s League to promote parity within the party. She then reflected on the gendered implications of the nomination.

“There is a risk that one of the most progressive policy proposals before the ANC conference will now come asunder. This is the proposal to bring equality in representation to the ruling party by enshrining the 50-50 principle whereby the party’s lists should reflect equal numbers of mooted male and female candidates. If the [Women’s] league does not drive this policy, it will falter on the alter of ego and ambition. What were they smoking? The pipe of patronage, position and careerism no doubt” (Mail & Guardian, 30 November 2007).

This excerpt reflects what I have called a women in leadership discourse premised in part on a liberal-inclusionary feminist paradigm. Various discourses that extend, and even challenge, this feminist paradigm in terms of gender transformation were, however, also included. In the week following the editorial above, a column by another author issuing a strong challenge to this paradigm was included, an extract of which is given below.

“Just as we need to question whether skin-colour affirmative action or economic empowerment are the best ways of bringing about redress, we cannot be expected to cow into submission because we might just walk into a male chauvinist temple. To argue that by making its decision to back a man, the league has failed women who are under the yoke of patriarchy is to deliberately mix issues. The fact is that it is indisputable that patriarchy, as with all other forms of unfair distribution of power and influence in society, is an evil to be eradicated. It does not follow, however, that thinking a man would be the best person to lead one or another political party makes one indifferent to what is wrong with patriarchy” (Mail & Guardian, 7 December 2007).



Through this column, space has been made to deconstruct and challenge aspects of the liberal-inclusionary feminist paradigm. However, the broader message regarding the need for gender transformation in South Africa remains, and was generally consistent throughout the newspapers reviewed. In addition to this challenge and deconstruction, numerous spaces were given to perspectives on the issue of the ANC Women's League's nomination of Jacob Zuma that reflected concerns over the *qualitative* aspects of this nomination rather than the quantitative aspects of gender parity.



Image 29: Discursively delving into issues of symbolic representation, Mail & Guardian, 7 December 2007

In all of the columns shown above (Image 29), the symbolic and practical gendered implications of the nomination of Jacob Zuma, in particular, were raised. His ability to lead and represent South Africa in terms of gender transformation in light of the public statements he made, particularly during his rape trial, as well as issues around his gendered lifestyle and actions (such as polygamous marriage, infidelity and unsafe sexual practices) are brought into question over and above the fact of his being male. These discourses are interested in symbolic, social and “cultural” representation in addition to numerical representation. In the excerpt below, the discursive linkages between the former kinds of representation and the issue of power are raised. In the context of asserting that the ANC Women’s League nominated a leader who represented various patriarchy positions, one columnist wrote the following for the MG:

“If you operate within the paradigm of the big man, your words and actions will be ‘unstrategic’. The battered women who return to their abusers see no alternative” (Mail & Guardian, 7 December 2007).

In this excerpt, a discourse that recognises the patriarchal power prevailing over the minds and actions of many women is forwarded, representing an understanding of gender relations that is social constructionist and critical (embedded in the notion of power relations). In my view, it represents an instance of deconstruction of the basis for more simplistic forms of liberal-inclusionary feminism.

Discourses constructing gender and gender relations, as I have mentioned, also frequently incorporated issues around socialisation, economics, gendered structural frameworks such as legal provisions and access to resources, and various other contextual issues. This, again, suggests a more social constructionist orientation than an essentialist or naturalised construction of gender as emerging in some of the discourses discussed in relation to the other two newspapers.

For example, in a feature article on sex workers in Johannesburg (see Image 30 below), the social and structural implications of criminalised sex work are raised to highlight causes behind gendered violence perpetrated against sex workers. While the plight of both male and female sex workers is raised, the unequal power dynamics between (predominantly male) clients and sex workers born out of social, structural and economic inequality and

prejudice are highlighted, and sex worker advocates are generously quoted. Titillating, sexualising and trivialising discourses around sex work noted in some of the articles in the other newspapers reviewed are replaced here by a discourse that interrogates the socio-economic context of sex work and employs activist language to describe it (for example, the use of the term “sex worker” rather than “prostitute”). Not only the voices of the activists quoted, but also the language used by the journalist, reflects this; it is an instance of complicit discourse supporting an activist paradigm around sex work.



Image 30: Complicit and activist discourses working together in a feature on sex work, Mail & Guardian, 30 November 2007

Various other articles reflect similar discursive orientations. For example, the article shown in Image 31 below (left) links the flat-lining economy in Zimbabwe to the rise of the sex economy there, a reflection and reinforcement of gendered economics. Another article shown in Image 31 below (right) questions the value of progressive policy and law surrounding issues of gender based violence in the context of the socio-economic vulnerability of women and a lag in implementation.



Image 31: Raising socio-economic and structural dimensions to gender issues, Mail & Guardian, 30 November 2007 (left) and 7 December 2007 (right)

Overall, advocate discourses around gender issues such as patriarchy in political leadership and gender based violence were quite prevalent, and more cohesive with complicit discourses around these issues. Furthermore, while not all articles framed particular phenomena overtly as gendered, the underscoring of various issues as linked to social, economic and political processes and inequalities effects a critical approach. This approach is also laced through with an apparent awareness of the role of gender in the matrix of social constructs. From this component of the research, it appeared that a deliberate feminist project is being advanced in the MG. The role of current events and gender campaigns in promoting gender transformation projects was raised again in the case of the MG, as it was with the SS and ST, through qualitative observations and counts. However, the MG in particular seemed to have capitalised on these events to forward gender transformation issues, in particular a woman in leadership discourse.

From my observations, gendered discourses in the MG reflected both a strong liberal-inclusionary feminist paradigm and a more social constructionist, relational approach to gender, at times in separate spaces and at times blended in various ways. The discourses emerging were also quite critical, placing gender within a context of inequality and power relations. However, the MG caters for a niche, and quite elite, socio-economic demographic of readers. It also undertakes more in-depth comment and analysis than is common in most newspapers, particularly with respect to issues affecting African countries and the poor.

While the format is “tabloid”, and the inclusion of a number of human-interest pieces reflects an aspect of tabloidisation, the style and discursive approach is decidedly not tabloid, but critical. As such, while the analysis I have undertaken reflects a closer alignment between the discourses emerging in the MG and those of my conception of gender transformation than the SS or the ST, it is important to bear in mind that the ways in which these discourses are shaped makes them, perhaps, largely inaccessible to broader readerships. Each newspaper needs, in this regard, to be viewed in the context of its market and the discourses that shape journalistic approaches to its market. Assessing the value of various types of discursive strategies in this kind of context could help to develop appropriate strategies for transformation.

6.3.5 *Key Findings from the Newspaper Discourse Analysis*

Perhaps the most significant finding made during this component of research was, firstly, the degree of importance that the **styles, norms and functions of various spaces** within the newspapers had on the types of gendered discourses emerging. These different spaces and the tensions between the discourses emerging in them raise valuable questions regarding the state and **trajectories of feminist thought and gender transformation** in South Africa and its media. Questions arose regarding the role of newspaper reporting styles (such as tabloid, investigative and critical approaches) in constructing gender transformation discourses and parameters, and therefore also the related issues of **political economy** and broader discursive advances in terms of gender and transformation, ones that arguably shape what readers expect from and appreciate in their chosen newspapers.

A second key finding was the extent and forms of **discursive contradictions** in terms of gender and transformation. While there was, at least in two newspapers, significant contradiction in terms of gender transformation discourses, this component of the research flagged a number of prevalent discourses related to gender and transformation, discourses that will be compared and discussed in relation to the interview data.

The term “newspaper” tends to conjure up notions of “news reporting”, and its attendant connotations of “fair” and “unbiased” reporting of, principally, mainstream political or other national current events. However, the level and significance of spaces alternative to this

emerged as a key finding in this component of the research. In particular, columns, letters pages and various types of entertainment sections played a critical role in constructing the gendered orientation of the newspapers reviewed. In addition, I noted that these spaces were central in shaping the scope of, and opportunity for engagement with, diverse gender transformation issues and, in many cases, the perpetuation of patriarchal gender constructs. Normative values and conventions around humour, irony, colloquialisms and the armoury of “free speech” and opinion provided latitude in these spaces. Therefore, anti-feminist and misogynistic discourses, for example, had space to thrive in these sections where editorial decisions allowed this (as will be discussed further in Chapter 7). Activist discourses, whether for or against gender transformation, emerged particularly strongly in these spaces as a result. Gender constructs that would perhaps be unacceptable in other spaces are, in a sense, legitimated in these spaces.

While these more “**informal**” and **colloquial spaces** provided vast opportunities for constructive engagement with gender transformation issues (opportunities that were, indeed, taken up on numerous occasions), they also served to both actively reproduce and subtly sanction prevailing gendered constructs that inhibit gender transformation. Given that these spaces are provided for the presentation of diverse ideas - without the kinds of constraints placed upon, for example, front page news reporting - the causes behind the discursive contrasts between and within the different newspapers are of particular interest. For example, the SS’s columns, jokes and letters pages contained a number of discourses that fervently attacked the basis for gender transformation as I have defined it, including overt anti-feminist backlashes. There were, in addition, columns and editorial pieces that promoted gender transformative ideals and practices. However, the kinds of backlash emerging in the SS did not echo, for example, the discourses emerging in similar spaces in the MG. Some of the potential causes behind these variations will be explored in relation to the interview findings.

From this component of research, it appears that these spaces are not completely “free” and “open” to diverse opinions, but that a **discursive filtration system** is in place, leading to disparities in the gender transformative orientation of the newspapers, even if these are internally contradictory. This appears to be linked to editorial policy and identified or assumed readership and market characteristics. I have noted, for example, that in spaces reflecting strong **tabloid style** influences, gendered constructs tended to be not only most

patriarchal, but based on **naturalised conceptions of gender**. In contrast, in a more “**critical**” **journalistic approach**, gender constructs tended to be based on **politicised conceptions of gender**.

The importance of the **overall visual culture of the newspapers**, as I have called it, also emerged strongly. I did not attempt to undertake a thorough or very theoretically informed analysis of visual culture. However, to get an overall sense of the visual culture when I realised the importance of images in relation to text I asked a useful broader question: what would a complete outsider to the human race determine about gender if all they had were these images before them? By asking this question, glaring evidence of patriarchal visual culture based on the sexualisation of women and femininity, the commodification of this sexuality and the persuasiveness of the male gaze emerged as especially linked to tabloid style. The pervasiveness of these kinds of images recalled to me Judith Butler’s (2003) assertions on the performativity of gender. She argues that the repetition of a series of gender performances is the basis for, or the “sediment” of, the formation of concrete instantiations of gender and constructions around the possibilities of gender.

“If the ground of gender identity is stylised repetition of acts through time, and not a seemingly seamless identity, then the possibilities of gender transformation are to be found in the arbitrary relation between such acts, in the possibility of a different sort of repeating, in the breaking or subversive repetition of that style” (Butler, 2003: 392).

In the case of the newspapers reviewed, the visual culture was also neither always internally cohesive (repeating only the same style) nor cohesive with other discourses borne through the news text itself, and a seamless identity was therefore not created. However, the kinds of visual, stylised repeating produced in the newspapers reviewed has significant relevance to the project of gender transformation in the manner suggested by Butler (2003), for the possibilities of gender transformation are shaped by what is repeated and how. The images in the newspapers were often very telling of underlying notions of gender relations, and present a set of gendered possibilities that are at times transformative but often not.

While the focus thus far has been on columns, letters, images and so forth, the more formal spaces of news reporting were not separated from processes of and negotiations around

gender transformation. **News reporting** avoided advocate discourses, but was implicated in the construction of **gendered discourses through strategies of discursive complicity**. I have highlighted some examples of this, illustrating for example the role of fact selection and story selection, and the language framing or buttressing the opinions and quotes of others. Spatial discourses were also important here, revealing gendered values and ideas by the very amount and kinds of space given to various news stories. I also demonstrated through the use of examples how some news reporting and investigative reporting reflected gendered discourses by merely sidestepping gendered issues, or framing them as un-gendered.

The kinds of gendered discourses identified were various. However, some were of particular prevalence and interest. I should note that these discourses emerged out of a particular historical context. Activist campaigns and particular political events dominating the news appeared to have a significant impact on the regularity and kinds of content and discourses emerging. Of course, the sample cannot justify broad speculations in this regard. However, that particular issues were raised more frequently is supported to a degree by another, quantitative study that showed the amount of attention given to women and issues such as gender based violence in the South African media were significantly affected by **current political events** (such as the Zuma rape trial) and **campaigns or special days** (such as Women's Day) (Media Tenor South Africa, 2006).

As has already been mentioned, **anti-feminist discourses** appeared, especially within the SS. Some of the examples I have raised in this regard resonate with Pilcher and Whelehan's (2004) assertions that anti-feminist backlash often uses the language of feminism itself to turn against its principles, a discursive strategy that was noted in relation to various columns reviewed. Discourses based on notions of progress as well as nostalgia surrounding a mythical notion of the "good old days" have in the past been used to thwart feminist ideals (ibid), and were noted in some of the examples given in this Chapter as well. This includes the blaming of feminism for women's contemporary problems, and the romanticising of traditional binaries of masculinity and femininity, which are naturalised as harmonious (ibid). As Faludi (1992) noted in reference to anti-feminist backlash in the United States of America, the media can play an important role in disseminating, and making "palatable", underlying tensions around transformation in the form of anti-feminist sentiments.

The strength and pervasiveness of anti-feminist backlash discourses in the newspapers reviewed came as quite a surprise to me. It should not, however, be viewed as a simple phenomenon or one that exemplifies the state of gender transformation. In contrast to these discourses were ones that overtly and subtly promoted gender transformation. Even in the SS where such discourses were more prominent, a strong liberal-inclusionary feminist paradigm was also present, and spaces were created to demonstrate and promote women's diverse locations and contributions within society. This underlines the unevenness of feminist trajectories.

It is important to bear in mind, however, that particularly in newspapers in which the tabloid style was more prominent, **gendered discourses related to the “private sphere” of intimate personal and sexual relationships lagged significantly behind those related to the “public sphere”** in terms of gender transformative orientation. Liberal-inclusionary paradigms were strong in all the newspapers reviewed, and interestingly especially so in the SS, which contained numerous manifestations of anti-feminist backlash, and the MG, which appeared to adhere to quite a cohesive gender transformation project. When it comes to gender transformation discourses, the liberal-inclusionary feminist paradigm appears to have the most social and political currency, particularly as it relates to (or perhaps because it relates to) the public sphere.

This indicates some interesting aspects of gender transformation trajectories in the media and arguably in South Africa more broadly. The discourses emerging in the newspapers reviewed reiterate the feminist idea that the personal is political, but also show that, when it comes to gender politics, more progressive discourses are accommodated by and promoted through the public domain while significant struggles and tensions related to changing gender relations are undertaken in relation to the private domain, often through informal spaces. The fact that tabloid style is characterised by a greater personalisation of news - making news more about people and their “private” or personal lives - is perhaps one of the reasons for what I would argue are less transformed gender discourses in these “informal”, personalised spaces in tabloids in particular. If gender transformation trajectories related to the “private sphere” generally lag behind those related to liberal-inclusionary ideals, or the “public sphere”, then tabloid newspapers in their greater focus on issues related to the “private sphere” can also reflect this lag in feminist trajectories.

Some of the common sites of discursive struggle - and often anti-feminist backlash - relate to the nexus between feminism and religion or “culture” (whether “African” or “Western”⁴⁹). These nexuses represent critical locations of struggle over gender transformation, and it is therefore here that many impassioned discussions and powerful contradictions of discourse occur. The contradictions in discourse and the spaces they both play out in and relate to (news or opinion, private or public relationships, for example) therefore tell us something about the state of gender transformation and the diverse trajectories it is taking, necessarily involving ongoing struggles over meaning.

Overall, **tabloidised newspapers presented more discursive contradictions** in terms of representations of gender. In particular, complicit discourses and certain advocate discourses in columns written by independent columnists often contradicted the more formal, editorial stance on gender issues (which tended to be more progressive). On the other hand, in the case of the critical style newspaper the MG, there was more of a cohesive pro-gender transformation discourse. Here, the application of journalistic values of free speech and diverse perspective, when compared with the tabloidised newspapers, resulted in discursive negotiations more over the details of best practice and strategy for gender transformation than over the need for gender transformation and the debunking of the old (and current) gender order itself.

Finally, this component of the research raised an important question through the comparison and contrast of gendered discourses flagged from each of the three newspapers: in what ways can discourses shaped in the context of economic imperatives to “tabloidise” reflect and promote gender transformation as I have defined it for this research? And if so, how can this be achieved in a way that appeals to the professional and social expectations of journalists and readers? The MG’s discursive orientation was most aligned to my conception of gender transformation, but caters for an economically elite and smaller niche newspaper market. Given this reality and the opportunities inherent in more tabloidised forms of journalism (whether dormant or already catalysed opportunities towards engaging in processes of gender transformation), how can gendered discourses be renegotiated and transformed in the print news media? These questions will be considered in the following Chapter, which throws more light on journalistic and editorial discourses towards better

⁴⁹ There being no singular, agreed upon or unchanging African or Western culture, I put this between quotation marks. This can therefore refer to numerous interpretations or manifestations of cultural values and practices.

understanding the processes and perspectives that shape and inform the representations produced out of tabloidised and critical newspapers, especially in terms of gender transformation.